

QVOϞH THE RAVEN – 28TH



A FRATERNITY OF SHADOWS NETBOOK

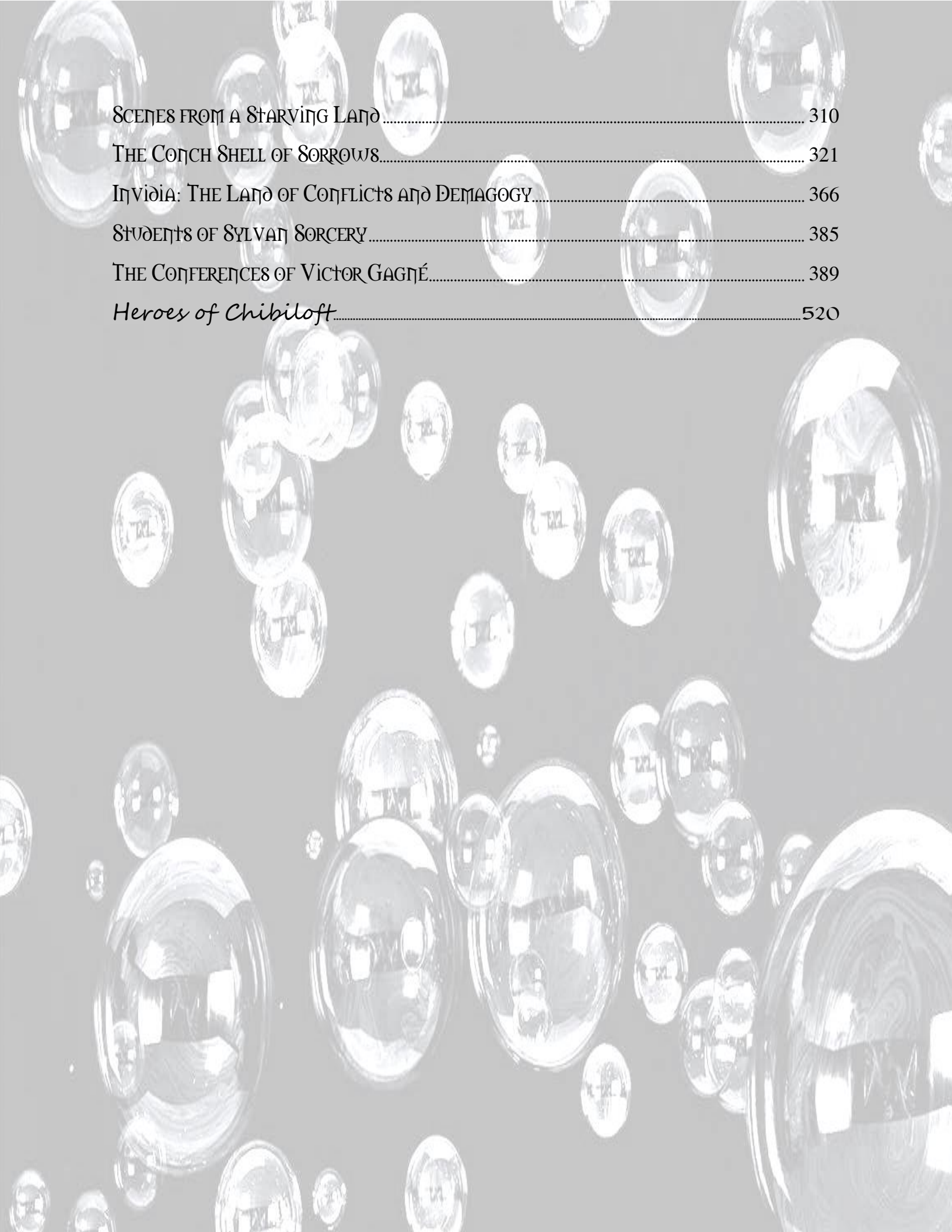
ABOUT ALTERNATIVE REALITIES, PARALLEL WORLDS,
STRANGE BUBBLES, NEW DOMAINS, OR WHAT MIGHT
HAVE BEEN...

RELEASED ON HALLOWEEN 2021

www.FraternityOfShadows.com

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION TO THIS YEAR'S THEME.....	1
HANDS STAINED WITH SHADOW.....	2
DEMENTLIEU, LAND OF MANIPULATION AND HYPOCRISY.....	12
THE GRAND ESTATE CLUSTER.....	28
A PRIMER TO THE UMBRA PEOPLES.....	47
OLERICK'S COLLOQUIAL GUIDES PRESENTS.....	101
<i>Excerpts from "The Register of Monsters"</i>	126
POST-APOCALOFT.....	146
CURSED ITEMS.....	154
DOVEHOME, THE ANTI-RAVENLOFT.....	156
LAMORDIA LAND OF PROGRESS AND TECHNOLOGY.....	170
The Falkovnia Files.....	199
Falkovnia Über Alles.....	200
Sins of the Father.....	204
Falkovnian Rebels.....	217
The Spawn of the Lizard.....	222
The Cyclops's Legacy.....	259
BORCA: A LAND OF POISON AND INTRIGUE.....	271
JUDGMENT ON SILENT WINGS.....	280
Lampago.....	283
CITY OF RAVENLOFT.....	297



SCENES FROM A STARVING LAND.....	310
THE CONCH SHELL OF SORROWS.....	321
INVIDIA: THE LAND OF CONFLICTS AND DEMAGOGY.....	366
STUDENTS OF SYLVAN SORCERY.....	385
THE CONFERENCES OF VICTOR GAGNÉ.....	389
<i>Heroes of Chibiloff</i>	520

COPYRIGHTS

This product has been published under the regulations of the Open Gaming License Version 1.0a 'd20 System' and the 'd20 System' logo are trademarks of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and are used according to the terms of the d20 System License version 6.0. A copy of this License can be found at www.wizards.com/d20.

This product requires the use of the Dungeons and Dragons® Players Handbook, published by Wizards of the Coast. Dungeons and Dragons, Wizards of the Coast, and D20 are registered trademarks of Wizards of the Coast.

OPEN GAME LICENSE Version 1.0a. The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved.

1. Definitions: (a) "Contributors" means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b) "Derivative Material" means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), potation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other form in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) "Distribute" means to reproduce, license, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d) "Open Game Content" means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity. (e) "Product Identity" means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress; artifacts; creatures characters; stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphic, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, personas, likenesses and special abilities; places, locations, environments, creatures, equipment, magical or supernatural abilities or effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product Identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the Open Game Content; (f) "Trademark" means the logos, names, mark, sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game License by the Contributor (g) "Use", "Used" or "Using" means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content. (h) "You" or "Your" means the licensee in terms of this agreement.

2. The License: This License applies to any Open Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License.

3. Offer and Acceptance: By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License.

4. Grant and Consideration: In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive license with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content.

5. Representation of Authority to Contribute: If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content, You represent that Your Contributions are Your original creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License.

6. Notice of License Copyright: You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game Content You are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title, the copyright date, and the copyright holder's name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any original Open Game Content you Distribute.

7. Use of Product Identity: You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or co-adaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title and interest in and to that Product Identity.

8. Identification: If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of the work that you are distributing are Open Game Content.

9. Updating the License: Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any authorized version of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License.

10. Copy of this License: You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute.

11. Use of Contributor Credits: You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so.

12. Inability to Comply: If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected.

13. Termination: This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License.

14. Reformation: If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable.

15. COPYRIGHT NOTICE Open Game License v 1.0 Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast.

Quoth the Raven Vol. 28, Released on October 31st, 2021

Dungeons and Dragons, D&D, and Ravenloft are trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast Inc (WotC). These trademarks are used without permission.

No part of this document is Open Game Content. The articles contained within this document are the sole property of the authors. Any unauthorized duplication of this document will result in a public beheading by Jacqueline Montarri, then spanking by Adam.

INTRODUCTION TO THIS YEAR'S THEME

“There are many, many, many worlds branching out at each moment you become aware of your environment and then make a choice.”
– Kevin Michel

“All my life,” he said, “I have been strangely, vividly conscious of another region—not far removed from our own world in one sense, yet wholly different in kind—where great things go on unceasingly, where immense and terrible personalities hurry by, intent on vast purposes compared to which earthly affairs, the rise and fall of nations, the destinies of empires, the fate of armies and continents, are all as dust in the balance” – Algernon Blackwood

“I sank back, deeper into the parallel universe I had found.” – Olivia Sudjic



Esteemed members of the Fraternity,
Miladies,

2021 saw the release of a new version of Ravenloft in 5th edition. It's an understatement that it's not how we – old timer fans – would have done it. Some will like it; some will use this new Ravenloft to get inspiration. So, here's this year's theme: other options of how Ravenloft could be.

Thank you to all authors and readers! Do not forget to review what you like and dislike. Enjoy this netbook!

Joël and Ron of the FoS

www.FraternityOfShadows.com

PS: many, many thanks to Benjamin Bauml and Mark Bartels for their help in editing the articles. If you want to thank them, their email is ma

CENSORED



HANDS STAINED WITH SHADOW

SUBCLASSES FROM GRIM HOLLOW IN THE DREAD REALMS

BY JONATHAN "HELL_BORN" CRAWFORD

Author's Note: When Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft released the official 5th edition setting conversion of Ravenloft to the public in 2021, it was surprisingly underwhelming in terms of player-focused content. In particular, only two new subclasses were on offer to represent the unique adventurers likely to be found in the Dread Realms: the College of Spirits Bard, and the Undead Patron Warlock.

Fortunately, 2021 also saw the release of the Grim Hollows Player's Guide, by Ghostfire Gaming; a sourcebook aimed at players interested in their 5th edition-based Dark Fantasy setting. In the vein of articles from Quoth the Ravens past, such as "Sword, Fist and Mist", this article will analyze the twenty-four subclasses from that sourcebook and discuss potential origins and plot hooks for them in games of Ravenloft.

Whilst this article will provide an overview of each subclass's core identity, it will not provide mechanics for them. Interested readers who have never heard of this sourcebook before are encouraged to buy it and support Ghostfire Gaming.

BARBARIAN

PATH OF THE FRACTURED

A barbarian following the Path of the Fractured takes a more cerebral approach to the traditional barbarian's rage-fueled fighting style. Rather than simply allowing themselves to be controlled by their fury, or tap into it when needed, the Fractured studies and practices esoteric psychological techniques in order to fundamentally split their psyche into two halves; the intellectual "Ego" and the emotional "Id". Of course, in the misty realms, other Fractured may find themselves pursuing this path involuntarily; their mind splinters after exposure to some horror that so traumatized them that they were forced to simultaneously tap into their deepest survival instincts and wall them off from the rest of their mind.

Regardless of whether they chose this path or it was forced upon them, the Path of the Fractured carries distinct powers. When the "Ego" persona is in control, the barbarian gains heightened intellectual abilities, whilst when the "Id" takes over, the body is enhanced. Indeed, Fractured in their "Id" personas physically change to the point they are barely recognizable; most human Fractured end up looking like calibans, whilst caliban Fractured can end up as truly monstrous!

Fractured who deliberately took this path are only found in domains where the practice of alienism is established. Such realms include Mordent, Dementlieu, Darkon, Lamordia, and Nova Vaasa. Such Fractured often have some connection to the mental illness research facilities present in these domains; they may not have been active practitioners of psychological treatment themselves, but they may well have corresponded with the practitioners residing there. Deliberately Fractured often have a superiority complex, feeling that their ability to manipulate their minds and receive such obvious benefits from doing so elevates them above the "common herd". The deliberately Fractured tend to act with the greatest coherency between their two personas. Whilst some do indeed view their "Ego" and "Id" as separate, they will rarely exhibit behaviors associated with multiple personality disorders.

One exception to the general origins of deliberately Fractured above is that the Thaani of Barovia may well have passed down fighting traditions honed during their history in Bluetspur that functionally equate to the Fractured path.

In comparison, the accidentally Fractured can arise from any walk of life. All that matters is that they were confronted with something so terrible that not only did it awaken their most bestial survival instincts, but the trauma has left them reeling. This most likely resulted as a result of confrontation with a monster or some truly wicked villain, but it's possible that the Fractured may simply have fallen afoul of a particular bad reaction to drug use in domains such as Nova Vaasa. Many of these Fractured were patients in a mental asylum at least once. Some may believe themselves to be possessed... and that could actually be the case.

The accidentally Fractured often have minds that haven't diverged as fully or cleanly as their deliberate counterparts. These Fractured may actively be aware of their two personas and even communicate between themselves. They may actively hate their opposite sides, which can

manifest as everything from verbal abuse directed to their "other self" to fighting for dominance.

PATH OF THE PRIMAL SPIRIT

Barbarians who walk the path of the Primal Spirit emerge from backgrounds almost identical to those who walk the path of the Totem Warrior. Both barbarians revere sacred animal spirits and learn to forge a mystic link with a specific spirit that empowers them. But whereas the Totem Warrior learns to channel that spirit's essence, imbuing themselves with innate magical abilities whilst in the throes of rage, the Primal Companion instead forges a deeper link - one so strong that their companion spirit takes physical form and travels at their side. These barbarians can often be mistaken for the beastmaster ranger, until they fall into their characteristic battle fury.

Primal companions are most likely to emerge from the more primordial regions of the Demiplane of Dread, the same as their Totem Warrior counterparts. Barovia, Kartakass, Invidia, Valachan and Nova Vaasa are all likely homes for these barbarians.

BARO

COLLEGE OF ADVENTURERS

Whilst all people love stories and songs of mighty heroes and bold adventurers, bards of the so-called College of Adventurers take these tales to their hearts. To an adventurer-bard, these are more than just morality tales or popular entertainment; they are very practical guides to how to follow in the footsteps of these heroes and survive.

An adventurer-bard seeks to become a jack of all trades, to the point that they can develop the ability to mimic other adventuring classes to a limited degree, whilst also honing their practical knowledge as far as they can. These traits make them incredible versatile, and an excellent fit into almost any kind of party.

Bards are found throughout the realms of mist, but the College of Adventurers is particularly associated with people who celebrate adventurers in their stories and songs. In the core, this largely covers Kartakans, Forfari, and the Darkonese; adventurer-bards from these lands are fairly normal. However, any individual inspired by bardic tales to pursue greatness could take this subclass, and thus realms normally characterized by their hostility to adventurers or their apathy, such as Barovia or Tepest, are likely to give rise to these bards, as unusually bold and cloistered youth take strength and hope from the old tales to the point that they finally gain the courage to leave.

COLLEGE OF DIRGE SINGERS

None who have ever mourned can doubt the powers of grief and melancholy. Whilst funerary musicians are common to much of the Core, the true Dirgist, a bard who has learned to tap the dark powers of necromancy through their music, is something else entirely.

Dirgists in the core are predominantly associated with Darkon, and especially eastern Darkon, with the tradition reputedly having originated from the isle of Liffe in the Nocturnal Sea. In Darkon, their style of music is referred to as "The Graveyard School". Ironically, whilst Kartakans avidly perform at funerals, they revile the dirgist as a borderline blasphemy; Kartakan funerals practice music to celebrate life, whilst the dirgist calls upon the powers of death through paens of grief, sorrow and loss. Sources are conflicted as to whether or not the far-off realm of Souragne is either similarly opposed to dirgists for reasons akin to the Kartakans, or if it is another haven for the school.

CLERIC

Eldritch Domain:

Clerics who embrace the Eldritch domain wield divine power in its rawest, most sanity-blasting form. They draw upon the powers of madness and dreams, speaking as the tongues of gods thought long dead. Ineffable, unknowable, these are the patrons of the Eldritch.

Obviously, such clerics are born, not made. There are no major religions or mainstream faiths in the Core that pay homage to such esoteric deities. An Eldritch Cleric typically arises spontaneously or after discovering some ancient grimoire that reveals long-forgotten lore. They are the leaders of small cults and the magi reigning over secret societies, and as such they can be found anywhere in the Demiplane of Dread. In Hazlan, a Mulan noble who unearths an ancient tablet from a private dig on their property may study it on a whim, only to find themselves haunted by terrible lucid dreams and haunted by shadowy figures. Beachcombers on the shores of the Nocturnal Sea discover golden relics, and wake screaming in the night of lost Shay-lot and the God Below. Manic figures in Lamordia scream of ancient powers returning to claim the world that mankind has inherited, and are dismissed by their "rational" kin.

Inquisition Domain

A cleric of the Inquisition believes in two things; that their god is supreme above all others, and that arcane magic is a blasphemy that must never be tolerated. Suffused with this certainty and the power of hate, the Inquisitors are deadly enemies to those they believe to be enemies of their church - especially spellcasters.

As designed, the Inquisition domain most strongly resonates with the Lawgiver faith of Nova Vaasa and Hazlan. Of these two domains, the Inquisitor almost certainly comes from Nova Vaasa; would-be

"witchhunters" tend to fare poorly in Hazlan, whose witchking takes a dim view of being called "abomination".

A good secondary alternative would be to play the Inquisitor as a Tespestani Cleric of Belenus; whilst the class features are specifically focused on battling spellcasters over fey creatures, the combination of the fey's tendency to rely on spells and the Tepestani Inquisition's secondary status as the demiplane's premier "witchhunters" makes the fit still quite a solid one.

Lastly, an unusual option for this subclass would be to play a Cleric of Ezra from the Nevuchar Springs sect; whilst Ezra's faith doesn't specifically focus on battling spellcasters, it does traditionally hold a great deal of enmity for rival clerics, which the highly militant Nevuchar Springs sect is most likely to act on. An Ezran Inquisitor could be devoted to battling divine spellcasters instead of the traditional arcane ones, eager to prove the supremacy of the Lady in the Mists and to defeat the "heathen" priests who lead folks astray.

DRUID

CIRCLE OF BLOOD

Whilst druids in general are characterized as the followers of "the old ways", the Circle of Blood practices a particularly old form of magic; the magic of blood and sacrifice. Blood is the essence of life, and as such it holds great power to those who know how to tap it. Druids of Blood are able to draw strength from the deaths of those around them, as well as to reach out and unleash the primal strength contained within an ally's blood.

Discuss with your Dungeon Master before taking this class! In the eyes of some DMs, this class's focus on blood magic means it may be too close to the dark arts to be tolerated as a player character.

Druids of Blood emerge wherever the druids of the Dread Realms are particularly contested, seeking to

harness death to turn against their many foes. The most obvious source for such a druid is the Forfarrians of Forlorn, who seek to employ its sangromantic rites to aid them in their ongoing battle against the goblins that defile that land. Otherwise, a blood druid may arise anywhere that individuals may look to the old magics for power, likely arising as a weird hermit with a sinister reputation in the more remote and wild domains such as Barovia, Invidia, Verbrek, or Kartakass.

CIRCLE OF MUTATION

All druids believe that nature is something that must be championed and protected. But what separates Druids of Mutation from their brothers and sisters is their decidedly unorthodox methodology. Having witnessed the ways humanoids have transcended nature's limits, they believe that nature needs a helping hand, and so they seek to manipulate the very fabric of life, altering and twisting plants and animals to imbue them with new abilities. They start by focusing on altering their own forms through Wild Shape, but slowly gain the ability to transform other beasts as well.

Most druids regard Druids of Mutation as blasphemers, but the Druids of Mutation believe that their efforts are what will ultimately save nature from destruction at humanoid hands.

In the Core, Druids of Mutation will primarily arise from Lamordia; such druids will probably not have quite the same religious beliefs about nature as druids from other realms, and may instead view themselves more as scientists unlocking the secrets of life and evolution. Their sanity may often be circumspect.

Another major source for Druids of Mutation is the Red Academy of Hazlan; Hazlik has long focused on the study of warping, shaping and creating life, so Mulan or Rashemani students of the Academy with similar inclinations could manifest talents akin to a Druid of Mutation. Such a character is likely multiclassed as a Wizard, but you could discuss with

your Dungeon Master about instead using this subclass as a Wizard's subclass that also provides access to the Wild Shape ability.

Other Druids of Mutation will emerge from across the Core in more singular fashions. Perhaps your Druid studied an obscene manual on fleshcrafting recovered from Bluetspur, or maybe you were a student of Falkfuhrer Doktor Vjorn Horstman at the Falkovnian Ministry of Science.

FIGHTER

BULWARK WARRIOR

Though the fighter's role is often regarded as simple, the truth is that it is just as complex and multifaceted as any other. After all, there are many faces to combat, and no mortal can hope to master them all. Bulwark Warriors focus on the art of defensive combat. With strength, endurance, a sturdy shield, and the thickest armor they can find, Bulwark Warriors form impregnable walls in the face of the fiercest obstacle.

No one domain in the Core is particularly "associated" with this subclass, as it represents a fairly universal concept. In fact, its reliance on heavy armor and durability is likely to be seen as somewhat old-fashioned in the more modern domains such as Borca or Dementlieu.

The dwarves of Darkon are probably the closest thing to a "native culture" that the Bulwark Warrior has, as it embodies the traditional dwarven fighting style to a T. This means it has likely passed on to other Darkonese warriors, especially those from areas with notable dwarf populations.

The only other noteworthy source of Bulwark Warriors is Falkovnia, whose brutal military tactics plunge their soldiers into grim, life-or-death struggles. Whilst not respected like the elite Talons are, Bulwark Warriors often form a solid core of veterans who manage to survive even the impossible odds that Kingfuhrer Vlad Drakov throws them into...

sometimes if only by knowing when to flee the military and abandon their cursed homeland.

LIVING CRUCIBLE

As long as something valuable has required effort to achieve, there have been those who have sought an easier way. Living Crucibles are fighters who aren't satisfied to rely on training to achieve the pinnacle of their abilities, or even on what nature deems the peak of physical capabilities. Instead, they turn to the study of alchemy, using themselves as test subjects to create, hone, and develop powerful combat drugs that allow them to make themselves harder, better, faster, stronger.

Living Crucibles only emerge in domains with a strong association with alchemy, such as Hazlan, Darkon, Nova Vaasa, and Borca. In the dread realms, Living Crucibles are often drug addicts, and may in fact be less warriors seeking an advantage and more hedonists striving to refine more potent narcotics, stimulants, hallucinogens and euphorics.

An interesting idea to consider might be what other abilities a Living Crucible's practice of dosing themselves with experimental drugs and noxious tinctures may have unlocked. A multiclass to Fractured Barbarian or Wild Magic Sorcerer would be perfectly thematic.

MONK

WAY OF THE LEADEN CROWN

Whilst all monks seek to master body and mind, the Way of the Leaden Crown focuses on unlocking the mind's hidden powers, imbuing its practitioners with strange psychic abilities. In most realms, this Way is associated with a strong belief in the right of humanoids to self-governance, with the Leaden Crown standing as a (perhaps self-elected) defense against aberrations and extraplanar creatures that might seek to rule over humanoids.

In the Dread Realms, the Way of the Leaden Crown is most likely passed down in its traditional form amongst the Thaani people of Barovia; having been tormented in their past by the horrors of Bluetspur, they possess both the affinity for psionics and the burning desire to make sure their captors can never take them again.

This Way may also exist in the realm of Hazlan, where it has probably forsaken any philosophical claims to the world's defense and is instead a cult-like movement amongst the Mulani, who are forever searching for new ways to gain power - especially over the Rashemani masses.

WAY OF PRIDE

Most monastic traditions preach the rejection of ego, the importance of humility, and the desirability of subservience to a greater whole. The Way of Pride rejects those beliefs entirely, deriding them as self-sabotaging nonsense; they instead champion the individual to embrace their confidence to the utmost, honing their arrogance and self-esteem until they can literally draw power from their own pride in their bodies.

A native practitioner of the Way of Pride is almost certainly a Mulan from Hazlan; only that realm combines the cultural embrace of both martial arts and unrestrained arrogance in such a way that this discipline could naturally emerge there.

PALADIN

OATH OF PESTILENCE

One of the darkest of all paladins, the Paladin of Pestilence is a grim herald of decay who spreads corruption, disease and filth to tear down that which offends them. Living by three simple tenets - Strength in Resilience, All Things Must Pass, Might Makes Right - the Paladin of Pestilence yearns to separate the weak from the strong and to grind away that which they view as holding the world back. At best, they are well-intentioned extremists,

turning their dark powers on monsters or the forces of corruption and stagnation. Most, however, are terrible villains.

Check with your Dungeon Master if you are interested in playing a Paladin of Pestilence! This antiheroic-at-best mentality and use of disease and rot as weapons may be too rooted in villainy for a Ravenloft campaign in their eyes, especially as Ravenloft has a long tradition of harshly punishing antihero and nonhero players.

OATH OF ZEAL

Hate is strength. That is the Oath of Zeal in its purest, simplest form. Similar in some ways to a paladin who has sworn the Oath of Vengeance, the Paladin of Zeal is a fanatical warrior whose driving goal is to see their work done, no matter the cost to those around them. Their tenet has but four commandments, and these sum up the Paladin of Zeal's mentality in a nutshell: Uncover Corruption. Purge the Heretics. No Mercy. By Any Means Necessary.

Paladins of Zeal are, ironically, the paladin subclass most likely to appear in the Dread Realms, due to their shadow-touched nature. Amongst the Iron Faith of the Lawgiver, these paladins serve as its holy warriors and champions against all threats. In Tepest, the Paladins of Zeal are the strong right arm of the Inquisition, seeking out and slaying witches and faeries and any who deal with them. Zealot paladins sworn to Belenus sometimes drift to the Core from far-off Nidala. Amongst the Church of Ezra, the Nevuchar Springs sect heralds Zealots as their greatest warriors against the Creatures of the Night. Even the cult of the Morninglord has a few Zealots in its ranks, dedicated to battling vampires and other nocturnal horrors.

RANGER

GREEN REAPER

The Green Reaper is a ranger who specializes in the study of all nature gives that is poisonous, venomous or toxic. They are warrior-assassins, harvesting deadly poisons and toxins from the wilderness and using this to augment their weaponry, imbuing them with heightened killing abilities compared to other rangers.

In the Core, two domains above all others produce Green Reapers, although they can appear in any domain that features poisonous native plants and animals, and will naturally proliferate in realms known for their toxic flora and fauna.

Forfarian Green Reapers are the silent blade of the druidic resistance against the goblins of Forlorn. Having decided that it is only right and fitting to wield nature's darkest gifts against the "wee beasties" despoiling her, these rangers creep through the dark woods and harvest its abundance of poisonous plants and fungi to make deadly attacks on goblins. These rangers tend to be ruthlessly pragmatic; poisoning a water supply and wiping out a whole goblin tribe is better than picking them off one at a time, after all.

Borcan Green Reapers tend to be very different to standard rangers; they often have very little interest in the wilderness for its own sake, and most don't consider themselves to be "rangers". Instead, they study natural poisons to harvest the abundant toxins of their homeland for their own use; many are fairly wealthy assassins, court poisoners or even professional duelists whom everybody knows (or at least suspects) use poison. A significant number are even from the ranks of the nobility. If playing a Green Reaper from Borca, consider multiclassing as a Rogue (Assassin, Swashbuckler, or Mastermind are most fitting) or investing in skills to represent that your character is as adept at maneuvering through the tangles of the social wilderness as they are with the undergrowth of the forest.

VERMIN LORD

Typically regarded with fear and distaste, these urban rangers practice a variant of the Beastmaster's philosophy - but rather than taming a single companion, they tame entire swarms of vermin, typically rats. With a magical affinity for disease and decay, many vermin lords are bitter misanthropes with a pronounced distaste for civilization, or else they are hedonistic nihilists fascinated by decay and ruination.

In the misty realms, only two domains spawn Vermin Lords with any particular frequency: Richemulot and Nosos.

ROGUE

HIGHWAY RIDER

From the backs of their trusty steeds, these rogues range far and wide, stalking the backroads and the rough country whilst waiting to ambush any passing traveler, coach or caravan. They strike from nowhere, swiftly take what they want, and then flee into the safety of the wilderness.

Highway Riders can be found through large swathes of the Core; any domain with a well-established road network and a tradition of horsemanship will of course produce its own Highway Riders. The two domains most known for their populations of Highway Riders are Darkon and Nova Vaasa.

MISFORTUNE BRINGER

Rogues will seek any advantage they can in their dirty dealings, and for some, this route leads to mystic trickery. Whilst the Arcane Trickster overtly wields magic, the Misfortune Bringer takes a more subtle approach, mastering the arts of cursing others with various minor jinxes, befuddling and debilitating their foes and marks alike to give the rogue the advantage.

Misfortune Bringers are quite common in the Dread Realms, but must walk with caution; whilst all who live in the misty lands know of and fear the power of curses, that fear can be a double-edged sword. A Misfortune Bringer who flaunts their powers too heavily may well provoke angry mobs desperate to destroy them. As a result, Misfortune Bringers tend to be highly nomadic, moving on before others can rally the mob. Ironically, those realms that most fear the curses of a Misfortune Bringer, such as Barovia or Tepest, are in many ways the most likely to give rise to these luck-stealing rogues.

This subclass is particularly associated with the Vistani, and that can bring its own dangers in places where the Vistani are especially hated. Whether or not the Misfortune Bringer actually has Vistani blood or merely studied the Vistani's rituals of cursing is up to the player.

SORCERER

HAUNTED

The powers of the Haunted sorcerer are easily explained; they have a strong connection to the spirit world, so much so that a ghost has attached itself to them, granting them a variety of ghostly powers. The sorcerer may regard this phantom as a friend and confidant, or perhaps they resent each other and are forced to work together, but regardless, they are in it together.

Haunted sorcerers abound in the Dread Realms, given how prevalent ghosts are in these lands. Some gain their power through rituals that openly call forth a spectral familiar, especially those from Darkon, whilst others may have been born with this power. Rumors suggest entire dynasties of Haunted sorcerers may be found in the foggy villages of Mordent. And of course, anyone who survives a near-death experience anywhere in the Dread Realms may find themselves returning to life with a companion to guide them along the way.

WRETCHED BLOODLINE

Tales abound of people who forge pacts with magical beings... and also of people who fall afoul of the vengeance of those self-same beings. A sorcerer whose powers stem from a Wretched Bloodline is the latest heir to a generations-spanning curse, but one who has learned to exploit their affliction. Whatever side-effects they may suffer, they have learned to leech the magic from their blood and wield it as a weapon, as well as to blight the luck of those around them.

As with the Haunted Sorcerer, Wretched Bloodlines are quite common in the Dread Realms. The vast majority will be either Fey-cursed, likely victims of hags or Arak, or Undead-cursed, typically having fallen afoul of the many vampires or liches. A Fiend-cursed sorcerer could still exist, but will require more research, given that fiends and fiendish cults are a distinct rarity in the misty lands. Perhaps one of your ancestors bargained poorly with Inajira?

WARLOCK

THE FIRST VAMPIRE

Vampires. Few undead have the sheer presence, the sheer mythological weight, as these powerful bloodsucking beings. In the mightiest of vampires, those of great age or who earned their damnation through curses or black magic, that mystical might becomes a force that others can learn to tap, granting them the powers of a warlock and the ability to imitate the nature of a vampire.

Vampire patrons for warlocks are certainly quite plentiful in the Dread Realms. Darklords such as Strahd or Von Kharkov are obvious candidates, but even elder vampires who haven't claimed such roles could potentially loan their ability to mortal vassals, such as Lady Kazandra, the leader of Darkon's Kargat.

The big question with playing a Vampire-sworn warlock is not "how", but "why". Why did your

character seek the powers of the vampire, and why did your patron accept you - or at least, why do you believe they accepted you?

One interesting twist on this subclass is that you are not bound to a singular patron in a conventional manner. Instead, you may actually be a kind of necrophage; you are a hunter of vampires who feeds on the tainted spirits of those who slay, stealing their essence and using it to strengthen yourself so that you can hunt more vampires and their thralls, willingly accepting the possibility of damning yourself to becoming such a monster in turn if you can turn their powers against them.

Another potential twist is that you are not bound to a vampire, but instead you are a specialist necromancer who seeks to become a vampire, to take that power for yourself through rituals of blood and death, without risking servitude to a vampiric sire. This works particularly well with a warlock who has taken the Pact of the Tome, or even multiclassed into Wizard.

THE PARASITE

There are powers in the dark that hunger for many things - for life, for flesh, for souls. The patron known simply as "The Parasite" eagerly seeks vessels that will help feed its hunger, implanting a tiny fragment of itself into their bodies and souls, allowing its vassal to feed in the same way as it does and offering them a dark route to physical empowerment. As the vassal's might grows, the line between host and parasite blurs.

Essentially a more predatory counterpart to the Great Old One, Parasite-patron warlocks are similarly diffuse in origins. It is most likely that they have some connection to Bluetspur and the Illithid God-Brain, for this is certainly the mightiest parasite to be found in the Dread Realms. Whether they were contacted by it in their dreams and offered a simple choice of feed or be food, or deliberately called for its dark gift after reading about it in

blasphemous occult texts, is irrelevant. All that matters is that they feed.

WIZARD

PLAGUE DOCTOR

General wisdom holds that curative magics are the sole province of priests, whilst wizards wield forces only suitable for destruction. The tradition known as the Plague Doctors rejects that wisdom, instead studying the medicinal sciences, herbalism and alchemy whilst combining them with arcane magic, learning to create a variety of tinctures that can heal or harm as the mage sees fit.

In the Dread Realms, Plague Doctors are most likely to exist as an organized tradition in the realm of Darkon, as it has both a long-standing acceptance of arcane magic and a history with deadly diseases, in particular the dreaded pandemic known as the Crimson Death that struck Darkon in the autumn of 688 BC and wiped out 1 in 5 Darkonians.

The other domain likely to have a notable tradition of Plague Doctors is Lamordia, which soundly rejects divine healing and instead turns to more scientific means of curing ills and maladies. Of course, that domain's insistence that magic does not exist presents some problems to having wizards who originate from that domain. A Lamordian Plague Doctor might be in denial that they are practicing magic at all, instead believing themselves to merely be on the cutting edge of alchemical bio-science.

Plague Doctors can also arise in the wilder regions of the Core, where they are likely to be known as "Folk Healers" or "White Witches"; such individuals are not heirs to an organized tradition, but instead the inheritors of a family legacy, or perhaps a chain of master-apprentice tutelage that may go back for generations. Such wizards are particularly likely in domains that consider themselves forsaken by the gods, such as Barovia or Verbek, where their blend of alchemy, herbalism, practical doctoring, and

magic may be the only lifeline that isolated villages have in case of an emergency. Despite this, these wizards will still be figures of superstitious fear and dread amongst their backwards neighbors, and it's far from implausible that they may have been driven from their home after one failure too many.

An interesting alternative origin for a Plague Doctor character is as a member of a Hala hospice. Take proficiency in Religion and adopt the tenets of Hala, and such a character would present a perfectly viable alternative to the Cleric for a Hallowed Witch of Hala.

SCHOOL OF SANGROMANCY

All know and fear necromancy as the study of magics relating to death, but relatively few know of its subschool, sangromancy, which instead focuses on the power of life as expressed through its most elemental medium: blood. Sangromancers are to sangromancy what necromancers are to necromancer; the undisputed masters of their art, specialized in wielding its powers with greater skill and adeptness than any mere dabbler can hope to achieve.

It bears mentioning that the Sangromancer subclass has features that revolve entirely around the Sangromantic School, an array of new spells introduced in the Grim Hollow Player's Guide. Without access to these spells, the Sangromancer is fundamentally useless.

However, as with the Circle of Blood Druid and the Oath of Pestilence Paladin, players are advised to discuss with their Dungeon Masters if they feel inclined to play this class, for it may be deemed too villainous to make a suitable player character in a Ravenloft campaign.

As highly specialized subschool of necromancy, sangromancers arise wherever necromancers arise, which in the Core means they are mostly commonly found in Darkon and Hazlan.



DEMENTLIEU, LAND OF MANIPULATION AND HYPOCRISY

BY TOMMASO "MISTMASTER" MAZZONI

Culture level: Renaissance

Ecology: Full

Climate & Terrain: Temperate, The domain is a mainly plains, between the Musarde River and the Sea of Sorrows.

Languages: Dementlieuse (French), Balok, Vaasi, and Mordentish.

Religions: Ezra, Lathurr, Andral.

Races: Human (Dementlieuse) 94%, Other 4%.

Government: Aristocratic Republic.

Ruler: Monsieur-Gouverneur Marcel Guignol.

Darklord: Dominic d'Honaire

Lightlord: Allan Ray

Inhabitants: 10,000,000.

Analogue: France, end of eighteen century with a Venetian republic twist.

Capital City: Port-a-Lucine (130,000 in)

Important towns: Chateaufaux (108,000), Carlion-le-Duc (103,000), Chateaunoir (75,000)

Borders: West: Sea of Sorrows, North: Harrington Dale, Pureterre and Lamordia, East: Harrington Dale and Falkovnia, South: Verbrek, Mordentshire, and Espinada.

TROPES

Dementlieu is a land of intrigue, manipulation, schemes, and contradiction; the privileged boast their freedom, while the poor and the downtrodden struggle to survive. Dementlieu is the land where the horror lays hidden behind light and splendor, and

the evil is the evil of hypocrisy, slander and manipulation.

DOMAIN OVERVIEW

Dementlieu is a mostly flat land between the Sea of Sorrows and the Musarde river. Blessed with fertile soil and a temperate climate, Dementlieu houses well-attended woods used as hunting preserves for the ruling nobles. The roads are well managed and a number of inns and small villages dot the land. The three major towns, after the capital of Port-a-Lucine, are: Chateaufaux, which guards the only bridge on the Musarde river, which separates the bogs and marshes of the Falkovnian Marche from Dementlieu proper, Carlion le Duc, on a gentle hill heading northwards towards the border with Pureterre, near the northern course of the Musarde river, and Chateaunoir, near the border with Mordent in the south.

THE PEOPLE

Dementlieuse are an hard working people, with some taste for good things, though. The Dementlieuse literacy rate is quite high, so they are a well-informed people, through the many newspapers and books. While only noblemen can be part of the Council of Brilliance, the Senate, the legislative parliament, is open to every wealthy man, and all citizens can vote for it; politics is thus quite the pastime for many Dementlieuse. Even your everyday peasant is able to read a newspaper and

will comment on it in front of the inn of his village. The Maires (Mayors) of the various villages are directly elected every five years, and every citizen holding property in a village or town is allowed to participate; needless to say, local politics are taken very seriously by the Dementlieuse. Appearance and reputation are quite valuable for the Dementlieuse, who know how much damage slandering can do. They are not very religious, especially when compared with the Pureterrans in the north, their "separated brothers". After the Falkovnian occupation the border population in particular has developed a more martial inclination. At the same time there has been a rekindling in the relationship with the Pureterrans, after their unexpected help against Falkovnia, during the occupation. Arts of all kind are of great importance to the Dementlieuse people.

History

Age of Creation

In the Age of Gods Dementlieu was the seat of a battle between Zakhata, the Lawgiver, and his sister Ezra, our Lady of Tears. Zakhata killed off the majority of Ezra's human cohorts, but the goddess's tears revived them.

Age of Empires

The ancient Olympian Empire built the first bridge of Chateaufaux and had a major harbor, Photogefyra in nowadays Pont-a-Lucine.

Age of Darkness

In the Age of Darkness, Dementlieu was a barbarian kingdom, invaded by Tergs. King Charles I, Stronghammer, defeated them, and created the Kingdom of Dementlieu which included also Pureterre, Harrington Dale, Richemulot, and Mordent.

The Modern Age

In the Modern Age, Zherisian invaders stole Mordent from Dementlieuse hands. The Kingdom of

Dementlieu became more centralized and absolutist with the passing of time. After losing the colonies of Ile de la Tempete, Ghastria, and Souragne in yet another war with Zherisia, the poor conditions of the people and the economic crisis led to the Great Dementlieuse Revolution, which marks the end of the Modern Age and the beginning of the Current Age. Southern Dementlieu (our Dementlieu NdR), led by Jean-Robert Guignol and Francois de Leon, became a republic, with the decapitation of the then King. The North remained a kingdom, the Kingdom of Pureterre. After a period known as the Great Terror, the republic stabilized himself as the aristocratic one it is today.

The Current Age

In the Current Age, after the end of the Great Terror, and the beginning of new colonial attempts, the major event was the Falkovnian invasion, and subsequent occupation and annexation of the majority of the nation by Vlad's armies. After five years of guerrilla warfare, and the prolonged siege of Port-a-Lucine, kept free thanks to Mordentish, Zherisian, and Pureterrann aid, Dementlieu broke free, and restored its independence in the current borders.

PLACES OF INTEREST

The capital city of Dementlieu is the shining city of Port-a-Lucine; this sprawling metropolis lays at the center of the Parnault Bay; the city is defended by land by massive walls and is divided in four Quartières:

Marchant, in the north-east, with the docks and the shops, and many inns.

Publique in the north-west, where you can find the government offices, the Jean-Robert Guignol Musée, the Port-a-Lucine Art Musée, the Maison de l'Opera Dementlieuse, the Ballet National du Dementlieu, the Universitée Nacional Dementlieuse (National Dementlieuse University), and the Palais Brillianté, the Shining Palace, the seat of the Council of Brilliance and of the Lord Governo. The Palais de

la Justice (Justice palace), the seat of the main court, and the general headquarters of the Gendarmerie are also in Publique, as are the Jardins Royales and its botanic gardens;

Ouvrier, the popular quarter, in the south-east, is an overcrowded slum, where crimes abound and people struggle to survive. The Germaine d'Honaire Memorial Hospital, Orphanage, and Charity is the only support for the poorest people.

Just on the other side of the Rue de Soleil, the main road, in the south-west, you find **Savant**, the noble quarter; there you can find Maison d'Honaire, and the other noble families' palaces, as well as the more expensive inns, shops, and restaurants.

Ste. Mere de les Larmes, Ezra's monumental Cathedral, dominates Place de Leon, the central square of the city.

The fortified city of Chateaufaux holds a strategic position on the river Musarde, both the only Bridge, and the best road on the somehow insidious Falkovnian Marche. During the Falkovnian invasion it was the theater of bloody battles and served as headquarters for the occupation force. A monument in the main square commemorates the victims of those times. The Laughing Pig is the most famous inn and restaurant of the town and it is owned by Harould Bellemonte (Middle-aged human fighter 5, LG) a retired war-veteran. A Core-renowned carriage factory, Clerque & Verbois has contributed to the reconstruction establishing its central headquarter in the town, and employing many people. The factory has a distinguished tower shape which makes it an interesting view.

Carlion-le-Duc is an important port on the Musarde river, and controls all trade with Lamordia and Pureterre in the North, and managed to pass the Occupation unscathed. The Town Hall was once the Ducal palace of Carlion-le-Duc. The Headfall Inn is the main inn of the town, its owner is Granny Antoinette Gilard, the Maire's sister, a big woman famed for her cooking.

Chateau noir was an agricultural village razed to the ground by the Falkovnian army during the punitive expedition against Mordentshire, because it was suspected to offer shelter to the Mordentish based resistance. Completely rebuilt and repopulated, it is now a thriving town with lot of trading and manufactories. The Black Cat Inn is the main restaurant of the town, and its owner is a crazy yet beloved woman, Julie Savoire.

RELIGIONS

The Church of Ezra, Mother of Tears is, since the Revolution and the breaking of ties with the Home Faith, the state religion of the secularized republic. It focuses on the care of the poor, the respect of the law, and on spiritual growth, mercy, and compassion. This sect of Ezra actually claims to be more ancient than the Home Faith, which became the dominant branch of the faith of Ezra only after King Charles IV's reign, 100 years after the fall of the Terg Empire. The Head of the Church is the Bastion of Port-a-Lucine. This Lawful Good religion has a shield with a tear as its symbol, the favored weapon is the Longsword, and its domains are Community, Good, Healing, Law, Protection, Travel.

THE FAMED AND THE INFAMOUS

Allan Ray

(Adult Human Investigator 12, NG) he head advisor of the Gendarmerie Dementlieuse, Allan Ray is of Zherisian and Darkonese descent, and he might have elven blood in his veins. Allan Ray's demeanor is calm and controlled, but under his cold facade he hides a deep sense of justice and decency; his deductive abilities are exceptional, and he is pretty skilled with weapons too. His love of truth often puts him in a difficult position with the Dementlieuse ruling class's hypocrisy and duplicity. His ability has foiled the criminal plans of the mysterious crime-lord known as the Brain, but he has also uncovered the existence an even more mysterious overlord, only known as the Master, who seems to rule the

whole of Dementlieu through a tightly knotted net of blindly obedient servants. No clues have emerged on who the Master might be, but he suspects that person hides himself in plain sight. He has recently overcome his dependence on a drug and he suffers painfully because of his abstinence. He has also forbidden himself to have any kind of human relationship, lest he expose himself to his enemies. Doctor Sedgewick is the only one able to see through his veil of misanthropy.

(Adventure hook: Recently, Allan's investigation on the mysterious puppeteer known as the Master might have uncovered some good clues, but the fundamental proof is still missing and Allan decide to ask for PCs help.)

Arthur Sedgewick

[Middle-aged Alchemist Chirurgeon 8, NG] Doctor Sedgewick had been a camp medic during the Falkovnian invasion and occupation, and during the siege of Pont-a-Lucine; He is a native of Mordent, his father a Zherisian, but his family moved to Carlion-le-Duc when he was very young. He is the only person who can put up with Allan Ray's jerkish attitude. He is also Mr. Ray's biographer.

(Adventure hook: Arthur is quite worried for Mr. Ray, who is working himself sick with on his latest case; desperate for help, he asks the PCs for aid.)

Lord-Governor Marcel Guignol

[Old Human (Obedient) Aristocrat 6, LN] The longest serving Lord-Governor of the Most Serene Republic of Dementlieu to date, Marcel Guignol, is the head of the powerful Guignol family, and a descendant of Jean-Robert Guignol, one of the fathers of the republic. He had been a member of the Council of Brilliance (Councilor of Economy) for 20 years before being elected as Lord-Governor. His health is ailing, but he still exudes an air of authority. Under his tenure the country prospered, poverty was reduced, and Dementlieu managed to survive the Falkovnian invasion. Secretly he has been turned in an Obedient, a puppet in the hands of the Master,

Dominic d'Honaire. By law, as Lord-Governor he is also Maire of Pont-a-Lucine.

(Adventure hook: Lord Marcel is seriously ill, but he is not allowed to die, not yet, and every person involved with treatment of his health problems is disappearing, including a close friend of one of the PCs.)

Councilor Claude La Grange

(Middle-aged Human Illusionist Wizard 8 N) The Councilor for Economic Business, Claude La Grange is a member of the very influential La Grange family, and he is also the head of the Société des Legerdemain, a guild of stage-magicians who are, in truth, arcane researcher. His powerful will and arcane defenses have preserved him, thus far, from being subjugated by d'Honaire's manipulations. His own arcane researches, however, came with a price, giving him the unsettling ability to turn his head by 180 degrees.

(Adventure hook: Councilor La Grange has noticed some evidence of embezzling of public funds by members of the council; needing to investigate the matter, he decide to employ the PCs, demanding discretion and secrecy.)

Councilor Helené du Suis

(Young Adult Human female, Rogue 7 NE) The protégée and sometime lover of Dominic, she is the Councilor for Public Function, responsible for all bureaucratic matters. She is very ambitious, and is taking advantage of d'Honaire's affections to restore her own destitute family. She knows she is playing with fire, but she hopes to gain much from this relationship. She is walking a fine line, and knows that.

(Adventure hook: Helene is discreetly filling public offices with her men, with members of her family in important positions; when proof of her nepotism falls into the hand of a journalist, friend of the PCs, she won't spare any effort to have those proofs back, and the journalist silenced.)

The Brain aka Rudolph von Aubrecker

(Middle Aged Living Brain in a Jar Psychic 10, LE) Once the brilliant, yet debauched, spare to the throne of the Lamordian Barony, and a bitter rival of Dominic at Dementlieuse University, he was mortally wounded while on his way back from Dementlieu. Brought to Dr von Mordenheim, his brain was saved, but his body was lost; He developed mental powers that allowed him to install himself in Pont-a-Lucine and to create a powerful criminal empire; he found himself at odds with the great detective Allan Ray, and also with the mysterious overlord called the Master; while suspicious, the Brain is still ignorant of the true identity of the Master.

(Adventure hook: Rumors say that the Dementlieuse criminal underground is changing; the Circle Sinister might not be the most powerful gang in the city anymore; the PCs are asked by a friend in the Gendarmerie to investigate the Dark Thought, a supposed new player.)

Councilor Jean-Pierre Theroux

[Adult Human Bard 4 (Obedient) CG] The young, flamboyant scion of the Theroux family is a patron of the arts; his Councillorship is that of the Culture, and he controls both instruction and artistic development. Him being an obedient means that d'Honaire controls the main intellectual activities of the country through him.

(Adventure hook: Lord Theroux has intentions to host a great bardic competition, the Festival of Port -a-Lucine; however, the first edition will be the last if he can't manage to find the prizes, which were stolen; he asks the PCs for help.)

Councilor Josephine Chantreaux

[Middle-aged Human Gunslinger 8 LG] A veteran of the Falkovnian Invasion and Occupation, the Councilor for the Foreign Affairs is responsible for the Treaty of the Seven Towers between Dementlieu, Pureterre, Mordent, Richemulot, Borca, Dorvinia, and Tepest. She is a staunch opponent of

the Falkovnian regime, and tries to discreetly help any opposition to Drakov. Her strong will has protected her from d'Honaire's powers, until now, but she is still playing to his tune.

(Adventure hook: Tepest wants to leave the Treaty and that is something Josephine won't allow to happen; she sends the PCs as her intermediates to Kellee's court to persuade the Tepestan Queen to stay in the alliance.)

Councilor René Thoubold

(Adult Human Fighter 5 (Obedient), LN) The Councilor of Defense, commander of the Gendarmerie, and hero of the Liberation of Chateaufaux, René Thoubold is honest and straightforward; he is also one of the Obedients, subjugated by d'Honaire's will.

(Adventure hook: Renè is getting worrying reports from the garrisons in the Falkovnian Marches; is Falkovnia preparing a new invasion or simply trying to prevent Dementlieu from building a new fortified city in the marches? In any case he sends the PCs to investigate.)

Gaston de la Pont

(Adult Bard Magician 5, NG) Gaston de la Pont is a celebrity in Dementlieu, a quite talented stage magician, he is also a hero of the Falkovnian Siege of Pont-a-Lucine, where, still half a boy, he managed to entrap a command of Talons in the sewers, preventing them from opening the doors to their army. He is more interested in his art than in the more serious arcane research that the Société des Legerdemain pursues. However, he is an excellent front-man and recruiter for the society.

(Adventure hook: During a show, one of Gaston's tricks goes wrong and a PC's friend dies; they must investigate the accident.)

Jean-Jonas Fildejaques/The Whisper

(Adult Human Vigilante 8, NG) The no-nonsense director of la Gazette de Pont-a-Lucine, JJ is a good

man who fights for truth in a city ruled by lies. The greying, mustached man is a widower; he lost his wife to a killer paid by a corrupt politician to shut him up but he has, after that episode, redoubled his efforts.

(Adventure hook: His own most vocal opposition during the day, writing scorching editorials against the threat of vigilantes, during the night, Fildejaques, wears the pale mask of the crime-fighter known as the Whisper, the terror of every cutthroat in the city; and the PCs stumble on his true identity by chance.)

Bastion Joan Secousse

(Old Human Cleric of Ezra 7, LG) The ailing Joan is the beloved head of the Dementlieuse Sect of Ezra's Church. The cult of Our lady of Tears is quite different from the other sects, and claim to be the more ancient and faithful of the sects; Her death could create a strong division in the church, as her designated successor does not have a strong popular appreciation.

(Adventure hook: She is discussing secretly with an envoy of the Borcan Bastion to end the schism; when the envoy goes missing Joan sends for the PCs; they must find him before Joan's health takes another dive.)

Maire Henry Melano

(Middle-aged Aristocrat 4, LN) The Maire of Chateaufaux, he has worked hard to restore his city from Falkovnian occupation; his efforts have been rewarded, and once again Chateaufaux flourishes. He is fairly sure to be re-elected in the upcoming next election.

(Adventure hook: Henry has been behaving strangely for a while, and his wife asks the PCs for help, before the elections starts.)

Marc-Antoine Clerque/Jean-Henry Verbois

(Adult Human Splintered One Rogue 8 CG & Fighter 8 LG) Marc-Antoine Clerque is a flamboyant, red-haired tall and lean man, quick of tongue and nimble

of hand, who spends great amount of money both in leisure and in charity. His partner is the sober war veteran Jean-Henry Verbois, less talkative, shorter and portlier, but still muscled. The two of them are a formidable team as head of their factory, but they are never seen together.

(Adventure hook: Marc-Antoine and Jean-Henry are one single person; Jean-Henry was captured and tortured by the Falkovnian army and experimented on by their arcane researchers. To survive, his mind created a second personality; Marc-Antoine takes hold when night falls, and leaves Jean-Henry notes on his actions, while Jean-Henry does the same during the day. But one day, Marc-Antoine is grievously injured before he can retire to his manor and the PCs see his transformation; he begs them to keep his secret.)

Maire Marie Gilard

(Old Green Hag, Witch 7, LE) This middle-aged, classy woman, at the head of a famous and renowned factory of sweets in Carlion le Duc, is one of the richest women in Dementlieu.

(Adventure hook: Marie Gilard is, in truth, a Green Hag of great cunning. Her factory is a cover for much darker businesses, involving drugs and dangerous potions; however, she struggles to keep up appearances, putting her at odds with her sisters and daughters, who often succumb to their darkest alimentary urges. Once in a while, she must act to prevent them from being exposed by employing adventurers as her unwitting problem solvers.)

Antoinette Gilard

(Old Green Hag, Witch 5, NE) The maire of Chateaufaux's younger sister, confidentially called granny by her customers, is a jolly and witty woman, always ready to give a word of advice.

(Adventure hook: A Green Hag of a more traditional bent, Antoinette struggles under her sister's tight rule; when she decides enough is enough, she contacts the PCs with grave news about her sister.)

Maire Lucien Lamont

(Adult Human Afflicted Werewolf Hunter 7, N) Lucien Lamont enriched himself in Verbrek, before returning to Chateaunoir to help its rebuilding, and becoming its mayor. Unfortunately, beside his riches, he also found the bite of a werewolf there; he keeps his curse a close secret, using a rare concoction of herbs from the land of Zeindost, in the far south, to keep his own inner beast in check, and so far, he has succeeded.

(Adventure hook: Someone has discovered Lucien's secret and has stolen his reserves of herbs; three days are left before full moon night and Lucien asks the PCs to recover his medicinal herbs.)

Julie Savoie

(Adult Human Oracle of Ezra 6, NG) Julie is a weird woman, always smiling and saying things without any apparent logic. She is also very welcoming and compensates for her madness with her generosity, and the community adores her so much that attempts to put her into an asylum have failed thanks to the town's indignation.

(Adventure hook: Julie is an obstacle for one of Dominic's schemes, and she is too crazy to obey him; he is trying to undermine her, and she asks for the PCs help against "the mockingbirds who sing foul songs.")

Dr Wilhelm Mikki

[Middle-aged human Wizard (Alienist (see below)) 7 CN] This bizarre resident of Chateaufaux is a brilliant scholar, a powerful arcanist, and he is more than half mad. He is also rich and influential, so the authorities let him be.

(Adventure hook: This time Dr Mikki is worried, his last experiment might have consequences that his money won't be able to remediate or cover up; he asks the PCs for help.)

Marcel Bodine

(Human Adult Artificer 9, L/) Marcel Bodine is considered the Victor von Mordenheim of Dementlieu, and both he and von Mordenheim despise this definition, for different reasons; von Mordenheim believes his genius knows no equal, while Bodine admires the intellect of von Mordenheim, but deeply despises his lack of ethics. That said, Bodine is a genius, and his inventions could change the face of Dementlieu and of the whole core, should someone start to finance him seriously; but, for the moment, no one is doing that, and his attempts to relocate to another country have failed. Someone seems to fear the potential of Bodine's inventions.

(Adventure hook: Once again, an investor suddenly stepped back before signing the contract, but this time Marcel wants to learn why, and asks for the PCs' help.)

Organizations

The Circle Sinister

This Neutral Evil criminal syndicate is the richest known criminal guild in Port-a-Lucine; the leader of the organization, Pierre le Noire (Middle-aged Human Rogue Guild Agent 13) has even sat in the Senate a couple of times and many of the guild activities are currently legal. Le Circle d'Onyx, the insurance company, is the guild's main cover and is so powerful that it has kept the Dilisnyas and the Boritsis out of Dementlieu until now.

(Dread Possibility: The Real Brain of the Guild - While the Gendarmerie thinks that the Dark Thought is an upstart gang, which is fighting the Circle, things might be different if the Brain has managed to take control of Pierre's mind.)

The Dementlieuse Senate

The Senate is the Neutral legislative body of Dementlieu. It confirms the members of the Council of Brilliance, and elects the Lord-Governor. Its sessions are usually presided by the Chief Advisor.

The two main parties are the Liberals, which are a narrow majority that represent the bourgeoisie, and the Conservatives, which represent the landowners. The Liberal senators are, in the majority, still free from d'Honaire's influence, thus, he won't be elected Lord-Governor should Guignol die, retire or be declared unfit to rule.

(Dread Possibility: The 152th Seat - There are 151 seats in the Senate, with the 151st belonging to the president; but originally there was a 152th seat, a stone throne carved with runes, belonging to the king. Any attempt to remove it failed, so today it is covered by a curtain; the throne is said to be cursed. Anyone who sits on it without being the rightful king of Dementlieu will die in 24 hours.)

The Fraternity of Shadows

This Neutral Evil organization of scholars, in Dementlieuse known as the Fraternité des Ombres pose as an exclusive college fraternity of the Dementlieuse University: the ΦΔΟ (Phi Delta Omicron, FdO in the ancient Olympian alphabet), which works as a recruitment pool for the real fraternity. The Fraternity dedicates itself to knowledge, but the methods it uses to gain it might be really unethical. The Fraternity divides its ranks between informants, agents, brothers, elder brothers, and the 5 members of the Inner Circle including the headmaster of the University, Lord Balfour de Casteelle (Middle-aged Human Illusionist Shadow Brother 13 NE)

(Dread Possibility: The Secrets of the Shadows - the Inner Circle and the Elder Brothers of the Fraternity are all powerful spellcasters, who are researching the nature of the Mists; but what force powers them? Maybe an ancient darkness, imprisoned at the beginning of the Age of Creation? The same force maybe convinced the Fraternity Inner Circle that they are living in an illusory word, an illusion they are trying to remove.....)

The Noble Brotherhood of Assassins

This CG organization strives to end the corruption, nepotism, and conservatism of the ruling class; the name is ironically referring to character assassination, the act of defaming someone using rumors, newspapers, pamphlets and the like. The new leader of the organization, Isabelle d'Aprix (Middle-aged Human Bard Wit 12, CG) is turning the organization in a powerful political player; she has even founded a party to represent their group in the senate, the Partie Radicale (Radical Party).

(Dread Possibility: The Pen Kills More Than the Sword - Someone has taken the Brotherhood's name too literally: enemies of the brotherhood are found dead, with a sharpened pen in their necks. Who is this mysterious killer?)

The Port-a-Lucine Gazette

This LN newspaper is the oldest and more prestigious in the Core; it covers daily a vast number of topics and employs firms of Core-wide fame under the firm direction of Jean-Jonas Fildejaques

(Dread Possibility: a New Investor - the Gazette is in need of new funds, but what would be the true intentions of the investor, Lord Theroux? Could the newspaper lose its neutrality?)

The Society of Legerdemain

This Neutral society, under the cover of prestidigitation and entertainment, pursue real arcane researches. It also wields considerable political power, since its chairman Claude La Grange became the Councilor for economic business

(Dread Possibility: The Secret Library; under the Café Mystique, the private club of the Society, rumors say that a great arcane library is kept hidden; protected by many spells and traps, it could retain very dangerous secrets.)

THE DARKLORD: DOMINIC D'HONAIRE

Middle Aged Humanoid (Human) [NE Mesmerist 13] (69 HP)

Speed: 30 feet

Initiative: +0 (+1 in the Maison d'Honaire)

Senses: Perception +17(+1 in the Maison d'Honaire)

Armor Class: 17, Touch 12 Flat Footed 17 (+2 natural, +3 armor, +2 deflection) (+1 in the Maison d'Honaire)

Space/Reach: 1 square /1 square

Combat Maneuver Defense/Combat Maneuver Bonus:+9/19 (+1 in the Maison d'Honaire)

Str:9, Dex:10, Con:10, Int:18, Wis:12, Cha 20 (24)

Saving Throws: Fort:+6, Ref:+10, Wil:+16 (+18) (+1 in the Maison d'Honaire)

Special Qualities: curse of the Dark Lord, Immune to Mind Affecting Effects, Consummate liar, knacks, mesmerist trick (Compel Alacrity, False Flanker, Gift of Will, Greater Mask Misery, Mask Misery), towering ego, touch treatment (minor, moderate, greater), Manifold tricks (4), mental potency(+2), Glib Lie, Spells, Sinkhole of Evil 1

Special Attacks: hypnotic stare (-3), painful stare, Bold stare (Disorientation, Psychic Inception, Susceptibility), Suggestion at Will (Voice), Dominate at Will (Gaze) Create Obedient.

Attack: Melee: +1 sword cane +9/+4 (1d6/x2)(+1 in the Maison d'Honaire) **Ranged:** +1 pistol +10/+5 (1d8+1/x4, range 20 ft, ignore armor, misfire 1; 2 with paper cartridges) (+1 in the Maison d'Honaire)

Skills: Bluff:+32 (+35), Diplomacy:+21(+23), Disguise:+13 (+15) Intimidate:+21 (+23) Knowledge (History):+16, Knowledge (Local):+16, Knowledge (Nobility)+16, Performance (Oratory):+17 (+19) Profession (Lawyer) :+17, Sense Motive:+17, Sleight of Hand:+16, Spellcraft: +20.(+1 in the Maison d'Honaire)

Feats: Deceitful, Cast in Combat, Focus Skill (Bluff), Exotic Weapon Proficiency (firearms), Intuitive Spell, Logical Spells, Improved Feint.

Spells:

Spell DC: 17+Spell Level. (+1 in the Maison d'Honaire)

Spells per Day: 1th: 7; 2d: 7; 3d: 6, 4th: 4, 5th: 2

Known Spells: 0-Level Mesmerist Spells (Knacks): *detect magic, detect poison, detect psychic significance**, *lullaby, message, unwitting ally*.

1st-Level Mesmerist Spells: *burst of insight**, *confusion (lesser)*, *detect undead, diagnose disease, discern next of kin, unnatural lust, vanish*.

2nd-Level Mesmerist Spells: *anonymous interaction, anticipate thoughts**, *cat's grace, mantle of calm, tongues*.

3rd-Level Mesmerist Spells: *confusion, geas (lesser), glibness, see invisibility, seek thoughts*.

4th-Level Mesmerist Spells: *break enchantment, daze (mass), detect scrying, invisibility (greater), modify memory*.

5th-Level Mesmerist Spells: *foe to friend, seeming*.
*See *Occult Adventures* for the Mesmerist class.

Challenge Rating: 15

Proprieties: (46,500 gp/62,000 gp) +1 Pistol, +1 Sword Cane, Amulet of Natural Armor +2, Bracers of Armor +3, Cloak of Resistance +2, Headband of Alluring Charisma +4, Ring of Protection +2

BACKGROUND

Dominic d'Honaire was born in the Current Age, 55 years ago, the scion of the Dementlieuse house of d'Honaire. As a boy, he was pampered, especially after his mother's death; the arrival of a new strict governess forced the boy to develop his charm to get what he wanted, and he became a master strategist and manipulator. He developed a passion for politics and oratory, which pushed him to

graduate as a lawyer at Pont-a-Lucine University. There he met the only two people able to compete with him at chess, Allan Ray and Rudolph von Aubrecker; but while, with the first one, the rivalry developed in a friendly way, with the arrogant von Aubrecker it transcended. His first step towards darkness was arranging for the Lamordian heir to be ambushed during his travel home. During the Falkovnian invasion and occupation, he unlocked his psychic powers and used them to further the cause of Dementlieuse freedom. Succeeding his father as the Councilor for Law, and Chief-Advisor of the Lord Governor was his greatest achievement, but it came with a price: the life of his father. He poisoned the elder d'Honaire to get him to retire, and that ultimately killed him. Getting his way was becoming Dominic's only preoccupation; as the head of his House, he had to marry, and he set his eyes on Isabelle Guignol, the daughter of the Lord Governor. But she was already promised to another nobleman, and he arranged for that man's suicide. He married her, and she gave him his heir, Dominic le Jeune. But Isabelle discovered Dominic's involvement in her beloved fiancé's suicide, and he drove her to suicide too, covering it with a murder pinned on bandits. This last atrocious crime brought the attention of the Mists, and he became Dementlieu's Darklord. It happened at the signing of Chateaufaux Ceasefire which ended the Falkovnian occupation.

~~CURRENT SKETCH~~

D'Honaire rules Dementlieu behind the scenes, but he is unsatisfied by this; his curse (see below), however, prevents him from gaining any kind of glory or any direct advantage. He is toying with the idea of marrying again, to Helene; he knows that the woman is playing him for a fool, but he can't resist challenges. He is deeply addicted to chess games on a nationwide scale, and he is still playing an actual game started when he was at the University, against Allan Ray. They meet rarely, but any time they do, they play without the board, only using their photographic memory. He is playing on a broader scale against Wilhelm von Aubrecker, a.k.a. the

Brain. His curse prevents him from winning decisively, but he stays ahead; his heir, Dominic le Jeune, whom he cares for deeply, is a lecher and not interested in politics; his last son, Germaine, however is showing potential. At any given time, he has at least four schemes ongoing and three brewing. He is starting to grow frustrated, however, as ultimate victory keeps eluding him.

~~COMBAT~~

Dominic despises getting involved personally in battle. When he must, he uses his powers and his spells to sway the opponents; if forced to, he will draw his pistol and his sword cane and try to make a fighting retreat.

~~SPECIAL ABILITIES~~

Dominate (Gaze) DC 23 at Will

Suggestion (Voice) DC 23 at Will

Create Obedient: Three failed Will saves against his Dominate power in the same year turn the victim in an Obedient, perpetually dominated. The tricks implanted in Obedients do not count against his maximum per day, he can also communicate telepathically with his Obedients, and they get a +1 bonus against Mind Affecting effects, +1 for each year they spent as Obedients. He can have a maximum of 20 Obedients under his powers in any given moment. (Level+Charisma modifier) Mesmerist abilities (See *Occult Adventures*)

~~CURSE OF THE DARK LORD~~

Dominic's curse is the inability to reap any direct advantage by his own authority; he can't advance beyond his actual station nor can he get his heart's desire. Every time he tries, it ends with him empty handed. His schemes can only succeed when he does not gain direct advantage by them. He is also unable to be acknowledged for his merits. As a side effect, his domination powers do not work on his blood relations.

LAIR

Maison d'Honaire is the ancestral manor of d'Honaire family. It is a rank 1 Sinkhole of evil, with the confusion ability.

CLOSING THE BORDER

When Dominic wishes to close the borders, a mirage illusion confounds the travelers, forcing them back. Only drunken, mindless, or confused creatures are immune to this effect. Dominic can close the borders for one hour every week.

NEW CLASS ARCHETYPES

ALIENIST (WIZARD)

While many alienists simply study aberrant human behavior, some, including Mikki, have stumbled onto true Aberrations that have contacted some of their patients and broken their minds. These True Alienists have gone past treating mental health and to directly study these and combat creatures behind the veil.

The Alienist (*or Aberrationist*) is a Wizard who studies the mysteries of the unnatural creatures that come from beyond the stars or from under the earth. (*Idea derived from Complete Arcana Alienist wizard PrC*)

Associated School: Transmutation.

Suggested Opposition Schools: Divination, illusion, or conjuration.

Alignment: any not lawful.

Requirements: An alienist must choose a familiar as her arcane bond at 1st level.

Modified Powers: The following school powers modify the Physical Enhancement and the Change Shape powers of the transmutation school.

Mental Enhancement: Like Physical Enhancement but it provides a bonus to one mental characteristic; It does not count for bonus spell slots.

Change Shape: At 8th level, you can change your shape for a number of rounds per day equal to your wizard level. These rounds do not need to be consecutive. This ability works like Aberrant Body I or Monstrous Physique II. At 12th level it can also work as Aberrant Body II, Ooze Form I, or Monstrous Physique III

Pseudonatural Familiar (Ex): At 7th level, you gain Improved Familiar as a bonus feat, and your familiar gains the Pseudonatural Template.

SHADOW BROTHER (WIZARD)

The shadow brother is a wizard who learned the ways of the Fraternity of Shadows.

Associated School: Illusion

Suggested Opposition Schools: Necromancy.

Alignment: any not good.

Requirements: A shadow brother must choose a familiar as his arcane bond at 1st level.

Shadow Knowledge: the shadow brother adds half level to any Knowledge check.

Replacement powers: The following school powers replace the extended illusions, blinding ray, and invisibility field powers of the illusion school.

Disturb Illusions (Su): You can temporarily dispel an illusion when you pass your save to disbelieve it, for a number of rounds equal to 1/2 your wizard level, maintaining concentration with a move action. At 20th level, you can permanently dispel an illusion, by spending an illusion spell of the same level, as an immediate reaction once you pass the saving throw.

Shadow Ray (Sp): As a standard action you can fire a shadowy dark ray at any foe within 30 feet as a ranged touch attack. The ray causes creatures to be

frightened for 1 round. Creatures with more Hit Dice than your wizard level are shaken for 1 round instead. You can use this ability a number of times per day equal to 3 + your Intelligence modifier.

Shadow Field (Sp): At 8th level, you can manipulate shadow in a 20-foot radius for a number of rounds per day equal to your wizard level. These rounds do not need to be consecutive. You can increase the intensity of the darkness up to that of a *deep darkness* spell; you can also extinguish any non-magical light source in the radius, and drastically drop temperature inside the area. Any hostile creatures in the area get an amount of cold damage equal to your wizard level. At 12th level you can use the shadows as a *shadow conjuration* spell, and they are 50% real for non-believers. At 20th level you can use it as the *shades* spell.

Shadow Familiar (Ex): At 7th level, you gain Improved Familiar as a bonus feat, and your familiar becomes a Shadow.

NEW MONSTER

BRAIN IN A JAR

CE Tiny undead CR 4 XP 1,200

Init +2; **Senses** blindsense 60 ft., darkvision 60 ft., Perception +11

Defense

AC 18, touch 14, flat-footed 16 (+2 Dex, +2 size, +4 armor)

hp 37 (6d8+12)

Fort +4, **Ref** +4, **Will** +8

SQ: undead traits, channel resistance +4, madness

Offense

Speed 0 ft., fly 30 ft. (good)

Melee slam +1 (1d3-5)

Space 2 1/2 ft.; Reach 0 ft.

Spells: Like a 6th level Psychic, concentration +10 (+14 casting defensively), save 14+spell level.

Spell-like Abilities CL 6th, concentration +10 (+14 casting defensively)

Constant—*mage armor*

At will—*mage hand, open/close, telekinetic projectile* (+8 to hit)

1/day—*dominate person* (DC 17)

Str 1, Dex 15, Con -, Int 18, Wis 15, Cha 15

Base Atk +4; CMB -3; CMD 5.

Feats Alertness, Combat Casting, Logical Spell

Skills: Bluff +7, Diplomacy +11, Fly +19, Knowledge (arcana) +11, Knowledge (religion) +11, Perception +11, Sense Motive +11, Stealth +19.

Languages: Common, Undercommon, telepathy 100 ft.

Environment: any land or underground

Organization: solitary or cabal (1 plus 1-6 controlled undead and humanoids)

Treasure: standard

Special Abilities :

Flight (Su): The flight of a brain in a jar is magical in nature.

Madness (Su): Anyone targeting a brain in a jar with a thought detection, mind control, or telepathic effect makes direct contact with its tortured mind and takes 1d4 points of Wisdom damage (DC19 Will deny)

NEW TEMPLATES

LIVING BRAIN IN A JAR

The Living Brain in a Jar is an acquired template which can be applied to any humanoid with an intelligence score of 18 or more.

The base creature keeps any ability not tied to the original body, including class level, feats, and skill ranks

Size becomes Tiny, or Little for a Large base creature.

Type: Aberration (augmented humanoid)

Senses: Same as the Brain in a Jar.

The physical abilities of the creature become those of the Brain in a Jar, except Constitution which is 10; the creature's mental ability scores get a Bonus of +4 Int, +2 Wis, +2 Cha.

Speed: same as the Brain in the Jar.

HD: same as the base creature.

Special Abilities: same as the base creature + Spell-like abilities of a Brain in a Jar. Spellcaster Level is equal to the creature's HD.

Skills: the same as the base creature + Fly and Stealth as class skills.

A living Brain in a Jar needs a daily dose of special alchemic fluids to stay healthy. They cost the same as one ration of food; deprived of this vital liquid for 3 days, the Brain starts to suffocate (see suffocation). A living brain in the Jar can eat and consume liquids, adding them to its vital liquid. Living Brains in the Jar are immune to breathing-based effects (like a killing cloud) but they do sleep. Once every month they need to clean their jar, which requires 8 hours of work. A Brain out of the Jar is staggered and gets a -2 penalty to every d20 roll. The Brain must be immersed in a liquid to be able to rest. A Brain Jar is a magical item (CL 6) with hardness 5 and 30 hp, and repairs itself if damaged but not destroyed. To create a new Jar, the Brain needs a masterwork quality receptacle able to house the brain and 8 hours of work, in which are consumed 600gp in alchemical reagents. The Jar can also be created by level 9 Caster having the Create Wondrous Object feat, with access to the spells *Mend*, *Bear's Endurance*, *Water Breathing*, *Secure Shelter* and *Major Creation*.

Alignment: the same as the base creature. The appropriate Craft skill (Glass working or Metal working) check might be required.

CR: the same as the base creature +2

PSEUDONATURAL CREATURE

Pseudonatural is an acquired or inherited template that can apply to any living creature.

CR: 9 HD or less, as base creature +1; 10 HD or more, as base creature +2.

Alignment: Any non-lawful.

Type: The creature's type changes to aberration. Do not recalculate HD, BAB, or saves.

Senses: A pseudonatural creature gains darkvision.

Defensive Abilities: A pseudonatural creature gains a +4 bonus on saves against mind-affecting effects, resistance: acid and electricity 10, and DR 5/Crysteel (if 11 HD or less) or DR 10/Crysteel (if 12 HD or more).

Speed: Unless the base creature burrows better, the pseudonatural creature burrows at 1-1/2 times the base creature's land speed (through dirt, sand, clay, and similar materials), rounded down to the nearest multiple of 5 feet. If the creature already has burrow, it increases its speed by 30 ft. It can create viable tunnels by halving its burrow speed, and it burrows at half speed in hard ground.

Special Abilities: A pseudonatural creature gains one of the following abilities for every 4 HD or fraction thereof.

Camouflage (Ex) A pseudonatural creature can use Stealth to hide in any sort of underground terrain, even if the terrain does not grant cover or concealment. It gains a +4 racial bonus on Stealth checks. This bonus does not stack with any racial Stealth bonus possessed by the base creature.

Cave Stride (Ex) A pseudonatural creature can move through any sort of underground terrain (such as rocks, mud, stalagmites) at its normal speed and without taking damage or suffering any other impairment. underground terrain that has been magically manipulated to impede motion still affects it. Optionally, this ability may function in a different type of terrain, to allow the pseudonatural creature

to move through undergrowth, swamps, ice, and so forth. Whatever the choice, this ability only functions in one type of terrain. This ability can be selected more than once, for a different terrain each time.

Darkness (Su): As a swift action, a pseudonatural creature can surround itself with darkness for 1 round. It can use this ability for 1 round per day per Hit Die; the creature can see through this layer of darkness.

Energy Resistance (Ex): A pseudonatural creature gains resistance 10 to one energy type, or increases an existing resistance by 10. Resistance increased beyond 30 becomes immunity instead. This ability can be selected more than once.

Ooze Shape (Su): A pseudonatural creature can change shape into an Ooze like Ooze Form I; It can be taken up two more times allowing the creature to use Ooze Form II (At least 8 HD) and III (At least 12 HD)

Spell Resistance (Ex): A pseudonatural creature gains SR equal to 11 + its CR. This does not stack with any existing SR possessed by the base creature.

Soundless Step (Ex): A pseudonatural creature does not makes sounds when moving if it does not want to, and it can't be perceived using hearing-based abilities.

Uncanny Dodge (Ex) A pseudonatural creature gains Uncanny Dodge, as the rogue ability of the same name.

Telepathy (Su): a pseudonatural creature can communicate by telepathy in a range of 30 ft with any creature it shares a language with.

Spell-Like Abilities: A pseudonatural creature with an Intelligence or Wisdom score of 8 or more has a cumulative number of spell-like abilities depending on its Hit Dice. Unless otherwise noted, an ability is usable once per day. Caster level equals the creature's HD (or the caster level of the base creature's spell-like abilities, whichever is higher).

1–2 *Daze, Ghost Sound 3/day*
 3–4 *Detect Thoughts, True Strike*
 5–6 *Daze Monster*
 7–8 *Telekinetic Maneuver*
 9–10 *Mind Thrust IV*
 11–12 *Hold Monster*
 13–14 *Stone Tell*
 15–16 *Ego whip V*
 17–18 *Power word: Stun*
 19–20 *Foresight*

Abilities: A pseudonatural creature gains a +4 bonus to Constitution and a +2 bonus to Intelligence and Wisdom. A pseudonatural creature receives a –4 penalty to Charisma (minimum 1). Pseudonatural creatures derived from creatures without an Intelligence score gain an Intelligence of 3.

Skills: A pseudonatural creature with racial Hit Dice has skill points per racial Hit Die equal to 4 + its Intelligence modifier. It gains Acrobatics, Climb, Escape Artist, Fly, Intimidate, Knowledge (pick one), Perception, Spellcraft, Stealth, Survival, and Swim as class skills.

Languages: Pseudonatural creatures speak Undercommon as well as any languages spoken by the base creature

NEW SPELLS

ABERRANT BODY I

School transmutation (polymorph); Level alchemist 3, arcanist 4, bloodrager 3, investigator 3, magus 4, sorcerer 4, witch 4, wizard 4

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, M (a piece of the creature whose form you plan to assume)

Range personal

Target you

Duration 1 minute/level (D)

You assume the form of a Small or Medium creature of the aberration type. Your base speed changes to match the new form's base speed, with a maximum speed of 60 feet (even if the chosen form has a base speed in excess of that speed). If the form you assume has any of the following abilities, you gain those abilities: climb speed 30 feet, burrow speed 30 feet (average maneuverability), swim speed 30 feet, darkvision 90 feet, scent, metal scent and telepathy 30 feet. If the form you assume has the aquatic subtype, you can breathe air and water. If the creature has any weaknesses, you gain those weaknesses. If a listed ability depends on an item (as is the case with boot stomp), this spell transforms the nearest counterpart among your worn gear into that item.

You can more easily cast spells that the creature has as spell-like abilities, although you must still cast them as normal for your class. When you cast a spell that the creature has as a spell-like ability, it requires no verbal or somatic components and can't be countered.

Small Aberration: If you assume this form, you gain a +2 size bonus to your Dexterity and Constitution scores.

Medium Aberration: If you assume this form, you gain a +2 size bonus to your Strength and Constitution scores.

ABERRANT BODY II

School transmutation (polymorph); Level alchemist 5, arcanist 6, investigator 5, magus 6, shaman 5, sorcerer 6, witch 6, wizard 6

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, M (a piece of the creature whose form you plan to assume)

Range personal

Target you

Duration 1 minute/level (D)

This spell functions as aberration body I, except it also allows you to assume the form of a Tiny or Large creature of the aberration type. Your base speed can't increase above 90 feet this way. If the form you assume has any of the following abilities, you gain those abilities: burrow speed 60 feet, climb speed 90 feet, fly speed 30 feet (good maneuverability), swim speed 60 feet, all-around vision, blindsense 30 feet, darkvision 120 feet, scent, see in darkness, bleed, blood rage, burn, cave stride, compression, constrict, disease, DR 2/crysteel, earth glide, grab, heavy weapons, icewalking, madness, metal scent, oversized weapons, poison, rust, stunning cone (1d6 round), trample, trip and undersized weapons. If the creature has immunity to mind-affecting effects or poison, you gain a +4 resistance bonus on saves against those effects. If the creature has any weaknesses, you gain them.

Tiny Aberration: If you assume this form, you gain a +6 size bonus to your Dexterity score and take a -2 penalty to your Strength score.

Large Aberration: If you assume this form, you gain a +4 size bonus to your Strength and Constitution scores and take a -2 penalty to your Dexterity score.

ABERRANT BODY III

School transmutation (polymorph); Level alchemist 6, arcanist 7, investigator 6, shaman 6, sorcerer 7, witch 7, wizard 7

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, M (a piece of the creature whose form you plan to assume)

Range personal

Target you

Duration 1 minute/level (D)

This spell functions as aberration body II except it allows you to assume the form of a Diminutive or Huge creature of the aberration type. If the form you assume has any of the following abilities, you gain those abilities: burrow speed 90 feet, climb speed 90 feet, fly speed 60 feet (good maneuverability), swim

speed 90 feet, all-around vision, blindsense 60 feet, blindsight 30 feet, darkvision 120 feet, metal scent, scent, see in darkness, tremorsense 60 feet, telepathy 90 feet, ability damage (max 1d4) bleed, blood rage, burn, cave stride, compression, constrict, disease, DR 5/crysteel, eat fear, earth glide, fear aura, frightful presence, fortification, grab, heavy weapons, icewalking, madness, oversized weapons, poison, rend, rust, sound mimicry, stunning cone (2d6), swallow whole. If the creature has immunity or resistance to any energy types, you gain resistance 20 to those energy types. If the creature has immunity to mind-affecting effects or poison, you gain a +8 resistance bonus on saves against those effects. If the creature has any weaknesses, you gain those weaknesses.

Diminutive Aberration: If you assume this form, you gain a +8 size bonus to your Dexterity score and take a -4 penalty to your Strength score.

Huge Aberration: If you assume this form, you gain a +6 size bonus to your Strength and Constitution scores and take a -4 penalty to your Dexterity score.

ABERRANT BODY IV

School transmutation (polymorph); Level arcanist 9, sorcerer 9, witch 9, wizard 9

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, M (a piece of the creature whose form you plan to assume)

Range personal

Target you

Duration 1 minute/level (D)

This spell functions as aberrant body III except it doesn't limit your base speed and also allows you to use more abilities. If the form you assume has any of the following abilities, you gain those abilities: burrow speed 120 feet, climb speed 90 feet, fly speed 90 feet (good maneuverability), swim speed 120 feet, all-around vision, blindsense 60 feet, blindsight 30 feet, darkvision 120 feet, metal scent, scent, see in darkness, telepathy 100 feet,

tremorsense 60 feet, ability damage (max 1d6), ability drain (max 1d4), bleed, blood rage, burn, cave stride, compression, constrict, disease, DR 10/crysteel, eat fear, earth glide, fast healing 5, fear aura, fortification, frightful presence, gibbering, grab, heavy weapons, hide in plain sight, icewalking, medium fortification, oversized weapons, poison, regeneration, rend, rust, sound mimicry, stunning cone (3d6), swallow whole, trample, undersized weapons. If the creature has immunity or resistance to any energy types, you gain resistance 30 to those energy types. If the creature has immunity to mind-affecting effects or poison, you gain a +8 resistance bonus on saves against those effects. If the creature has spell resistance, you gain spell resistance 6 + your caster level. If the creature has any weaknesses, you gain those weaknesses.

NEW SPECIAL MATERIAL: CRYSTEEL

This violet-grey crystal, mined deep underground in the mountains and known for its effectiveness against aberrations and dream creatures, once cut and tempered with a special resonance procedure, is lighter, harder and stays sharper than regular steel. Weapons made of crysteel cost twice as much to make as their normal counterparts. Also, adding any magical enhancements to a crysteel weapon increases its price by 2,000 gp. This increase is applied the first time the item is enhanced, not once per ability added.

Items without metal parts cannot be made from crysteel, an exception can be made for glass and crystal ones. An arrow could be made of crysteel, but a quarterstaff could not. A double weapon with one crysteel half costs 50% more than normal.

Crysteel has 30 hit points per inch of thickness and hardness 10, it takes no damage from cold but double damage from sonic. Crysteel damage reduction can be ignored by weapon with a magic enhancement of +3 or more.



THE GRAND ESTATE CLUSTER

A SERIES OF DOMAINS INSPIRED BY THE GAME DARKEST DUNGEON

BY: HYPERION80L

The Grand Estate Cluster is an unusual Cluster in the terms of its creation. Like many Domains, it was started with one land for a new Darklord. As the years continued, the location in the Material Plane which the first Domain was based proved to be a fertile ground for the Dark Powers in their collection of their favorite targets. Perhaps as a dark coincidence, all of the Darklords collected from these fertile grounds all come from the same family, each inheriting the estate in the Material Plane before committing an act of evil they could not be redeemed for, and their version of the estate is made their Domain.

Although the actual Corbeau Estate, on which the Domains are based, is a typical noble's estate, the cluster itself is much larger. Each domain holds a version of the estate, made to reflect the Darklord who controls it, along with surrounding lands that are each a twisted reflection of the desires, and the crimes, of those Darklords.

Although each of the Darklords are part of an extended family, they despise each other; each considers the others to be usurpers or false claimants to the estate they consider their own. When they are not busy with their various schemes to try and achieve what they desire, they plot against one another, firmly believing that the clues to their goals are being hoarded by the others. The entire cluster has become the battleground to a family feud, perhaps one of the most terrible battles of all.

CORVANIA

Cultural Level: 7 (Medieval)

Religion: Church of Ezra, Heart of Darkness

Terrain: Temperate fields, hills

Government: Democracy

Ruler: Mayor Thom Blackbriar

Darklord: Edmund Corbeau

Analogue: English countryside

Edmund Corbeau was the lord of the large Corbeau Estate. He was known for being a distant lord to the people of the small hamlet on his lands, barely being seen in public, often relaying orders or requests through messengers. He had grown up isolated, having only a few servants and his books for companions since his parents wished for him to focus on his studies and responsibilities and not be distracted by things that they considered frivolous or childish. Edmund's only friends were his books, the only things which did not inhibit or judge him. He developed a disconnect with people and his subjects, not having patience for dealing with mundane situations when he preferred the study of tomes, both new and old, having more interest in knowledge and events from abroad rather than what was going on at his doorstep.

After his parents died, Edmund only gave a bare minimum of mourning to them, showing barely any care for the people who raised him. Afterwards, Edmund went right back to his books and his studies. He performed his duties, but again at the bare

minimum. Orders were made with messy signatures, judgements were passed without consideration to any evidence beyond the cursory examination, and he considered all of it a nuisance.

His people were downtrodden as the lord neglected some of their needs, but it was not horrible or unbearable. If they did not earn his ire and draw him away from his studies, he was content to leave them alone.

Edmund's fate was forever altered when he found several books of forgotten knowledge and theories on several subjects hidden in the walls of the family library. They had been plastered into the walls, obviously never to be found until Edmund began work to expand his library. Curious, Edmund took the books and began to scroll through them. The books detailed knowledge of exotic methods and knowledge in several subjects which some would call fiction, ludicrous, or downright mad.

Not Edmund, though. For once, he found he had a passion towards something. Voraciously reading the documents, he noted, re-read, and examined everything with academic zeal. The knowledge of such things fascinated him. Even if it was considered mad, it was so new and interesting that he found himself pulled into it. He grew to eagerly read the books at every opportunity and experiment with the things he discovered.

One of the last books Edmund read was one detailing an unknown portion of the land he ruled. It spoke of ancient creatures and the land being tainted by a force of unknown origins. He read of some conflict his ancestors had had with the force, when it was still new in the Material Plane. It detailed the strange and otherworldly nature of the beast and the sacrifice Edmund's ancestors put forward to seal it when they were not able to destroy it. The seal was underneath the very ground that Corbeau Manor was built on.

Now immensely curious, Edmund began hiring workers to begin digging underneath the manor. Using the books he discovered as a guide, Edmund

dug deeper into the ground. As they got deeper, the ground grew hard, as if soured. The men began to feel afraid of what they were doing, but Edmund's zeal would not permit them to retreat or leave.

Edmund's desire for the power beneath his estate soon became dark and all-consuming. Soon, he refused to allow the workers to leave the dig site. The sick and wounded were executed so as to keep the men and guards from being distracted. Their bodies were tossed aside like so much refuse, which Edmund saw them as. The men were expected to dig a certain amount before they could be fed and watered. Sometimes Edmund did not want to feed them simply because he felt they were not digging fast enough for his tastes.

Finally, in what seemed like the bedrock of the land, the workers broke through the rock and came to the spot where Edmund was positive that the entity he had read of was located.

What was found inside that cavern was so terrible, many workers were driven mad or to suicide just by seeing it. Edmund, perhaps reinforced by the dark knowledge he already knew or an already altered state of mind, was able to begin running for his life.

Above ground, the mists of Ravenloft rose and surrounded the lands of the Corbeau estate and whisked the people within away.

Upon awakening, Edmund found himself no longer human, but a fleshy mass of eldritch substance. He could manipulate the flesh to manifest a form, but he could not separate himself from it, nor could he extend its reach past the doorways of his own manor. He was trapped within and had lost all of the books of forbidden knowledge, in the chaos of the entity being unleashed.

CURRENT SKETCH

Edmund lives utterly dependent on the human cultists who revere him as the 'Heart of Darkness'. He can spawn monsters from his flesh, but they cannot leave the manor either, or else their lifespans

are measured in days at most. He has the knowledge and power of the entity he desired, but his home has become his prison, as the power cannot pass beyond its border, the ancient seal still very active and woven into the land in such a way the cultists can't dismantle it for him.

Edmund believes that if he can somehow harness the true power of the entity, which he believes has other parts hidden under the lands of his enemies, he can finally take full control and free himself. He plots and sends out his cultists to try and find clues to the locations of these pieces of the entity he is fused to.

THE LAND

Corvania is a dreary land of wilted plant life and scenery, almost looking like it is slowly decaying. The taint of Edmund seeps across the land. Growth of produce and raising of animals is difficult at best as it is quite easy for crops and animals to take ill.

The largest settlement is Crow's Nest, a downtrodden hamlet of people who try to get by as best as they can. The town leaders are members of the cult called the Seekers of the Dark who believe that by pleasing their deity, they will be able to join their flesh with his and attain power and immortality. Edmund has promised this, although he has no intention of seeing it through.

Corbeau Manor sits on a hill in the middle of it all. It remains with all the signature architecture and splendor of a manor, but it is clearly abandoned, and nothing of value remains, having been picked clean by villagers in search of resources. Cultists station themselves there, squatting among it all, which Edmund barely tolerates as an intrusion into his personal space.

Monsters

People are the worst monsters in Corvania. Cultists, bandits, maniacs, and other people who give into the darkness prey on the other humans who reside there. What other monsters found in the land are

wandering monsters from the other domains that surround Corvania.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The Seekers of the Dark are excavating sites of old ruins on behalf of Edmund, looking for more pieces of the entity he is bound to. Such pieces are never discovered, but relics which may relax some of his restrictions are.

CHAMPIGNON

Cultural Level: 5 (Dark Age) although the people have knowledge of Medieval age.

Religion: Church of Hala, Druidic Faith

Terrain: Temperate forests, hills

Government: Meritocratic council

Ruler: Elizabeth Stillwater

Darklord: Julianna Corbeau

Analogue: Dark Forests

Julianna Corbeau inherited the Corbeau estate after her uncle was confirmed dead, once the people gained the courage to try and find him. Although his body wasn't found, the collapsed tunnels had so many bodies in it, he was assumed to be one of them. She moved into the estate with her family and set about fixing the property and the extensive tunnels her uncle dug under the foundations.

While the repairs were happening, Julianna discovered a set of books which seemed to have been abandoned or lost in the tunnels. Reading them, she found many bizarre writings, and recipes for strange concoctions. She considered them insanity for the most part but discovered that one of the books was an extensive encyclopedia of plants and their properties. A botanist in her free time, Julianna amused herself and read through the entries of the book and the strange plants within whenever she felt like reading something amusing.

While she was in her studies, her eldest daughter took ill with a serious illness. Healers were proving

stumped by the illness with little idea as to what to do. The locals said it was native to the area and there was no cure. In desperation, Julianna went to her books, the ones she found in the basement tunnels, hoping the strange writings would have a clue. To her relief, she found a description of the same illness which afflicted her daughter. More importantly, a cure was written in the pages of the botany book.

Julianna brought the matter to her husband, but he dismissed it as folk remedies which could not be trusted. He was a firm believer in science and modern medicine. If those did not have an answer, then nothing would. Having already given up hope, he simply said they should spend their time with their daughter and say their goodbyes.

Enraged and disgusted with her husband for giving up so easily, Julianna refused to simply just give up because modern science did not have an easy answer. She took to the thick and overgrown nearby forests to find the ingredients she needed. It was a dangerous journey, and Julianna nearly lost her life due to her lack of experience in the true wilderness, but she was able to find the ingredients she needed for the recipe.

Julianna returned and with her herbalism skills and some luck, concocted the potion from the ingredients and fed it to her daughter, despite the resistance and admonishments from her husband. To the shock of the healers and those who had given up, Julianna's daughter made a slow, but full recovery. The potion had worked, proving the effectiveness of the 'folk remedies' that others had looked down on.

Julianna became famous in the nearby hamlet, able to brew remedies to cure several local ailments and illnesses, after the residents heard that she had cured a previously incurable sickness. This served to increase her reputation, although it strained her relationship with her husband. She grew stern with him and never let him forget how he was willing to give up on their child. He in turn began growing

bitter with her vindictive taunting, at her growing fame, but also her fascination with the folk remedies he saw such little value in. It broke the spirit of their marriage since neither were willing to let go of past sleights or their ingrained beliefs.

As the years passed, Julianna made the estate her own, growing numerous trees and other plants in order to face less risk in harvesting what she needed for her remedies. She was deeply fascinated by the recipes in her book, often tinkering and experimenting to see if they would work. Inevitably, the potions did work, only increasing Julianna's reputation and filling her family coffers.

Julianna discovered hidden notes near the back of the book hinting toward a new recipe of a concoction which supposedly would bring youth and vitality while it was consumed. Julianna grew eager to try the new concoction, but found the recipe was incomplete. Whoever had been trying to concoct the mixture did not have time to finish.

Julianna set to work on her latest project, but her desire turned into a troubling fixation as time passed. As her daughter grew up, Julianna began to grow envious of her beauty and grace, seeing herself growing older and grayer in comparison. She used her own mixtures to cure her own ailments, but the aging process continued, and so Julianna felt her time to shine was coming to an end.

Her research grew to a deep obsession, destroying the relationships she had with the rest of her family. So resentful of her aging, she eventually refused to even look at her daughter, not wishing to be reminded of her age and how her bond with her husband had withered long ago.

Julianna's true descent came when she came to discover her husband had been keeping a mistress. Although their bond had been long soured, Julianna was enraged at the treachery and the loss of reputation she might suffer with the revelation of the impropriety.

Thinking ruthlessly, Julianna made more concoctions and slipped them into wine that she knew her husband would share with his mistress. It was a potent drug, which knocked them out before they even realized that the wine tasted off. One they were knocked out, Julianna brought them to her lab where she forcibly fed them test batches of her formula as living test subjects. Both were subject to painful side effects of the concoctions, including blisters, sickness, and even some physical disfigurement. Even as they eventually begged for death, Julianna fed them more, making even more horrible suffering for them.

It took three days for the servants to gather the courage to check on Julianna. They revealed what they knew to the authorities, and the local militia arrived to make a check. At the same time, Julianna believed she had finally perfected her magnum opus, the formula for eternal youth and vitality. More gruesomely, she had harvested fungus and molds that grew from the corpses of her husband and his mistress to make it. Believing she would now shine eternally in beauty, fame and reputation, she consumed it as the militia broke in.

The effects of the formula soon took effect. Julianna began to bloat and scream in pain. She grew large, but certainly not more beautiful. In moments, her body was warped by the concoction and appeared more like a large, blubbery hag than the beautiful woman she envisioned. Enraged, and seeing she had been caught, Julianna barreled through the shocked militia, fleeing into the gardens and out into the forests as the mists rose to engulf her.

CURRENT SKETCH

Julianna is desperately searching for a cure to her condition. She has not realized that in functional terms, her initial formula worked. She is as youthful as any woman in her prime, but her body became bloated and large to accommodate processes which allow her to have it. She merely believes that she made the formula wrong and just needs to remake

it, and then tinker with it to regain her beauty and the immortality with it.

She does not, or perhaps will not, realize that this is impossible. Not only has she lost the book where she recorded her experiments, but the fungus she harvested from her husband and the mistress were a unique accident, a chemical reaction brought by the numerous formula she already fed them before the mushrooms sprouted. Still, she desperately experiments and harvests, going so far as to use humanoid body parts as ingredients.

THE LAND

Champignon is a land choked with overgrown and wild forests and has numerous breeds of herbs, fungus, and other plants growing in it. If the people of Oak Hollow, a simple trapping and logging settlement, were able to try and export more than furs or lumber, they would have quite a profitable export on their hands from the sheer number of medicinal plants which grow there. Still, the people are cautious, knowing that the woods are anything but safe and whisper of 'The Hag' who lives deep within them, throwing lost travelers into her cooking pot to feed her monstrous children.

In the middle of the deepest forest called the Weald, the Corbeau Estate remains. This version of it is overgrown, most of it being covered in vines, kinds of fungus, or having trees growing over or through portions of it.

MONSTERS

Julianna has taken on a number of apprentices who came to her, hoping to learn from her exploits. They work as her agents, harvesting and brewing concoctions of their own. Constant exposure to the fumes and effects of the potions have turned them into hag-like creatures themselves, although their spells are all in the form of potions and other alchemical solutions.

Other monsters include wild animals, but also a strange fungus which grows on corpses and

animates them into wild minions. What purpose they serve, or if they serve Julianna, is not yet known. So far, they exist to try and spread their spores further before they die and wither. Their fungus is especially prized by the hags as a resource, making them a potent bartering tool for anyone hoping to make a deal with them.

The bandits who populate safer portions of the forest are almost a footnote, often waylaying wagons or goods which travel down their roads.

ADVENTURE HOOK

A strange illness starts afflicting the land and the hags have the cure. They demand sacrifices in return for it, but secretly, the hags are the ones who created the illness.

BLOEDVELD

Cultural Level: 8 (Chivalric) for the Bloody Court, closer to 6 (Early Medieval) or 7 (Medieval) for everyone else.

Terrain: Warm Swamps

Government: Landed Aristocracy

Religion: Church of Ezra

Ruler: Lady Carmilla Corbeau

Darklord: Lucius Corbeau

Analogue: Masquerade parties of Italy, bayou swamps

After the scandal of the murder of the former master at the hands of his wife, the Corbeau Estate fell to Lucius Corbeau. He was quick to take ownership, almost gleefully, and set about hacking down the greenery, trees, and other plants which took up so much of the estate grounds. Many hoped the arrival of the new lord would be a fresh start for the territory.

Lucius quickly had the grounds groomed to perfection and had numerous gardeners make a veritable portrait of beautiful flowers and greenery. Beautiful hedge mazes, peaceful ponds, elegant

flower gardens, marble statuary, and other scenes of utter beauty, all fitting for nobility. It brought advancements of culture and art to the otherwise rural area of the Corbeau Estate.

It was a fresh start, but not for the better.

Lucius proved to live for hedonistic delights and often neglected his ruling duties in favor of pursuing his pleasures. He held constant parties where other people of the rich or noble classes were invited to sate their desires and enjoy the privileges. In his mind, they deserved pleasure for no other reason than for being rich and of noble blood, showing his immense sense of entitlement.

Lucius proved just as cruel as he was handsome. He only accepted beauty on his property. Anyone who was less than splendid in beauty, with him being the most beautiful, was painfully ejected from the parties he held and shunned by his circle of sycophants. Such ejections usually involved beatings for the viewing pleasure of the other guests, their rancorous laughter mixing with cries of pain.

Lucius still grew bored with his parties, seeing the same things repeatedly, and began searching for bigger thrills. As he searched for inspiration for his next party, he stumbled on a series of books detailing new recipes of wine and other culinary delights in a basement cellar where he had shoved his relatives' belongings that he didn't want to keep. Upon seeing the exotic vintages of wines and foods in one of the books, Lucius quickly set to work for his next party.

Lucius quickly gained the reputation of being a wine connoisseur. He had so many exotic and unique wines, everyone wanted to taste what exotic vintage he could come up with. He would have his wine mixed with other ingredients, creating exciting new drinks. The foods were devoured voraciously and held to much aplomb. His name was on the tongues of everyone considered wealthy or noble, allowing him to network with so many.

Still, Lucius soon grew bored again and looked to the recipes deeper in the book which gotten him such praise. He quickly discovered wines and foods which required new ingredients that would be considered...unusual. Most included blood or organs usually not considered palatable. Still, Lucius was like any spoiled aristocrat, wishing for the newest thing now, if not sooner.

After each party, Lucius would go back to the book, trying to find something new to entertain his guests and himself. Many new ingredients and mixes were used to make new cocktails. The more exotic the ingredients he would put into his meals, the more decadent and hedonistic the guests would become, drunk on the tainted wines which would be provided to them. This in turn would make the parties much more entertaining and exciting for Lucius.

Yet still Lucius would grow bored and try to find something new barely after the last party ended. This came to a head when one of his servants died in an accident, their blood spilling out and tainting the latest mixture of wine. Not wishing to deal with the mess, and curious as to what it might do, Lucius had all of the servant's blood mixed with the wine and served to the guests, after some modifications that book had suggested for blood wines.

The party was the most hedonistic yet. Guests would gorge themselves on food or take part in beatings of the servants for the fun of it. Physical delights were supplied by courtesans, and everyone acted more like primitives in fancy clothes than the nobility they claimed to be. It was the most delightful party yet for Lucius and he knew he had found the key to ensuring all his delights. He did not care for anyone or their disgusting behavior, merely seeing beautiful people like himself enjoying themselves as they deserved to thanks to their aristocratic lineage.

Knowing the blood wines were the key to his pleasures, Lucius took to having someone from the hamlet, or a servant, killed before each party, draining their blood to mix with the wines in recipes from his important books. It would be served to his

guests, once again making it a party of legends, but these debaucheries came to be regarded with disgust by the people and by more responsible nobility who wished for nothing to do with any of the attendees. Some may have thought aristocracy had the right to act in such a way, but others derided Lucius, since aristocracy should have been above such things.

One night, a sinfully beautiful woman came to attend the party, attracted by the supposedly legendary delights the parties boasted. Her arrival had no fanfare, but everyone noticed when she arrived. She outshone everyone at the party and all eyes were on her from the moment she stepped into the ballroom. She drank the wine but did not lose herself to the display of savagery like everyone else. Instead, she had a harsh critique for the wine and seemingly looked down on the other guests as if they were swine.

Lucius grew jealous and enraged that someone dared critique his perfect wine and his 'noble' pleasures. Deciding to punish the woman for her rudeness, he lured the woman out to the balcony under the pretense of seeking a romantic interlude. He drew a blade he had pocketed from the buffet to murder her, but she quickly revealed herself as a vampire-like creature who swiftly tried to devour Lucius. Only his strong stomach helped him keep his senses in the face of her disgusting transformation. A lucky stab had him seemingly slay the woman before she could end his life.

Rather than be completely afraid or utterly horrified, Lucius wondered if the rare specimen might offer an even better wine vintage than mere human blood. He secreted the body away and drained it of all its blood, mixing it with his latest batch. As he served the wine to his guests for the next party, the mists rose and swallowed the estate for the third time.

The guests drank the wine, but soon found themselves mutating. Their eyes turned insect-like, their nails grew sharp, and their noses almost became a proboscis. Their beauty was gone,

showing the bloodthirsty monsters they always were underneath. Lucius grew horrified, finally seeing the evil he was perpetuating and tried to flee, but only found himself running into the vampiric creature he slain, smiling adoringly at him.

CURRENT SKETCH

Lucius has what he wanted, to be able to have parties and delights all the time, but he is tortured by the disgusting imagery of the Bloody Court and must witness their evil feasts and decadence all the time. The mosquito-like creatures slightly appear human and play the role of nobility at a party, although they still repulse him.

He constantly has to host the creatures, and the vampire he thought he had slain has taken the role of lady of the manor, always being more beautiful than him even in the monstrosities surrounding them. Lucius must continue providing for the Bloody Court since he fears them turning on him.

Lucius is the Darklord, although one may think his 'lady' is the true ruler. He holds the power to control insects such as mosquitos and ticks, syphoning blood from people to make his desired wines called the Blood Vintage. He could control the Bloody Court, except for Carmilla who can take them back since they do hold their blood, but he fears them too much to even try experimenting with the idea.

THE LAND

The land of Bloedveld is a marshy, muggy swampland. Ticks, leeches, mosquitos, and other bloodsucking swamp creatures are almost a plague on themselves. Other swamp animals populate the swamps, although they often show mutations from the Sycophant Disease which afflicts everything.

The standing village of Blood River is the only major center of population. All of the people are akin to Broken Ones or Mongrelfolk, but show signs of mosquitos, leeches, ticks, or other animals that draw blood. They are quite sane, although they show

twitchy spasms and prefer to eat bloody meats. They deeply fear the Bloody Court.

The Corbeau Estate rests on one of the few large spots of dry land, decorated in extravagant pieces of art and decoration, but all of it appears to be in serious stats of neglect. Old crates of Blood Vintage litter the grounds, piles of wasted food rot in corners, and bodies of victims lie drained of all fluids like random trash. Some weak members of the Bloody Court lay listless, begging for wine or blood so they can rejoin the party.

MONSTERS

Almost everything here is a monster which would devour anything they can for blood. It is all thanks to a disease called the Sycophant Disease, created when mosquitos began feeding on the members of the Bloody Court as they partied in the marshes. Victims soon grow thirsty, desiring blood more than water or common wine. The more they drink, the more insect-like features they develop.

A priest seems to be the only one who is not afflicted with the disease, but he is just as dangerous. He often uses fire to burn anyone he finds afflicted with the disease. Why he is not afflicted, no one can say, but some theorize he may have a cure.

The worst monsters are the Bloody Court themselves. They are humanoid but have many features akin to ticks and mosquitos with pointed noses, sharp teeth, and bulbous eyes. They put on airs of nobility but once they smell blood, they will pounce, transforming into insect-like monsters and wring every bit of blood out of their victims.

ADVENTURE HOOK

One or more of the party has been afflicted by the Sycophant's Disease, slowly giving them a craving for blood and mutating their features to be more insect-like. A cure must be found, but where to look? The crazed priest who somehow remains unafflicted, or deep somewhere in Corbeau Manor?

DIEPINHAM

Culture Level: 8 (Chivalric)

Religion: Church of Ezra, Sekolah

Terrain: Open ocean, small islands

Government: Landed hierarchy

Ruler: Richter Corbeau

Darklord: Richter Corbeau

Analogue: English coast, Innsmouth

After the last lord of the Corbeau Estate disappeared after what seemed like his most violent party yet, the estate languished as the people tried to forget about what happened, hoping they were now free from cruel lords. The monument to Lucius' vanity was left to decay for a time, erasing him from the people's minds.

After some time, a new owner of the estate was discovered, a grandson of Lucius from an affair he had during one of his parties. Richter Corbeau was grizzled and grew up poor, being the son of an illegitimate child and had to work to eke out a living on boats. Many had hopes that someone who knew the value and hardships of hard work would make a better lord than the one they had before.

Receiving the estate and what funds it had left after Lucius spent so much of it on his indulgences, Richter set up the task of building a business to replenish the coffers. He tried building up a few ships to start a shipping and fishing business. He managed to buy or have built some boats to at least begin the shipping empire he envisioned. There was some income, but not enough to bring the Corbeau estate back to its splendor. Still, it was the beginnings of recovery.

Still, no plan goes smoothly, much less one involving the sea. Richter's first setback hit hard as one of his ships sank in a storm. Whatever funds he had managed to accumulate were suddenly gone, being tied up in the cargo, and leaving nothing left to pay the rest of his sailors.

Desperately digging through family books and archives for anything he might be able to use as a monetary asset. He found a set of old books among his grandfather Lucius' discarded belongings. Among them, he found a book of archeology one of Richter's ancestors wrote. He read it closely, wondering if they had a cache of artefacts he could sell. Richter soon discovered that there was a nearby set of caverns leading underwater, sporting a number of ruins and strange architecture, which his ancestors had been examining before they promptly abandoned the search.

Seeing an opportunity, Richter grabbed some supplies and set out to find the caves. Near the coast in an underground tunnel, Richter traveled deep, finding coral and barnacle growths usually found underwater. Past that, he found the odd structures and architecture, all of it depicting nightmarish sea creatures and styled in ways he could barely understand. He would have been quick to raid the ruins for whatever he could find, but he was blocked by the residents of the underwater temples, sahuagin.

These sahuagin, although vicious, were not uncivilized. They wished for a better hold on the land, a launch point for land raids and Richter was willing to provide that in return for riches and resources. The sahuagin struck the deal and were willing to provide, but they wanted a sign of dedication, proof Richter would hold to his end of the bargain and not try to betray them. They required a sacrifice on Richter's part, a sacrifice of a human life with his own hands.

Richter promised to do so and he already had a target in mind. He had been having romantic relations with a woman in town. It was strictly casual for him, but the woman believed Richter might make her his wife and lady of the Corbeau Estate. Realizing she was his key to receiving wealth and fortune, Richter lured the woman down to the docks. As they stood at the end, before she could realize what was happening, Richter threw her into the sea where the sahuagin pulled her deep underground into their

tunnels. When the tide receded the next day, Richter found numerous pieces of gold and jewels in his possession, more than enough to restore his business and begin inflating his fortunes.

Richter let the business grow, receiving infusions of gold from the sahuagin and in return, he merely had to either throw someone to their clutches as a sacrifice to their god or do some other unsavory task to allow them to build their kingdom in the tunnels under the cove, as they prepared to advance on the land. Weapons, items, supplies, and other needs the sahuagin had were smuggled to the caves and added to their war supplies.

It was a potentially devastating invasion, but Richter inadvertently saved the land when he grew too greedy.

With new fortunes, Richter soon changed, believing he deserved more thanks to being one of the richest people in the area. Still, his greatest income came from his secret ventures. He constantly received demands from the sahuagin for rare items. To keep people from finding out what he was doing, he commissioned a ship of smugglers to retrieve his items or smuggle illegal goods for added coin.

As the sahuagin demanded more dangerous or rare items, the smugglers demanded more pay. Richter seethed with the demands for better pay, turning miserly and wishing to hoard his money thanks to his poor childhood. Still, he could not just let them go, since they knew too much about his illegal ventures.

Deciding to get rid of the greedy crew in favor of a cheaper one, he 'rewarded' his smugglers with a feast that left them sleepy and drunk, stumbling around their own boat. With them in no shape to resist, Richter cursed their anchor with one of the items he had collected. The anchor immediately sank to the bottom of the sea, taking the ship and the crew beneath the waves with it. This was the final act which had the mists of Ravenloft rise, taking Richter and his sahuagin allies with them.

When the mists parted, Richter found himself on a tiny island's worth of land with an open sea before him. He was confused at what happened, until the water rippled and the ship he sank rose back up, wrapped in anchor chains, with the ghostly crew moaning in pain and accusing him of treachery. Richter fled, horrified by the image, running back to his manor, now overlooking the sea. As he tried to hide from the ghost ship, he began hearing a musical voice accusing him of his crimes, forcing them to hear the words over and over.

CURRENT SKETCH

Richter still has his business in shipping goods and after he learned of access to other domains, he began shipping goods and products to them. However, he only receives a trickle of wealth back, as the anchored ship rises from the waters and attacks his ships, sinking many of them. Oddly, if they bring back material goods like wood, animals, or produce, the ship does not appear since they do not add to Richter's fortunes in the way he desires.

The sahuagin are furious with Richter, rightly believing it to be his fault they are in their current domain. They still have a tentative alliance with him, since they know they are now together in their misery and must work together to survive. Still, the alliance is tenuous and could snap if anything more goes wrong. Richter seethes at the disrespect, but the sahuagin are the source of his fortunes so he needs to play nice with them.

The sahuagin are not much help against the ghost ship, but when they try to muster for a push through the mist or to other domains, they find themselves facing the Siren. She is a Ravenloft Siren who, when she induces her charm, takes on the appearance of a merfolk version of the woman Richter who sacrificed to the sahuagin for their dark bargain. Her songs have the sahuagin begin fighting among themselves and force them to flee battered, and in some cases eaten by the Siren.

Richter's power as a Darklord lets him harness magic and powers of Sahuagin, allowing him to use the same powers and abilities of a sahuagin cleric of Sekolah. His curse, though, is that he can't go near water without his anchored crew or former lover emerging from the sea. They always know where he is and if he tries to go out to sea, they emerge to try and drag him down although they never quite get their hands on him. Every night, the Siren sings where he can hear, reminding him of his numerous crimes.

THE LAND

The only real landmass is the island where Corbeau Manor resides, almost like a forlorn lighthouse. There are a few small landmasses, mostly hosting fishing shacks owned by some of the villagers. There is a fishing village nearby where the people are left alone by most of the threats, but often they must treat with groups of sahuagin to fish in certain areas.

In a passage in a cliffside, there are tunnels and caverns of sahuagin buildings and ruins. Some sahuagin live there, trying to pray to Sekolah for release from their prison and so they may continue their plans of conquest. They never get a reply.

MONSTERS

Sahuagin claim to be the masters of the sea, dominating it like Richter does the land. Their only competition are the Siren and the anchored crew who they seem to never be able to track down or defeat. These two creatures are the ones who are masters of the sea, able to rout the sahuagin and anyone else who works or swears to Richter's banner.

ADVENTURE HOOK

A group of sahuagins have discovered a means of slipping by the notice of the anchored crew and The Siren via means of a sunken vessel at the bottom of the Lonely Sea. They mean to escape Diepinham and conquer seas elsewhere.

VARKENSTEEN

Cultural Level: 1 (Stone Age) for the swinefolk and 8 (Chivalric) for the people

Religion: Church of Ezra, Swine Mother

Terrain: Temperate forests and plains

Government: Individual settlements

Ruler: Individual landowners/elected officials

Darklord: Siobhan Corbeau

Analogue: London sewers and countryside

Two generations after Richter Corbeau vanished, supposedly escaping people he owed money to, his grandniece Siobhan inherited the estate, despite fierce opposition from other family members who wanted Richter's fortune.

Once it was in her name, Siobhan set to work on bringing the estate forward and trying to make it a true gem in the family's name once again. Part of her plans was to repair and expand the old aqueducts, to expand them as part of a plan to allow the town to expand and grow more prosperous. The new lady of Corbeau Manor had high ambitions and was determined to see them through.

Siobhan searched for the plans to the castle and quickly found them among a series of books her ancestors penned in her granduncle's former office. Finding the plans, she found the aqueducts were arranged in a strange pattern but thought nothing more of it at the time. Her focus was on repairing and extending the aqueducts before moving on to the rest of the castle.

A personality trait of Siobhan was quickly made apparent to those working under her: she was pragmatic to a ruthless degree. She expected the job to get done and she did not tolerate anything slowing them down. Even as men inevitably got hurt or sick, Siobhan would not let them stay home as, in her view, they could still swing a pick or supply tools and materials. The complaints grew more numerous and louder, but she merely equated it to the squeals of pigs and ignored them.

The revitalization of the aqueducts revealed that the tunnels all went in odd directions and had strange architectural configurations. Pondering whether it might be important, Siobhan returned to her ancestor's blueprints. Reading the notes in detail and cross referencing, she discovered the aqueducts were arranged in a large arcane design. What purpose the designs were for, she did not know and the books she had did not reveal, but she believed it could only benefit her family and quickly threw herself into arcane studies to try and discover more.

Siobhan was voracious for knowledge and eager to discover the purpose of the aqueducts' design. She pushed her men harder than ever before, wanting to have what was there repaired before the design was completed according to the blueprints and its purpose unveiled. Dreams of arcane power or abilities danced in her mind, tempting her pride.

Her progress slowed down to a halt when a cave-in killed several workers. Siobhan refused to slow down and ordered the men to keep working. The workers refused, seeing that Siobhan would work them to death if it meant it got the achievements she desired sooner. They all quit, leaving Siobhan enraged that the 'pigs' would dare speak out against her.

In need of workers, but with no one in the town willing to do so, and not willing to pay for workers farther away, Siobhan decided to look to her ancestor's journals on magic to perhaps create her own workers: golems, zombies, anything which would work as much as she wanted and not speak out against her.

She soon found a possible solution. Golems were too literal and needed to be monitored, while undead were dim-witted and tended to not be good for delicate tasks. One branch of magic she discovered was summoning demonic entities to do the job for her. She learned the kinds of demons she needed were not physically adept in themselves, but by summoning them in a vessel, they would be better suited for the task.

She set to work. Since she did not dare try humans for such spells, not that she could get any, she decided to use pigs since their flesh was close to a human's. Her first attempt had abominations from the fusion of demon and swine. Disgusting and not suited for the work, Siobhan tried to find a use for them. So, she sent them into the older aqueduct tunnels to make themselves useful and keep out of her sight. As her skill increased, she summoned better demons and she was able to create pig-like monsters who would obey her.

Soon came the issue of how to feed the numerous monsters she had created. Her pragmatic mindset turned its darkest yet and she began tossing the bodies of her dead workers to the beasts, and then when those ran out, she fed them what workers she had left or servants in her home. The pigs soon developed a taste for human flesh and Siobhan would reward them with the bodies of her enemies or people who would not be missed in return for their hard work.

With this increase in skill, Siobhan began developing a god complex in making her creations, but her arrogance likewise increased with her skill. Believing she now had true power, instead of relying on demons for power, she began a ritual which would summon perhaps the largest swine monster yet. She tried to summon a higher demon to fill several pig bodies and make it her enforcer.

She conducted the ritual, but the higher demon saw through the portal and quickly realized what she intended and wanted no part of it. The demon refused and Siobhan grew enraged, trying to use caustic magic to force the demon to appear so she might let it fill the corpses. The demon refused but Siobhan was determined to force the demon to her whims, believing herself powerful enough to force such a demon to her whims. To punish the arrogant mortal, the demon cast its own magic, ripping open a portal to someplace new and letting the mists of Ravenloft fill the tunnels, offering Siobhan as a sacrifice for the Dark Powers, one they eagerly accepted.

Siobhan found herself in the aqueducts once the mists lowered, but they were now a dizzying new maze of desolate ruins. Believing it was the demon's doing, Siobhan grew furious that her work had been wasted. Siobhan rallied her pig mutants and sought to reclaim the work she had done. As she tried to leave, once the sun or moon touched her skin, Siobhan found herself wracked with pain before her body transformed into that of a repulsive wereboar.

CURRENT SKETCH

Siobhan is regarded as the queen of the pigfolk, their goddess, and they obey her without question. They are lazy, though, and only get energetic after they get fed. Her only goal is to complete the array of aqueducts, believing it can cure her of her affliction of lycanthropy with the potential power it has. She has made copies of the designs she was following, but the layout of the aqueducts has changed, making her previous work and designs useless. She has to start all over again and try to determine what the design is supposed to look like from scratch.

THE LAND

Varkensteen exists primarily underground, and above the ground it is covered with idyllic forests and plains. The village of Sow's Hoof seems peaceful enough, as the people raise their crops and produce, although they take care to raise plenty of pigs, hoping that when the pigfolk try to slip through the town at night, they take the pigs instead of any people. It works most of the time, but now and then the allure of human flesh is too much for the pigfolk to resist.

The aqueduct tunnels surprisingly extend to all versions of Corbeau Manor and whatever aqueducts they have. All of them are mistways which are reliable, leading to one specific version of the manor in each land. It is dangerous to attempt, as many natural hazards exist and to get to one mistway, they must traverse the pigfolk infested tunnels of Varkensteen and find another.

Like the other Domains in the cluster, Corbeau Manor still exists. It lies half buried in the ground, allowing Siobhan to live there without having to expose herself to the light above and transform her back into her wereboar form.

MONSTERS

The pigfolk are the main threat in Varkensteen, but not the only ones. Many sewer monsters live in the tunnels, feeding on the refuse or the corpses left behind. At the very bottom of the aqueduct, the pigfolk speak of a pit of writhing flesh which mutates and spawns its own monsters to bring back more food for it.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Previously unknown portions of the aqueducts have been discovered, offering possible clues and insights into the strange patterns of the aqueduct's layouts. Siobhan has heard of this and has sent a group of swine to claim the tunnels for her. It becomes a race to try and find any clues or resources the new tunnels might hold.

WANDERHEIL

Cultural Level: (8) Chivalric, but only Wilhelm has knowledge of that culture.

Religion: None. Eternal Order worshippers make pilgrimages here.

Terrain: Desolate lands, dead trees

Ruler: Wilhelm Corbeau

Darklord: Wilhelm Corbeau

Analogue: Graveyards

When Siobhan disappeared, presumably in a cave-in, thanks to her relentless work on the aqueducts, her brother Wilhelm was named the heir of the Corbeau Estate as her closest relative, since she was unmarried. He eagerly took it and claimed it for himself, eager to show up his sister.

Wilhelm was the lazier of the two siblings, preferring to just have things handed to him rather than work

for it like his sister. He barked orders to his underlings and demanded things get done that he preferred not to do since himself he considered to be too bothersome. He led a life of whimsy, pursuing his interests until they bored him, and then went to pursue his next interest. He was looked down on by other members of his family, especially his sister, causing Wilhelm to stew with anger whenever she was praised for anything she did.

During his whimsical pursuits, Wilhelm discovered the same books his sister did, after going through her things. After reading through them, Wilhelm discovered many spells he could do. Among them was many potent necromancy spells. Wilhelm saw an opportunity, planning to use the necromancy to have the dead tell him their secrets so he could claim all the secrets and knowledge of his family and make himself greater than his sister could ever hope to be.

He began to use simple spells to have the dead begin speaking to him while he animated skeletons to handle his daily annoyances for him so he wouldn't have to pay servants. Some of the corpses he tested the magic on whispered tantalizing hints of powers and projects that the previous lords and ladies of the manor had undertaken. Wilhelm grew greedy for the secrets and delved deeper into the family crypts so he could learn more. Sadly, the bodies of the previous lords in question could not be found. The crypts for Edmund, Julianna, Lucius, Richter, and Siobhan were empty.

Realizing he would have to try and summon their souls, Wilhelm searched out more necromancers who were eager to lend their aid, either for gold or for the secrets Wilhelm had. They enacted several rituals to summon the souls of Corbeaus to learn their ancient secrets. With several rituals, they summoned the souls of past members of the Corbeau family to interrogate them for their knowledge.

The group of necromancers did learn secrets, some secret rooms, and found lost tomes or treasures, but

none of them had any idea as to what secrets Wilhelm wanted. He demanded more elaborate and powerful rituals to force the souls of the missing lords to appear so that he could interrogate them.

The necromancers worked hard and made powerful rituals. They even turned to human sacrifice, trying to create vessels, with the missing lords' souls inside. All their rituals failed, and Wilhelm only grew more wrathful. It never occurred to Wilhelm and his minions that the lords they sought were still alive.

Finally, in a fit of temperamental rage, he conducted another ritual and at the apex, sacrificed all his necromancer allies in hopes it would make the ritual more potent. Any true mage would know that was a terrible idea, but Wilhelm only listened to lessons when he wanted to, so did not know the risks. The backlash caused an explosion of necromantic energies as the mists of Ravenloft came down once more on the Corbeau Estate.

Wilhelm woke up but did not feel his heart beating in his chest. He had been transformed into an undead, a wight. He looked up but saw no soul of his ancestors being summoned. He raged once more, causing the ground to erupt with skeletons and zombies while his sacrificed necromancers likewise rose.

CURRENT SKETCH

Wilhelm believes that his ancestors had a secret to immense power or knowledge. He also believes that certain members have the clues, but no ritual he knows of can seem to summon them. He has no idea that the answers are quite close, in the Darklords of the other domains in the cluster.

Wilhelm is able to raise any dead body as any kind of undead he wishes. However, he cannot draw their intelligence with them. He has to order them to do everything, and they cannot speak or even think. His attempts to draw the secrets of his ancestors are plagued by constant roadblocks. He could find a way around them, if he worked for it, but his lazy

mindset constantly has him trying to find the easiest way to find results.

THE LAND

Wandenheil is a dead land, filled with nothing but dead people and animals, with dead trees and numerous headstones decorating the land.

The one village is a necropolis, having only undead, following Wilhelm's last order to making things or keep busy. So the undead constantly make tombstones, blacksmithing, and other things which they push out of town, which explains the decorations in the land.

Corbeau Manor exists here, but it is a crumbling ruin. Wilhelm does not care to maintain it since he only cares about trying to interrogate the corpses of his ancestors for the missing knowledge he so desperately wants.

MONSTERS

All kinds of undead monsters populate the land. They are surprisingly docile since they do not do anything unless Wilhelm orders it. Even if attacked, they just keep up their last order until they are cut down.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The undead of the land have begun wandering into other domains and are building totems and digging holes as if searching for something. Since the undead are remotely controlled, clues to their purposes are few and far between.

STERLUCHT

Cultural Level: 9 (Renaissance)

Religion: Church of Ezra

Terrain: Open prairies

Government: Commonwealth

Ruler: Henrietta Corbeau

Darklord: Henrietta Corbeau and The Crystal Out of Space

Analogue: Kansas farmlands

Once again, the Corbeau Estate went without a master for some time before Henrietta Corbeau stepped up to claim the lands. The people were glad to be rid of it, many believing that the land was cursed, and the town was mostly empty by that point. Only the ones who could not afford to move or traditionalists remained. Henrietta quickly took charge and began to bring in farmers and loggers to expand the open lands to make it a major grain and produce provider and restore the estate to its prime.

The town was repopulated and, for a time, the farming seemed to be progressing well. Henrietta explored the decaying manor she hoped to one day restore. As she explored, she found the same books so many of her ancestors did. She read them, but beyond curiosity, she did not regard them as more than that.

The farming progressed and there were many potential products in the produce to be had. The land seemed ready to give, as plenty of different crops were able to grow in the surrounding area. The logging from cleared lands was also netting tidy profit, enough that Henrietta was considering tree farms to help supplement income and have another avenue of trade for the area. Many wondered if Henrietta would be the one who would finally break the apparent curse on the Corbeau Estate.

As things seemed to be going well, misfortune struck. A terrible drought hit the land and stunted the crops. At first, the people decided to persevere, but as the days without rain stretched on, the crops

began to suffer. The people were beginning to starve and considering leaving to escape it. Seeing her future threatening to dry up, literally, Henrietta soon became desperate and looked back to the books her ancestors wrote. One depicted a ritual which supposedly would beseech a higher power.

Desperate, and perhaps reckless, Henrietta set up the ritual, reading only what she needed to do for the ritual rather than going through all the minute notes and observations on the ritual. She recruited scholars to help make sense of the rites, but she only shared what she had of the ritual, disregarding the details and perhaps not wishing for the scholars to disrupt what she felt like was her last hope.

The ritual was required to be done on a specific night, so preparation time was short, forcing Henrietta to rush, again disregarding the details. Placing keystones in a pattern around one farmstead, Henrietta and the scholars she recruited conducted the ritual and created their beacon to the higher power they hoped would be able to end the drought and bring verdant fields back to their lands. They invoked the ritual and the keystones began to glow, indicating that the magic had been activated, although nothing happened immediately.

Henrietta feared the ritual did not work. In only a few nights though, a meteor fell from the sky and crashed into the farm in the very middle of the fields. As the smoke cleared, the people saw a rock of dark stone and glowing rainbow crystals. As the people pondered what it was, not noticing the rapidly growing stones around it, the mists of Ravenloft soon engulfed the area.

The crystal soon began to spread from the impact site, infecting everything in rapid succession. Their skin became akin to ash and their organs transformed into crystals, changing into an almost zombie-like state, turning on the other people around them. People fled, and not all escaped in time. When the people passed the lines the keystones drew, the crystals and the infected

stopped following. Henrietta looked on in horror at what she had allowed to fall to the ground.

CURRENT SKETCH

It is unclear if Henrietta is the Darklord of Sterlucht. Although she is tormented, by hearing the screams of pain of the people who succumbed to the crystals as if she were reliving the event, this may be a manifestation of the psychological trauma of her experience and guilt. She seems to have a powerful resonance with the keystones, able to feel how strong they are and where they need to be recharged with spells.

On the other hand, the Crystal Out of Space seems to want to spread like a virus, as crystals erupted from the ground within its barriers, turning everything ash gray and susceptible to crumbling like dust if disturbed. Any people or animals caught inside likewise turn grey and their bodies slowly crumble, revealing their bodies to be filled with crystals from the meteor. They shamble like zombies, uncaring of their surroundings unless they see someone uninfected by the crystals. Then they attack. Like their master, the crystal monsters cannot pass the line the keystones create.

The Dark Powers' sudden action may hint that what Henrietta did by inviting the Crystal out of Space to her world was so terrible, she was quickly pulled away. On the other hand, the Crystal seems to be far more malicious and perhaps the Dark Powers snapped up the Crystal before it could try to run away or grow too large for them to add to their collection. If that was the case, Henrietta may be the keeper of the Crystal, her own punishment for inviting it, and is now keeping it from escaping.

None can truly understand the logic of the Dark Powers.

THE LAND

A large portion of the land has been overtaken by the crystal as the ritual was centered on a large farm, in the hopes that it would be able to recover

quickly from the drought if the ritual worked. The rest of the land is a large ring which seems to have recovered from drought, but people dread going near the barrier, keeping a large distance from it.

Corbeau Manor exists here as well, although it seems that much of the stone which was missing back in the material plane has been replaced by crystal. It makes the scene beautiful but reminds Henrietta what she invited into the world.

MONSTERS

The only monsters native to Sterlucht seem to be the crystal-infected animals and people inside the barrier. They wander aimlessly, or seem to cultivate more crystals until they dissolve, leaving their crystals behind. Despite this, the population of monsters does not seem to decrease for long.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The wards to the infected lands have been sabotaged by a cult who have come to worship the crystal as a deity. They seek to release it. The cultist members must be found before the barrier fails.

THE HEIR APPARENT

With all evil of the Corbeau Family, which created the Grand Estate Cluster, it appears at first glance that there is no redemption for the name of Corbeau. Still, there was one member of the family who bears the spark of hope to redeem the name, however unlikely it would be in a place like the Land of Mists.

After the lands of the Corbeau Estate were supposedly struck by a meteor and Henrietta Corbeau had been considered killed in the impact, the area was utterly abandoned and the people fled, believing the land was truly cursed. Only a few houses remained in the nearby hamlet, the name of which was forgotten, as to many, it was simply home. The estate became a ruin and considered a place of evil and a curse, leaving it untouched as it

continued to crumble, with many hoping it would crumble completely and be forgotten. Any remaining Corbeau family members refused to take the land, believing it would only doom them in some way.

Eventually, the title passed to Lachlan Corbeau. Unlike many of his relatives, he did not see any truth in the stories of his ancestors, although he readily believed they brought themselves to ruin. He came to visit the estate with some adventurer friends he had made. They came to the ruined estate and looked through it for what might be left behind. Like his ancestors before him, Lachlan found the books each of them had read, in what remained of his great aunt Henrietta's chambers. Unlike his ancestors though, he did not try to take in the dark knowledge within. Instead, he tossed the books aside, uninterested in his own family history. His ancestors who took the manor destroyed themselves with their greed, arrogance, or a mixture of both. He wanted to break free from the Corbeau name and make it into something new, not try to redeem a tainted legacy.

Finding nothing which interested them, Lachlan and his companions left the manor with plans to tear it down and perhaps build something anew. Their path took them into the thick mists, clouding their vision.

In the Mists..

Emerging from the mists, Lachlan and his companions found themselves in a very different hamlet than the one they had traveled up from. It was, not thriving, but populated. The people were downtrodden and destitute. They called their home Crow's Nest and the land Corvania. It wasn't long before the people learned Lachlan's name and recoiled in fear of him. The name 'Corbeau' had become synonymous with evil in the Grand Estate Cluster, as each of the most terrible people there were all from that poisoned lineage.

Lachlan listened in horror as the people recounted tales of The Hag in Champignon, the Bloody Count in Bloedveld, the Deep Priest in Diepinham, The Swine

Queen in Varkensteen, the Necromancer in Wandenheil, the Doom Prophet of Sterlucht, and the Heart of Darkness spawned in Corvania by Edmund Corbeau. All of them were members of his family, despite the ages that passed, and all of them had brought evil, torment, and destruction in their wake to the people of their lands.

Lachlan and his friends tried to escape, but every attempt to cross Corvania's borders only took them to one of the other lands. They found themselves assaulted by undead, swine, fungus, mutant insects, and other horrors native to each of the lands. In each land, he saw a glimpse of the Corbeau Manor, a different iteration but unmistakable. And in each land, a friend was slain by the native horrors until Lachlan was left alone.

A lesser man would have broken, but Lachlan only saw what his family had wrought and realized he had been brought to this land for a reason. He had to end the heinous continuing crimes of his family members and atone for the atrocities they were all responsible for.

And so, Lachlan began his quest. Not to redeem his family line, but to end it once and for all.

CURRENT SKETCH

Lachlan has established himself a network of brave souls who say "no more" to the evils that his extended family is imparting. Recruiting Wizards, Rogues, Fighters, and others who rally to the cause, Lachlan organizes raids into the territories of his relatives. Their targets are usually to slay prominent monsters who serve the Darklords, raid holdings for supplies, and collect spoils to pay the mercenaries and adventurers who are brave enough to sign on with him. He strategizes to learn what he can about his relatives, methods, and goals to undermine and destroy them.

Lachlan's quest is difficult, thanks to the power his relatives hold as Darklords of their lands. Although raids succeed well enough and powerful monsters can be felled with luck, tactics, and a few brave lives,

fighting the Darklords is proving to be his greatest challenge. His teams have been known to find one of the manors and raid it, although many can die in the process. Only the most experienced and powerful of the members dare get close to the various versions of Corbeau Manor to try and slay monsters and raid for supplies.

The operation is also costly, in more than just gold and valuables. Although Lachlan's men can open safe routes for trade through his efforts, it is often said they generally lose a man per mile they secure. Recruitment is sometimes difficult, and training new recruits is a long process. The lack of resources can sometimes stretch Lachlan thin and allow the Darklords to recover forces or special monsters. Still, they get windfalls now and then, getting much-needed resources to pick up the fight again.

The Darklords despise Lachlan and his operations infuriate them as well as keep them from focusing on their goals. This is perhaps why Lachlan and his relatives rarely are able to confront one another since he adds to their torment just with his presence. They consider him a usurper, trying to steal their rightful inheritance as lord of Corbeau Manor and the surrounding lands, taking away what they believe is rightfully theirs.

Endmund considers Lachlan a nuisance, a nothing who constantly annoys him. He sends cultists or the odd monster to try and snuff him out, but otherwise he focuses more on trying to free himself from his prison.

Julianna sees Lachlan as an interloper who is trying to steal away her fame and glory. She does hope to capture him and experiment on him since they have the same blood and perhaps it might offer a clue to get her beautiful figure back.

Lucius silently applauds Lachlan killing off the mutants and members of the Bloody Court, but he hopes if he can just get Lachlan into his version of the Corbeau Manor, he can switch places with him and flee while leaving his descendant as the Bloody Countess' favorite companion/snack.

Richter seethes with hate for Lachlan, believing him to be trying to steal his fortune. He often tries to hunt for Lachlan's mercenaries if he discovers they are in his territory, making him one of the most active in their antagonism.

Siobhan considers Lachlan to be an ignorant child who doesn't understand the importance of her work. She will kill him just as easily as she would capture him to see if he knows anything about the designs of the aqueducts...and then kill him when she's done with him.

Wilhelm simply loathes Lachlan, although his hate is much more childish. He thinks Lachlan is another relative who is trying to show him up and take away what is now rightfully his.

Henrietta and Lachlan share a cordial relationship, although Henrietta is focused more on trying to push back the Crystal out of Space's influence and Lachlan does not trust her yet, fearing she may be just as evil as his other relatives. They rarely meet, usually when both happen to be in the fields of Sterlucht.

DREAD POSSIBILITY

Although Lachlan did not take the books of his ancestors with him, one of his companions did, leaving the books which began his relative's corruption in his possession. If the Darklords discover he has them, it may turn into an all-out war between the Corbeaus to possess them. On the other hand, Lachlan could be corrupted by the books as well, either becoming a Darklord of a new domain in time or replacing one of his relatives.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Lachlan has many operations ongoing into many domains. Resources are needed to keep the company of mercenaries going. There are outposts such as huts, ruins, and other places which need to be searched or bounties placed on some of the dangerous monsters which wander the domains and victimize the people. More experienced parties can end up helping lead the charge into foiling the plots of the Darklords themselves.



A PRIMER TO THE UMBRA PEOPLES

NON HUMAN RACES FOR DARK FANTASY RAVENLOFT CAMPAIGNS

BY JONATHAN "HELL_BORN" CRAWFORD

NATURAL INCLINATIONS

The races in this article use the Natural Inclinations system from the Chronicles of Aeres setting for 5th edition. At character creation, a member of this race receives a +2 ability score modifier, which must be placed in one of the three ability scores listed as Natural Inclinations, and a +1 ability score modifier, which can be placed in any ability score except the one in which the +2 bonus was placed.

INTRODUCTION

Greetings, reader. You hold in your hands what is hopefully the first of my scientific journals into the occult underground of this misty realm. I am Professor Noma, and this is my seminal product; "A Primer to the Umbra Peoples", the culmination of years of painstaking research across the manifold lands of this world.

Even before my recent arrival in the lands of mist, I was always a keen anthropologist, and I have observed on many worlds that a seeming multiversal constant was that humanity was never truly alone. Until I arrived here. This was the first realm in which humans seemed to reign over the world entirely on their own - oh, there were the usual demihuman suspects, the dwarves, elves, gnomes and halflings, but they were all marginalized, pushed to the fringes of society and scattered in small pockets across the land. This was so unexpected that I felt compelled to investigate, whereupon I discovered the truth: there

are just as many nonhuman humanoid races in these realms as in the realms beyond the mists. They just exist in hiding.

Inspired by the phenomenal works of Dr. Van Richten, and his worthy heirs, in the form of the Van Richten's Guide series, I have created this text as a basic introduction to the different nonhuman peoples who inhabit the misty realms. For ease of reference, I have divided these races into three categories; the Created, the Divergent, and the Parallel. Please remember that these terms are used only for reference in this text, and are not used by the hidden folk themselves!

THE CREATED

The Created is my term for those races which are not born naturally, but instead were artificially granted life through sorcery or occult sciences. The Created are in many ways the most unfortunate of the Umbra folk, for they are rarely endowed with the ability to walk confidently in disguise amongst human, compelling them to a life on the fringes of society unless they can find a way to endear themselves to a small community, or find solace in the ranks of adventurers.

BROKEN ONE

The line between "man" and "animal" is not as clear cut as the more arrogant denizens of these realms like to think. I have encountered many races on

many worlds whose forms blended the humanoid physique with distinctly animal traits... but only here have I met such creatures as the spawn of dark artifice, rather than natural beings.

BIOLOGY:

Broken ones are not so much a singular race as they are a catch-all term for any artificially engineered beastfolk creature. Typically, they began their lives as ordinary animals, but were forcibly transformed into a humanoid creature and imbued with at least near-human sapience in the process - according to stories I found, however, the lost realm of G'henna was supposedly ruled over by a mad priest who would sometimes curse those found guilty of heresy by warping them into a partly human, partly animal state.

Because of this, I can give no simple description of the broken ones as a whole. Each individually is functionally a species of one, and even two broken ones of the same animal root-stock may look very different.

Aside from their different animal natures, broken ones vary most wildly in how human they look, which typically reflects the skill of their creator. At their most flawed, they look vastly animal, just forced into a crude semblance of a humanoid physique, whilst the best designed could almost pass for human, save for small and subtle bestial traits. Even these most human broken ones typically will be taken for bestial calibans, and the spectrum of "human-favoring" broken ones will often be similarly mistaken in species.

For an example; three broken ones all based on a common cat. The first is a twisted animal; upright but hunched over, with digitigrade legs and paws that can just barely function as human hands. The second is mostly human, save for feline eyes, ears and a tail. The third looks something like the catfolk of other realms, with a fully upright posture and plantigrade limbs, but a clearly feline face.

Because broken ones are created, not born, and usually at the hands of rather unwholesome individuals, there have been studies done into their fertility. Broken ones can freely interbreed with each other, with humans, or with animals of their base stock, assuming that the parents are of compatible sizes (a broken one of rat stock could only be bred to a dire rat, for example), but the product of such unions are always bestial calibans.

PSYCHOLOGY:

The mindset of a broken one is as unique as its physical form, but typically is based around juxtaposition between its natural bestial instincts and its human intelligence. Some broken ones strive to act more human; others still think like animals, but with the greater wits granted to them by their transformation.

There is a marked tendency for broken ones to display personality traits that are culturally associated with them; a rat broken one that is inquisitive, scheming and duplicitous; a cat broken one that is proud, aloof and fickle; a rabbit broken one that is timid and amorous, etcetera.

Another major influence on their personality is the nature of their relationship with their creator. A broken one whose maker was cruel and authoritarian is likely to be servile - or vindictive and stubborn. On the other hand, one whose creator was kindly and gentle may be trusting and compassionate in turn.

SOCIOLOGY:

Broken ones are made, not born, and their society is thus inherently artificial as a result. They are typically found alone or in small groups, the product of mages, alchemists or mad scientists, who create them as experiments, labor, servants or simply to satisfy a whim. From here, they may escape from a particularly cruel master, or be set free when their master is slain by a society they have angered with their experiments and/or attitudes.

The largest known broken one society is that of the mysterious island of Markovia, which formerly existed as a tract of haunted wilderness in the Core before the Great Upheaval displaced it into the Sea of Sorrows. Markovia is home to dozens of broken ones who exist in a largely tribal state. They are defined by their absolute terror of their creator, who resides somewhere on their island, and their desperate attempts to emulate "civilized human society". It seems that this creator torments those who give in to their bestial impulses. When given the chance, Markovian broken ones have been known to flee their homeland, viewing that the wider world has to be a better place.

The second largest known population of broken ones is found in Hazlan. Hazlik, the archmage who rules over Hazlan, is very fond of experiments in manipulating the stuff of life, and this fondness has been passed down to his students at the Red Academy. Nowhere else will one find so many wizards studying the ways in which transmutation magic can be used to resculpt flesh and bone. Broken one servitors have become something of a status symbol in Hazlan, and in fact they are often treated better by the Mulan mage-lords than the Rashemani serfs of that nation!

As mentioned before, the lost land of G'henna is said to be home to a subcivilization of formerly human broken ones who scratch and claw an existence outside of the dubious safety of the Zhakatan theocracy.

Similarly, the lost land of Bluetspur was also said to be home to a large population of broken ones, often regarded as the least terrible of the many horrors inhabiting that realm.

The only other domains with a significant broken one presence in the Core are Darkon, Lamordia, and Falkovnia. Of these three, Falkovnia may have the largest emergent population; rumor has it that the Kingfuhrer is having his infamous "Science Division" attempt to alchemically engineer broken ones as a super soldier project. The Shadow Rift is reputedly

home to large numbers of broken ones as well, the product of fey meddling, whilst individuals have been spotted haunting the wildernesses of Forlorn and Nova Vaasa, likely having fled there from neighboring realms. Stories of distant Paridon suggest that alchemical experiments there may be giving rise to a broken one population.

ADVENTURERS:

Adventuring broken ones typically either fled their master (or the angry mob that killed their master) and now have to scratch a living on the fringes of society, or were shown kindness by an adventuring band and taken in by them.

Whilst not stupid, broken ones are rarely educated, and so they typically gravitate towards the classes that need the least amount of training; Barbarian is the iconic broken one class, but there are plenty of broken one fighters and rogues as well. Their origins as creations of powerful magic means that broken ones actually do have a natural affinity for magic, which typically manifests as their becoming Wild Magic Sorcerers. Broken one wizards, who typically taught themselves by sneaking peeks at their creator's grimoires when the master wasn't looking, are rare but not impossible.

Bluetspurian broken ones were notorious for their psionic aptitudes, and it's not impossible that other broken ones might similarly find their altered minds give them access to unusual powers.

BROKEN ONE RACIAL MECHANICS

BETTER BEASTS

For brevity's sake, this article presents the Broken One with a fairly generic statblock, encouraging the use of background, skills, feats, class and subclass to enhance the particular beastly flavor. With the DM's permission, the broken one lore can also be used to justify playing a more "standard" beastfolk race, such as a minotaur, lizardfolk, centaur, harengon, or even a third-party race, such as the Wildekind from

the Chronicles of Aeres or the Gnoll from Keith Baker's Exploring Eberron. Consider physically reskinning your character to make them more human-like or artificial in appearance if you take this route.

Natural Inclinations: Dexterity, Constitution, Wisdom

Size: Medium

Speed: 30 feet

Darkvision: You have Darkvision to a range of 60 feet.

Torturous Birth: You gain +1 maximum hit point at character creation. You gain a further +1 maximum hit points each time you gain a level.

Feral Senses: You have Proficiency in Perception.

Tooth and Claw: Your Unarmed Strikes do 1d6 damage.

Kinspeak: You can cast *Speak with Animals* at will, as per the spell.

BROKEN ONE RACIAL FEATS

ALPHA BEAST

Prerequisite: Broken One

You are a truly impressive specimen of feral might, and your threat display sends lesser beings cowering in your wake.

Effect: +1 Strength OR +1 Charisma, Gain Alpha's Challenge racial feature.

Alpha's Challenge: As a bonus action, you can unleash a bestial roar, howl, bellow, scream or other animalistic cry. Creatures of your choice within 10 feet of you that can hear you must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of you until the end of your next turn. The DC of the save equals 8 + your proficiency bonus + your

Constitution modifier. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

BESTIAL FORTITUDE

Prerequisite: Broken One

Fashioned through means best defined as torturous, your ability to survive punishment is truly incredible.

Effect: You have Advantage on saves against Disease and the Poisoned Condition. You have Resistance to Poison damage. When you spend hit dice to recover hit points as part of a short rest, you recover twice the amount of hit points rolled, with excess hit points being lost.

MAGEBREED

Prerequisite: Broken One

Whether you were created from a magical creature or you simply absorbed some of the magic used to create you, you have a natural spark for arcane magic.

Effect: Pick a cantrip of your choice from the Wizard spell list. At levels 3 and 5 respectively, you can pick a 1st level spell and then a 2nd level spell from the Wizard spell list, both of which can be cast without expending a spell slot once per long rest. All spells chosen for this feat use Intelligence as their spellcasting ability score. You can also cast these spells using spell slots you have of the appropriate level.

WALK WITH BEASTS

Prerequisite: Broken One

By strengthening your feral nature, you have recaptured mastery over a medium denied to humans.

Effect: Gain one of the following movement options: Burrow 30ft, Climb 30 ft, Fly 30ft, Swim 30ft. If you choose a Swim speed, you also gain the ability to breathe both air and water.

CARRIONETTE

There is always something rather sinister about puppets, and their close relations amongst the toys. This effect is rarely lessened in the case of a puppet that can move and think on its own terms.

BIOLOGY:

Carrionettes are a kind of construct created from the most humanoid shaped and intricately detailed of dolls; marionette puppets are the most common form, as their moniker suggests, but any variant of doll or puppet that features full articulation and which is crafted to resemble a human or humanoid could potentially become a carrionette. They are typically made of wood, straw, ceramic, cloth, tin, or some combination thereof.

Precisely what brings these former toys to life is currently unknown. If there are magical rituals designed to purposefully create them scattered around these dread realms, then they must be particularly obscure, even compared to the myriad other forms of golem. Legend speaks of a town lost in the mists where a mad craftsman endlessly produces carrionettes, populating his empty realm with a veritable army of these toy-sized golem-kin. Other stories speak of carrionettes being able to infuse something of their essence into fellow toys on the nights of the full moon, enkindling life where none previously existed. But the most recent and prolific story I have heard is that carrionettes spontaneously arise in the bedrooms of children - especially children who have been neglected or abused - brought to life by childish wishes and dreams.

PSYCHOLOGY:

Carrionettes are well-known as monsters consumed by an envy of humanoids and their living bodies, driven by envy to wield strange magics to try and steal humanoid bodies so that they can enjoy life for themselves. This text will instead focus on that

minority of carrionettes who do not allow themselves to be so consumed.

Non-malicious carrionettes tend to be heavily influenced by the characters "ascribed" to their original toy; a carrionette in the shape of a paladin is bold, brave and virtuous, a jester is constantly cracking wise and telling jokes, a princess is haughty and regal, etcetera. Their temperament tends to be very childlike; carrionettes are often dominated, if not entirely ruled, by their emotions, which can make them erratic and prone to behavior of extremes.

The one defining trait that these carrionettes is a deep, sincere love for children. Carrionettes adore children, and yearn to see them happy, safe and protected. Most regard adults with indifference; carrionettes who take the side of adults as the protectors and caretakers of children are almost as rare as those who regard all adults with suspicion and hostility. Nothing elicits a carrionette's wrath like preying on children, and even the most virtuous of carrionettes can fly into savage furies when confronted with those guilty of such crimes. They especially loathe adults who neglect, torment or abuse their children, and are quick to lash out against them. The worse the adult's crimes, the more vindictive and deadly the carrionette's response.

If questioned in this, the carrionette typically shrugs it off. "Thou shalt not let the molester of children live," is typically quoted.

SOCIOLOGY:

Outside of the legendary carrionette village, carrionettes are rarely seen in anything more than small groups of two to eight individuals, and even those are outnumbered by encounters with lone carrionettes. This is not due to any inherent territoriality or hostility towards their own kind - in fact, most carrionettes seem to actively enjoy interacting with one another, happy for the chance to have a peer. However, carrionettes are relatively

rare, and so don't often have the chance to group together.

Most carrionettes who do not attempt to steal the lives of humans for themselves tend to stay close to where they were originally created. They are usually found in the homes of the more wealthy, but may also appear in traveling puppet shows or orphanages. Nothing forces them to remain in these places, but they usually see little reason to move on from the familiar territories unless forced to do so by external pressure, such as an angry mob.

"Nomadic" carrionettes can be found roaming just about anywhere, though they tend to prefer the fringes of human settlements. Sometimes they operate in plain sight, striking a bargain with travelling puppeteers to play the role of their puppets and thus add an unusual level of skill to the act. These relationships can prove surprisingly profitable to both sides. Other such nomads are found lurking in or around refuse dumping sites, or sneak their way into orphanages. Some even go on the road themselves, wandering through the wilderness in almost a parody of traveling peoples, like the Vistani.

Religion is a thorny issue for carrionettes; whilst some simply disregard it as "boring", many find themselves actively interested in the question of whether or not they have souls, but the answers they seek are rarely given to them by the religions native to these dark realms. Only Hala or the Mordentish "Pure Hearts" sect of Ezra offers anything approaching a spiritual welcome to questing carrionettes.

ADVENTURERS:

Adventuring carrionettes are an oddity. Not so much because carrionettes are disinterested, but because it is rare that they will find humanoid parties willing to give them the chance. Though I have personally encountered an all-carrionette adventuring band.

The most iconic class for carrionettes is the Rogue. Naturally small and stealthy, being able to hide in

plain sight as a seemingly innocuous toy, they are experts at infiltration and assassination tactics.

Bardic carrionettes, on the other hand, are surprisingly common as well. With an innately magical nature and being "born" from toys meant to entertain, many carrionettes find they can combine these traits to provide magical benefits to others.

Warrior carrionettes are uncommon, due to their small size and difficulty in attaining proper armor, but the supernatural strength they bear due to being constructs makes them more likely than one would think. The majority of carrionette warriors are Barbarians, since that comes naturally to a race blessed with unnatural strength but cursed with childish fury. I have discovered stories of a lone carrionette "knight" whose dedication to hunting child predators of various stripes had given them the abilities of a Paladin sworn to the Oath of Vengeance, however.

Because most religions don't really accept carrionettes, carrionette Clerics and Druids are incredibly rare. They are more likely to embrace the path of the Warlock, typically swearing an oath to a Fey, Fiend or Undying master.

Their innately magical nature means carrionette Sorcerers are fairly common, usually possessing Wild Magic or Shadow Magic. Carrionette Wizards are rarer, but only because they are often held back when it comes to acquiring spellbooks.

CARRIONETTE RACIAL MECHANICS

Natural Inclinations: Dexterity, Intelligence, Charisma

Size: Small

Speed: 25 Feet, Climb 25 feet

Darkvision: You have Darkvision to a range of 60 feet

Living Construct: You are Immune to Disease and do not need to eat, drink, breathe or sleep. You are Immune to magically induced sleep.

Puppets Always Watch: When you take a long rest, you do not actually sleep, but instead spend the time in an inactive, motionless state, retaining full awareness.

Comedy & Tragedy: You have Proficiency in both Performance and Intimidation.

Nimble Escape: You can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of your turns.

CARRIONETTE RACIAL FEATS

GASLIGHTER

Prerequisite: Carrionette

The dark magics that gave you life allow you to break the minds of your enemies with ease.

Effect: You gain +1 to your choice of either Intelligence, Wisdom or Charisma. You learn the Hideous Laughter spell and one 1st-level spell of your choice. The 1st-level spell must be from the enchantment or necromancy school of magic. You can cast each of these spells without expending a spell slot. Once you cast either of these spells in this way, you can't cast that spell in this way again until you finish a long rest. You can also cast these spells using spell slots you have of the appropriate level. The spells' spellcasting ability is the ability increased by this feat.

CUT 'EM DOWN TO SIZE

Prerequisite: Carrionette

The bigger they are, the harder they fall.

Effect: You gain +1 Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution. When you damage a creature with an attack or a spell and the creature's size is larger than yours, you can cause the attack or spell to deal extra damage to the creature. The extra damage equals your level. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

NIMBLE ESCAPE

Prerequisite: Carrionette

Effect: You can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of your turns.

ERMORDENUNG

The Created races of these dread realms often stand visibly apart from their creators, struggling to find a place for themselves in a world that so often seems to hate them for the sin of having been born. But one Created race walks amongst humanity completely unnoticed. These are the ermordenung of Borca.

BIOLOGY:

Ermordenung begin their lives as ethnic Borcans (or, more rarely, Dorvinians), and as such bear the traits of that race; human, pale-skinned, dark haired and dark-eyed. All ermordenung were specifically chosen for their physical attractiveness (and, to a lesser extent, their intelligence), and as such they exemplify the traits that Borcans and Dorvinians consider beautiful. Rare individuals may display subtle mutations; their nails, lips and/or the whites of their eyes may turn black or blue, their nails may grow with unnatural speed and naturally form a claw-like shape, and their veins may stand out as eerily vibrant reds, blacks or blues against marble-white skin. These traits are never so obvious they cannot be concealed with more than a little makeup, however.

The true element that marks ermordenung as different from the humans they once were is the alchemical poison suffusing their bodies. Each is as deadly as they are beautiful; flesh and blood, skin and breath, every single aspect of their being is permeated with a deadly toxin. The touch of an ermordenung carries a swift, agonizing death, and the greater or more prolonged the exposure, the more devastating. Ermordenung are so lethal that they are never affected by biting flies, mosquitoes,

ticks or other irritating vermin, as the diminutive creatures die as soon as they touch the ermordenung's flesh.

Understandably, ermordenung are all but impervious to venom themselves, save for one key weakness: their own toxin. An ermordenung is no more resistant to the venoms of one of his fellows than a human would be. As a result, ermordenung are forever cut off from all physical contact with other people, as they are too toxic even for each other.

PSYCHOLOGY:

Having begun their lives as humans, ermordenung display the full range of human attitudes, beliefs and mindsets. Whatever unifying traits they have are a case of nurture, not nature.

Ermordenung tend to be ambitious and pragmatic, if not outright ruthless and/or manipulative; they are selected for these traits, after all.

A strong hedonistic tendency is common amongst ermordenung, and many wrestle with feelings of alienation, isolation, bitterness and self-loathing. Some try to drown these feelings out with pleasure or cruelty, others lash out in their pain.

In general, ermordenung are actively encouraged to embrace their darker sides and revel in being monsters, as a means of social control by their creator. Those ermordenung who reject these temptations must leave Borca, or be destroyed.

SOCIOLOGY:

Uniquely amongst the umbra peoples, ermordenung take refuge in audacity and operate almost entirely in plain sight. It is common knowledge that Lady Ivana Boritsi, the ruler of the realm of Borca, is accompanied by a clique whom she refers to as her "ermordenung". It is an unspoken but widely known truth that these ermordenung are Lady Boritsi's personal assassins and poisoners. But what nobody knows is that these individuals, once human, have been irrevocably transformed into poison-fleshed

post-humans through dark alchemy. In fact, Lady Boritsi herself was confirmed by those few ermordenung I spoke with as the first and most powerful of their kind.

In truth, the ermordenung are more a secret society within Borca than a true race as with the other peoples discussed in this work. Their post-human nature connects them to each other more than mere social unit, reinforcing the group bond by emphasizing their alienation from the rest of humanity. Those who refuse to join the group, or who resent the transformation, are forced to flee Borca and try to make a life for themselves as, effectively, a one-of-a-kind creature.

ADVENTURERS:

Ermordenung adventurers are rare, but not unheard of. Some may be agents of Lady Boritsi, sent to act beyond her borders. Others may be fleeing her reach. Regardless, ermordenung will keep their secrets close; only the most desperate or loyal will come clean about their post-human nature.

As Borcans first and ermordenung second, adventuring ermordenung favor the same classes as their human peers, though shaped slightly by their origins. Given they are typically recruited from the active social climbers or from amongst Borca's performing artisans, ermordenung are almost overwhelmingly rogues, favoring the Assassin, Swashbuckler and Mastermind subclasses, with a significant minority of Bards, usually of the College of Whispers. A small minority turn their attention to arcane magic, hoping to understand themselves better by following the path of Wizardry (usually Transmutation). Other classes are almost unknown.

ERMORDENUNG RACIAL MECHANICS

Natural Inclinations: Constitution, Intelligence, Charisma

Size: Medium

Speed: 30 feet

Toxic Touch: When you hit with an unarmed strike, you can choose to do Poison damage instead of the normal Bludgeoning damage. Additionally, if you start your turn grappled by or grappling a creature, that creature takes 1d6 Poison damage.

Venom-Steeped: You have Immunity to Poison Damage.

Kiss of Death: As an action, you can force one creature within touching range to make a Constitution save (DC 8 + your Proficiency bonus + your Constitution bonus). If the saving throw fails, the target is Poisoned for 1 hour.

ERMORDENUNG RACIAL FEATS

UTTER VENOM

Prerequisite: Ermordenung

You have refined the potency of your internal poisons to the point that you can slay even creatures normally proof against venom.

Effect: You gain +1 to an ability score of your choice. Poison damage inflicted by your unarmed strikes ignores Poison Resistance, and does half damage to creatures with Poison Immunity.

MIASMA

Prerequisite: Ermordenung

Your body produces such an excess of toxic ichor that you can spit your deadly blood at foes.

Effect: As a bonus action, you can exhale a 15ft cone of poisonous mists. Creatures caught in these mists must make a Constitution save against DC 8 + your Proficiency bonus + your Constitution bonus. A creature takes 2d6 Poison damage on a failed save, and half as much damage on a successful one. The damage increases to 3d6 at 6th level, 4d6 at 11th, and 5d6 at 16th level. After using your breath weapon, you cannot use it again until you complete a short or long rest. A creature that fails its saving throw against your breath weapon is Poisoned as if by your Kiss of Death racial trait.

HAND OF BLIGHT

Prerequisite: Ermordenung

The slightest touch from you can condemn a foe to a lingering death.

Effect: When a creature has been Poisoned by your Kiss of Death racial trait, it automatically takes 1d6 Poison damage at the start of each of its turns until it either dies or the Poisoned condition is ended.

LEBENDTOD

Dire circumstances breed unusual bedfellows. And in these dark realms, sometimes the best ally one can have is a being who is already dead.

BIOLOGY:

All known lebendtod originated on Graben Isle in the Nocturnal Sea, and are created from the native Grabenites. This gives them the appearance of extremely tall, long-boned, rangy humans with extremely pale skin, white-blond, slightly wavy hair, and faded blue eyes. Amongst men, hands and feet are large, hips rather narrow, jaws squared off and rugged, and the heads often appear slightly too large for their bodies, especially if the man is naturally thin. Grabenite women tend to be more fittingly - even quite amply - proportioned and very attractive, though rickets and a propensity to begin losing their teeth early in life take its toll. As undead, lebendtod do not suffer from the over-sensitivity to sunlight that their living counterparts are afflicted with.

Lebendtod are capable of spawning on their own, a unique trait amongst the Obedient Dead, as the Weathermay-Foxgrove Twins dubbed such creatures in their Guide. However, they rarely use this trait unless directly ordered, in part because it can go wrong and instead simply create a dangerous ghost. Still, this means there could be lebendtod of non-Grabenite stock out in the world.

The most unique physical attribute of the lebendtod is that their "essence" is strongly rooted to their bodies as a whole. This makes them incredibly tough to kill, as they can freely dismember themselves into separate parts and then be reassembled. They can even control disarticulated body parts, although this is an ability which requires a great deal of cunning to utilize efficiently; most simply rely on the tricks one can get up to with a disembodied hand.

One extremely strange aspect of the lebendtod is that they do actually age, albeit at an incredibly slow pace.

PSYCHOLOGY:

Uniquely amongst the undead, lebendtod possess all the intellect, creativity and personality traits they bore as living humans, save for a single telltale trait; each lebendtod has one passionate feeling of their life altered in some key detail. Something that was once hated now becomes loved, or vice versa, or something that they once felt very passionate about it is now regarded with total apathy. Of course, such a trait is only remarkable to those who knew the lebendtod as who they once were.

Perhaps the most defining feature of the lebendtod psyche is that they exist to serve. Whilst it's possible that some may dream of freedom, lebendtods as a whole need to have a master, in much the way that living humans need food and drink. Whatever order their master gives them, a lebendtod must obey.

SOCIOLOGY:

The lebendtod have more in common with a secret society than a race proper, which is only natural. All lebendtod were originally created by a powerful necromancer who lairs on a desolate island in the Nocturnal Sea from victims originally native to Graben Isle. Unless directly commanded otherwise, these lebendtod continue to pursue whatever life they enjoyed as living humans, only to stop and abandon that life should their master call for their service.

ADVENTURERS:

At first glance, a lebendtod adventurer may sound like an impossibility, but there are reasons why lebendtod may be encountered as adventurers. Primarily, their reclusive master relies on lebendtod to venture forth from Graben Isle to the rest of the Nocturnal Sea and the Core and the lands beyond them both, primarily to seek out and recover spellbooks and magical items that must then be sent back to their masters. Charged with this overarching goal, and otherwise left to their own devices to handle accomplishing it, lebendtod often find that membership in an adventuring party is a useful means of achieving their goal. In fact, they can often be surprisingly upfront about their purpose, openly describing themselves as agents of a distant, little-supporting patron interested in gathering items of the arcane; for many adventuring parties, those are acceptable terms. Furthermore, their master is said to be a jealous figure eager to cull the population of potential rivals, and what adventuring party would look too closely at a potential comrade eager to battle a practitioner of the dark arts?

The classes taken by a lebendtod adventurer - at least, one of Grabenite stock - are shaped by both the harsh, impoverished land from whence they hailed as living folk and the fact that they are regarded as little more than tools by their master. Overwhelmingly, they are Fighters, Rogues or Rangers, with a tiny handful of lebendtods able to somehow use the spiritual link they have with the arch-necromancer who created them to draw upon his magical energies, functioning as Undying or Undead Warlocks.

Lebendtod of non-Grabenite stock could be almost anything.

LEBENDTOD RACIAL MECHANICS

Natural Inclinations: Any

Size: Medium

Speed: 30 feet

Darkvision: You have Darkvision to a range of 60 feet

Unliving: You do not need to eat, breathe, drink or sleep, and are Immune to Disease and the Poisoned condition. You are also Resistant to Necrotic damage.

Unsleeping: When you take a long rest, you do not actually sleep, but instead spend the time in an inactive, motionless state, retaining full awareness.

Living Visage: You have Advantage on Deception checks made to pass as a living creature.

Made to Use: You have Proficiency in one Skill or Tool of your choice.

Detachable Limbs: You can freely remove and reattach your extremities by using an action. Detached limbs are Tiny, do not benefit from any armor you are wearing, and share your hit point total. So long as you are within (Proficiency bonus times 10) feet, you can control your detached limbs mentally. At the DM's discretion, using this trait can give you Advantage on an Intimidation check.

LEBENDTOD RACIAL FEATS

FALSE LIFE'S KISS

Prerequisite: Lebendtod

By exhaling deeply into the mouth of a corpse, you can create a temporary servitor.

Effect: You gain +1 Intelligence, Wisdom or Charisma. You can cast Animate Dead without expending a spell slot once by touching a corpse. Once you have used this ability, you must complete a long rest before you can use it again.

MARROW SWORD

Prerequisite: Lebendtod

By manipulating your own bones, you transmute an arm into an inseparable weapon.

Effect: As a bonus action, you can change one or both hands into a bladed implement of magically strengthened bone. This weapon has the statistics of any melee weapon without the two-handed or heavy properties, and counts as magical for damage resistance. You are proficient with the use of your Marrow Sword.

THE DIVERGENT

The Divergent are those races who are tied to humanity through its blood; hybrids, mutants, and other multifarious offshoots. The Divergent are the Umbra folk most strongly torn between worlds, standing metaphorically between the occult underground so shunned by most in the misty realms and the world of the so-called "normals" of the land.

CALIBANS

Without a doubt the most prolific of the Divergent races - indeed, of the Umbra folk as a whole - calibans proliferate throughout the misty realms and are the most widely recognized of the humanoid races of this world after elves, dwarves, gnomes and halflings.

Precisely what calibans are is hard to describe, although a very simplified explanation would be to describe them as planetouched unique to this demiplane of dread. To elaborate; calibans are a human offshoot created when an unborn child is corrupted inside of its mother's womb. Usually, this happens as a result of exposure to dark magical energies, either accidentally or sometimes deliberately, but they have also been tied to particularly extreme negative emotions or even to acts of blasphemy - cannibalism, incest, necrophilia and bestiality. Most native to the misty realms regard them as living manifestations of evil, either a divine punishment handed down for the sins of their progenitors or a symptom of a greater evil at work in their birth environment. I suspect instead that it is

more that acts of darkness trigger an upswelling in the innate magic of this world, contaminating the unborn in a similar way that environments steeped in celestial, fiendish or elemental energy can give rise to aasimar, tieflings and genasi.

Calibans are invariably physically altered, twisted by the magical energies in their bodies in ways that separate them from the human norm. Such deformities may not necessarily be negative or even particularly ugly, but even the most attractive and well-made caliban is visibly not human, and as such elicits a stark negative reaction amongst the close-minded... who, sadly, are quite prolific in this world. While no two calibans look identical, studies of this race have revealed distinct 'archetypes' or perhaps 'strains' that a caliban usually falls under, and for this reason my usual analysis of physiology and psychology will be more in-depth than usual. I will do my best to examine the five most recognized caliban archetypes, before moving on to the more generalized societal traits common across the strains.

Whilst I will describe three examples of each archetype that I have personally met, I emphasize to readers that these are by no means an ironclad guide. Much like tieflings, calibans are remarkably divergent in form, and any individual is, in many ways, a species of one. In fact, it's not unheard of to encounter calibans that resemble races more familiar to those who hail from beyond the mists, or even for such races to be mistaken for calibans.

Before we proceed, I must acknowledge that the basis of this entry in my guide is taken from the manuscript "A Guide to the Caliban Race", which was discovered by adventurers in an abandoned warehouse in Darkonese city of Mayvin. Readers, be assured that I have striven to confirm the findings of this unknown author as best I can.

For this first section, we will discuss the archetypes in the order of their prevalence; Brutes, Cannibals, Bestials, Banshees and Witchspawn.

BRUTES

The caliban archetype known as the Brute is without a doubt the most common of its kind, and in the eyes of many is perhaps the ugliest. As their name so bluntly announces, Brutes are characterized by extreme physical strength and/or resilience; even with their propensity towards warped spines and stunted or deformed legs, Brutes typically tower over ordinary humans and usually bulge with muscle. They often bear a resemblance to the half-orcs and half-ogres of worlds I have visited, but the mutations can be more extreme than that; jutting bony ridges, mismatched eyes or limbs, warped limbs, musculature swollen beyond reasonable growth, warts, pockmarks, tusks and fangs, these are just a small sample of the variety of ailments placed upon Brutes.

Also known as "The Accursed", Brutes have a sad tendency to be more mentally underdeveloped than most calibans, even given the race's tendency to be undereducated. Some Brutes simply never grow beyond the emotional and reasoning capacity of a child, others struggle with intense, almost uncontrollable surges of emotion. Sadly, their lot is to be regarded as all muscle and no brain. It bears emphasis that not all Brutes are like this; even those who seem "simple" can be surprisingly cunning, and more than one Brute has concealed a surprisingly formidable intellect behind a doltish facade. I have found many Brutes have a surprisingly innocent nature; a fundamental wish to belong mixed with almost childish naiveté that sees them eager to make friends, and almost desperate to please. If treated with proper respect and kindness, Brutes can be incredibly loyal... sadly, this trait is often abused to lure Brutes into a lifestyle little better than slavery. The rage of an angry Brute is justifiably feared.

Perhaps because of this yearning for companionship, Brutes are the archetype most likely to try and forge a life for themselves amongst human society. Stereotypically, a Brute is either a lowly worker,

often in agriculture, construction, or dock works, or else a criminal. They can theoretically be found in any role in which their strength is an asset, although that is mitigated by the typical desire of the humans around them to keep Brutes out of sight.

Some of the Brutes I have met include:

Bandersnatch: I met this caliban in the sewers beneath Paridon. With greasy yellow, near-translucent skin that exposed throbbing veins and twitching nerves beneath, and a skeletal face against a thick-corded neck, Bandersnatch was quite a sight. His most iconic mutation was his arms; the left arm had withered away into a rounded knot of gristle, but the right arm had swollen into a writhing, boneless tentacle, topped by a meaty hand several times larger than it should have been. Even at rest, his knuckles dragged on the floor, and yet his grip was strong enough that he could pluck a man's head from their shoulders with a single determined twist. Bandersnatch had taken it upon himself to become a guardian to a small collective of human orphans, forgotten in the press of humanity; they begged and stole what they needed, and Bandersnatch dealt a swift, violent end to any who threatened his little charges.

Alice the Goon: This female caliban was the head of a thieves guild I ran across in Dementlieu, having assumed such a lofty role by employing her greatest asset; her underestimated intelligence. Alice claimed to be a mere enforcer for a reclusive boss thief, whom I discovered Alice had actually killed and buried years ago. The deception allowed her to operate almost literally in plain sight. After all, who would believe this caliban woman, with her long greasy hair, oversized arms, stunted legs and rippling muscles could actually be clever enough to outwit human criminals?

Hawg Welles: Encountered in Darkon, Hawk Welles showcases how fine the line between the different caliban archetypes can be. With his pig-like pink skin, thick layers of blubber, heavy two-toed feet and four-fingered hands, and prodigious tusks, he has an

undeniably porcine appearance that suggests a Bestial caliban. But his strength and stamina both characterize him as a Brute. Welles owns a small pig farm, and lives a surprisingly comfortable life. Locals have learned the hard way to live him alone, however, as Welles has proven both willing to kill to protect himself and seemingly impervious to pain. I was regaled with many stories of the caliban stoically protecting himself against human aggressors, with one particularly noteworthy story being of a bully who tried to rob Welles in the middle of the street. According to what I was told, Welles calmly picked the man up by the head, ignoring the dozen dagger stabs to the chest he took in the process, and squeezed the man's head until it imploded before taking back his money and ambling home.

CANNIBAL

Only slightly less common than the Brute archetype, Cannibal calibans may perhaps be the most feared of the five archetypes. Also commonly known as "Living Ghouls", Cannibals are physically characterized by subtle yet repulsive traits; slightly altered limb proportions that lead to a disturbing natural gait; hairless or rubbery skin, fang-like teeth, often crooked or overly abundant, claw-like nails, an overly long tongue or excessive salivation. In fact, many Cannibal mutations are very similar to traits seen in ghouls, and it's not uncommon for the deathtouched breed known as ghouls to be mistaken for Cannibals - and vice versa. Whereas Brutes are characterized by strength and stamina, Cannibals tend to be fast, agile and graceful.

In contrast to Brutes, Cannibals most strongly manifest their archetype in mental alterations. Calibans of this archetype are prone to strange and deviant hungers; warped digestive anatomies that not only make them capable of digesting noxious foodstuffs such as raw meat or rotten fruit, but an actual hunger for this vile fare. Full-fledged anthropophagic cravings aren't universal, but are

common enough to earn this archetype its moniker. Others suffer instead from more metaphysical appetites; heightened libido, a natural susceptibility to addiction, startling compulsions and obsessions, especially with the more macabre or violent aspects of life.

Whilst Cannibals often integrate into the seedy underbelly of society, they are more willing to abandon humankind than their Brute kinsfolk. Entire clans of Cannibals are known to roam the wilderness of the Core, often making a living as bandits, mercenaries, grave robbers, body snatchers and other disreputable muscle. Invida in particular is known to be home to a network of large and sprawling Cannibal clans, whom Malocchio has eagerly courted to join his army.

Some of the Cannibals I have met include:

Sister Python, the Gluttonous Nun: It was in a traveling freak show that I encountered the Cannibal known only as Sister Python. Clad in the vestments of an Ezrite priestess, Sister Python could have passed successfully for a human woman, albeit one of unusual height and slenderness, unless one paid note to the elongated nature of her limbs and fingers. Until she opened her mouth; curving, needle-like fangs frame a maw that can stretch to abnormal sizes, allowing her to take truly titanic bites. Her act, if one can be so generous, was to commit acts of truly stunning gluttony; at one performance, she singlehandedly devoured enough food to feed a family of four, whilst in another, staged for a more depraved audience, she consumed a suckling pig alive and whole in the manner of her namesake. I offered to free the poor woman from such exploitation, but she rebuffed me, claiming that she lived a life of ease and luxury compared to most calibans. The sad thing is, I cannot deny her claim.

Lady Lizbeth: I conceal this caliban's last name out of prudence. Born the sole daughter to a minor aristocratic family in Borca, Lady Lizbeth is fortunate in that her caliban traits are quite minor; deathly pale skin in which black-and-blue veins stand out

prominently, and eyes of solid black, both traits that can be concealed with a little makeup and costuming. To the dismay of her parents, her mind is much closer to the 'norm' for Cannibals; she has an unshakable fixation on death and decay, taking a deep and sincere fascination in bloodshed and despair. She channels these longings into her artwork, and she is a talented artist, poet and songstress, but her family worries that the morbid nature of her works may attract the wrong kind of attention.

Toomes: This Invidian caliban was born to one of the great Cannibal clans of that land, but has since struck off on his own as a mercenary. Ironically, despite his upbringing and generally flexible grasp on morality, he does have a few very firm limits, most notably a distinct aversion to the idea of hurting children. He most recently made a stir in Nova Vaasa by hanging an aristocrat's gutted, jointed body from the gates of his own estate; the man, it was discovered, had a personal dungeon filled with peasant children, and I will not stain your souls by describing what he had done with them. He had made the mistake of hiring Toomes to assist him in gathering "playmates". Toomes can be recognized easily by his exaggerated, borderline rictus grin, bulging eyes, and long, slimy, black tongue.

BESTIAL

The rarest of the "common" caliban breeds, Bestials, also known as "Man-Beasts", are calibans characterized by distinctive animal-like features. Depending on the individual caliban, this can range from relatively subtle mutations such as animalistic eyes, claws, fangs, a vestigial tail, overly abundant body hair or patches of scales, to full-fledged animalistic features. A Bestial caliban may resemble an animaloid race such as bullywugs, lizardfolk, lupins or catfolk, or may even be a chimeric creature, with multiple different animal traits. Strangely, calibans of this strain rarely if ever have the disjointed "piecemeal assemblage" appearance

associated with broken ones; their appearance tends to be naturally harmonious, leaving them inhuman but at the same time not directly ugly, as is often the case with Brutes or Cannibals.

Bestial calibans tend to have a natural affinity for wild creatures and places - sometimes only those connected to their appearance, other times in a more general sense. They are much more likely to break away cleanly from humanity than Brutes or Cannibals are, preferring to live a life in the wild as subsistence farmers, hunters, trappers, prospectors, hermits and the like. Ironically, this means they are often more comfortable with themselves than the more civilization-orientated breeds are. Bestial calibans often have a sense of belonging and kinship that eludes many others; after all, animals do not care what a caliban looks like.

A downside to their mutation is that Bestial calibans often struggle with their bestial instincts. They aren't stupid, but they may well have animal-like impulses that they need to consciously exert control over, such as territoriality or a need for a strong social hierarchy. A ferocious temperament is a common failure; much like Brutes, Bestials can explode into uncontrollable violent outbursts if sufficiently pressed.

Some of the Bestials I have met include:

Nen Nine-Eyes: This spider-featured caliban, with his malformed, silk-spraying tongue, chelicerae-like fangs, two pairs of semi-vestigial arms and name-sake multiple eyes, makes a very comfortable living for himself as a burglar and, it's reputed, sometime assassin, in the heights of Paridon. He climbs with a swiftness and surety no human can match, and can easily leap and bound from rooftop to rooftop, which has allowed him to easily break into the upper storey targets he favors, as well as to evade Paridon's constabulary.

Brown Jenkins: Though originally of Richemuloise origin, I encountered this caliban in Mordent. With a body covered in fur, a long rat's tail and a distinctly rodent-like cast to his features, Jenkins admits to

coming from a long line of rat catchers and grime trekkers, but was close-mouthed about what prompted his departure from the realm of his birth.

Empusa: This young lady was the first caliban I ever encountered during my first trip to the benighted realm of Tepest. I stumbled across a village planning to "burn an evil fey", and found myself watching as they dragged a terrified teenager to the stake. I had... opinions... about the matter, and after all was said and done, I took her in as my ward. I called her Empusa due to her mutations; cat-like eyes, ears and claws contrasting a donkey-like tail and hoofed, digitigrades legs.

BANSHEE

These rare calibans are also known as "Wailing Women", as the strain only seems to manifest amongst female children. If there are males of this strain, they are very rare, and/or so similar to their more common counterparts that they go unnoticed. In contrast to the ugliness of the other strains, Banshees are always beautiful... but it is a cold, eerie beauty that ultimately disturbs rather than allures. The phenomenon has been explained to me that they almost, but don't quite, come off as human, being just that little too perfect.

Banshee mutations typically revolve around death and beauty; pitch-black, silver or white hair, unnaturally pale and cool flesh that may appear ice-hued, marble-white, or long-dead. Black or white or blood-red lips, nails and eyes, uncannily still and smooth features, and strange vocal manifestations are all common. It's not unheard of for banshees to be confused for dhampirs, or genasi of the ice, grave and blood strains.

Mentally, banshees are often as obsessed with the macabre as their Cannibal cousins, though they are more likely to exhibit this obsession through melancholia and artistic outlets, rather than the dark hungers of their kinsfolk. Banshees often become

bards, channelling their dark affinity for grief, death and the dead through music and painting.

Because they do not visibly stand out as much as their cousins do, Banshees have the most luck with successfully blending into society, though even then they are usually kept at arm's length as "creepy" or "disturbing". Their beauty merely shields them from the obvious slings and arrows cast at their more deformed counterparts. A startling number of Banshees, perhaps as a result of this, turn to arcane magic, finding a similar comfort in it that Bestial calibans find amongst the creatures of the wild. Banshees make formidable necromancers, having a natural affinity for spells that breach the barrier between life and death, though I have also met illusionists and enchanters amongst their ranks.

Some of the Banshees I have met include:

Glittering Gerda: I met this caliban in the borderlands between Darkon and Lamordia, where she lives as a hermit, keeping a small subsistence farm and honing her natural sorcerous talents. At a glance, I would have mistaken her for an ice genasi in other worlds; her skin of cold blue shot with snow-white veins, bluish-white hair, misty plumes of breath and skin that frosts instead of sweats are all traits common to those paraelemental-kin. But her blood-red eyes, lips and nails all showcase her true caliban nature.

Bathory Requiem: Coldly beautiful, this Darkonese caliban keeps to herself, with little tolerance for the outside world; too often stung by mankind's cruelty, she has become as cruel as she is lovely. With marble-white skin, vampire-like fangs, ghostly whispers that underlie her every word and a third eye, she is an obvious target for the many "witch hunters" of this world. Let the incautious be warned: she is a powerful necromancer, and has no respect for human life!

Nyx: This poor creature plays in a small theatre in Borca. Androgynous, with a flowing mane of black-and-white hair it weaves around itself like a shroud, solid black eyes and arms that resemble the claws of

a giant raven, Nyx is a talented musician and songstress who is allowed to play at the theatre, and is even marketed as its star attraction. Alas, Nyx is famed not for their skills, but as little more than a glorified freak show.

WITCHSPAWN

Rarest of all the caliban strains, the Witchspawn defy the stereotype of calibans as tough, strong and dim-witted. Sharp-witted and usually physically unimposing, the strength of the Witchspawn lies not in muscle, but in their natural affinity for spellcraft, leading to their nickname of "Arcane Scions". Even the least deformed of witchspawn bears a palpable aura of arcane energies, and they are typically the most physically mutated of all calibans.

As their moniker suggests, Witchspawn typically bear mutations that resemble fiendish traits or homage the characteristics assigned by the superstitious to arcanists; horns, tails, hooves for feet, forked tongues, extra digits, bizarre colorations, extra eyes, witch nipples, vestigial twins. A Witchspawn can often easily be mistaken for a tiefling, which is no comfort in this realm.

Witchspawn are almost invariably highly intelligent, though I have heard stories of so-called "idiot savants" who had child-like minds but compensated with a powerful grasp of sorcery. They tend to be ruthless, disparaging towards those of perceived lesser intellect, spiteful, self-centered and callous, but I cannot say that these traits are inherent so much as they tend to be learned behavior; the rarity of Witchspawn has much to do with the sheer hostility their mutations provoke, and those who survive tend to be both those quickest to flee into seclusion and understandably jaded in the face of a cruel, hostile, unwelcoming world. Those Witchspawn lucky enough to be born in domains where arcane magic is welcomed, such as Darkon or Hazlan, might tend to be more optimistic or otherwise positive in outlook, but even then, Witchspawn tend to cling to magic as the only true

ally they have in a world that despises them, and be quick to vent their wrath on those that are beneath them.

Some of the Witchspawn I have met include:

Hagsget: Whilst he was born in Tepest, the caliban known as Hagsget has no love for his motherland, having only avoided the cleansing flames of its inquisition thanks to the love of his mother and a Hala priestess willing to smuggle him to safety - although she in turn simply abused him, to the point he turned his back on Hala as swiftly as he could, becoming a wandering witch for hire. Unnaturally tall, thin and gaunt, towering over others despite a crooked spine that thrusts barbs of bone out his back, with overly elongated, six-fingered hands sporting wicked claws, Hagsget is made all the more striking for the fact his facial features are incredibly well-formed and handsome, contrasting his otherwise warped frame.

Flamekiss: At first, I would have mistaken this caliban for a fire genasi, with her crimson-and-orange patterned skin, glowing eyes, black teeth and tendency to exhale smoke and cinders. But in fact this Hazlani caliban was born to a Mulan family in good standing, and was uncannily fortunate for her kind; recognizing her obvious mutations, she was sent to the Red Academy, where the revelation of her innate pyrotheurgic abilities meant she was upgraded from 'test subject' to 'student'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, she is a hardline mage supremacist, even for a Hazlani, and revels in opportunities to burn submission into "defiant drudges".

Malcubus: I met this traveling caliban on the road; unusually for a Witchspawn, he has taken the path of the bard instead of the sorcerer. With cloven hooves, a rat-like tail, tiny horns on his forehead and a forked tongue, the rationale behind his name seems obvious, and grows only more so if one gets to know the sardonic, sarcastic, yet strangely charming individual.

SOCIOLOGY:

Calibans are, fundamentally, human. As bizarre as their appearances may be, all calibans have the same basic drives and desires as any humanoid; sadly, in these misty realms, those desires often go unsated. Calibans are frequently killed at birth, forced into seclusion and raised in secret as the family shame, or dumped into the oft-brutal and uncaring "refuge" of religious or public childcare programs. Whilst there are a few who have the fortune to be raised by birth or adoptive parents who legitimately care for them and wish them well, for most calibans, life is an endless procession of loneliness and cruelties.

There are no caliban-exclusive societies that I am aware of, saving the Cannibal clans of Invidia. Brutes and Banshees typically cling to human society, so desperate to belong that they will tolerate the endless abuse society heaps on their heads. Bestials and Witchspawn usually retreat into the wilderness, becoming hermits and shunning contact with human cruelty. Cannibals can go either way.

Whilst calibans have a reputation as criminals and monsters, that is largely because society gives them limited option to be anything else. Only the magocratic society of Hazlan gives calibans any real chance of social mobility, and even then only for native-born calibans. Despised and abused by those in power, calibans naturally come to hate their oppressors. Religion offers them little comfort; the Churches of the Lawgiver and Belenus see them as abominations to be destroyed, and the Church of Ezra varies between treating them with contempt and hostility, an attitude which the Divinity of Mankind shares. Only the faiths of Hala and the Morninglord offer anything approaching a warm welcome. Nova Vaasan calibans do seem to feel a particular fondness for Mytteri, although that may be just part of the race's general tendency to embrace cults dedicated to magic, chaos, change and fiend-worship simply because such faiths exult them rather than damning them.

ADVENTURERS:

Despite everything stacked against them, a surprising number of calibans become adventurers precisely because they maintain a fundamental optimism. They believe that the world is good, and that if they can prove they are not monsters, then they will be welcomed as the people that they know they are. Others take up the mantle for more selfish reasons; gold and power may be cold comforts, but cold comfort is better than no comfort. More than one caliban becomes an adventurer after they are saved by an adventuring party; beyond whatever practical considerations there are to sticking close to proven defenders, there is the simple fact that this may be the only kindness the caliban has ever known.

Brutes are most likely to be Barbarians or Fighters; despite their association with the criminal underworld, they tend to be leg breakers, muggers and muscle, rather than true Rogues.

Cannibals, in contrast, are largely drawn to the Rogue class, followed by Ranger and Barbarian.

Bestials are typically Barbarians, Rangers or Druids.

Banshees favor the Bard, Sorcerer and Wizard classes.

Witchspawn favor the Wizard, Sorcerer and Warlock classes.

CALIBAN RACIAL MECHANICS

SIDEBAR: ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATIONS

Calibans are a naturally mutable species, and whilst the Banshee, Bestial, Brute, Cannibal and Witchspawn are the most recognized types, there are plenty of calibans which do not fit the mode. If your DM permits, the caliban origin can be used to explain PCs of any number of humanoid races.

Natural Inclinations: Determined by subrace.

Size: Medium

Speed: 30 feet

Darkvision: You have Darkvision to a range of 60 feet

Living Shame: You have Proficiency in the Stealth skill, and Advantage on checks to resist being Frightened.

Cursed Blood: Choose the Banshee, Bestial, Brute, Cannibal or Witchbreed subrace. This determines your natural inclinations and other racial traits.

Banshee

Natural Inclinations: Dexterity, Intelligence, Charisma

Darkling Beauty: You have Advantage on Persuasion checks.

Condorre il Requiem: You know a single Cantrip that must belong either to the Bard spell list or to the Necromancy school. At 3rd level, you gain a single 1st level spell that must belong either to the Bard spell list or to the Necromancy school, which you can cast without expending a spell slot once per long rest. Spells cast using this trait use Charisma as their spellcasting ability score. You can also cast these spells using spell slots you have of the appropriate level.

Bestial

Natural Inclinations: Strength, Dexterity, Wisdom

One With The Beasts: Through sound and gestures, you may communicate simple ideas with beasts. You have advantage on all Charisma checks you make to influence them.

Feral Instincts: You have Proficiency in Survival and Perception.

Brute

Natural Inclinations: Strength, Constitution, Wisdom

Powerful Build: You count as one size category larger to determine your carrying, dragging, lifting, pulling and pushing capacities.

Savage Attacks: When you score a critical hit with a melee weapon attack, you can roll one of the weapon's damage dice one additional time and add it to the extra damage of the critical hit.

Long-Limbed: Your reach with melee weapons is 10 feet instead of 5 feet.

Cannibal

Natural Inclinations: Dexterity, Constitution, Wisdom

Skitter-Scrambler: You have Proficiency in Athletics.

Nightmarish Antics: As a bonus action, you can put on a horrible display - contorting your facial features, emitting a freakish gibbering, or otherwise attempting to terrorize your opponents. Creatures of your choice within 10 feet of you that can either see or hear you (your choice) must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of you until the end of your next turn. The DC of the save equals 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Constitution modifier. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Witchbreed

Natural Inclinations: Constitution, Intelligence, Charisma

Unearthly Knowings: You have Proficiency in Arcana.

Born Witch: You can cast the Thaumaturgy cantrip. From 3rd level, you can cast Cause Fear as a 1st level spell once per long rest. From 5th level, you can cast Detect Thoughts as a 2nd level spell once per long rest. You choose whether to use Intelligence or Charisma as your spellcasting score for spells cast with this trait. You can also cast these spells using spell slots you have of the appropriate level.

DEATHTOUCHED

One of the more familiar races in my travels has been the so-called "Planetouched"; humanoids touched in the womb by extraplanar energies or bearing the blood of extraplanar creatures. Though typically lacking a unifying culture, save in certain situations, this basic archetype repeats itself across the many realms, and even in these mist-shrouded lands, one can find those so marked - if only the tieflings and aasimar.

But there exists a similar category of beings; the "Deathtouched". The living expressions of the necromantic arts, the Deathtouched are beings whose heritage mingles undeath and life into something that blurs the borders in ways all too many regard as obscene. And no realm in my experience has been more fruitful in producing such beings than these misty realms in which I now wonder. The potential implications of this are staggering, and worth contemplation, but that is a topic for another tome; in this tome, I shall merely endeavor to discuss the Deathtouched as people.

As with the Calibans, the Deathtouched are more a collection of races than a singular race, if not quite to the same extent. There are five distinctive Deathtouched races, and potentially more that have yet to be discovered. These five are the Dhampir, Fetch, Ghedan, Ghul and Mortif.

DHAMPIR

The association between vampires and desire is old and deep; in many ways, the root of a vampire's unholy existence is desire - the desperate yearning to live, even beyond their deaths, that compels them to leave the sanctity of the grave and prey upon the living in order to sustain a mockery of existence.

Dhampirs, then, are in many ways amongst the most common demihumans native to the realms of dread. The unnatural existence of the vampire, its deep

foundation in the element of desire and its perverse connections to the very fluid of life allows vampires to mingle their essence with the living with far greater ease than any other undead creature. Indeed, dhampirs are frequently born to living parents who have merely had contact with the bloodsucking undead; female vorlogs who yearn for male companionship invariably spawn dhampirs if they survive long enough, whilst a man who was saved from becoming a vampire's spawn may find the taint in his blood expressed through his offspring. Dhampirs being created in their adulthood are the rarest of all, and typically the result of (usually botched) rituals attempting to save a victim from dying and being reborn as a vampire in turn.

Although there are stories of those who seek to hunt vampires finding themselves ironically "blessed" with vampire-like powers in their own right. Such cruelly humorous metamorphoses are quite common in these lands, so I am inclined to regard these stories as holding more than a grain of truth.

Despite their numbers, dhampirs do not have an easy life in the lands of mist. In the most benighted and superstitious hamlets, dhampirs are often mistaken for true vampires, and executed for the sins of their forebears. Even in more civilized lands, a dhampir makes folk nervous, for they are children of predators, and one cannot help but wonder if that will not come out in their blood. The fortunate ones inherit supernatural charms that they use to ease their way, but many dhampirs turn to a nomadic existence, roaming the lands in search of a place that will finally grant them peace. The stereotype of the dhampir who hunts the undead is a common fixture in stories and songs throughout the core, and it has its roots in reality.

A dhampir typically resembles a human with a cold, almost statuesque beauty, or else a strangely feral charm. Their coloration is typically exaggerated based on their heritage; marble white or ebony black skin is not unheard of. Their eyeteeth tend to be long and sharp, but not so much that they cannot be hidden. Hair is typically deep black or pale white,

but metallic silver or bloody red hair isn't unheard of. Most dhampirs struggle with deep, passionate emotions - what they feel is often felt to a disproportionate intensity, and they struggle to control themselves in the face of these powerful desires, especially when they are enflamed with rage or desire. Despite stereotypes, an arrogant streak is not an inherent aspect of the dhampir lineage.

The unusual variety of vampires in these dark realms has led to a similar profusion of dhampir variants. Whilst the above describes the common dhampir well enough, there are also dhampirs of dwarven, elven, gnomish and halfling blood, and each of these bears traits reminiscent of their peoples' distinctive vampire counterparts. Even the rare nosferatu and chiang-shi strains have similarly unique dhampir offspring.

Of their fellow "death-touched", dhampirs get on best with fetches, who can understand the depths of their passions. In comparison, ghuls often loathe dhampirs, despite their shared predatory inclinations, since dhampirs have an aura of majesty and charm that ghuls distinctly tend to lack. Blood genasi and dhampirs tend to either loathe each other on sight, or else find each other strangely fascinating.

FETCH

The half-ghost, or fetch, is typically thought of as a rarity, but in these realms, they are second in numbers only to the dhampirs - and a close second at that! One need only look at the profusion of ghosts and specters in these lands to see where they might originate!

A ghost is many things, but at its core, it is desire made manifest. It is the desperate urge to achieve something, a hunger so intense that it allows the spirit of the dead to defy the natural order of things and continue existing as a mockery of life. When this is taken into account, then perhaps it is not so surprising that ghosts who cling to the mortal coil

out of some perverse sense of love or lust can take their blasphemous existence further still, and produce living children?

Some fetches are born to ghostly fathers, called back from the grave by their yearning for one last embrace with their still-living lover. Others are the children of undead mothers, whose sheer will to grant their babe the life that was stolen from them allows them to defy the laws of primal nature.

Much like planetouched and calibans, however, many fetches are born as a result of environmental contamination. A child conceived or, more rarely, born in a graveyard or a known haunted site has a chance to be born with one foot in the realms of both the living and the dead. Other fetches were born to mothers who were exposed to strong surges of necrotic energy whilst pregnant, but survived and gave birth to living children. And other fetches still simply were born as a result of mingling strong spiritually touched bloodlines; mediums and spirit-talkers are well known in the realms of mist, and when families with a propensity for such sensitivity interwed, their strengthened bloodline may produce unexpectedly potent ghost-speakers.

A fetch resembles a human with hair, skin, and eyes of a nearly transparent white, blue, or ash-gray color. Female fetches are often mistaken for banshee calibans, whom they most closely resemble. Regardless of sex, fetches often seem mournful, wracked by sorrows that they seemingly cannot explain to those who inquire, whilst others may be detached and apathetic, or perpetually distracted by things that others cannot perceive. Some have violently passionate natures, living lives caught in an eternal tempest of their emotions, but these are rare. They are usually slender, waifish creatures, and many suffer from strange, incurable illnesses that seem to be part of their very being - wracking coughs, sporadic bleeding from the mouth or eyes, or chronic fatigues that often leave them bedridden. But despite this physical frailty, the minds of fetches are invariably sharp and they have a strange, compelling presence to them.

GHEDAN

Regarded by many as the least of the deathtouched, the ghedan, or "half-zombie", or "half-revenant" is uncommon even in these lands. The product of dark necromantic experiments, flawed attempts at reviving the dead, or even the obscene fruits of necrophiliac couplings, ghedans exist in a strange state of half-life and half-death - not a true mindless zombie, but at the same time, less than a man.

Of all the deathtouched, their bloodline may be the most tainted, as they are highly associated with blasphemous acts of necrophilia - sometimes with revenants who still bore an all-too-human love in their hearts, more often with particularly depraved necromancers and twisted obsessives.

More than any other deathtouched, however, ghedans are likely to be created artificially. Magics intended to grant true life to the slain are never exactly easy, and in the misty realms, they are particularly prone to going awry. Whilst an imperfect resurrection may sometimes produce a fetch or mortif (or, far more rarely, a dhampir or ghul), they largely result in ghedans, and in fact ghedans of this origin may outnumber the "trueborn".

Hollow black eyes are the most defining physical characteristic of ghedans; their hair ranges from dark to unearthly pale, and their skin often has a corpse-like pallor to it, sometimes even a sickly green or blue tinge reminiscent of rot. Some are gaunt, others thick and muscular. But all ghedans are physically numbed to the world; they move slowly and ponderously, with even the most active and alert of their kind finding they live in a strange, hazy state of semi-consciousness. They are not stupid, but their attention is often unfocused and wavering, and they can become easily distracted, if only by their own trains of thought. But once they set their mind to something, they are unyielding in their pursuit of it. Ghedans feel little fear, and less pain; they shrug off wounds that would kill an ordinary man and continue on as if untouched. A

ghedan never stops, never tires, never relents until it has what it wants.

For this reason, ghedans are popular minions in the darker circles of the Core. They make excellent guards, and intimidating enforcers; their ability to shrug off punishment and keep pursuing whatever they desire can be the stuff of urban legend. But their intelligence is often underestimated, and more canny ghedans readily exploit this to carve out a place for themselves in the world.

GHUL

In many ways, the dhampir and the ghul could be seen as two sides of the same coin. Both are the fruit of a mingling of human blood and the ichors of an undead predator. But whereas dhampirs share something of the macabre allure associated with vampires, ghuls are regarded more as noisome, unclean, vermin.

Of all the half-undead, ghuls are the most likely to be born to undead mothers; male ghouls are typically far more concerned with their literal appetite than any other sort of hunger. Usually, this is a result of a pregnant woman being transformed into a ghoul, either by the dreaded ghoul fever or as a result of a dark curse brought on by cannibalism or similar acts of unholy gluttony. Ghuls that were "deliberately bred" are definitely in the minority, but not unheard of - they are often the progeny of female ghoul lords, whose heightened intelligence and greater control over their appetites makes them more likely to engage in such nightmarish acts of congress. Darkest still are those conceived as the result of unholy alliances between humans and ghouls - corrupt families, gravediggers and necromancers who, for whatever unholy purpose, have cause to make congress with the hungry dead and form soul-blasting unions of common purpose.

The vast majority of ghuls, however, are once-normal humans transformed - typically as a result of contracting ghoul fever or some other curse that

began the change into a true ghoul, but which they managed to arrest before they could complete their descent into true undeath.

In many ways, ghuls are dark parodies of the dhampir. Invariably gaunt, if not emaciated, their rough, leathery skin clings tightly to their bones. Their mouths are full of jagged, yellow fangs and long, black tongues loll freely at the slightest excuse. They have black, green, pale purple, or chalk-white skins, and pupil-less yellow, red, or green eyes that glow faintly in low light, and their natural scent, unless carefully covered with soaps and perfumes, is a noxious reek of carrion or dried blood.

Ghuls hunger for decaying flesh and rotting meat, and much like their undead relatives are drawn to scavenge from graveyards and burial pits. They have no fear of death or injury, and indeed they regard life itself as a great joke. Their morbid humor often covers deep bitterness, and many ghuls privately loathe themselves as much as they resent humankind for the normal life they can never live.

Understandably, ghuls are almost always outcasts from society, interacting with it only as criminals or adventurers. Some become hunters of the undead, feasting on what they kill, but others still simply wish to lash out at a world that they view as mocking them.

MORTIF

Common wisdom holds that dealing with dark magic can stain the soul, and both tieflings and calibans are cited as proof of this fact. But necromancy too can leave its taint behind on practitioners, and the mortif exist as proof of this fact.

Like the tieflings whom they most closely resemble, mortif are marked in the womb by the stain of necromantic energy. Often, they are children of necromancers, especially those whose lineage have seen many generations of dabblers in the dark arts, or were conceived in areas infused with necrotic energy, such as graveyards or haunted houses. Some

were born to mothers who survived a brush with life-sapping attacks, or were sired by fathers who had been brought back to life. And others are simply distant descendants of the so-called "half-dead" - dhampirs, fetches, ghedans and ghuls.

Regardless of the source, all mortifs are marked by this fundamental connection to necrotic energy, although as the "lesser" deathtouched, mortif features are typically much more random, and modest compared to their "halfblood" relatives.. They tend to be pale and thin, with hair of black, dirty brown, or gray hues. They often bear subtle hints of their unearthly nature; a persistent scent of the grave, eyes that glow red, yellow or green in low light, skin that clings tightly to their bones, or black fingernails. Those directly descended from the "half-dead" may bear some traits in common with them, such as an elongated, blackened tongue for ghoul heritage, or pronounced eyeteeth marking distant vampire blood.

Their "watered down" blood also means mortif don't have as many iconic personality tendencies as their counterparts do. A mortif is often reclusive, perhaps even antisocial, and soft-spoken. They tend to have strong-willed and fearless, but usually are quite introverted. Their emotions tend to be either stunted and non-intrusive, or extremely lively and a major influence on their personalities and deeds. Many mortifs build up a reputation as quiet and unassuming amongst casual acquaintances, but as beings of deep passion and almost frightening intensity amongst those they trust enough to open up to.

Mortifs are prone to bouts of depression, brought on by a natural feeling of being alienated from the living around them, and can plunge into melancholic outbursts that last for days or even weeks. This is only exacerbated by a strong proclivity towards paranoia; many mortif are inherently afraid of the living, consumed by the nagging dread of what might happen should their tainted ancestry be discovered.

The one trait universal of mortifs is that they have a very strong opinion on death, dying and the undead. Whether that opinion is positive or negative depends on the individual. Mortifs are as likely to be ruthless slayers or powerful necromancers as they are to be compassionate healers or driven slayers of the walking dead. Some have an affinity for the macabre, a propensity towards dark humor, or even an outright love of the morbid. They find kindred spirits amongst those who are similarly outcast for their connection to the darkness; calibans, their fellow deathtouched, dread genasi, and even some brauchnens.

SOCIOLOGY:

Like their caliban counterparts, the deathtouched do not view themselves as a distinct race; many are, ironically, unaware of their not being some kind of unique aberration in the lands they call home. Discovering there are others like them out there is often nothing short of a revelation. Although this breeds a certain measure of fellow feeling towards each other, they are not connected enough to make any real steps to separate themselves from the societies of their parents.

Dhampirs are, of course, associated with those lands inhabited by vampires. Barovia is generally assumed by those aware of the dhampir existence to be swarming with them, but ironically this benighted realm has a startlingly small population of dhampirs, and that concentrated almost exclusively amongst the Gundarakite population. I personally encountered a small, all-dhampir village in the lands that had once been Gundarak, and even they were close to the borders of what was now Borca. Precisely why they are so rare in what would seem to be their natural homeland is a mystery, although I uncovered some evidence that may suggest a powerful vampire actively hunts them down and destroys them - or else that the native Barovians kill their deathtouched offspring at birth. Instead, dhampirs are found scattered throughout the major cities of the Core; those of chiang-shi origin are said to proliferate in the distant realms of l'Cath and

Rokushima Taiyoo, and only recently begun manifesting in the Core as migrants emerge from those lands. If the Core has a "dhampir homeland", it is instead Darkon, where human and demihuman dhampirs proliferate.

Fetches are found primarily in those realms known for their hauntings. Specter-shrouded Mordent produces more than its share of these half-ghosts, whilst in Falkovnia, it is whispered that a widow who lays down on her husband's grave at night may rise to find a child of equal parts flesh and ectoplasm kicking in her womb. In benighted Darkon and Hazlan, necromancers perform obscene experiments to cross the boundaries between life and death, which may give rise to fetches, amongst other creatures. The Mordentish fetch is definitely the most iconic of its kind, and tends to enjoy the best life; cursed with a natural sickliness and an affinity for magic, fetches usually don't enjoy long lives in Falkovnia.

Ghedans are largely concentrated in Darkon and Hazlan, the fruits of necromantic experimentation - though it is said that families who live near the Darkon borders have a peculiar tendency to produce ghedan offspring, as do Falkovnians who live close to the Darkon borders. Ironically, ghedans thrive in Falkovnia, unlike their fetch cousins; their brute strength and mindless indifference to pain and fear makes them useful enough that the Kingfuhrer and his butchers can look past their obvious inhumanity. A surprising number of ghedans are found in Lamordia as well, despite that realm's notorious refusal to accept the reality of magic.

Ghuls have no particular homeland, though it is rumored that the infamous cannibal clans of Invidia are made of almost as many ghuls as they are calibans. Wherever ghouls emerge, ghuls follow. They do seem to be relatively plentiful in Falkovnia and Nova Vaasa, where their literal stomach for violence serves them well.

Mortifs are associated with Darkon and Hazlan, but can be found throughout the Core and beyond.

In fact, Darkon actually houses the closest thing yet seen to a fledgeling deathtouched community. In the area surrounding the cursed city of Il Aluk, the deathtouched population has been rising sharply. Not only are existing Darkonese deathtouched drawn to the area, but those women who live around what is now called Necropolis are birthing deathtouched babies in a steadily increasing number - most commonly mortif, followed by fetches and ghedans, with ghuls and dhampirs uncommon but still present. None of the adult deathtouched I interviewed could explain their fascination with the Necropolis, only that it "feels right". What will happen next is anyone's guess, but is certain to be fascinating: the deathtouched have revealed that they alone amongst the living are inherently immune to the legendary Shroud of Necropolis, the necrotic energy field that instantly slays and reanimates any who dares to try and set foot in Il Aluk!

Religion is a... touchy subject for the deathtouched. Most tend to be agnostic, atheistic, or outright maltheistic, which is an understandable reaction if the typical attitude one encounters from a preacher of any religion is "kill it with fire!" That is not to say there aren't some religious deathtouched, just that the religions of these lands are not especially welcoming to them. Frankly, most religious deathtouched have something of either a raging guilt complex, a masochistic streak, or both.

Dhampirs are likely to follow the path of Ezra, usually focusing on the Mordentish sect or the Nevuchar Springs sect - in either case, they are often self-flagellating (sometimes literally) fanatics, desperate to atone for their "tainted blood". Other dhampirs are some of the very few non-Barovians to worship the Morninglord, and these tend to be more stable than their Ezrite counterparts.

Fetches are likely to be spiritual, but not religious; their close ties to the world of ghosts and spirits naturally breeds an acceptance of them as fact, but no religion is quite compatible with their views. They often form their own beliefs and may even found fledgling cults.



Mortif are the most likely of the deathtouched to be religious, and are split roughly equally between those who embrace the more militant aspects of Ezra and the Morninglord's doctrines to hunt the undead and those who worship more "pro-death" doctrines, such as Erlin or the Eternal Order. Non-religious spiritualism is another major presence in their ranks. And, of course, there are plenty of mortif necromancers who trust in the power of arcane magic over the divine.

Ghuls and ghedans are the least religious deathtouched races; ghedans rarely care to consider the topic of spirituality, and ghuls often actively revel in spitting blasphemies and curses to shock and repulse the people they resent.

ADVENTURERS:

Deathtouched make natural adventurers, given their combination of power and a diminished connection to mortal society. Indeed, many deathtouched were "born" as adventurers, especially in the case of ghuls or ghedans, who are likely to be once-humans who found themselves transformed due to mishaps in the course of their journeys.

Dhampirs are the most variable of deathtouched in their choice of classes, typically focusing on either strength or magic, or even combining the two; a dhampir is more likely to be an eldritch knight than a mere champion. Spellcasting dhampirs tend to favor the sorcerer, bard or wizard. Paladin dhampirs are surprisingly common, although their tendency towards self-loathing and focus on slaying evil means they usually swear the Oath of Vengeance above all others.

Fetches are almost invariably sorcerers or wizards; magic is their natural strength, and whilst a fetch warrior isn't impossible, it would definitely be an oddity. Fetch bards aren't unheard of, especially those of the College of Spirits. Fetch rogues are rare, but they make formidable arcane tricksters and assassins.

Ghedans, in contrast to fetches, are almost invariably fighters or barbarians. Ghuls favor the rogue and the ranger; they make fearsome assassins, but are surprisingly likely to become beastmasters, often training giant rats, vermin, or fearsome scavengers.

Mortif favor the wizard and sorcerer classes; their natural affinity for necromancy and shadow magics simply makes these the most logical focuses for their talents. However, they are versatile, and so more than any other deathtouched are likely to surprise those who try to pigeonhole them.

DEATHTOUCHEd RACIAL MECHANICS

DHAMPIR

Natural Inclinations: Determined by Subrace

Size: Medium

Speed: 30 feet

Superior Darkvision: You have Darkvision to a range of 120 feet

Sunlight Sensitivity: You suffer Disadvantage on Attack Rolls and visual Perception checks when you or the object of your focus is in direct sunlight.

Deathborn: You have Resistance to Necrotic damage.

Vampiric Bite: Your fanged bite is a natural weapon, which counts as a simple melee weapon with which you are proficient. You add your Constitution modifier, instead of your Strength modifier, to the attack and damage rolls when you attack with this bite. It deals 1d4 piercing damage on a hit. While you are missing half or more of your hit points, you have advantage on attack rolls you make with this bite.

When you attack with this bite and hit a creature that isn't a Construct or an Undead, you can empower yourself in one of the following ways of your choice:

You regain hit points equal to the piercing damage dealt by the bite.

You gain a bonus to the next ability check or attack roll you make; the bonus equals the piercing damage dealt by the bite.

You can empower yourself with this bite a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Multifarious Curse: Choose the Vampire, Nosferatu, Chiang-shi, Dwarven Vampire, Elven Vampire, Gnomish Vampire or Halfling Vampire subrace.

VAMPIRE

Natural Inclinations: Strength, Intelligence, Charisma

Spider Climb: You have a Climb speed of 35 feet. From 3rd level, you can climb across vertical surfaces and upside down on horizontal surfaces without penalty.

Quick as Death: Your base walking speed is 35 feet.

NOSFERATU

Natural Inclinations: Strength, Dexterity, Charisma

Predator's Shield: You are Immune to Charm effects.

Darkling Charms: You have Advantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks.

Kiss of the Moon: If you complete a long rest without being exposed to sunlight, you gain Temporary Hit Points equal to your Level.

CHIANG-SHI

Natural Inclinations: Strength, Constitution, Charisma

Rigor Mortis: Your speed is only 25 feet. When you use Vampiric Bite, you can choose to increase your speed to 35 feet for 1 day.

Claws: Your talons are a natural weapon, which counts as a simple melee weapon with which you

are proficient. A claw attack does 1d6 + Strength modifier Slashing damage.

Sharpened Senses: You have Advantage on Perception checks made using hearing or your sense of smell.

The Leaping Dead: You always count as having a running start when making a long or high jump.

DWARVEN VAMPIRE

Natural Inclinations: Strength, Constitution, Wisdom

Dwarfish Frame: Your speed is 25 feet, but you ignore the speed penalty imposed by wearing heavy armor.

Dwarven Resilience: You have advantage on saving throws against poison, and you have resistance against poison damage.

Stonewalk: You have a Burrow speed of 25 feet through earth or stone. You can choose whether or not to leave a tunnel behind you when you burrow.

ELVEN VAMPIRE

Natural Inclinations: Strength, Dexterity, Intelligence

Mooncursed: You do not have the Superior Darkvision or Sunlight Sensitivity racial traits.

Fey Ancestry: You have advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put you to sleep.

Trance: Like a true elf, you do not sleep, but instead enter a semi-conscious trance-state for four hours. After resting in this way, you gain the same benefit that a human does from 8 hours of sleep.

Spawn of Blight: You can cast the Infestation and Primal Savagery cantrips. Choose at character creation whether these cantrips use Intelligence, Wisdom or Charisma as their spellcasting ability score.

GNOMISH VAMPIRE

Natural Inclinations: Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom

Smallfolk: Your Size is Small and your Speed is 25 feet.

Gnome Cunning: You have advantage on all Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma saves against magic.

HALFLING VAMPIRE

Natural Inclinations: Dexterity, Wisdom, Charisma

Smallfolk: Your Size is Small and your Speed is 25 feet.

Unnatural Feast: You can cast Create Food & Water as a 3rd level spell once without expending a spell slot. Once you have used this trait, you must complete a long rest before you can use it again.

Halfling Nimbleness: You can move through the space of any creature that is of a size larger than yours.

FEY

Natural Inclinations: Intelligence, Wisdom, Charisma

Size: Medium

Speed: 30 feet

Darkvision: You have Darkvision to a range of 60 feet

Deathborn: You have Resistance to Necrotic damage.

Poltergeist Tricks: You can cast the Mage Hand and Minor Illusion cantrips, using Wisdom as your spellcasting ability score.

Ghostwalk: As a bonus action, you can become incorporeal for 1 turn. Whilst incorporeal, you can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. Moving through objects requires concentration, as if concentrating on

maintaining a spell. If you end your turn inside an object, you take 5 (1d10) irresistible Force damage and are returned to the nearest unoccupied space. Once you have used this trait, you must complete a long rest before it can be used again.

GHEBAT

Natural Inclinations: Strength, Constitution, Wisdom

Size: Medium

Speed: 25 feet

Darkvision: You have Darkvision to a range of 60 feet

Relentless Endurance: When you are reduced to 0 hit points but not killed outright, you can drop to 1 hit point instead. You can't use this feature again until you finish a long rest.

Hardy: Your hit point maximum increases by 1, and it increases by 1 every time you gain a level.

Dead Nerves: When you are hit by a critical hit, you can use your Reaction to change it into a normal hit. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Deathborn: You have Resistance to Necrotic damage.

The Dead Don't Sleep: You don't need to sleep, and magic can't put you to sleep. You can finish a long rest in 4 hours if you spend those hours in an inactive, motionless state, during which you retain consciousness.

GHVL

Natural Inclinations: Dexterity, Constitution, Wisdom

Size: Medium

Speed: 35 feet, Climb 35 feet

Darkvision: You have Darkvision to a range of 60 feet

Talons: Your talons are natural weapons, which you can use to make unarmed strikes. If you hit with them, you deal slashing damage equal to 1d4 + your Dexterity modifier, instead of the bludgeoning damage normal for an unarmed strike.

Coffin-Licker: You have Resistance to Poison damage, and Advantage on saving throws against the Poisoned condition and disease.

Macabre Humor: You are Immune to the Frightened condition.

Deathborn: You have Resistance to Necrotic damage.

MORTIF

Natural Inclinations: Constitution, Intelligence, Charisma

Size: Medium

Speed: 30 feet

Darkvision: You have Darkvision to a range of 60 feet

Deathborn: You have Resistance to Necrotic damage.

Darkling Powers: You can cast the Chill Touch cantrip. From 3rd level, you can cast False Life as a 1st level spell once per long rest. From 5th level, you can cast Ray of Enfeeblement as a 2nd level spell once per long rest. Spells cast with this trait use Intelligence as their spellcasting ability score.

Perversion of Life: You can voluntarily choose whether your type is Humanoid or Undead when targeted by spells or effects that key off of creature type.

DEATHTOUCHED RACIAL FEATS

DEATHSLAYER

Prerequisite: Dhampir, Fetch, Ghedan, Ghul, Mortif

Your connection to the undead grants you a natural facility for slaying them.

Effect: Whenever you make an ability check involving undead, you can treat a d20 roll of 9 or lower as a 10.

You know the location of any undead creature within 180 feet, even through total cover.

You can produce holy water using a ritual. The ritual takes 1 hour to perform, and uses 25 gp worth of powdered silver.

SHUT THE EARTH

Prerequisite: Dhampir

Like your vampiric ancestors, you can defy gravity.

Effect: You gain a Fly speed of 40 feet (Hover).

GREATER POLTERGEIST TRICKERY

Prerequisite: Fetch

Your magical abilities are unusually strong for one of your kind.

Effect: You gain the ability to cast Fog Cloud and Silent Image as 1st level spells without expending a spell slot. Once you have used each spell in this way, you cannot use it again until you complete a long rest. At 5th level, you can cast Misty Step without expending a spell slot once per long rest. You can also cast these spells using spell slots you have of the appropriate level. The spells' spellcasting ability is your choice of your spellcasting ability scores, if any.

EXHUMATION

Prerequisite: Ghedan or Ghul

Your connection to the grave allows you to manipulate earth and stone to a limited degree.

Effect: You gain +1 Constitution, you gain a Burrow speed of 35 feet, and you can cast Meld into Stone at will.

BLACK BREATH

Prerequisite: Ghedan or Ghul

By dredging up the corruption buried deep in your soul, you can expunge it in a cloud of noisome vapors.

Effect: You can exhale a noxious cloud of black miasma as a bonus action. When you use your breath weapon, each creature in a 15 foot cone must make a saving throw. The DC for this saving throw equals 8 + your Constitution modifier + your proficiency bonus. A creature takes 2d6 damage and suffers the Poisoned Condition until the beginning of your next turn on a failed save, and half as much damage on a successful one. The damage increases to 3d6 at 6th level, 4d6 at 11th level, and 5d6 at 16th level. After you use your breath weapon, you can't use it again until you complete a short or long rest.

IT WILL NOT DIE

Prerequisite: Ghedan

Pain does not exist for you. Fear barely registers. You will do, or you will be destroyed; there is no in between.

Effect: You gain +1 Constitution. As a bonus action, you can spend one Hit Die; you gain Temporary Hit Points equal to the result of the roll + your Constitution score.

DRINKER OF LIFE AND DEATH

Prerequisite: Mortif

Your soul's twisted frequency allows you to feed on the energies of life and death with equal impunity.

Effect: You gain Resistance to Radiant Damage. As a reaction, when an ally you can see takes radiant or necrotic damage, you may choose to take that damage in their place. The damage you take ignores your resistance to radiant and necrotic damage. You may block the damage for multiple allies at the same

time, using the same reaction, taking the damage again for each ally protected in this manner.

QUEVARI

The saying that man must battle his inner demons is one that I have found in some form or another across many lands. But never have I seen it so literal as in the case of the quevari.

BIOLOGY:

To a casual eye, the quevari appear as just another human ethnicity - in fact, quevari often interbreed with the humans of the domain in which they dwell, so it can be very hard to distinguish a quevari from an ordinary human. A slight predatory cast to the features and the occasional unsettling glint in the eye is usually the most "inhuman" these people get.

What truly distinguishes a quevari from a human is a metaphysical trait more than anything biological. The quevari as a people are cursed with what they call "the bad blood", a strange, possibly fiendish influence that compels them to acts of murderous savagery.

Most of the time, it merely whispers, very quietly, in the back of the quevari's mind and is easily controlled, though if a quevari does begin to succumb to rage, it can break through. But the bad blood truly makes itself felt on the nights of the full moon. During these three nights, a quevari's control of themselves utterly slips away, and their dark self is unleashed. They become vicious, sadistic monsters with a ravenous appetite for the flesh of sapient creatures, as cruel and wicked as any fiend I have ever encountered.

Bewitched by what they call "the rising of the bloodmoon", the quevari become terrors that stalk the night, slaying and devouring any non-quevari they encounter, before retreating to slumber during the day. Only on the dawn after the third full moon do they regain control of themselves.

One merciful aspect of this strange curse is that, when the bad blood is in control, they become intensely territorial, and will not leave a specific area; in their "native" environment, they will not travel beyond the limits of their settlement, whilst traveling quevari caught by the bloodmoon's madness will not voluntarily travel more than a mile or two from wherever they bedded down. Thus, it is possible to avoid the quevari in their savage phase by staying outside of their reach.

Under the influence of the bloodmoon, a quevari's speed and reflexes increase to unnatural heights, allowing them to dodge blows or move with startling swiftness across even the most treacherous terrain. They become unnaturally athletic, climbing, jumping and running with far greater adeptness than they display at any other time. They are fearless in their savagery; the need to kill drowns any concern for life or limb. A quevari is not mindless, but they will shrug off injuries, fighting until killed, and fearlessly dare the odds if they believe they can catch a victim to torment and kill.

PSYCHOLOGY:

When not controlled by the fiendish slaughter-lust of the bad blood, the quevari are a quiet, friendly, peaceful people. Many individual quevari are devout pacifists, even vegetarians, and abhor violence. They display a strong love of beauty, but tend to be humble. If it weren't for their bloodlust, the quevari would be some of the sweetest, most gentle people in these misty realms.

Some quevari, in fact, are too sweet for their own good. These fall into the trap of denying their fiendish selves, and end up more than a little mad as a result of it. They deny what their dark selves do, desperately covering up the signs of what happened during the bloodmoon and insisting that nothing happened, ever would happen, or ever will happen. These quevari are actually looked down upon by their kin, who point out that such behavior is in fact wicked; denying their darkness only grants it freer reign to do as it likes.

Much of what makes an individual quevari unique is where they fall into the camp of optimism versus fatalism. Some quevari cling to hope, others take a dull comfort that "things are the way they are", and others walk in between those two extremes.

Discipline and control are highly important to all quevari, though this is as much a social trait as a mental one. Most reject their fiendish self as a curse, but the boldest souls experiment in trying to control it, or even to use it.

SOCIOLOGY:

Quevari largely live a peaceful existence, dwelling in small, isolated villages of a dozen or more quevari families. Such communities are invariably self-sufficient as possible, typically engaging in a mixture of subsistence farming, hunting, gathering, fishing and foraging, and always try to keep to themselves as much as possible, to protect others from their dark sides - which shapes much of their interaction with others.

Quevari communities are always friendly and welcoming to those who come in peace, but they also strive to keep non-quevari away during the bloodmoon. There are never formal inns or trading posts directly inside quevari communities, and outsiders are gently but firmly pushed to be on their way before the rising of the bloodmoon. In some rare situations, quevari have even resorted to locking particularly stubborn or luckless travelers inside of fortified basement cells that can be barricaded from the inside, leaving them at least the chance of being able to survive the next three nights as the once-peaceful villages turn into starving sadistic cannibals.

Sadly, there are quevari populations where denial has become the dominant mentality, and these villages take none of the steps their counterparts do to safeguard travelers. Non-denialist quevari regard these communities with abject horror, and rumors suggest they may even launch punitive raids on the denialists in hopes of preventing them from



exposing the quevari as a whole to the wrath of the non-quevari peoples of this world.

A common excuse given to hurry travelers along is that the quevari are devotees of an obscure cult and that the upcoming full moon represents a sacred ceremony that outsiders are not permitted to see. Which brings up the topic of religion. To put it simply, there is no universal quevari religion; each village tends to have its own particular faith, which is largely shaped by where it lives. The local faith usually has a cultish feel, but is typically devoted to an innocuous patron deity focused on agriculture, peace, beauty, harmony, healing or mercy. During the bloodmoon, the dark sides of the quevari may engage in their own twisted religious behavior, typically offering praise to a fiend, powerful undead, or some formless horror from beyond the mists.

The church of the Morninglord, strangely, does seem to be making some inroads into their faith. I also encountered at least one quevari commune in Verbrek that heaped curses and abuse upon the Wolf God, viewing themselves as victims of his malefic touch.

ADVENTURERS:

Adventuring quevari are uncommon at best; many quevari, even if they do not believe in pacifism, believing the violent nature of the adventurer's lifestyle is just asking for trouble. Although almost as many argue that the violent lifestyle may actually prove a way to satiate their dark side's cursed hunger. Adventuring quevari either adhere to the latter belief, or hope to find some kind of cure for their condition - at least for themselves if not for their race - by exploring the wider world.

The issue, of course, remains what happens during the bloodmoon. Quevari are the umbran race most likely to adventure exclusively in bands of their own kind. The groups will strive to make camp far from civilization during the full moon. Lone quevari in racially mixed bands will instead be forced to separate from their non-quevari companions,

usually excusing it as a religious sacrament. Only desperation or firm loyalty will convince a quevari to come clean about their racial curse to outsiders.

The two classes competing for dominance amongst the adventuring quevari are the Monk and the Barbarian. Most are naturally inclined towards the monk, whose focus on discipline, grace and control naturally meshes with their innate attributes and desires. Other quevari, however, find the barbarian's brutal rages are a natural outlet for their dark impulses.

A significant minority of quevari adventurers become warlocks, often laboring in ignorance of who their patron is and what they desire - the powers stem from whatever dark deity their bad blood offers praise to, and the quevari must try to use these unholy gifts to the cause of good.

QUEVARI RACIAL MECHANICS

Natural Inclinations: Strength, Dexterity, Wisdom

Size: Medium

Speed: 30 feet

Bloodmoon's Savagery: When you score a critical hit with a melee weapon attack, you can roll one of the weapon's damage dice one additional time and add it to the extra damage of the critical hit.

Caged Demon's Wrath: As a bonus action, you can invoke the fury of your inner demon. Your speed increases by 10 feet and you gain +1 Armor Class. This state lasts for 1 minute or until you are either knocked unconscious, end a turn without attacking a hostile creature, or use a bonus action to end this trait. If you have the Rage class feature, you can activate and benefit from both a Rage and Caged Demon's Wrath at the same time and using the same bonus action. Once you have used Caged Demon's Wrath, you cannot use it again until you complete a long rest.



Peace Through Labor: You gain proficiency in a total of two Instruments, Artisan's Tools, Languages, or any combination thereof.

QUEVARI RACIAL FEAT

Fiendish Swiftnes

Prerequisite: Quevari

When the fiend's fury races through your veins, your body becomes light as a feather, allowing you to move with unparalleled ease.

Effect: You gain +1 Dexterity. When you are using Caged Demon's Wrath, you gain Spider Climb 40 feet and can high or long jump up to your remaining move speed without a running start.

THE PARALLEL

Finally, the Parallel are those races who, in realms beyond the mist, would simply be called "humanoids". They are not humans, and often have their own cultures to which they belong, but they either can pass amongst humanity or choose to live on the fringes of human society.

BAKHNA RAKHNA

The plight of the so-called "smallfolk" races is worth noting in many realms, but perhaps these dark and haunted lands with their abundant cruelties test the limits of those peoples cursed with a lack of stature and muscle more than others. When considered in the light of the world they inhabit, the bakhna rakhna cannot be blamed overly much for accepting the label of "monster".

BIOLOGY:

Their appearance makes it obvious that bakhna rakhna originally began as goblins, as they have all of the telltale physical characteristics associated with them. Visually, however, they differ in terms of coloration; stark white skin, ashen gray to misty

white hair, and unusually large eyes of a gray or dull color differentiate them from their goblin kin.

Unlike most common goblin strains, however, bakhna rakhna are notably light averse; their skin burns quickly and painfully after a relatively brief exposure to sunlight, and their large eyes are overly sensitive to light, which means the glare of day dazzles them. For this reason, bakhna rakhna are largely nocturnal, or dwell in areas notable for their natural gloom, such as Mordent or the Mistlands in Darkon.

Other subtle differences include a powerful paralytic toxin in their blood, the mystical ability to teleport short distances, and relatively low fertility compared to other goblinoids; bakhna rakhna are only about as fertile as halflings.

PSYCHOLOGY:

Bakhna rakhna are simultaneously similar to common goblins, and yet also distinctly different. Like the common goblin, the typical bakhna rakhna is highly inquisitive and mischievous, but they are also far more cautious and loyal than the typical goblin; bakhna rakhna rarely engage in the kind of seemingly borderline suicidal impulsiveness common to normal goblins, and their devotion to kith and kin is equivalent to that normally attributed to dwarves, instead of the vicious "every man for himself" attitude usually seen amongst goblins.

That is not to say that the bakhna rakhna are entirely free of the goblin selfishness, however. Bakhna rakhna empathy tends to stop outside of the close circle of family and friends; the race as a whole sees nothing wrong with taking what they need from others, nor with dishing out punishment if their thefts are opposed. I suppose I cannot be too staunch in my condemnation of this attitude, however, as many humans in these dark lands have a similar attitude, especially in the face of nonhumans.

Whilst the bakhna rakhna can be vengeful, the race as a whole isn't spiteful. They prefer to respond in a



"tit for tat" measure, amping up the severity of their retaliation to measure the hostility directed at them. If a homeowner locks up the food they seek, they will make a mess of the kitchen. If the homeowner tries to poison them, they will return the favor. If the homeowner sets deadly traps for them, they will do the same. The general attitude of the bakhna rakhna can be summed up as "we won't start it (hypocritically ignoring their thefts of food), but we will finish it!" Even if directly confronted in battle, bakhna rakhna prefer to flee (usually paralyzing their would-be assailant first) rather than fight.

Despite this, bakhna rakhna relationships with non-bakhna rakhna aren't always hostile. Most humans who live in bakhna rakhna territory have learned that if food is deliberately left out for them, bakhna rakhna will take it and peacefully pass on, and that at worst it is easier to simply let them rummage through their kitchens and take what they want then start a feud. What not many humans realize is that if an individual openly and explicitly invites bakhna rakhna to dine with them, then they are invoking a peace treaty. Those few who have stumbled upon this have actually established positive relations with bakhna rakhna tribes.

SOCIOLOGY:

Bakhna rakhna typically live in nomadic family groups averaging four to nine individuals, though these may gather together to form small tribes of five to twenty four. These groups pursue a nomadic existence, wandering the land in an endless search for food, hunting, scavenging and, yes, thieving what they need as they go.

A bakhna rakhna group rarely stays in one place for more than a few weeks, and its presence is largely dependent upon how welcoming the environment is. The harsher the conditions, the sooner they move on.

As small, fairly weak creatures pursuing a nomadic existence in lands so monster-haunted as these, bakhna rakhna have very strict laws governing their

own kind. All members of a family are expected to be loyal, and punishments can be severe. Exile is considered the most terrible punishment of all, but any bakhna rakhna can earn this dreadful fate if they are proven to have seriously or deliberately endangered the family or tribe.

Many of these customs revolve around food. It is hard to understate how important food is to the bakhna rakhna - amongst themselves, food actually replaces currency. The more effort required to prepare food, the more valuable it is. The sharing of food is also highly significant amongst bakhna rakhna; lesser crimes are typically punished with a mixture of beatings, shunnings and forced tithes of food, whilst when two clans meet, food is exchanged as a sign of peaceful intent. Simply placing food down and walking away guarantees that both parties can go their separate ways, but a deliberate invitation to share food is a sign for the clans to begin talks. If all goes well, this can swiftly turn into a minor festivity, which gives members of the clans a chance to exchange gossip, share warnings, and potentially find mates.

Whilst bakhna rakhna and human interactions largely tend to be viewed in a light of parasitism, those few humans who have tried to actually talk to the goblinoids have found more mutually beneficial options are available. Bakhna rakhna are not unwilling to work in exchange for what they feel is a fair price in food, and small farms or homesteads who have offered these goblinoids a place to live have benefitted as a result. The bakhna rakhna will pull their weight in handling chores during the night, and even act as guards, warding off dangerous animals, predators, and even lesser monsters with volleys of poisonous arrows - or at the very least alerting their adopted human partners so they can escape in time.

Similarly to halflings in other realms, bakhna rakhna are intensely proud of and loyal to their families. They keep intricate genealogies, and are quick to go to the defense of their family. Even non-bakhna rakhna who earn the friendship of a clan are



informally adopted, honored with the moniker "cousin".

Bakhna rakhna practice a druidic faith that honors nature spirits and noteworthy ancestors, sometimes incorporating powerful fey or undead into the mix as well. A few bakhna rakhna have even gone so far as to incorporate Hala into this ancestral faith, but in general they largely ignore the religions of the Core.

ADVENTURERS:

Adventuring bakhna rakhna are typically either exiles, so desperate for the safety of a tribe that they attempt to find one with humans, motivated by intense curiosity even by their own race's standards, or repaying a debt of kindness owed to either the party as a whole or a single individual. It's not unheard of for families with allied bakhna rakhna tribes to produce adventuring scions... only for one of the bakhna rakhna to follow their "cousin" off to adventure.

The stereotypical bakhna rakhna adventurer is a Rogue, and they do in fact produce many Scouts and Arcane Tricksters. However, the bakhna rakhna actually favor the Ranger class above all others.

Druids and Warlocks sworn to Archfey, Undying and Undead patrons fill the role of priests in bakhna rakhna society, saving the rare Hala priest (and even then, more likely to be a Celestial Warlock or Divine Soul Sorcerer). Though rare, wizardry is a talent that typically runs down in very proud family lines, who often carry grimoires that have served as spellbooks for all their ancestors; bakhna rakhna wizards favor the Illusionist and Enchanter traditions. Sorcerers are much more common, and overwhelmingly favor Shadow Magic.

Warriors are the least common, and almost exclusively Fighters, with a handful of Monks who practice strange techniques passed down through family lines; bakhna rakhna are typically too pragmatic and concerned with preserving themselves to become Paladins, and even less likely to become Barbarians.

BAKHNA RAKHNA RACIAL MECHANICS

Natural Inclinations: Dexterity, Constitution, Wisdom

Size: Small

Speed: 25 feet, Climb 25 feet

Darkvision: You have Darkvision to a range of 60 feet

Sunlight Sensitivity: You suffer Disadvantage on attack rolls and visual Perception checks if you or the object of your focus is in direct sunlight.

Misty Step: You can cast Misty Step once per short rest.

Poisonous Blood: As a bonus action, you can sacrifice one hit die to coat one piece of ammunition or one slashing or piercing weapon in your blood. The smeared weapon does +2d6 Poison damage on its next successful hit, after which the effect wears off. Once applied, the blood retains its potency for 1 minute before drying and losing efficacy.

Nimble Escape: You can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of your turns.

BRAUNCHEN

The battle between good and evil is a metaphysical conundrum that is considered and studied across the multiverse. Yet few realms offer quite as intimate a look into the personal nature of this struggle as these lands of mist and dread. Here, one can find a creature who seemingly exists only to ask the questions of redemption.

BIOLOGY:

Braunchen are a minor branch of the Arak, or "shadow fey", a race of dark fae endemic to this world who inhabit the mystical regions known and feared as the Shadow Rift. Those interested in a deeper study into the Arak are advised to read "Van Richten's Guide to the Shadow Fey". Part of the

reason behind their rarity is that they represent the apex of a distinctly unnatural lifecycle.

These fey begin their existences as creatures called fanggen; hag-like Arak spiritually bound to a dark, twisted, oak-like tree. Resembling wrinkly old hags with stringy green-grey hair, toothless mouths, hunger-filled milky white eyes and long, twiglike fingers, fanggen are a dark counterpart to another minor Arak breed, the vilay. The vilay are already a macabre twist on the dryad seen in other worlds; appearing as a ghostly pale-skinned elfmaid with long white hair and sparkling green eyes, vilay care only for seducing attractive and charming humans into falling in love with them, whereupon she slays them and transforms their love-swooned ghost into part of her ever-expanding spectral harem. But fanggen are nothing less than naked predators. Using illusions to disguise themselves as vilay, fanggen seduce humanoids into coming close to them, allowing them to devour their victims both body and soul.

However, should a fanggen devour 100 virtuous souls, an amazing metamorphosis occurs. Upon sealing the 100th soul into her tree, the twisted tree suddenly erupts in spectral flames, which tear it apart and reduce it to a burned stump, even as the fanggen screams in pain before falling unconscious. 24 hours later, she awakens transformed into her new form: a braunchen.

Braunchens appear as beautiful elf-maids with pale green eyes and either ashen-gray hair offsetting charcoal black skin, or soot-black hair offsetting ash-white skin. When enraged or in combat, a braunchen may display traits of plants, animals, or even a combination thereof - horns of branching, thorny wood, writhing serpents sprouting from the scalp, arms covered in bark or beetle-like chitin, a fox-like bushy tail made of flowers or a root like the tail of a cow - but it's unclear if this is the result of a glamor failing and exposing the braunchen's true form, or if their wrath merely causes these traits to appear, a lingering remnant of their fey mutability.

Whilst braunchens retain something of the aversion to sunlight that characterises the Arak, and they find bright light discomfiting and distressing, they are no longer fatally burned by the sun's rays. They do retain their fey longevity, and are even immune to effects that normally function by withering victims with age.

PSYCHOLOGY:

As drastic as the physical transformation is for braunchens, it pales compared to their mental transformation. A fanggen is not merely a predator, but actively sadistic; they are cruel, rapacious creatures that hate all life, and will even fight each other to the death because they loathe the idea of being challenged in their hunts. Only other fey are immune to their disdain, and the fanggen merely tolerates them. Their thoughts revolve around inflicting pain, terror and death, with at best a side interest in causing misery.

Braunchens lack these malevolent urges, though they can have a fiery temper. But they do remember all too well what they did as fanggens... and they are consumed by guilt and remorse. Transformed through the power of collected goodness, braunchens believe intrinsically in the ideals considered good. They are gentle, compassionate beings, whose dark memories are a constant torment on them. Almost all bear a melancholic edge, though others deal with their burdens in different ways. It is not in a braunchen's nature to succumb to grief, however; one of the few lingering remnants of their fanggen savagery is a stubborn self-esteem.

Redemption is central to the mindset of braunchen, and they invariably seek to make amends for their past lives. Exactly how they do this is where individuals differ. Some are devout pacifists, or strive to redeem those whose souls have been similarly tainted. Others, however, are merciless slayers of evil, who care only to preserve the sanctity of their own souls through violently purging the wicked that they encounter.



One dark twist of their origins is that braunchen minds are surprisingly vulnerable to splintering. Should a braunchen ever suffer from madness when confronted by the evils of the world, she will typically develop a new personality - which most believe is an echo of one of the souls her past life consumed resurfacing and hoping to escape.

SOCIOLOGY:

Braunchen are almost never found in groups. Fanggen are not common, those who manage to transform are rarer still, and braunchen are always made, never born. They maintain some connections to the Seelie Court of the Arak, but even then the relationship is strained and distant at best; braunchen think too much like mortals for their cousins, and the casual cruelty of even the Seelie is disgusting to the braunchen. On the rare occasion when a braunchen does meet another of her kind, the older braunchen usually adopts the younger as a little sister, seeking to pass on what wisdom she can.

Invariably, braunchen gravitate towards mortal society, typically drifting on its fringes. Those who don't pursue the adventurer's lifestyle typically take up humble roles of service, hoping that they can slowly make the world a better place. One braunchen might join a hospice of Hala, another may become a midwife, and a third may become a housemaid. They do not flaunt what they are, but instead minister to those in need as best they can.

Braunchen are amongst some of the most open-minded individuals one could hope to meet in these misty lands. Whilst few are overtly naive, it is not in their nature to judge others for their appearances or their pasts. They tend to gravitate towards the outcasts of these lands and offer them a hand; calibans, deathtouched, dread genasi, tieflings, even "monster" races like paka or red widows are accepted with open arms into a braunchen's social circle.

Religion is a personal matter for the braunchen. Some individuals reject religion, either because they

view it as unimportant or because they believe themselves unfit to join the faithful. Others become zealous believers - those invariably turn to the religions that offer hope and compassion to this world; the Morninglord, Hala and the Mordentish "Pure Hearts" sect of Ezra see the most believers amongst Braunchen. I have personally encountered a braunchen who worshipped Mytteri as a god of freedom and rebellion, a patron worthy of respect in her battle against the forces of the Lawgiver.

For it bears mention that all braunchens agree that religions that preach suffering, cruelty and misery must be torn down. The Lawgiver is their bitter enemy, as is the bloody Wolf God of Verbrek. Whilst not inherently hostile to the church of Belenus, the anti-fey Inquisition that dominates Tepest in his name is, of course, a natural enemy to these good-doing fey.

ADVENTURERS:

Many braunchens become adventurers. One could almost say the race is born to adventure. Whether they are merciless slayers, hopeful redeemers, or walk between those two extremes, a braunchen always has the same basic motivation: to make the world a better place... even if that means getting rid of those who make the world a worse place.

Adventuring braunchens can take many forms. Many focus on their magic, often a distinct blend of fey and shadow magics common to the Arak (multiclassed Fey Warlock/Shadow Sorcerer), but sometimes becoming druids or wizards. Bards are a relatively common choice for braunchens, who seek to spread hope and joy to the benighted peoples of the land.

Braunchens rarely become clerics, even though they are not opposed to faith. Most favor a more personal, intimate connection with their deity, and may even have the self-doubt teaching that they are not worthy to lead a spiritual congregation (Celestial Warlock or Divine Soul Sorcerer). However, braunchens are surprisingly likely to become



paladins, typically favoring the Oaths of Devotion, the Ancients, and Redemption. A tiny minority do take up the Oath of the Watcher, usually to battle the Unseelie Shadow Fey.

BRAUNCHEN RACIAL MECHANICS

Natural Inclinations: Strength, Wisdom, Charisma

Size: Medium

Speed: 30 feet

Superior Darkvision: You have Darkvision to a range of 120 feet.

Sunlight Sensitivity: You suffer Disadvantage on attack rolls and Perception checks based on sight when you or the object of your attack/scrutiny is in direct sunlight.

Fey Ancestry: You have advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put you to sleep.

Unaging: You do not age, and will never die of old age. Effects that specifically manipulate age have no effect on you.

Well of Knowledge: Once per long rest, you may give yourself advantage on a check that involves a skill or a tool.

Shadow Glamours: You can cast the Primal Savagery cantrip. From 3rd level, you can cast Dissonant Whispers as a 1st level spell once per long rest. From 5th level, you can cast Blindness/Deafness as a 2nd level spell once per long rest. Spells cast with this trait use Charisma as their spellcasting ability score. You can also cast these spells using spell slots you have of the appropriate level.

BRAUNCHEN RACIAL FEATS

GIVE OF THYSELF

Prerequisite: Braunchen

Having preyed on the lives of others for so long, you have learned in your quest for redemption to offer your own life to restore others.

Effect: As a bonus action, you touch a willing creature and expend your Hit Dice up to the higher of your Wisdom modifier or your Charisma modifier. The target recovers missing hit points equal to the total rolled result of your expended Hit Dice. Excess hit points are lost.

ULTIMATE SACRIFICE

Prerequisite: Braunchen

By pouring all but the dregs of your life energy into a dying comrade, you can save them from the jaws of death.

Effect: You can cast Revivify without material components, at the expense of dropping to 0 hit points and gaining two failed death saves. Once you have used this trait, you cannot use it again until a week has passed.

SHADOW FEY SORCERY

Prerequisite: Braunchen

You have honed the innate abilities of the shadow fey, recapturing some of their fundamental magical might.

Effect: You can cast a single Druid cantrip of your choice. You can also cast Feign Death and Tiny Servant once per long rest, each at their lowest level.

HEBI-NO-ONNA

Many a treacherous person has been derided as a "snake." Predatory, perhaps even poisonous, a serpent is a creature often considered to be dangerous to have around--with good reason, for those not practiced in handling them--and if that weren't enough, serpents often hold villainous roles in legends. Some of the greatest deceptions and swindles of myth were perpetrated by ophidians. Naturally, it is regarded as foolhardy to extend a hand in friendship to a snake, for one is just inviting the beast to strike. For the unfortunate hebi-no-onna, a snake is the only hand they can extend.

BIOLOGY:

Hebi-no-onna are an all-female race who largely resemble beautiful human women, save for the fact that they have writhing venomous serpents in lieu of arms. This is actually not dissimilar to a particular form seen amongst the serpentfolk race known as yuan-ti in other lands, but I have been unable to prove any connection between the two races. The typical hebi-no-onna appears to be a native-born of Rokushima Taiyoo or I'Cath, although I have discovered reports suggesting that the race may also exist in Sri Raji and Kalakeri - what moniker it goes by in those lands, however, I do not know. Those few hebi-no-onna born in the lands of the Core, predominantly Darkon, Dementlieu and Mordent, appear more ethnically mixed, and it's possible that if the race proliferates in the Core for long enough, they may soon become ethnically indistinguishable from the Core's native humans.

The species of the serpent varies widely, but usually resembles a venomous snake native to her homeland. Most hebi-no-onna have viper arms, whilst the stories I found of Sri Rajian and Kalakeri snake women described them as having cobras for arms.

Aside from her serpentine arms, a snake woman's primary telltale features are her vertical slit pupils, which can expand to a more rounded, oval shape

that allows her to pass as human with greater ease, and her long, sharp, slightly retractile canine teeth; these venom-conducting fangs have sometimes caused hebi-no-onna to be mistaken for a vampire. There are stories suggesting that snake women may have other reptilian mutations, such as scaly skin (or at least patches thereof), unusually colored hair or eyes, single-toed claw-like feet, and vestigial tails, but these stories have not been confirmed.

A snake woman possesses the innate ability to communicate with snakes. For protection, she wields venomous bites, both from her serpent-hands and from her own human mouth. The venom in her human mouth is a particularly powerful psychotropic toxin, which they refer to by the euphemism of "daigatu", literally "nightmare wine". The eyes of a snake woman are capable of exuding a hypnotic allure, which makes them preternaturally adept at coaxing others into listening to them.

In addition to these natural powers, snake women have a strong natural affinity for arcane magic, especially the arts of enchantment and illusion. Not every snake woman fully develops this potential, but they all have it.

To reproduce, hebi-no-onna must take humanoid consorts, and they are known to be crossfertile with humans, elves and half-elves - if a hebi-no-onna mates with an elf, the child will resemble a half-elf, but if the mother Hebi-no-Onna appears to be a half-elf herself, then her daughters by elven fathers will appear to be pureblooded elves. A fertilized hebi-no-onna will carry her child in her womb for nine months, but the race is ovoviviparous; they are egg-bearers who incubate their eggs inside of their bodies for the duration. The egg hatches shortly after being laid, resulting in either a Hebi-no-Onna daughter or a boy-child of the father's race.

PSYCHOLOGY:

Hebi-no-onna are a fascinating study in contradictions. They are at once coy seductresses and ruthless pragmatists; shameless hedonists and



demure maidens; coldblooded manipulators and passionate romantics.

The key to understanding a snake woman is to realize that she is taught from the cradle that she must keep her true self hidden behind a protective mask, and that the persona she presents to the world around her is not and indeed should not be the same persona that she truly is. To further complicate this, hebi-no-onna are taught to value power in all its forms, and to ruthlessly acquire it, because only power can give them security.

Which is not an unreasonable attitude to take, given that the snake women occupy a position in Rokushima Taiyoo and l'Cath culture not dissimilar to that held by vampires in Barovia. A hebi-no-onna's life literally depends on her ability to go amongst humans without being discovered for her true self.

The "public face" of a hebi-no-onna typically attempts to be simultaneously appealing but also to keep others at arm's length (pun unintentional). A rare few flaunt power by claiming noble birth or the protections of arcane might, but even these often tend to put on a facade of being flirtatious and gregarious. A serpent woman rarely acts the part of the cold, aloof, imperial matriarch.

Vanity and avariciousness are common failings of the snake women, who often find they must turn to the dubious comforts of admiration and wealth to make up for a life distinctly lacking in true friendship and camaraderie. A snake woman's collection of fine artwork, beautiful jewelry and precious gems is a way for them to remind themselves that they are safe, secure, and to give them some comfort in a life where they are almost always terribly alone.

Whilst hedonism is a natural vice for them to fall into, it cannot be denied that a certain sensual appetite is a seemingly native part of who the hebi-no-Onna are. They revel in physical indulgence, living it up as extremely as they can. Strong liquors, potent mind-altering drugs and gluttonous revelry are

cherished as the only pleasures they can indulge in freely.

Given the chance to trust, however, the snake women often display a surprisingly vulnerable side. Those I encountered often displayed a remarkably romantic attitude, and even the biased writings of their homelands gave hints that if given the chance, a hebi-no-onna can be a deeply loyal, loving and faithful companion.

SOCIOLOGY:

Hebi-no-onna live thoroughly hidden in the human societies of their homelands, rarely gathering in anything larger than a small clan of immediate relations. Whilst snake woman mothers tutor their daughters rigorously to prepare them for the outside world, they are also firm in the belief that their children must move on as soon as they can, as safety can only come by staying scattered and hidden within the greater numbers of humanity.

Many hebi-no-onna form secretive cults centered around themselves, typically using a combination of blackmail, hedonism and arcane enthrallments to lure, compel and dominate prospective members. Such cults may be simple hedonistic societies, or they may function as guilds of thieves and assassins, or there may be elements of both combined. A cult's treatment is often unpredictable, with the hebi-no-onna at its center simultaneously needing them as the closest thing she has to friends and loved ones, and resenting them for the fact that they only are with her because she is blackmailing them or has dominated their minds. Typically, a hebi-no-onna frequently switches from doting on, indulging and cherishing her underlings to lashing out at them in bitterness and spite.

Courtship is a tricky affair for the snake women. Many hebi-no-nna actually want to take a lifelong mate, and they often display a sincere interest in romances around them - either supporting them or vindictively destroying them, depending on the Snake Woman in question. But at the same time,



their clearly inhuman nature once exposed, their evil reputation in their native lands, and the general xenophobia of these misty lands makes the odds of finding a spouse very low indeed.

Most hebi-no-onna come to treat marriage as a stepping stone to power, reproduction as a grim necessity, and love as an impossible dream. There are countless stories of hebi-no-onna seducing powerful men to take them as wives, or at least concubines, and thus securing their path into positions of wealth and authority. However, these men rarely find themselves actually bedding the snake woman, instead being beguiled with magic or simply murdered to spare her from his attentions - which largely has to do with the fact that those men targeted in this way are typically old and/or quite repulsive in either looks, personality, or both.

One vanity ubiquitous to the hebi-no-onna is this: only the best will do to father their children. Potential sires are carefully gauged, based first on their physical appearance, and then on their intellect. Practitioners of arcane magic are particularly attractive, given the hebi-no-onna's own racial affinity for magic. Once is chosen, he must be brought to bed, typically through vigorous seduction by mundane means; snake women tend to consider it "unsporting" to use magic to lure a chosen mate into the bedroom, but may ignore this cultural hangup if they find themselves enamored enough. Once the deed is done, the father's fate depends on the whim of the now-expectant mother; hebi-no-onna prefer to simply wipe the father's memories of their tryst from his mind or leave him convinced they were merely a nightmare, but sometimes murder is the only solution.

ADVENTURERS:

Hebi-no-onna adventurers are a rarity, but not unheard of; these are typically young snake women setting out into the world and looking to find a place to settle down, or else they are fleeing from a place where their identity has been discovered.

The iconic class of the hebi-no-onna is the Wizard - specifically, the Enchanter or Illusionist. Almost as iconic is the Bard, especially the College of Whispers. The third most likely class that a hebi-no-onna will take is either the Rogue (typically the Mastermind) or the Monk.

HEBI-NO-ONNA RACIAL MECHANICS

Natural Inclinations: Dexterity, Intelligence, Charisma

Size: Medium

Speed: 30 feet

Serpent's Blood: You have Resistance to Poison Damage and Advantage on saves against the Poisoned condition.

Snake Talker: You can speak with snakes (as per Speak With Animals) at will. You can compel docility from snakes, as per the Animal Friendship spell, at will.

Hypnotic Eyes: You have Proficiency in Persuasion.

Writhing Arms: Your reach with Unarmed Strikes is 10 feet instead of 5 feet.

Kiss of Nightmare Wine: As a bonus action, you can spit psychotropic venom at a single creature within 30 feet. The target must make a Constitution saving throw (DC 8 + your Charisma modifier + your Proficiency bonus). If the target fails, it takes 1d6 Psychic damage and is Frightened for 1 minute. You can use this trait a number of times equal to your Proficiency bonus. All uses are recovered on a long rest.

HEBI-NO-ONNA RACIAL FEATS

TWIN SERPENT KATA

Prerequisite: Hebi-no-onna

You have mastered the martial traditions of your race, allowing you to reliably bite foes with your serpentine hands.



Effect: You gain your choice of +1 Dexterity or +1 Wisdom, and your Unarmed Strikes now do +1d4 Poison damage.

DRAW THE SQUAMOUS VEIL

Prerequisite: Hebi-no-onna

You have learned mystic rites that allow you to conceal yourself in the body of a serpent.

Effect: As an action, you can Wild Shape into the form of a Tiny, Medium, or Large Snake. This form uses the Poisonous Snake statblock, aside from being of the size specified. This transformation follows all of the normal rules for Wild Shape. You can use this feat to transform twice, and all uses recover on a long rest. If you have the Wild Shape class feature, uses of this feat do not count against your daily uses of Wild Shape.

PAKA

The cat is an animal which has held an uncertain and often contradictory place in humanoid cultures throughout the worlds, alternatively loved and loathed, seen as both ally and threat. It is perhaps fitting that in these dark and gloomy realms, there exists a race of catlike humanoids - not an uncommon creature, in this multiverse, I must admit - who exemplify that fundamentally feline fickleness.

PHYSIOLOGY:

Similarly to red widows, paka are a race of animalistic shapeshifters - a trait that has contributed to their obscurity, as those individuals aware of them have largely mistaken them for yet another strain of feline therianthrope, as several such werebeast lineages are already known to haunt these misty realms. But this is not true, and has led to a gruesome demise for many misinformed hunters over the years. No, paka are simply a race of beastfolk who have developed the innate ability to alter their appearances to resemble a single,

specific, human form - essentially, who they would have been were they born human, and not a paka.

In their native form, a paka resembles a lithe, thinly-built humanoid cat. Unlike most of the catfolk races I have encountered, however, paka favor the "human" aspect over the feline in their anthropomorphism. The traditional catfolk appearance of a cat-headed, fur-covered, tail-waving humanoid is extremely rare, if not unheard of, amongst paka. Instead, they look more or less like humans with additional feline features, and those precise features vary wildly from individual to individual (though specific arrangements tend to run in families). All paka have retractile claws in lieu of nails, cat-like slit pupils, and needle-like fangs in lieu of teeth.

A paka may or may not have a cat's tail, which in turn might be either a fully grown appendage, or a mere nub, similar to a lynx or a dock-tailed housecat. Ears are always pointed, but depending on the individual this may result in either fully-formed cat-like ears atop the head, or merely elongated, leaf-shaped ears (similar to those of some elves) covered in fur. Some paka do possess fur in their true form, though usually not a full-body covering; "glove" and/or "boot" like patches covering the lower lengths of their limbs are most common. Pawpads on the feet are rare, and pawpads on the hands are rarer still, but not unheard of. A paka's facial features often have a sharp "feline" cast to them, and they may or may not have whiskers and/or a dark, slightly upturned nose.

Paka eye colors include the full spectrum of human and feline colors, with gold, yellow, orange, blue, green and copper as the most common. Female paka invariably have yellow or orange hair, whilst males can have these colors, light brown, or dark red. As they age, their hair visibly streaks with grey.

When a paka assumes his or her human form, the effect is largely one of subtracting feline features; fur and whiskers fall off, ears are replaced with human ears, pupils round out and irises change to



something more human-colored, tails are retracted, teeth flatten and blunt, etc. A person who has clearly seen a paka in both forms will usually recognize them as the same person. One telltale trace that always remains is that the nails are unusually sharp and long; even in human form, a paka can extend their claws and use them for self defense.

Almost all paka appear as humans in their alternate form. In a tiny minority, however, a certain feline cast remains to the facial features - not the full "catfolk" appearance of their natural form, but enough to make them appear not pureblooded human. These paka usually pass themselves off as half-elves, something their natural speed and agility assists with.

A slain paka reverts to its true feline form, assuming it wasn't in that form to begin with when killed.

Diet-wise, paka are predominantly carnivorous, although their humanoid nature has given them a digestive tract slightly better-adapted for omnivorous fare. Paka need a highly meat-based diet to stay healthy; they can eat plant matter or grains with better success than a housecat could, but they can't live off of them. Dairy is a well-loved treat, but paka are, fortunately, spared the poor tolerance for it that plagues lesser felines. They are also more tolerant of foods that would normally kill a cat, such as garlic, grapes and chocolate; these foods won't usually kill a paka, but will leave them with severe stomach distress until they manage to purge their systems.

Paka are short-lived and fast-breeding; they reach maturity by thirteen, are middle-aged by their mid-twenties, and seldom live more than fifty to sixty years. A female paka can produce two litters of 1-6 kittens a year, with each litter gestating for about six months. The average litter size is three kittens; single-births are rare and regarded with superstitious dread.

Like the cats they resemble, paka are not a naturally monogamous race. A female paka mates with any

attractive male she wishes, and the males cavort freely with any interested parties. In fact, a fairly common outcome is that all the females of a given pride - see below - will fall pregnant around the same interval and by the same male, although that male will usually only remain in the area for a small handful of "breeding seasons" before moving on. They may sometimes dally with particularly attractive humans, elves, and half-elves. Paka almost never marry amongst themselves, and even when they marry outside of their race, they usually don't stay together for particularly long - unfaithfulness usually becomes a dividing wedge in the relationship.

Paka can interbreed with humans and elves, but usually avoid doing so. In the case of a paka mother, the children are always paka. Children sired by a paka father tend to be paka if female and of the mother's race if male.

Similarly to how red widows have a supernatural ability to communicate with spiders, paka can also communicate with felines of any size or nature. They also possess a distinctly supernatural charisma when interacting with felines, although the precise level depends on the distinct species of the feline in question. Common house cats regard paka with an attitude that can only be described as reverential, an attitude that is largely passed on to the other "lesser" cats. Great cats, however, are far less beguiled, as are most magical felines... except for feline lycanthropes. The various werecat breeds all have an innately favorable reaction to paka, so unless there are very obvious flaws or the werecat has an unusually strong personality, paka often end up assuming a dominant role when interacting with werecats - which may be partially why they have been frequently mistaken for a werecat breed in their own right.

Because of this, paka almost invariably surround themselves with cats, if they can get away with it. Many paka are deeply involved in the various cat-breeding clubs and societies of the Core, and exotic lineages are quite prized amongst their ranks.



PSYCHOLOGY:

As is common with catfolk throughout the planes, paka have a mentality most readily defined as "feline". Despite their strong cultural dedication to secrecy, they are also naturally prone to craving attention; they relish in the adulation of others, and even people who don't know a paka's true species will usually regard them as proud, vainglorious, a show-off or similar. Natural predators, the paka love to hunt; much of their view of the world comes through viewing it through the lens of the hunt. This can actually be a subtle way to identify paka; they have a near-irresistible tendency to use hunting terminology and metaphors even in situations where those would be out of place.

Paka are also a race of born hedonists. They are passionate and reactive by nature, little troubled by guilt or concern for the opinions of others. A paka knows what they want and goes for it. Paka invariably develop a reputation as flirtatious, if not outright licentious, and many grow to take a deliberate delight in shocking others with scandalous behavior.

This passion takes a dark form in that it leaves the paka with a fixation upon revenge. The dark urgings of vengeance are almost impossible for paka to resist, and indeed most don't even bother to try. Revenge is the central topic of most paka writing and thinking, a rare exception to their usual indifference to abstractions and philosophies: in a race devoted to the here and now, revenge is the one sacred truth. It is more important and real than love or sorrow. Entire treatises have been written on vengeance, the righting of wrongs, and justice.

Perhaps this in flipside is why paka so highly admire and respect gratitude. After all, if paying back the wrongs done unto you is so important, then by logical conclusion, it is equally important to repay the rights done unto you. Not all paka live up to this high standard, of course, but gratitude is still an acknowledged and respected virtue amongst their kind, the light twin to the dark virtue of vengeance.

SOCIOLOGY:

The epitome of what I call "The Parallel", the paka have their own entirely unique society that they belong to, but at the same time they have thoroughly infiltrated human societies across the core. The largest known concentration of paka seems to be found in Nova Vaasa, and this may well be their origin point in these misty realms. From there, they have spread to Hazlan, Tepest, Barovia, Richemuloise, Dementlieu, Falkovnia, and Invidia. Of these locales, Nova Vaasa, Richemuloise and Dementlieu have the largest populations.

The fundamental unit of paka society is "The Pride"; an extended family and assimilated family friends with a matriarchal power structure, ruled over by the wisest, most cunning and socially adept female elder - known as "The Queen". This group works together for mutual benefit and protection, with the paka trying to put its collective wellbeing and benefit above all else... they don't always (or even usually) live up to this ideal, but humanity is in no position to throw stones based on this reality!

Paka prides are matriarchal in large part because only the females feel an inclination to remain together and to hold a common territory, even if the pride may pursue a nomadic existence within that territory. Male paka are far less connected to the pride's social structure; they typically pursue an existence as nomadic wanderers, existing largely on the margin of the pride; they involve themselves with a given pride only so long as they feel invested, and then leave, moving on to seek out another pride into which they will insert themselves.

The paka do not look down on males for this 'wanderlust'. It is simply seen as the way things are. In fact, it serves a vital role; the constant migrations of the males ensures a steady supply of fresh blood and prevents inbreeding from becoming a problem. It also allows male paka to serve as an informal social network that links the paka race as a whole. For this reason, male paka benefit from a form of sacred hospitality; unless they are directly involved

in a feud between two prides, male paka can always trust that they will be welcomed by any pride they ask to join.

Werecats of the different strains often find themselves incorporated into the pride, but usually as a kind of second-class citizen. Infected werecats in particular tend to be perceived as mere 'dumb muscle' and employed as such, although natural werecats and those infected or maledictive werecats who have attained mastery over their bestial forms can work their way up the social hierarchy. Male paka in particular often travel as the leader of small bands of werecats, fully exploiting their supernatural feline charisma.

Whilst some paka prides exist as nomads, mostly in Nova Vaasa, and there are rumors of an entire town populated exclusively by paka that I couldn't substantiate, most paka prides integrate into human communities. Or perhaps a better word might be "infiltrate". Usually, members of a pride do not live together, instead communicating through the guise of social clubs, gangs, guilds, or other secret societies, or communicating through letters and coded messages in news-sheets. Different prides that share the same settlement in particular tend to either stay out of each other's way, or at worst come to blows in a struggle for territorial dominance.

Prides often support themselves through illicit means, especially in Nova Vaasa and Richemulot. Which actually stems in large part from a traditional enmity that paka feel for humans. In its simplest form, a core philosophy of the paka race is that humanity wronged them in the past, and they must seek revenge for this crime. Because of this, paka feel no hesitation in metaphorically or even literally preying on humanity.

Ironically, though, the paka are actually slowly abandoning this ideology of anti-human militancy.

The primary reason why has to do from a secret revealed to me by a male paka of my acquaintance who fancied himself an amateur historian; the paka's history prior to the emergence of Nova Vaasa in the

680s is a murky and ragged affair, and despite claims amongst some queens otherwise, the race no longer actually remembers what the "Great Wrong" was. And whilst the paka are inherently vengeful, they do not believe in wasting their time and energy over something that might never have actually happened.

A second major reason for this turn on their traditional beliefs is, with equal irony, the paka propensity to live amongst and alongside humans. Whilst almost all paka kittens are educated on their "true superiority" as they grow up, most paka young grow to maturity alongside humans, which often exposes them to the truth that humans are not, in fact, mindlessly cruel and dedicated to the destruction of the paka.

Lastly, the simple truth is that other races have proven more of a threat to paka in their largely imitative lifestyle, and so require more focus. In particular, the race was decimated when the Requiem swallowed Il Aluk, which had become a center of paka activity. Consequently, the undead have now begun to rival if not replace humanity as the "inherent enemy" of their people.

It bears emphasis that this is not a widespread belief, just yet. It is growing, but largely among the young - and also largely outside of Nova Vaasa, whose population is hardly the type to encourage the belief in humanity's merits. But every paka willing to turn their back on an empty, hollow grudge is one paka less interested in cutting humanity's collective throat, which is always a good thing.

Religion is... not a strong point amongst the paka. That said, they only acknowledge a single patron; a mischievous and hedonistic trickster-god called, simply, "The Cat Lord".

As an aside, I have encountered this title in many realms, and seen it used in reference to many different figures. Various Cat Lords have been both male and female, and described as anything from unique extraplanar beings or demigods to primal spirits or even archfey. The one common thread is

that the Cat Lord is seen as the protector and patron of all felines. In fact, this trait, combined with their shapeshifting, makes the paka rather reminiscent of a race called the tibbits, and I cannot help but wonder if they mightn't be connected in some way, similar to how red widows might be linked to aranea.

Very little is known about the Cat Lord, other than that "priests" of this deity are usually the Queens of paka prides. Most give their so-called patron little more than lip service, and whilst queens often tout themselves as his (or sometimes her, depending on the pride) chosen leaders, the paka are by no means a theocracy. In fact, most "priests" of the Cat Lord that I encountered seemed more like warlocks or sorcerers to me.

The possible connection between the paka's Cat Lord and the forgotten Vaasan gods Sehkmaa and Bubahkaa must remain a matter of speculation.

ADVENTURERS:

Paka adventurers are not uncommon - in many ways, almost every male paka is an adventurer. What's uncommon is for them to adventure alongside non-paka. When this does happen, typically, the paka member of the group is either motivated by common purpose, finds one or more of the group either amusing or interesting (the two emotions often overlap, for paka), or else the paka is simply desperate for a group to belong to. A paka adventurer does not reveal their true race to their companions lightly, and often if they are aware of it, it has to do with how the paka member joined their party to begin with.

A typical paka adventurer is seeking either entertainment, adulation, or vengeance. They are most likely to be males, given that male paka are naturally inclined to wander, but female paka can also find these motivations compelling enough to leave - or else they simply have been exiled from their pride for whatever reason. They are generally characterized as flamboyant and attention seeking -

if not from the rest of the party, then from those who hire the party, but most would rather be admired and adulated by all and sundry. Whilst their concern about the center of attention may cause them to be brushed off as foppish, vainglorious, egotistical, immature, foolish or any of a variety of negative comments on their intellects, let those who underestimate a paka's skill, cunning and intelligence beware!

The Rogue is the most common class for the paka, and they excel at it. Of its subclasses, the Swashbuckler, Mastermind, Inquisitive, Scout and Assassin are favored. Male paka are particularly likely to be Rangers, typically Beast Masters, Hunters or Monster Slayers, whilst females prefer magical routes to power and are usually Sorcerers, Bards or Warlocks. They rarely become Fighters, but their vengeful natures and savage temperaments make them natural Barbarians, and they also practice a number of Monk traditions, notably the Kensei and Way of Shadow.

One distinct oddity of the paka adventurer is that a paka with a familiar or an animal companion invariably takes some kind of feline creature for the role.

PAKA RACIAL MECHANICS

Natural Inclinations: Dexterity, Intelligence, Charisma

Size: Medium

Speed: 30 feet

Darkvision: You have Darkvision to a range of 60 feet

Feline Agility: When you move on your turn in combat, you can double your speed until the end of your turn. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you move 0 feet on one of your turns.

Cat's Claws: Because of your claws, you have a climbing speed of 20 feet. Your claws are natural weapons, which you can use to make unarmed

strikes. If you hit with them, you deal slashing damage equal to 1d4 + your Dexterity modifier, instead of the bludgeoning damage normal for an unarmed strike.

Speak With Cats: You can communicate with cats, as per the Speak with Animals spell, at will.

Human Guise: You have two forms; Paka and either Human or Half-Elf (choose which at character creation). You can shapechange between these forms as a bonus action. None of your game statistics, clothing or equipment change. You are considered to be a Shapechanger for effects that target such creatures..

Lick Wounds: When you spend Hit Die to regain hit points as part of a short rest, you can reroll results of 1; the second roll's result must be taken.

PAKA RACIAL FEATS

CAT LORD'S BLESSING

Prerequisite: Paka

The Cat Lord has blessed you.

Effect: You gain a +1 to your Intelligence or Charisma. You can cast Enlarge/Reduce once per long rest. You gain a Cantrip of your choice from the Wizard spell list. Spells cast using this feat use the higher of Intelligence or Charisma as their spellcasting ability score. You can also cast these spells using spell slots you have of the appropriate level.

RAVENKIN

Barovia is generally accepted as the oldest of the dread realms. Something about its forest-clad mountains and dismal villages screams of an ancient, unspeakable history, and the brooding expanse of Castle Ravenloft casts a surprisingly wide shadow over the Core. How fitting, then, that one of the oldest umbra peoples can be found hidden in those same shadows, watching with ageless eyes and

bearing antediluvian memories against the forces of darkness.

BIOLOGY:

At a casual glance, a ravenkin would be indistinguishable from a common giant raven. These sapient avians appear as massive corvids, averaging about three to four feet in height with a wingspan of at least five feet. Physically, the only major difference is in their talons, which are articulated so as to be capable of human-level acts of manual dexterity. A ravenkin is perfectly capable of clasping a dagger or short sword by the hilt in its foot and fighting with the skill of a comparably experienced human warrior. The greatest difference is in their sheer intelligence.

Like other corvids, ravenkin are omnivores, feeding on a diet made up of just about anything they can get; insects, berries and small game make up their primary foodstuffs.

Ravenkin are extremely long lived, and can live for up to three hundred years. However, they are a slowly dying race, whose fertility has been massively destabilized since their emergence into the misty realms. Only two out of every ten ravenkin eggs hatch, a state of affairs they blame on the curse of the dark powers that they believe control and shape these lands.

It is unknown if ravenkin can interbreed with dire ravens or related creatures, such as the *Corvus Regis* ("King's Ravens") of Darkon, and they treat the topic with great distaste, similar to the common human aversion to bestiality.

PSYCHOLOGY:

Ravenkin mentally resemble their corvid cousins in great detail. They are highly inquisitive and intuitive beings, with keen intellects and a sharp eye for details. They can be curious, and they have a pronounced sense of humor, with a distinct tendency towards sardonic, subtle or outright macabre humor. They enjoy word games and mental

puzzles, and typically have a strong sense of irony - especially when it comes to those who test them in a battle of wits.

But there is more to them than that. Ravenkin are also devout believers in the existence of good and evil - and that it is their racial duty to battle evil. Whilst this has been tempered by the natural suspicion towards outsiders that is so ubiquitous in these dread realms, ravenkin have the temperaments of devotees of good and righteousness, striving to make the world around them at least a little better. They eagerly assist those who prove themselves similarly sworn to battle evil, and despite their rather unimposing frames, many ravenkin have taken up the mantle of champion against the dark.

Whilst the ravenkin attitude towards their battle varies from optimism to bitterness to a kind of determined defeatism, they are staunch and unyielding; once a ravenkin has made up their mind, they will give their lives to do what they feel is right.

Perhaps the greatest flaw of the ravenkin as a whole, outside of their sometimes dark sense of humor and propensity towards negativity, is their vengeful streak. Most ravenkin hold themselves above indulging such base urges, and the elders of their communities strive to keep their people from going rogue, but some ravenkin eventually become so obsessed with battling evil that they decide that the ends can justify the means.

SOCIOLOGY:

The vast majority of ravenkin dwell in the lands of Barovia, but individuals or even single family groups have been sighted in forests throughout the Core; Falkovnia, Tepest and the Shadow Rift are said to be home to the largest secondary populations of ravenkin in these lands.

A ravenkin community consists of multiple family groups who live in close proximity - well, close as a flying race determines it. Each ravenkin family group stakes out an individual copse of trees as their

personal territory, creating a large nest to raise chicks in until they are old enough to perch in trees as they see fit. From an outsider's perspective, a ravenkin "village" is nothing more than a collection of large raven nests scattered over an area of several miles. These communities typically consist of a hundred and fifty five to two hundred individuals, and are often attended to by vast flocks of tamed crows and ravens, who provide a certain level of camouflage to their masters.

Ravenkin communities are gerontocratic, with the eldest leading. For this reason, a ravenkin's naming convention consists of their personal name and an agename that easily summarizes how old they are (measured in "moons" and "seasons") and lets other ravenkin know readily who to defer to.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the ravenkin is not so much that they are deeply religious, but that they are the only known race in these lands to still preserve the ancient faith of Andral; the solar deity whose church once held sway over the lands of Barovia, Darkon and Dorvinia, but has since all but vanished. Many ravenkin elders are "sunspeakers", or priests of Andral, but they acknowledge that their god no longer speaks to them as he once did, and their powers have changed as a result. Some ravenkin individuals or families have abandoned Andral, instead turning to the Morninglord or the Forfarian version of Belenus, but these "heretics" often have a strained relationship with more mainstream ravenkin.

Another fascinating aspect is their long history of connection with the wereravens. In fact, there is a secret alliance of ravenkin and wereravens, known as the Keepers of the Black Feather, who have dedicated themselves to the destruction of Barovia's monsters, especially vampires, and with a particular focus on the eldest vampire in the land.

ADVENTURERS:

Adventuring ravenkin are quite normal. Ironically, despite being so inhuman-looking, they actually can

better infiltrate humanoid societies better than some actual humanoids. Even in these lands, who looks twice at somebody with a tame raven, even if it is unusually large?

Ravenkin rarely take martial classes; their distinctly avian bodily shape makes them, whilst not helpless, not exactly ideal for the role, either. They can only wield relatively small melee weapons, and whilst they can wear armor, it must be specially constructed. The only martial class "typical" of a ravenkin adventurer is the Paladin, usually of the Oath of Devotion or, for the more warlike ravenkin, the Oath of Vengeance.

Ironically, ravenkin make fairly adept rogues, especially by focusing on their natural ability to fly and their small size. Such ravenkin typically become Thieves, Arcane Tricksters, Masterminds or Inquisitives, but the rare ravenkin Assassin can be surprisingly deadly.

Mystical classes are the most commonly associated with ravenkin adventurers. "Sunspeakers" are typically either Celestial Warlocks or Favoured Soul Sorcerers, though ravenkin devoted to the Morninglord or Belenus are the standard Cleric of Light (or, more rarely, Life). Wizardly ravenkin ironically tend to favor the Evocation school, often specializing in spells of fire and radiance to call down Andral's wrath upon the tainted creatures of darkness. Outside of sunspeakers, sorcerous ravenkin are rare and typically wield Storm Sorcery; Shadow Magic sorcerers are extremely rare, and often outcast, because of their association with darkness. Ravenkin warlocks are almost always sworn to Archfey patrons, though rumors speak of some outcast ravenkin becoming servitors of Erlin, a malicious god of trickery and death from Gundarak; these are Undying or Undead Warlocks.

RAVENKIN RACIAL MECHANICS

Natural Inclinations: Intelligence, Wisdom, Charisma

Size: Small

Speed: 25 feet, Fly 40 feet

Natural Flight: You have a Fly speed of 40 feet, but you can only fly if you are unencumbered and are wearing light armor or no armor.

Birdspeech: You can communicate with ravens and other scavenging birds at will, as per the Speak with Animals spell.

Raven's Wisdom: You have Proficiency in Insight and Perception.

RAVENKIN RACIAL FEATS:

FLAMES OF PURIFICATION

Prerequisite: Ravenkin

Your faith in Andral allows you to infuse fire with his wrath against the undead.

Effect: You gain a +1 to your Wisdom or Charisma. When you cast a spell that inflicts Fire damage, you can change the damage type to Radiant.

HOLY FIRES OF ANDRAL

Prerequisite: Ravenkin

You retain a spark of the divine connection to your patron god, Andral, allowing you to wield the most basic of his magics.

Effect: You gain a +1 to your Wisdom or Charisma. You can cast Cure Wounds and Burning Hands, both at their lowest level, once per long rest each. Spells cast using this feat use the higher of Wisdom or Charisma as their spellcasting ability score. You can also cast these spells using spell slots you have of the appropriate level.

RED WIDOWS

What separates a person from a monster? To many 'scholars' of this misty realm, the answer is simple; humans are people, and any non-human intelligent race is a monster. To myself, the answer is more complex, but a short summation would be that a monster is a being that could be a person, but chooses to prey on other people rather than co-exist.

This summation becomes inaccurate when confronted with the red widows. How do you define an intelligent race that most frequently preys on other sapients, not from malice or cruelty, but out of simple ignorance and lack of understanding?

PHYSIOLOGY:

In their native form, red widows are giant spiders, resembling the more common black widow but with an inverted color scheme - red chitin offsetting a black hourglass-shaped design on their back - and about seven to eight feet in length. However, each red widow is inherently able to assume a singular humanoid form, in the manner of a therianthrope - a red widow's "humanoid form" is a natural part of them, and cannot be replaced with other forms in the manner of, say, a doppelganger or a skin thief. Most red widows assume a human form, but they can take the form of any humanoid race encountered in these lands of mist.

This potential diversity has to do with the race's unique reproductive methodology. Red widows are an entirely female race, lacking males of their own species. Instead, they must copulate with humanoid males to breed; the children of such pairings are red widows, but their humanoid form always inherits the race and features of their father. The one defining trait of a red widow in humanoid form is that they always have bright red hair, which they usually pass off by claiming membership in an ethnicity known for this trait - Forfarian, most typically.

In many ways, red widows remind me of another race I have encountered beyond these realms; the aranea. These too are a race of sapient giant spiders with an innate ability to assume a singular humanoid form that they develop at birth. There are some very key social differences, but still, I cannot help but hypothesize about a possible link between the two races.

Red widows typically only have spider and humanoid forms. Unlike aranea or werespiders, they do not have the innate ability to assume a "hybrid form". I have heard rumors of red widows who do possess this ability, but couldn't verify them; it's possible that at least one such story actually depicted a red widow whose "human form" was a spidery-featured caliban, and who could pass herself off as human with mundane disguise methods.

Unlike most spiders, red widows possess masticating fangs as well as the traditional envenoming ones. This allows them to chew as well as consume liquefied tissue. Like all spiders, red widows are carnivores, feeding on flesh and blood.

Red widows become fertile for a period of one month out of every 12, usually in the spring. Whilst the urge to mate can be resisted, it is a strong impulse. To breed, a red widow needs only to mate with a sufficiently fertile humanoid male in her humanoid form, fertilizing a clutch of 2d4 eggs.

After a brooding period of 24 hours, these eggs will need to be laid and incubated; most red widows will kill a sufficiently large creature, such as a sheep or a goat, and lay their eggs in the corpse, but others will paralyze a living creature and lay their eggs into its still-living body, in a manner akin to a wasp, to ensure the maximum amount of food is retained over the nesting period.

It bears mentioning that this host body is usually the sire of the red widow's brood, killed or paralyzed once the fertilization is complete.

However, the use of a host is not strictly necessary; it merely combines food and shelter in one easy

package. A red widow can simply lay her eggs into a silken egg-case and then provide food for her children in the form of raw meat, bowls of blood, mice, lizards and small birds once they hatch.

Upon hatching, which occurs 1d6 days after being laid, red widow hatchlings are at their most vulnerable. Over a period of about three months, they grow quite rapidly, attaining a length of about 2 feet. Over the next three months, they will double that size, and then slow their growth, ultimately reaching their full size and full maturity at the age of twelve months, whereupon they also manifest their ability to assume humanoid form.

Compared to more "normal" humanoids, red widows live an incredibly short time, even by the standards of short-lived races such as calibans or goblinoids. Assuming they do not die through violence or accident, a red widow's lifespan only stretches for three decades, with most dying around the age of 20 to 30 years old.

One strange ability of the red widows is that they are able to communicate with spiders - both normal spiders and their larger "monstrous" counterparts - and exert a kind of control over them. This enables them to tame their lesser counterparts like a skilled beastmaster, and use them as their agents. This trait has led to the race being nicknamed "Spider Queens" by those aware of their existence.

PSYCHOLOGY:

Red widows are a fascinating psychological study. Although as intelligent as any human, most red widows live a simplistic existence dominated by instinct; despite having the potential to be more, most red widows are better classified as extremely intelligent animals rather than as sapients. They concern themselves only with following their instinctual drives for shelter and food, and any humanoid behavior is essentially a mimicry - a tool to assist in filling those drives.

Many red widows, if not most of them, never grow out of this... intellectual laziness, for lack of a better

word. But others are different. These red widows grow beyond their instincts, and realize there is more to life than simply feeding. Red widows who survive beyond their first decade almost invariably experience this cognitive shift; they have simply lived too long and been exposed to too much of humanoid society to resist developing their minds beyond the simple instinct-fueled stage of their youth. Others possess this curiosity from a younger age, simply due to the natural variables of personality. And the smallest minority are taught how to be people rather than beasts, as we will discuss in the Sociology segment.

Bestial red widows are basically a form of particularly dangerous predator, clumsily imitating humanoid norms and behaviors to acquire food. There is little to discuss there, so we shall instead move on to the "awakened" red widows.

Even those red widows who have grown beyond letting instinct rule their existence tend to have a very primal mentality. Whilst some go so far as to exult intelligence over instinct, most red widows still trust instinct as a basic guide; the saying "don't think; feel" is the typical mantra of the red widow.

Passion and Patience are the keystones of the red widow psyche. They are a naturally emotional race, but also very good at pushing those emotions aside until they feel safe to indulge. A red widow naturally understands the idea of waiting to savor food, but then will feast rapaciously, devouring as much as she can get away with. An angry red widow might explode in an outburst of temper, or put on a façade of being unaffected and secretly plot until she can attain vengeance, depending on which serves her better (and also how extensively she has been provoked).

Hedonism is an extremely common, if not ubiquitous, aspect of red widow psychology. Which should be no surprise. Fundamentally, what civilization offers red widows over their instinct-driven lifestyle is pleasure, both carnal and cerebral. Food and drink, initially consumed just as a

protective disguise, becomes appreciated for the concept of taste alone. Reading and art offer mental stimulation comparable to, yet distinctly different from, the hunt for sustenance and shelter. Sex for pleasure rather than to breed, or the use of drugs, are surprisingly common, especially amongst older red widows. Red widows tend to be indulgers rather than creators, but that isn't always the case. Some red widows become fascinated with the process behind creating the pleasurable things they so enjoy, and eagerly pursue them.

Another major influence in red widow psychology is their awareness of their own mortality. Once a red widow understands just how short her life will be, invariably she will have to learn to live with that fact. Some refuse to accept this cruel twist of fate, either wallowing in denial or seeking a "cure" for it. Others accept it and focus instead on living as full a life as they can in the span that they have. Some become cautious to the point of paranoia, others become almost recklessly bold, having accepted the inevitable and being content to go out if it's on their terms.

This awareness of their mortality also influences how they balance passion and patience. A red widow understands the need to wait, but at the same time, she knows she literally cannot afford to wait too long. Red widows usually become known as "clever, but impulsive" amongst their unknowing peers, as they typically favor gratification over anticipation.

This element particularly comes into play in the developing of skills or talents; red widows are unlikely to focus on subjects that they do not possess a natural talent for unless it truly fascinates them, simply because a red widow is aware that she doesn't have the time to truly devote herself to mastery. A red widow may enjoy paintings, but is unlikely to do more than dabble in the art herself unless she is naturally talented, simply because she doesn't have the decades to spare to devote herself to mastering it. You are extremely unlikely to find a red widow sculptor who works in stone, simply

because it is such a time-intensive process, but red widows often become skilled cardsharps, because card games play to their natural strengths - and for similar reasons, red widows are some of the few non-Vistani to be interested in the board game of *drotche*.

Red widows often develop a reputation as "flighty" or "fickle" amongst other races, tending to pick up and then discard interests or projects.

The last element of note to discuss is that, being a race of lone predators at heart, red widows can be frightfully pragmatic or ruthless compared to most humanoids. A red widow's primary concern is her own survival, and she has no instinctive qualms about sacrificing others, metaphorically or literally, towards that goal. Sympathy and empathy aren't impossible for red widows, but they don't come as naturally as they do to, say, humans. Even when they try to be more "kindly", it's often imperfectly understood, and they can often be disturbing to those who see them at their most human when the spider within metaphorically peeks out.

SOCIOLOGY:

As fascinating as their psychology is, sociology is even more so, because it is largely an emergent phenomenon.

As I stated above, most red widows pursue an instinctual lifestyle that essentially mimics that of a standard giant spider, but with the addition of humanoid infiltration for hunting, in the manner of other "humanoid mimics". These red widows concern themselves only with survival; having emerged from their birth-nest, they scurry into the wilderness to survive in the manner of an ordinary spider, until they reach their maturity at the age of 1 year. Now furnished with their humanoid form, they often begin infiltrating humanoid society, typically gravitating towards the most fringe existences; these newly matured red widows typically become barmaids or prostitutes, as these roles are always open with minimal questioning to an attractive

female and they usually require little complex social interaction. The red widow find shelter and settles down, typically feeding on any humanoid male she lures into her clutches - most red widows are killed within a few years of maturity because they get too aggressive with their hunting strategy; the ones who survive to reach their first decade invariably learn to cover their tracks and better blend into their host society.

Ironically, as a red widow becomes a better mimic, she becomes less of a threat. Oh, a red widow will see nothing inherently wrong in killing and consuming an assailant who threatens her, but fundamentally the race has no particular attraction to sapient prey. Humans and humanoids are attacked simply because they are large, easily-subdued prey creatures; red widows have no dietary need for flesh or blood taken from sapient creatures. Once she understands that the option is available and less dangerous to her, the typical red widow is more than happy to subsist on animal flesh.

What's truly fascinating is that a growing number of these veteran red widows are adopting humanoid social concepts. Which only makes sense. After all, why endanger yourself by killing the fathers of your children, when there are safer ways to incubate your eggs? Why allow young red widows to threaten your comfortable existence by being obvious predators when you can teach them the tricks to surviving as you do?

The result is a small but growing number of red widow clans, consisting of a matriarch who rears her children for the first year of their life, teaching them the secrets of blending into humanoid society and why preying on them is actually not beneficial. These younglings are typically sent away when they reach their maturity, but not always - I encountered one red widow clan that operated in plain sight by disguising itself as a "night club" in Dementlieu; each generation's brood simply joined the club as new "hostesses" and so went unnoticed.

It bears mentioning that red widows are still trying to identify the role of males in their fledgling society. After all, despite their necessary role in perpetuating the species - and red widows can easily grasp that it is ultimately less dangerous if they don't kill the males they breed with - the fact remains that males are of a different species and thus pose a threat to the secret life of these shapeshifters.

Being lone predators by nature, and having no particular need for paternal care, most red widows resolve this dilemma by keeping males at arm's length. Though they accept males as sexual partners, and a surprising number confessed to me that they actively enjoyed the act, they make no attempt to form permanent bondings for themselves. These red widows typically have a string of suitors that come and go, or they settle into the role of mistress to a wealthy partner - as the red widow only cares about her consort's financial support and satiation of her yearly breeding urge, she makes little threat to her consort's existing marriage, making for a comfortable existence.

However... a side effect of their immersion into humanoid culture, which in these misty realms tends to heavily promote monogamous pair-bonds, is that some red widows do eventually grow curious about forming such a union themselves. For some, it's a purely political move; the wife of an important man wields much greater power and security than a mere courtesan. Others simply see what humanoid women around them have and start wanting it without understanding it. And others? They genuinely fall in love. Sadly, most attempts to form an interspecies union fail should the spouse discover the true species of his lover. But, on the other hand, I did encounter one couple where the male knew that he was with a red widow, and they were still together, so perhaps there is hope for other red widows with similar inclinations.

As an aside, whilst biologically geared towards breeding, once a red widow has assimilated the concept of sex for pleasure, they typically give little thought to the gender of partners. Some red widows

establish themselves publicly as homosexuals, a fact aided by the fact that any male lovers they take are only for the span of the breeding period, and often swiftly disposed of once their purpose is fulfilled.

In terms of religion, red widows are rarely devout believers. They may feign loyalty to a particular faith, if this is an obvious survival tool, but as creatures with an inherently materialistic view of the world, red widows are little given to trust in such nebulous concepts as "faith". Red widows inherently value the tangible over the immaterial, and even a red widow who has seen proof of divine magic rarely has the ability to truly believe in its origin. Most red widow "priests" are typically sorcerers faking an affinity for divine magic, or warlocks; a fiend, a powerful fey or any other such magical entity is demonstrably real, after all, and thus a red widow can readily grasp the idea of service in exchange for power.

ADVENTURERS:

Adventuring red widows are typically either running from something or searching for something - usually a way to prolong their lives, but sometimes just for wealth and comfort. Due to the aforementioned lack of empathy, red widows are rarely motivated by altruistic goals, and they are usually quite focused on either payment or personal vendetta. Not all red widow adventures are nonheroes, but most are at best antiheroes.

For their classes, red widows tend to favor those that play on their natural strengths and which fit best with their natural inclinations towards self-centeredness and hedonism. Outside of Drunken Fist Style, there are very few red widow monks, for example. Martial classes are extremely unappealing to red widows, who prefer to avoid danger rather than directly wade into combat.

Typically, red widows will be either rogues or sorcerers, followed by warlocks and wizards. As stealth predators by nature, red widows find that roguish talents and mentality both come intuitively to them, whilst their fundamental nature as magical

beasts often finds its expression as instinctive magic users. Magic fundamentally appeals to red widows, and so they are quick to pursue the path of pact magic; the studying required makes wizardly magic less appealing, but red widows are intelligent and focused enough to typically have a natural talent for it. Such red widows almost invariably become either necromancers or transmuters, seeking immortality (or at least an extended lifespan) through their discipline, though others become illusionists or enchanters to expand upon their natural predatory skills with a new arsenal.

RED WIDOW RACIAL MECHANICS

Natural Inclinations: Strength, Dexterity, Charisma

Size: Medium

Speed: 30 feet

Darkvision: You have Darkvision to a range of 60 feet

Spider Queen: You can cast the Infestation cantrip, using Charisma as your spellcasting ability score. Additionally, you can communicate with spiders as per the Speak with Animals spell at will.

Spiderwere: You have two forms; humanoid and giant spider. You can switch between these forms as a bonus action. None of your game statistics, clothing or equipment change. In spider form, you gain the Spider Climb and Webspinner racial traits, but lose the use of your hands and voice. In human form, you lose the Spider Climb and Webspinner racial traits. You are considered to be a Shapechanger for effects that target such creatures.

Spider Climb: You have a Climb speed of 30 feet and can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Webspinner: As an action, you can produce spider's silk. This functions as casting Web as a 2nd level spell without needing to use a spell slot, except that the webbing is unaffected by anti-magic or Dispel

Magic effects, and dissolves in 24 hours. You can use this racial trait a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus. Completing a long rest restores all uses of this ability.

RED WIDOW RACIAL FEATS

PRODIGIOUS SPINNER

Prerequisite: Red Widow

Your spinnerets are particularly well-developed, allowing you to produce a seemingly endless supply of silk.

Effect: There is no limit on how many times you can use Webspinner before resting. Your webs still dissolve 24 hours after they are created.

HYBRID FORM

Prerequisite: Red Widow

You have mastered the shapechanging abilities inherent to your kind, allowing you to assume a third form that combines elements of spider and humanoid.

Effect: You can use a bonus action to assume the form of a humanoid, a giant spider, or a humanoid/spider hybrid. In hybrid form, you gain access to your Spider Climb and Webspinner racial traits, but retain the use of your hands and voice. Additionally, when in hybrid form, you gain a +2 bonus to all ability score checks.

AFTERWORD

Having reached the end of this primer, I find myself faced with a dilemma. I firmly believe that knowledge is power. But I also understand that power can be misused. Van Richten's Guides were written to dispel the aura of secrecy and invulnerability surrounding the great monsters of this world, and I thoroughly believe he has only achieved good through disseminating such information. But I know that the humans of this world are gripped by paranoia, xenophobia, and

hostility. Such reactions are not unjustified, but they also give me cause to fear. There are those who would take this text and use what I have written to root out all the beings I describe, simply because they are intelligent and not purely human, which in the minds of these individuals makes them a threat. I wrote this book to peel back the layers of ignorance and to offer a hope of a better future, a chance to bring peace... but I fear I may have well done the opposite...

SIDEBAR: SOURCES

The Fetch, Ghedan, Ghul and Mortif originally appeared in the Dragon Magazine article "Born of Death" in issue #313.

The Braunchen originally appeared in the article "Lesser Breeds of the Arak II", in The Book of Secrets, written by Rene Littek.

Calibans originally appeared in the Ravenloft Campaign Setting for 3rd edition, but this iteration is inspired by the article "Brutes & Banshees" from Quoth the Raven #8, written by Uri "Shadowking" Barak.

Broken Ones were inspired by the article "The Making of Men" from the Book of Souls, written by John W. Mangrum.

Paka were inspired by the article "Races of the Mists: Paka" from Quoth the Raven #19, written by David "Jester" Gibson.

Ravenkin originally appeared as a playable race in the Dragon Magazine article "Half-Pint Heroes" in issue #262.

Carrionettes, Ermordenung, Lebendtod, Quevari, Bakhna Rakhna, Hebi-no-Onna, and Red Widows all debuted in the Ravenloft Monstrous Compendium Appendix.



OLERICK'S COLLOQUIAL GUIDES PRESENTS...

SACRED SITES AND LEGENDARY LANDMARKS:

Part Four in the Traveling Cloakman Series

BY JEREMY ROBY

INTRODUCTION

A myriad of amazing landmarks are scattered across this land of ours - several of which have already been reviewed by noteworthy authors before me. Therefore, I will bypass the most obvious and famous locales of the domains below so as not to bore my esteemed readers. Besides, I believe that I write for a more discerning audience, one more at home traveling off the beaten path.

So, without further ado, here is the latest entry in my continuing series...

THE BLOODY HAND OF GUY DE MENTHE (DARKON)

This is a small but gruesome landmark located deep in the bowels of Karg, home of the dreaded Kargat and the equally infamous prison known as the Black Hole. Ever since the capital city of Il Aluk has become off limits (due to the Requiem) King Azalin now holds his state executions in the large public square found in Lower Karg.

One such prisoner who went to the chopping block was Sir Guy De Menthe, a petty noble that presided over a small barony in the Vale of Tears region. During the Shrouded Years he allegedly waged a guerrilla war against neighboring districts to expand his power. Once word of this reached King Azalin, he ordered Kargat agents to seize the baron and throw him into the Black Hole to await his final judgment. Despite professing his innocence from the start, he was found guilty and sentenced to death.

There is a long tunnel known as "The Last Mile" that serves as a gateway from the prison to the outside plaza where criminals are led out to the executioner's stage via a caged wagon. On his way out Sir Guy stretched his hand through the bars and slapped the side of the tunnel while he exclaimed, "As you have my innocent blood on your hands, let my mark forever remind you of your guilt!" The execution took place without further incident.

A smudged, bright-red handprint appeared on the wall several months later. At first, there were attempts to wash the bloodstain away, but, strangely, it kept coming back. Even magical means could not erase it. Eventually, the Kargat left it alone and now take a sort of perverse pleasure in the grim

reminder of the twisted justice they serve. It is said to drip blood and run down the wall excessively whenever an innocent victim passes through en route to their execution.



(Muddy Bloody by tubblesnap)

THE BONE CATHEDRAL (BORCA)

Despite its macabre moniker, this small cave complex on the outskirts of Vor Ziyden is actually considered holy ground by some. It was established by a small group of G'Hennan refugees several generations ago (from the time when Borca shared a border with that lost domain) and is maintained by a handful of crimson-robed Zhakatan acolytes who serve as its caretakers.

Everyone knows G'Hennans have curious religious beliefs, but very few outsiders know the peculiar details of their worship. Even though these immigrants turned their back on their home country it seems their superstitions are harder to give up. That is why a group of them first set up this ossuary as a shrine to their ancestors.

Whenever a native G'Hennan dies, their family brings their remains to these narrow, winding passages to be ceremonially cleansed. While the full process is not shared with outsiders, it seems to be a highly ritualized procedure of boiling the flesh from the bones and then polishing them with a special tincture. Once the skeleton has been treated it is then installed in a small alcove along with various decorations and memorials provided by the family. Even those immigrants who die without any surviving family members are interred here, as the local authorities call in the G'hennan monks to remove their bodies whenever they are found. (This, of course, has the practical benefit of cutting down on burial costs for the civil authorities.)

Over the years, several hundred contributions have been deposited here - enough to line several "Bone Galleries" as they are called. Periodically, surviving family members may even make a pilgrimage to the site to pay tribute to their ancestors, but the practice is not widespread. Indeed, the site itself is seeing less and less traffic nowadays because of the fact that no new settlers have appeared since the Great Upheaval in 740 BC. However, there are still enough G'Hennan enclaves in the nearby cities of Lechberg, Ilvin and Vor Ziyden to keep it operating for the time being.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: I was originally going to place this site in G'Henna and have it be used by Mongrelmen in a twisted reflection of the local custom of making dishes and jewelry out of the skulls and teeth of loved ones, but decided that the domain was too remote for it to be of any real use. It can still be placed there if the DM so chooses, however, without losing its flavor. Alternatively, this location can be set in almost any domain and used as a Mistway that links G'Henna to the Core.



(Ossuary by Todd Huffman)

THE BURIED CITY (HAR'AKIR)

The Akiri desert hides many things, but surely not an entire city? Such a fantastic story, however, is just what several adventurers and merchants have reported back to me. These first-hand accounts share such an eerie similarity with one another that I am inclined to believe them.

Each narrative details the same series of events. First, every expedition begins by following the road that leads south out of Muhar. Second, the location of this site is only revealed after the passing of one of those fierce, day-long sandstorms that are known to occur in the hinterlands of this domain. Finally, a large stone structure is glimpsed poking out from the sand dunes in the distance and the curious party moves to investigate.

The most common feature reported is known as the Great Obelisk. It is a narrow, four-sided column with a pointed tip carved out of a pale, blue granite with delicate veins of gold running through it. Sticking straight up, it towers several stories over the surrounding dunes. It's true height is impossible to discern, as its base is obscured by the sand.

Another location that is repeatedly mentioned is the Cyclopean Gate - a stone archway flanked by two huge statues of warriors dressed in ancient armor and holding spears in their hands. It is believed to be the main entrance of the city, even though only a small portion of the complex is ever uncovered at one time. The parts of this metropolis that lay beyond this point have many disturbing features; avenues narrow and widen at random intervals, twist and turn instead of following straight lines, and converge at odd angles.

The most mysterious object, by far, is what I call the Shrouded Sphinx. It is described as a larger-than-life-sized statue of a winged creature (carved out of the same otherworldly substance as the Great Obelisk) that sits on its knees and holds its head in its hands. Deep sorrow is felt by anyone who gazes on it. While most records state that the face is covered, there are scattered reports that claim to be able see two fiery pinpoints of light shining out from between the statue's splayed fingers. There are still other reports that describe a different pose altogether - one with its arms stretched out in front of it and rising on one knee as if pleading for help. Perhaps more than one of these sculptures inhabit the area.

Another detail that each account shares is that the city is never able to be found twice. Several attempts have been made to return and do a more thorough excavation of this site but all expeditions have been fruitless. Are the desert sands truly so fickle or does the city only reveal itself at preordained times?

THE BURNING ORPHANAGE (MORDENT)

While I was traveling south along the Mill Road, near the Forest of the Ancients, I had the opportunity to explore the burnt-out ruins of the infamous Gore Orphanage. A weed choked wagon path turns off the road and travels through a small but dense wood before arriving at the blasted site. Little remains of this once sprawling edifice. Charred bricks are scattered over a wide clearing, and the bare outline of a stone foundation can still be seen.

Established by Dr. Elias Gore in 621 BC, the orphanage stood for nearly a hundred years before a mysterious fire razed it to the ground completely in 719 BC. As many as sixty people, mostly children, lost their lives that night. The true cause of the fire was never discovered, but there are many macabre theories.

Most locals believe the fire was ignited by an errant lightning bolt during a tremendous thunderstorm. This would explain why on rainy nights some locals claim to see a spectral building awash in flames appear on the heath and hear loud shrieking in the night. Others say a curse was brought down on the place after they accepted a deformed child known locally as the Devil's Baby (because of its unnaturally bright pink skin and small horn-like protuberances on its forehead). The proponents of this version claim that the child survived to adulthood and still practices satanic rites among the ruins. I saw no evidence of any such activity during my visit.

THE CHALK GIANT (HAZLAN)

Deep in the Dunlands region south of Sly-Var is a series of small, rolling hummocks that are home to a number of small Rashemani farming communities. The largest of these hills stands about 500 feet above the plains, and the grass on its slope has been cut away to form a picture of a giant man that can be made out from miles away. It's a rather crude drawing with simplistic shapes for facial features and elongated legs that stand apart awkwardly. It holds some sort of implement in its right hand, possibly a spear or staff. The entire figure is enclosed in a rectangular frame, as if he is standing within an open doorway.

Its origin is unclear, as even the Rashemani that inhabit the area say it was there long before they arrived. Some scholars claim it is a long forgotten Rashemani god. Locals believe it marks the resting place of a sleeping king that was interred within the mound long ago and is awaiting an unknown sign

before he returns to life and rules this land once more.

Each spring villagers clear the encroaching grass away from the outline and perform a small re-dedication ceremony. This annual upkeep has only been interrupted twice in recorded memory. Several years ago, a Mulan satrap banned the Rashemani from performing the rites because he felt it was a blasphemy in the eyes of the Lawgiver. Soon after, however, a great sickness spread through the entire population. The next year, floods and mudslides buffeted the surrounding countryside. After that, the lord decided it was better to let the celebration be held rather than risk further bad luck being visited upon his lands.

THE CITY OF SECRETS (SEBUA)

Amongst a dusty, remote canyon located in the eastern badlands of this domain lies a marvelous sight - an entire city carved out of the very rock walls that protect and conceal it from outsiders. Local caravan leaders call it Siraya, or the City of Secrets, and it was once a prosperous waystation along the trade routes that stretch between Phazazia and Har'Akir. Now, it stands as an abandoned testament of better times.

When this domain first appeared, a small enclave of Phazazians who sought to escape from Diambel's control settled just across the border. As its location became more widely known, merchants and traders began to use it as a convenient stopover on their trips to Har'Akir. The shrewd townspeople took advantage of this situation and started providing caravans with much needed supplies (at an extremely high markup, of course).

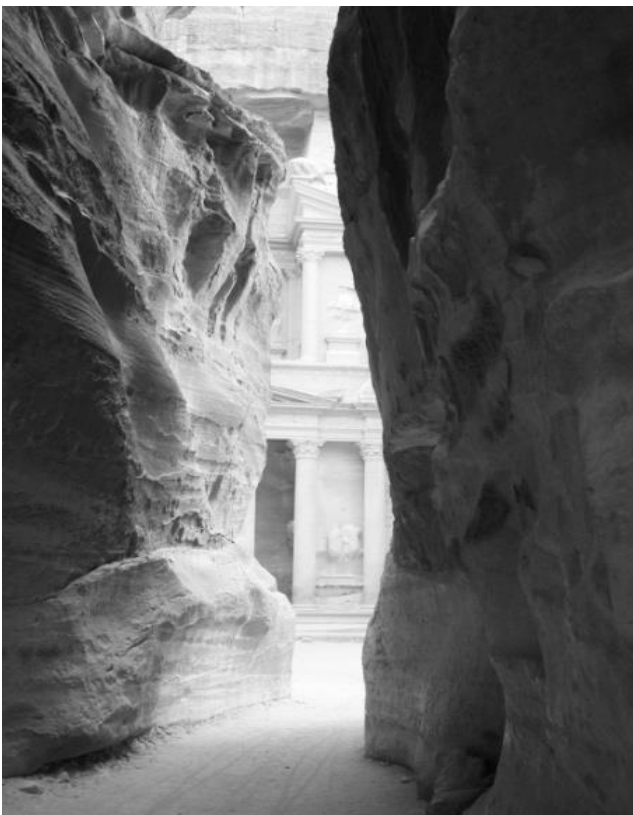
After years of constant growth it became a lively and prosperous trading hub. A variety of entertainment venues eventually sprung up, providing pleasures that were forbidden under Diambel's rule. Gaming houses such as Hasan Alhazi (Fortune's Well) specialized in sports and gambling while venues such

as Qaws Alraghba (Desire's Rainbow) featured raucous musical performances and sensual dancing girls.

Circa 730 BC a great earthquake struck, causing the underground wells that supplied the city with water to dry up. All of the structures built high upon the cliffside collapsed, homes and businesses built at ground floor or below became unstable, and cave-ins occurred regularly. After some feeble attempts at rebuilding, the entire enterprise was deemed a hopeless cause and a mass exodus of the remaining populous followed.

Eventually, the trade routes were redirected and its location began to fade from memory. Nowadays, it is only utilized by thieves and brigands as a hideout from their enemies and an escape from the harsh desert climate. I took a detour to this locale during my time in the Amber Wastes, and can attest that it is a complete ghost town. All that remains are gaping black doorways, haphazard piles of stone debris, and the ever-present desert sands that are slowly covering over the last vestiges of this abandoned town.

(Petra - The Treasury by Arian Zwegers)



THE COLOSSUS OF ABDOK (VECHOR)

One would think that the ever shifting landscape of Vechor precludes any permanent landmarks a traveler could rely on to guide them, but there is one unique exception I simply must point out.

Along the Nostru Delta, just south of the city of Abdok, there are several small islets that appear and disappear depending on the river's current and amount of rainfall in the area. On one of these ephemeral outcroppings there is a very striking monument that greets travelers as they approach the city. Known as the Colossus of Abdok, it is a gargantuan statue of a mighty warrior.

The interesting part about this figure is that while its location stays the same its appearance changes every time one passes by it. Sometimes both feet are broken off at the ankles, while at other times it is broken off at the knees, waist, or chest. At other times it stands complete and intact but the material it is constructed of changes – sometimes it is made out of a precious ores like gold or platinum, at other times it is made out of duller metals like iron, and still other times it is made out of alloys such as bronze or brass. Sometimes it is painted in lifelike colors and sometimes it stands bleached white and lifeless.

When I first journeyed through this region it appeared as headless and composed of wood. Although I have observed this phenomena several times, I am not entirely convinced that all these seeming variations are not merely tricks of the light. I can't deny it is quite a dazzling sight to behold, but I wouldn't recommend risking your sanity to view it unless you had other business that draws you to this domain.

CORAL CASTLE (DEMENTLIEU)

I fondly remember, on one of my first wanderings about the Core, taking a detour down an overgrown side road off the Lamordian Turnpike and discovering the quaint village of Etoun and the charmingly named Coral Castle.

It's a colorful misnomer, as it is neither made of coral nor built like a castle. Actually, it is just a crude labyrinth made with limestone blocks of all shapes and sizes elaborately arranged on a jagged outcropping that overlooks the Sea of Sorrows.

Locals say an old sea captain named Jean Luc Baisson built it for a mermaid, named Shellycoat (so-called because of the shiny coat of oyster shells she wore). He claims they met out at sea and she subsequently followed him home. He used to prattle endlessly on about her many charms at the local tavern, but no townspeople ever caught a glimpse of her.

It is a difficult to reach spot, as the narrow path that leads down the cliffs has many loose rocks and slippery patches. At several junctures during my visit I almost fell headlong into the gray water 100 feet below. Indeed, this is exactly what his neighbors say happened to Baisson himself after he mysteriously disappeared one day.

Several secrets went to the grave with him - such as where he found such huge stones in the first place. Or how he managed to carry them all the way down to the plateau all by himself. No workmen or wizards were known to have aided him, and he preferred to do his building in the dead of night when no one would be watching.

Since Baisson's untimely passing puzzling phenomena have plagued the area. Locals swear that the complex is still growing, with more stones being added each year. In addition, eerie noises have been reported by people who wander these coastal cliffs at night. I myself visited this site one balmy evening and can confirm hearing what sounded like rounds and rounds of raucous sea shanties

occasionally punctuated by the loud, tinkling of a woman's laughter. Is the old sea dog still alive, or does his spirit forevermore inhabit the strange structure he devoted his life to?

THE DARKLIGHT CAVERNS (LAMORDIA)

Outside of Neufurchtenburg, roughly two thirds up the eastern side of the Sleeping Beast mountain range, lies an abandoned mine with an ominous legend attached to it. One of several digs worked by Darkonian dwarves, it was a profitable source of precious metals such as gold, silver and platinum for over 100 years.

Several decades ago, miners accidentally broke through a tunnel wall and found themselves in a secret chamber with glowing, floating orbs that bounced around lazily. The dwarves dubbed them the Darklights. At first, this remarkable discovery was considered harmless and remained contained to that single alcove. Within weeks, however, the spheres spread to all the adjoining tunnels and became a nuisance to the workers.

The mine foreman decided to "dig deeper" and try to find the source of this bothersome activity. He assembled a team of fellow dwarves and after exploring the original chamber found a low, cramped path at the far end of it. The group immediately set off to follow it. One week later only the foreman emerged from the shaft and he was as a babbling wreck.

He eventually recovered enough of his senses to tell a chilling story. He said the party traveled ever downward for two days, through narrower and narrower tunnels. The Darklights became more numerous the deeper they went and they seemed to intentionally tag along with the expedition as if they had an intelligence of their own.

The further they went, the more disturbing their findings were. There were slick patches of weirdly colored fungal growths, see-thru rock columns, and giant stone gates with odd sigils carved on them that

filled the party with dread. Nevertheless, they continued on, and it was only after they passed the seventh and final such gate that the Darklights stopped following them.

The group found themselves in a vast underground cavern lit bright as day due to the walls and ceiling being covered in bright crystals of all shapes and sizes. A castle, also made of crystal, stood in the center of this grotto and the dwarves approached it cautiously. Entering this edifice was easy enough, and inside they found immense hordes of rare gems heaped everywhere. Then, the terror struck; this palace had an invisible guardian which snatched members of the party one by one as they were exploring the rooms.

The survivors of the initial attack huddled together in the throne room to plan their escape. A human figure, enrobed in royal finery, sat motionless on a grand throne. He appeared lifeless but well preserved. His flesh was described as being see-through and hard as stone, as if crystallized. The foreman ranted incessantly about the ruler's face, warning others to avoid looking at the visage too long lest they too become petrified. Eventually, the bedraggled party made a desperate attempt to escape the castle, but as stated before, it was only the mine foreman who made it out alive.

Nowadays, the mine is shunned by locals, and all the tunnels attached to it have been caved in. Fortune seekers, however, still appear periodically and attempt to re-discover the fabled lost land of this "Crystal King" and the treasure he protects.

THE DEVIL'S FOOTPATH (LIFFE)

On a lonely stretch of beach about a half mile wide, on the southernmost tip of this island, is home to several groupings of hexagonal columns that jut straight up from the sea and that are so tightly packed together they form large, uneven plateaus. If examined from a distance they appear much like a man-made paved road, hence it being named the

Devil's Footpath. Locals claim it was created by a mad wizard long ago, but scholars say it is a natural effect of the basalt stone it is comprised of. At low tide, even more such platforms are revealed, and some claim these steps form an unbroken road on the bottom of the sea floor that stretches all the way to some unknown destination.

It is held in great awe by most of the local population. They swear that evil spirits dwell within these very stones, and are angered when humans disturb them. I visited this windswept beach and met an old hermit that made his home nearby who told me several interesting tales.

There have been several reports, backed up by local law enforcement, of drunken parties being held on this site, and some revelers relate unearthly experiences. Victims say that after a long night of revelry, they feel a sudden rush of air that lifts them up into the sky and spins them around and around. Then they gently float down to the ground with nothing more than a spell of dizziness and a few bruises to mark such an extraordinary ride.

Some people, however, claim those targeted by these spirits are whisked away to farther off destinations, such as the bay town of Armeikos or Moondale on the island's northern shore. Still others report being transported as far away as Nevuchar Springs in Darkon, Egertus in Nova Vaasa and Graben Town on Graben Island. Obviously, I believe these to be the ramblings of hopeless drunks!

(Bushmills NIR - Giant's Causeway 14 by Daneil Mennerich)



THE DIVINING ROD OF EZRA (DARKON)

Just past the city of Tempe Falls, between Lake Temporus and Mt. Nirka, lies a small sanctuary that holds the Divining Rod of Ezra, a little known holy relic of the Church of Ezra. A divining rod is a forked branch usually taken from an oak tree that has its single end filed down to a sharp point and is used to locate things that have been lost or hidden. It can find anything from buried treasure, underground wells, or any other prize that its holder wishes. In the Mountains of Misery region, miners traditionally use them to locate rich veins of ore. This item looks similar to others of its kind, only slightly smaller and black with age. Supposedly, it was blessed by Ezra herself during her earthly journeys amongst the realms.

Besides the rough terrain one must cross to reach it, the sanctuary is relatively easy to approach. The rod is stored in a stone cask placed underneath the altar at the back of the chapel. The anchorites bring it forth only once a year during a local spring festival. Those who wish to have good luck in the coming year's endeavors wait in line to be blessed. The ceremony involves the petitioner kneeling in front of the priests, bowing their head, and being tapped once on the right shoulder, once on the left, then twice on the right again.

Local miners put great store in its luck bestowing properties. Legend has it that it was used to locate the Striganota Vein, the richest deposit of gold ever tapped, and the mother lode that helped put Tempe Falls on the map in the first place.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: This item can actually break one of the cardinal rules of Ravenloft – it can tell the user whether the person they are concentrating on is either of Good or Evil alignment (spinning in a clockwise manner and pointing up for good and spinning in a counter-clockwise manner and down for evil).

Alternately, if that is too powerful of an attribute, it can be treated as an enhanced version of a True Seeing spell, allow the user to see through illusions and enchantments of any kind. It is only usable once every five days after a ritual of fasting and prayer. Only a couple of the leading anchorites and the current Bastion know of this ability.

THE DOLL CEMETERY (KARTAKASS)

About halfway between Harmonia and Skald, along the Road to Harmony, stands a well-known but melancholy waystation called the Doll Cemetery. It is an makeshift memorial created by grieving parents of children killed by wolves and other predators in the area.

At the center of this enclosure towers an ancient, imposing sycamore tree known as Ol' Boney, so-called because it continues growing but never sprouts leaves. Traditionally, pieces of its bark are peeled off and used as notes for scrawled remembrances of loved ones. Its appearance lends a mournful air to the surroundings and I assume this graveyard sprang up spontaneously at this location because it was a customary spot for the community to come together.

The bereaved scatter clothing, baubles, and other memento mori of their lost children haphazardly about the bushes and trees in the area. Memorials of wreaths and flowers and candles are also set atop large rocks or on the ground within small clearings. The most eerie part of this entire experience, however, is the dozens of dolls that hang from the surrounding branches. Some are headless, while others have arms and legs broken off. I found the stares of their empty eye sockets incredibly disconcerting.

It is not easy place to find, as it is never spoken of to foreigners. I only learned of its existence while visiting some local friends who recently lost their youngest daughter. It lies off an unremarkable pheasant path that slants away from the main road. I

have only visited it twice in my travels (the last time being four years ago) and I am sad to report that the number of shrines continue to grow.



(I See Dead Dolls by Esparta)

THE DROWNED TOWN (RICHEMULOT)

In the Gasping Lake region of the Silent Fields, just over the border with Dementlieu, lies a lake whose history belies its placid appearance.

A few years ago this area suffered from an extreme drought, known colloquially as the Thirsty Season, for several years in a row. In order to survive, towns had to resort to rationing water amongst its citizens to preserve this valuable resource. No one was allowed to use the well at the town square without permission from the town council, and then only in the minutest amounts. Citizens chafed at these restrictions, but complied due to the understanding that something drastic had to be done or else everyone would die.

There was one woman, however, who violated these rules and visited the well nightly to steal water in order to better care for her newborn at home. She was eventually caught, and put in a pillory in front of the local church as punishment. After a day of abuse

she was released but when she returned home she found that her baby had died. She immediately flew back to the town square and in her anger threw out a curse - "The devil take your town and may it never know thirst again just like my little one!" As she spat out the last word a great geyser shot out from the town well.

At first the townspeople were filled with wonder and believed they were saved. But as the well continued to overflow they became more alarmed. Within hours, it filled up the town square and flooded nearby building and streets. Villager quickly fled to their homes, grabbed their belongings and ran away as fast as they could. The water continued rising until the entire town was submerged and a brand new lake was now in its place.

On uncommonly clear days careful observers can see the buildings of this town resting on the bottom of the lake. Some even report hearing phantom church bells ringing in the area. People who have braved the chilled waters say they have found household goods that are strangely preserved, but that dry up and turn into dust if they are brought to the surface. To this day, no one dares to settle in this area despite its serene beauty.

THE DUMP (FALKOVNIA)

Just outside the city limits of Morfenzi, along the Old Timori Road, lies a putrescent eyesore used by the people of that city to store their refuse. What's so interesting about a trash heap, you ask? Well, two unique geological features make this particular spot stand out.

First, there is the infamous Bottomless Chute, which lies roughly at the center of the complex. It was this natural sinkhole that people originally put to use to discard their castoffs. Amazingly, dumping has been going on for generations now and still the garbage does not reach the brim. Throughout the years, people began tossing things hither and thither and enormous junk piles have risen up and cut off the

original disposal site. The so-called Rag Men, custodians of The Dump, are the only ones who know the secret byways to reach its edge. They tend to the ever-growing piles and deposit wagon loads of the surrounding refuse into the pit daily. Nowadays, only those who are highly motivated to ensure what is lost *remains* lost venture this deep.

The reason for that is The Dump's second unique feature - the blasted stretch of earth known as the Brimstone Fields. It was inadvertently created by the Rag Men several years ago. In an effort to make more room for the ever increasing amounts of junk that the citizens produced the Rag Men decided to start burning piles of the stuff and then carting off the ashes to be thrown into the Bottomless Chute. This scheme worked perfectly fine for a while, until one day when the ashes continued to smolder despite all their efforts to quench them!

It seems they accidentally uncovered a large natural deposit of sulfur that laid just below the surface. The deposits ignited from the heat above and in turn belched forth a noxious yellow smoke that soon caused visitors to choke and wretch. The Rag Men race to smother these gaseous eruptions whenever they occur, but more appear every day.

While one is able to walk within these vapors for short periods of time, prolonged exposure causes violent coughing, retching and even death. Covering your nose and mouth with a cloth is highly recommended. Periodically, this deadly smog even drifts across the Old Timori Road and reduces the visibility of travelers to a few feet ahead of them.

THE ELEPHANT GRAVEYARD (THE WILDLANDS)

The uninhabited, lonely vistas of the Wildlands are an unlikely place to find anything of interest to the average traveler. I have heard tales from several adventurers, however, of a rather unique site that couldn't help but pique my interest.

In a lonely, out of the way corner on the grassy steppes, just before they meet the torpid swamplands, there is a series of canyons tucked away where the elephants of this land are said to go when they know it is their time to die. This so-called Elephant Graveyard can be easily recognized by the countless heaps of bones that carpet the ground.

How did such a place come to be? Jungle guides say that when an elephant becomes too weak or sick it will break away from its herd and instinctively make the long, solitary journey to its final resting place where it can die in peace away from any predators. When I visited this melancholy arena myself, I admit it was unnaturally still and silent. There was no trace of the usual scavengers, such as vultures or hyenas, one would expect to find prowling around such an abattoir.

Sri Rajians, who sporadically venture into this untamed land to capture prize specimens, have several anecdotes regarding this uncanny patch of ground – each less likely than the last. They say that once a year the souls of these long-dead creatures are drawn back to their earthly remains and wander freely about the area.

Others believe it is home to a group of powerful animal spirits that can grant boons to supplicants, a sort of “Oracle of Bones”, if you will. It is a common belief in the region that elephants never forget anything they see or hear and can thus pass on hidden or lost knowledge. If a petitioner brings the pelt of one of their natural enemies (such as a lion or crocodile), this collective will answer any question put to them.

The more prosaic minded dismiss these stories as superstitious folderol. They are more interested in obtaining the ivory from the tusks, which is a rare and much sought after commodity in the Core. But, any explorer who risks this journey must be wary. Even if one were able to survive the usual hazards of this land, it is said that ivory from this valley is cursed and will bring death to any would-be thief. If that were not enough of a prohibition, anyone who has

ever visited the site never seems able to recollect its exact location afterwards. Indeed, every map I have examined differs from one another.

After many fruitless days spent crisscrossing the savanna, I finally came upon this elusive boneyard. It is indeed an awe-inspiring sight, but not half as horrible as the Sri Rajians would have you believe. While I encountered nothing out of the ordinary, I did have a somewhat restless slumber. It may just have been a result of the exhausting trek or a mild form of heatstroke, but all throughout the night murmuring chants ran echoed in my head. They repeated over and over again, and I could almost make out words, except they didn't make any sense to me - "Surus... Kandula... Maha Pambata... Lallah Rookh..." Was it just my imagination? Auditory hallucinations? Perhaps the natives' tall tales had gotten under my skin more than I would like to admit.



(Elephant Graveyard by bobosh_T)

THE EMERALD MIRROR (HAZLAN)

On the far eastern side of this domain, where the Broken Forest and the Skraplan Foothills meet, there is a mountain pool with supposedly miraculous healing powers known as the Emerald Mirror. It is one of several purported "Fountains of Youth" that can be found scattered amongst the Core, and interestingly enough, its exact location is contested by the denizens of surrounding domains. Barovians say it can be found in the Bloodfang Hills, while Kartakans say it lies within the Arkalis Hills. The most reputable sources place it in the shadow of Mt. Soren in Hazlan, however, and that is why I have chosen to include it here.

Reports describe a lush valley with a large pond that has a shiny green film over its entire surface. Visitors say the entire area has a bewitching quality that lulls their senses and leads to a kind of peaceful lethargy, and they often tarried within this idyllic glen for days. They also state that the forest animals that reside there are oddly docile and are unafraid of approaching people and creatures that they would normally flee from.

Those that eventually loose themselves from this unearthly paradise relate an encounter with a mysterious figure, whose true nature is difficult to ascertain. Some travelers say they meet a beauteous water nymph who lives in the pool and appears to a chosen few. She supposedly speaks in a sweet, lilting voice and bestows supernatural favors on those she takes a liking to. Others say this figure is actually the specter of a woman who drowned in the waters and is constantly searching for a compatible mate to live (or die) with her beneath the waves.

What her true purpose is no one can say. Some seekers do return from their journey with their injuries healed and their health restored. Others appear unchanged. Perhaps this woman is just a vision induced by the natural gases that this water sits atop and from where it also gets its healing properties (much like the famed Nevuchar Springs in

Darkon). Curiously, the water carried away from this site does not seem to have any special qualities.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: The two competing visions of an enticing female are mere illusions. The actual inhabitant of this remote region is a hag called Malenda. She herself spreads the rumors of a Fountain of Youth in order to lure travelers to her lair so she can feast on them. She uses spells to heal some travelers in order to keep miraculous tales circulating in the surrounding domains. She appears as a lovely young lady to further confuse any investigators or possible monster hunters who try to learn the truth.

ESMERALDA'S BOWER (SOURAGNE)

The sweltering land of Souragne is home to a disproportionate amount of local legends, most of which are related to the enormous swamp, La Maison D'Samblet, which dominates the land. Tales of unhappy ancestral ghosts, water-logged zombies seeking revenge on the living, and capricious nature spirits are almost as numerous as the mosquitoes that infest this realm.

On its surface, Esmeralda's Bower is an innocuous landmark that lies about three miles outside of Port d'Elhour. It is a mammoth, petrified weeping willow with a wide canopy of leaves that neatly ensconces the area around its trunk in perpetual darkness. It is very claustrophobic enclosure and the sweet scent of decay permeates the air. Young lovers often tryst there after dark because of its isolation and tragic history.

Its origin is a typical piece of romantic drivel, relating the tale of two young lovers forbidden to marry because of a petty family rivalry. They pledge to meet under the tree and run away together, but their plan is found out. The would-be bridegroom is killed before he can reach his love, and when the would-be bride discovers his fate, she dies on the spot of a broken heart. Her spirit is said to have

becomes one with the tree, turning it to stone to stand as an eternal monument to their love.

There is also a darker side to this lonesome spot. A Voodun priest I spoke with says this tree actually lies at a nexus of supernatural power and that if you know the correct rites you can perform extraordinary spells there. It is rarely attempted, however, because the energy here is so great that it can also cause incantations to spectacularly backfire on the caster.

Indeed, there is a tale that says one shaman carried out a gruesome ritual there not so long ago in order to speak with his long-lost paramour. Somehow her spirit melded with the tree and attempted to hold him in a lover's embrace; his dead body was found the next day hanging from its branches. Let that be a stark lesson to those who deal with such unnatural forces!



(Weeping Willow Tree by Nikoretro)

THE GARDEN OF AYESHA (PHARAZIA)

In the westernmost region of this dry, desert domain an amazing sight rises out of the dunes. Nomads call it the Garden of Ayesha, a tomb built for the first wife of a former Sheikh who ruled the land long before the reign of Diambel. Supposedly, the sarcophagus that holds her embalmed body still rests within a small chamber that lies at the very heart of this mausoleum.

While its existence is commonly known, few travelers venture there as it does not lie near any caravan routes or oases. I visited this site briefly, and it is a surreal experience to walk among the verdant fronds in the middle of a desert. This remarkable feat of engineering is composed of five broad circular platforms made from golden sandstone, each tier is smaller than the one it rests on. Each level has a small aisle that runs down the middle of two wide troughs (one around the outer edge of the landing and another around the inner core) that hold a variety of exotic trees, shrubs, and vines.

An ancient, wizened old man accosted me while I was inspecting the grounds. He claims to be the caretaker, but I find it hard to believe that such a frail figure maintains such a large complex all by himself. This lonely fellow was more than willing to chat and eager to learn of news from the outside world, but he became more taciturn whenever asked questions about the structure itself. He did reveal, however, that the building sits atop a deep well that has never run dry in all his time there.

A determined visitor can find many rare and wondrous plants here. A sample of some native species includes:

1) The Desert Rose – These flowers bloom year round and come in several vibrant shades of red. It is used to create a mild poison when crushed and distilled.

2) Acacia Trees – This tree that grows quite tall and is covered with dull red leaves. Its sap is used by local tribesman to make gum.

3) Jasmine – This plant is notable for its fragrant flowers with striking white petals and is used in the making of exquisite and highly sought-after perfumes.

4) Date Palms – This is a hardy bush that only grows a few feet high, but bears abundant fruit in large clusters close to the ground. Its fruit is a staple in Pharazian cuisine and is used in the making of local desserts such as maamoul cookies.

People come from all over the domain (and beyond) to obtain specialized ingredients. Locals utilize the leaves and flowers found there to craft a variety of items which are then sold at the Grand Bazaar in Phiraz. Some shopkeepers even hire special couriers for this task if they are unable or unwilling to make the journey themselves.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: Any botanical component needed for potions (whether harmful or beneficial) can be found in this garden. Interested parties can either try to schmooze the caretaker (with juicy gossip or a gift of a new plant) or grease his palm with a suitable amount of gold. Otherwise, they are likely to spend several days searching for what they need on their own. The caretaker then uses the information or money he has obtained to pay off Diambel. Normally, the domain lord would destroy such a thing of unbowed beauty but even he has found its contents useful from time to time.

GUTTENHEIM'S FOLLY (BORCA)

If one travels northward along the Lech Road that leads to Falkovnia, you will pass a strangely out of place monument known as Guttenheim's Folly. It is a tall superbly crafted limestone column, roughly nine feet tall and three feet in diameter, with elaborate engravings all along its rounded surface. It is easily missed amongst the foliage of the area and it is

virtually hidden during the spring and summer months. If one were to make a closer inspection, however, they would be amazed by what they uncover.

Each of the four sides of the column has four square panels that run from bottom to top. Each side relates a different, but similar, story. Starting from the lowest tile, an observer will find a figure dressed in the trappings of either a priest, a soldier, a politician, or doctor. All are standing at a literal crossroads, with three divergent paths that stretch off to the horizon. The second tile shows their respective figure's rise in their chosen profession (the soldier fighting an enemy, the priest tending to the sick, etc.). The third tile shows the figure enjoying the fruits of his chosen profession (the soldier commanding an army over a great battlefield, the priest giving a sermon in a large church, etc.). The fourth and final panel shows the figure on their deathbed, in a pious and peaceful pose surrounded by various family, friends, and admirers.

Altogether it's a rather remarkable storytelling technique. If one studies the images, however, they will find certain elements that don't seem to fit, aspects whose meaning seem downright disturbing. For instance, there is a faint indication of a devilish figure hiding behind the protagonist in the first panels of each sequence, as if to suggest that they are making a literal deal with the devil in exchange for their success. The infernal motif is repeated in each succeeding panel, with background figures sporting horns on their head or cloven hooves on their feet. The pattern becomes more apparent in the final panels, as flames and tiny bat-winged demons repeatedly appear, as if foretelling the protagonist's descent into hell after they expire.

As if that was not uncanny enough, legend says that if you look closely at the background in each picture, a far different tale unfolds – that of the artist's murder. Lazlo Guttenheim was a renown sculptor of his day, and his work was highly fashionable for a time. At the height of his fame, a wealthy stapan (his name is curiously unrecorded) commissioned the

artist to create this column which was to be displayed in his courtyard. It was meant to be a paean to his family's recent rise in the ranks of nobility. At the same time that Guttenheim began the work, however, he also started a secret affair with his patron's wife!

This situation went on for months while the artist slowly toiled away at his work. In the final days, Guttenheim must have had a premonition of his own murder at the hands of the jealous husband. He decided to carve a record of the events leading up to his death in the hopes of condemning his killer. On the very night his masterpiece was unveiled, the foul deed was done, just as it had played out in Guttenheim's prophetic dream.

After his death, the column gained a sinister reputation as several freak accidents occurred in the household. These incidents went on for several years, and the stapan eventually went bankrupt and had to sell the estate off. (Such is the fate of many noble houses in Borca.) When the new owner took over he had it unceremoniously removed from the premises, which explains its current placement.

HAWKWEED FIELDS (RICHEMULOT)

The convivial countryside of this domain is not where one would expect to find a landmark of a martial nature, but this is just what you'll see a little ways north of Pont-A-Musea. Cracked armor, broken swords, and other assorted equipment can be found in the fields along the Road of Whispers.

This was the site of a fierce, three-day battle, called the Crimson Mile, between Richemulotese and Falkovnian forces during the Borderlands War of 716 BC. The invaders were eventually repulsed after several bloody skirmishes. It was Vlad's first, and only, attempt at conquering the country that suddenly appeared to his south. Each spring, as if in commemoration of the event, brilliant white flowers with rusted, red flecks on their petals bloom profusely. Dubbed Hawkweed by the locals, it is

claimed that they are only able to grow from the decomposed bodies of vanquished enemies.

THE HIVE OF THE WHIPPERWELTS (SITHICUS)

The Hive of the Whipperwelts is a terrifying sight when one comes upon it unexpectedly in the Misttop Hills region outside of Har-Thelen. It is a giant nest made out of leaves, mud, sticks, feathers, and anything else that can be scavenged from the forest.

Legends say a swarm of these unique creatures appears whenever someone is on their deathbed, and pilfer the deceased's personal belongings to line their nest. As a consequence of their magpie-like behavior, a collection of odd items can usually be found hanging from the branches or laying on the ground beneath their hive. A word of warning to lazy thieves, however – when I visited this site I was attacked en masse and came away with nasty red splotches and scratchy skin wherever I was stung.

The thing that makes these creatures even more mysterious is that no one has been able to tell me exactly what a Whipperwelt is! Some say they are small birds that possess preternatural speed, while others say they are large insects with sharp, long stingers (similar to wasps). Mayhap they are a combination of both; they moved much too fast for a close examination.

Interestingly enough, I have heard of several different hive locations. The Kender of the Fumewood in the northeast report finding a nest. As do the Wild Elves in the Iron Hills in central Sithicus. Perhaps they are spreading?



(Underside of a Sociable Weaver Nest by Mr. Nightshade)

LONELY LIZZY (MORDENT)

Along a forlorn stretch of the South Road, just before it enters Valachan, a creepy local legend has been circulating for decades. If you pass through any village in this area, superstitious locals will warn you to not pick up any hitchhikers. They say an apparition of a young girl, dressed in an out-of-date evening gown, appears on stormy nights and implores anyone who passes by to aid her in getting home.

As the story goes, if assistance is offered to this winsome maiden she will graciously enter the coach and sit wherever indicated. She always gives the next village along the way as her destination. She is quite a lively chatterer, explaining that she was abandoned by an angry suitor at a nearby ball and was forced to find her own way home. After riding for an hour or so, she intimates that her house is very close and requests to slow down the carriage so she can find the entrance to the driveway in the rain. When the vehicle slows just enough, she suddenly leaps off, and quickly disappears around a thick bend of trees!

An abandoned farmhouse with a small family cemetery behind it can be found nearby. If the graveyard is explored a faded, tattered dressing gown is found draped over one of the tombstones whose occupant's name has been obscured by age. If this peculiar encounter is mentioned at the local tavern, residents will relate the story of Lonely Lizzy - a girl who was killed several years ago in a hit-and-run accident after leaving a dance early after she saw her beau dancing with another girl.

THE OBLONG TABLE (BAROVIA)

Hidden deep within the eastern foothills of the Dreadmount, about halfway between Krezk and Vallaki, one will find a macabre relic of a bygone era. It lies on a small hillock with an unnaturally smooth and level summit that rises far above the surrounding treetops. If there ever was a path that lead to its apex time has erased any imprint off the face of its slope. I had to traipse over an unending string of thorny thickets to reach the top.

On this plateau rests a large stone platform known as the Oblong Table. It is rectangular in shape, as wide as a man and twice as long. It is wedged into the soil at a significant angle, neither parallel to the ground nor standing straight up and down. Narrow channels run around its edge and are stained a dark brown by some liquid that sluiced through it ages ago. The very air surrounding this grim tableau made me uneasy, intimating that I stood on cursed ground.

Nearby villagers believe it is an old Terg altar to their netherworld gods and was used for human sacrifices. They crafted this entire tableau sometime between their invasion of Barovia in 320 BC and their expulsion by the army of Strahd von Zarovich in 347 BC. There is no telling how many prisoners of war met their end on its surface.

Locals swear that it is being used to this very day by a cult of devil worshipers who seek to continue its bloody history of human sacrifice. They cite as proof the great boomings with no apparent source that are

heard for miles around called the "Drums of the Dead". The sporadic fires spied by locals on certain days of the year are also hard to explain away. Reports of this phenomena are clustered around the spring equinox and summer solstice, suggesting a ritualistic origin for their appearance. I've heard of no one who is brave enough to venture into the foothills at night to discover the truth, however.

THE OLD MAN OF THE SEA (SEA OF SORROWS)

The Sea of Sorrows holds many secrets that people are now just beginning to understand, with each new discovery leading to more questions. The following phenomena is one such case.

The Old Man of the Sea is commonly described as a stone outcropping shaped like the face of a bearded, wrinkled sea captain. The image is most widely seen in a profile only, with a prominent forehead, a pointed nose and a frowning mouth. Some sailors, however, have reported spying a visage more akin to a skull with empty eye sockets and a gaping, toothless maw. I attribute these instances to a trick of the sea fog.

Its exact location is maddeningly hard to pin down, but it is most widely reported to manifest on the sheer cliffs that surround the island domain of Markovia. Scattered reports have located it on the southern bluffs of Blaustein, on the stone tower of the Asylum for the Mentally Disturbed in Dominia, and even on the gentle, rolling hills of Ghastria!

Its origin is impossible to discern, but several sailor's legends attempt to explain its purpose. Some say it the a spirit of a skipper whose ship sunk after hitting a shallow reef and who now appears to warn other ships from a similar fate. Others say it is a magical totem that guards the hiding place of a fabulous treasure.

There are two conflicting omens universally associated with its appearance, however. Sailors believe the first person who spies its face is ensured good luck for the rest of the voyage. Secondly, it is believed that any ship that sights it is also destined to lose one of its crew before returning to port. Oftentimes, crew members argue over who spotted it first, and very nearly all of these arguments lead to violent brawls. When these fisticuffs turn lethal for the loser, the winner is naturally crowned as the true "Favored One". How much of this is due to a supernatural agency and how much is self-fulfilling prophecy I leave for others to say.



(Old Man of the Mountains by Boston Public Library)

THE RADIANT BOY (VERBREK)

While presently the forests seem to be winning out against civilization in this land, there once was a time when people were more populous than they are now. Evidence of this can easily be found in the Vale of Memory region where ruins of old and forgotten villages lie. While no buildings are completely intact, there are several crumbling brick chimneys and shallow stone cellars to be spied amongst the grass and underbrush.

The apparition known as the Radiant Boy has not been extensively recorded, but the details of its manifestation are remarkable. He appears as a giant humanoid figure, naked except for a dull orange glow that surrounds him from head to toe. He seems to dance and stumble about for a time with no obvious purpose and twist all about as if being attacked. He gradually decreases in stature during this performance and is eventually reduced to the size of an adolescent boy.

Eventually he gets up and dashes down into an old grating that must have been used as a fireplace at one time. After a few moments of darkness, a blinding flash of light illuminates the night and the apparition returns no more. This show is repeated several nights in a row, but no clear cause has been found to trigger its appearance. Due to this alarming activity, wolves are said to avoid this area at night.

I do not encourage anyone to roam the untamed forests of Verbrek without good cause. And, I must admit, even I am not brave enough to test the veracity of this story. If anyone else but the stoic trappers and hunters of Verbrek had told such a tale, I would not believe it. Their only explanation for its mysterious actions is that the spirit is retracing its last moments, when its homestead was attacked by wolves many years ago.

RHYMER'S GLEN (KEENING)

The lonely, haunted domain of Keening is not often visited by casual travelers, and even most seasoned sojourners avoid it. There is one site I learned of, however, that I would be remiss if I omitted.

It is known as Rhymer's Glen; whether named after the entity that lives there or for the first person that found it, I do not know. Located somewhere in the forest that surrounds the City of the Dead, it is said to be a large oval clearing hemmed by gnarled yew trees that provide a deep shade. I'm told is a rather idyllic place compared to the rest of the landscape that surrounds it. During the daytime, that is.

If you happen upon it at night, or stay past sunset, an altogether different story is told. The knots on the tree trunks take on the appearance human faces twisted in torment and the leaves shine with an unearthly, silver glow. When the moon hangs high in the sky, a phantom champion dressed in archaic armor is said to appear and challenge any trespassers to a duel. The exact nature of this duel is unclear - some report it is a contest of riddles, while other says it is a test of might. If the visitor wins the match, I am told that they are granted a boon by the knight. If they lose, they forfeit their life. Clearly, only the most desperate souls would search out such a place and abide by such a deal.

I, myself, was not successful in snuffing this place out, but I have heard a multitude of tales that attest to its existence. Interestingly, each story features a different adversary depending on where it is told – the Tepestani believe the villain to be one of the Fey, the Vaasi say it is a stray plains cat altered by dark magic, and Darkonians say it is a cursed elf.

THE SALT PAN (SARAGOSS)

Few are the men that can say they have visited this "land", and fewer still are those who can say they

have escaped from it. While this site may be nothing more than another mariners' tale, something in the repeated, haunting descriptions told by unlearned men from disparate lands makes me believe there is a ring of truth to it.

Those I have interviewed explain that every so often a blanket of fog follows after one of those great wracking gales that the domain is famous for. A thick, cloudy vapor rolls steadily in from the northwest corner, and eventually covers the entire domain. If one is brave, or foolhardy, enough to enter this preternatural fog they will find themselves in an eerie twilight region. This Salt Pan, for this is what everything in this place is made from, is rumored to hide an exit from this dread realm.

The salt forms crystalline structures that rise out of the water and form grotesque shapes. Everything seems disturbingly out joint and to have taken on weird proportions. Pustule-ridden mushrooms that belch noxious fumes, flowers with intricate, geometrically-shaped petals and razored edges, and even blank, staring eye sockets that seem to weep with a black, sticky tar have been reported. The rough outcroppings cast sinister shadows across the plain, and it is eerily quiet. I'm told the only thing one can hear is your boots crunching on the rime and the air has a tang that stings the nose. Sometimes the more unstable landforms break off and crash through the thin sheet of salt, causing cracks and sinkholes to appear.

Inhabitants of this domain like to relate one story in particular to frighten newcomers. They say a long time ago one particularly headstrong castaway attempted to gain his freedom through this perilous egress. He fought through one hardship after another and despite all odds finally found the fabled portal. Just before he stepped through the gateway, however, he cast a final backward glance at the place he was leaving behind and was instantly turned into a pillar of salt!



(Dead Sea by Indyblue)

THE SCREAMING SKULL OF ABERNATHY HALL (MORDENT)

Just outside the town of Blackburn's Crossing, in the Vale of Twilight region, is a grim reminder of how the spirits of the long dead can still influence the present. The unique legend of the Screaming Skull of Abernathy Hall begins nearly a hundred years ago.

Matthew Abernathy appeared in Mordent around 656 BC, claiming to be a distant cousin of the Mournesworth family. He set himself up as a merchant and was eventually accepted by the reticent townsfolk. He acquired a modest fortune and a lovely young bride. In honor of his upcoming nuptials, he decided to build a grand mansion in the style of his ancestors. Unfortunately, he didn't live long enough to see the project finished. He died from a mysterious illness shortly after returning from their honeymoon.

This is where the story gets interesting. His will made the curious stipulation that his bleached skull should be displayed on the central mantelpiece of his new home. (This is a very old tradition in the region and one whose origin is unknown.) The new widow, however, could not countenance such a gruesome reminder of her loss and refused. Instead, she put it in a locked cupboard in the cellar. Several weeks later, banging and wails began to issue from the basement. After several investigations by friends and

family, the cause of the disturbances was clear. She eventually conceded to her late husband's wishes in order to keep the peace. It became quite a local sensation, and it is no wonder that people still tell the tale today.

The whereabouts of the skull is now unknown. People say the widow had it sealed in the family crypt where she herself was interred after passing away. And, of course, locals say if anyone trespasses on the property they are accosted by hideous shrieking sounds until they are driven off the grounds. I'm inclined to believe these instances are the result of practical jokers, as youths frequently dare each other to spend the night in the decrepit mansion to prove their bravery.

THE SHRINE OF THE SERPENTS (SRI RAJI)

In most cultures the serpent bears overwhelmingly sinister connotations. In the jungle-covered domain of Sri Raji, however, they are venerated. The Shrine of the Serpents is a modest temple complex dedicated to Manasa, the Rajian goddess of snakes. It is home to the Rainbow Arch, which is purported to be the site of her first earthly manifestation. A dedicated priesthood maintain this sacred site alongside hundreds of snakes.

It is located along the Moksha Sadak (Enlightenment Road) a few hours north of the junction of the Jangal Sadak (Jungle Road) that leads to the village of Pakat and the Pragya Sadak (Wisdom Road) that leads to the town of Tvashtri.

Once a year, the great Naga (the Rajian word for snake) Festival is held. There is no fixed date for this celebration as its timing is decided through complex religious calculations I don't pretend to understand. It always coincides, however, with the end of the months long monsoon season.

On the appointed day, inhabitants from each village carry a specially crafted clay effigy of the goddess upon a large, colorfully decorated bier and lead a procession that terminates at the temple courtyard.

Manasa is most commonly depicted as a lithe, graceful lady with her arms and legs adorned with snakes as bangles or necklaces. She is sometimes shown to be standing under a hooded canopy comprised of several cobras.

Supplicants bring their ailing relatives to be healed, especially if they suffered a snakebite. Additionally, a native kills a serpent on accident (that is, one of those believed to be under the goddess' protection) they will bring an offering to the shrine to placate the deity.

There are scores of different species of snakes living in the Sri Rajian jungle, but there are only a handful that most travelers will ever come across, traditionally known as the Big Four:

1) The Milk Stripe – Named for the long white stripe that runs down its back, this brown, non-venomous snake lurks around farms and the outskirts of villages. It subsists on a diet of insects and small rodents. Most people tolerate its presence because it keeps vermin out of their food stores and homes.

2) The Jeweled Cobra – Named for the unique string of diamond-shaped markings found on its hood. It has a very startling appearance, but is non-venomous. It makes its home in the jungle, but is most often seen in street shows put on by fakirs who claim a mystical connection to this serpent and control its actions with recorder music. The most famous of these purported snake charmers is a hermit known as Pungi, who can be found performing in Tvashtri.

3) The Hanging Viper – This jade-colored snake is venomous and can grow very large (up to 20 feet by some reports). It is a tree snake, hence its name, and drops down from above to surprise its prey. It eats almost anything it can encoil, such as frogs, lizards and monkeys. I'm told it is capable of killing and devouring a human being, but encounters with it are rare.

4) The Black Darter AKA The Night Whisperer – this snake is covered in shiny black scales except for two

bright red spots where its “ears” are. It makes a distinct but faint swishing noise as it travels and is considered the deadliest of all snakes in this domain. Its fast-acting venom can incapacitate a full grown tiger. It roams wherever it can find prey and has been known to attack children and pets.

Within the temple walls, however, all of these different species live in a peaceful co-existence. All the snakes that live under the temple roof are incredibly docile, even the venomous ones. Every once in a while an albino snake appears, and it is considered an avatar of Manasa and treated with the utmost care and respect. If one finds such a specimen in the wild it is considered a blessing and seen as a sign of great favor from the goddess.

SINNER STONES (NIDALA)

While no official holy sites besides village churches dedicated to the worship of Belenus are allowed to exist in this land, there are a still some spots that provide a link to a more pagan past that this land's ruler cannot completely erase.

Meadows with irregularly placed, giant-sized stones dot the landscape of the eastern portion of this domain. These megalithic collections are made of irregular shaped boulders filled with quartz and silica known locally as sarsenstone. I'm told that in the past they served as meeting places for communities to come together for seasonal rites and local festivals that featured dancing, feasting, and other merrymaking.

Some sites, such as Stange Acre and Scorn Hill are arranged in concentric circles. Others such as the Cripple Rocks and Witherstane Ridge are laid out in long rows. Some sites, such as the Merry Maidens, The Drunk Dancers, and the Skurling Devils follow no pattern at all.

Elena has re-purposed these places, however, to serve as an object lesson in disobedience. Each one has a legendary origin attached to it, but all follow the same transgressive pattern. The Drunk Dancers,

for instance, are purported to be a group of revelers who had one too many to drinks after the taverns closed and broke the prohibition against dancing on a holy day. The Skurling Devils are supposedly the remains of miscreants that played the outlawed game of Skittles all through the night and were turned to stone just as the sun rose.

Presently, they are universally regarded as places of ill omen and locals avoid them. Certain outcroppings are said to draw more than their share of lightning during thunderstorms. Others are said to regularly rearrange themselves during the night - such as the infamous Goad Stones of Bogie Downs that are never found in the same place twice. Some locals even believe these stones are multiplying and will eventually stretch their way all across the land.

The most infamous site is Oddar's Tarn, located just outside the tiny hamlet of Oneire in the southeast. It appears to be a large rock cellar set in a moss-covered hillside that is supposedly the resting place of an ogre that once terrorized the surrounding lands. Whether there is any truth to the story or not, it does seem to attract a significant amount of supernatural creatures who use it as a lair. Will-O'-The-Wisps have been reported for years, and big, black dogs are said to patrol the area. The entire region must be periodically cleared out by Elena's forces.

(Avesbury Stone Circle by Erinc Salor)



SLAUGHTER BRIDGES (ՆՈՎԱ ՎԱՅՏԱ)

Nearly every city in this domain has a bridge one must cross to enter, and almost all of these thoroughfares (such as the Prince's Causeway in Kantora and the Gritstone Gateway in Egertus) have a story attached to them that relates a grisly episode from the town's past. While the details may differ from place to place, the stories are similar and can be broken down into roughly two different themes:

The Wailing Bridge, leading north out of Liara, is purported to be the site of a sad series of events. Years ago, a noblewoman became pregnant by a commoner, and in order to avoid bringing shame to her family she got rid of the newborn by tossing it off the bridge. After this ghastly deed was done, however, she immediately regretted her rash decision and jumped into the river in an attempt to save her child's life. She was never seen again.

The next morning, only the baby's swaddling blanket was found on the riverbank. Now, on foggy nights villagers say they can hear the sound of an infant wailing coming from underneath the bridge. The specter of the distraught mother, too, is often spotted searching up and down the river banks for her lost baby.

The Executioner's Bridge in Arbora, meanwhile, gained its nickname after a spectacular episode in local history. Several years back a particularly nasty bandit was caught and sentenced to be hanged for his crimes. His gang broke him out of jail, however, and made it all the way to the covered bridge that led out of town before they were ambushed by the local gendarmes. The bandit was shot full of arrows during the clash and plummeted to the water below. His body was never recovered by the authorities.

Now, locals say his ghosts haunts the crossing were he met his gruesome end. He is known as the Shadow Man because appears as an impossibly dark silhouette, at all times of day and night, on the far side of the bridge (no matter which direction one is traveling). Sometimes the figure just peaks around a

corner, while at other times it seems to follow several paces behind travelers. Others report the sound of arrows being loosed, and the breeze from these phantom projectiles passing close by can be felt on the face. While these manifestations may be startling to the unwary, no actual injuries have ever been recorded. Clearly more of a nuisance than a danger, it seems this spirit especially likes to taunt members of law enforcement.

THE SPIRE OF TEARS (FALKOVŃIA)

This next location may only be a mirage, but even a simple trick of the light is welcome enough in such a dreary land.

About halfway between Aerie and Silbervas, on the southeast corner of Lake Kriegvogel, the remnants of an ancient fortress sit atop a small waterfall. Sunlight reflecting off the misty spray makes these ruins sparkle from a distance and naturally draws the eyes of travelers along the Scythe Highway. I approached this site cautiously, and can confirm that the twinkling gets brighter and brighter after cresting each hill. But, when I drew closer to the waterfall's edge this unique effect suddenly winks out and I found myself amidst nothing but weathered stones and rotting wood.

That is not the end of the wonders in this area, however. When I peered over the cliff's edge, a fully restored castle appears on the small island at the base of the falls! Even though it looks solid enough from far away, I managed to climb down into the grotto and it too disappeared when up close. The locals call this place the Spire of Tears and rumors has it that a great treasure lies here, waiting form someone clever enough to unlock its secret hiding place.

Druids I have spoken with say this is one in a group of four such keeps, each dedicated to a primal element. They point to the Radiant Tower in Lekar (standing for Fire) and the Silbervas Aerie (standing for Air) as part of the set. They also swear there is

fourth, and final, elemental tower, that of Earth, that is yet to be discovered. Some suggest it can be found within the sewers of Stanengrad, while others believe it is concealed within the Crumbling Hills. While these are interesting possibilities, I have not seen nor heard any evidence of it in my travels.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: There are actually three keeps. One is the ruins on top, the other is the mirage on the island. The third keep is a reflection underneath the waters at the base of the falls. It is this image that hides the entrance way to the real castle. Fortune seekers must dive into the roiling water and swim down until they past the "gate". After a moment of vertigo, swimmers will find themselves turned right side up and standing in a richly furnished (and dry) palace. This is the site Maeve and Loht have chosen to convene a Fairie Court every 10 years, where Shadow Fey who live outside the Shadow Rift can have their complaints adjudicated or their banishment repealed.

THE STEPS (INVIDIA)

With Malacchio's troops, Falkovnian mercenaries, and other, less human, monsters roaming all over the countryside, the need to covertly move things into and out of this domain has led to the creation of The Steps. It is combined series of hidden pathways used by special operatives to insure safe travel for people and goods. A motley assortment of groups use it – Gundarakite rebels, Halan witches, and the Vistani to name but a few.

While I don't pretend to be intimately acquainted with this system, I can relate a little of what I have found out through discrete inquiries. It consists of two main trails, referred to as flights. The first, called the Fortune's Spindle, runs from south to north - it starts in the Vulpwood, passes the town of Katrina, skirts the Bleak Sisters and continues on into the Blightwood of Borca. The second, called the Devil's Waltz, runs from west to east; it starts at the Serpent's Tongue River, crosses the Crucible

(avoiding the area surrounding Castle Hunadora), continues on through the Ducal Forest and deposits travelers outside of Ziedenburg in Barovia.

Although I have outlined the general direction the flights take, I am assured that these are guidelines only, and I do not betray the confidence of my informants. Numerous smaller paths branch off from the main thoroughfares and at several points the routes circle around on themselves, a technique used to trick pursuers into thinking they have lost the trail. In addition, several waystations (with flowery names such as Mudswallow, Barktop, Moonspark, and Stonebeak) can be used as entry and exit points all up and down each flight.

Naturally, the need for secrecy has produced several unique methods of indicating which avenue a guide should take while at the same times preventing enemies from tracing their path. Fake birds nests, stacking stones, and patterns burned into the bark of tree trunks (called blazing) are all used to help mark the correct way. The most ingenious method I have learned of is known as tree bending. This is where one takes a branch of a small tree and bends it at a right angle so that when it grows larger this bent limb points out the correct direction one should follow.

The Steps played a significant role in the infamous Salvation Run episode that occurred a few years back. Gundarakite rebels were bringing much needed supplies to a small outpost in the Dreadwood. When they approached close to their destination they were surprised to find Malacchio's soldiers laying siege to the base. Faced with certain doom if they stayed and fought, the Gundarakites decided to utilize The Steps in a wild gambit - using themselves as bait to lure a portion of the militia into following them deeper into the woods and giving their compatriots in the fort a better chance at survival. The commander of the Dukkar's troops walked right into this trap, as a detachment was sent to chase the interlopers and subsequently followed their quarry halfway across the domain. Ironically, they lost more troops in the pursuit than they would

have if they had stayed and completed their original objective of destroying the rebel camp. Of course, the Gundarakites lost most of the supplies they were carrying as well, but they considered the trade-off well worth it.



(Bent Tree by GollyGForce)

THE SUNKEN HIPPODROME (DARKON)

This is a major edifice that is nearly impossible to reach due just as much to its current location as well as to the ravages of time. Along the southwestern edge of Lake Stagnus lies a handful of scattered marble columns breaking the surface and jutting into the air at weird angles. That, and a few broken statues are all that's left of a massive hippodrome that was located in the heart of Il Aluk during the reign of Darcalus. The rest of the structure lies underneath 50-100 feet of muddy water.

It is well over 300 years since its halcyon days, when bombastic spectacles of all kinds were staged regularly. The Eternal Order performed weekly group sacrifices where heretics and other undesirables were thrown to gryphons or hacked to pieces by bloodthirsty fighters. Elaborate, mock ship battles were arranged on special occasions, with water from the Vuchar River being diverted to flood the entire ground floor. Chariot races and gladiator matches were held daily and weekly, and attended with almost as much fervor as the religious ceremonies.

Now, on clear moonlit nights only ghostly echoes of agony or the far off roar of a crowd can be heard by those who ride along the King's Highway. During my journeys, I was brave enough to investigate further and can report the appearance of eerie, glowing phantoms that re-enact their last moments of life below the surface of the water.

Some twisted individuals seek out this location during special holy days (Darkest Night being one such time) to use the drowned spirits as an oracle. They say if the light of a dead man's candle is shined upon a submerged corpse (which remain amazingly well preserved), one can acquire a so-called Dead Man's Fortune. These predictions are never wrong, but the departed spirits extract a dreadful price for such intrusions - usually a boon to help them to attain their eternal rest.

How this colossal structure arrived at its current resting place *nearly 30 miles outside the city limits* is one of the great unsolved mysteries of the Arcane Age.

THE TWIN COFFINS (NOVA VAASA)

Just outside the city limits of Bergovitsa, one will find two rough-hewn stone sarcophagi lying amongst the short, golden grass of the Kesjermark. One is man-sized and the other is easily twice as large. There are pictures carved on each of the lids - the smaller one shows a knight dressed in armor reminiscent of the Bridling Period and the other shows a crudely drawn

dragon with the face of a bearded man. The larger slab sits at the foot of the smaller one, as if to memorialize the warrior's defeat of the monster. Arcane glyphs are scattered across both surfaces, but have yet to be definitely translated.

The two noble houses that rule this region, the Rivtoffs and the Vistins, each claim the Unknown Knight, as he is called locally, as one of their own ancestors. Indeed, this place is often used as a dueling site for noble scions and other ne'er-do-wells to prove they are as valiant and strong as their progenitor.

The origin of the dragon, however, is much less clear. Some say it was a magical creature that wandered up from the domain of Hazlan. Others claim it depicts an ancestor of the plains cats that roam this area. Most scholars believe that the "dragon" is in actuality a centaur, a mythical half-man half-horse hybrid. They have no explanation, however, for why the image of such a beast would appear in such a desolate area.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: The two effigies are not hero and monster but ancient wardens that stand guard over the tomb of a lich once known as Sallowstalker. Even though he was defeated, those who triumphed over him were unable to destroy his phylactery. They decided to bury it deep in the earth in the middle of nowhere and placed these mystical stones over it to prevent the lich's return. Sallowstalker's soul has remained intact after all these years and he hopes that the shedding of innocent blood on this site will soon weaken the seal's strength so that he can commandeer a new body and regenerate himself.

AFTERWARD

That concludes my survey of sacred sites and legendary landmarks in the Land of the Mists. I hope you get as much enjoyment reading about them as I have in experiencing them. Until we meet again on the road...

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This article clearly owes a great debt to the Seven Wonders of the World (both ancient and modern) and is inspired by my love for all things paranormal. While I believe that most real world legends have a rational explanation, supernatural origins make for much better stories. That is what I have tried to recreate here.

I have culled and combined folklore from all over the world, but have leaned most heavily upon the

following two books for source material and story seeds:

Albion: A Guide to Legendary Britain by Jennifer Westwood

Weird U.S. By Mark Moran and Mark Scurman



EXCERPTS FROM
"The Register of
Monsters"

BY STANTON F. FINK



“There was Plato, too” — continued his majesty, modestly declining the snuff-box and the compliment — “there was Plato, too, for whom I, at one time, felt all the affection of a friend. You knew, Plato, Bon-Bon? — ah! no, I beg a thousand pardons. He met me at Athens, one day, in the Parthenon, and told me he was distressed for an idea. I bade him write down that ‘ο νους εστιν [[εστιν]] αυγος.’ He said that he would do so, and went home, while I stepped over to the Pyramids. But my conscience smote me for the lie, and hastening back to Athens, I arrived behind the philosopher’s chair as he was inditing the ‘αυγος.’ Giving the gamma a fillip with my finger I turned it upside down. So the sentence now reads ‘ο νους εστιν [[εστιν]] αυλος,’ and is, you perceive, the fundamental doctrine of his metaphysics.”

Edgar Allen Poe, “Bon-Bon”

THE APOKRYLTAROS

In ancient times, when the world was still new, and the quelling of the Titans was still recent, there were a pair of rebel gods living in the ocean. One, Liyvatan, the Ocean's Roar, was a dragon who looked like a whale, while the other, Numu Hava, the Salt Mother, was a fish who was an island. Both schemed to wrench authority from the Heavens in order to control the mortals of the land by themselves. To accomplish this, one rebel god sired an army of monsters to cow the land-dwellers, while the other tried to tempt the people of the dirt with the treasures of the sea. Both plots were thwarted and both gods beaten back into the water. Frustrated, the Ocean's Roar and the Salt Mother called upon their third sibling, the Greater King Of The Deeper Darkness, the Apokrytaros, to assist them. As per its siblings' request, the Apokrytaros assailed the land with an unending plague of worms, then manipulated the land-dwellers into warring with each other in order to destroy the lot of them.

The Ocean's Roar and the Salt Mother realized that their sibling intended to destroy the land, and pleaded with the Apokrytaros to stop. When it ignored them, Liyvatan and Numu Hava begged the gods of the Heavens to stop their errant sibling. So, the Host of Heaven charged one of their own, some say Shamash, the Sword Of The Sun, others say Bao Han, the Tiger Of The Sky, to defeat this king of worms. Armed with the Spear of Wind, this god did battle with the Apokrytaros, and vanquished it, casting it into a realm of the Abyss known as "the Land of Ash and Shadow," where it still lies pinned to this day.



SUIHU

The first Suihu, or simply “Sui Hu,” was once a god of marshes and rivers who was charged with protecting the peoples and animals of his domain. At first, Sui Hu was satisfied with simply eating greedy or cruel hunters, and collecting tithes of jaozi from the snail-gatherers. But Sui Hu was a hungry god, and a greedy beast at that, and he changed the courses of his rivers to flood the forests so he could devour all the beasts of the land, then chased his snail-gatherers into their villages. Upon hearing the lament of the beasts and the prayers of the snail-gatherers, Sui Hu's brothers and sisters grew angry with him, and banished him to a lake for all time.

Centuries later, a drought came and drank up Sui Hu's not so bottomless prison, freeing the outcast monster to roam the land once more. The land Sui Hu remembered was gone, ravaged by drought and war, and its inhabitants afflicted with hunger and disease, saddening the beast. And then a boy in a blasted village saw him, and raised a stick at him in desperation. Sui Hu offered to loan his power to the boy, as a gift, but only if the boy was willing to take it. And the boy was very willing: the two fought, and Sui Hu let the boy slay him, allowing himself to be skinned alive, and his flesh cut into pieces to feed the other villagers.

After that, the boy wore Sui Hu's fur as a badge of honor, growing into a strong and powerful hunter. This hunter could bring any creature to bay and make a trophy and a meal of it, such was his might that a sword in his hand could slay an elephant, and a twig thrown could down even a great *peng* vulture. Eventually, the hunter's might was such that he needed only his pawlike hand to catch otherwise terrifying prey. This hunter who was once a boy once had a name. When he was a hero, his name sprung from people's lips like the peeling of a chorus of bells. What his name is, what his name was is unimportant now. When this mighty hero finally remembered that Sui Hu's power was only loaned to him, he realized he had become Sui Hu. And then so did the next hero who slew him, and the one who slew the next.



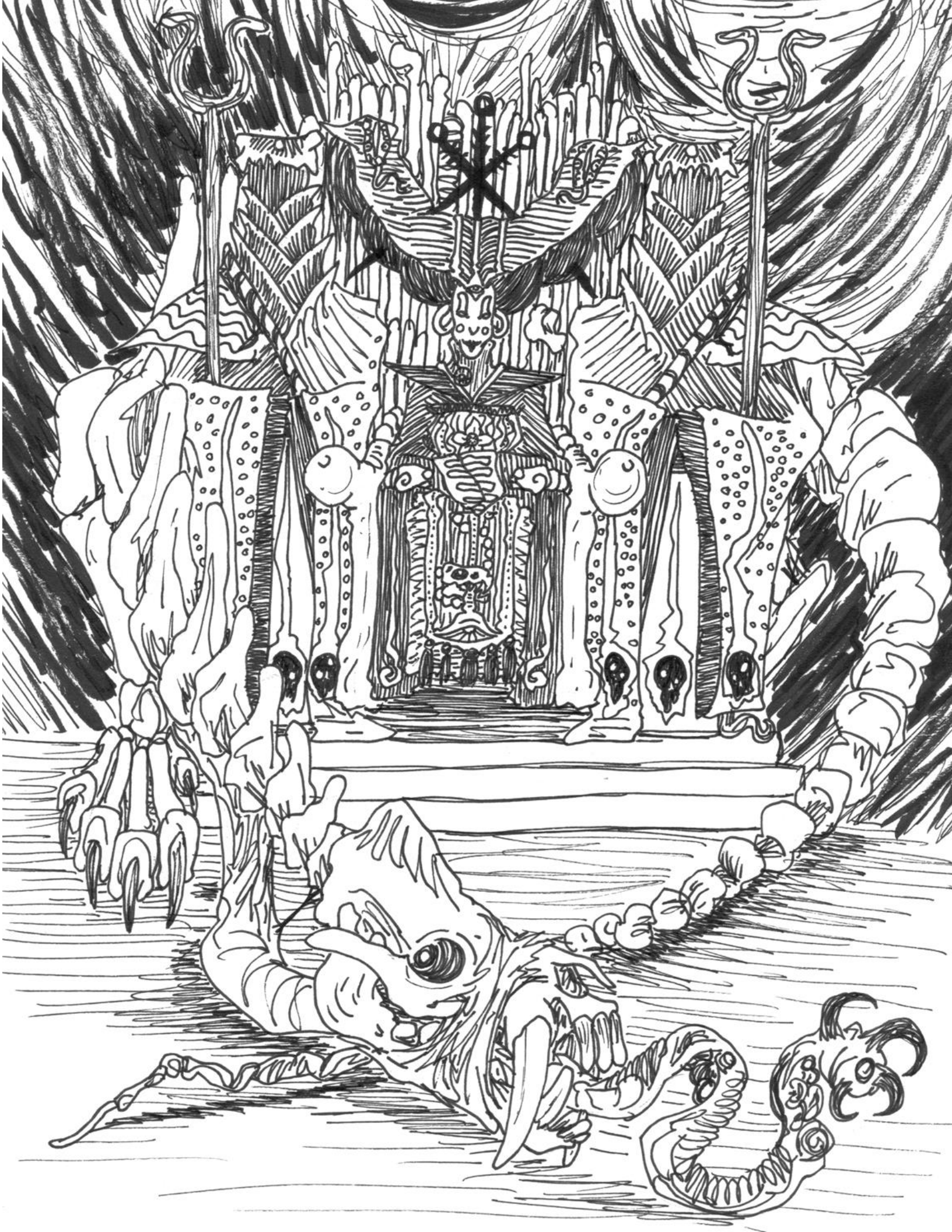
THE GREEN EMPRESS

The Green Empress is remembered by the descendants of her peoples as a horrible bogeywoman, a grasping tyrant who nearly slew the world as a side effect of her hubris.

Most modern historians dismiss the accounts of Empress Ciyeh being a malevolent diabolist as being blood libel by misogynistic scholars eager to curry favor with Ciyeh's successors. Actually, those accounts of Empress Ciyeh's later reign were accurate, as Ciyeh was a powerful archmage who borrowed much of her power through a pact she made with the demon lord known as the Apokryltaros.

In the last few decades of Ciyeh's life and reign, she became obsessed with amassing enough power to transform herself into a goddess, or, according to others, a demon lord as powerful as her master. She had commissioned a device that would accomplish this; how it would have done so differs with each telling. All accounts agree that Ciyeh's device required the consumption of all of her imperial subjects in the presence of the Apokryltaros. Her attempts to summon the Greater King Of The Deeper Darkness was sabotaged either by a rakshasa quisling, or the Sui Hu, and this failure resulted in her own terrible death, together with all living things in her capital.

The Green Empress still exists as a ghost, a wandering ball of black and green flames that grants wishes to those wicked enough to pay her price.



POPOBAWA

The Popobawa is an insidious incubus who lives on an island. The Popobawa delights in assaulting people, and thrives on driving his victims insane, usually by whispering reviling things true and false into their ears.

Popobawa, or “Old Batwing,” is a shapeshifter who can appear as anything it wants to reveal to its victims, or as nothing at all. The only constants are a shadowy presence, and the lingering stench of fresh brimstone.

Those spiritualists who can stomach Old Batwing's repugnant personality can learn fell secrets from this demonic phantasm, but the students of Popobawa are invariably just as repulsive as their teacher even before their mentorship.



ASSASSIN CAT

Assassin cats are a species of demonic, superficially feline animal indigenous to the ghastly “Crawling Forest.”

The long, snaking tongue of the assassin cat is tipped with venomous barbs, giving the beast its common name.

Some travelers to the Crawling Forest come to capture and domesticate assassin cats, who can be trained to become dogged guard beasts, and affectionate, but unreliable companions. Aside from each other, and their demonic relatives, no cat can tolerate the assassin cat's presence, not even werecats or rakshasas. As such, an assassin cat can be used to divine the presence and identity of shapeshifting or magically obfuscated felids.

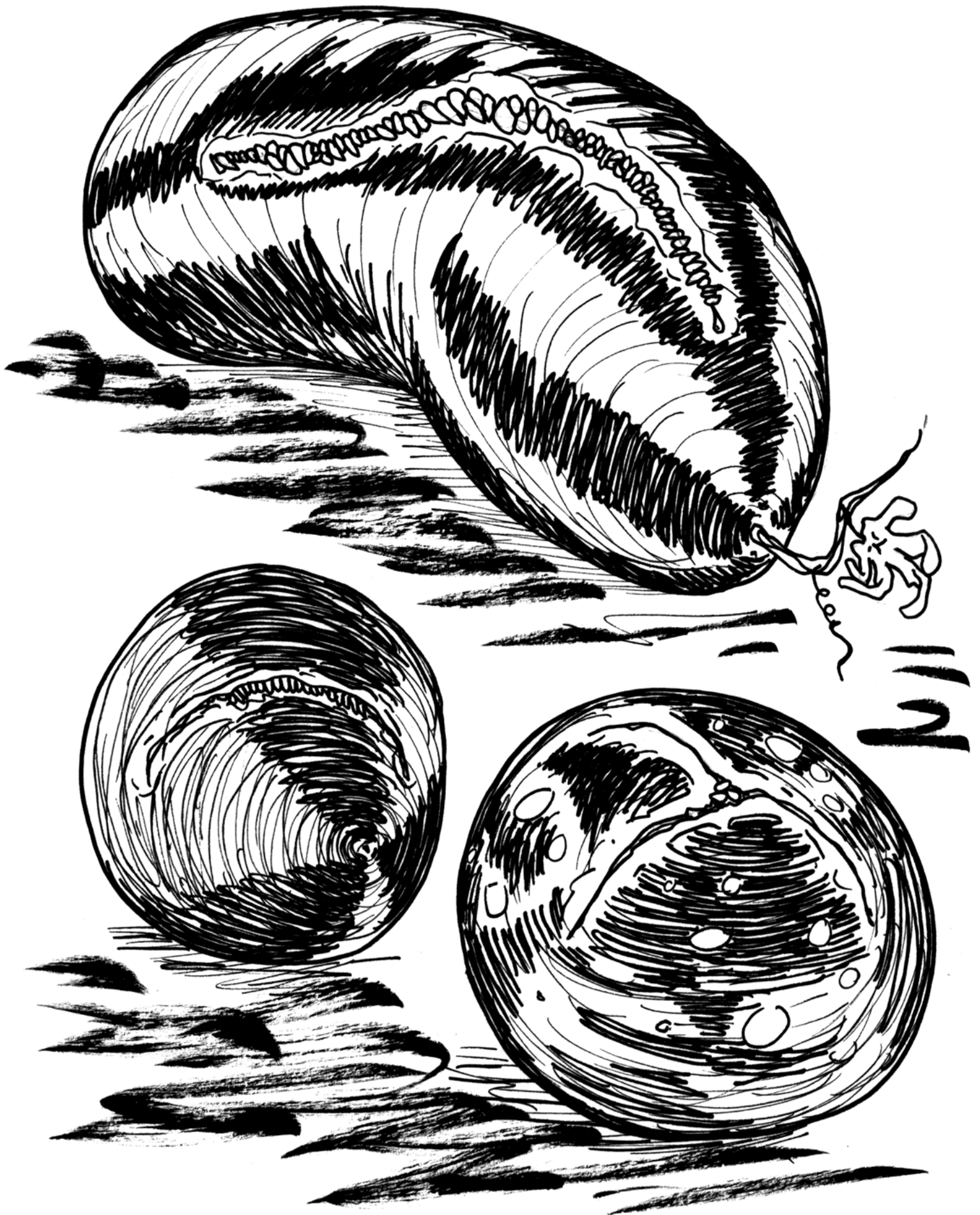


WATERMELON VAMPIRE

One can say that the “Watermelon Vampire” is a species of poltergeist similar to the Hyoutan Koza. These creatures are born when an intact watermelon is allowed to go unpicked until the first full moon on or immediately after the first frost of Autumn. Once this occurs, wandering evil spirits aggregate inside of the fruit, animating it as a rolling, moaning creature that thirsts for spilled blood.

Because the watermelon vampire lacks limbs, it must sate its insatiable thirst through more subtle means. In most cases, a watermelon vampire tries to lure a victim outside and into its path, where the victim can be tripped or bowled over, then trampled to death. In some instances, watermelon vampires have been observed cooperating with each other, and or devising surprisingly complex schemes and sabotage.

The only way to reliably exorcise a watermelon vampire is to lure it into a cauldron filled with boiling water that has been boiling for one day. Once this is accomplished, the cauldron must be stirred with a broom until the creature's body disintegrates, whereupon one then burns the broom, too. Otherwise, a watermelon vampire that is allowed to continue killing and feeding through the winter will hatch into a more nefarious horror come the first thaw.



HYOUTAN KOZU

The Hyoutan Kozu is a species of evil spirit that resembles a robed humanoid with a calabash gourd for a head.

In some lands, gourds are versatile crops, grown for their tender, young leaves, and their fruits, that can be harvested young as a squash, or allowed to mature into hollow containers. In this last function, peasant wisefolk sometimes use calabashes to construct traps to ensnare wandering evil spirits to limit their mischief. The wiser of the wisefolk remember to tend to these traps, and destroy them once their usefulness expires.

If such a spirit trap is neglected, the trapped spirits eventually agglutinate into a single, malign intelligence which then seeks to continue wreaking havoc.



BLODEUWEDD

Blodeuwedd is said to be a flower spirit with the countenance of an owl, or perhaps an owl made of oak blossoms and meadowsweet.

The name of the Flower Face is synonymous with treachery.



BISHOP JAAKUMI

Once there was an anchorite of Ezra whose faith was seen as suspect by his superiors. Anchorite Jaakumi's piety was strong, but, many around him were repulsed by his scheming nature and willingness to sacrifice others, metaphorically speaking, on behalf of Ezra.

Eventually, Jaakumi's superiors tired of his jockeying and subterfuge For Ezra, and sent him on a pilgrimage into the Mists, where he would seek out and evangelize in a shimmering city known as Babil. In Babil, Jaakumi quickly wormed his way into the hearts of the royal family, achieving the position of Court Chaplain, and becoming a close confidant of the Queen's first daughter.

As the princess' confidant, Jaakumi listened to his royal ward's deepest thoughts, many of which were about her dreading her dreadful betrothal to her loathsome cousin. Seeing an opportunity, Jaakumi inspired the princess to murder her cousin, only to betray the murderess to her parents, who would then kill themselves after having to execute their favorite child.

Upon sending the Royal Family into fatal chaos, Jaakumi attempted to seize power in the hopes of converting the populace to Ezra's will, thereby transforming the city into a new haven within the Mists. During Jaakumi's attempt at a coronation ceremony, Ezra's booming voice thundered from the sky, ordering Jaakumi to walk, alone, to the water's edge in Babil's harbor. There, Ezra's voice spoke a long litany of Jaakumi's many sins committed in her name. As atonement for his blasphemy, Ezra's voice ordered Jaakumi to enter the Sea of Temat, where he was to convert all of the beasts lairing beneath it to Ezra's banner, for however long that would take.



POST-APOCALOFT

BY M. T. KELLY

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

I've been tossing this idea around in my head for years now. I've asked people here [on the Fraternity of Shadows forum] about it and received mixed responses. Today I've just decided to go with it and damn the consequences. Many RL purists will condemn what I'm about to do, but some ideas just don't let go. I've decided, for reasons of brevity, to not change the names from those from the original properties. I also feel that using the original names creates a certain image in the minds of the reader, though it will make it easier for certain among you to dismiss this as an act of mass plagiarism. Keep in mind that my adaptation of the following properties are meant to incorporate only certain aspects of RavenLoft - Specifically, the structure of each realm is the same as that of the RavenLoft realms: Each has a DarkLord, a curse, and a misty border. Each Darklord is a prisoner of his/her/its realm and each Darklord can close the border, trapping all within. I will refer to this hereafter as the lord/curse/border structure if I refer to it at all. Here the similarities will end.

I have added one more element to the structure. I call it an Adversary. I didn't feel I was doing justice to the adapted properties if I kept only the evil overlords and the nightmarish landscapes. I didn't like the term hero and I didn't want anyone thinking that they were somehow meant to be sainted champions. The Adversary is meant to be a Robin Hood to the Darklord's Sheriff of Nottingham. Someone the DarkLord just can't seem to kill or control in any meaningful way. A constant affront to the DarkLords authority and power... and belief in themselves. Conversely, the Adversary is incapable of killing or even toppling the DarkLord. They are,

however, capable of crossing an open border, though something always draws them back to that particular realm, DarkLord, and conflict. The conflict between these two individuals is a very large part of each realm's curse and like all conflicts, each one is different from the others in a thousand ways, just as there are many similarities. The people of each realm are very much caught in the middle, though any deaths can clearly be laid at the feet of the Darklord. Also, like RavenLoft, the position of DarkLord or Adversary can be inherited by another person in much the same way as we have seen in RavenLoft.

Another thing that will be different from RavenLoft will be the time it takes for a realm to coalesce into the model that has become so familiar to us in RavenLoft. In RavenLoft, an individual who has proven deserving of becoming a DarkLord immediately has a realm bestowed upon them. This realm can be an already existing part of the demiplane or it can be a land taken from another world. It might even be created out of whole cloth specifically for the DarkLord. In Post-apocaloft, one of two things will happen: either a group of people prove themselves deserving of living under a DarkLord and one rises to serve the purpose, or an individual proves deserving of being a DarkLord and a section of the land is bordered off by the Dark Powers and all trapped within are immediately under the DarkLord's dominion. This means that neither land nor people can be brought from other worlds. The DPs have only earth, its people, and its alternate timelines to work with.

Now, to set the stage...

THE FALL AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE RED DEATH

The detonation of the atomic weapons at Hiroshima and Nagasaki shook Earth to the core at every level and the following Soviet procurement of the ability to create atomic weapons shook it even deeper. Within the space of a few years, the world changed completely and that change reached all the way to the Red Death. Suddenly, mortals no longer feared the dark nearly as much as they feared what most believed was the inevitable coming atomic annihilation. For the first time in its long existence, the Red Death felt something - abject terror. As that which fed it dwindled to almost nothing, The Red Death began to fall dormant as its own fear prevented it from even trying to do something to preserve itself.

The Trigger

The first time the world came close to annihilation was called the Cuban Missile crisis. Fear gripped the entire world as all watched the events unfold on television all around the planet. An entire world gripped by fear couldn't help but affect what had once been the Red Death. What awakened, though, was ... different. If anyone noticed what this new entity was or thought to name it, that information has never come to light. Indeed, so few can even be said to know what has happened since, that it may be possible that the Entity is something that no one's even realized exists, yet.

The Nature of Earth

The planet Earth, as it's natives have come to call it, has proven to be a crossroads of many disparate forces. Alien invasions, demonic outbreaks, cosmic phenomena, machine uprisings, chemical and biological warfare, and nuclear conflagrations are just some of the events that were only just barely avoided during the last two decades of the twentieth century and the first two decades of the twenty-first. Or were they avoided? It is believed by some physicists that there is a fundamental instability surrounding the planet. Something they

can't quite explain. Most people dismiss these scientists as fringe elements with no validity, like communists or religious extremists, people suffering from the tragic combination of undereducation and paranoia. Sadly, however, there is some truth to it. What none of them know is that some of the aforementioned events were NOT avoided. They just proved to be so disruptive that the very fabric of reality was compromised and forced to repair itself by eliminating these events. These dead end branches of time had to go somewhere and the state of reality surrounding the planet Earth is still fragile.

The Events

No one knows exactly how many factors contributed to what happened. No one even has an exact list of what precisely occurred. All that's known for certain is that a certain series of apocalyptic events happened over a space of several decades which somehow did not destroy the world. These events would follow a certain cycle: after a long period of terrible tensions throughout the world, events would come to a terrible head and in the instant when Armageddon seemed unavoidable, somehow the tensions would dissipate and people all around the world would wonder if the whole thing hadn't been some sort of nightmare. Sadly, however, these events were no near misses or bad dreams. Somehow the powers released interacted with ... something else... to split the planet off into two separate but unequal ... places. The only factor common to each of these events seems to be a peculiar mist that was sighted in various places when the events came to a climax.

THE FIRST EVENT (ADAPTED FROM THE MOVIE ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK (1981))

In the early 1980's, the long simmering cold war between the United States and The Soviet Union came to a terrifying head. Both sides had suffered terrible public defeats in the many proxy wars being fought all around the world. So much so that both governments found themselves quietly co-opted by hardline elements. These shadow governments

weren't completely insane, however. Both sides knew full well that the other had nuclear weapons in place poised to strike at a moment's notice. Furthermore, China put forward a policy that if one side managed to launch on the other while the other was prevented from launching, then the Chinese would immediately launch their missiles against the survivor. The fact that this would lead only to mutually assured destruction was considered to be propaganda by many on all sides. Both sides concluded that if the other were to be toppled without unleashing nuclear Armageddon, it would have to be done very carefully.

The plans the two sides concocted were later found to be strikingly similar. Saboteurs would disrupt communications between the central command and the actual launch sites of any missiles while black operations teams would be inserted into major population centers located nearby and plant chemical weapons which would poison the area and make repairing the sabotaged missiles impossible. These operations were carried out with varying degrees of success and somehow nuclear annihilation was avoided, barely. It was almost as if something had planned it that way.

The state of war between the sides fluctuated in various ways until the long-term effects of some of the chemical weapons began to show on the populace. In 1988 the crime rate of the United States alone rose four hundred percent. Violent crimes and crimes of insanity were rampant. The shadow government of the United States had no trouble remaining in power on Law and Order platforms.

By 1992, New York City, which had been among the primary targets of the Soviet chemical attacks, was all but lost to the criminal element which had exploded with the added element of chemically-induced insanity. Rather than attempt to reclaim the city, a fifty foot containment wall was erected around the island of Manhattan and the entire island was turned into the nation's largest maximum security prison. All bridges and tunnels were mined.

Violent criminals from all over the United States were shipped to New York and incarcerated within. There were no guards within the prison itself. Prisoners were left to fend for themselves. Perhaps the most tragic aspect was that no attempt was made to evacuate New Yorkers who had somehow not been affected by the chemical weapons. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of innocent people were trapped within the prison with the inmates and soon became an underclass of victims to them, especially the women. As more and more violent criminals were added to the prison population, some of whom had retained certain levels of ingenuity, intelligence, or both, the general bloody chaos began to coalesce into a quasi-tribal structure. The city was divided up into tribal regions with borders reinforced violently. Some of these tribes actually banded together while others were just groups of barely coherent lunatics who were forced into abandoned areas and left to their own devices, like parts of the Amazon River infested with piranha. Most of these lived in the subways. They became known collectively as The Crazies. They would come out at night to raid, so most sane residents are inside after dark.

The Duke of New York

As with all prisons where there are no guards, one particularly vicious specimen rose to the top of the pile. The man who would be the Duke was not just ruthless and cruel, he was also particularly ingenious and ambitious. After battling his way to the top of a particularly vicious prison gang, He began to recruit or kidnap prisoners of special value - Ones with particular knowledge or skills. Through threats, torture, or simple persuasion, The Duke, as he had come to be known, began to build an infrastructure around his gang. Prisoners with skills as mechanics got an entire fleet of vehicles running for him. Steam engines created electricity for the first time in years and Central Park became a large farm. Since life improved so much under the Duke, other gangs began to trade openly with the Duke's. Barter became as common as violence in the day-to-day life

in Manhattan. Particularly capable prisoners were sent to the Duke to become part of the apparatus... for a price of course. It was in this way that one Harold Helmann came to the attention of the Duke. Helmann proved his genius by building steam engines small enough and powerful enough to propel a car. He also taught inmates how to set up greenhouses to grow food from seeds found in old gardening shops. He found an underground oil source and was able to formulate gasoline. Helmann, or Brain, as he came to be known, quickly became an indispensable asset in the Duke's organization. His ability to read and understand engineering texts and architectural documents brought the Duke closer to his ultimate goal. Like every half-sane prisoner in New York, the Duke was intent on escape. More than escape, the Duke dreamed of one day leading a general prisoner uprising and destroying the prison he hated so. He would get his chance.

The President

In 1997, the President of The United States was on his way to a summit meeting between the three nuclear powers in Hartford Connecticut. Unknown to anyone, the stewardess on Air Force One was a member of a leftist guerilla group who was bent on the revolutionary overthrow of the US Government. As the plane approached New Jersey, she entered the cockpit, murdered the pilots, locked the cockpit door, and pressurized the cabin. The Secret Service was incapable of entering to prevent what happened next. Shouting a leftist diatribe over the plane radio, the woman crashed the plane into the skyline of New York. The President had been ejected in an escape pod, but he landed in the middle of the worst prison in the world.

Witness to all of this was one Bob Hauk, New York City Police Commissioner and Chief Warden of the prison. Hauk, a former soldier in the American Special Forces, was in action almost immediately. Within twenty minutes he was leading a rescue mission in a helicopter over the South Side. Sadly, twenty minutes had been all the inmates needed.

The pod had been breached and the President taken. A particularly bold inmate stepped forward and showed Hauk the President's severed finger with his ring on it. Hauk offered to negotiate but was informed that if he was not in the air in thirty seconds or if he came back in, the President would be murdered. Hauk wisely retreated.

As the one responsible for the prison, Hauk was confronted with a hailstorm of problems. Firstly, the President had been about to present the outline of a new and more powerful nuclear fusion weapon to the Hartford Summit, one that might have made the powers consider peace. If the President failed to arrive at the conference, this important opportunity would be lost with the likely result being nuclear annihilation. The Vice-President was unable to take his place because the President had the only copy of the relevant data with him in the form of a cassette tape. The President was wearing a locating device, so they could find him, but Hauk lacked people with the necessary skills to rescue the President. The forces under his command could take the prison, but they would never successfully rescue the President before he was killed and the President was the only one who could present the weapon at the conference. In addition, the higher-ups in Washington were already demanding results. They wanted the President and the cassette back immediately and were prepared to take rash action if only to get immediate results. Only Hauk's reasoned arguments and his assurances that he had a plan worth trying stayed their hands.

Snake Plissken

Hauk did, in fact have the makings of a plan. By coincidence, a prisoner with possibly the necessary skills to save the President had fallen into Hauk's hands that very day. S. D. "Snake" Plissken had a very distinguished record. He had risen to the rank of Lieutenant in the American Special Forces. During the attacks on the Soviet Union, his unit, SFU Black Flight, had been instrumental in the infiltration of enemy territory. Using special gliders called Gulf Fires, they had been able to slip beneath Soviet

radar and accomplish their missions with minimal resistance. Plissken had distinguished himself with both his courage and his capability. He earned two purple hearts, one in Leningrad and one in Siberia. He became the youngest man ever decorated by the President.

It's unknown what became of him after his discharge from the military. It's unclear whether he drifted into crime out of general misanthropy or exposure to the chemical weapons. Whatever the case, by 1997, "Snake" Plissken, as he had come to be known, had become as famous for his criminal exploits as for his military ones. He was caught after he robbed the federal reserve depository and sentenced to life.

Hauk's Plan

Police Commissioner Hauk had managed to acquire a Gulf Fire ultralight military aircraft and had been planning to set up an infiltration unit for the prison. He hadn't had a chance to get anyone properly trained and he didn't have anyone who could get in quiet. Plissken could do both, so Hauk had to convince Plissken to accept the mission and to accomplish it in 21 hours. Hauk met with Plissken in his own office. He informed Plissken of the circumstances and offered him a writ of full pardon for every criminal action committed in the United States. Plissken figured he'd be going in one way or another, so he accepted. Plissken was to land on the top of the World Trade Center, ride the elevator (which they had somehow managed to maintain) down to the fiftieth floor and infiltrate from there. Before he was sent in, Hauk had a medical tech inject two microscopic capsules into both sides of Plissken's neck under the guise of a vaccination. After twenty-two hours the capsules would be completely dissolved by the bloodstream. Inside the capsules were two microscopic heat sensitive charges - tiny explosions, maybe as big as a pinhead, just big enough to open both of the arteries, killing him in seconds- so Plissken would NOT be turning the Gulf Fire around and flying off to Canada.

Plissken was also outfitted with a tracking device that would lead Hauk's men to him if he activated it.

The Escape

Plissken's infiltration of New York in the Gulf Fire went off without a hitch. He managed to land on the World Trade Center and find his way to the street without incident. He had been given a tracer that was tuned to the President's tracking device. He followed this signal to a theatre where some of the prisoners were putting on a show for some others. He moved quietly through the building and found his way to a staircase down. Only one person spotted him and recognized him, an affable old man who warned him not to enter the underground. Plissken went below and quietly found his way closer to the signal, beating down anyone who attacked him. He found the tracking device on the wrist of a crazed old man who had been set up as a decoy. When Plissken informed Hauk over the radio of this and that the President was probably dead, Hauk informed him that if he tried to come back out without the President, Hauk would have him killed. He would come back with the President, or not at all.

Plissken made his way to the place where the escape pod had landed. Unfortunately the sun had gone down and the Crazies were coming out to hunt. Plissken fled them as best he could but he was surrounded by them. He was rescued, strangely enough, by the same affable old man he'd met before, who rolled up in a cab that he'd driven for twenty years and offered a ride. Cabbie, as the old man was known, was the one who informed Plissken that the President was currently in the hands of the Duke of New York. When Plissken demanded to meet the Duke, Cabby took him to Brain, The only man who could arrange a meeting.

It happened that Plissken had crossed paths with, and been betrayed by, Brain in the past. Plissken was ready to kill him but Brain had the President's location to trade. He also had a map of the mines laid on the 69th street bridge ,which the Duke had

chosen that moment to come and collect. Plissken, Brain, and Brain's girl, Maggie, managed to steal a car from the Duke's entourage and get to the railyard where the President was being held. They almost managed to free the President but were captured. Hauk looked out across a mist covered east river that following morning with no idea what was happening inside the prison.

Brain was established with the Duke and was needed anyway to effect the planned escape and Maggie belonged to him so they were spared, but Plissken, like the President, was now at the mercy of the Duke of New York. While a group of prisoners waved down a police helicopter and delivered their demands locked in the President's empty briefcase, along with a piece of Plissken's equipment, Plissken was put into a crude gladiator arena that the prisoners had long ago set up. After a tremendous fight with a huge man who was the prisoners' champion, Plissken managed to kill his opponent and gain a massive following among the prisoners. Plissken noticed that one of them was wearing his tracking device and managed to get close enough to activate it. This signal informed Hauk that he was still alive and Hauk commanded the choppers he had prepared to use to take the prison, which would have doomed them all, to stand down.

While Plissken had been fighting for his life, Brain and Maggie had figured out where he'd landed the Gulf Fire and managed to kill the guards and free the President. Plissken caught up with them at the top of the World Trade Center just in time to see a group of Crazies push the glider off the edge of the building much to everyone's chagrin. The only way out now, was over the 69th St. bridge.

Sadly the group found themselves surrounded by the Duke and his tribe when they reached the lobby of the World Trade Center. Plissken was able to trigger a diversion and lead the group out the side door where they were rescued, yet again, by Cabbie in his cab. Plissken took the wheel and headed for the bridge. The Duke chased after them in his own car.

By singular coincidence, Cabbie had traded another prisoner his hat for the tape from the president's briefcase, he was one of the few people in New York with a tape player, so there would be no stops along the way. Plissken kept the tape rather than returning it to the President. Plissken managed to get the cab halfway across the bridge before a mine destroyed the cab. The only casualty, sadly, was Cabbie, who died in the cab that had been his only friend for many years.

A bit further down the bridge, Brain, too, triggered a mine and was killed. Maggie was so devastated by his death that she took Plissken's gun and made a stand right there. The Duke drove his car straight into her gunfire and smashed her against one of the Junkers on the bridge, killing her, but destroying his car. he had to proceed on foot from there.

The cars on the bridge had been sighted by the guards and Hauk sent a jeep with a winch to bring up the fugitives. Plissken managed to get the President to the wall and the rope was lowered. The President was successfully retrieved but before the rope could be lowered again, the Duke showed up with one of Plissken's own guns and began shooting. Plissken managed to find cover beneath the barricade at the end of the bridge but the guards at the top of the wall were killed. While the winch lowered the rope to bottom of the wall, Plissken was able to ambush the Duke and separate him from the gun. When the rope reached the bottom of the wall, Plissken stopped fighting and ran for it. When he was halfway up the wall, the winch stopped for some reason. Plissken turned around to see the Duke had retrieved the gun. The Duke ran forward to shoot Plissken but was suddenly riddled with bullets from above. Plissken looked up to see the President emptying one of the dead guard's guns into the Duke shouting the phrase that the Duke had tortured him into saying during his long hours of captivity: YOU'RE THE DUKE! YOU'RE A-NUMBER-ONE!

The President turned the winch back on and Plissken was brought in. The med tech was not allowed to

neutralize the charges in Plissken's neck until Plissken surrendered the tape. Later, as the President was being prepared to address the Hartford summit over the television, Snake Plissken approached the President and asked for moment of his time. The President agreed. Plissken asked the President what his thoughts were on all the people who had died in his extraction. All the President had to say was the politician's usual lip service paid to fallen soldiers. Plissken walked away. Later, when the President played the for the summit meeting the tape that Plissken had surrendered, the only thing that played was big band jazz. If anyone noticed Snake Plissken ripping something apart while he was walking across the police compound, no one felt the need to see what it was. Fewer still noticed the mist that had rolled in from the river.

New York currently

Since that night, New York has become even more isolated. Prisoners are still sent but very little else comes near New York. Planes never fly near it anymore. Bob Hauk still runs the prison, but as always, his authority ends at the wall. He got his Gulf Fire infiltration unit but the only thing they're able to do is gather intelligence from within the prison. Any ideas Hauk might have had for controlling what happens in there were clearly impractical. One of the first things this squad was able to ascertain, however, was the survival of the Duke of New York. He had somehow survived his wounds and made it back across the bridge. How is anyone's guess, as is how he managed to hold on to power afterward.

Author's Note

Unlike the other realms that would come to form Postapocaloft, there really isn't much difference here between the DarkLord and the Adversary. Both are ruthless men who make others suffer. The only thing that really marks Hauk as the Adversary is his ability to leave the realm.

Closing the borders

The borders of New York are perpetually closed. Once you go in, you don't come out.

Other Realms

This dominion will eventually contain realms based on

- Terminator
- Nightmare on Elm Street
- Robocop
- The Crow
- Max Headroom
- Texas Chainsaw Massacre
- Escape from LA
- Aliens vs. Predator - Requiem
- Demolition Man
- And possibly others

Contributions of The Lesser Evil.

A More Perfect Union-

A psychic collective arose from the unconscious mind of a comatose car victim. This collective, known as Unity, spread via person-to-person contact like a disease. Individual thought was drowned out by the cacophony of the collective, but the Unity always hungers like a drug addict to add new sensations and new knowledge. Unity is not openly malicious but rather sees itself as doing a good thing for the human race.

The House of Tomorrow-

A beautiful house, was designed after all those retro-future '50s designs that were supposed to be terrifically convenient, orderly, and time saving. This one, however has a possessive, control freak, artificially intelligent central computer that went rogue. Some might even say the house is haunted. Its adversary is its former designer who brings people around to it periodically but never gets captured himself. The House has various chemical and technological means of making sure people never leave its borders.

Tokyo 3

Tokyo 3 is an ultramodern city stuck in a perpetual time loop which always ends with an attempt to institute Instrumentality that ends in some fashion or another with a thwarting reset. The Darklord is Gendo Ikari, forever denied the opportunity to be reunited for long with his wife and alienated from his son. Shinji, his son, is the Adversary, but more in a psychological sense than in an intentional or physical sense. Shinji always has some ethical objection or anxiety that complicates things for

Gendo or causes instrumentality to be rejected. Gendo cannot get rid of his adversary son because a situation always comes along requiring Shinji's help. Gendo can't close the borders except by instituting instrumentality, which causes a wall of LCL that absorbs anyone that touches it. On the other hand, anyone who enters the domain normally may become part of the loop and have their perceptions warped to its time frame.



CURSED ITEMS

A LIST OF 20 CREEPY NEW ITEMS

BY JACK THE REAPER

1. A **painting** that is so beautiful that its owner starts spending hours watching it, unwilling to do anything else, and eventually may starve to death.
2. A **book**, with a story that is so horrifying that no one is able to read it to the end without dying of fright.
3. A **perfume**, smelling so good that everyone who smells it is filled with uncontrollable desire to eat the user alive.
4. A **coin** that makes other coins in its vicinity disappear, remaining alone in the purse or treasure chest.
5. A **pillow** that makes those sleeping on it have a dream the apparent length of a lifetime, in which they live in a different world, have different families, etc., while believing it's their reality and that their former reality was a dream. When they awake, they'll be shocked and hardly remember the real world, in which only a single night has passed.
6. An **amulet** with the power to bring its owner back to life from the dead. Unfortunately, it only does so when the owner is safely buried, dooming him to a cycle of deaths and resurrections inside his grave.
7. A **small stone idol**, of an ancient sea god. If carried on a ship, it becomes unimaginably heavy without changing appearance, making the ship sink into the sea.
8. A **comb** that makes all the hair of the person who used it fall away the next night.
9. A **cloak** giving its owner the ability to fly, but only to ascend and not to descend, dooming him or her to hover far above the ground and probably die from starvation/exposure (or remove the cloak and drop down).
10. A **comb** giving the hair a lustrous, lively look, but also makes it actually alive. The animated hair can grow itself and move autonomously, causing many troubles.
11. A **master key** capable of opening every locked door, but it will not always open to the place it's supposed to lead to, but to darker, more dangerous, or otherworldly places instead.
12. **Spectacles** that give their owner perfect sight, but make him dependable on them as his sight without them deteriorates quickly. Then they'll start playing tricks on him, until he can't distinguish reality from hallucination.
13. A **bag** producing incriminating evidence against its owner, e.g. body parts, bloody knives etc., every time it's being searched by law enforcers.
14. A pen that sometimes changes the writing done by it into embarrassing or horrid confessions, seemingly in the owner's handwriting.
15. A **cradle** making any baby sleeping in it permanently invisible.
16. A **piece of jewelry** making people who see it fall immediately in love with its wearer - but only those people the owner doesn't want to attract. People he/she is interested in, are repulsed by it.

17. A **book** about diseases, their symptoms and how to diagnose them. Those who read it become hypochondriacs, feeling as if they actually have those symptoms and unable to cure themselves.

18. A **talisman** of good luck, whose owner will always miraculously survive natural disasters like fires, floods, collapsing buildings, etc., even when everyone around him is killed. In truth, the medallion is the one creating those disasters, draining the luck from other people around and transferring it to its wearer.

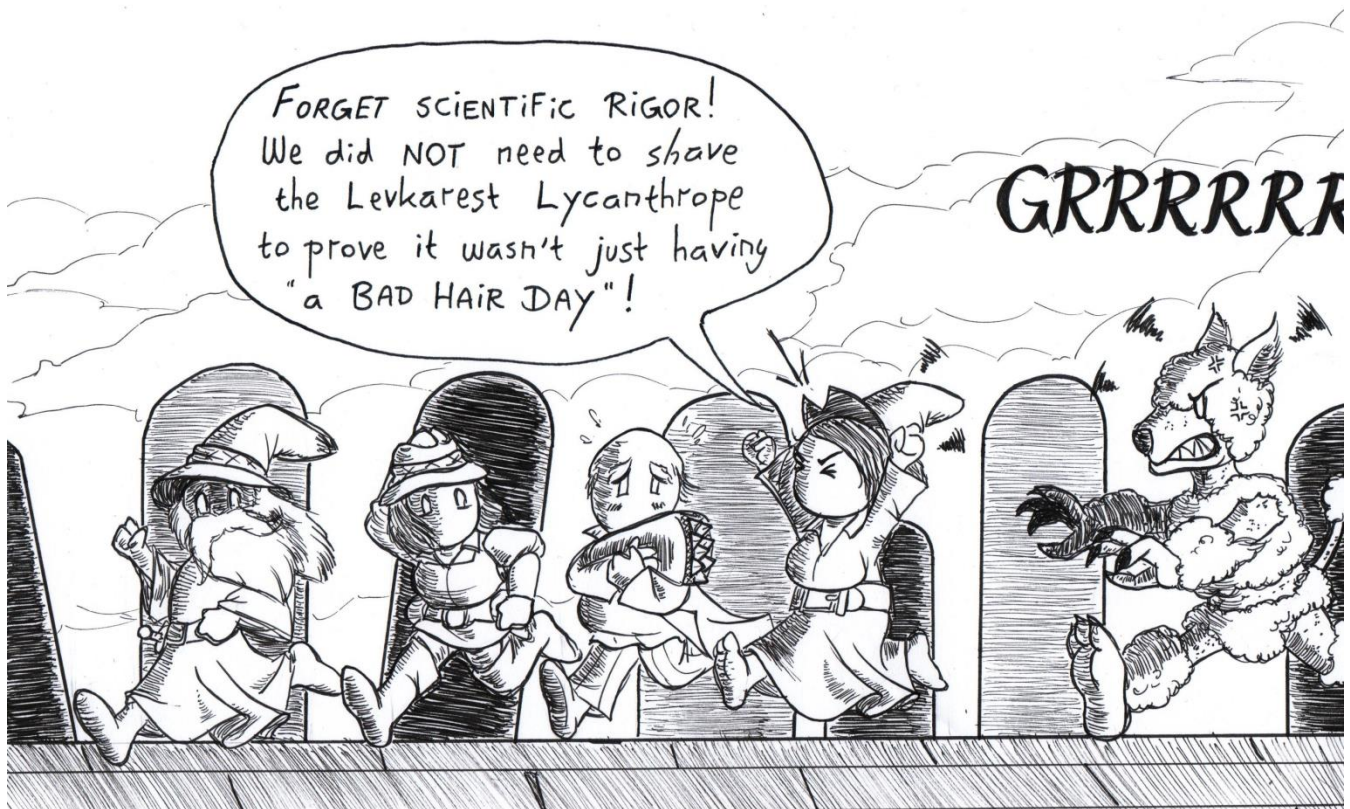
19. A **necklace** that detaches the wearer's body from his control, from the neck down. The body will start

acting on its own, doing all kinds of evil things, while the wearer can only control his head (to speak, cry, etc.).

20. An **earring** that causes its wearer to always hear unceasing voices of crying babies in the background, and that can't be removed.



Common Sense Over Scientific Rigor Mortis...



DOVEHOME, THE ANTI-RAVENLOFT

REALM OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

COMPILED BY MT KELLY (OTHER CONTRIBUTORS LISTED AS NOTED)

Some sages who have studied the multiverse believe that it arcs toward balance. For every great good, they believe, there exists a great evil, and for every negative, a positive. There is a story quietly making the rounds of the domains of dread about a realm on the far side of a mirror where instead of lands full of good people ruled by monsters, fiends, undead, the mad, or just the wicked, there were instead lands full of monsters, fiends, undead, the mad, or just the wicked, ruled by good people. The idea almost staggers the people of Ravenloft.

THE PROTECTORS OF DOVEHOME

Like the Darklords of Ravenloft, the Protectors of Dovehome are bound to a particular domain. Unlike the Darklords, they may cross the borders at will when on a mission. It is the other denizens, most of whom are monsters, fiends, undead, the mad, or just the wicked, of Dovehome that are trapped within their borders. By powers checks, they may earn the ability to cross borders and many have succeeded in doing so. This allows an economy to be built and further nurture the populace toward good, at least in theory. As Ravenloft is a prison of horror both for mostly good regular populace as well as their Darklord tormenters, Dovehome is a prison of obligation for the mostly wicked regular populace as well as their Protector teachers. To exit either realm, an adventurer must cross the borders and brave the other realms hoping to find a way out. As the Darklords have a particular torment, usually of their own making, which haunts their existence, The Protectors are constantly confronted with frustration of their righteous efforts and can be just as unhappy and trapped as their counterparts. Also

like Ravenloft, adventurers of any sort may be drawn into it.

THE PATH OF THE PROTECTOR (BY JAMES FIRECAT)

The Path of the Protector is for a paladin or similar figure who devotes themselves to always being at the service of those in need.

Step 1: Only needs to eat or drink half as much as normal person would. A noticeable mark of whatever cause they have devoted themselves to (a god, a town, a family, an order) will appear somewhere on their body in a relatively noticeable place. They will also gain the ability to cross domain borders.

Step 2: Spell resistance equal to your HD +10 against evil spell casters, -2 CON. Your body strangely feels as if it is weaker, but the strength of your convictions helps make up the difference.

Step 3: Immunity to poison and disease, -2 Cha, + 1 OR. Due to the fact that you seem to be driven more by your purpose than traditional human desires, you may forget to breathe for strangely long periods of time, but it doesn't bother you.

Step 4: You no longer need to sleep, allowing you to be ever ready to help others at any time of day or night, and you gain 60-foot darkvision. Every time you try to eat or drink (though you suffer no penalties from starvation or thirst when you refrain from doing either) you end up being violently ill afterwards, a fact that is going to attract no small amount of attention.

Step 5: You are now a Deathless Pristine Mummy or apply other templates as necessary.

THE WHO'S BLESSED OF DOVEHOME

GABRIELLE ADERRE

Young Gabrielle Aderre's Mother told her constantly of the love that her father had borne for the both of them. Though she had never known him, Gabrielle just knew that he was a kind and decent man who'd undoubtedly given his life for the both of them. He must have been, for he was a *giorgio* and her mother a Vistani. When her mother passed away, Gabrielle realized how much love, in all its forms, meant to her. She looked around and saw terrible things: wife-beating, adultery, prostitution, etc. She realized that love needed to be nurtured and shored up on occasion. Using her abilities as a Witch, which her mother had helped her cultivate since childhood, she constantly watches over the people around her, reminding them of the love they feel for each other. Husbands and wives are reminded of why they married. Children are reminded of times their parents looked after them when they were sick or scared. Parents are reminded of times their children made them proud. Gabrielle made this her life's work especially after she found out the truth about her father.

TRISTESSA

Tristessa did NOT like children. She had disliked them ever since the day she first got pregnant and felt the baby growing within her, like some form of parasite. Her baby was perfect, but she never completely liked it because of the imposition it was on her life. She cared for it because she was expected to by everyone, including herself, but she still resented the responsibility. She knew there was something wrong with her but still persevered in her efforts because she knew it was right and just. After the death of her child, she began constantly finding lost children, particularly babies, and felt obliged to care for them until she could find a way to return them to their parents or find them another home. She still feels the same resentment, however - not for the children directly, but for the world which has imposed upon them upon her (at least at first). She hates changing diapers. She hates wiping noses. And she REALLY hates cleaning laundry, but there's no one else.

The Province of Keening is full of baby cries and is a place where widows and desperate mothers know that their abandoned children will grow up better than in any other orphanage. Good Adventurers know that they should visit and give a hand or some money for the orphans, since donations really go toward their care, never squandered. So, in just a few years Tristessa found herself immersed up to the neck in babies and children.

She does get help from a few maids but she is very strict with the personnel. While she doesn't like the job, she is very responsible about it and wouldn't allow people to make the life of the children miserable. She constantly says to herself that she will abandon everything and leave, that she will not accept another puffy, crying annoyance, she will not spend even another copper from her once-large fortune to provide for children, but still when she angrily shouts to anyone approaching with a baby, one look at the child's eyes and dirty diapers and the protests go down the drain.

Deep inside her, Tristessa enjoys her task, even if she doesn't recognize it. She hates all the hard work but even though she never realizes it, the "annoying buzz" of children laughing and playing is rewarding, despite all these torments.

THE THREE GRANNIES

More like three fairy godmothers, The Grannies of Tepest are the Protectors of their realm. As three fairy children who were raised by a loving farm family, these three women have developed a deep and abiding sense of kinship with mortals and almost their every action is in relation to this. Their province of Tepest constantly attracts people with terrible problems of one sort or another, which the three sisters feel the need to help them with, each in their own way. The eldest and wisest, Letitia, is, at heart, a teacher. Whenever she intervenes, she feels the need to teach something to those she is helping. This is especially true of the many lost children they come across. As Tepest and Keening are neighboring provinces, Tristessa commonly sends her children to the Grannies for schooling, especially the trouble cases. Her younger sister, Laveda, is the tallest and most formidable of the sisters and not above bashing a few heads to knock some sense into the stubborn. This isn't to say that she's heavy-handed or

crabby, she's just not above tough love. The youngest, Lorinda, is an earth mother and druidess/ranger type. There is nothing she doesn't know about nature. She's constantly helping people with her abilities as a healer and herbalist. She also knows the Tepestani woods like the back of her hand so she's also a capable guide.

MALKEN

Tristan Hiregaard was the worst crime lord of a bad province. Smuggling, prostitution, extortion - Hiregaard ran it all. Not just through brutality, but through blackmail. He owned the king. He owned the lords. He owned the people. Even the Vistani feared him. Few had the courage to cross him and those that did paid a heavy price. So when Tristan found a Vistani boy stealing from his castle, he brutally and painfully murdered him. He even went so far as to tie the final knot in the boys' rite to signify death and sent it and the boy's body back to his tribe, daring them to do something about it. The tribe knew that anything they did in reprisal would be visited back on them 100-fold. They had no choice but to let it go, but that wasn't enough for the boy's sister, Rozalia. She left her tribe that night after burning her possessions and effectively making herself an outcast and darkling, all because stopping Tristan was more important. She knew that no one in the land had the courage to topple Tristan Hiregaard, so she cast a curse upon him that he would topple himself and because she no longer existed to her tribe, his vengeance could not come back on them. Not long after she cast her spell, however, she was accosted by bandits in Hiregaard's employ. It seemed her quest for justice had ended before it began, when suddenly, the bandits were driven off by shadowy figure that would only identify himself later as Malken. Recognizing him as the only one with courage enough to topple Sir Tristan, Rozalia joined with this mysterious stranger on the way to the city of Bergovitsa. There, posing as a horse trader, Malken challenged each of Tristan's illegal interests. Suddenly people began to think that maybe Tristan wasn't so unstoppable after all, for no matter how skilled or numerous the thugs he confronted were, Malken always managed to best them. Tristan would always remind anyone who became too rebellious, rather brutally, that Malken had yet to cross paths with himself. Tristan also turned to magic to locate his elusive foe. After murdering his son, Ivaar, and his best

friend, Sigfrid, both for rising against him, Tristan finally learned that Malken was, in fact, himself, and they've been battling over the people of Nova Vaasa ever since. Much to Malken's sorrow, one of the first casualties of this war was Rozalia.

YAGNO PETROVNA (BY GNARFFINGER)

Every year in the land of G'Henna, there is a bumper crop of food. Gluttony and Obesity are rampant. Yagno Petrovna is like Richard Simmons in such a setting, trying to encourage people to eat sensibly and exercise, but the people think he's nuts...

THE HOUSE OF LAMENT (by Gnarffinger)

The House of Lament is a tourist destination, where the house spirits provide every luxury for its ungrateful visitors. The house spirits grieve for their inability to please the most unpleasable guests.

IVANA BORITSI (by Yaoi Huntress Earth)

A plain-looking and mousy girl, Ivana felt like romance was something that would never be for her, due to her looks, despite her boy-crazy, free-loving mother's attempts to convince her otherwise. She decided instead to focus on other avenues of love (family, friends, giving to others, etc.). Things changed when a heartless, gold-digging bard named Pieter seduced Ivana and in the guise of teaching her that romance could in fact be for her, though in reality, he used her and was very emotionally abusive so that she'd never leave.

Her mother tried to seduce him in hopes that he'd lose interest in Ivana but it failed and Pieter killed her so she'd stop trying to ruin his meal ticket. Nostalia convinced Ivana that Pieter should die for his crimes, and they planned the ironic poisoned kiss of death upon him. Ivana currently dives into her charity works, family (especially her beloved cousin Ivan) and focusing on her inner beauty. Though she's mostly closed her heart to romance, she still yearns for it.

—ALTERNATE IVANA BORITSI (by brilliantlight)

Ivana Boritsi is the beautiful daughter of Camille Dilisnya, a very loving woman. Her vile father had incestuous desires for his daughter and murdered her

mother. When he found out that the daughter he longed for had a lover, he made up some magical poisonous lipstick that only affected the receiver of a kiss and she wound up killing her lover in this way. With her protector out of the way, he tried raping his daughter but forgot in his perverse desire that she still had the lipstick on, and when he tried to force a kiss out of her, he died. After his death, she invented a potion that heals with a kiss. She has used this on more than one occasion to heal those badly injured. Being only one woman, she can't do it all herself so she created the *ermordenung*, giving them the same power. Opposing them is the puritanical Church of Ezra, which teaches that is man's lot in life to suffer.

Her cousin Ivan Dilisnya is a man of refined tastes and has been since a child. He delights in sharing his artistic talents with others. A consummate actor, he has sponsored many plays for charity in which he is one of the actors. He was a fine lad from birth, often giving his desserts to the various servants so they could enjoy themselves.

The one thorn in his side was his sister Kristina, who was a vile woman but one who was able to hide this side from Ivan. She wound up marrying a rich man and having a child. The vile woman was killed by Ivan when he tried stopping her from killing her own child, who she thought was a "waste of money," since any money spent on the child couldn't be spent on her.

The two cousins joined forces after the Grand Conjunction and always watch each other's backs. The Church of Ezra now has to face two powerful opponents. However, so far the powerful church has been more than able to hold its own.

HARKON LUCAS

Harkon Lucas loved music. It was his first love from almost before he could even walk. He used to hear bards singing in the hills and forests of Cormyr. They would come to the forests to be alone and compose their music and little Harkon loved to listen to them from the bushes. When his fellow wolfweres began to attack his beloved music makers, Harkon would defend them with all his passion. As he was larger and stronger than his fellow wolfweres, He succeeded in driving them away. His passion for music was such that it

overwhelmed his basic nature. He wanted nothing so much as to make music. The bards embraced him as kindred spirit and taught him all they knew of music. Many of these bards and minstrels were musical geniuses and Harkon learned things unknown to most musicians. His fellow wolfweres, of course, wanted nothing to do with him or his dream and so he decided to join the world of men. The breaking point came when several of his fellow wolfweres attacked him and his teachers as Harkon was performing for them. He was singing, so he was caught off guard. He fought with all the savagery in his nature and passion in his soul but when he had finally slain all the marauding wolfweres, he turned around and saw that his teachers were dead. He was crushed. To this day, he finds performing to be a very painful experience - a serious handicap for a musician. His intense feelings often cause him to make terrible mistakes in his music, making any official performances into complete cacophony. This has led to an interminable case of stage fright on his part. As such he is rarely asked to perform officially. Hearing him rehearse, however, is a very moving experience. For this reason, Harkon Lucas has embraced the role of teacher to other musicians. He considers his pupils his children and treats them accordingly. He feeds his wolfwere appetites with animals and only releases its savagery when he sees his beloved musicians attacked. Sadly, this happens quite often in the wolfwere- and werewolf-infested realm of Ravenloft he's settled in, Kartakass. Currently, Harkon Lucas teaches some of the most promising musicians in Kartakass. More Meistersingers of the country have been pupils of his than not. Sadly, like all lands in Ravenloft, Kartakass is a land in constant conflict. Couple the constant battles between wolfweres, werewolves, and humans in Kartakass with the big egos of many of the brilliant musicians, and you have a perfect recipe for that constant conflict. And while Harkon Lucas is more than willing and capable to defend his musical prodigies from the beasts of the forest, he is utterly incapable of interceding in the many duels fought between rival musicians. It breaks his heart to see otherwise promising talents lost to pointless, murderous, rivalries. Harkon Lucas might have better luck looking after the people of Kartakass if he were to take a greater political role in the country, but then he'd have to abandon his teaching.

RUDOLPH VAN RICHTEN

Rudolph Van Richten fiercely envies the power that vampires have. His whole life, he has lived in the shadow of those more powerful than him, like the gypsy tribe who kidnapped his son and sold him to the vampire who turned him. Van Richten had never dreamed that vampires actually existed. Now that he had learned of them, he immediately saw them as his key to great power. Unfortunately, before Van Richten could get his son to change him into a vampire, his son, repelled by what he had become, walked into the sunrise to prevent vampirism from spreading like a disease from him. Since that day, Van Richten has obsessively hunted vampires hoping to convince or force one to turn him. He knows that vampires dominate those who they turn, so he always has an assassination plan in place for the one that turns him. His efforts, unfortunately, have always met with frustration. He has always been forced to kill the vampires he has caught before they could turn him. He has surrounded himself with people with ambitions similar to his own. He has learned of beings of similar power like werebeasts, liches, ghosts, and the created, but none, in his opinion, can so quickly gain him personal power as becoming a vampire.

BLUEBEARD (by Buzzclaw)

Bluebeard is a navy officer who tries to combat piracy. Many of his subordinates are barely better than the pirates he fights. He wrestles with this constantly but usually ends up looking the other way.

Instead of a room filled with his wives' corpses, it's filled with statues, poems, and pottery made by Bluebeard himself. Like RL Bluebeard, he always gives his wife a key to the room with a stern command not to open it. Unlike in RL, the key doesn't make a mark on the wife's hand when she opens it. Inevitably, once the wife enters the room, she conceals this from Bluebeard and becomes slowly consumed by insane jealousy.

"How DARE he waste his time on dead harlots? Doesn't he know how great I am?"

The wife will eventually enter a murderous rage and try to kill Bluebeard in his sleep. He will defend himself but his wife will continue to attack, imbued with seemingly

superhuman strength. In the end, she will collapse, dead, and he will cradle her in his arms and weep. He will dedicate himself for weeks to creating works of art to immortalize her and foreswear ever marrying again. Then he'll meet a charming foreign lady. They'll fall in love and get married...and the cycle will start again.

JACQUELINE RENIER (by James Firecat)

At first glance Richemulot would seem a paradise, the wide, open plains are inviting and scenic, and even its large cities have a surprisingly majestic air about them. They're large enough that even the poorest beggar can put not just one but two or three roofs over their head (owning a multistory home) as opposed to many other cities in the core where people are packed in like sardines. Though the sound of rats in the walls is nearly ever-present, even the beasts seem strangely sanitary and sterile. The people are full of good cheer, warm smiles, talk and gifts. Lots of talk, and very large gifts.

It isn't unheard of for someone to give someone else in Richemulot a gift that accounts for up to 90% of their material wealth.

Theft in Richemulot is no longer accomplished with the sword but with the word instead, as everyone schemes to try and ferret out the secrets of their neighbors and other public figures with which they could blackmail them into abject poverty.

Standing against this tide of double dealing is one lone woman. By all public accounts, Jacqueline Renier is a well-meaning but not especially bright "ruler" of the city who often, it seems, can barely be bothered to even rule, instead preferring the life of a socialite gadfly, letting people go about their business while performing gifts of charity here and there when the mood strikes her.

In reality, Jacqueline is not only a wererat, but a wererat in command of a small army of other wererats (the rest of her family) not to mention being able to control the numerous rats that fill her city which is how she does whatever she can to limit the damage they do to her city's inhabitants. Rather than simply telling them to drown themselves in a river, however, instead Jacqueline uses her control of the nation's vermin to collect secrets on her own people faster than any group

of humans possibly could. Thus Jacqueline can be aware of who is attempting to blackmail who and with what, and make a counter move to try and limit the damage that takes place under her watchful eye as best she can.

Alas Jacqueline is ever-plagued by her eternal foe, Henri DuBois, Henri somehow discovered that Jacqueline was a wererat and then purposely seduced her, so as to infect himself in the course of their lovemaking. Giving himself over to the power of the beast within, unlocked by the act, Henri stalks the streets and sewers of Richemulot, ever ready to devour the unwary any chance he gets, eating rat and human alike so as to deprive Jacqueline of any way to track his movements...

—ALTERNATE JAQUELINE RENIER (by brilliantlight)

Jaqueline Renier stood out due to her true empathy with other people and was one of the rather rare good wererats. She tried finding and helping other good wererats such as her sister Louise. Her grandfather was a kindly wererat himself who was able to retain nominal control due to his strength. One day an evil wererat tricked her into giving her grandfather poisoned food and he died. Since the poison was slow acting, it was never traced back to her or the evil wererat who tricked her. One day a power-hungry man named Henri Dubois tried to seduce her. It almost worked but she had a gift that caused her to turn into a wererat whenever a corrupt person tried to seduce her. She chased him out of the house. Rat or no, the man became obsessed with her. She might be a wererat but she was his key to wealth and power and he has never given up. With the help of her right-hand gal, Louise, she fights off the sinister plots of the evil Henri Dubois.

KING CROCODILE (by brilliantlight)

King Crocodile is the just lord of the Beastlands. He is intensely interested in humans but the evil animals try to kill any human that tries to enter the domain. When they aren't killing humans, they are killing each other, not for food but just for sport. He tries constantly to get them to kill only for food but still they keep their vicious habits. A wise jackal left the Beastlands behind to enter a new domain where he tries to get humans and animals to live together in balance with each other but is often thwarted by evil humans and animals.

MALUS SCALERIS (by brilliantlight)

Malus Sceleris was born to a civilization-hating society. His father was the wicked druid leader of this evil band of barbarians. His father was planning to get his people to gather together to burn down the largest city within 200 miles. With the huge horde he was able to get behind him, he was capable of doing so. Malus was planning to reveal this plan to the city dwellers so they could either prepare themselves for the attack or flee. His father then poisoned him, but on the verge of death he wound up in a new domain. A bright, shining city full of hard-working people. However, he is constantly on guard against huge bands of barbarians led by druids bent on sacking the city and killing all the inhabitants. He has managed to keep them off but lost many poor souls to raids.

RUDOLPH VON AUBRECKER / DOMINIC D'HONNAIRE (by hidajiremi)

Rudolph von Aubrecker was a just young nobleman who was set to inherit his father's position before a horrific sailing accident left him almost dead. Found by Victor Mordenheim, the reclusive "Good Doctor," Rudolph hovered near death for many days. He admitted his fear of dying to Dr. Mordenheim, who offered a slim hope--the removal of Rudolph's living brain, which would let his kind personality and brilliant mind survive the death of his body. Rudolph accepted, and the Good Doctor struggled to perform the operation; he would have failed but for the tireless efforts of his wife and nurse, Elise.

When Rudolph awoke as a brain in a jar, he found himself blessed with the incredible power to see into men's minds and hearts. Without the constraint of his flesh, he had become a pure mind, a creature of unbounded empathy and compassion. Still, without his body, he felt he could no longer be a proper ruler for Lamordia, and chose to allow his family the closure of believing he had passed away. Victor and the "Living Brain" worked together to help many people before Rudolph began to become restless. He believed that he could help more people on his own, building up an organization that played to his strengths; Dr. Mordenheim agreed, and one of the doctor's assistants

traveled with the Living Brain to act as his hands and feet on the long road to Dementlieu.

The decadent nation had seen better days. With a near-permanent "reign of terror" brought on by the mad rule of Governor Guignol and a vicious criminal underworld run by the notorious Alanik Ray, the only ally that the Living Brain could find was the last remaining honest councilor of the nation, Dominic d'Honaire. A mesmerist and hypnotist specializing in the removal of traumatic memories, d'Honaire was approached through intermediaries about the possibility of an alliance.

For now, the two dance around one another in the shadows; d'Honaire is fearful that the "Brain" is actually one of Guignol's men, trying to expose d'Honaire's disloyalty, while the Brain worries that a man as private as d'Honaire would find the Brain's telepathic abilities to be an intrusion. The day that these great minds can overcome their personal worries and truly ally for a greater cause will be a mighty day indeed for the forces of good.

ALFRED TIMOTHY (by James Firecat)

"Excuse me fine gentlemen, but have you heard the good word?" a young man loudly announced, to a crowd of lumberjacks returning from their day's toil.

"Oh great, it's that lunatic priest..." Muttered one of them.

"Looney is the word for him..." Added another.

The priest in question was a young man who was somewhere in his early twenties. But his fresh face, devoid of any sort of mustache or beard, and large wide open eyes conspired to doubtlessly make him look even younger than he actually was.

He approached the workers with a sort of awkward, bowlegged walk, and his back was slightly hunched, as if there was something wrong with his body, but it was impossible to say quite what.

Unshaken by the mockery of those around him he broke into his sermon.

"Consider the wolves of the forest, they serve not out of fear or coercion but out of genuine loyalty. All wolves from the strongest Alpha to the weakest Omega are

bound together in a life where they need not fear the lash of the overseer, where they would never dream of making another into a slave. Brothers, are we not at least deserving a life as splendid as that of wolves?" He implored in a voice so dramatic that his frail body seemed to be in the process of shaking itself apart.

"Every single god damn day it's the same speech. He may be able to stand around in rags flapping his lips about freedom but I've got a family to feed..." grumbled one of the lumberjacks.

Another decided that the time had finally come to do something about the annoyance.

He approached the priest, who was dressed in little more than dirt-stained rags, and dealt him a firm blow from his ax handle. As the lumberjack was a man in the prime of his life, with the body of one who spends their life chopping down trees, he had no trouble at all sending the younger, frailer, priest face first to the ground.

"Shut up!" He barked at the brown-haired youth.

"I will let none silence me on the holy quest that I have been given by the Fen-Dweller," the priest insisted as he rolled to his feet to face his attacker.

The lumberjack pulled back his ax handle and prepared to deliver another blow.

When it came down the priest raised up his arms to stop it.

The lumberjack struggled with all his might, but he could not shake the priest's grip on his makeshift weapon. There was a strange light in his eyes and now the brown-haired holy man's body did actually begin to tear itself apart!

There was a sound of grinding bones and twisting muscles as whatever had previously been wrong with him was made right. His body became as big and powerful as any of the lumberjacks.

Then it kept growing.

Silver tufts of hair began to sprout all over his body, as fingernails grew and lengthened, digging into the lumberjack's sleeves and holding him in place as everyone else nearby screamed and ran for their lives.

The priest tore through what little garments he had, leaving him naked except for a golden amulet in the shape of a crescent moon that hung about his now much thicker neck, on a string.

His face elongated into something approaching a lupine muzzle, as his feet became massive paws and all across his body the “hair” was now growing so thickly that it would be better to call it fur.

The lumberjack wanted to run but he was held in place by the strength of the beast's grip as easily as a child held onto their favorite toy.

Only once the transformation into a nine-foot tall wolfbeast was fully complete did the 'priest' speak again, his voice an inhuman growl that was still just barely understandable.

“As I was saying, would you please but take a few moments and consider the good word of Fenrir and joining the universal pack of brotherhood?” It inquired in a surprisingly polite tone, before (now that it had regained full control of its limbs) letting go of the lumberjack.

Verbrek is a land in the midst of great changes. Within the last few decades mankind has finally won out over nature. Wolf packs are being pushed back, forests are being cut down, some men are making incredible fortunes off of exporting the land's resources. What goes unsaid is that some people are now somehow being made even “poorer” than they ever would have been when the land was still wild, finding themselves falling deeply into debt, no longer even properly owning the tiny cabins that they live in.

Alfred Timothy saw the inequality that humans lived in, and realized just how wrong it was, especially compared to how splendid, simple, and free life was for the wolves of Verbrek, at least for those whose homes and hunting grounds were not being intruded upon.

Alfred, being a natural werewolf, considers himself a link between humanity and wolf-kind, one who believes that he has been tasked by the Great Wolf God Fenrir (Chaotic Neutral) to bring the freedom of the latter to the former. Alfred (Chaotic Good) goes about this task with more zeal than tact or proper planning (growing up in a family of natural werewolves, his ideas about what

life is like for normal humans are a bit spotty at times) but he always means well and he never hurts anyone who doesn't try to hurt him first.

Alfred is also not above occasionally stealing from those who have so much that they can't possibly miss what he takes, and giving it to those who need it much more badly, more than one grand party in Verbrek has been interrupted by a having a huge wolf creature break in, grab a buffet table in both hands and carry it off.

Alfred will transform back into human form whenever he is overcome by feelings of anger, so he combats this by going about his work with the irreplaceable joy of a young puppy (as Terry Pratchett noted, anything that has both human and wolf like traits is bound to have at least a little dog in there somewhere) and will likely have a smile on his face even if someone has just tried to beat him half to death or clamped him in chains. It's not as if injuries or imprisonment can hold a servant of the Alpha and Omega wolf for long....

VLAD DRAKOV (by Mistmaster)

Vlad Drakov was a brave and loyal warrior, who raised through the ranks, being distinguished for his strategic mind, and for his great respect for life; he always managed to win battles with the smallest death toll. He never wanted to rule, but when the Falkovnian kingdom fell into anarchy, the crown was all but imposed on his head. Drakov would ask nothing more than to be able to stay in Lekar and reform the country, even allowing for the creation of a representative government; but enemies force him to fight. He is continually forced to win wars, then he feels compelled to help his defeated enemies, and that causes his kingdom to grow. Each time, he needs to start again to integrate the new subjects and land, and as soon as all is ready to summon the first legislative parliament elections, a new war starts, and all must be delayed.

VECTA / KAS (by Mistmaster)

King Vecna was the wisest of the archmages, the kindest of kings, and all of Cavitia worshipped him almost as a god. His faithful lieutenant was the paladin Kas. After the death of the king, Kas died of grief, and he arranged for himself to be buried to guard his king forever. But the mourning of his people over his passing

and the cruelty of his successors, united with the sincere devotion of the good Cavitian people caused Vecna to ascend to godhood. Faithful Kas became his herald, and the now divine Vecna sought to return to his kingdom. but to do so a price was required, so Vecna ordered Kas to sever his left hand and to carve his right eye out. This sacrifice allowed Vecna, god of Teaching, to return to his kingdom, as harbinger of a new age of prosperity. Vecna still suffers from the maiming he imposed upon himself, but he endures it; Kas on the other hand, doubts himself for obeying that specific order, and he has sworn himself off from his mighty sword, until the day he will find the Eye and the Hand of his lord, and Vecna will be whole again.

URIK VON KARKOV (by Mistmaster)

Urik von Karkov was born as a domestic panther on Toril. However, he was unlike every other panther; he had the sensibility and the intelligence of a man. Thanks to that, he fell desperately in love with his owner. Sune, the goddess of love, heard his pleas and turned him in a man. He married and was happy with his former owner, until the day she was killed, alongside their children. The grief turned him into a panther again, and he ran; he swore that he would use all of his power to protect innocent women and children from the cruelty of the world. Lightpowers heard his pleas, and they brought him to Valachan, a kingdom ruled by a misogynist tyrant. He killed him, and became the new ruler of Valachan, regaining a human form, and set himself to protecting his people, especially women and children. However, he is still grieving for his dead family, and his grief will overcome him every time he becomes close to another woman. When this happens, he takes his panther form and runs until the following full moon. When he returns to his human form, he comes back to his castle and again starts his solitary life, protecting and defending the people of Valachan.

ANHKTEPOT (by brilliantlight)

Anhktepote was the pious ruler of Har'Akir and started out as a devout worshiper of Ra. He then found out the truth. The priests had lied to him. Far from being a just god, Ra was merely a tyrant who worked through the pharaohs. He expected unquestioning obedience from his worshipers and he commanded them through the

pharaohs, who were virtually worshiped as gods themselves. But this was all a ruse, all commands from the pharaoh were actually from Ra who was amused by people bowing down to a mere servant. One god led the struggle against the oppressive Ra and that was Set. Far from being the evil, corrupt god he was smeared to be, he was actually the leader of the struggle for freedom and justice. When Ra found out Anhktepote's loyalties had changed, he had his corrupt priests murder him and turn him into a mummy while cursing his kingdom. This did not stop the pious Anhktepote who even now, after death, struggles against the corrupt priesthood.

STRAHD VON ZAROVICH

Strahd Von Zarovich spent his entire adult life fighting in an unjust war. Partially thanks to his efforts, those who profited from the war were exposed and a decades long war between nations was ended. Strahd, and several other war veterans like him, were placed in charge of the border provinces between the two nations. Strahd was set over the province of Barovia and was quartered in its most famous residence, Castle Ravenloft. He quickly developed a reputation for justice, righteousness, and an even hand. He sent to his relatives to inform them of his new life and they responded by asking him to take in his youngest brother, Sergei, and teach him better ways. Sergei did prove to be a bit of a wastrel and rogue, but no villain. Strahd agreed to try to mentor his brother. He was having some success in this endeavor until the day Sergei brought home a girl he'd met in the village. Tatyana was a mischievous young woman who tended to encourage all of Sergei's worst qualities. Strahd soon realized he would have to straighten out both of these young people, which was why he was so pleasantly surprised when they announced their engagement. Strahd enjoyed preparing for the wedding and had several discussions with the bride and groom about the responsibilities of the married. Everything seemed to be going wonderfully until Strahd's old friend and subordinate, Alek Gwilym, was found murdered. Strahd, Sergei, and Tatyana were devastated but it was too late to postpone the wedding. On the morning of the wedding, Strahd had withdrawn to compose himself, when Tatyana came to check on him. To his surprise,

she tried to seduce him. She got as far as kissing him before he stopped her.

"This is wrong," he said, "You're going to marry my brother."

"Would you marry me if I asked you?" She asked.

Strahd couldn't force himself to answer.

"I knew it," she said huskily. "I saw the way you looked at me when you thought nobody would see. You desire me, don't you, Elder. Well, it's all there for you. All you need to do is say it."

Strahd finally got a hold of himself.

"No," he said, "I will not dishonor myself or my brother in such a way." And he turned to leave.

"Just like Alek," he heard her say and he turned back just in time to receive her knife in his chest. As he fell to the floor, he noticed it was blade of a Ba'al Verzi assassin.

"Too honorable to just say yes. It's all right. I'll just marry your brother to become ruler of Barovia. I may even keep him around for a while. He amuses me. Farewell Old One." she said as she left the room. That was last thing Strahd saw.

When Strahd came to, he was on a bed with his chest bandaged. His rescuer had been one of his guests. Leo Dilisnya. Tatyana had barely missed Strahd's heart and Dilisnya had had to call upon various surgeons and magic healers to keep him from dying. Strahd had been comatose for weeks and, in that time, Tatyana and Sergei's iron-handed reign had been consolidated. The country was in the midst of a reign of terror. Many had been executed on suspicion of involvement in Strahd's murder. Strahd immediately set out for Castle Ravenloft to set things to right, against Leo Dillisnya's advice. As Strahd rode through the streets in his regalia, Barovians began to say his ghost had risen to take revenge on his murderers. When they learned the truth, they all followed him to Castle Ravenloft. When Strahd arrived at the Castle, he burst into the throne room to find Tatyana, standing over Sergei's murdered body with the bloody Ba'al Verzi blade in her hand. She fled, and Strahd pursued her, cornering her on the castle overlook. She tried again to seduce him.

"Strahd," she said, "I always wanted you, not him. When I heard you were alive, I killed him, since I didn't need him anymore."

Enraged Strahd charged her and barely dodged her knife when she struck. He pushed her back and she lost her balance next to the overhang and flipped over the side, crying out just briefly. Strahd raced to the side and looked over, seeing that she had managed to grab the edge of the cliff on her way down.

"Strahd," she begged, "Please save me."

Strahd reached for her, fully intending to do so. What he didn't know was that she'd managed to gain a foothold as well and when his hands grabbed hers, she pulled with all her might, trying to pull him down with her. Her blood slicked hands slipped from his, however and she fell down the cliff, screaming Strahd's name all the way down. Strahd collapsed in grief on the overhang, and remembered an old fable from his youth.

A scorpion asked a frog to carry it across a river. The frog hesitated, afraid of being stung by the scorpion, but the scorpion argued that if it did that, they would both drown. The frog considered this argument sensible and agreed to transport the scorpion. The scorpion climbed onto the frog's back and the frog began to swim, but midway across the river, the scorpion stung the frog, dooming them both. The dying frog asked the scorpion why it stung, to which the scorpion replied "I couldn't help it. It's in my nature."

—Current Sketch

It's been decades since that day. Strahd quickly learned that he wasn't aging anymore. He believes one of the spells used to heal him has made him age more slowly. Years later, Strahd met another young man who reminded him so much of Sergei that Strahd took him in and tried to mentor him like before. This young man also met a wild, tempestuous woman like Tatyana whom Strahd also tried to mentor and the cycle repeated itself almost exactly. Strahd realized then that the two young people and he were under a curse and that it would repeat itself until he could find some way to break Sergei and Tatyana free of their scorpion-like natures.

ISOLDE (by KingCorn)

The Carnival

It goes by many names: The Night Circus, the Carnival of Mad Delights, the Horror Show. But all know of the Carnival, a traveling show of madmen and monsters, who twist the minds and bodies and even souls of those who watch their dark performance.

Some say the carnival was formed by souls escaped from hell, others say the entire show is just one great demon, or that they are merely the castaways of the world who have turned to violent madness. The truth is far sadder, and disturbing.

Far off in the mists was once the City of Castaways: L'Morai. Here, all the freaks and mutants of the world, all the unique souls, would find themselves through the fickle mercy of the mists. Here, they would be raised to be proud of themselves, to be proud of their uniqueness. The crown of this place was the Carnival, a performance to celebrate the talents of its citizens, to revel in their freak nature rather than feel shame. But not all was well, for even in this place of mercy, darkness can take root.

Hermos was always a cruel child. He used his hulking size to pick on those weaker than him, and as grew to near-giant size so too did his cruelty. He, his partner Marie, and several others in the city, resented their nature, resented the idea of having to accept being freaks for their whole lives. To them, the idea of pride as freaks was a sick joke. Driven to frenzy, they attempted to burn the city down, and fled into the mists, calling on any god or devil they could, to help grant them revenge upon the world for cursing them with such twisted forms. And someone answered.

Isolde was infamous for her sick cruelty, even in the Abyss. Her desire to corrupt the pure, to pervert the innocent, to twist the world into a foul parody of itself was all consuming. When she heard of the mists, of the supposed heroes that lay within, she could not resist the call. She would corrode the good of that land, and shape it into her own image. Entering the mists, she found herself weakened but alive, and already with petitioners. The exiles of L'Morai prostrated before her, and offered their lives, their very souls, for a chance to

follow her in her mission of corruption. And so, The Carnival began.

The center of the Carnival is Isolde herself. A vain succubus, she is ringmaster of the Carnival, thriving in the center of attention, in seeing interest turn to allure, turn to horror. Using her power, she spreads the Twisting, a corrupting plague of magic, which twists the audience slowly into monstrous parodies of their former selves, bringing forth their darkest desires and compulsions. and leaving behind broken communities.

Behind her is the monstrous Hermos. Often mistaken for a Caliban, the hulking brute is the enforcer of the Carnival. Isolde has gifted him for his devotion, granting him strength greater than a true giant, and near-immortal healing, but in doing so, has twisted his form further. For this, he both loves and loathes her, worships her and curses her. He is a hateful being, hateful of his mistress, hateful of the world, and most of all, hateful of himself and his fellow freaks.

Behind him are others, such as the cruel vampiress Amelia, now a true vampire. Or the hollow man Tindal, once a kindly wizard now, a wicked sociopath (his attempt at purging himself of his darker nature going deathly awry). Or the mysterious and pure Familiar, child of the Gentlemen Caller. He, more than any other is Isolde's special project, for if she can corrupt the child of a deva, a truly pure soul, then she can corrupt anyone.

But not all hope is lost, for resistance can be found in even this horror show. Born of souls unwillingly cursed by Isolde, this group is led by Professor Pacali, a former teacher at Il Aluk university. Once seeing the carnival as a mere band of unfortunates, he thought to study their deformities to perhaps cure them. Now stuck in the carnival, he is at his wits end trying to bring it down. The years of horror have made this once kind man bitter and paranoid, not helped by the Pickled Punks he is cursed to spawn from his growing dark thoughts. However, beneath it all, in him beats the heart of a righteous man.

VICTOR MORDENHEIM / ADAM

Victor Mordenheim was ahead of his time, and everyone who knew him, even some who didn't,

suffered for it. Mordenheim became obsessed with life, death, and power when his mother died and his father nearly lost his mind. Looking for ways to manipulate life and death, young Victor studied corpses and carcasses to learn everything he could. Recognizing his son's passion, Victor's father sent him to medical school. There, Victor fell in with some colleagues who had embraced a twisted philosophy that emphasized the idea that a doctor had a right to decide whether a patient should live or die. Victor took this philosophy to a mercenary end and became the first scientist/surgeon to think of weaponizing his skills and selling them to the highest bidder. He began in medical school when he gave plague-ridden fluids to a landlord, who used them to kill a group of peasants so he could clear them off his land. He used the money he made to further his unethical experiments quietly while he pursued his medical studies. Mordenheim began to lead a dual life: he would publicly pursue his studies as a conscientious medical professional, while privately pursuing his unethical experiments as a scientific assassin. He would always study the results of his murders, looking for information he could further apply. He also sold his surgical skills as a torturer. He was very good at keeping people alive longer than they would choose. After graduating university, Mordenheim married Elise von Brandthofen and the seemingly happy couple retired to his ancestral home, Schloss Mordenheim, where he began to secretly pursue his most ambitious project: a resurrected corpse, impervious to harm, that would be the perfect undefeatable soldier. As he pursued his goal, he and Elise did their best to start a family, but after a stillbirth and a crib death, Elise fell into a deep depression which Victor decided to take advantage of to complete his project. After 13 years of research, Mordenheim accomplished his goal. His flesh monster was a reality. Mordenheim was very pleased with the creature. It was incredibly strong, seemed to heal overnight, and seemed impervious to pain. Mordenheim treated the creature very cruelly, hoping to harden it into a killer, while still remaining in control of it. Unbeknownst to Mordenheim, however, the cell in which he kept the creature was connected by an old drainpipe to Elise's chambers. One day, the creature heard Elise singing to her dead son, Adam, and called out to her. Taking his voice for the ghost of her dead son, the two began a relationship. Elise's loving

kindness undermined Victor's attempts to twist the creature into a killer and Victor found himself stymied in his efforts to create a super killer under his control. When the Mordenheims took in an orphan girl named Eva, Elise found her life complete. Eva was not as lost in her mind as Elise was and one day was able to follow the drainpipe down to the cell where the creature was locked. Adam and Eva began a secret friendship that lasted until she found out what Victor Mordenheim was actually trying to do. That day, she waited for Victor to leave the house, then led Elise down to the cell. At first, Elise was horrified but she soon recognized in the creature the son she'd wanted and was happy to give him her dead son's name. The three finally resolved to leave Schloss Mordenheim and never look back, but none of them had realized that their whole meeting had been a trap set by Mordenheim. Victor ambushed them and captured both Elise and Eva. He then informed Adam that if he did not do as he was told, his loved ones would suffer. Elise went into a fury and attacked Victor, breaking away from him, grabbing Eva and running for her life, with Victor in pursuit and Adam close behind. Sadly, Elise tripped on a stone stairway and fell down them with Eva in her arms. When Victor caught up with them, Eva was dead and Elise was barely alive.

"NOOOOOOOOOOO!!!" bellowed Adam from the top of the stair. He moved on Mordenheim, intending to kill him.

"STOP!" shouted Mordenheim, and Adam did, reacting to a word Mordenheim had conditioned him to respond to, "Elise is still alive, barely. If you harm me, there will be no one to see to her wounds and she will die. Which is greater? Your hate for me or your love for Elise?"

Adam snarled at Mordenheim, then helped him get Elise to the laboratory. While Mordenheim did what he could for Elise, Adam moved Eva's body to the laboratory, as well.

When Mordenheim had done all that he could, he informed Adam that she was in a vegetative state. He might be able restore her in time, but he would need Adam's complete obedience to even have a chance. Adam responded by punching Mordenheim in the mouth and knocking out five of his teeth.

"Let that be your answer!" Adam roared, "You need only your hands, your eyes, and your mind to restore Elise! You could lose any other part of your body, and I'll be happy to take them from you if you ever try to use her or Eva to dominate me again!"

For the first time in his life, Victor Mordenheim shook with terror.

"More than that!" continued Adam, "Eva has only a broken neck! You restored me from less! I would advise you to seriously consider restoring her as well, lest I figure out what else you can do without! I suggest you get to work posthaste, because you never know when I'll be back to check in on you! For now, I've seen all of you I can stand!"

With a furious roar, Adam bounded off the high balcony and disappeared into the night. Neither one of them noticed the mists rising

—Current Sketch:

Mordenheim and Adam are locked in a battle of wills. Adam continues to try to force Mordenheim to restore Elise, and Mordenheim continues to try to force Adam to do his bidding. Adam succeeded in forcing Mordenheim to revive Eva, but she had no memory when she regained consciousness. They committed her to an asylum, where her memories are slowly returning. Adam's threats to Mordenheim have somehow proven hollow, for whenever Adam does take a piece of the doctor, he finds himself later missing the same piece, then they both find those pieces regenerated later. The single exception to this are the five teeth Adam knocked out of Mordenheim's mouth, as both have learned. In the meantime, Mordenheim continues to sell his skills to the highest bidder, hoping to build a power base that will allow him to destroy Adam, or dominate him, while Adam does his best to thwart Mordenheim's schemes and protect those he would victimize. He figures that this is what Eva and Elise would want him to do. All of Lamordia tells stories of the unkillable, scarred, hero, who lives across the ice-choked bay.

THE HEADLESS HORSEMAN (by HyperionSol)

Eli Van Hassen was a generous and kind landlord who often allowed extensions and breaks to those who rent land from him. He was also generous to the poor and downtrodden. However, many people in the village took advantage of that, hoping to milk him as much as they possibly could.

One day the village was attacked by a Hydra and a hero called the Horseman arrived and slew it, turning him into a hero. He was welcomed by Eli and his energetic and vivacious daughter Talitha. Talitha and the Horsemen soon fell in love and it was only a matter of time before they would wed. Eli applauded this, seeing the Horseman as a fine young man.

The people of the village were stirring in their greed. With inflated rumors, many believed that the Horseman had access to Eli's complete fortune, or had a fortune of his own, since a wealthy man was allowing a virtual unknown to marry his daughter. The people began to scheme in an effort to get their hands on it. Finally, someone accused the Horseman of rape and the people captured him, threatening to kill him unless he told them about his fortune and handed it over.

The Horseman had no such fortune and insisted on that. The people did not believe him and prepared to execute him. Eli and Talitha discovered what was happening and soon sent men to stop it before things went too far. Sadly, they were too late, despite how fiercely they fought to stop the greedy citizens. As they did, the light of Dovehome began to shine.

The Horseman rose up from his beheading, running the Endless Road to bring justice to the greedy citizens on the light of the sickle moon. Often he works with Eli, who uses his legal authority to cut down on the schemers, fraudsters, and otherwise dishonest people of his domain during the day - something he should have done long ago. Talitha and the Horseman share some moments, but she searches constantly for his missing head so she might help him find rest and allow his duty to come to an end.

This domain's theme is fraudsters and con men, naive rulership being given the harsh light of reality, and the

consequences of not identifying and dealing with issues such as these.

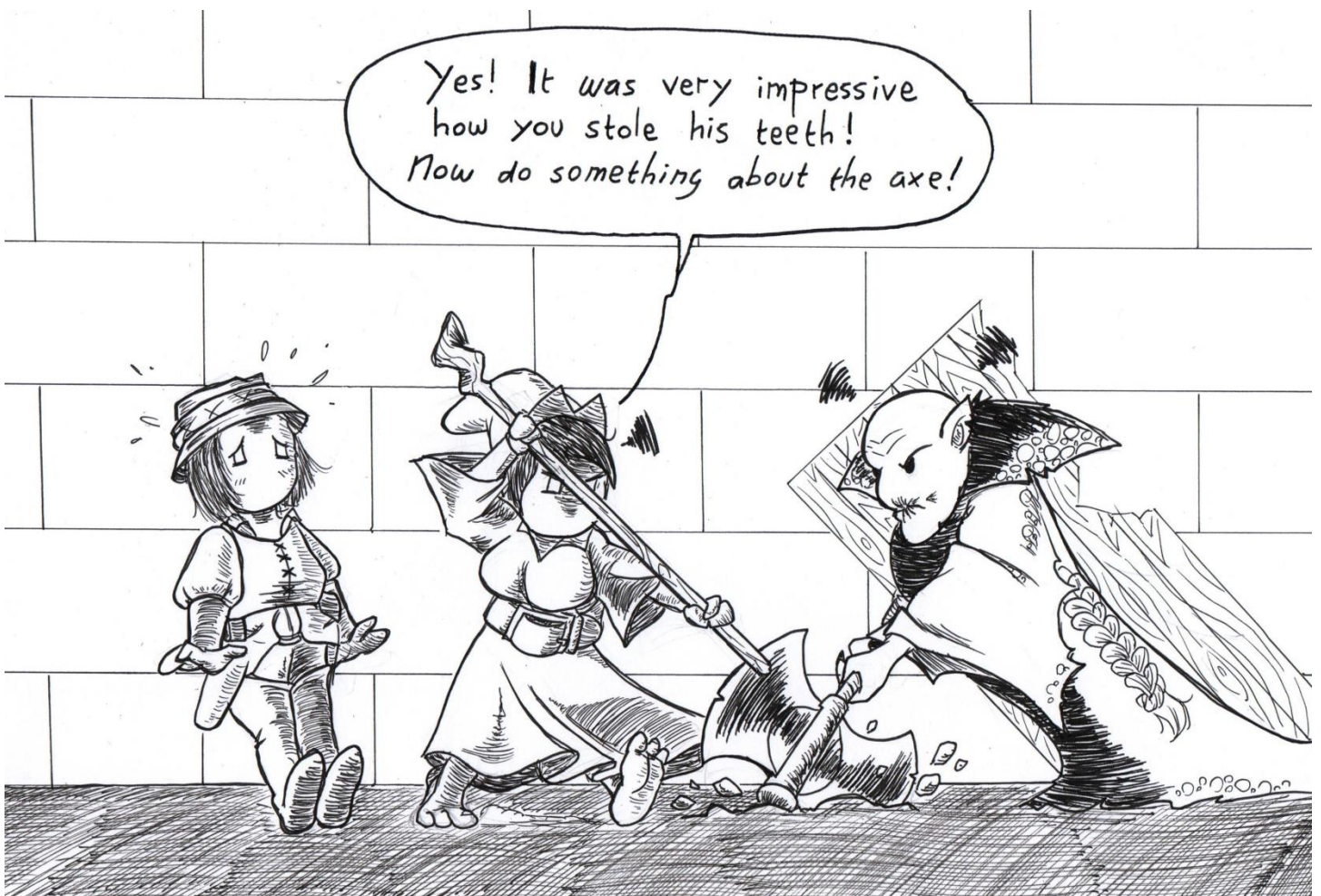
THE UNKNOWN

This is all the information that has been found about this mythical, or perhaps fictional, place.

There are rumors of more, and of course, glaring omissions, but this is all the information that has come to light ... for now.



Prank War in Ravenloft ...



LAMORDIA LAND OF PROGRESS AND TECHNOLOGY

BY TOMASSO "MISTMASTER" MAZZONI

Culture level: Renaissance

Ecology: Full

Climate & Terrain: Alpine. The domain is dominated by the Sleeping Beast mountains, it is a bit less frigid on the coast, while arctic on Agony Island.

Languages: Lamordian, Lamordian (Falkovnian), Darkonian, Dementlieuse.

Religions: Divinity of Self (LN), Skogul the Warrior Maiden (LG), Lathurr the Spark of Progress (CG); Fenris the Winter Wolf (CE).

Races: Human 95%, Constructs 4%, Other 1%.

Government: Parliamentary Federal Monarchy.

Ruler: His Grace the High Baron Vilhelm von Aubrecker.

Darklord: Doctor Viktor von Mordenheim

Lightlord: Elise von Mordenheim

Inhabitants: 1,500,000

Analog: Late XIX Century Switzerland.

Capital City: Ludendorf (182,000 in, Standard, L/N),

Important Towns: Neufurchtenburg (160,000 in),

Buchstadt (80,000 in) Mordenheim (67,000 in)

Borders: North: Darkon, North-east: Darkon, East and

South-East: Falkovnia, South East Harrington Dale;

South: Pureterre and Dementlieu, West: Sea of Sorrows.

TROPES

Lamordia is a land which explores the evil of hubris and unethical science, the horror of unleashing forces one can't control and also the horror of abusive parents. It's also the land where rationality and instinct, the progress of the urbanized land, and the wilderness of the mountains, clash.

DOMAIN OVERVIEW

This little country is encased between tall mountains; villages and cities dot the vales and cliffs, and the narrow plain between the Vuchar, Musarde, Spinnwebe, and Kalt Rivers and the Shlafendes Biest (Sleeping Beast) mountains.

The Musarde river Delta is underpopulated, covered in forests.

The Schwarze river, houses the biggest city and port of the nation, the capital, Ludendorf; on the other side of the river sits Shloss Aubrecker, the Baronial family residence.

On the north, the City of Mordenheim, at the feet of the Sleeping Beast mountain range, guards the pass through the mountains to Darkon.

On the East, Neufurchtenburg sits on the only crossing of the Vuchar river. The Island of Qual (Agony) is a frozen stretch of land, full of rich mines. The principal settling and port-city of the island, and the main sea faring port of Lamordia, is the city of Buchstadt.

THE PEOPLE

Lamordians are a practical and cultured people, thanks to the six years of compulsory education everyone gets, with a school being present even in the smallest thorp. They enjoy their freedom, and they are usually open to the wonders of technology. Magic is just another field of science, even if it is regarded as too erratic and inexact by many Lamordian scholars, with the exception of alchemy. Lamordian people fear only what they can't control, and, unluckily for them, there are a lot of things they can't. Lamordians have a secular view on religion; they can't deny the existence of the gods but they regard many of them as merely ascended beings; all religions are tolerated in Lamordia, as long they do not disrupt order and do not infringe on Lamordian freedoms. Lamordians often regard themselves as enlightened survivors, under siege from less advanced people.

Lamordian fashion is practical but elegant in its simplicity; their national drink is beer, and they can be loud when celebrating. They work to live but they do not live to work.

HISTORY

Age of Creation

In the Age of Creation, the world was born from a great explosion; a spark of that explosion developed a mind of its own and that was Lathurr, who from then on, guided the enlightenment of living beings. However, the primal, bestial instincts of the first living beings also got a mind for itself; that mind chose winter and frost as his mantle, and the shape of the wolf, an instinct-driven predator. Thus Fenris was born; the fight between Lathurr and Fenris shaped the world. From their eternal conflict arose a being who fought for peace and preservation, not for eternal change; that being was called Skogul, the warrior Maiden.

Age of Empires

Lamordian Barbarians ran to the mountains when the Olympian empire annexed the fertile plains of present

day Falkovnia; there they developed mining and sailing as means to survive and they thrived.

Age of Darkness

When the Olympian Empire collapsed, the Lamordians were no longer barbarians; they started to expand their rule, and they formed a nation, the Lamordian Empire, which controlled part of Darkon, present day Tepest, Falkovnia, and parts of Dementlieu, Richemulot, Borca and Dorvinia.

The Modern Age

The Lamordian Empire started to decline, losing lands to Dementlieu and Barovia; they started to colonize the lands discovered far in the west, which they called Niew Lamordia. The Divinity of Mankind, today called Divinity of Self, a religion that viewed the majority of deities as ascended mortal beings, and preached enlightenment as the path to divinity, was born in Lamordia in this period.

The Current Age

The Lamordian Empire collapsed after its defeat in Zherisia; the last Lamordian Emperor died heirless, and the land was torn by war. This allowed two generals, Vlad Drakov and Gondegal Adallyn, to carve out a kingdom for themselves in Falkovnia; the capital city of Lekar was lost to Falkovnia, but the von Aubrecker family, led by the young Baron Vilhelm, managed to unify the many autonomous villages and cities of the old Lamordian Homeland, around the mountains of the Shlafendes Biest. They elected him as Baron of Lamordia, and created an actual federal state, which survived Falkovnian conquest because they never managed to hold the mountains, where the resistance endured; Vilhelm is still on the throne in spite of a very advanced age; nowadays, he is mostly represented publicly by his daughter and only surviving heir, Frau Gerta. He presides over an age of technological advancement and economic prosperity.

PLACES OF INTEREST

The Black Bear Inn has the best brewery in Ludendorf; old Captain Otto Shwarzerzahn (Old Human Fighter 7, CG) is a retired member of the Lamordische

Kriegsmarine, and participated at the defense of Ludendorf during the Winter War. He always has some tale to tell, for people willing to listen. Also, on the docks of Ludendorf one can find the Breaking Wave Inn, the best restaurant in the city, renowned for their Ludendorfish Codfish. The owner is Frau Greta Maurer (Old Human Expert 5, NG) the best cook in the North-western core.

The Lamordian Staat Shuss, the house of the Lamordian Bundenstag, the legislative body, also houses the Chancellory and the official residence of the Bunderkanzler (federal chancellor).

On the other side of the Schwarz river one can see the majestic Shloss Aubreker, the seat of the von Aubrecker family; the Rudolph von Aubrecker Bridge, which can open itself to traversing boats, allows people from the southern road to arrive at Ludendorf. Under the river, a tunnel allows the great novelty of recent years, the train, to go from the Ludendorf Train station all the way through the mountains, in a circle which stretches to Neufurchtenburg, and from there, tunnels the mountains to return to Ludendorf.

The Shrine of Inner Divinity is the main seat of the Divinity of Self Church, and also houses the Ludendorf Staaten Universität.

In Neufurchtenburg can be found, among others, the Broken Horseshoe Inn, notorious for its Falkovnian cooking; it's owner, Albert Gebrochenkralle (Middle Aged Human Rogue 8, CG) is a Falkovnian exile embittered by recent overtures to Lekar made by Lamordia's government.

The Staatsmiliz Schule für Offiziere Albert von Aubrecker in Neufurchtenburg is also a research center, and a private university; the General Staff headquarters of the Lamordiche Staatsmiliz also sits in Neufurchtenburg.

The Convent of the Alabaster Helm is the biggest temple in Lamordia, and doubles as public hall for Neufurchtenburg; it is the principal seat of the Church of Skogul.

The city of Mordenheim climbs up the flanks of the mountains, and is defended by powerful walls; The Rudolph von Mordenheim Gedenkstätte Universität, a prestigious private university, financed by

Dr. Mordenheim himself sits in this city. Schloss Mordenheim dominates the city from a tall cliff, and higher on the mountains, one can find the Monastery of the Quickening Thunderbolt, main seat of Lathurr's Church. Mordenheim also houses a great public library, and a museum.

On the Island of Qual (Agony), the port-town of Buchstadt houses the Lamordiche Staatliche Bergbaugesellschaft, the state mine company, and the training and research facilities, general staff headquarters, and school for officers of the Lamordische Kriegsmarine.

The Water Lily is a wrecked ship adapted into an inn; its owner was a travelling Darkonian Botanist named Jakob Travian (Adult Human Alchemist Horticulturist 3 LN) who decided to settle there after being the only survivor of the shipwreck of the Water Lily. A shrine of Fenris is rumored to exist in the lair of two Winter Wolves, in the northern part of the island.

RELIGIONS

The Divinity of Self Church is a religion that teaches that the majority of deities were once mortal beings, and that they ascended to divinity through self-improvement. Its favored weapon is the quarterstaff; it pays respect to every deity, even Chaotic ones, but more as a sort of role-model. Its symbol is a squared circle; while it was born as a human religion, with the name of Divinity of Mankind, it has opened, in theory, to every sentient being and thus it changed its name to Divinity of Self. Humans still form the majority of its worshippers, however. Its domains are Community, Knowledge, Law, Luck, and Strength. It teaches the importance of self-improvement, teamwork, innovation, self-discipline and hard work. Its leader is the First Enlightened, Helmut Shiermann, who lives in the Shrine of Mankind in Ludendorf.

Fenris the Wolf of Winter : This CE aspect of Fenris is the incarnation of primal passions and instincts, and is seen as the embodiment of Winter; his cultists revere the Winter Wolves as holy beasts, and a snarling white wolf is his symbol. The Cult of Fenris is a secret society, members of which worship in secret, and build their shrines in insulated caves on the mountains. They

worship their god by unleashing their most basic passions in orgiastic rituals, and they can come from any layer of the society. Fenris's favored weapon is the dagger, and his domains are Chaos, Evil, Madness, Strength, Water, and Weather.

Lathurr the Spark of Progress: This CG aspect of Lathurr, is the embodiment of curiosity, thirst for knowledge and innovation; he also personifies the natural changing of life. He presides over both science and magic, but he favors a scientific approach for both; he is revered by scholars, inventors, researchers, scientists, alchemists, and arcane casters. His symbol is a pentacle with a thunderbolt in its center; his domains are Air, Artifice, Chaos, Good, Knowledge, and Magic. His favored weapon is the javelin. The mysterious Thundering Abbot is the unofficial leader of the Cult in Lamordia

Skogul the Battle Maiden: This LG aspect of Ezra is the embodiment of logic, reason, stability, truth, and conservation; she is the protector of everything that works in the world. She is also a patron of soldiers, militias, bureaucrats and politicians; her symbol is a knight's helm with two crossed swords; her favored weapon is the longsword, and her domains are Community, Good, Law, Nobility, Protection and Strength. She teaches that you must preserve the good and protect it from evil. The church is in communion with the Home Faith of Borca and the First Blade of Skogul, Bertha Adermann (Adult Human Paladin 8, LG) holds the rank of Arch-sentire.

THE FAMED AND THE INFAMOUS

Elise von Brandthofen-Mordenheim

(Adult Human Oracle 15 NG) The daughter of the headmaster of the University of Ludendorf, she is the wife, and only true love, of Ritter Victor von Mordenheim. Elise fell in a coma after trying to stop her husband from killing Adam; in spite of her coma, she is fully aware of her surroundings and able to influence things; her burden is her inability to reach her beloved husband while she manages to reach out for Adam and his brothers.

(Adventure Hook: Hired by Dr. Mordenheim to hunt the infamous Golem Adam, the PCs are then visited in their dreams by a beautiful woman who begs them to reconsider.)

Katrina von Brandthofen

(Young adult Human Expert 5) Niece and confidant of Elise, she is one of the usual vessels her aunt uses to carry out her will. She is finishing her third year in Medicine in Mordenheim.

(Adventure Hook: Katrina often allows her aunt to possess her body to communicate, but when the woman's spirit is unable to get back into her body they need a hand only the PCs can give.)

Rudolph Blutigeflosse

(Human Afflicted Seawolf Rogue Pirate 6 NE) A pirate and a cutthroat, Captain Rudolph is one of Dr. Mordenheim's corpse dealers; his abused wife Erika lives in Buchstadt, where she works as a barmaid at the Water Lily and is forced to spy for him.

(Adventure Hook: Rudolph is a Seawolf, and he turned his wife in one too; she is terrorized of being outed but won't able to stand the life her husband forces her into any more. One day while eavesdropping on the PCs, she decides to offer them her husband's head on a plate.)

Oberstfuhrer Deiter Furshter

(Adult Human Fighter 10, LG) Furshter is the commander of the militia in Ludendorf; he has served as General during recent crisis. He is often seen in the streets, patrolling personally, in spite of his rank; his fairness and his stalwart sense of duty and decency has earned him good relationship with the general population.

(Adventure Hook: The Colonel is honorable, yet he is politically ambitious, and he aims to the position of Shult of Ludendorf, which will be open to him since Lars Grosshans wants to retire. However, someone is exerting pressure to prevent him from being a candidate. He contacts the PCs and asks them to investigate with discretion.)

High Enlightened Helmut Shiermann

(Middle Aged Human Cloistered Cleric 7, LN) The leader of the Divinity of Self Church is a small man with greying black hair, green eyes, and a calm and soothing attitude. Under his shrewd leadership, the church has grown in numbers and influence.

(Adventure Hook: The High Enlightened is interested in Dr. Mordenheim's recent works on grafts, as the idea of artificially augmenting natural potentiality through the application of ingenuity plays along with the church's beliefs. However, he does not trust the Doctor, so he asks the PCs to investigate, as he feels that Mordenheim is hiding something.)

Hauptmann Marcus Ragenstorf

(Middle aged Human Fighter Corsair 7 N) A retired commander in the Lamordian war navy, this elegantly dressed blond man with thick mustaches is now a rich merchant. He often frequents the Breaking Wave Inn, as he is very fond of Gerta's cooking.

(Adventure Hook: Gerta's cooking is not the only reason, as Marcus has been contacted by a Falkovnian spy who is trying to get monetary support. He is playing along, trying to get information he can benefit from, but the Falkovnian are trying to pressure him through intimidation, and he needs the PCs help to make clear that he is not a man to be trifled with.)

Shult Lars Grosshans

(Middle-aged Human Fighter 5, LN) Herr Grosshans is the Shult (Mayor) of Ludendorf, and one of the richest merchants and factory-owners in the city; now fattened and walking with a limp, he was, in his youth, an officer of the militia. He owns one of the bigger steelwork factories in Lamordia, the Grosshans Stahl.

(Adventure Hook: Han's limp is worsening and he is considering to leave his position. However, he has been contacted by the Mordenheim estate, and the Doctor offered him a therapy which is working. But suddenly the Doctor has asked him for a series of favors, growing in relevance. The doctor threatened to withdraw the therapy which would be fatal for Hans, if he does not keep conceding those favors to him, which have escalated out of control. He asks for the PCs to steal the

recipe from Mordenheim's lab, so he will be able to continue the therapy without be tied to the mad doctor anymore.)

Dr. Berthold Hoftmann

(Old Human Alchemist Chirurgeon 6, LG) The son and heir of Dr. Baltus Hoftmann, who founded the Hoftmann Krankenhaus (hospital) to heal the wounded of the Falkovnian Invasion, Berthold is one of the world's most famous healers and surgeons. He is the current administrator and head physician of the hospital. His responsibilities seem to have taken a toll on him, recently.

(Adventure Hook: the truth is, someone is poisoning Dr. Hoftmann and this makes him easier prey for the Lurker. The PCs must discover a way to save the poor doctor's life.)

Otto Krieger

(Middle-aged Fighter 1/Rogue 7, NE) Once a promising soldier of the militia, Otto Krieger got crippled in a skirmish with bandits, and had to renounce his dreams, becoming a bitter drunkard, and a corpse-thief on Dr. Mordenheim's payroll.

(Adventure Hook: Thanks to the latter's good references he has managed to get his current job as caretaker at the Hoftmann Krankenhaus. He has recently freed a Greater Fyhir, which he calls the Lurker, a creature created by a cultist of Fenris before the hospital was built. He uses it to speed the death of the most serious patients; in that way, he has always a stash of fresh corpses to sell. Unfortunately, Doctor Hoftmam is beginning to suspect something and he has involved the PCs in the investigations.)

Herr Martyn Smitskopf

(Middle-aged Human Bard Inkmaster 5 N) A wealthy nobleman, and a famous writer, Herr Smitskopf is also a patron of the arts and he funds a yearly prize, the Smitskopf Literaturpreis, for young novelists, poets and writers. In his prime, Smitskopf traveled a lot, and he often refers to his experiences in his books.

(Adventure Hook :Martyn Smitskopf is hosting his yearly party at Shloss Smitskopf for the Smitskopf Prizes, and

the PCs have been charged to keep the money of the prize safe until the ceremony is over.)

Dr. Marcus Ruscheider

(Human Adult Ranger Corpse Hunter 7, NG) For the majority of the Lamordian people Dr. Ruscheider is a notorious archeologist and historian; in truth, he inherited his father 's knowledge and drive to kill the undead.

(Adventure Hook: For months, Marcus has been fed information about an hulking, brutal undead who resides on Qual, and he has recruited the PCs to lead them in a hunt; but things are not the way they seem.)

Abordicus Slategrinder

(Adult Dwarf Wizard 6 N) Abordicus is a sober scholar, specialized in constructs, particularly, stone ones.

(Adventure Hook: Abordicus is researching an ancient Olympian tome which could revolutionize the creation of stone golems. But he suspects someone is trying to steal the book from him and hires the PCs to protect it.)

Annabelle DeFoes

(Young Adult Doppelganger Rogue NE) Annabelle DeFoes was not born a Doppelganger, but turned into one by the experiments Dr. von Mordenheim performed on her. Today she is one of his more faithful agents; in her natural form, Annabelle's skin is blue, her hair is red, and she has yellow eyes.

(Adventure Hook: Annabelle is posing as Dr. Mordenheim, hellbent to destroy is reputation, but by doing so she is attracting attention from other forces. The PCs are charged by Elise with the task of stopping her, for her own good.)

Barton Bellikok

(Middle-aged Human Rogue 3 NE) The sly, conniving owner of the country inn known as Thistle and Bonnet is notorious for robbing his clients, without ever getting discovered. He sells information to everyone, for a satisfying (for him) price.

(Adventure Hook: Barton is in serious trouble now. He decided to use the information he got from a robbed

client to blackmail the wrong people, and now his innocent 6-year-old son is in danger. He presents himself as a desperate father in need of help to the PCs.)

The Thundering Abbot

(Old Human Oracle 12 of Lathurr CG) The mysterious Abbot who heads the Monastery of the Quickening Thunderbolt is notorious for his booming voice and his cryptic advice.

(Adventure Hook: The people of Mordenheim are woken up in the deep of the night by the sound of a voice screaming "Eureka!" echoing in the vale from the peaks, six nights in a row. The Shult of Mordenheim sends the PCs to the Monastery to investigate.)

Frau Gerta von Aubreker

(Human Adult Aristocrat 5, LG) After her brother Hendrik's death and their other brother Rudolph's disappearance, Gerta became the heir apparent to the Lamordian throne, and she is already an influential member of the parliament. She is a shrewd and intelligent woman, and has built a solid net of alliances, inside and outside Lamordia.

(Adventure Hook: Someone seems to have information about her brother Rudolph's whereabouts and Gerta asks the PCs help to verify this news, with discretion.)

Dr. Heidi Dumholzen

(Middle aged Human Artificer 14 N) Dr. Dumholzen is an expert in metallurgy and a renowned producer of Iron Golems. She has worked in the construction of the railway and of the train.

(Adventure Hook: Dr. Dumholzen is working on a revolutionary steel working process and is going to demonstrate it by creating a Steel Golem, an improved version of an Iron Golem; but her prototype is stolen and she needs the PCs help to get it back.)

Horg Gekrümterbuckel

(Adult Caliban Rogue 7, LE) The faithful helper of Dr. von Mordenheim, Horg is a short, hunchbacked person, with a silver tongue and a quick hand.

(Adventure Hook: Horg is accused of corpse stealing but the PCs have seen him in another place at the time the crime was done. While they have no sympathy for the Dr. and his helper, they must investigate the matter.)

Dr. Jervais Juvenoth

(Adult Human Alchemist 3 NG) Juvenoth is a famous biologist and Dr. von Mordenheim's son-in-law through his marriage with Victor's estranged adopted daughter, Eva. He is a devout follower of Lathurr. He has 5 children, together with his wife.

(Adventure Hook: Jervais has accepted many things in his life out of love for his wife: a matrilinear marriage, the role of the house husband while his wife continues her studies, and to live in his wife's shadow. What he is not willing to stand anymore is the cold war between his wife and her father. He used to respect Victor von Mordenheim, but years of verbal abuse as he is, in his words, unworthy of his daughter, have changed this. He wants Victor out of their life and out of their children's life, but when his eldest, Adam Victor, suddenly moves into his grandfather's Castle he needs the character's help to make sure the boy is safe and possibly to get him back.)

Eva von Mordenheim

(Human Alchemist 6 LN) Niece and adopted daughter of Dr. von Mordenheim, she is in a very cold relationship with him after the incident that put her adoptive mother in a coma. She inherited her father's drive and her mother's empathy.

(Adventure Hook: Eva's relationship with her father is cold, but they still care for each other, Eva named her eldest son Adam Victor, after all. But Eva is trying to mend her own relationship with her brother Adam, and when she is informed about her father's latest plot against Adam, she contacts the PCs for help.)

Dr. Johanna Zecher

(Human Alchemist Surgeon 6, CG) Dr. Zecher is a famous surgeon, but she refuses to follow bureaucratic rules, and she does not work in public hospitals (She does operate pro-bono, though).

(Adventure Hook: Dr. Zecher has been kidnapped under the very eyes of the PCs by a short, hunchbacked man. Dr. Mordenheim needs a hand to heal his wife and he decided to take Johanna's.... literally. The PCs are now her only chance.)

Captain Hans Giesbrecht

(Middle Aged Human Fighter Corsair 9, CN) The commander of the Lamordian navy presidium on Qual is a big, boastful man who often frequents the Water Lily Inn. He holds his position thanks to many victories against the Blaunsteinian pirates, but he is quite the unruly man.

(Adventure Hook: Captain Giesbrecht's tongue loosens when he drinks, and he reveals to the PCs the place where he has kept the huge treasure of a pirate ship he sacked in his youth. Unfortunately they aren't the only ones to hear that.)

Zann Dilisnya

(Adult Human, Slayer 8, LE) A scion of the house of Dilisnya, Zann is a ruthless bounty killer who works for whoever can pay his price.

(Adventure Hook: the PCs have a bounty on their heads and Zann is up to cash it in.)

Emil Bollenbach

(Adult Human, Artificer 14, CE) Once a promising and generous monster hunter, Emil was kidnapped for experimentation by his hero, Dr. von Mordenheim, who tried to put his brain inside a Flesh golem. Saved by the sacrifice of one of his friends, Emil snapped, and decided to take matters into his own hands; he wants to create an army of super golems (not Flesh ones, he despises them) and he is totally ruthless and unpredictable.

(Adventure Hook: Emil is ready to unleash his army on Lamordia. He will make sure Mordenheim pays for his crimes and he cares not for the destruction that will bring. The PCs must stop him, somehow.)

Adam von Mordenheim

(Awakened Flesh Golem, Barbarian 10, CN) The first and best of Mordenheim's creations, he was adopted in the doctor's family, but the doctor was cruel and cold



towards him, while Elise was comforting and forgiving. After the incident which rendered Elise comatose, he fled to Agony Island, where he tries to survive; he has recently started to reach out to various constructs and golems, to shelter them from humanity. Adam is as prone to kindness in regard to defenseless creatures as he is to ruthless aggression to his perceived enemies. During the Falkovnian invasion, he mercilessly mauled the head of the occupying force, whom he had caught trying to violate a woman; he is not malicious, though he feels great satisfaction when he manages to thwart his father's work.

(Adventure Hook: Adam is building a community of intelligent constructs in Qual, calling it Elisestahd, and he needs help to keep it hidden from human authorities. Following clues from his mother, he approaches the PCs for help.)

ORGANIZATIONS

Brotherhood of the Forsaken Sons

A CN band of constructs and golems recruited by Adam; they serve the whims of their emotional big brother.

(Dread possibility: The Berserker Brothers. Not all the members of the brotherhood are satisfied with Adam's reactive and defensive approach. A minority wants vengeance against humanity who exiled and shunned them. This minority is growing and is ready to rebel.)

Cadre of Winter Fang

A CE sect devoted to Fenris, with many unexpected members, including nobility and members of the parliament, they secretly meet for debauched bacchanals in which they often commit atrocities, led by their mysterious leader and using their influence to cover for it.

[Dread possibility: The Winter Wolf - The head of the cadre (Adult Human WinterWerwolf Cleric of Fenris 9, CE) is a mighty anthropomorphic Wolf with white fur. no one has ever seen his human form; it is suspected he might be a very powerful noble, but he could be anyone.]

InnereStaatssicherheit Miliz

This LG branch of the Militia is devoted to fighting covert menaces to Lamordian security, both mundane and supernatural; its leader is Oberstleutnant (Lieutenant colonel) Carl Neufeldt (Adult Human, Fighter Opportunist 8, LG). This branch holds higher moral standard the other secret services.

(Dread possibility: Der WinterFalk - There are rumors that the ISM captured a supernaturally augmented Talon in the Winter War and turned him in a weapon against the enemy of Lamordia.)

THE DARKLORD: VICTOR VON MORDENHEIM

Male Middle-aged Human Promethean Alchemist 15, LE (105 HP)

Speed:30 feet

Initiative: +3 (+1 in Schloss Mordenheim)

Senses: Perception +21 (+1 in Schloss Mordenheim)

Armor Class: 28, Touch 23 Flat Footed 20 (+4 Dex, +5 deflection, +5 Battle Coat, +4 dodge) (+1 in Schloss Mordenheim)

Space/Reach: 1 square /1 square

Combat Maneuver Bonus/Combat Maneuver Defense: +12/26 (+1 in Schloss Mordenheim)

Str:12, Dex:18, Con:16, Int:32, Wis:16, Cha 14

Saving Throws: Fort: +12, Ref: +13, Will: +8 (+1 in the Royal von Shnee Palace)

Special Qualities: Curse of the Dark Lord, Mad Science, Alchemy, Quick Alchemy, Poison Use, Swift Poisoning, Immunity to Poison, Discoveries (Combine Extracts, Infusion, Dilution, Enhance Potion, Alchemical Simulacrum, Doppelganger Simulacrum, Greater Alchemical Simulacrum, Promethean Disciple (B), Mutagen, Infused Mutagen, Preserve Organs X2, Aromatic Extracts) Rejuvenation, Sinkhole of Evil 1, Cold Immunity, Golem Companion, Spell Resistance 26. Special Attacks: Caustic Aura (Ex), Cold Aura(Ex), Fire Aura (EX), Shocking Aura (Ex), Caustic Touch (Ex),



Freezing Touch (EX), Scorching Touch (Ex), Shocking Touch (Ex), Dominate Constructs (Ex).

Attack: Melee: +3 Construct Bane Adamantine Battle Gauntlet (+25, + 20, +15, 1d8+11+2 HR and +2d6+2 damage against constructs, 20x2) or Touch (+13, 2d8 Acid, Cold, Electricity or Fire damage).

Range: +3 Construct Bane Thunderstick (+25,+20,+15, Range 100 ft, Fires Adamantine Bullets, 1d10+11 +2 HR and +2d6 +2 damage against constructs)(+1 Hit and Damage Rolls in Schloss Mordenheim)

Skills: Appraise +29, Craft (Alchemy) +40, Craft (Mechanics)+29, Craft (Taxidermy) +29, Disable Device +22, Heal +24, Knowledge (arcana) +29, Knowledge (engineering) +29, Knowledge (nature) +29, Perception +21, Profession (Physician) +21, Profession (Smith) +21, Profession (Tinkerer) +21, Sleight of Hand +22, Spellcraft +29, Use Magic Device +20. (+1 in Schloss Mordenheim)

Feats: Brew Potions (B), Craft Constructs(B), Extra Discovery (X 5); Focus Skill (Craft Alchemy), Focus Skill (Heal), Quick Draw.

Formulae Known: All up to 5th Level, including all Wizard/Sorcerer spells centered on the caster or working on constructs, and all Clerical healing spells. Formulae Prepared:1st/8, 2nd/7, 3rd/7, 4th/6, 5th/5. Saving Throw DC: 21+Extract Level.

Challenge Rating: 17

Progerity: Gears and Components for 10,000 GC value, 100 PC, +3 Construct Bane Adamantine Battle Gauntlet, headband of Mental Superiority +6, belt of Physical Perfection +4, +3 *Construct Bane Thunderstick*, Battle Coat.

BACKGROUND

Victor von Mordenheim, the Ritter von Mordenheim, was born the elder son of the powerful baron and medic Dr. Carl; a brilliant mind since his early years, he became distinguished in several fields, successfully gaining degrees in engineering, physics, mathematics, medicine, chemistry, and biology. After the death of his mother during the difficult delivery of his brother Franz, he decided to specialize in surgery and in medical research; among other things, he discovered the blood

groups, the existence of viruses and bacteria, and divided the elements by characteristics, designing the periodic table. The more his ability grew the more grew his hubris; his war against death became one he fought for himself, not for his patients. When his brother, freshly married, took ill, he strove to save him with a revolutionary technique, the implanting of an organ; but to get the right organ, Victor did not hesitate to euthanize a terminally ill patient, and take the organ; that was his first step towards damnation. When his brother died all the same, from a rejection crisis, he started to think that natural life was too fragile, and imperfect, so his new goal became to make it better. With that goal in mind, he started to conduct unethical and unorthodox experiments. A chance of salvation came in the form of the sweet, beautiful Elise, daughter of an important academic. Their initial happiness was marred by the discovery of Elise's sterility. The woman flatly refused an invasive cure proposed by her husband of; she opted instead to adopt Victor's orphaned niece, a girl called Eva, towards whom Victor developed a close father-daughter relationship. However, the girl's health problems rekindled Victor's old obsession with controlling and create life; he started to employ corpse thieves for his experiments, unscrupulous ones, who started to kill people to give him fresh bodies. After several attempts, he managed to create a self-aware Flesh-Golem, who he called Adam; Adam should have been, in von Mordenheim's mind the first specimen of a new mankind, but, after inducting him into his family, he started to feel extremely disappointed in Adam. He was strong and resistant, yet, not as brilliant as his son should have been. The growing friendship between Eva and Adam particularly bothered him and he started to sow dissent between them. After one fight between them, Adam unwittingly dropped the girl in an icy river, almost killing her. Victor at that point tried to kill Adam, but Elise interposed herself, resulting in her coma, only kept alive by her husband's medical treatment. While Victor cursed his wretched creature, Adam ran from his cruel father, as Schloss Mordenheim was surrounded by the Mists, and Victor von Mordenheim became the Darklord of Lamordia.

CURRENT SKETCHES

Victor today is dedicated to two goals: to destroy Adam and to heal his wife, but he never manages to get him

destroyed and her awake; he still does not want to understand that she stays in the coma on purpose, and she will stay that way until he reconciles with Adam. He has patented a lot of innovations from the train to the clockwork miners, and he uses his vast economic resources to finance researchers and politicians to help his goals while closing their eyes to his practices. He is also continuing his experiments on constructs but none of his many attempts have stayed faithful for long.

COMBAT

Mordenheim despises physical combat, and he will leave it to his Golem companion; should Adam or another forsaken creature be in the fray, von Mordenheim will fight personally.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Golem Companion: A large Golem with 15 HD, who constantly shields von Mordenheim, giving him a +4 Dodge Bonus to AC when adjacent to him. The Golem can have any Magic Immunity trait of any single kind of Golem, and any special ability; it will rebel against Mordenheim's will one year after its creation, and need to be replaced.

Mad Science: None of his items or abilities count as magical for SR and dispelling purposes; he is able to create an extract with a standard action.

Rejuvenation: If von Mordenheim dies, he returns after six days, taking over the body of a Golem Companion, whether it is the current one or an older one.

Energy Aura : It inflicts 3d6 damage Reflex save DC29 for half damage (Acid, Cold, Electricity, or Fire, by choice) radius 20 feet. Up to 26 rounds every day.

Curse of the Dark Lord: von Mordenheim can't destroy Adam, nor wake his wife up; the only way to succeed in

the latter is by reconciling with Adam, for the former, he would have to kill Elise first. He knows both facts but denies them fiercely.

LAIR

Schloss von Mordenheim, seat of Victor's lab, is a massive and gloomy structure; as a rank 1 sinkhole of evil, it can bestow the frightened condition (Will DC29)

CLOSING THE BORDER

If Mordenheim wishes to close the borders, a blizzard stops any way in or out Lamordia; this happens only when the doctor's ego is wounded by failure, and can last up to a day; it is not conscious, but it is tied to Victor's mood.

DREAD ALTERNATIVES

VARIANT CLASS: ARTIFICER (VARIANT ALCHEMIST)

Role: *The Artificer is the one who finds innovative solutions for any problem, tinkers and fix what does not work, invents new items, and finds creative ways to use those which exist already; She transforms mundane items into wonderful and deadly creations; her manual skills come in handy even when magic is not involved.*

Alignment: Any

Hit Die: d8

Starting Wealth: 3d6x10 gp (average 105 gp)

Class Features						Spells per Day					
Level	Base Attack	Fortitude Save	Reflex Save	Will Save	Special	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	0	2	2	0	Artifice, Eldritch Crafting, Weapon <u>Potence 1d6</u> , Craft <u>Wonderous Item</u> , <u>Spellcrafter</u>	1	-	-	-	-	-
2	1	3	3	0	Discovery, Improve Item +1	2	-	-	-	-	-
3	2	3	3	1	Weapon <u>Potence 2d6</u> , Swift Crafting	3	-	-	-	-	-
4	3	4	4	1	Discovery	3	1	-	-	-	-
5	3	4	4	1	Improve Item+2, Weapon <u>Potence 3d6</u>	4	2	-	-	-	-
6	4	5	5	2	Discovery, Skill Mastery	4	3	-	-	-	-
7	5	5	5	2	Weapon <u>Potence 4d6</u>	4	3	1	-	-	-
8	6/+1	6	6	2	Discovery, Improve Item +3	4	4	2	-	-	-

Class Features						Spells per Day					
Level	Base Attack	Fortitude Save	Reflex Save	Will Save	Special	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	6/+1	6	6	3	Weapon Potence 5d6	5	4	3	-	-	-
10	7/+2	7	7	3	Discovery, Improved Skill Mastery	5	4	3	1	-	-
11	8/+3	7	7	3	Improve Item+4, Weapon Potence 6d6	5	4	4	2	-	-
12	9/+4	8	8	4	Discovery	5	5	4	3	-	-
13	9/+4	8	8	4	Weapon Potence 7d6	5	5	4	3	1	-
14	10/+5	9	9	4	Discovery, Improve Item+5	5	5	4	4	2	-
15	11/+6/+1	9	9	5	Weapon Potence 8d6	5	5	5	4	3	-
16	12/+7/+2	10	10	5	Discovery	5	5	5	4	3	1
17	12/+7/+2	10	10	5	Improve Item+6, Weapon Potence 9d6	5	5	5	4	4	2
18	13/+8/+3	11	11	6	Discovery	5	5	5	5	4	3
19	14/+9/+4	11	11	6	Weapon Potence 10d6	5	5	5	5	5	4
20	15/+10/+5	12	12	6	Grand Discovery, Improve Item+7	5	5	5	5	5	5

Class Skills : The Artificer's class skills are Appraise (Int), Craft (any) (Int), Disable Device (Dex), Heal (Wis), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Knowledge (engineering) (Int), Knowledge (nature), Perception (Wis), Profession (Wis), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Spellcraft (Int), Survival (Wis), Use Magic Device (Cha)

Skill Points at each Level: 4 + Int modifier.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Artificers are proficient with all simple weapons. They are also proficient with light and medium armor, and with shields, but not tower shields.

Eldritch Crafting (Su): Artificers are not only masters of creating mundane items like Armors, Ammunitions and Weapons but also of the art of creating special magical items.

When using Craft (alchemy, armor, baskets, books, bows, calligraphy, carpentry, cloth, clothing, glass, jewelry, leather, locks, paintings, pottery, sculptures, ships, shoes, stonemasonry, traps, or weapons) to create an item, an artificer gains a competence bonus equal to his class level on the Craft check. In addition, an alchemist can use Craft (appropriate skill) to identify magic items as if using detect magic. He must hold the item for 1 round to make such a check.

An artificer can create three special types of magical items—artifices, gadgets, and weapon potencies. Artifices are permanent items the artificer uses to enhance their battle prowess or to gain similar advantage. Weapon potencies are charged devices that grant more damage to a weapon's successful attack—both of these are detailed in their own sections below.

Gadgets are the most varied of the three. In many ways, they behave like spells in item form, and as such, their effects can be dispelled by effects like *dispel magic*, using the artificer's level as the caster level. Unlike magical items, though, gadgets are always single use. An artificer can create only a certain number of gadgets of each level per day. Her base daily allotment of gadgets is given on the Class feature table. In addition, he receives bonus gadgets per day if he has a high Intelligence score, in the same way a wizard receives bonus spells per day.

When an artificer creates a gadget, he infuses the mechanical and alchemical parts of the gadget with magic siphoned from his own magical aura. A gadget, once created, remains potent for 1 day before losing its magic, so an artificer must re-prepare his gadgets every day. Gadgets can be shared with any creature, but they stay active for only 1 minute per artificer's level once shared, and must be used before that time expires. Creating a gadget takes 1 minute of work—most artificers prepare many gadgets at the start of the day or just before going on an adventure, but it's not uncommon for an artificer to keep some (or even all) of his daily gadget slots open so that she can prepare gadgets in the field as needed.

Although the artificer doesn't actually cast spells, he does have a schematics list that determines what gadgets he can create. An artificer can utilize spell-trigger items if the spell appears on his schematics list, but not spell-completion items (unless he uses Use Magic Device to do so). A gadget is "cast" by activating it, as if activating a spell-completion item—the effects of a gadget exactly duplicate the spell upon which its schematic is based, save that the spell uses the item as its origin point and if the spell as a duration, that duration expires if the gadget is removed, disabled, or destroyed (DC to Disable Device checks=Spell Saving Throw check +10. The Armor Class and CMD of the gadget is that of the creature using the gadget +5+spell level.) An artificer can draw and activate a gadget as a standard action. The artificer uses his level as the caster level to determine any effect based on caster level.

Creating gadgets consumes raw materials, but the cost of these materials is insignificant—comparable to the valueless material components of most spells. If a spell normally has a costly material component, that component is expended during the use of that particular gadget. Gadgets cannot be made from spells that have focus requirements (artificer gadgets that duplicate divine spells never have a divine focus requirement).

An artificer can prepare a gadget of any schematic she knows. To learn or use a gadget, an artificer must have an Intelligence score equal to at least 10 + the gadget's level. The Difficulty Class for a saving throw against an

artificer's gadget is 10 + the gadget level + the artificer's Intelligence modifier.

An artificer may know any number of schematics. He stores his schematics in a special tome called a schematic book. He must refer to this book whenever he prepares a gadget, but not when he uses it. An artificer begins play with two 1st-level schematics of his choice, plus a number of additional schematics equal to his Intelligence modifier. At each new artificer level, he gains one new schematic of any level that he can create. An artificer can also add schematics to his book just like a wizard adds spells to his spellbook, using the same costs, pages, and time requirements. An artificer can study a wizard's spellbook to learn any formula that is equivalent to a spell the spellbook contains. A wizard, however, cannot learn spells from a schematic book. An artificer does not need to decipher arcane writings before copying them, artificers can learn any alchemist's formula as a schematic and an alchemist can learn any artificer's schematic as a formula.

The artificer spell list is equal to the alchemist spell list, minus the various *alter self* spells, plus the *repair construct* spells.

Artifice(su): An artifice is a special device an Artificer can create and infuse permanently with his own magical power. A 1st level Artificer can choose one of two forms for his its artifice: Helper or Gizmo. The Helper is a Homunculus and follows the rules for the Homunculus of the Promethean Alchemist, but it can have an humanoid shape, or it can have the shape and the starting stats (less constitution) of any wizard familiar, with the standard initial benefits. This Homunculus is never living and does not need the Artificer's blood to be created or to develop, but is made of inorganic material or wood; the helper can follow one command every round, and commanding the helper is a move action which doesn't provoke opportunity attacks. A damaged Helper recovers hit points every day equal to its artificer's Intelligence modifier, doubled if the artificer spends an hour of work and passes a DC 15 Craft Check. A Gizmo is a diminutive device that can be integrated in an armor suit, in a weapon, or in a shield, with a full round action (same for getting it off). If integrated in an armor, it grants a +2 Bonus of Enhancement on AC and 3 temporary hp

per HD, but a -2 penalty on Hit Rolls. If integrated in a weapon, it grants +2 to Hit Rolls and Damage Rolls and a -2 penalty on Armor Class. If integrated in a shield, it grants a +2 Bonus on Armor class and Saving Throws and a -2 Penalty on hit rolls. If the Artifice is destroyed (it has 5 HP + the artificer's Intelligence modifier, per artificer class level), the Artificer needs one day and materials valued at 100gp per artificer level to rebuild it, (the same cost applies to build it at later levels). Only the artificer can benefit from the Gizmo (but see the shared artifice infusion below), and a Gizmo can stay active up to 10 minutes per artificer level. The artificer can have only one active gizmo on herself at a time, unused gizmos are inactive, and only one gizmo of the same kind can be active at the same time.

Weapon Potency(su): A Weapon Potency is a diminutive object, which can be easily attached to a weapon; when activated, it releases one charge which, if the weapon hits, inflicts the given amount of electricity damage. A ranged weapon passes the charge to its ammunition. If the attack misses, the charge is wasted, and only the first attack in a round benefits from the potency. Normally only the Artificer can activate the potency (see the "infused potency" Discovery below). The artificer can create a number of charges every day equal to her level +Intelligence modifier and keep them in one potency or divide them into separate potencies up to the number of charges. (The extra potency feat works exactly like the extra bomb feat only with extra charges instead of extra bombs). The bonus damage of the potency is not multiplied in case of critical hit but the victim takes extra electric damage of 1 per dice of the potency in case of critical hit. Only one Discovery which modifies the damage of a potency can be applied on the same charge. The Save DC for any Potency is 10+1/2 Artificer level+the artificer's intelligence modifier.

Craft Wondrous Items: The Artificer get Craft Wondrous Items as a Bonus Feat without having to respect the prerequisites

Spellcrafter (ex): The Artificer can use the Spellcraft ability to destroy magic items and recover part of the components, storing its magic; the task requires 10 minutes per item Caster level. With a failure of 5 or more, the item is destroyed with no benefit for the

artificer; with a success the artificer recovers a value of gp in raw components equal to 2.5% the original price per artificer level, and also a number of Creation Points equal to the item caster level. Artifacts can't be destroyed this way, and cursed items have a DC on the Spellcraft Check double that of other items, and they are not destroyed on a check that fails by 5 or more, but instead cast their curse on the artificer. The maximum amount of Creation Points an artificer can have is equal to the artificer's level + the Artificer's Intelligence modifier. Creation Points can be spent as a swift action to gain a +5 Bonus in an Appraise, Craft, Disable Device, Heal, Profession, Spellcraft, or Use Magical Device check. The Creation Points can also be used as a standard action to give temporary magical power to a touched mundane item. By investing a number of points equal to the caster level of an Item the Caster would be able to create (he must have the level, the feat, and access to the required spell in his schematic list) into an appropriate mundane item (e.g. a weapon for a magic weapon) will transform the item into that magic item for one hour. These items can be used by anyone. The Artificer can also use this ability to destroy magical traps using the trap DC as DC for the Spellcraft check, but activates the trap with a failure of 5 or more.

Discovery

At 2nd level, and again every 2 levels thereafter (up to 18th level), an artificer makes an incredible crafting discovery. Unless otherwise noted, an artificer cannot select an individual discovery more than once. Some discoveries can only be made if the artificer has met certain prerequisites first, such as uncovering other discoveries. Discoveries that modify weapon potencies or helpers that are marked with an asterisk (*) do not stack with each other. Only one such discovery can be applied to an individual potency or set up daily on an individual helper. Those marked with (^) are permanent and can't be applied together on the same Helper. The DC of any saving throw called for by a discovery is equal to $10 + \frac{1}{2}$ the artificer's level + the artificer's Intelligence modifier. An artificer can choose any Item Creation feat she meets the prerequisites for, using her Artificer Level as her Caster Level, instead of a discovery.

Artifice Discoveries

Adamantium Helper[^]: The artificer's helper is remade in Adamantium, it gains +2 Armor class, +2 Strength, +3 HP per artificer's level and 5/Adamantium Damage reduction. An artificer must be at least of 8th level and must have the helper artifice to select this discovery

*Elemental Helper**: The artificer chooses an element (air, earth, fire, or water). Her helper gains resistance 5 to the associated energy type and a +2 competence bonus on an associated skill check. This resistance increases by 5 and the competence bonus by 2 for each of the following discoveries the alchemist possesses: grand helper, greater helper, and true helper.

The elements and their associated energies and skills are air (electricity, Fly), earth (acid, Climb), fire (fire, Acrobatics), and water (cold, Swim). An artificer can select this discovery up to four times, but must choose a different element each time and can't apply more than one to its helper at the same time, unless she has more than one helper. Every day, at the start of the day, she can set on one Elemental affinity. The artificer needs to have the helper artifice to select this discovery.

Extra Gizmo: The artificer can use another gizmo, reducing by half the time each of the two can stay active. An artificer must be at least 12th level and to have the gizmo artifice before selecting this discovery.

*Feral Helper**: the artificer's helper's natural attacks inflict damage as if on one size category bigger and the helper gains a +2 competence bonus on Intimidate skill checks. The artificer needs to have the helper artifice to select this discovery.

Gizmo (Su): This discovery gives the artificer the gizmo artifice class ability. (This discovery exists so artificer archetypes who have variant artifices or have chosen the Helper Artifice, can also build a gizmo)

Grand Gizmo: The artificer's gizmo now grants extra benefits, and the regular benefits increase, but this interferes with the item's increases. Now every bonus increases to +6 (7 hp bonus per level for the armor gizmo), but the penalties increase to -6. Plus, if incorporated in an armor, the armor gains the Medium Fortification special ability (50% probability to negate a

critical hit) and the damage reduction increases to 10/Adamantium. If incorporated in a shield the shield gains the *dancing* special ability and the *ghost touch* one; if incorporated in a weapon it gains the *Light energy* special quality and it ignores 10 points of Damage reduction. An artificer must be at least 16th level and have the greater gizmo discovery before selecting this discovery.

Grand Helper (Su): The artificer's helper becomes a true Golem of a kind the artificer would be able to create with the Craft Constructs feat, other than organic golems, like Flesh ones. It keeps the helper's abilities, special qualities, and hit dice, but it gains the Golem's hit points, special qualities, and special attacks, except for berserk. An artificer must be at least 16th level and must have the greater helper discovery before selecting this discovery.

Grand Mind Gizmo (Su): The artificer's mind gizmo now grants a +8 enhancement bonus to the allotted mental ability, a +6 enhancement bonus to the second mental ability score, and a +4 enhancement bonus to a third mental ability score (Charisma for the hat, Intelligence for the scarf and Wisdom for the Cloak) and the Blindsight (60 feet) special quality. The artificer takes a -2 penalty to his Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution as long as the mind gizmo is active, and takes 2 points of ability damage to each physical ability score when the concentration ends; also she gets 1 non-lethal damage per level, which can't be healed as long as the gizmo is active. An artificer must be at least 16th level and must have the greater mind gizmo discovery or class ability before selecting this discovery.

Grand Power Gizmo (Su): The artificer's power gizmo now grants a +8 enhancement bonus to the allotted physical ability score, a +6 enhancement bonus to the secondary physical ability score, and a +4 enhancement bonus to a third physical ability score (Constitution for a belt, Strength for a shoe, and Dexterity for a glove) and a +8 enhancement bonus to initiative. The artificer takes a -2 penalty to his Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma as long as the power gizmo is active; also, she gets -6 penalties to Will saves. An artificer must be at least 16th level and must have the greater power gizmo discovery or class ability before selecting this discovery.

Greater Gizmo: The artificer's gizmo now grants additional benefits, while its interference with the artificer's movement also increases: if applied to an armor, the wearer gains a 5/Adamantium damage reduction and the Enhancement Bonus to AC becomes +4, the temporary HP grows to 5 per Level. If she applies the gizmo to a shield, she gains the benefit of a *shield* spell (the shield stops *magic missiles* and counts for the AC against ranged touch attacks) the bonuses to AC and ST raises to +4. If she applies the bonuses to a weapon, the weapon can ignore 5 points of damage reduction and the bonuses increases to +4. The penalties, however also increase to -4. An artificer must be at least 12th level and he needs to have the gizmo artifice before selecting this discovery.

Greater Helper (Su): The artificer's helpers size grows to Large, and the artificer can choose one special ability from a specific golem kind the artificer would be able to create with the Craft Construct feat, and apply it to the helper. An artificer must be at least 12th level and to have the helper artifice before selecting this discovery.

Greater Mind Gizmo (Su): The artificer's mind gizmo now gives a +6 enhancement bonus to one mental ability, and +4 to a second one (Wisdom for the hat, Charisma for the scarf, and Intelligence for the cloak). The penalty applies to both related physical abilities, and the artificer gains Blind Perception (+60 feet) An artificer must be at least 12th level before selecting this discovery.

Greater Power Gizmo (Su): The artificer's power gizmo now gives a +6 enhancement bonus to Initiative, a +6 bonus on the allotted physical ability score, and a +4 bonus on a second physical ability score (Dexterity for the belt, Constitution for the shoe, Strength for the glove.) She gains a -2 penalty to the respective mental abilities as long as the power gizmo is active, and she also gets a -4 penalty on Will saves. An artificer must be at least 12th level before selecting this discovery.

Helper (Su): This discovery gives the artificer the Helper artifice class ability. (This discovery exists so artificer archetypes who have variant artifices or have chosen the gizmo Artifice, can also build a Helper)

Infused Gizmo (Su): The artificer can share one gizmo with another creature. An artificer with this discovery

can share a maximum number of gizmos equal to her Intelligence modifier.

Ironwood Helper (Su)[^]: The artificer's helper is remade in Ironwood; it gains +2 Dexterity, the woodstride Druid class ability, and 2/Cold Iron Damage reduction.

Mind Gizmo (Su): The artificer gains the ability to create a gizmo-like device which can be integrated in a hat, scarf or cloak, which heightens senses (Darkvision +60 feet) and gives a +4 enhancement bonus to one mental ability score at the expense of a physical ability score. If the Mind Gizmo enhances her Intelligence (in a hat or a in a helm), it applies a penalty to her Strength. If it enhances her Wisdom (in a scarf or a necklace), it applies a penalty to her Dexterity. If it enhances his Charisma, (in a cloak or in a hood) it applies a penalty to his Constitution. When she applies the gizmo and until she removes it, she takes 1 nonlethal damage per Caster Level, which can't be healed.

Mithral Helper (Su)[^]: The artificer's helper is rebuilt in mithral. It gains a +2 bonus to Dexterity, evasion (or greater elusion if it already possesses evasion), and DR 4/silver. The artificer must be at least of 6th level before selecting this discovery.

Multiple Helpers: The artificer can build another helper, following the rule to rebuild a destroyed artifice, the artificer is counted as she was 3 level less to calculate this helper's abilities. This discovery can be made more times, each additional helper having an artificer level one level lower than the previous one. The artificer must be at least of 4th level to select this discovery. Any selected helper discovery can be applied to each helper. However, only a single command can be given in any round and only one helper will obey. Inactive helpers still defend themselves if engaged, makes opportunity attacks, and count as allies for flanking purpose.

Power Gizmo: The artificer gains the ability to create a gizmo-like device which can be integrated in a belt, shoe, or glove which gives a +4 enhancement bonus to initiative and to one physical ability score at the expense of a mental ability score. If the power gizmo enhances her strength (in a belt or a in a waistband), it applies a penalty to her intelligence. If it enhances her Dexterity (in a shoe, in a slipper or in a boot), it applies a penalty to her Wisdom. If it enhances her Constitution,

(in a glove, in a gauntlet or in a bracer) it applies a penalty to her Charisma. It also gives a -2 Penalty to Will saves as long as the power gizmo is active.

*Spiked Helper *(Su)*: The artificer's helper is designed to have large spikes growing from his joints, paw, spine, and shoulder blades. The helper's natural armor bonus increases by 2. The spikes count as masterwork armor spikes with which the helper is proficient. An artificer must be at least 6th level before selecting this discovery.

Gadgets/Magic Item discoveries:

Combine Gadgets: When the artificer creates a gadget, he can place two schematics into one gadget. When the gadget is consumed, both schematics take effect. This gadget has a level two levels higher than the highest-level schematics placed in the gadget. An artificer must be at least 8th level before selecting this discovery.

Double Wielding: The artificer can use two wands with a full round action as long as the secondary wand casts a spell of two level lower than the first one; consider the caster level of the spells as two levels less. The artificer must be at least 8th level before selecting this discovery

Enhance Wand: Whenever the artificer uses a wand she uses her artificer level as the caster level of the wand.

Extended Gadget: The duration of a schematic is doubled, an extended gadget use a slot one level higher than a normal gadget.

Extend Potion: A number of times per day equal to his Intelligence modifier, the artificer can cause any potion he drinks that does not have an instantaneous duration to function at twice its normal duration.

Gadget Thrower(ex): The artificer invents a device which allows him to hand out her Gadgets and activate them with a standard action, at a range of 30 feet. The artificer must be at least 6th level before selecting this discovery.

Golem Builder: For the purpose of creating a Golem, an artificer is counted as 2 levels higher. The artificer can select this discovery up to 3 times for a maximum of a +6 (e.g., a 14th level artificer with this discovery qualifies to create an Iron Golem. If she has selected

this discovery two times she qualifies for creating a Gold Golem). An artificer must be at least 10th level before selecting this discovery.

Greater Item Improvement: The bonus the artificer gives to an item lasts a number of uses up to the artificer intelligence modifier; The artificer must be at least 10th level before selecting this discovery.

Wand Mastery (ex): Whenever the artificer uses a wand, she calculates the DC for any spell it contains using her Intelligence modifier, instead of the minimum modifier needed to cast a spell of that level.

Spellcrafter Discoveries:

Animated Tools (Sp): The Artificer can spend up to 5 Creation Points to transform a Tiny object (not a weapon) into an Animated Object for 24 hours. The object has a number of hit dice equal to the spent points. The Object can't attack, but will use the aid another action to the best of its abilities. A set of tools (1 HD objects) can also actively continue to work on an appropriate task without the artificer's presence. The artificer must be at least 8th level before selecting this discovery.

Attuning Magic Item (Ex): The Artificer can spend 10 minutes to make a Spellcraft Check to attune a magic item she could destroy to any creature, including herself, with a +5 to the usual spellcrafter check's DC. That item won't work for another creature until that creature has kept the item for a month. The item can't be a consumable one. She can also make a Spellcraft check against another artificer result to de-attune an attuned magic item. The artificer must be at least 8th level before selecting this discovery.

Construct Repair (Sp): The artificer can spend a creation point and one hour of work to repair all damage in a construct.

Curse Breaker (Ex): The artificer can spend 1 Creation point per item level to try to destroy a cursed item with the normal spellcrafter DC, without doubling it and without risking activating the curse. The artificer must be at least 8th level before selecting this discovery.

Detect Magic Items (Sp): The artificer can spend 1 Creation Point to use *Detect Magic* as a spell-like ability, but the spell only detects magic items.

Dilute Potion (Ex): Like the alchemist's dilute potion discovery, but the artificer can do it by spending 1 Creation point each time instead of once per day. An artificer must be at least 8th level before selecting this Discovery.

Grand Animated Tools (Sp): Like greater animated tools but the artificer can spend up to 15 Creation Points, create animated objects up to 15 HD, Large (minimum 12 HD) and Huge ones (15 HD). Vehicles and Huts so animated have the Trample special attack and they last up to a month. An artificer must be at least 16th level and have the greater animated tools discovery before selecting this discovery.

Grand Attuning Magic Item (Ex): Like attuning magic item, but if the artificer spends 5 Creation points the attuned creature keeps the benefit of the item (if the item grants a continuous effect) for one month. The artificer must be at least 16th level and must have the greater attuning magic item discovery before selecting this discovery.

Grand Construct Repair (Sp): Like Construct Repair, but by spending 10 Creation Points the Artificer can repair all damage in a construct with a standard action. An artificer must be at least 16th level before selecting this discovery.

Grand Creation Pool (Su): The maximum number of Creation Points an artificer can have doubles. An artificer must be at least 16th level and have the greater creation pool discovery before selecting this discovery.

Grand Spellcrafter (Ex): Adding a +10 to the spellcrafter check DC, the harvested creation points raise to 3 per Spellcaster level, and up to 75% of the cost of the item can be gained as raw materials. The check can be made with the usual DC, or +5 DC for no chance of wasting the item with a failure; This ability can be used on artifacts, following the normal spellcrafter rules with +10 DC. An artificer must be at least 16th level and have the greater spellcrafter discovery before selecting this discovery.

Greater Animated Tools: Like animated tools, but the artificer can spend up to ten creation points and create Tiny (5HD), Little (7HD) and Medium (10 HD) animated objects and the tools can also attack, using the Artificer move action and stay animated up to a week. An artificer must be at least 12th level and have the animated tools discovery before selecting this discovery.

Greater Attuning Magic Item (Ex): Like attuning magic item but if the artificer spends 1 Creation points, the attuned creature keeps the benefit of the item (if the item grants a continuous effect) for 24 hours. The artificer must be at least 12th level and must have the attuned magic item before selecting this discovery.

Greater Construct Repair: Like construct repair but the artificer can spend 5 creation points to repair all damage to a construct in 10 minutes. An artificer must be at least 12th level and have the construct repair discovery before selecting this discovery.

Greater Creation Pool: The maximum creation points an artificer can have raises by 5. An artificer must be at least 12th level and have a creation pool before selecting this discovery.

Greater Spellcrafter: Adding a + 5 to the spellcrafter check DC, the harvested creation points raise to 2 per Spellcaster level, and up to 50% of the cost of the item can be gained as raw materials. With the usual DC, there is no chance of wasting the item. An artificer must be at least 12th level and have the spellcrafter class ability before selecting this discovery.

Replenish Wand (Su): Expending 1 creation point per five charges, the artificer can replenish the expended charges of any wand he would be able to create. The artificer must be at least 8th level before selecting this discovery.

Tame Alignment: Expending 5 creation points, the artificer can ignore the usual negative levels for using aligned items of an opposite alignment than their own, for 24 hours. The artificer must be at least 8th level before selecting this discovery.

Trap Breaker: The artificer can spend 1 creation point to negate the usual possibility to activate a magic trap with a failure using the Spellcrafter ability. The artificer must be at least 6th level before selecting this discovery.

Weapon Potency Discoveries:

Acid Potency:* When the artificer creates a potency, she can choose to have it inflict acid damage. If the target fails a Reflex save, they take an additional 1d6 points of acid damage 1 round later.

Anarchic Potencies: When the artificer creates a bomb, she can choose to have it deal chaotic divine damage. Lawful creatures that are hit from an anarchic potency must succeed at a Fortitude save or be staggered on their next turn. Against neutral creatures, anarchic potencies deal half damage, and such targets are not affected by their staggering effect. Anarchic potencies have no effect on chaotic-aligned creatures. An artificer must be at least 8th level before selecting this discovery.

Axiomatic Potencies:* When the artificer creates a potency, she can choose to have it deal lawful divine damage. Chaotic creatures that are hit from an axiomatic bomb must succeed at a Fortitude save or be staggered on their next turn. Against neutral creatures, axiomatic potencies deal half damage, and such targets are not affected by their staggering effect. Axiomatic potencies have no effect on lawful creatures. An artificer must be at least 8th level before selecting this discovery.

Blackstar Potency (Su):* This potency crushes the target like a void potency, then repels nearby creatures with a burst of gravity. The target takes damage as if hit by a void potency. All other creatures within 5 feet of the target except the potency's wielder are subject to a bull rush. The artificer uses his artificer class level in place of his Combat Maneuver Bonus, and adds his Intelligence modifier in place of his Strength or Dexterity modifier to resolve the bull rush attempts. Creatures moved by a blackstar potency are pushed directly away from the target's square. An alchemist must have the void potency discovery to create blackstar potencies.

Blinding Potency (Su):* When the artificer creates a potency, she can choose for it to detonate very brightly. Creatures that are hit by a blinding potency charged attack are blinded for 1 minute unless they succeed at a Fortitude save. This is a light effect. An artificer must be at least 8th level before selecting this discovery.

Burning Potency:* When the artificer creates a potency, she can choose to have it inflict fire damage. If the target fails a Reflex Save, it takes 1d6 fire damage the next turn.

Concussive Potency:* When the artificer creates a potency, he can choose to have it inflict sonic damage. Concussive potencies deal 1d4 points of sonic damage, plus 1d4 points of sonic damage for every odd-numbered level, instead of 1d6. Creatures that are hit from a concussive potency charged attack are deafened for 1 minute unless they succeed at a Fortitude save. An artificer must be at least 6th level before selecting this discovery.

Confusion Potency (Su):* The artificer's potencies twist the target's perception of friend and foe. A creature that is hit by an attack charged up by a confusion potency takes damage from the attack and is under the effect of a *confusion* spell for 1 round per caster level of the alchemist. Reduce the amount of normal damage dealt by the potency by 2d6 (so a potency that would normally deal 6d6 points of damage deals 4d6 points of damage instead). An artificer must be at least 8th level before selecting this discovery.

Cursed Potency:* When an artificer creates a potency, she can choose to have it deliver a debilitating curse. A creature that is hit by an attack charged with a cursed potency must succeed at a Will save or be affected by *bestow curse*. An artificer must be at least 12th level to select this discovery.

Darkness Potency:* When the artificer creates a potency, she can choose to have it suppress light sources on the target. This extinguishes nonmagical light sources carried by the target and dispels magical light sources for 1 round/level as *deeper darkness*.

Deconstructing Potency: The potency emanates a vibration which disrupts inorganic matter. When the artificer creates a potency, he can choose to have it

deal extra damage against construct creatures but less damage against other creatures. Against creatures with the construct type, a deconstructing potency deals 1d8 points of damage, plus 1d8 points of damage for every odd-numbered level the artificer possesses, instead of 1d6. Against all other creatures, the deconstructing potency only deals 1d4 points of damage, plus 1d4 points of damage for every odd-numbered level, instead of 1d6. This is a sonic effect. A deconstructing potency destroys unattended inorganic matter in a cube with a 5 foot edge with a charged touch.

Demolition Charge:* When the artificer creates a potency, she can choose to have it deal damage to an object as if by a sunder combat maneuver. If the item is worn or held by an opponent, the attack is directed on the object without penalties. If the object is unattended, a demolition charge deals an additional 2d6 points of damage on a direct hit. An artificer must be at least 8th level before selecting this discovery.

Dispelling Potency: When the artificer creates a potency, she can choose to have it dispel magic effects instead of dealing extra damage. Creatures hit by an attack powered by a dispelling potency are subject to a targeted *dispel magic* spell, using the artificer's level as the caster level. This cannot be used to target a specific spell effect. The artificer must be at least 6th level before selecting this discovery.

Ectoplasmic Potency:* The artificer can make her potency emanate a special vibration that damages incorporeal creatures and reveals the presence of undead creatures hiding in the area. Incorporeal creatures struck by an ectoplasmic potency charged attack takes full damage from the attack as though it was a force attack. In addition, squares 5 feet around the target begin to faintly glow in the spaces where undead creatures have traveled in the last minute, including undead benefiting from *invisibility* or other forms of obscurity (such as *ethereal jaunt*), effectively creating a glowing trail. Any undead creatures in the affected area at the time of the attack likewise glow faintly. This glowing effect lasts for 1 minute, and is otherwise identical to *faerie fire*.

Fast Potencies (ex): An artificer with this discovery can quickly activate more than one charge of a potency in a single round. The artificer can activate additional charges as a full-round action if his base attack bonus is high enough to grant him additional attacks. This functions just like a full-attack with a ranged weapon. An artificer must be at least 8th level before selecting this discovery.

*Flesh-Eating Potency**: The artificer can create potencies that devour living matter. The artificer's potency deals damage one die step higher than normal (regular potencies deal d8s, concussive potencies deal 1d6, and so on), but they have no effect on inorganic matter. In addition, a creature with at least a +1 armor bonus to AC is less likely to be harmed; the target of the attack can attempt a Reflex save against the potency's save DC to take only half damage from the potency.

*Force Potency**: When the artificer creates a potency, she can choose to have it inflict force damage. Force potency deal 1d4 points of force damage, plus 1d4 points of force damage for every odd-numbered level, instead of 1d6. Creatures that are hit by the attack are knocked prone unless they succeed on a Reflex save. An artificer must be at least 8th level before selecting this discovery.

*Frost Potency**: When the artificer creates a potency, he can choose to have it inflict cold damage. Creatures that take a direct hit from a frost potency are staggered on their next turn unless they succeed on a Fortitude save.

Grounding Goo (Su)*: The artificer's potency applies a sticky residue after any damage from the charged attack is resolved. If a creature damaged by the attack has a nonmagical fly speed, its flight is severely impaired, and it takes a penalty equal to the artificer's level on Fly checks for 1 minute.

*Healing Potency**: When the artificer creates a potency, she can choose to have it heal damage instead of dealing it. Creating a healing potency requires the artificer to expend an infused gadget or potion containing a cure spell. A creature that takes a direct hit from a healing potency charged attack takes no damage from the attack and is healed as if she had used the gadget or imbibed the potion used to create the

potency. A healing potency damages undead instead of healing them and the attack does its regular damage.

*Holy Potency**: When the artificer creates a potency, she can choose to have it deal good divine damage. Evil creatures that are hit by a an attack powered by a holy potency must succeed at a Fortitude save or be staggered on their next turn. Against neutral creatures, holy potencies deal half damage, and such targets are not affected by their staggering effect. Holy potencies have no effect on good-aligned creatures. An alchemist must be at least 8th level before selecting this discovery.

Infused Potency: The artificer can infuse his potency with a bit more of his magical aura allowing, the potency to be used by other creatures.

Jury-Rigged Potency (Su)*: Unlike normal potencies, jury-rigged potencies can be created from whatever materials the artificer has on hand; this makes them particularly handy in situations where the artificer might find himself imprisoned or stripped of his equipment. Jury-rigged potencies can be crafted and activated as a swift action (this counts against the artificer's daily use of potencies), and they deal only 1d4 points of damage. This damage increases by 1d4 at 3rd level and every 2 levels thereafter. Despite being useful in a pinch, jury-rigged potencies are nonetheless crudely crafted and highly unstable; if the artificer's attack roll results in a natural 1, the potency misfunctions as she is creating it, and she takes the charge's damage herself. An artificer must be at least 4th level before selecting this discovery.

Knock-Out Potency: When the artificer creates a potency, he can set it to not kill living creatures; The charged attack extra damage dice are d8s but all the damage of the attack is non-lethal.

Madness Potency: The artificer's potencies do more than shock flesh—they shock the mind. A creature that is hit by an attack charged by a madness potency takes damage from the attack plus 1d4 points of Wisdom damage. Reduce the amount of normal extra damage dealt by the potency by 2d6 (so a potency that would normally deal 6d6 of extra damage deals 4d6 points of extra damage instead). The amount of Wisdom damage

dealt by a madness potency is reduced by 1 for each madness potency charged attack that hit the target in the past 24 hours, to a minimum of 1 point of Wisdom damage. An artificer must be at least 12th level before selecting this discovery.

Neutralizing Potency: When the artificer creates a potency, she can choose to give it the potential to end certain ongoing effects instead of dealing damage. Each ally in a 5 feet radius can immediately attempt a ST against any poison afflicting them and any ongoing conditions or ongoing acid, cold, electricity, fire, or sonic damage. (If an effect did not allow a saving throw, this potency doesn't allow affected creatures to attempt one.) Success counts as one successful save toward ending poison and immediately ends other conditions. Exposed poison in the radius is also rendered harmless. A creature with poison abilities that is hit by the attack finds those abilities useless for 1d4 rounds unless it succeeds at a Fortitude saving throw. This discovery doesn't stack with any other that modifies potencies.

*Ooze Blight**: A target hit by an attack powered by the artificer's potency loses the split special quality for 1d4 rounds. In addition, against creatures with the ooze type, this attack deals untyped damage that bypasses all resistances.

*Profane Potency**: When the artificer creates a potency, she can choose to have it deal evil divine damage. Good creatures that are hit from a profane potency charged attack must succeed at a Fortitude save or be staggered on their next turn. Against a neutral creature, a profane potency deals half extra damage, and the target is not affected by the potency's staggering effect. A profane potency has no effect against evil-aligned creatures. An artificer must be at least 8th level to select this discovery.

*Psychoactive Potency**: Psychoactive potencies emanate a frequency which heighten certain sensations. A creature struck by a psychoactive potency takes a -1 penalty on saving throws against charm, emotion, fear, and pain effects, and the DC for Intimidate checks against the victim decreases by 2. This effect lasts for 1 hour per artificer level. These penalties do not stack, and a creature can only be affected by a

single psychoactive potency at a time. A psychoactive potency deals 1d6 fewer hit points of extra damage than normal. An artificer must be at least 6th level before selecting this discovery.

Sand Potency (Su)*: When the artificer creates a potency, she can pack the casing full of sand that explodes in an abrasive cloud on impact. A creature that takes a direct hit from a sand potency is blinded for 1 round, as are any creatures in a 5 feet radius (DC = 10 + half the alchemist's level + his Intelligence modifier).

*Siege Potency**: As a standard action, the artificer can infuse a loaded siege weapon or a ranged weapon's ammunition with the power of his potency. As long as the siege engine or the ammunition piece is fired before the start of the artificer's next turn, the ammunition does damage normally, and also deals the damage of the potency. Creatures that take the potency's extra damage, take 1d6 points of fire damage each round until the fire is extinguished. Extinguishing the flames is a full-round action that requires a Reflex save. Rolling on the ground provides the target with a +2 bonus on the save. Dousing the target with at least 2 gallons of water automatically extinguishes the flames. An artificer must be at least 12th level and must possess the burning potency discovery before selecting this discovery.

Sticky Potency: The effects of the artificer's potency are persistent and continue to damage creatures for 1 round after the initial damage. Creatures that are hit by a sticky potency charged attack take 1 damage for extra dice of damage 1 round later. Potencies that have effects that would normally occur 1 round later instead have those effects occur 2 rounds later. An artificer must be at least 10th level before selecting this discovery.

*Substantiating Potency**: Your potencies are infused with a life-binding frequency and a longing for life, lending ethereal creatures a measure of substance. You can add to an attack a potency that inflicts no extra damage but instead creates a 10-foot-radius cloud of fog that functions as *fog cloud* and lasts for 1 round per artificer's level. Incorporeal creatures that pass through this cloud become partially solid, taking half damage

from nonmagical attacks and full damage from magic weapons, spells, and spell-like abilities. This effect lasts for the duration of the smoke cloud, even if the incorporeal creature moves outside the cloud's area. A creature affected by the cloud can attempt a Will saving throw to negate the substantiating effects of this potency. An artificer must be 10th level before selecting this discovery.

*Sunlight Potency (Su)**: The alchemist can add to attacks potencies that explode with a searing radiance equivalent to that of sunlight and that act as blinding potencies. Undead, fungi, molds, oozes, slimes, and creatures to which sunlight is harmful or unnatural take +2 damage per die from the attack. Undead that are harmed by sunlight and that fail their Fortitude saves against the attack are staggered for 1 round. An artificer must be at least 10th level and must have the blinding potency discovery before she can select this discovery.

*Tanglefoot Potency (Su)**: A creature that is hit by a tanglefoot potency charged attack must succeed in a Reflex save against the potency's DC or be entangled and glued to the floor as if it had failed its save against a tanglefoot bag.

Underwater Demolition (Ex): The artificer gains the ability to allow attacks charged by their potencies underwater (normally, many weapons like ranged weapons, thrown weapons and others can't be used or are limited in the water), including throwing and shooting from the air into the water. If the attack travels through water, the range increment is reduced to 5 feet.

*Void Potency (Su)**: Void potencies charged attacks deals 1d4 points of extra bludgeoning damage, plus 1d4 points of extra bludgeoning damage for every 2 artificer levels beyond 1st, instead of 1d6. A creature hit by the attack must succeed at a Reflex save against the potency's DC. If it fails, it is knocked prone and can't get up for 1 round. If it succeeds, all of its movement speeds are reduced to 5 feet for 1 round. Other creatures within 5 feet of the attack's target take no damage, but must succeed at a Reflex save against the potency's DC or have all their movement speeds reduced to 5 feet for 1 round. An artificer must be 6th level before selecting this discovery.

Other Discoveries:

Air / Water Breathing Graft: An artificer with this discovery has created a device grafted in her throat which allows her to breath air or water. She gains the amphibious special quality but needs to maintain the device, spending 15 minutes every 24 hours to clean and lubricate it; failure to do so causes 1 constitution damage for every hour thereafter. The Graft can be permanently and safely removed with an heal check DC 20.

Artificial Organs (Ex): The artificer learns how to enhance and substitute his vital organs with inorganic devices, reducing the chance of a mortal wound. When a critical hit or sneak attack is scored on the artificer, there is a 25% chance that the critical hit or sneak attack is negated and damage is instead rolled normally. This does not stack with similar abilities that negate critical hits and sneak attacks (such as fortification armor). An artificer can take this discovery up to three times; the effects stack, increasing this chance to 50% and then 75%.

Bomb: The artificer gets the class ability Bomb as an alchemist of equal level. An artificer must be at least 6th level before selecting this discovery.

Chameleon (Su): An alchemist with this discovery can shift the colors of his skin and equipment to blend in with the surrounding terrain. He gains a +4 enhancement bonus on Stealth checks. At 10th level, the bonus on Stealth checks increases to +8.

Divine Holo: The alchemist can develop special devices and lenses and combine them with his mechanical tools to create unique devices that project images in the surrounding space. By expending two daily uses of her potencies, she can use the device to create an image in a space adjacent to her, as *silent image*, using his artificer's level as the spell's caster level. The image she creates remains for a number of minutes equal to his artificer level. He can dismiss this image as a standard action.

Doppelganger Replicant (Su): The artificer learns how to create a replicant, a life-simulating construct, a soulless duplicate, into which he can project his consciousness. As a full-round action, he may shift his consciousness

from his current body to any one of his available doppelganger simulacra, which must be on the same plane as the alchemist. If killed in a simulacrum, he transfers to his own body automatically; if killed in his own body, he is dead. Unused simulacra (including his abandoned original body) appear to be lifeless corpses, though they do not decay. Creating a duplicate costs 1,000 gp in materials and requires 1 week to build. An alchemist must be at least 10th level and must have the alchemical simulacrum discovery before selecting this discovery. The created simulacrum is a creature, not a supernatural effect.

Flexible Crafting (Ex): The artificer selects one Craft skill she is trained in per intelligence modifier; she will be able to use that Craft skill in place of Disable Device, Knowledge and Use Magic Items, when the device to be disabled, the construct, item or building to be recognized and the item to be used use that skill in their creation process. The artificer must be at least 8th level before selecting this discovery.

Glimmering Gadget (Sp): The artificer can expend any prepared gadget to produce a cube of glowing floating tokens that act as per *glitterdust*. The area must be adjacent to the artificer and covers one 5-foot square per level of gadget sacrificed, and the effect's save DC is calculated using the level of the sacrificed gadget.

Golem Graft (Ex): The artificer can replace up to four of his own amputated limbs with those of a inorganic golem. If the grafted limb is an arm, the alchemist gains either a +5 feet reach or a slam natural attack that deals 1d8 points of damage (1d8 for a Small artificer). If the grafted limb is a leg, the alchemist gains one of the following benefits: a +5 bonus to CMD and ST against forced movement, or +5 bonus to Combat Maneuvers to bull rush, push, and pull. For each limb the artificer replaces in this manner, he takes a -2 penalty to Wisdom as he loses his sense of self.

Golemification (Ex): The artificer has mastered the art of substituting parts of the body with artificial ones and applied this knowledge to his own body, turning himself into a constructlike creature. After learning this discovery, the alchemist must perform a 30-day regimen of a special diet, rigorous exercise, and inoculating himself with appropriate nanogolems. At

the end of this regimen, he falls unconscious for 24 hours, then awakens as a "living golem." The artificer's type does not change, but he becomes immune to cold, nonlethal damage, paralysis, and sleep. An artificer must be at least 10th level and must have the artificial organs discovery before selecting this discovery.

Grand Flexible Crafting (Ex): Once per, day the artificer can declare she uses one of her flexible crafting skills in place of an unrelated skill. [At DM's discretion, the artificer player should justify the choice in the action description, e.g. "To reach the top of the tree my character plants nails in the trunk to step on them," in order to be able to use Craft (carpentry) in place of Climb.] The Artificer must be 16th level and must have the greater flexible crafting discovery before selecting this discovery.

Greater Divine Holo: The artificer's unique device allows him to create lifelike images. If she expends an additional daily use of her potencies, the image she creates with the divine holo discovery also produces sound, smell, and heat, as *major image*. The artificer must be at least 6th level and must have the divine holo and improved divine holo discoveries before selecting this discovery.

Greater Flexible Crafting (Ex): The Artificer can always take 10 in one of her flexible crafting selected skill checks, even when it would not normally be possible. The Artificer must be 12th level and must have the flexible crafting discovery before selecting this discovery.

Greater Replicant (Su): The artificer gains the ability to create a replicant. This works like the *simulacrum* spell, except it costs 100 gp in materials per Hit Die of the simulacrum, requires 24 hours to be build, and decays into lifeless leather, metal, stone, and fabric, rather than ice or snow, if killed. An artificer must be at least 14th level and must have the Replicant discovery before selecting this discovery. The created replicant is a creature, not a supernatural effect.

Healing Touch (Ex): The artificer gains the ability to heal other creatures with his Nanogolems. As a standard action, he may touch a creature and apply 1 round's effect of his spontaneous healing discovery to that creature; this counts toward his spontaneous healing

limit for the day. The alchemist's daily limit for hit points healed by spontaneous healing increases to $5 \times$ his alchemist level. This ability only functions if the target is the same type of creature (humanoid, undead, and so on) as the artificer. An artificer must be at least 6th level and must have the spontaneous healing discovery or class ability before selecting this discovery.

Improved Divine Holo: The artificer's unique device allows her to create images accompanied by sound. If she expends an additional daily use of her potencies, the image she creates with the divine holo discovery also produces minor sounds, as *minor image*. The artificer must be at least 4th level and must have the divine holo discovery before selecting this discovery.

Life Support (Ex): The alchemist is familiar enough with the ties between his body and spirit that he has built devices ingrained in his clothes and armor that allow him to linger at death's door far longer than a normal person. He treats his Constitution as 10 points higher than normal for the purpose of determining when hit point damage kills him (so an artificer with a Constitution of 10 and this discovery dies at -20 hit points instead of -10). Reducing her to 0 Constitution or its equivalent (from ability damage, ability drain, Constitution penalties, and so on) makes her unconscious and comatose, but she is only killed after taking an additional 5 points of Constitution damage, drain, or penalty (in effect, the artificer must be brought to -5 Constitution in order to be killed by these attacks). An alchemist must be at least 4th level before selecting this discovery.

Material Mastery (Ex): Your superior knowledge of the nature of matter enables you to ignore spell requirements more easily when crafting magic items. By expending a Gadget of the same school and level as a spell prerequisite when crafting a magic item, you take only a -2 penalty for ignoring that requirement, instead of -5 .

Mechanical Arm (Ex): The artificer gains a new mechanical arm (left or right) on his torso or in place of his original arm. The arm is fully under her control and cannot be concealed except with magic or bulky clothing. The arm does not give the alchemist any extra attacks or actions per round, though the arm can wield

a weapon and make attacks as part of the alchemist's attack routine (using two-weapon fighting). The arm can manipulate or hold items as well as the artificer's original arms (for example, allowing the artificer to use one hand to wield a weapon, another hand to hold a wand, and the third hand to hold a shield). The arm has its own "hand" and "ring" magic item slots (though the artificer can still only wear two rings and two hand magic items at a time). An artificer may take this discovery up to two times.

Method to the Madness (Ex): The alchemist has learned to channel his madness into one of his alchemist class abilities. When the alchemist takes this discovery, he chooses one of either gadgets or weapon potency. If the artificer selects gadgets, she uses her Charisma bonus in place of her Intelligence bonus to calculate bonus gadgets per day and the DCs of the gadgets, if she selects weapon potency, she uses his Charisma bonus in place of his Intelligence bonus when determining the number and the saving throw DCs of her potencies. The artificer must have the madness extraordinary ability to take this discovery. This discovery can be taken twice, allowing the artificer to select both potencies and gadgets.

Nanogolem Swarm (Su): The artificer grows a greater colony of nanogolems in her own body and can summon a Nanogolem Swarm (See Below) 1 per day; the nanogolems are controlled by the artificer, and the swarm stays for 1 round per artificer level, then returns inside her body. The Artificer must be at least 18th level before selecting this discovery and must have the healing touch discovery.

Paddlewheeled Extremities (Ex): An artificer with this discovery grafts special paddlewheels on the outer side of his ankles, greatly improving his movement underwater. The artificer gains a $+4$ enhancement bonus on Swim checks and can take 10 on a Swim check even if distracted or endangered while swimming.

Remote Control (Su): The artificer learns how to use the nanogolems to implant orders in a sleeping agent, whom he releases back into its original society none the wiser. The artificer can create a sleeper agent in a process that takes 1 minute; the target must be unconscious for the process's duration. At any time

during the next year, as long as he is within 1 mile of the sleeper agent, the artificer can activate the agent's programming. When the sleeper agent is activated, treat her as if she were the target of a *dominate person* spell with a caster level equal to the artificer's level at the time the sleeper agent was created. If the sleeper agent is killed or the *dominate person* effect's duration expires, the sleeper agent is permanently released from the artificer's control. The artificer can also release any sleeper agent as a free action. The artificer can have one active sleeper agent for every 6 artificer levels he possesses. An artificer must be at least 12th level before selecting this discovery.

Replicant (Su): The alchemist gains the ability to create a replicant. This works like the *lesser simulacrum* spell, except it costs 100 gp in materials per Hit Die of the simulacrum, requires 24 hours to be built, and decays into lifeless leather, metal, stone, and fabric, rather than ice or snow, if killed. An artificer must be at least 8th level before selecting this discovery. The created simulacrum is a creature, not a supernatural effect.

Sense Trap (Ex): An artificer with this discovery who approaches within 10 feet of a trap can make a Disable Device check to locate it. She has a +1 bonus to CA and ST against Traps; This Discovery can be taken up to five times, the bonus stack.

Spell Knowledge: Your studies into how all things are interconnected have taught you to cast a very limited number of spells. Select a single spell from the sorcerer/wizard spell list that is at least 2 levels lower than your highest-level gadget known. You can prepare and cast this spell as an arcane spell. Preparing the spell uses up a gadget slot 1 level higher than the spell's level. Your caster level is equal to your alchemist level, and your save DCs and concentration checks are Intelligence-based. You're considered to have this spell on your spell list for purposes of prerequisites, spell completion items, and spell trigger items. You may select this discovery more than once. Each time, it grants you access to another spell from the sorcerer/wizard spell list.

Spontaneous Healing (Ex): The artificer gains the ability to heal from wounds rapidly, thanks to a batch of nanogolems she creates. As a free action, once per

round, she can heal 5 hit points as if she had the fast healing ability. She can heal 5 hit points per day in this manner for every 2 artificer levels she possesses. If the artificer falls unconscious because of hit point damage and he still has healing available from this ability, the ability activates automatically each round until he is conscious again or the ability is depleted for the day.

Tentacle (Ex): The artificer gains a prehensile, arm-length, mechanical tentacle on his body. The tentacle is fully under her control and cannot be concealed except with magic or bulky clothing. The tentacle does not give the artificer any extra attacks or actions per round, though he can use it to make a tentacle attack (1d4 damage for a Medium artificer, 1d3 damage for a Small one) with the grab ability. The tentacle can manipulate or hold items as well as the artificer's original arms can (for example, allowing the alchemist to use one hand to wield a weapon, the tentacle to hold a weapon, and the third hand to activate a potency). Unlike an arm, the tentacle has no magic item slots.

Tough to Swallow (Su): The artificer becomes hard and indigestible. Any creature that hits the thought artificer with a bite attack takes 1 damage, which bypass any resistance and must make a Fortitude Save, with a DC equal to the artificer's potency DC; with a failure he won't be able to use the same attack again for 1d4 rounds. Any creature that swallows the artificer whole gains the nauseated condition for 1 round unless it succeeds at a Fortitude save (same DC as above). If the artificer is trapped in the creature's gullet and it becomes nauseated, the creature vomits him back out immediately as a free action at the start of the creature's turn; the artificer lands prone adjacent to the creature. The artificer ignores the usual damage by digestion for 1 round per Intelligence modifier.

Vibes (Su): The artificer broadcasts an imperceptible resonance that grants him a permanent +3 competence bonus on Bluff, Diplomacy, and Intimidate checks.

Wings (Ex): The artificer grafts to her back batlike, birdlike, or insectlike functional mechanical wings, allowing her to fly as the *fly* spell for a number of minutes per day equal to her caster level. These minutes do not need to be consecutive, but they must be spent in 1-minute increments. An artificer can select

this discovery multiple times; each time he does so, he adds his caster level to the number of minutes per day that he can fly with the wings. This flight is an extraordinary ability. An artificer must be at least 6th level before selecting this discovery.

Improve Item:

Beginning at level 2, the Artificer is able to improve mundane items with an hour of work with the proper tools. Those items give an additional + 1 competence bonus the next time they are used in a skill check. This Bonus grow to +2 at level 5 and +1 every three level after 5. The artificer can improve 1 item per intelligence modifier in a single session. The artificer can use this ability a number of times equal to the bonus it can grant.

Skill Mastery:

Beginning at level 6, the artificer can choose a number of her trained class skills up to her Intelligence modifier, as long as they are not Craft, and get able to take 10 in these skills even if she is threatened or in a hurry.

Greater Skill Mastery:

At level 10, the skill mastery ability of the artificer allows her to take 20 once a day in any one skill she has applied the skill mastery to.

Grand Discovery

At 20th level, the artificer makes a grand discovery. He immediately learns two normal discoveries, but also learns a third discovery chosen from the list below, representing a truly astounding eldritch crafting breakthrough of significant import. For many artificers, the promise of one of these grand discoveries is the primary goal of their experiments and hard work.

Grand Discoveries:

Awakened Intellect: The artificer's eldritch implants have enhanced her intellect. Her Intelligence score permanently increases by 2 points.

Craft Artifact: The artificer can craft minor artifacts as though they were regular magic items.

Disjuncting Touch: The artificer gains the ability to destroy magic items and harness their power and materials with a touch. He can use the Spellcrafter ability as a standard action; once per day she can use the *Mage's Disjunction* spell, using her artificer level as her caster level. She can only use it on magical items or traps, it works in antimagic fields, and has a 2% chance per level to destroy a major artifact with the risk to lose only this ability (Will save DC 25). (In the Mistworld, minor artifacts can be destroyed by *Mage's Disjunction* with a 4% chance for caster level and their destruction won't cause any major consequence; For major artifacts the rules are those on Pathfinder Rulebook)

Eternal Youth: The artificer has discovered a way for the nanogolems to cure aging, and from this point forward she takes no penalty to her physical ability scores from advanced age. If the artificer is already taking such penalties, they are removed at this time.

Fast Healing: The artificer's nanogolems responds to damage with shocking speed—she gains fast healing 5.

True Gizmo: One of the artificer's grand Gizmos now gives a full bonus of +8 (and Fast healing 5 if it gives temporary hp) to everything, while the penalty says the same.

True Helper: One of the artificer's helpers becomes Huge and gets a bonus to every ability score equal to the artificer's Intelligence Modifier.

True Maker: Once per day, the artificer can automatically create a number of masterwork mundane items equal to her level +Intelligence modifier, with an hour work, transmuting any material in her possession. Alternatively, she can create a number of minor magic items equal to half the number of the mundane ones, a number of Medium items equal to a quarter of the number of the mundane ones, or one major one. For the major and medium items, the artificer needs to provide the raw materials.

New Alchemist Discoveries

Knock-out Bomb (Su): When the alchemist creates a bomb, she can set it to not kill living creatures; The damage dice become d8s but all the damage of the bomb is non-lethal.

New Oracle Curses

Curse of Sleep: By accident or by foul design, the oracle is cursed to fall asleep in the worst situations; in combat, the oracle falls asleep for a minute and will fall prone without any help. But she stays aware of her surroundings, is not defenseless, takes only a -2 penalty to her armor class and Reflex ST (plus eventual penalty for being prone) and can still cast spells. While effectively blinded, the sleeping Oracle is conscious of every person in a 30-foot radius and automatically knows where her allies are in this radius; a perception check DC 15 as a move action allows the sleeping oracle to pinpoint hostile creatures in the radius of her awareness. At 5th level, the Oracle can sleepwalk, with a 20 feet speed; at level 10 she can cast *Magic Jar*, using her sleeping body as the jar. She adds the *Magic Jar* spell to her 5th level Known spells. Her spirit can also be hosted by a consensual creature, in which case they share the body. At level 15 she adds *Teleport*, *Greater* to her known spells of 7th level.

NEW ARCHETYPES: BARD (INKMASTER)

The Inkmaster is a bard who concentrates on the power of the written word.

Skill Points: 8+Int Modifier.

Armor Proficiencies: an inkmaster is not proficient in any armor. (This modifies the Bard Armor Proficiencies)

Bardic Spellbook: An inkmaster needs to prepare her spells at the beginning of the day using a special songbook; The Inkmaster spellcasting ability is intelligence and the Inkmaster has no number of maximum known spell, but can copy them, hearing other bard's performances or from Wizard's spellbooks. Inkmasters can learn any spell from the Wizard list they have on their own list, but also any Enchantment and Divination spell and any glyph and rune inscribing spell. They learn two spells of any level they can cast every level. This alters the Bard Spells ability.

Scribe Scrolls: The Inkmaster Bard gets the feat Scribe Scroll as a bonus feat at 1st level; this substitutes for Bardic Knowledge.

Bardic Performance: An Inkmaster uses written word in her performances, reading from texts during Comedy, Oratory, Poetry, and Sing checks, which are the skills the bard can use in performance checks. This modifies the bardic performance ability.

Recorded Performance: Once per day per Carisma modifier, the Bard can scribble down magical summaries of her performance. Whoever reads these scribbles gains the bonus of the Bard's Inspire Competence for one round plus half of the bard's caster level. This replaces Versatile Performance.

NEW MONSTERS:

GOLEM, STEEL

As an Iron Golem but for the following changes:

+2 Dexterity, +3 Armor Class (+1 for the increased dexterity, +2 for Natural Armor); +1 Reflex, No vulnerability to rust, Immunity to acid.

Challenge Rating 14. construction: Like Iron Golem, but +20% cost, Caster Level 17.

NANOGOLEM, SWARM (*Diminutive construct*) (CR 9)

A Nanogolem Swarm is composed by thousands of diminutive silver-laced constructs designed to manipulate matter. All together they form a silverly tide.

Nanogolems were created by artificers to help them operate on a very small scale; Nanogolem swarms sometimes are left behind when powerful artificers dies. They search for a purpose and will help any living creature who can offer them one.

N Fine construct (swarm)

Init +10; Senses blindsight 100 ft.; +21 Perception.

Defense

AC 25, touch 25, flat-footed 18 (+7 Dex, +8 size)

hp 97 (15d10); fast healing 2

Fort +7, Ref +14, Will +11

Defensive Abilities construct traits, dispersion; DR 10/magic; Immune weapon damage, Magic which harms construct; Resist electricity 10, fire 10.

Speed 40 ft. (perfect) Melee swarm (3d6) Space 15 ft., Reach 0 ft.

Special Attacks: distraction, repair, dominate, disassemble.

Statistics

Str 1, Dex 24, Con —, Int 10, Wis 18, Cha 10

CMB: +2, CMD:19

Feats: Ability Focus (distraction), Ability Focus (disassemble), Ability Focus (dominate), Alertness, Greater Fortitude, Iron Will, Lightning Reflex, Toughness.

Skills: Perception +21, Sense Motive +6, Stealth +22 (+32 to hide)

SQ construct traits, hive mind, swarm traits

Environment: artificially created, they are often found in urbanized settings with a Renaissance or Higher Cultural Rating.

Organization solitary

Languages: it understands Common, can communicate telepathically with a dominated creature, and can shape itself into words and symbols.

Treasure none

Special Abilities

Dispersion (Ex): As an immediate action, a swarm can disperse into the air around it, expanding to fill any area up to a 30-foot square. While dispersed, the swarm deals no damage and may not use its special abilities, but it is able to immediately hide in plain sight with a +10 bonus and takes only the standard amount of damage from area effects. Once dispersed, it takes the swarm 2 rounds to coalesce again, during which time it cannot attack. A nanogolem swarm can remain in its dispersed state indefinitely.

Disassemble (Ex): As a standard action, a nanogolem swarm can destroy a nonmagical unattended Item; attended items get a Reflex saving throw made by the attender, DC 19. The save DC is Constitution-based. A nanogolem swarm can also disassemble a construct, but the construct is not destroyed, only deactivated for one round with a failed save.

Dominate (Su): As a standard action, a nanogolem can force an individual who failed their save against the

Distraction effect to make a Will Save DC 19; on a failure, the creature is dominated for 1d4 rounds.

Distraction (Ex): Any living creature that begins its turn with a hostile nanogolem swarm in its space must succeed on a DC 19 Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1 round. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Hive Mind (Ex): Any nanogolem swarm with at least 1 hit point per hit die forms a hive mind, giving it an intelligence of 10. When a nanogolem swarm is reduced below this threshold, it becomes mindless.

Repair (Su): With a standard action, a nanogolem can repair an item as per a *Make Whole* spell (Caster Level 15). It can also heal a creature by the amount of his swarm attack. Once a day, a Nanogolem Swarm can cast a *Regeneration* spell at Caster Level 15, which rebuilds a missing limb as a fully functional artificial limb. This ability also can resurrect a creature that has been dead for no more than 15 rounds as with a *breath of life* spell.

NEW TEMPLATE: WINTERWEREWOLF

This Template is an acquired or inherited template you can apply to any Medium or Large humanoid; It is identical to the Greater Werewolf template except for the following:

- +4 Strength, +2 Dexterity;
- Damage reduction 15/Silver. Vulnerable to Fire, Immune to Cold.
- Breath Weapon (Su): Three times a day, 30 feet cone, 6d10 frost damage, DC reflex save to halve the damage 10+1/2 Hit Dice+ Constitution Modifier. On a failure, the victim is also staggered for 1d4 round. Only usable in Beast or Hybrid form.
- Challenge Rating: base creature +2





The Falkovnia Files

— 0102 — NO/47

Falkovnia Über Alles

A THINK TANK OCCULT SOCIETY IN FALKOVNIA

BY MICHAÏL ADAMIS

“One leader, one people, signifies one master and millions of slaves.”

— Albert Camus, *The Rebel*

THE TEUSTEN SOCIETY

The Teusten Society was originally a “Teusten study group” headed by Mikhail von Bluhdt, a wounded Dead Man’s Campaign veteran turned artist from Morfenzi, who had become a keeper of pedigrees for the Teustenorden (Order of Teusten), a military order founded in 690 BC and formally named in the following year. In 694 BC, von Bluhdt moved to Aerie; his Teusten Society was to be a cover-name for the Aerie branch of the Teustenorden, but events developed differently as a result of a schism in the Order. Mikhail von Bluhdt was contacted in Aerie by Rudolf von Bottendorf or Sir Bodendorf, an occultist and newly elected head of the Silbervas schismatic offshoot, known as the Teustenorden Bewahrer der Tasse (Keepers of the Cup). The two men became associates in a recruitment campaign, and Bottendorf adopted von Bluhdt’s Teusten Society as a cover-name for his Silbervas lodge of the Teustenorden Bewahrer der Tasse at its formal dedication.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: KEEPERS OF THE CUP

The Teustenorden offshoot once known as the Bewahrer der Tasse was created in Silbervas, influenced by the Ezrite heretical group “The Échansons” (The Cupbearers). The Falkovnian version is that this divine lineage the Cupbearers believe in exists, but although divine it is not Ezra’s lineage; in fact, one of their goals is search of the divine being’s nature. They too believe that this divine lineage exists but its purpose in the Land of Mists is not that of protecting mankind but of ruling over it.

They believe that Vlad Drakov and his offspring are these divine descendants, ruling Falkovnia as their divine right. Now renamed “The Teusten Society” they see themselves as guardians of this divine bloodline and have pledged their lives in securing Drakov rule in the Land of Mists at any cost.

Another primary focus of the Teusten Society is a claim concerning the origins of the Falkovnian nation. In 690 BC, people who wanted to join the Teustenorden, out of which the Teusten Society developed in 694 BC, had to sign a special “blood declaration of faith” concerning their lineage, signed by blood. Teusten was the ancient land from where the Talons of the Hawk, who were spirited away to the Demiplane from Taladas, descended. A few of those mercenaries formed the Teustenorden, an elite society of knights sworn to the cause of racial superiority.

The Teusten people were seafaring warriors, and the ocean waters were the lifeblood. Even those who chose to live inland built their towns neighboring rivers and lakes, to be connected to the greater sea. Foreigners saw the Teusten as bloodthirsty warriors, who would either die in battle or drink themselves to death, brawlers who despised anyone in the world who is not their own kind. Battle and conflict were regarded as life’s greater pleasures. They held a repugnance toward other races, especially dwarves, whom they found repulsive and often attacked on sight. Their ill will towards other races was thus combined with their love for battle, regularly beating up those who were not “of their own kind”.

Teusten women were often as combative as the men, although less of them tended to travel abroad as they usually gladly took the role of the submissive wife, but also due to having difficulty attaining positions of leadership, a sign of sex-based discrimination. Slavery was an acceptable part of life for the Teusten peoples. Although most dwarves were killed on sight, there were still several kept for labor. The same was true for other races as well as other humans. Elves were often seen as a weak race and those elves who proved themselves in physical labor were bragged about by their owners as “the best of their race.”

The laws of Teusten were similar to those of any other nation, regulating theft, rape, or murder, but only against Teusten people or property. There were no trials by jury or magistrate, but rather a trial by blood. Depending on the severity of the crime, the accused had the chance to defend themselves by battling either the accuser or a monster in the Wahrheitenarena (Arena of Truths). Magic of any sort was not often practiced in Teusten, but warriors loved to get their hands on magical items and use them to create their own tales of glory.

A wizard defeating someone with magic was not perceived as glorious as warriors defeating powerful wizards. But although there are many Teusten legends of warriors abhorring the use of magic, in most of them, a warrior would often defeat a powerful wizard after an epic adventure to acquire a magic weapon, so the use of magic items was “accepted” by the Teusten. Divine magic in Teusten was a great rarity, usually performed by mystics in numinous rituals and ceremonies. These mystics were called Tärnanen, a kind of ancient Teusten priest-king, and they used a writing similar to dwarven runes. In fact, Teusten legends recount how the dwarves stole their magic writing, which was the reason for Teusten enmity against that respected race.

The Teusten Society promotes a cult of ancestor worship, as a way to keep the race pure, and provide immortality to the Falkovnian kingdom. Through the years, its members have modified a variety of existing customs to emphasize the elitism and central role of their society, frequently using Tärnanen symbolisms. As naming ceremonies, marriage ceremonies were altered, funeral ceremonies, as well as Teusten-centric

celebrations of the summer and winter solstices were instituted.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: LIEBENBORN

Liebenborn (“Love” Born) is the name of the concept of women being impregnated with love for the state and the king, but also for the ultimate act of love the Liebenborn babies would grow to offer, sacrificing their lives in the service of the state. It is a Teusten Society-initiated, state-supported, association in Falkovnia, with the goal of raising the birth rate of strong Falkovnian children of persons classified as ‘racially pure’ and ‘healthy’ based on Teusten Society racial hygiene and health ideology.

Liebenborn provides welfare to its mostly unmarried mothers, encourages anonymous births by unmarried women at their maternity homes, and mediates adoption of these children by likewise ‘racially pure’ and ‘healthy’ parents, particularly members of the military and their families. An award called “Das Nest der Ehre der Falkenmutter” (The Nest of Honor of the Falkovnian Mother) is given to the women who bore the most Falkovnian children.

Initially set up in Silbervas in 700 BC, after the Falkovnian defeat in the First Dead Man’s War, to counteract the death rate of Falkovnian soldiers in the war against Azalin’s forces and to promote Teusten eugenics, Liebenborn soon expanded into several other cities and activities. These activities include the selection of ‘racially worthy’ orphans for adoption and care for children born from Falkovnian women who had been in relationships with Talons or Teusten Society members. It originally excluded children born from unions between common soldiers and Falkovnian women, because of military status, but after the Second Dead Man’s War in 704 BC, children of soldiers were accepted. Many children were kidnapped from their parents and judged by racial criteria for their suitability to be raised in Liebenborn homes, and fostering by military families. The Teusten Society is sometimes involved in kidnapping children from Falkovnian fugitives as they are considered stolen property of Vlad Drakov and given to Liebenborn.

Located in Silbervas, the organization was partly an office within the Schutzstaffel (protection squad)

responsible for certain family welfare programs, and partly a society for the Teusten Society leaders. The main goals of the program were to support racially, biologically and hereditarily valuable families with many children, placement and care of racially, biologically, and hereditarily valuable pregnant women, who, after thorough examination of their and their progenitors' families by the Teusten Society, could be expected to produce equally valuable children. The program also provides care for the children and for the children's mothers. All male children born in Liebenborn are raised to become soldiers, while the more aggressive ones may become Talons. Most female children are integrated in the breeding program when they reach puberty, while the ones with exceptional qualities are groomed to join Kara's Daughters, an elite staff of female servant-guards for noblewomen of the country, or used as spies in neighboring countries' noble families.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE TRAITOR

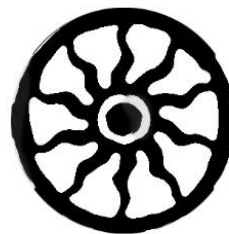
In 723 BC Marshal Oswald Vorbel, upon having a change of heart, seeing all the misery and injustice around him, discreetly left the Teusten Society and founded the Knights of the Ashen Bough ("Lights in the Fog," *Book of Secrets* p.129). Although he is extremely old, having entered his ninth decade, he is still active and, through the Knights, he helps fugitives escape Falkovnia. Recently though, his actions have been discovered by Vigo Drakov. The cambion hasn't decided yet which would be worse for the redeemed officer, giving him to Vlad Drakov to be punished for his treachery, closely monitoring him to expose other cells of resistance in Falkovnia, or corrupting him and making him voluntarily betray the society he founded.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: KRIEGSDAGGER

These honorary silver daggers signify membership to the Teusten Society. Their pommels are fashioned in the shape of a skull, while their grip is rumored to be tied with shadow unicorn leather. The cross guard is in the shape of a hawk with the quillions styled as the bird of prey's wings. The blade has "Azalin" written with black patina on its silver surface. All *kriegsdaggers* are death bane daggers created to give massive amounts of magical energy damage to Azalin. It is, however, unfortunate that Azalin is immune to the powers of these dagger, as he is immune to the *slay living* spell cast during the dagger's creation and also since the *kriegsdaggers* don't have his true name written on their blades. Adventurers may hear rumors about these daggers and may go to great lengths to "acquire" one of them, only to find out that they are totally useless against the lich king.

These daggers are always given to a member of the Teusten Society when they first enter the fold of this racist brotherhood and are a way of recognizing who is a member and who is not. This is the reason why all members of the society hold their dagger as one of their most prized possessions, since they are the symbols of their membership. They would never sell their daggers, even preferring to die than to lose their status within Falkovnian society.

All daggers are to be returned to the society in the event of a member's death; these daggers are then given to another initiate of this obsolete cult of warmongering fanatics.





Sins of the Father

THE MINISTER OF THE CENTRAL PRISON OF LEKAR

BY MICHAEL ADAMIS

*“I will be Führer one day
I will command all of you”*
— Dead Kennedys, *California Über Alles*

There are few people who can compete with Vlad Drakov’s cruelty within the domain of Falkovnia or the other Domains of Dread. Everyone around Vlad Drakov is a potential enemy or a disgrace to his eyes. There is only one person Kingsfürer Vlad Drakov is proud of and sees as capable of ruling Falkovnia, if it wasn’t for his Vistani heritage: Vigo Drakov. But though Vlad has been seeding many illegitimate children through the practice of First Night privileges, with some of his enemies estimating that one in five Falkovnians can trace some blood connection to him, someone else has placed his cuckoo’s egg into the hawk’s nest.

Years ago, when Isabella Aderre, mother of the previous ruler of Invidia, Gabrielle Aderre, and grandmother of the Dukkar Malocchio Aderre, was a concubine slave of Vlad Drakov, a nameless gentleman whose face was not remembered by Isabella forced himself upon her, resulting in the birth of Vigo Drakov, the minister and director of the most vicious prison in the Land of Mists. The son of the incubus known as The Gentleman Caller and a *giomorgo* woman who can trace her bloodline to the Zarovan matriarch, Madame Eva, Vigo Drakov is a ruthless half-fiend and master manipulator.

He has managed to deceive the domain’s tyrant for decades, since his birth, and has infiltrated within Falkovnian society. He has managed to inspire fear among the populace and no one dares to look down on him for his Vistani heritage in a land where mixed marriages are taboo even if they are encouraged by the state. Although he was born as a normal human baby, he began to develop several fiendish deformities after

the completion of many power rituals, making his true form unrecognizable from his “human” one.



VIGO ĐRAKOV

Male Half-fiend-Half-Vistani, Medium outsider (neutral evil) Ftr3/Rog2; CR 9; Medium humanoid; HD 6d8+3d10+6+3d6+6, hp 69; Init +3 + time shift; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Spd 40 ft, Speed 30 ft. (6 squares) in scale mail; frenzy +10ft; AC 19, touch 13, flat-footed 16; uncanny dodge (+3 Dex, +4 armor, +2 natural); Space 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; Base Atk +10/+4; Grp +14; Full Atk +16/+10 *flaming burst longsword* (1d8+4/19–20, +1d6 fire damage) or 2 claws +14/+14 (claw 1d6+4/1d6+4/19–20); SA Blood oath powers, cause hunger, spell-like abilities, sneak attack +1d6, sadistic strike, *dæmonfrenzy*; SQ Alternate form, damage reduction 10/cold iron or good; Immune electricity and poison; darkvision 60 ft, resistance to acid 10, cold 10, fire 10, telepathy 100ft, reality wrinkle, mimic, evasion; AL NE; SR 16; Fort +13, Ref +15, Will +7

Str 18, Dex 17, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 18

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th)

At will—*charm person* (DC15), *detect thoughts* (DC 14), *fear* (by touch DC 16); 4/day—*disguise self*; *Invisibility* 3/day

Sorcerer Spells 6/7/3 (CL 4th) (DC 14 + spell level)

0— *arcane mark*, *dancing lights*, *detect magic*, *read magic*, *message*, *unnerving gaze*;
1st—*alibi*, *comprehend languages*, *disguise self*;
2nd—*vision of entropy*;

Vigo's extra spell-like abilities are the product of a power ritual in Tepest, while his wizard spells are due to his high intelligence and Zarovan ancestry.

Reality Wrinkle: 40 ft. diameter

Corruption Points: 15

Feats: Alertness, Craft Wondrous Item, Deceitful, Mask of Gentility, Persuasive, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (longsword)

Skills: Bluff +14, Diplomacy +14, Disguise +14 (+24), Escape Artist +5, Intimidate +20, Knowledge (planes)

+10, Knowledge (engineering) +4, +10 Sense Motive +7, Heal +3, Listen +9, Search +6, Spot +9, Craft (Poisonmaking) +5, Move Silently +15, Hide +9, Forgery +2

Languages: Abyssal, Draconic, Falkovnian, Darkonian, Mordentish, Lamordian

Unaligned Demon: One in ten cambions is not born chaotic evil, and although Vigo is the son of a powerful Incubus, his mother Isabella Aderre was a Zarovan half-vistana; this peculiar mix has denied him the chaotic nature of his father but has given him some powers of the Zarovan.

Time Shift (Su): Because of his Zarovan blood and demonic nature Vigo is adrift in time. This effect is more obvious during combat (or situations when an initiative roll required). At such times that the half-fiend would roll an initiative check, roll an additional 1d6 and 1d10 every round. The ten-sided die indicates an adjustment applied to the cambion's initiative roll. If the roll of the six-sided die is high (a 4,5, or 6) then Vigo is a bit ahead of everyone else and the roll of the ten-sided die is added to the initiative roll. If the roll on the six-sided die is low (1, 2 or 3), then Vigo is lagging a bit behind everyone else and the result of the ten-sided die is subtracted from his initiative roll. If the modified number is 1 or less, then Vigo acts last in that round.

Misplaced in time (Su): If he rolls a natural 20 in his initiative check and then a 6 on his 1d6 roll, then for that round, Vigo behaves as if under the effects of a *haste* spell. If he rolls a natural 1 on his initiative check and then a 1 on his 1d6 dice roll, then for that round his movements are slowed as though under the effects of a *slow* spell for that round.

Lost in time (Su): If he rolls a natural 20 in his initiative check, then a 6 and a 10 in his time shift rolls, he moves with lightning speed and takes an extra round of actions, before anyone else can react, and everyone else is considered flat-footed for him. If he rolls a natural 1 in his initiative and then a 1 and a 10, then he misses a whole round and is considered flat-footed, as he is so out of the time sequence that he seems to be moving in slow motion.

Menschengestalt (Su): Vigo can assume the form of a specific male human as a standard action 3 times per day. This ability functions as a *polymorph* spell cast on itself as a 6th-level caster, but he does not regain hit points for changing form and can assume only the form of that specific man. In this form he is over six feet tall, with broad shoulders and a well-muscled, finely-honed body. He shares many similarities with Vlad Drakov I, such as the angular features and hawk-like nose, thus affirming Drakov of his parentage and invigorating Vlad's ego. There are some differences, though, in appearance as his straight raven black hair, skin darker than Drakov's dusky tan, and mesmerizing dark brown eyes give away his vistani ancestry. To many, he appears as a darker clean-cut version of Vlad Drakov, radiating the same reassuring presence but lacking his "father's" arrogant demeanor. Vigo can remain in his human form until he chooses to return to his natural form.

Minister and Director of the Central Prison of Lekar, Falkfuhrer Vigo Drakov's natural demonic form can cause those who see him to be awe-struck. He has a very strong build and his pitch-black, pockmarked skin is encrusted with tiny scales. Although clearly inhuman, his looks are not necessarily ugly to behold. He has not even a single hair on his head between his pointy ears, but his bushy, angular eyebrows and long, extended stark white goatee make woeful contrast with his ebony skin. His teeth may be sharp and pointed, but the most menacing characteristic on him are his eyes, lit by a hellish burning emptiness.

When he speaks in his true form, he has strong articulation and his voice sounds heavy and faucalized. He wears black scale mail armor, and always dresses up in fine, militaristic dark-toned outfits, excluding anything that would reflect his vistani heritage. The result is that he usually appears to be dressed in the elegant clothes of a general.

In demon form, his head is usually covered by a black-jeweled coif-like close-fitting cap covering his sideburns, and enhancing his ears. He wears a large star-shaped medal and a long cape. He usually wears short riding boots with his embroidered trousers tucked inside them. He always carries a poisoned dagger strapped around his waist by a belt.



In his public, human form Vigo Drakov appears as a tall, heavy-framed middle-aged man, with long hair and a well-trimmed beard. His weather-beaten brown skin balances between the complexion of the Vistani and Vlad Drakov's. His visage is almost identical with Vlad Drakov's, having the coarse features and hawkish nose, but his dark brown eyes and black hair are the only facial characteristics that differ from his "father's" to reveals his Vistani heritage.

But although he uses this appearance in the presence of other people, when identifying as Vigo Drakov, he can change his appearance to look like any humanoid. A master of disguise, he uses powerful illusions to change

his visage and form to that of other humanoids, as he sees fit. His only giveaway is his time-shifting Zarovan heritage, though it is unnoticeable most of the time, there are rare times when he can seem completely off or really fast; when this happens, he will pretend to be absentminded in the first case or otherwise try to gaslight the ones wondering about it, feigning to be baffled by what he is being questioned about.

There are even rarer times when he could be so lost in time that he is perceived as moving in slow motion or unnaturally fast. When this happens, he will always use magic to perplex those who have witnessed that time lapse phenomenon.

Silent Metal (Ex): A cambion has no armor check penalty on Hide and Move Silently checks

Mask of Gentility (Ex): Vigo cunningly hides his true motives and nature behind a facade of camaraderie and gentility. If he is subjected to a divination spell that normally would reveal his alignment, his alignment registers as neutral. In addition, if someone tries to use the Sense Motive skill to get a hunch about his purpose or nature, they must succeed on a DC 30 check to obtain an accurate impression

Sadistic Strike (Su): As head of the Central Prison of Lekar, Vigo has managed to excel in the “art” of torturing, causing pain and anguish. Vigo’s skills and expertise in pain makes him treat any weapons with which he attacks (including natural weapons and spells with attack rolls) as if he had the Improved Critical feat for those weapons.

Dæmonfrenzy (Su): Having performed a power ritual in Falkovnia, Vigo is able to embrace his chaotic nature and enter a frenzied state as a free action, once per day, for 11 rounds. While in this frenzy he gains a +6 to Strength, +6 to Constitution, and a +3 morale bonus to Will saves, but he attacks recklessly, imposing a -2 penalty to AC. When entering a frenzy, his blood becomes thicker, making his wounds bleed slower. He gains 30 temporary hit points that disappear when the frenzy ends. While in this state, he cannot use any skills or abilities that require patience and concentration.

Cause Hunger (Su): Having visited the hunger-infested domain of G’Henna, Vigo can, once per day, cause all creatures within his reality wrinkle to become insatiably

hungry and thirsty if they fail a DC19 Will save. Those who fail the save are compelled for 11 rounds to seek out and consume all food and drink they can find. They are only compelled to consume that which is actually edible, and are not compelled to consume that which they know to be poisoned. They are not compelled to act violently to satisfy this craving, though they might resort to theft. The effect lasts one round per Hit Die of the fiend, or until the target leaves the fiend’s reality wrinkle. Vigo sometimes uses this power when he interrogates prisoners, presenting a feast before them but having them manacled and unable to reach it.

Forget (Su): Once per day, Vigo can cause all creatures within his reality wrinkle to forget all events of the past 24 hours, if they fail a Will save. Any mind-affecting spells that were influencing the affected creatures are dispelled by this effect. This power was gained after making a Power Ritual in the domain of Darkon.

Mass Charm (Su): Another Power Ritual in Dementlieu has granted Vigo the ability to invoke a variation of the *mass charm* spell once per day. All humanoids of Medium-size or smaller in the fiend’s reality wrinkle are affected as though the fiend had cast *charm person* on them. A successful DC19 Will save negates the effects. There is no limit to the number of creatures the fiend can have charmed in this manner at one time. The charm lasts 11 hours or until the target is outside his reality wrinkle. Vigo rarely uses this power when interrogating prisoners as he prefers to torture them until they tell him the needed information.

Domination (Su): Having performed a power ritual in Blaustein, the fiend can, at will, force those around him to carry out his desires. He can either affect as many people as he desires with a *command* spell, lasting 11 rounds or focus his attention on 1 person, *dominating* that person for 11 days. All victims receive a DC19 Will save to resist the effect. This is Vigo’s last resort when he needs information from someone but they are unbreakable. He truly enjoys taunting those who, after suffering his tortures to the brink of death and still refusing to talk, were then dominated by him, giving him all the information he needed.

The Blood Oath Ritual (Su): The blood-oath ritual is an evil magic ceremony learned from his demonology research and customized by Vigo, which creates a

magical, mental link between the cambion and his mortal followers. The oath ceremony requires 24 hours to prepare, while Vigo meditates and readies the ceremony chamber. The ritual may be held at any location, so long as it is uninterrupted. Any interruption ruins the ceremony, and requires the half-fiend to begin preparations anew. The ritual lasts for 2 hours, plus an additional 10 minutes for each participant to be initiated.

The magic of the ceremony transfixes its mortal participants. Anyone desiring to leave the ceremony once it has begun must make a DC 21 Will save. Such a departure interrupts the ceremony.

A mortal who wishes to resist the bond with Vigo may attempt to do so when their blood mingles, with a DC 23 Will save. If the victim successfully resists the bond, Vigo will know that he did not form the link. The resistance, however, need not interrupt the ritual. Knowing this, Vigo will often allow the mortal to believe that they have escaped detection until after the ritual. Willing targets receive no saving throw.

Unerring Tracking (Su): The blood oath Vigo demands from his cult followers grants him the ability to sense the location of any of his sworn servants anywhere within the Demiplane of Dread. Although he receives no details concerning the location, he can track them in any domain without a mistake (consider it as though he automatically rolls a natural 20 when tracking one of his followers.)

Mishamel (Su): The second power granted to Vigo by the blood oath is the ability to hurt or even kill mortals through this mental link. Vigo has to merely concentrate his will and evil power along the link. He may use this power only if he can see the target and is within 200 yards of the prey. When within range, the half-fiend may use this attack form at will as a standard action.

If Vigo desires to merely hurt his victim, the mortal must roll a Fort save DC19 to avoid the attack. If the saving throw fails, the victim is afflicted by excruciating, debilitating pain for up to ten rounds; treat the victim's combat condition as being helpless. If Vigo desires to kill his victim, the mortal must roll a Fort save DC19. A successful save negates the attack; a failed save means

a painful death, as his victim's physical body slowly melts into a gooey liquid.

Fiendish Possession (Su): Vigo, as all fiends in the Land of Mists, may possess the bodies of mortal victims, using an ability similar to the *magic jar* spell. The focus for the possession spell is a large black crystal that Vigo has crafted specially for this purpose. He uses the *Totenkopfringe* (see below) as the receptacles for his victim's life forces. To form the proper link with the prospective victim, Vigo tricks them into providing some personal item for use during the spell.

After preparing the spell, Vigo shifts his spirit from his body into the crystal, and awaits the arrival of the intended victim. A possession attempt may be made if a victim moves within 110 ft. of the receptacle. Vigo may return his spirit to his body at any time, but this ends the possession. The possession attempt takes one round to complete. The target must roll a DC19 Will save to resist the attack.

Once Vigo has control of the target's body, he may use that body or dispose of it and reenter his own. While in the host body, he has full access to all his spell-like and mental powers.

The life force of a possessed victim whose body dies is not automatically slain. Rather, its spirit is shifted into the awaiting ring prepared specifically for the victim by Vigo. Only a *wish* or *limited wish* spell will free the spirit of the victim from its special receptacle without the consent of the fiend. The fiend may reverse the process at any time. Note that if the victim's body is dead, a *raise dead* or *resurrection* spell must be cast simultaneously or the victim's life force will perish.

BACKGROUND

Vigo Drakov is the son of the Gentleman Caller and the Zarovan half-vistani Isabella Aderre. Isabella was captured as a child and sold as a slave to Vlad Drakov of Falkovnia. One late winter night in 705 BC, a nameless faceless nobleman forced himself upon the terrified half-Vistani girl in her cell in the lower levels of Castle Draccipetri. Three months later it was obvious that the young girl was pregnant; Vlad Drakov was pleased that his seed would give him a child from his favorite concubine. Isabella's labor lasted for days and the king

became impatient, losing interest after a few days. A midwife was responsible for delivering the baby, under penalty of death if the mother or the child wouldn't survive.

But death came earlier than expected to the midwife, as she died from terror when she saw the demonspawn's blazing eyes. The baby's survival instinct kicked in, taking the form of a normal healthy human baby boy, before his mother could have a look at it. That was the last time she ever laid eyes on her firstborn, as it was taken from her into the care of the Liebenborn program to be raised properly. The child was an oddity for the Teusten Society that was responsible for Liebenborn, since it was the child of the king but at the same time it lacked the racial prerequisites to be accepted by a family.

Vigo was raised as an unwanted orphan, ridiculed by his peers, but his demeanor was left unchanged and as he grew older, so did his powers begin to develop. First was his power to detect the thoughts of those around him, he then understood that the reason for the behavior others had against him was not because they thought he was inferior than him, but because they feared his Vistani heritage. As time went by, he learned how to control this fear, channeling it to befriend those around him. From being scorned, now he was loved and respected, though this was because of his powers and nothing else.

As Vigo grew, he became aware that there was something special about him, that he was different from those around him. When he first realized his true nature, he was even more perplexed and knowing that, if people scorned him for being half-vistani, their reaction if they knew about his true nature would be totally hostile, seeing him as an abomination. He realized how important it was to hide his Abyssal heritage and he became really talented in that from childhood.

Vigo understood, from a young age, that power was everything, and knowing that he was considered one of the sons of the most powerful person in the kingdom made him feel that this was his destiny, to rule over all, human and demon alike. As his physical prowess grew, along with his mental powers, he was easily accepted in the Stangegrad Military Academy, where he excelled.

He was among the young men, many born under the Liebenborn breeding program, that assembled the largest army the world had ever seen, and marched to Darkon in The Fourth Dead Man's War.

We were far into Darkonian soil when the dead began to rise once more. A skeleton grabbed my leg to help itself out of the ground, looking at me with a red flickering light, illuminating the bony cavities of its eye sockets. I smashed its hairy skull with my mace and looked around me.

We were almost surrounded by the dead that kept coming; only our rear was open, and the men ignored my orders and began to fall back, some running away in panic. I tried desperately to boost my men's morale.

When that failed, I shouted that if they didn't continue advancing towards Martok, I would kill them myself. I actually hacked down two of my men to prove my point, cutting off their heads so that they wouldn't rise with the rest of the walking dead that had now completely surrounded us.

Then a strange thing happened; the red light emitted from the eyes of the skeletons, rotten corpses, and dead army men we fought vanished. They still moved around but there was something different in the way they behaved, as if their movements were no longer coordinated; some didn't even attack any longer.

Fatigue had begun to settle in, as my vision became a bit blurry and everything around me was distorted as air over a large fire, but we still fought, destroying many living corpses belonging to the dead army and continued our advance towards Martok.

We could see the city in the horizon when we noticed a small unit of our Falkovnian soldiers fighting their way between the lines of Darkonian forces, not very far away inland from our position.

They fought with courage, but it was not long before they were overcome by the Darkonian cavalry, comprised of the elite living soldiers of Darkon, and were forced into a tactical retreat.

When they reached our position, we learned that the unit's leader was a young minor officer by the name of Scharführer Vigo Drakov, a bastard of none other than Vlad Drakov himself, rumored to be a half-vistana. Somehow, he and his squad had managed to advance deep into enemy lines, but without any support from the rest of the army, they had to fall back. Nonetheless, his excellence in battle was unmistakable, outshined only by the Kingsfurer himself.

-An account on the Fourth Dead Man's Campaign, as reported by Hauptsturmführer Uwe Groezinger from the court-marshal records of Stangengrad, 57th Year of the Hawk (722 BC).

His accomplishments in combat were glorified, as he became a Falkovnian national hero and his achievements were only overshadowed by stories of his ruthlessness towards his men and the atrocities he had committed. He was accepted into Vlad Drakov's court and, combining his military and demonic skills in undermining other members of the military, he quickly rose in the ranks. His natural inclination towards torture gained him notoriety in all of Falkovnia and by 739 BC he was given the rank of Falkfuhrer and the position of Minister and Director of the Central Prison.

During the Grand Conjunction, as the Land of Mists became briefly a part of the Prime Material Plane, he experienced what it was to be truly free, no longer hiding his demonic nature; he corrupted, murdered, and searched books on demonology. He was about to travel to the Abyss, searching for the shard of evil, when the Grand Conjunction collapsed, the Mists dragging him back to Falkovnia as a prisoner. Since that day, he tries to find a way to escape the Demiplane but also to rise in status in the demonic ranks. Vigo is a cambion of great ambition; he wants to become a god, not a mercenary of demons to be looked down on.

CURRENT SKETCH

As a demonspawn half-vistana, Vigo is an amplified reflection of his Vistana mother's worst fears and failings. As his mother was an outcast, rejected by those of pure Vistani heritage, so has he been regarded as racially impure in Falkovnia, especially within the Teusten Society. Because of his demonic heritage, he would be regarded as a freak in human society if that was ever revealed. As an ethically unaligned cambion, a non-chaotic half-fiend, he would be poorly tolerated in the Abyss, probably abused. Although he longs for the day when he would be free from the Demiplane, he also dreads the confrontation with the demons belonging to the Abyss.

He is an outcast of both worlds, something that makes him feel bitter and hateful towards everyone and everything. This bitterness manifests as an unparallel sadism, fueled also by his mother's fear of torture. As she was a concubine-slave to Vlad Drakov, she had witnessed numerous atrocities being performed under his orders and she feared him. This fear was channeled to her demonspawn child, giving him a great instinct

towards torture (with a successful Sense Motive, he can figure out what his victims worst fears are and use them against them).

Vigo Drakov loves both deception and battle, and his roguish, tricky nature gives him plenty of opportunities for both. He makes good use of his demonic abilities to terrify prisoners and extract information from them, sometimes visiting them secretly in his real form and taking an aggressive, negative stance towards the subject and in general installing fear towards his victims.

This sets the stage for his alter self to act sympathetically, appearing supportive and understanding, and in general showing sympathy for the subject. The subject may feel able to cooperate with the “good” alter self, either out of trust or out of fear of the “Gefängnisdämon” (prison demon) and may then seek “Vigo’s” protection and provide the information he is seeking. The order can also be reversed. When performed in this manner, Vigo in his menschengestalt (human self) may try to gain a subject’s trust. If that fails, his demon-self aka “Vizgerün” will intimidate the subject to make him crack under pressure.

Vigo has lived all his life hiding his true self since his birth, trusting no one, not even his mother when he was a newborn infant. He would never assume his real form in front of anyone, not even in front of prisoners under an imminent death sentence, nor his followers. His secret identity is his most prized secret, along with his True Name (Åndudeiyžbeelbrog’när’tallaal, meaning “The False Prince among the Shadows” in Abyssal) and his phylactery, a black dagger formed from a meteor that fell near the village of Delmunster in 737 BC.

Because of Vlad Drakov’s dislike of magic, Vigo’s reality wrinkle is felt as a faint irritation by his “father,” who is totally deceived by probably the only “son” that makes him really proud. Vigo has taken full advantage of Vlad’s praise and would never let anyone compromise his status, making him paranoid of any potential discovery of his true identity as a half-abyssal creature.

VOZROL (FLAMING BURST SWORD)

This special weapon was found in the caverns of H’rakizuhm when Vigo was stationed as overseer of a

labor captain in the Crumbling Hills. The two dwarves who discovered it tried to hide it at first, not wanting it to fall to the wrong hands, but Vigo easily found out their secret, torturing the dwarves to death with it.

This long sword is a special *flaming burst sword* made of adamantine. It is special in that, along with its normal properties as an adamantine weapon (bypassing hardness when sundering weapons or attacking objects, ignoring hardness less than 20, having a +1 enhancement bonus on attack rolls etc.), it has two command words that trigger its magical properties. The first one, “Vulcanas” turns it into a flaming sword, dealing 1d6 extra points of damage, and on a critical hit it creates a burst of flames that deal an extra 1d10 points of fire damage. The second command word, “Zagmannon” turns its blade red hot, dealing an extra 2 points of damage to anything flammable it touches. Vigo uses the second command when he wants to torture someone, instead of using red-hot pincers. The sword provides a fast resolution to a cruel and extremely painful torture without the need for a fire to heat it.

He usually tries to befriend those he meets, to assess their value and skills; if he believes they are a potential threat, he will usually allow himself to get close to the strongest person and then lash out with a sneak attack using a paralytic poisoned blade, while his victim is flat-footed. He then decides if he wants the person alive for interrogation, or else he finishes off his target with a quick coup de grace attack.

If he fights against more opponents, he uses his *dæmonfrenzy* ability to destroy as many opponents as possible, moving fast to maneuver and attack. If he sees that he is losing a fight he will use his *fear* ability to escape.

Vigo claims to have extensive knowledge of the planes, he is supposedly an expert in demonology, mysticism, and the occult, posing as a scholar of some sort. He has an extensive collection of books. Mortals who approach him for advice on hunting demons are assessed and either quickly disposed of, accused of something and imprisoned, or misdirected to create the most destruction possible either to themselves, or to innocents, or both.

A loner by nature, Vigo keeps to himself, surviving on his wits and alternate form abilities. At times he finds humanoid partners to appease his sexual desires. The ones who survive the encounter usually are impregnated and die in childbirth, their tiefling babies murdered right after birth by horrified midwives.

Vigo Drakov is very ambitious, as if having something to prove, either to his real father, the demonic Gentleman Caller, or to himself. He always strives to excel in the creation of new ways of torture and torturing devices. In recent years he created a cult called “Abyssalerbe” (Abyssal heritage) around the “mysterious” demon known as Vizregün (the name he has given to his natural form), gaining followers while at the same time posing as the cultist leader. His ultimate goal is the creation of a state religion, and to amass his flock’s “spirituality” to ascend to godhood.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: HE KNOWS..

In 723 BC, soon after Vigo Drakov was accepted by his “father” after the The Fourth Dead Man’s War, he was sent to Blaustein, serving as security personnel for the protection of a Falkovnian delegation on behalf of Vlad Drakov for a proposal to use Bluebeard’s ships on behalf of the Falkovnian government, as a privateer fleet to attack Dementlieuese shipping. Because of Blaustein’s small size, Bluebeard immediately sensed the cambion’s reality wrinkle blocking his own powers of perception, and hence was aware that something was off with Vigo from the first day he met him. That same night, the darklord fell suddenly ill, the cause being a power ritual performed by Vigo.

The next day, the agreement talks were canceled, as Bluebeard wanted to rest and Vigo, along with the rest of the delegation was escorted back to their ship. Since the delegation failed, many of the diplomats were executed for treason.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: HE KNOWS THAT HE KNOWS

Vigo Drakov, having detected Bluebeard’s thoughts, knows that the darklord was sensing something peculiar in his presence and, after he canceled the diplomatic meeting, he has come to the conclusion that Bluebeard

has solved the mystery that is Vigo Drakov. Vigo, being always vigilant of his true identity being discovered, has sent multiple assassins to attempt to dispose of Bluebeard.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: HE KNOWS THAT HE KNOWS THAT HE KNOWS..

Vigo Drakov was immune to Bluebeard’s powers of *discern lies* and *detect thoughts*, but the assassins he sent weren’t.

Having repeatedly survived many attempted assassination attempts, Bluebeard has managed to discern that Vigo is the “man” who planned them. This made him even more curious about Vigo’s nature, and after many years he has discovered the cambion’s secret. Bluebeard is perhaps the only mortal person alive who knows of Vigo Drakov’s true nature.



DREAD POSSIBILITY: TOTENKOPFRING

After the Ebon Fold, a secret society of assassins operating in Lekar, was revealed to be using the Radiant Tower and its catacombs as cover for their illicit activities, and the tower burned to the ground, a few Ebon Fold members were captured and taken to the Central Prison of Lekar. Vigo, having knowledge of human anatomy understood that all the cult members were reanimated by magic. His interrogation revealed that a necromancer, Ladislav Sintesti, was leader of that army of assassins, created by magic and promises of "eternal life." Speculating that Sintesti, a "native" Darkonian, worked for Azalin, the Wizard-King of Darkon, he continued interrogating them and began gathering information on surviving members of the Ebon Fold.

Since most of his Ebon Fold prisoners were driven insane by their torturous death by the Falkovnian military prior to their "living" return, Vigo Drakov decided to investigate himself.

His soldiers had intercepted an Ebon Fold message, which informed him of a secret delivery of some sort in Stangegrad. He dominated one of the prisoners and after disguising himself as an Ebon Fold member he spied on the Ebon Fold meeting, without informing anyone about his whereabouts.

He learned that the Ebon Fold indeed worked secretly at the behest of Azalin to collect life-force using the "Death Shards" aka "Blood Blades." This life force was stored into a huge human crystal skull that was to be transported for a ritual in Nartok. Not eager to go to Darkon and possibly face Azalin alone, he found a group of adventurers to help him. Having found a small Vistani family encampment nearby close to the borders with Darkon, he easily disposed of the the vistani using one of the death shards, sparing only the family's pet monkey, which was easily dominated.

He found the adventurers, and posing as Vito Romenza, the sole survivor of the encampment after an attack by thieves, he led them to Nartok, and the city's Temple of the Eternal Order, where the Ebon Fold members had gone.

Without interfering personally, he discovered Azalin's *Infernal Machine* and witnessed the creation of Death, as the Mists circled the Temple. He managed to survive the encounter and travelled back to Falkovnia.

Vigo understood that he had witnessed an experimental prototype for a larger magical device in Il Aluk called the *Doomsday Device*. When the massive wave of negative energy from the Doomsday Device transformed Il Aluk into Necropolis and Azalin disappeared, he deduced with the knowledge he had accumulated that Azalin had ascended to a purely spiritual consciousness, able to travel in the realms beyond the Misty shroud. Seeing it as a way to escape the Land of Mists, if not to become a godlike being, Vigo begun studying the creation of a similar device.

In the following years, his studies led him to the design and creation of the *Black Crystal of Possession* and the *Totenkopfringe* (Death's Head Rings), with the help of his "brother" Falkfuhrer Mikhail Drakov and the Ministry of the Arcane. Vigo placed a particular importance on the creation of *Totenkopfringe*, so he used a metal workshop in the Central Prison's grounds to have them created by dwarven slaves who were masterwork metal workers. The rings were given as awards to prominent soldiers, members of the Teusten Society, and senior officers of the army.

These rings were not a state decoration, but rather a personal gift bestowed by Vigo himself and they were to be worn only on the left hand, on the "ring finger."

They were never to be sold, and had to be returned to him upon the death of the owner. He interpreted the deaths-head symbol to mean commitment to the state unto death.

By using the large black crystal as a focus for his possession spell and crafting the *Totenkopfringe* as the receptacles for his victim's life forces, he planned to use the rings to trap souls, later to be used for a demonic device he had designed.

To form the proper link with the prospective victim, Vigo needed some personal item for use during the spell.

Thus, Vigo created the concept of the aforementioned award. Each ring had the recipient's name, the award date, and Vigo's signature engraved on the interior. The ring holder had to sign a document of award acceptance using his own blood, coined after the Talon motto "Blut und Horror" (Blood and Horror), thus Vigo tricked them into offering him the needed component for the possession spell.

Then, by using his fiendish possession spell, he would take over their body and sacrifice them, to collect as many souls as possible. His plan was to use all these souls to fuel a demonic device of his own design, das *Dämonenmaschinengerät*, and use it to escape the Demiplane and possibly accelerate his demonic ascension. Masterful artisans built the device secretly, in the lower levels of Vogelsburg Castle, in southeastern Falkovnia, overlooking the village of Vogelsburg, where the Talon River springs out of the Crumbling Hills. Vigo ordered the return of all rings of dead men and officers to be stored in a chest there and organized a memorial to symbolize the ongoing membership of the deceased in the Falkovnian order.

When, in the summer of 755 BC, Azalin managed to pull his shattered essence together and returned to corporeal form to rule over Darkon again, it became obvious to Vigo that Azalin's ascension had failed. Vigo ordered that further manufacture and awards of the ring were to be halted. Then he ordered that all the remaining rings be blast-sealed inside a hill near Vogelsburg. Around 64% of the rings made have been returned to Vigo after the deaths of the "holders."

In addition, 10% have been lost on the battlefield of the last Dead Man's Campaign and the remaining 26% are either kept by the holder or their whereabouts are unknown.

The *Totenkopfringe* are cast in silver and blackened silver patina designs of dwarven runes, similar to those found in the dwarven mines called H'rakizuhm. The main feature of the ring is a silver, saber toothed, human-like skull (resembling that of a pit fiend) with two round, clear crystals for eyes.

Each ring has the recipient's name engraved on it, as well as Vigo's signature engraved on the interior, ridiculing the concept of an infernal contract. The dwarven runic inscription reads "Prove your worth, human!"

The rings were to be worn only on the left hand, on the "ring finger," they are of great craftsmanship and register to detect spells as though they were nonmagical.

Caster Level: 15th; Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item. *magic aura, contingency, soul bind*, a masterful silver ring; Market Price; varies gp; Weight; —



DREAD POSSIBILITY: ABYSSALERBE

Vigo Drakov, having an aspiration for greatness and inspired by the neighboring domain of G'Henna, when it was still a part of the Core, began creating a false image of his true self as a fallen demon prince, his ultimate goal: to become a god himself. Driven by his bitterness for being seeing as an outcast by the Teusten Society he decided to use them as pawns in his scheme. He created the persona of a firebrand young man named Falker Heinecke, an exemplar of all Teusten traits and characteristics, and easily climbed up the ladder of the Teusten Society. He began to gain a following within the Society and slowly he created a cult of personality within the Society.

In the aftermath of the Grand Conjunction, he caused a schism within the Teusten Society and formed the Abyssalerbe (Abyssal Heritage). Vigo, as Falker, distorted some parts of Teusten Society beliefs and made the assumption that Tärnanen were actually demon worshipers and the divine bloodline that the Keepers of the Cup are protecting is that of the abyssal demon prince Vizgerün, the Lurker Behind the Shadows. Although sages and demonologists within the Society denied the existence of such a demon prince, as there were no written accounts to prove his claim, Vigo managed to coax some members into following him.

Vigo, using the Falker persona, began organizing demonic ceremonies in remote ruins scattered across rural Falkovnia; in rare occasions he feigns to summon the demon prince Vizgerün, only to show his true demon self to his followers. All members of the cult have taken the Blood Oath.

The oath takes the form of a corrupted vistani blood rite, conferring upon the follower the status of "enlightened, yet not of the blood." Vigo, in the form of Falker, sacrifices an innocent victim, before "summoning" Vizgerün who stands face-to-face with the one who is to become Abyssalerbe. He draws forth an obsidian knife and slices the left hand of the initiate with a single slash of the blade. He then slashes his own palm and the two clasp bleeding hands.

Vigo wraps a scarf, soaked in the blood of an innocent and in tar (produced by the dry distillation of a combusted *vigilia dimortia* pine tree) around the two hands and says:

"Hands bound, blood mingles. He who does not have the demonic seed within himself will never give birth to a magical world."

While the rest of the Abyssalerbe gather round and chant, the two enter a dream state, and blood courses down their arms for several minutes. When at last the two hands separate, the initiate's hand is covered with blood, but the wound is miraculously healed. All that remains is a wide, black scar which creases the palm, forever identifying the victim as Abyssalerbe. Due to the evil and alien nature of the ritual, any non-participants witnessing it must make a horror check.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: A FIEND'S DISGUISE

The PC's have acquired the Soul Searcher Medallion, and somehow end up in Falkovnia. Vigo Drakov learns about the existence of this magical item in his father's kingdom and tries to do everything he can to destroy it, fearing that it can expose his true nature. Somehow his plan backfires and the PCs learn the truth about him. Now he has to dispose the only people who know his true nature.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: A STRANGE HANDSHAKE

Somehow Vigo crossed paths with a member of The Veiled Palm. The psychic managed to hide their thoughts and terror, but has remained silent fearing the demonic entity, until a group of wandering adventurers who have shown that they are people of trust also fall upon the psychic's path.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: PRISON BREAK

The PCs have been captured by the Falkovnians for one of the many "illegal" acts someone can do in Falkovnia. They are taken to the Central Prison, where they are interrogated by torturers. One of the PCs is a paladin and can sense the evil presence of the half-demon, so Vigo avoids interacting with them.

While on their stay in prison they learn or witness the presence of the demon Vizgerün who preys upon the prisoners. Now they have to persuade their guards to let them hunt this fiend. But they are sentenced to death only moments after they persuade one of the guards to help them.

Now they have to decide if they will continue the search for the fiend while hunted by guards or choose freedom instead.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE DIRECTOR

The PCs are taken to the Central Prison and instead of being tortured or interrogated as they expected, they are given a chance to gain their freedom by helping Vigo Drakov in some task: maybe to retrieve some *Totenkopfringe* that were stolen, or maybe the wearer overstayed in Darkon and forgot all about his Falkovnian background.

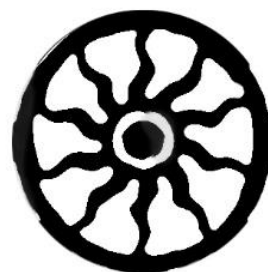
ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE DIRECTOR

Vigo has had enough with the misogynist darklord of Blaustein; he sends a group of assassins against him, offering to them a clear pale blue gem, about the size of an olive, as pre-payment. The gem is actually a Blaustein Gem used by Bluebeard to spy other lands.

As they travel to Blaustein in an already failed attempt to assassinate the domains darklord, they are captured. Bluebeard decides to reveal Vigo's true nature to the PCs and let them return to Falkovnia with the promise of assassinating the half-fiend instead.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: CULT OF THE DEMON

The PCs learn of the existence of Abyssalerbe as they come across upon some of its members. Now they try to discover who is the demon who hides behind this offshoot of the Teusten Society.



Falkovnian Rebels

ASSASSINATION ATTEMPTS ON VLAD DRAKOV AND OTHER ACTS OF REBELLION

BY MICHAEL ADAMIS

"I am truly free only when all human beings, men and women, are equally free."

— Mikhail Bakunin, *Man, Society, and Freedom*

Although feared by the populace and obeyed by his loyal Talons, Vlad Drakov's reign of terror is not without its assassination attempts. They are usually attributed to foreign spies, but this is not always the truth. Here is a list of failed assassination attempts against Vlad Drakov's life and important events of rebellion.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: FALSE FLAG OPERATIONS

Each assassination attempt described is not necessarily a historical fact, it may be a fixed event orchestrated under Drakov's orders, to be realized by paid foreign provocateurs or random events that are used as a propaganda to "justify" an invasion to a neighbouring domain or an attack on the populace. Some of these may have never actually happened, being only fake news created for Drakov's own purposes but they can also be used as adventure ideas that involve the PCs.

Not long after Falkovnia was formed in 690 BC, Vlad Drakov I and several members of his staff fell ill after dining at a revered establishment named, Metzgerleder, or "Butcher's Leathers," in Morfenzi. Poisoning was suspected, but no arrests or questioning was made, only executions. Drakov himself seemed least affected by the alleged poisoning, possibly due to his diet. Although this attempt was made before the Great Detective Alanik Ray coined the term "Morfenzi murders," this was the first of a series of murders attributed to the Lustmorde.

Later that year, Josef "Reppo" Brömer, a member of the Talons of the Hawk, who had attacked the Darkonian villages of Pound, S'Realm, and Glymshire, and veteran of "The Bloody Ride," vowed to assassinate Drakov as

revenge for a military purge in the first years of Drakov's governing. But he was turned over to the Talons before any concrete plan could be made. Josef Brömer was imprisoned at the Central Prison of Falkovnia until his escape in 705BC.

In 691 The Clawed of Silbervas, head of a rising thieves guild and an infestation of wererats, had 160 men infiltrate the Talons and begin gathering information on Drakov's movements. The conspiracy was uncovered by the Ministry of Intelligence and marks the beginning of the Years of Impaled Rats as the conspirators were arrested. The Clawed and his family escaped arrest through the aid of influential friends.

Paul Strumer led the Malwitz resistance group, composed of several veterans of the First Dead Man's Campaign. The group was named after cavalry general Georg Adalbert Malwitz and assisted in several assassination attempts, but also in "Reppo" Brömer's escape from the Central Prison of Falkovnia.

In 700 BC, General Falkfuhrer Hahn Osterlander and other high-ranking conservatives in the Talons formed a plan to overthrow Drakov if he declared war on Lamordia. Forces controlled by the plotters would storm Castle Draccipetri, arrest or assassinate Drakov, take control of the government, and install Drakov's widower brother-in-law, Leopold Dekovan as King. The plan was abandoned after Lamordia struck a trade agreement and, therefore, peace treaty with Falkovnia, neutralizing the immediate risk of war and resulting in the unfortunate execution of Leopold.

An unidentified man in a Talon uniform reportedly tried to kill Drakov during a rally at the Great Coliseum of Lekar in 704. Speculating him to be a Kargat agent, Vlad Drakov began planning a second invasion to Darkon.

At the peak of the Dementlieuvian Annexation of 707 BC, several officials in the Falkovnian Foreign Office attempted to instigate an army coup against Drakov; they distributed a letter asserting that “The oath of allegiance to Vlad Drakov has lost its meaning since he is ready to sacrifice Falkovnia,” and that “now was the time to act.” In its aftermath, Drakov commanded for his officers the wearing of magical bracers, which cause terrible pain to any would-be betrayers of Falkovnia.

In 711 BC, Captain Michal Karzewicz-Taneyewski and other members of the Guard of Nartok, having gained information of another Falkovnian Invasion of Darkon, attempted to detonate hidden explosives during the Day of the Hawk parade in Lekar. Barrels of gunpowder were concealed in a ditch, ready to be detonated. However, at the last moment, the parade was diverted and the saboteurs missed their target. Soon after, the Third Dead Man’s War began.

Meikoris Strassgrad, a Falkovnian half-elf and member of the Schwarz Kampfgesellschaft, an anti-racist nationalistic group, was tasked with planting barrels filled with gunpowder at the Talon section of the Great Coliseum of Lekar in 715. The plot was revealed to the Ministry of Intelligence by a double agent and Meikoris was executed by decapitation.

In the aftermath of the “The Starving March” in G’Henna, Josef “Reppo” Brömer, along with several co-conspirators of the resistance group Dämonkreis, and former General Falkfuhrer Hahn Osterlander, plotted once again to assassinate Drakov, in 719 BC. He obtained funds from co-conspirator Dmitri Likarevie, Vlad Drakov’s son-in-law, and kept track of Drakov’s movements through a contact at the Lekar City Command. However, before an opportunity presented itself, the plot was unraveled by the Ministry of Intelligence. Brömer, Osterlander, and Likarevie were arrested and hanged from the crenellations of Castle Draccipetri, left to starve in cages until only bones remained for all to see. The three men are regarded as holy men by followers of Zhakata and are celebrated annually in the wasteland called G’Henna.

In 720 BC, Falkovnian carpenter Georg Menschlsler placed a magical time-bomb at the Eule und Sense (Owl and Scythe) in Aerie, where Drakov was due to give his annual speech in commemoration of the “Borderlands War”. Drakov left earlier than expected and the bomb detonated, killing eight and injuring sixty-two others. Following the attempt, Menschlsler was held as a prisoner for over five years by Stadtfuhrer Igor Feigein, being slowly tortured, body and soul, until he expired.

Falkovnian diplomat and resistance fighter Erich Mordt hatched an assassination plot along with officer Laszlo von Mertzdorf, intending to do the same a year later, but the plan was abandoned after the security restrictions following Georg Menschlsler’s attempt to kill Drakov made the acquisition and concealment of the necessary explosives too dangerous.

Marshal Oswald Vorbel was with Vlad Drakov when he first came to the Land of Mists. Although never fond of Drakov’s excesses, Vorbel had seen the failure of Drakov’s needlessly brutal policies, and became changed. He founded the Knights of the Ashen Bough in 723 BC. Though very old, Vorbel kept on going through sheer inner will, leading the Knights to help fugitives leave Falkovnia but also on occasion smuggling weapons for various resistance groups.

In 706 Ludwig Ardner, a Falkovnian refugee, sent a poisoned letter to Drakov from Borca. An acquaintance of Ardner warned Drakov, and the letter was intercepted. This prompted Falkovnia’s invasion of Borca, as Drakov allegedly had evidence of Lady Camille Dilisnya’s involvement in what came to be known as the Widow’s Massacre.

Another failed attempt on Drakov’s life in 724 BC became the reason for Falkovnia’s invasion of both Dementlieu and Richemulot, two domains that offered asylum to the conspirators. Drakov demanded for his would-be assassins to be brought back to Falkovnia for execution. Thus, this series of border skirmishes was named the “Executioner’s Campaign,” although the name is even more appropriate, since Falkovnian soldiers were mere cannon fodder against the coordinated defensive attacks of both advanced domains.

In 727 BC, the Gold Claw Massacre, Falkovnia's invasion to Dorvinia, was supposedly organized after Drakov sent a message to Ivan Dilisnya, that said, "Stop sending assassins to murder me... if this doesn't stop, I will send my men to Degravo and there'll be no need to send any more."

Former Minister of Intelligence Gieork Vantrian uncovered in 729 BC a plot to murder Vlad Drakov by Falkovnian expatriates working with Invidian rebels. An Invidian cell of freedom fighters led by Elyeza Baschzna allied with a group of Falkovnians, in a common cause, thinking it was time to get rid of the tyrants of the Core. The plot was discovered before its inception and the mission was never launched.

An Ezran theologian, Maurice Duvaud, posed as monk, planning to shoot Drakov with a firearm from the reviewing stand as he passed through the parade on the Day of the Hawk, 731. His view of Drakov was blocked by the unwitting crowd and he was forced to abandon the plan. He then attempted to follow Drakov but failed. On his way back to Dementlieu he was discovered by a patrol. Believing that this was a religious conspiracy, Vlad Drakov ordered the destruction of all monasteries in Falkovnia. Located in the Vigila Dimorta Forest of eastern Falkovnia, the Hospice of the Bowed Heads managed to survive, as a terrible plague was unleashed upon the Falkovnian military that sought to put the Hospice to the torch. The purge against all religious buildings stopped after that fateful event.

As the Treaty of the Four Towers was signed in 729 BC, signaling an allied defense against Falkovnia, more revolutionary groups, began to spread in the kingdom of the "Mercenary King". Most of them were crushed, with only one gaining infamy among the Falkovnian government. In 735 BC, Gondegal, an outlander who had served in the Falkovnian military, defected and began organizing a resistance group. In the following four years he had managed to increase his influence, gaining the support of former high-ranking officials, war veterans and a few liberated demihuman slaves.

With various alliances and support from neighboring domains, he planned to liberate Falkovnia from the "Hawk's" iron grip and declare himself king of Falkovnia, rallying the populace around him as their liberator. Four years later, in 739 BC a random assassination attempt

by a dragonman later known as "The Basilisk" and seemingly orchestrated by Niklaus Kaiserhof became the reason for a series of investigations led by Vigo Drakov, Minister of the Central Prison of Falkovnia.

During the investigations, key figures of Gondegal's organization were discovered and Gondegal's campaign failed. Falkovnian propaganda names the campaign for the liberation of the people of Falkovnia, "The Lost Cause of the Lost King," and although Gondegal escaped capture, escaping from the armies of Falkovnia and fleeing into neighboring Darkon, his allies and organization were crushed before they could even begin their coup.

It is believed though that if Gondegal's organization had lasted a few more months, ultimately it would have been successful in defeating Drakov, as the Great Upheaval of 740 BC created turmoil in the Falkovnian government. There are stories of a large rebel army formed by slaves threatening Drakov during that cataclysmic event and rare accounts that Drakov disappeared, feeling threatened by the slave rebellion and going into hiding.

The slave army was led by former gladiators of the arena who took advantage of the tumult to free slaves in rural areas of the domain, creating a massive army of former slaves. They were separated into various factions, with the majority of them planning an attack in the Falkovnian capital. The "Slave Rebellion" was sadly crushed in the event known as "The Servile Massacre" with only one faction, "The Spawn of the Lizard" surviving and remaining active since then. The "Slave Rebellion's" existence is denied by the Falkovnian State; there are no official documents mentioning it, and a mere mention of this event in Falkovnia equals a death wish, as it is considered treason to do so.

After the Grand Conjunction, the freaks of the Carnival made the poor decision of fleeing Darkon, panicked by the tremors of the cataclysm, and crossing into Falkovnia, seeking a better life. While they were about to be massacred after being accused of harboring rebel slaves, a defiant woman named Isolde saved them from certain demise and decided to remain with them as their patron. A new Carnival was formed under her banner, offering protection and accepting nothing in return.

In 741 BC, after having joined the Circle and becoming a Knight of the Shadows, Gondegal took the plight of the Falkovnians to heart and made their welfare the focus of his life, vowing not to give up his war against Vlad Drakov until one or the other of them is destroyed. Gondegal found other Falkovnian expatriates and began to form a new movement, which Helna Vladinova of the Circle called the "Shadow Insurrection," forming alliances and a network with other rebel groups throughout the Core and beyond.

In the year 742, the "Shadow Insurrection" began attacking slavers, stretching from Nova Vaasa to Invidia and Falkovnia, creating a shortage of free labor for Falkovnia's colony in Invidia. Gondegal tried to make an alliance with the wild elves of the Iron Hills in Sithicus but his offer was declined.

In 743 BC, Drakov sent troops and created outposts along his supply line, which were in turn attacked by Gondegal's group.

In 744, a mental patient, Jakef Tuomas, traveled from Morfenzi to Lekar to murder Drakov but after he confessed openly his intent, he was arrested by the Talons and was executed on the spot.

That same year, soldiers Henning Trauerbach and Fabian Schlabrenfelder planned to poison Vlad Drakov I and his two sons, Vlad II and Vigo, during lunchtime. The commander-in-chief of Draccipetri's guards, Marshal Oswald Vorbel, knew about the plan but decided not to intervene. However, the plan was abandoned when Vlad II didn't attend, and there was fear of a possible civil war erupting between the Talons and the army, which would make Falkovnia vulnerable to its enemies.

After Gondegal's allies attacked Falkovnian enclaves across the Core, creating a large network of information, assistance, and supplies, by 747 BC the only Falkovnian colony surviving was the one in Karina. Gondegal then focused his attention back on Falkovnian soil.

By 747 BC, the kobolds of "The Spawn of the Lizard" had managed to drive Drakov's troops from the central region of Falkovnia, claiming the Seelewald forest, the heart of the domain, as their own autonomous zone. The Seelewald road, connecting Morfenzi with Aerie, became the focus of the group's guerilla attacks, defying Drakov's rule and disrupting commerce between the two cities.

When Malocchio Aderre usurped political rulership over Invidia in 747 BC, the old Invidian rebels of Elyeza Baschzna reformed to ally with Gondegal's "Shadow Insurrection," and began to plan another attempt against Vlad Drakov, fearing that an alliance between Falkovnia and Aderre's forces might be possible.

Near the end of 747 BC, "The Thorns of the White Rose," a Sithican resistance group led by the mysterious White Rose, made contact with Gondegal and agreed to support each other's cause whenever necessary.

In 748 BC, Ardonk Szerieza began the uprising of the Gundarakite rebels. With the help of Elyeza Baschza's Invidian rebels and "The Shadow Insurrection," he manages to expand his influence across occupied areas of Gundarak, but being so focused on his own people, Ardonk drove the relationship between the Gundarakites and the other groups to fall apart.

In 749 BC, the "Shadow Insurrection" along with Baschzna's forces made a failed attempt on Drakov's life; among the rebels killed was Dragov's illegitimate daughter Ireena Imlach and her husband Yuri Mitrovic. That same year, a cell of the "Ebon Fold," a secret society of assassins operating in Lekar was revealed. Their use of the Radiant Tower and its catacombs as cover for their illicit activities, caused the Falkovnian army to burn the Tower to the ground. Falkovnian propaganda created a connection between the Ebon Fold and the "Shadow Insurrection" to discredit the freedom fighters. Some of the notes of Mircea Giurgiu were salvaged from the burned tower and ended up on the hands of the "Shadow Insurrection."

In 750 BC, The Freemen of Falkovnia were formed by Gregor Kartovich and Liza, the sole survivor of a Hospice of Hala razed to the ground by Drakov's men during the religious purge of 731 BC. They move randomly from place to place and sometimes ally themselves with "The Spawn of the Lizard" or "The Shadow Insurrection." Ivan Rabinski left the "Shadow Insurrection" as they were not as radical as he would want them to be, and joined the Freemen of Falkovnia. Although more ruthless compared to the other two leaders of the group, his abilities of coordinating attacks and strategy earned him much respect in the group.

In 751 Gondegal, participated in the ceremony of the Final Ascension, becoming leader of the Circle and returned to Falkovnia following the events of the Requiem.

Falkovnia launched its fifth invasion of Darkon in March 751 BC, known as the March of Doom. The Freeman of Falkovnia intercepted a message to Baron Eduard Curwen of Nartok. Ivan Rabinski secretly traveled to Darkon and informed then Captain of the Guard of Nartok, Burkhart Volker, that the Baron had conspired with Falkovnian invaders to remain in power once the invasion is over. He was imprisoned but when it became obvious that the Darkonese were betrayed, as the Falkovnian forces reached Nartok and the Baron watched the battle from the spires of his keep, Burkhart Volker killed the traitor and released Ivan. The two of them forged an alliance that remains hidden from the rest of the Freeman of Falkovnia.

In late 752 BC, Former Marshal Oswald Vorbel met Councilor Josephine Chantreaux of the Council of Brilliance

in a remote area and they agreed to help each other. She began smuggling Falkovnian refugees and high-ranking officials with the help of the Knights of the Ashen Bough.

After the Hour of Screaming Shadows, in Sithicus, in Autumn 752 BC, the mysterious White Rose disappeared, "The Thorns of the White Rose" disbanded and the alliance that the "Shadow Insurrection" had with elves of Sithicus fell apart.

Gondegal, of the "Shadow Insurrection" met with Councilor Josephine Chantreaux in Port-a-Lucine. The meeting did not go well as there was a mutual distrust.

In 757 BC Councilor Josephine Chantreaux tried to approach the Freeman of Falkovnia and offered to support them, but her offer was declined.



THE SPAWN OF THE LIZARD

THE STORY OF BASILISK AND THE HUMANOID COALITION OF FALKOVNIA

BY MICHAEL ADAMIS

“HARKER: An ancestor? I see a resemblance.

DRACULA: The Order of the Dracul...the Dragon.”

— J.V. Hart, Bram Stoker’s Dracula Screenplay

Millennia ago, in the land of Taladas, on Krynn, in the area where the Blackwater Glade now lies, the dragonmen, the bakali as they call themselves, were powerful and great and had the skills to build towns and rule lands. What caused them to abandon their towns and lose their skills is a mystery, and the bakali have only a vague collective memory of what they once were. The Bakali Empire was very powerful and rich, with exceptionally talented wizards and alchemists, nothing to do with the present dragonmen, creations of the original bakali, that survive till this day after the Bakali Empire collapsed thousands of years ago.

-From the introduction of the Book of Amrocar as collected and archived in the City of Kristophan’s Imperial Library (by orders of Emperor Bakiliskis).

This article is based on the domain of Falkovnia ruled by the mercenary tyrant king Vlad Drakov I. Falkovnia is depicted as a militaristic totalitarian kingdom inspired by totalitarian regimes of the 20th century and the atrocities of World War II. Falkovnia is a place where the strong dominate the weak and Drakov’s tyranny of horror is one of strength over law. The Spawn of the Lizard is probably the most successful resistance movement in Falkovnia. It is a troop of kobolds that have more or less driven Drakov’s troops from a region at the heart of the domain through brilliant hit-and-run tactics.

EMPEROR BASILISCUS THE TRAITOR

Basiliscus was the brother of the Empress Verina, widow of the great Bakali Emperor Squamatus of the house of Varanus, who remarried Bakali Emperor Tarasis, also known as Tarasikodissa or Trascalissaeus of the house Agamidae, a Jarak-sinn, millennia ago, in the area that is now called the Blackwater Glade in the continent of Taladas on Krynn.

His relationship with the Emperor allowed him to pursue a military career that, after minor initial successes, ended after he led a disastrous Bakali expedition against the goblins of Neron. The goblins, with elaborate traps, guerrilla attacks, and clever maneuvers managed to destroy Basiliscus’s army, forcing him to flee in the heat of the battle. One half of his army died or was captured, and the other half followed the fugitive Basiliscus.

One of his generals was assassinated on Basiliscus’s orders by one of his own captains, to become the scapegoat of the defeat, upon their return to the capital of the Bakali Empire. But the wrath of the Bakali wasn’t satiated, and the people, as well as the Emperor, demanded accountability, so Basiliscus was sentenced to death. Only after the mediation of his sister Verina did Basiliscus obtain Imperial pardon, and was punished merely with banishment to what is now Thenol.

Despite this, Tarasis continued to be unpopular with the people and aristocrats, mostly because of his “barbaric” Jarak-sinn heritage; his right to the throne was limited to his marriage with Verina, the dowager Empress. Therefore, he chose to draw support from his generals.

Verina decided to overthrow her husband and replace him with her lover, the magister militum (leader of the army) Xantius, with the help of her brother Basiliscus. The conspirators fomented riots in the capital against the Emperor; Basiliscus also succeeded in convincing the Emperor's generals to join the plot, and Tarasis fled the capital with some supporters, taking with him the Imperial treasure.

However, the conspirators quickly fell into conflict with each other, blaming one another for the loss of the treasure. Basiliscus took the throne for himself, putting Verina's lover, and candidate for the throne, Xanthius, to death for treason against the empire, accusing him of plotting with Jarak-sinn supporters of Tarasis for the ruination of the Empire. Xantius called on the power of the mighty dragons in the sky, cursing the traitor, before the executioner's axe severed his head.

"Forked tongue, betrayer of trust, an emperor of ashes, created by lust.

A traitorous soul can never be whole, fragmented, eternal repines for a throne.

The throne is yours, you traitorous snake, it will break your soul apart for others to take."

After Xanthius's execution, Basiliscus organized a purge against the supporters of Xanthius and sent assassins to murder the remaining Jarak-sinn adherents of Tarasis left in the capital, solidifying his position as Imperium Princeps Imperator, Primus Ex Domus Lacertidae.

-Excerpt from the introduction to the "Night of Long Talons" from The Lost Notes of Amrocar.

This "Night of Long Talons" damaged relations with Jarak-sinn generals, who felt threatened by the new Emperor. The appointment of his close friend Armatus as *magister militum*, instead of one of more experienced generals, as well as securing his power by placing men loyal to him in key roles in the government, created resentment among many important figures in the imperial court and made him lose much of the support of the army and the aristocrats. His sister, Verina, was embittered by the actions of her brother, but feigned loyalty to him, holding a place as his advisor while planning her revenge.

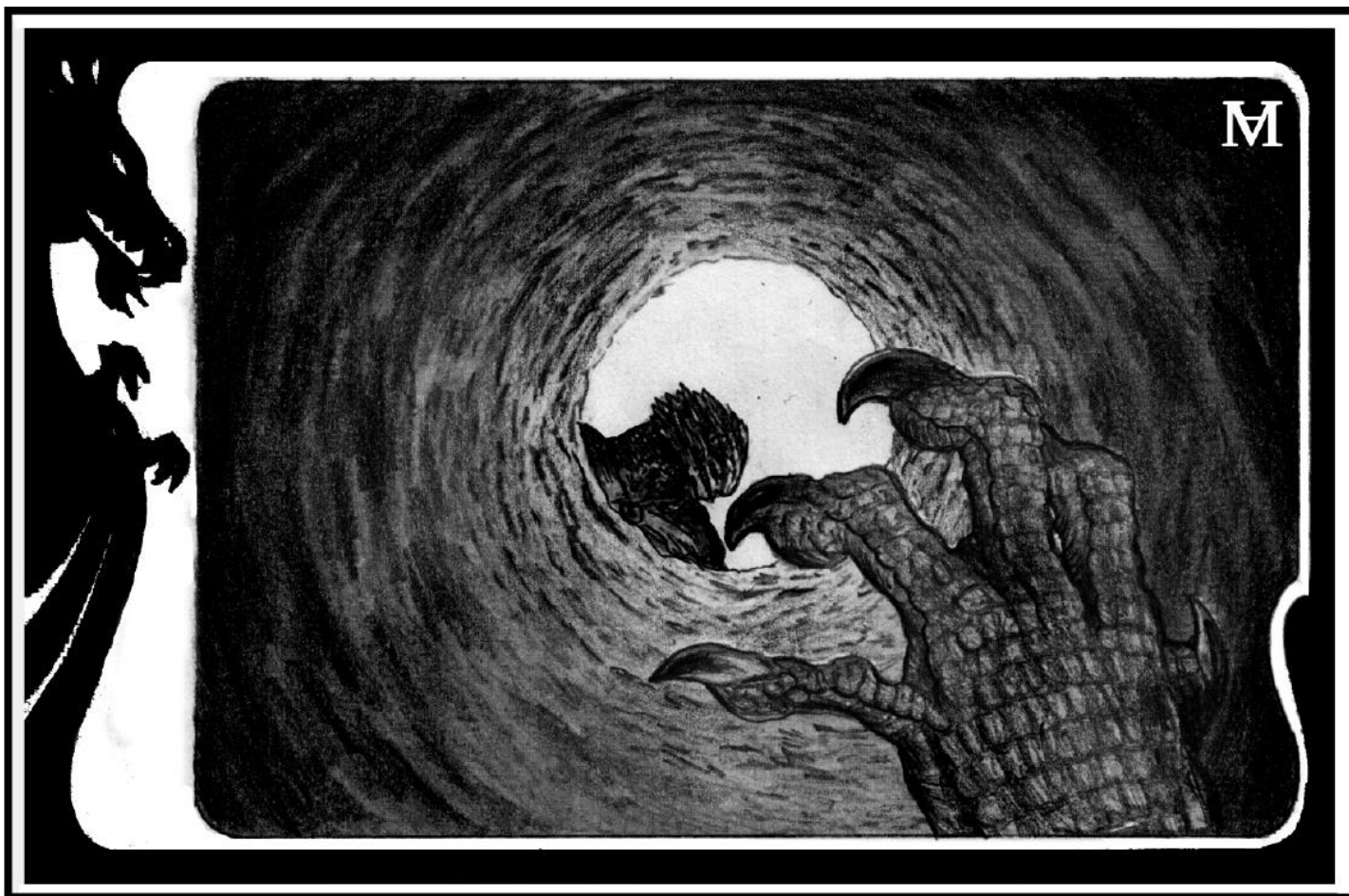
Since Tarasis had left no money to the Empire, taking the treasury with him in his exile, Basiliscus was forced to levy heavy taxes. The populace of the capital blamed him for a great fire that burned several parts of the city, areas where the majority was populated by Jarak-sinn. With the secret support of the aristocracy, Verina, and bribes paid by Tarasis, the generals agreed to switch sides and unite with Tarasis's remaining Jarak-sinn army, marching to the capital.

Basiliscus tried to recover popular support and sent another army against Tarasis, under Armatus's command, but Tarasis had succeeded in bribing Armatus too, promising to confirm his rank of *magister militum praesentalis* for life and promoting Armatus's son successor to the Bakali Empire. So, when Tarasis attempted to regain his imperial throne, he found virtually no opposition, triumphantly entering the capital.

Basiliscus surrendered himself after extracting a solemn promise from Tarasis not to shed his or his family's blood.

Tarasis kept his promise by sending Basiliscus along with his wife and two sons to a fortress, where Tarasis had them enclosed in a dry cistern, to die from exposure. Basiliscus cursed the emperor for days and promised not to rest until he sat on the throne again; he died having ruled for twenty months.

Since he had been an emperor, Bakali customs dictated that Basiliscus should be entombed with all the honors of an emperor and so it was that Basiliscus was embalmed in a lavish tomb, of his own design, already having been constructed before becoming an emperor, but with some new additions to the hieroglyphs that glorified his accomplishments; these additions now declared his traitorous status. Since he was the first and last of house Lacertidae, the reinstated Emperor Tarsis left the imperial bracelet of House Lacertidae on the dead former emperor's right arm, but ordered that it should be cut off from his body and placed over the sarcophagus before the tomb was sealed, a symbolic gesture of punishment to the usurper's corpse but also a superstition, as many magical glyphs were cast inside the burial chamber to prevent Basiliscus's resurrection.



Millenia passed and the Bakali Empire laid mysteriously in ruins; after all these centuries, the bakali lizard men found in the vast expanses of Blackwater Glade were separated into tribes, not in the least resembling the culture of the once proud and powerful Bakali Empire. They are referred to by explorers of Blackwater Glade as dragonmen.

AMROCAR'S LAST EXPEDITION TO BLACKWATER GLADE

Although shunned by the bakali, the civilized people of the Imperial League who have reached the interior of Blackwater Glade have been fascinated by these ruins. A few attempts had been made to explore and study them, although such efforts were fraught with danger. In particular, the minotaur wizard Amrocar spent the better part of his life tracking down clues to the riddles the ruins posed. This information, along with his maps, sketches, deductions, and speculations he noted in writing. During his expeditions he collected various

items and treasures from the ruins to study as well as live bakali specimens and eggs.

During one of his expeditions, he and his group, including some bakali from a tribe living close to the area, found a tomb deep in the marshes of Blackwater Glade. That was not a random discovery though, as they were following the written accounts of a Thenol explorer.

Under Nova Mons cordillera, east of Hawksbluff, is an area dense with typha and phragmites plants as well as gumtrees, willows, alders, and mangroves. This immense swamp area, called Nemus Nitotter Neroviz, is dangerous, filled with crocodile-infested marshes. There rain is common and gales flow like a river from the mountain range. The thickest portions of the swamp are low hills, cluttered with ruins emerging out of the green waters. Some of these ancient ruins are totally submerged, barely visible in the green waters, with

flooded corridors and chambers, creating a deathtrap for anyone curious enough to explore them.

These ruins and the lakes around them are taboo to the few dracovir living in the swamps, The dracovir know that evil spirits, saraki, wait to snatch up anyone foolish enough to violate the waters. At the same time, the lure of the ruins is irresistible. On rare occasions brave dracovir enter the ruins; if they are lucky enough to survive, they may return with great treasures, but supposedly only desperate dracovir exiles would risk entering the ruins, and for good reason.

As we explored the area our dracovir guides refused to continue; we decided to camp close by and left them there to guard our provisions. We had walked in the forbidden area of the swamp for a few hours, when we encountered one of those ruins, the entrance of an ancient tomb. The tomb's entrance was semi-submerged - a massive stone door blocking our passage. Over the portal was an inscription written in lokharic, an ancient draconian dialect, but I managed to decipher it. The inscription was a prophesy or warning that read:

"Here the Gods cannot at any summons enter, the Nameless One must remain undisturbed; do not approach the Nameless One, lest your soul be murdered. Beware of the servant of the ox that comes from towered skies and shall let that Evil once more upon the world".

We decided to not enter the tomb and to leave this cursed area. Following the marked path, we had created we managed to track ourselves back to our camp.

-From Feltarnos Cathcus Lamas, (The Primitive Swamp Exploration) written by Nica Hyun 136 AC.

Since it was believed that the Gods had abandoned Krynn after the Cataclysm, Amrocar didn't hesitate at all to open the ancient tomb and entered it.

Hargar the Sleek managed to delay the mechanism for the crushing wall trap that protected the portal before us; traps had already taken the life of two brave bakali men since we had entered the tomb. We managed to pass the trapped corridor and entered into the room ahead of us.

This was the largest room compared to what we had already encountered. The light of our torches was reflected back to us by the treasure trove of items that lay before our eyes, most of them made of fine crafted silver.

Weapons, silver statues of reptilian design and fetishes, furniture, food, wine, and chased silver boxes full of fresh linen clothes were placed carefully around the room. The whole room was centered around a large elaborate serpentinite stone sarcophagus, circled by six featureless, smaller ones. The room's four elaborate walls were carved and drawn, depicting reptilian creatures.

The name once inscribed on the stone of the largest sarcophagus had been erased. We had at last reached the burial chamber of the Nameless One's tomb. On its lid laid a mummified scaly hand with vestigial claws. The hand's wrist was adorned with a golden bracelet, with the image of a lizard in emerald; carefully I removed the jewelry from the dry, dark arm, to examine it. An engraving in Draconian read Basiliscus of House Lacertidae, at last the Nameless One was named.

-Excerpt from The Lost Notes of Amrocar

The chamber was full of drawings narrating the story of the deceased; the six plain stone sarcophaguses held six wooden coffins, carved as lizard-like humanoids, each of them embellished with silver and jade. Inside each of the coffins, except one, which was empty, was a reptilian mummy. Four out of five were female, while in the largest sarcophagus, the one that had the mummified arm placed on it, the mummy wore a finely crafted death mask made of a silver and jade. Since no treasures were stolen, Amrocar speculated that there probably was another member of the family that hadn't been buried with rest.

From the wall drawings, the minotaur Amrocar deciphered the story of the Bakali Emperor, Basiliscus the Traitor, as he was referred to in Amrocar's notes. They also found some glyphs on the walls amongst the drawings; the glyphs were imbued with magic and Amrocar surmised that the Bakali of old were exceptionally talented wizards and alchemists. This also led Amrocar to believe that Basiliscus probably possessed magical powers or had someone else

magically infuse the tomb with necromantic dark magic, indicating that Basiliscus planned to return from the dead and had spent a small fortune to build his tomb, probably before becoming emperor.

Amrocar took the mummified hand with the golden bracelet, some other treasures and the reptilian coffin of Basiliscus, along with his mummified corpse and mask, from the tomb and left, only to be robbed of the mummy during a storm, by his bakali guides. His human apprentice Trelan suggested that they should return to the tomb to find shelter from the storm that begun to grow stronger. When they returned, searching for cover from what grew to become a hurricane, they found one of their bakali guides in a comatose state, a look of terror on his face. They went deeper into the tomb, reaching the burial chamber again, only to find the other two bakali guides dead with the same horrified expression. A broken bakali egg was smeared on the ancient Emperor's mummy that now laid back inside its sarcophagus.

Amrocar speculated that the three bakali men had stolen the mummy and returned it, believing that this way they would avert the resurrection of Basiliscus. They placed the Emperor's coffin back into the sarcophagus and even sacrificed one of their tribe's eggs and covered the mummy with its yolk. Amrocar speculated it was some sort of ritual to appease the ancient emperor's spirit. Amrocar decided to stay there for the night, but close to the entrance of the tomb until the hurricane passed. During the night, all of the remaining members of the expedition were troubled by nightmares involving the resurrected Bakali Emperor.

When it was safe to go out of the tomb, Amrocar decided to leave the mummy where it was and place all the treasures they had taken as they were before they were disturbed, remembering the inscription on the tomb's entrance and afraid for the worst. They carried their surviving comatose guide back to his village and left for the Imperial City of Kristophan, never to return.

THE DRAGON, THE FORGOTTEN EMPEROR BASILISKIS

Unknown to Amrocar and the rest of his expedition, around the same time they opened the sarcophagus of the Basiliscus the Traitor, an egg had hatched, prior to its time, in a nearby bakali village. Many years passed,

and the young bakali that had hatched from this egg grew up among their tribe to become a strong hunter by the name of Archaius, named after the ancient soul that resided in him, as seen by the village shaman. Since his early childhood, the young Archaius had strange dreams of large magnificent towers and elegant interiors; the bakali shaman told him that these dreams were messages from his ancient soul, from his past, from his destiny. Then the day came for his hunt of passage to maturity, he was sent out alone to find and kill a bull alligator, so that he would be accepted among the Bakali as an elder.

He found a large alligator and hunted him in the swamps for hours; twice he was close to losing his left arm while hunting the large beast, until finally he managed to strike a deathly blow with his spear in the alligator's mouth. He felt the satisfaction of the hunt, but it didn't last long; right away he was alerted as he smelled something in the air. Before he could react, a net trapped engulfed him and a few men appeared. The men were from the neighboring kingdom of Thenol, and were searching for bakali men to recruit for their army.

The Thenolite army zealously recruited male bakali as they regarded them to be ferocious warriors eager to learn how to fight and, while they had difficulty controlling their savage natures, their amphibian abilities gave the Thenolite commanders a surprising weapon when crossing rivers or breaching watery defenses. They trained Archaius among others of his kind for battle and when they were ready the Thenolite generals sent them as an expendable diversion to attack an imperial river post.

The attack was a disaster and most of the bakali were slaughtered during the attack, while the diversion didn't work and the Thenolites lost the battle, retreating. The few bakali that survived were sold as slaves; Archaius himself was transported to the Imperial City Kristophan to become a spectacle, fighting in the Imperial Arena. When Archaius first laid eyes on the Imperial City, with its large, elegant towers almost touching the skies, he felt he was coming closer to his destiny, a destiny that was fragmentally shown in his dreams as the elder shaman of his tribe had told him.

In the Imperial League system, the Arena is not only a spectacle for the masses but it is elemental for the

Empire's stability, as it is also the judicial system of the Imperial League of Minotaurs. Archaius managed to survive his first battle in the Arena, showing great talent, and even though he was a slave, the crowd cheered for him, shouting "Bakali" every time he fought. After many gladiatorial battles, he managed to gain his freedom and was offered a place in the gladiatorial guild, which he joined, and continued to be employed as a gladiator champion for nobles.

After years of championing in the Arena, he was promoted becoming an Imperial Champion, a civil servant of the Empire, and was given an honorable title for his services. He was allowed to place the formal "-iskis" at the end of his name, a title that placed him one step beneath the minotaurs of the noble houses. Thus, every time he appeared in the Imperial Arena the crowds cheered his name, "Bakiliskis."

Archaius had already made a great fortune as a gladiator and, since the privilege of becoming the Emperor's Champion was attainable only to minotaurs, had also reached the highest citizen status he could attain and was thinking of retirement. Then, one day, a man by the name of Trelan asked Archaius to be his champion in the Arena. Apparently, Trelan had many times failed his master, Amrocar, an expert on bakali culture, and after a miserable life and much bad luck he had lost most of his fortune gambling. He now needed a champion to fight for him, probably to the death, against the Imperial State for his transgressions. As a reward, he would give Archaius the only precious item he still possessed, a golden bracelet with a sapphire image of a lizard.

Apparently Amrocar's human apprentice Trelan had defied his master's orders and had secretly taken the imperial bracelet of Basiliscus with him before leaving the burial chamber. Trelan told him that this bracelet once belonged to an emperor of house Lacertidae, of the ancient Bakali Empire, taken from the tomb of the emperor Basiliscus. Trelan was secretly relieved that he would be rid of the bracelet as he considered it cursed, blaming it for his follies. He was satisfied that the bracelet would return to one of the bakali and also joked about the coincidence of Basiliscus's bracelet ending up in the arms of a bakali with a similar name.

Bakiliskis immediately felt drawn towards the bracelet from the moment he laid his eyes on it. Seeing the similarity of the names as another sign of his destiny, he accepted to be Trelan's champion and resigned from his position of Imperial Champion to fight for one last time in the Arena. He defended his employer in the Arena in a fight to the death against an Imperial Champion, and after a deathly blow that the whole stadium cheered, he won, and was rewarded by Trelan with the golden bracelet, now proudly worn on his left arm.

That same night, Bakiliskis had a dream similar to the ones he had seen since he was a child; in his dream he was again in a large city with large elaborate towers and elegant interiors, but in this dream, something had changed. He didn't see the rich city around him with the amazement of a foreign traveler but as something familiar; the dream ended with him sitting on the Imperial Throne. He woke up confused but with a new purpose in life, a purpose to fulfil his destiny; as an Imperial Champion of the Arena this was the farthest he could have gone as a gladiator, but as a citizen, he could become more. He could become Emperor.

The customs of the Imperial League dictated that if citizens of the Empire believed they could rule better than the current ruler or grew confident of their abilities in ruling the League, they could issue an Imperial Challenge to the Emperor, a process of succession within the Imperial League. All challengers to the throne could give their name to the Imperial Chamberlain and then every winter and summer solstice, the pretenders to the throne would gather at the Arena along with thousands of spectators and challenge the Emperor. The challengers would fight each other in duels to the death, in order to prove the three worthiest to meet the Emperor.

The following solstice Bakiliskis challenged the Emperor amongst more than a hundred other challengers, something that surprised many, including the Emperor himself. The first day of the challenge ended with Bakiliskis and two minotaurs, an aristocrat and a general, standing in the middle of the stadium, surrounded by the bloodshed of the Emperor's challengers, but only one cry was heard over the others - "Bakiliskis," coming from thousands of spectators.

Usually the challengers spend the following two days after the first day of the Challenge resting and preparing for the final day of battle, but Bakiliskis was restless. He knew that the crowd was cheering his name in the Arena because they wanted to see their Emperor win over a former Imperial Champion of the Arena; the minotaurs would never bear to serve under another race. It was not completely unheard of, for someone other than a minotaur to become Emperor, but their reigns lasted no more than a few hours. It was almost a tradition, on the night of the final victory, for assassins to take their best shots at the Emperor, but they usually succeeded only when a non-minotaur was about to take the throne.

In a dream, he saw the assassins attacking him during the night; he dreamed that he woke, crying out, "You shall not shed my blood!" before becoming desiccated, turning to hard granite, only then truly waking up, screaming for air. The dream perplexed him and, the next day, he visited the only wizard he knew well enough, Trelan. Trelan told him that he would ask his former master, the wizard Amrocar if he could figure out the solution to his problem.

The next day, Trelan came to Bakiliskis with the information that he needed. Amrocar had told him that he had a *potion of petrification*, a magical potion that could turn him into hard stone, but also *willoshade oil*, that dark blue oil that could be extracted from the rare fruit of a willoshade plant, which could be applied on the petrified body to end the condition. He was willing to sell them to Bakiliskis for a large amount of money, and more financial support for his research, in the event of him surviving the night of the challenge and becoming Emperor.

Bakiliskis accepted and, the following day, the day before entering the Arena to face the Emperor, he visited the minotaur wizard Amrocar at his house. When Amrocar saw the bakali champion, he was impressed at how he had achieved so much in his life, and how his ascension could only be seen as proof of his theories about the Ancient Bakali Empire. Then, while he was ready to give him the two potions that the bakali champion needed, he froze; his eye caught the bracelet on his left arm, which he recognized right away.

He looked at his former apprentice, shocked, uttering the word "neban," Draconic for "traitor," and then he looked again to the dragonman before him, whispering "kapral," the word for "emperor." "Which bakali tribe do you belong to?" was the next thing he said, looking at Bakiliskis. With Bakiliskis's answer, the minotaur wizard shouted to Trelan, "Do you know what you have done?"

Bakiliskis stood silent in disbelief, as the old minotaur started talking about Basiliscus's tomb deep in the marshes of his homeland, about dark magics and the reincarnation of Emperor Basiliscus's soul. The clues where all there the Imperial bracelet, the close proximity of Bakiliskis's tribe to the tomb, the egg ritual, the early hatching of the bakali's egg, even his name. Amrocar was adamant that Bakiliskis was the reincarnated soul of the Traitor Emperor. Bakiliskis's patience was tested and failed, the insults he was given were too much for his inflated ego, and he hit the minotaur. The old Amrocar fell backwards, hitting his head on the wall, and now lay dead on the floor.

Trelan's fear intensified as he knew he was no match to the gladiator. "Don't even think of telling anyone what happened here today," said Bakiliskis to Amrocar's old apprentice, his eyes full with anger, Trelan cowered and assured the dragonman that he should not be worried about him. Bakiliskis left the dead wizard's house, leaving Trelan alone to deal with his former master's dead body, but also with the two potions they had gone there to buy; Bakiliskis, in his fury over being linked to a long dead traitor, had left the house without them. Trelan decided to collect as much information as he could about the tomb in the marshes, leaving the house and taking the two potions with him.

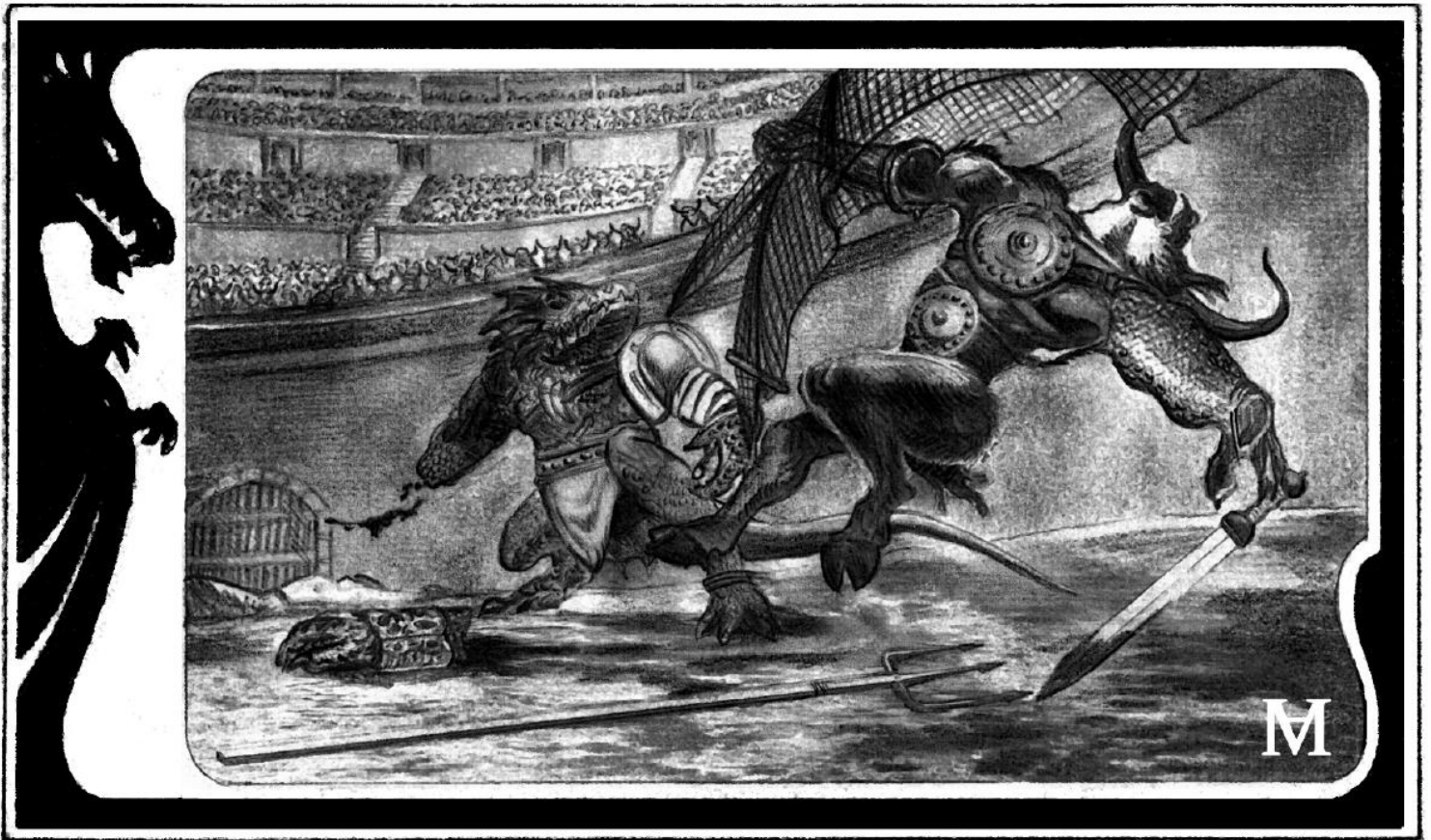
Bakiliskis spend the rest of the day trying to relax before the next day's great event; he had taken so many lives in his life, that taking the life of an old minotaur didn't make any difference to him. His only worry was the assassins he was sure he would face the following day or night, but he was sure that he would crush them as easily as he would crush the Emperor. Though he had affirmed himself of his survival, his sleep wasn't so relaxed. His sleep was disturbed, full of images of a life that was not his own and a dishonorable death in the bottom of a pit.

The next day was the final day of the Emperor's Challenge and the Rule of Might would decide who would be the next emperor. Emperor Ambeoutin IX, previously known by the name Kommodus, first faced his two minotaur challengers, as was decided by lottery, and he managed to kill both of them in two successive duels. At the sound of the third gong, signaling the next challenge, the Emperor and Bakiliskis leaped together with a blinding fury to the fight. The Emperor was fighting as a dimachaerus, with two swords, while Bakiliskis avoided the emperor minotaur's blows with his trident and a net, as a retiarius gladiator.

They were both agile and experienced fighters, making the battle really competitive. Again and again, they would strike blows to each other, shedding the blood of their opponent, making the crowd scream ecstatically at the spectacle, but no one would fall. Then, after a long

fight, the battle seemed to be drawing to its end; the two adversaries came close to each other, giving an advantage to the Emperor. With a mighty blow, the Emperor cut off the gladiator champion's right hand, the one holding the trident. The bleeding hand fell on the ground, still wearing the golden bracelet.

The Emperor would surely be the winner, if Bakiliskis hadn't sacrificed his hand in order to manage to trap the mighty minotaur with his net, causing him to stumble and fall, then hitting him with his strong tail. With a quick move, he took a hold of his trident from the ground and stood over the trapped minotaur Emperor Ambeoutin IX. The whole stadium went silent as Bakiliskis raised his trident and pierced through the minotaur Emperor's neck.



He now stood alone in the Imperial Arena, surrounded by the fallen bodies of the three minotaurs and the gong's sound was covered by the cheering of his name. Apparently, there were thousands of non-minotaur citizens, cheering the defeat of the minotaur Emperor; with it they saw a chance for change within the Imperial League, a chance for more opportunities.

As the name Bakiliskis was heard all over the Arena and across the Imperial city of Kristophan, the Black Cloaks of the Legion Imperius, the personal guard of the Emperor, did not carry him to the Imperial Palace as was custom, but instead he was carried to the Arena's infirmary where his wound was taken care off. This was probably the one thing that saved his life, as the Arena physician Everetus was a close friend of Bakiliskis since his days as a gladiator. The new Emperor was hidden in the catacombs beneath the arena, thwarting any plan for his assassination.

In addition, the loyal Emperor's Black Guard, composed of various races, could better guard their ruler in the small confined rooms of the Arena and so any attempt to murder Bakiliskis failed. But Bakiliskis had also a great loss that fateful day, as his left arm had gone missing along with the Bracelet of Basiliscus. Bakiliskis was furious; he ordered for both his hand and Imperial bracelet to be retrieved, but both were nowhere to be found.

Although most people in the court thought he was angry about the loss of his hand, Bakiliskis was more concerned about finding the bracelet; he became obsessed with finding it. Remembering the words of Amrocar about the missing hand of the mummy where the bracelet was found, he ordered for Trelan to be summoned before him, but the former apprentice wizard had also vanished. Believing that Trelan had something to do with the disappearance of the bracelet and his hand, he ordered for all of Amrocar's notes and maps on Blackwater Glade to be gathered, trying to discover the Ancient Tomb of Basiliscus. The studies of Amrocar were collected and archived in the Imperial Library in the Imperial City of Kristophan. His collected studies were collated in the infamous Book of Amrocar.

Bakiliskis spent a lot of resources trying to find the ancient tomb, sending several explorations into the marshes of his former homeland, but also trying to find

Trelan. In the meantime, the people of the Imperial League were levied with harsh taxes, corruptly spent on their Emperor's personal quest. Bakiliskis' popularity fell, and his name, once being gloriously cheered in the Arena, now was followed by spit and curses; he was referred to not by his title but as "The Dragon," seen as amassing his treasure while devastating the Empire.

When the next solstice came, the number of challengers for the Imperial throne was over three hundred; among them was the former Emperor's Champion. Bakiliskis could not be a match to the mighty minotaur, especially since now he was missing an arm. So, when the time came for the Challenge to the Emperor, Bakiliskis ordered his Black Guard to arrest the three remaining challengers, who stood washed in the blood of their rivals, among more than three hundred corpses.

The crowd in the Arena objected to Bakiliskis' decision and begun to shout the Konthian word "Akin" in the Arena, a battle cry translated as "Victory" or "Conquer" that was usually cheered to inspire confidence to the fighting gladiators. The battle cry that was cheered in the past for Bakiliskis was used against him, and large riots started in the Imperial City. The three challengers managed to escape and sought refuge in an old unused temple of Sargas, surrounded by an angry mob that protected them.

Some of the senators saw this as an opportunity to overthrow Bakiliskis, as they were opposed to his new taxes and his lack of support for the minotaur nobility. The rioters, now armed and probably controlled by their allies in the Senate, broke out and began to assault the palace. For the next five days, the palace was under siege. The fires that started during the tumult resulted in the destruction of a large part of the city. They then declared a new emperor, Hypatius, who was a nephew of former Emperor Ambeoutin IX.

Bakiliskis's advisors, in despair, advised him to consider fleeing, but he dismissed them as cowards, saying, "Those who have worn the crown should never survive its loss. Never will I see the day when I am not saluted as emperor. He who is born into the light of day must sooner or later die; and how could an Emperor ever allow himself to be a fugitive. Royalty is a fine burial shroud." With these words he gathered Narses, a

popular eunuch, and Plitus the Commander of the Bodyguard.

Carrying a bag of gold given to him by Bakiliskis, the slightly built eunuch entered the Imperial Arena alone and unarmed against a murderous mob that had already killed hundreds. Narses went directly to the section of the non-minotaurs, where he approached the important humans and reminded them that Emperor Bakiliskis supported them over the minotaurs. He also reminded them that Hypatius was a minotaur; then he distributed the gold. The human leaders spoke quietly with each other and then they spoke to their followers. Then, in the middle of Hypatius' coronation, the humans stormed out of the Arena. The minotaurs sat, stunned. Then, the Black Cloaks, led by the Commander of the Bodyguard stormed into the Arena, killing any remaining rebels indiscriminately of race.

About thirty thousand rioters were reportedly killed. Bakiliskis also had Hypatius executed, and exiled the senators who had supported the riot and was then free to reestablish his rule. But the same night, as he sat satisfied that he had managed to overcome his obstacles and dined watching the Imperial City below, he toasted a cup of wine to his rule, but then horror filled him as he slowly began to turn to stone. The last thing he saw was Trelan appearing before him, having dispelled his *invisibility* spell, with a satisfactory smile on his face. He had managed to take his revenge on Amrocar's death and every other person who suffered under Bakiliskis's rule or his gladiatorial weapons.

The former Emperor's Champion became the new Emperor, known as Ambeoutin X, a proud ruler and fierce fighter, who ruled for a number of years, as the twelfth Emperor of the Imperial League. Bakiliskis's rule had lasted for only six months, but they were painted in blood, as was most of his life. No one knows what Trelan did with the petrified emperor, whose name was soon erased from all historical records, his name never mentioned again. The minotaurs, being a proud race, saw that they had good reason not to have a non-minotaur as Emperor of the Imperial League of Minotaurs. One of the first edicts issued by the newly appointed Emperor Ambeoutin X was a *damnatio memoriae*, "condemnation of memory," indicating that Bakiliskis was to be excluded from official accounts,

removing his name from inscriptions, documents, and records of the Imperial League; there was even a large-scale rewriting of history excluding the name Bakiliskis. The mere mention of his name was punishable by death and soon it was never again heard within the Empire.

The time of the Dragon's reign of terror is something that never happened, as far as the Imperial League of Minotaurs is concerned, a gap of time in the Imperial successions, an era best left forgotten in the passage of time. Occasionally parents within the Empire will frighten their children when they misbehave, "threatening" them that if they don't behave properly the "Dragon" is going to get them. Now whether this refers to a normal dragon or if it a remnant of Bakiliskis's rule is a mystery.



DREAD POSSIBILITY: AN ANCIENT BLOODLINE

When Tarasis sentenced Basiliscus and his family to death, the Traitor's sister, Empress Verina, pleaded for the life of her favorite nephew Radus, who was too young to remember anything. Tarasis agreed to spare the child's life but only if the bakali child would grow up as a commoner, never learning of his ancestry and past. Verina agreed, giving the child to be raised in the Emperor's harem until he was 12, being educated by the women in the seraglio, but never learning of his heritage.

The bakali continued his life outside the palace and grew to become known as Radus the Fair, a bakali with many conquests and litters. Millenia have passed since then, but Basiliscus's bloodline has survived through the centuries, although it was minimized to a bakali tribe in Blackwater Glade, Archaius's tribe. Almost a century later, the same tribe was attacked by mercenaries of the fanatics of Hith, and Basiliscus's bloodline vanished from Krynn.

BASILISK THE FREEDOM FIGHTER

Almost a century passed, and in the Blackwater Glade another egg had hatched. When he was still young, before even it was time for his rite of passage, his tribe was massacred by a mercenary band; the young dragonman looked on in terror as the bodies of his tribe, some still barely alive were staked on 10-foot stakes. The young bakali was taken in front of the leader of the mercenary group, a man nicknamed "the Hawk." The mercenary leader didn't even look at the bakali child, paying more attention to his food. Maybe at the time he didn't recognize it, but it was sheer luck that helped the child survive that day.

The young bakali grew up alone, without a tribe, becoming a wanderlusting free-spirited dragonman, his name forgotten in history. His massive, strong build and bakali temperament made it easy for him to become a mercenary. He worked for whomever paid him the most money, usually evil fanatics of Hith. But when he learned that the mercenaries that had murdered his people worked for the Thenolites, he traveled to the Imperial City of Kristophan, walked into the Ministry of

War and Defense and applied to join the ranks of the Legion of Eragas. He hoped that he would be able to face the Talon of the Hawk mercenaries in battle and take his revenge, with the help of the military might of the Imperial League. He pledged his loyalty to the empire, swearing to obey his superiors, and to never shirk from battle.

He was transferred to the Dragonclaw Legion, serving in the cohort of the later infamous minotaur Nelis Ringhorn. He had the tattoo of his legion needled on his scaly left arm, a symbol of identification for deserters but also of respect due to any soldier of the empire. He exalted in battle, but later when Nelis Ringborn was promoted and transferred to another legion, things became harder for everyone. When his cohort lost the first battle of Hawkbluff around 354 AC without taking many losses, they were accused of cowardice by Dux Cantavian, general of Dragonclaw Legion, who ordered the military discipline of decimation to be executed.

The dragonborn's cohort (roughly 480 soldiers) was divided into groups of ten. Each group drew lots, and the soldier on whom the lot of the shortest straw fell was executed by his nine comrades by clubbing. The remaining soldiers were given rations of barley instead of wheat for a few days, and required to bivouac outside the fortified security of the camp for some time. Since the punishment fell by lot, all soldiers sentenced to decimation were potentially liable for execution, regardless of individual degrees of fault, rank, or distinction.

Being reminded of the atrocities he witnessed as a child, and tired of the oppression and orders of his superiors, as well as seeing that individual acts didn't mean anything in the legion, he deserted. But not long after, he was discovered by soldiers of the Imperial League and was hunted down. He managed to reach a foggy swamp in Hawkvale, thinking he would have the advantage in his natural environment, but the soldiers never appeared.

When the atmosphere cleared, he understood he was in a different place; he still was immersed in water but the forest of Hawkvale had disappeared giving way to a large lake. Where the mountain ranges of the New Mountains should have been, there was a large city. The Mists had taken him and transported him to the

southern shores of Lake Adler, close to the city of Lekar in Falkovnia. Eventually he was spotted by a patrol of Drakov's men and captured. Seeing his size, strength, temperament, and skills the Talon officer decided to transport the dragonman to Lekar. The bakali deserter recognized the insignia of the Talon of the Hawk on the soldiers that had captured him. When they entered into Lekar and saw whole blocks of buildings being ransacked and ragged commoners being staked, he knew exactly where he was.

The date was December 20th 739 BC, a day in the year full of celebrations across Falkovnia that commemorate the birth of Vlad Drakov, the Day of the Hawk. During this day supplicants gather and wait to speak with the king in Castle Draccipetri, seeking a favor from Drakov, or looking to be favored by him. These people generally come with gifts, which may include gold, information or even women. The ambitious Talon officer offered the bakali as a present for his king, hoping to be promoted.

My patrol unit found the creature on the shores of Lake Adler; we managed to capture it with a net. The scaly creature was so strong, five men were needed to pin it down, as it was put into chains... all of them soldiers loyal to King and Country. I didn't just inspect the chains; I shackled that upright standing lizard myself...

As the Day of the Hawk was dawning, I decided to present the large reptile as a gift to the King... My King!... I had been tired of patrolling the wild, I wanted to be reinstated to my old post... inside the palace... maybe even a promoted... Since it was early in the morning, I was among the first to be accepted for an audience with the King and I entered the throne room... with the beastman still in chains... I swear!...

The next thing I knew, the beast broke its shackles and attacked our King!... I was frozen in place; I didn't know what to do... I couldn't react!... Fortunately, the King's Guard managed to block the lizardman's attack, throwing him prone on the stone floor. Our King walked towards the reptilian, who was held down by four Talons, such was its strength... that's how it broke the chains holding it captive... I had nothing to do with that!... I am telling the truth!...

The King looked amusingly at the creature and said "What do we have here?"

"You killed my people!" shouted the lizardman with a rage in its eyes. I couldn't believe my ears - that forked tongued serpent could actually speak! As long as I'd had the creature detained, it hadn't said a word!... You have to believe me!...

"Ohhhh... it talks"... That is what the King said, although he didn't seem as surprised as I was. Really!... I swear... I didn't know that this creature was capable of speech; how could it be?... it was an animal, I've never heard of animals that talk, only in fairytales... I swear I didn't know!...

The King continued speaking to the beast "So you have come to Draccipetri, my castle, my home!... to murder me, have you? Is it really vengeance what you had in mind? Is it vengeance that you have been thinking of? Every waking hour of your miserable existence? Every nightmare you have with me destroying your loved ones?... Or is it something else?... Could it be that you want to become a king yourself dragonman?... You are brave... Brave yes... but stupid too, as all berserking reptiles of your kind are. I believe you will be a fine addition to the arena...Would you like that beast?... Maybe we should have more reptiles like yourself fighting each other in the Coliseum, fighting to see which one of you would become "King of the Serpents." Isn't that a great idea... lizard's spawn?...

The dragonman was still held down on the throne room floor, but he... it was silent. His fury, his rage, had subsided.

"That's better..." said the King "Know your place dragonman. And your place is amongst the rest of the pathetic beasts and subhumans of the arena. Guards, take this abomination out of my sight..." The King turned to face me; he gave me a look that shuddered my very existence, then he waved...

Note: The prisoner still refuses to cooperate, he insists he has no information about the plot to assassinate the Kingfuhrer and resists naming his accomplices. Even after a prolonged sit down on the Judaswiege, he hasn't disclosed anything I don't already know. I will continue his torture for a few days before taking more persuasive measures... And if I don't get the answers I want, I'll do

the same to the rest of the loyal men of his unit, until someone talks. "Father" insists on that...

-The testimony of Niklaus Kaiserhof as told to Falkfuhrer Vigo Drakov, Director of the Central Prison, Minister of the Central Prison of Falkovnia, Knight-Protector of the Kingdom of Falkovnia

25th of December 74th Year of the Hawk.



Vlad Drakov ordered that all reptilian captives, both humanoid and beast should be transferred to the Great Coliseum and ordered arrangements for a great spectacle. A few days later, the Great Coliseum of Lekar was crowded with people who wanted to see the reenactment of the war between the Kingdom of the Bear and the Kingdom of the Lizard. Brown and black bears, giant lizards, lizardmen and kobold prisoners, a dire bear, and a Kargat werebear prisoner were unleashed in the arena to fight for their survival; among them was the bakali prisoner.

In the bloodshed of beasts and humanoids that followed, the dragonman managed to coordinate the kobolds under his leadership and gain control of the giant lizard. The lizards were used as mounts by a few kobold gladiators, and were directed to attack the mammal beasts. A number of lizardmen and dragonborn attacked the huge ferocious bear measuring almost 12 feet.

The human who stood with the bears opposed to the reptiles, snarled at the crowd, slowly turning into a gigantic hybrid between a man and a bear. The rumors that had circulated of him being a Kargat spy apparently had been true, and the spectators were horrified by this defiant demonstration of Azalin's power.

The dragonman didn't hesitate in the least and with a loud war cry, he threw himself at the bearman. Taking the Kargat beastman off-guard during his transfiguration, the dragonman slashed through the

werebear's throat with his claws, biting the massive beast's carotid artery and dropping the large lycanthrope's carcass on the ground. Whatever influence or control the werebeast might have had on the rest of the ursidae mammals had vanished and, taking advantage of their solitary nature, as there is strength in numbers, the reptiles managed to isolate and kill each one of them. In the end the "Kingdom of the Lizard" was victorious, although having taken heavy losses.

The audience was thrilled by the spectacle, cheering for the "Kingdom of the Lizard," but then suddenly a gong was heard and the whole stadium fell silent as Vlad Drakov stood up from the Kingfuhrer's box and spoke, declaring the challenge of the Serpent King. The surviving reptiles had to fight each other and the last one standing would be coronated Basilisk. The bloodshed continued, even more ferociously than before, every creature fighting against those who were moments ago their comrades in arms in the war against the "Kingdom of the Bear".

One of the remaining giant lizards, those enormous beasts, was easily dispatched by its rider's spear piercing through its head, when it became more aggressive. Some of the remaining kobolds aligned themselves against the large dragonman, while the two remaining dragonborn, one of them the color of brass, with small wings, fought against the last remaining lizard and its kobold rider, the beast reaching the length of maybe 10 feet. One of the dragonborn managed to kill the mounted lizard, piercing its chest, dropping the kobold rider down and ending the pathetic creature's existence, only to be stabbed in the back by the winged dragonborn. The dragonman was still fighting the few remaining kobolds but they were no match for him; a few minutes later, there were four more bodies lying on the muddy ground, their blood mixed with the earth of the arena, as the crowd continued to cheer.

As the dragonman, the last standing kobold, and the backstabbing winged dragonborn were the only ones still standing, the gong sounded once more signaling the end of the battle. Then the crowd went silent once more as the "Mercenary King" spoke again. He congratulated the three remaining champions and ordered that, as the creed of "Rule of Might" dictates, they must face their

ruler in battle and defeat him. Everyone was surprised, believing that Vlad Drakov himself was challenging the gladiators. Having said that, he ordered the guards of the Coliseum to let the “Serpent King” enter the arena to be challenged by the gladiators.

The main portcullis leading to the arena’s dungeons was raised and an enormous, multilegged, reptilian horror entered the arena running. It charged the gladiators and with its strong jaws, it managed to cut the remaining kobold in half, while the other two gladiators, with closed eyes, tried to coordinate their attacks to kill the massive beast. They fought for a few minutes, managing to hit the beast multiple times while avoiding its attacks.

The dragonman was about to throw a killing blow to the beast, but missed, as the treacherous winged brass draconian decided to attack the dragonman instead of the beast, hoping to kill two sparrows with one stone. The dragonman managed to defend himself and stabbed the dragonborn through its heart; the dragonborn’s body turned to stone in an instant, trapping the dragonman’s weapon inside its dying body.

Fortunately for the dragonman, the large reptilian monstrosity stepped on the porous, petrified, winged dragonborn, shattering it beneath its strong legs, thus releasing the dragonman’s weapon.

The dragonman, who had already managed to injure a number of the basilisk’s legs, thus slowing it down, now moved faster than the large creature. He managed to outsmart it and, amassing all of his courage, opened his eyes and made a great jump, landing on the back of the petrifying beast. Being safe from the monster’s gaze and strong jaws, and balancing on its back, he managed to slash through it with ease, until the “Serpent King” expired. A big cheer was heard throughout the stadium, everyone shouting “Basilisk.” Drakov, being satisfied by the gore, maybe even having a degree of respect for the dragonman’s fighting capabilities, spared the dragonman’s life, sentencing “The Basilisk” to a life in the arena...

-Excerpt on The Basilisk, salvaged in 749 BC from the burned historical records of Mircea Giurgiu of the Radiant Tower, dated 74th Year of the Hawk (739 BC).



DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE ARENA

Falkovnian customs and state laws established even before the rule of Falcon the Great had institutionalized gladiatorial fights and the “Rule of Might” in Falkovnia. When Vlad Drakov came to power by challenging wizard-king Falcon the Great to a duel, and killing him in his throne room within the latter’s castle, he made changes to this law, so that he would never himself be challenged for the domain’s crown. This “Rule of Might” states that if two Falkovnians have a dispute, they can solve it in a gladiatorial fight to the death, usually taking place in the Great Coliseum of Lekar.

These judicial fights had been used in the past by strong men (as women have no rights in Falkovnian society) to gain more power or wealth by “lawfully” killing innocent people just to gain something they wanted. Since Vlad Drakov came to power, there have been less people willing to take their chances in the arena, as there are times where Drakov has forced the winning party to continue fighting against other gladiators or beasts for his own amusement.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: CHAMPIONS

While gladiatorial fights are usually between slaves, usually demihumans and prisoners, and occasionally beasts and monsters, there are those desperate enough to climb up the ladder of society by becoming champions of the arena. These homicidal opportunists usually end up dead but those who survive and are celebrated in the arena rise up to become Talons after pledging servitude to the Kingfuhrer and wearing Talon Bracers. Only Falkovnians have the right to become willing champions but there have been times when a human prisoner who prevails in the arena is forced to become a Talon, condemned to a life of servitude and atrocities in the name of Vlad Drakov.



The dragonman reigned as champion in the arena for the following months; “the Basilisk” as he was now known continued to win battles, making friends and losing them. The Basilisk and the gladiators may have been looked down upon by upper-class Falkovnians of the military, but none of them, not even Vlad Drakov the Kingfuhrer himself was ever able to match the fame and admiration these warriors achieved among the common people. The Hawk himself began to be irritated by the Basilisk’s success in the arena, every time putting even more difficult challenges against him.

But as a true warrior, the Basilisk valued his freedom far more than anything else, and knowing that he would never gain a pardon, being seen by the ruling class as nothing more than an animal, and sure that his luck could change anytime soon he began planning his escape. Then the Grand Conjunction occurred, earthquakes shook Falkovnia and the Basilisk helped to

mastermind a rebellion that ended with about 70 gladiators escaping from the fortified gladiator school of Lekar, all of them well armed with makeshift weapons.

Together, they escaped to the countryside, heading towards the forest in the center of the domain, freeing many more slaves of different races, in what has been referred to as “The Exodus of Slaves.” Many slaves, believing that the Great Upheaval signaled the “End of Days” got the courage to resist their Falkovnian captors and joined the rebellion, which increased their numbers significantly. They made their base in Seelewald forest and soon, the Basilisk and the rest of the rebel leaders had amassed a formidable and skillful fighting force that went on to defeat the Talons of the Hawk sent to capture them.

But when the Grand Conjunction collapsed, tensions began between different races of the rebel troops, based on millennia of hostility. Disputes for the command of the slave army were frequent, as well as factions of rebels supporting an attack on Lekar and end of Vlad Drakov’s tyranny. The basilisk feeling, that this internal conflict would inevitably divide them, decided to form a troop of kobolds and other lesser humanoid scaled races named “The Spawn of the Lizard,” leaving the rest of the rebel leaders and races to decide for themselves.

The Basilisk and the Spawn of the Lizard decided that it was more important for them to live free themselves than to try to liberate the whole kingdom - a kingdom where the majority already viewed them as subhuman monsters. A large portion of the slave army, consisting in its majority of humans and demihumans, under the leadership of the elven gladiator Arkonilmo Castus, dwarven armorer Oenomir Mithrilmaker, gnome warrior Crixbeck, minotaur gladiator Gannicus Ohn-Ergathan, and Falkovnian deserter veteran Lucious Cante, marched towards Lekar.

When we reached the end of Seelewald forest, we saw the golden plains of Blacksoil Vale. On the horizon we could see our destination, the tortured city of Lekar. We waited until nightfall before the command to move was given, taking advantage of the moonless sky and the cover the grain fields before us. Under the cover of darkness, the rebel army moved towards Lekar; our goal

was for the bulk of the army to reach as close as it could to the city walls undetected.

The rebel council’s plan was for a handful of stealthy rebels, including me, to secure the main gate of the city before daybreak. Then the rest of the rebel army, who would be laying hidden in the grain fields, would advance as fast as they could towards the main gates, entering the city before the remaining Falkovnian soldiers could react. The city would be ours, as we would be liberating its people and accepting anyone who wanted to support our cause to our ranks, thus augmenting our forces.

We would declare the city a free city-state, and prepare to defend it against the Talons of the Hawk. Since the main Falkovnian army had gathered near the northern border, in Stangengrad, it would need a few days to march to Lekar. This would give us the time we needed to prepare the city’s defenses and time for anyone who wanted to escape Falkovnia to leave.

As we advanced, covered by the crops of wheat, rye, and barley towards Lekar, I remember a strong wind blowing from the south, which was fortunate, as it could possibly hinder the archers of the city to hit their targets. That was, if we had managed to reach the city... When the whole army had progressed halfway between the forest and the far end of the grain fields, the darkness was lit up on our rear, but it wasn’t the face of the morning sun, as the stars were still hanging bright in the night sky, but a warm light, followed by a feeling of warmth, a loud continuous roaring sound, and death. We heard some of our men behind us shouting “Fire!”...

I looked back in amazement and fear, as a massive fire burned behind our lines. The south wind was blowing the inferno towards us. Then on the north we saw many small lights being lit up, followed by smaller ones flying in the sky, becoming larger as they reached our position. Volleys of burning arrows flew over us landing to the left side of our position, flanking us with another large fire.

There were only two directions for our army to move, straight towards the fortified city of Lekar, or north towards Lake Alder, the direction from where the arrows were shot. Then under the light of the arrows being continuously shot, we saw a massive army advancing towards us from the north. Apparently, the

information we had, of Drakov amassing a large army at Stangengrad to invade Darkon, was false. Drakov had indeed gathered a large military force, but it was not to invade the Wizard King's kingdom one more time, but to tempt us into advancing towards Lekar. Drakov had feigned advancing his army to the northern border only to make us leave the safety of the forest and selected a battlefield to quash the rebellion. And unfortunately, his plan had worked.

The Falkovnians had used scorched-earth military tactics, or *verbrannte Erde* as they call it, to trap us in a hellish battlefield, then moved their troops towards us, killing any rebel they encountered. Morale was low, and panic spread through the rebel army faster than *Crimson Death*. I saw many of my comrades drop their weapons and run towards the blazing fire, preferring to be burned alive than fall on the Hawk's Talons.

I don't remember much after, that except being surrounded by flames; the blowing wind had made the fire burn faster than I expected, engulfing me. Somehow I survived unscathed, physically that is. The flames touched my skin but I couldn't feel them burning my flesh. I seemed to be impervious to fire; I could only feel warmth, though the smoke still made it hard to breathe. As I was surprisingly immune to the fire, I ran as fast as I could through it, covered by the pyre that burned the corpses of my comrades, and headed back to the forest.

I believe the only reason I survived this holocaust is this ruby ring, borrowed, just days before that fateful event, from a Talon's corpse. This ring may have protected me from the firestorm but the images of that night and those of the following morning are burned in my memory.

When the first light of dawn illuminated the battlefield, I saw that Seelewald forest had expanded to a "forest" of impaled dead or dying bodies fixed on the black burned ground. This was not a battle, this was a massacre.

-Eyewitness account of the "The Servile Massacre" as recounted by Falco Lightfoot of Rivalis, 740 BC.

The Basilisk and the Spawn of the Lizard have remained in the area of Seelewald forest since then. Through brilliant hit-and-run tactics, the Spawn of the Lizard have, more or less, driven Drakov's troops from the region at the heart of the domain. Their guerilla tactics

against Drakov's traditionalistic soldiers has encouraged the goblins who plague the eastern wilds Falkovnia, into helping them. The Basilisk has managed to form an alliance with the goblins and jermelaine of the Crumbling Hills. This coalition of lesser humanoids in the heart of the domain, challenges the rule of Drakov in the area. The Spawn of the Lizard have formed a rule onto themselves, stretching from Morfenzi to Aerie, and from the Crumbling Hills to the west of the Seelewald Highway. The Spawn of the Lizard is perhaps the most successful resistance movement in Falkovnia.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE WILLOWS

After "The Servile Massacre" ended, the burned crops and parts of the forest begun to grow again. In a matter of days, tiny saplings sprung up from the burned fertile ground of the battlefield. After a few months, it was obvious that amongst them were some willow trees; these willows were actually immature death's head trees.

As the years passed, the willow-like trees competed with each other, sinking their roots among themselves in an attempt to grow stronger by stealing the other trees' life blood. Some withered, having been overwhelmed by the other "willows" and drained of the nourishment they needed, leaving about a dozen strong but still immature trees.

Normally, death's head trees grow to maturity in between 50 and 60 years, so these trees would normally be full grown around 790 BC to 800 BC. But in 751 BC, when the Green Maiden, a pseudonatural nymph who was summoned years ago by a long dead sorcerer, began to affect Falkovnia's wildlife with an infectious plague, she used her powers of nature to hasten the growth of the death's head saplings, creating a nightmarish grove on the northwest part of Seelewald forest.

Death's Head Trees are extremely competitive with each other, and a grove of this size is especially rare. These dread plants are spaced at a distance of about 50 feet from one another and are constantly competing for living humanoids to use for procreation.

The needle-toothed head-fruits of these trees resemble those of the various races of humanoids that died in the massacre, hauntingly calling for help in various languages.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE THORP IN THE MEADOWS

Most locals who live in the countryside avoid the area near the death head's trees and usually warn travelers to avoid the woods, something that is encouraged by the military to avoid strengthening the rebel forces that take refuge in Seelewald forest, but there are others who could take advantage of the existence of the "willows" to get rid of unwanted people.

There are still others, though, who have taken the existence of these deadly trees to another level. A village close to the deadly grove, a seemingly peaceful place full of happy people, compared to the rest of the domain, is called Blutfalk. The peacefulness of the village is only a facade, as most of the villagers are loyalists to the crown, who engage in monthly humanoid sacrifices, as offerings to the grove to appease the trees. But this practice is also a façade, as it hides a darker inhuman truth. The cult's leader, the charismatic Wachekapitan Klaus Graf, a vicious veteran and survivor of all the Dead Man's Campaigns, is a self-proclaimed Tärnanen Mystic, who uses these sacrificial ceremonies to quench his thirst for bloodshed, assuage his homicidal tendencies, and control the forces of the forest. During the week following a sacrifice, the Willow Grove becomes a rank 3 sinkhole of evil.

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing, but what happens when there are no good men to start with? The rest of the villagers prefer to be complicit in these sacrifices than risk themselves being the Wachekapitan's next victim. They usually befriend foreigners in an attempt to gain their trust, sometimes even pretending to belong to a rebellious group themselves in an attempt to sniff out any potential rebels or opposition to Drakov's rule.

Although Blutfalk is a very small village, its proximity to Seelewald forest and the forest's rebellious inhabitants has made it kind of a military outpost. The thorp is heavily protected with wooden walls and towers and has a small force of Falkovnian soldiers permanently posted there.

The company's military officer is Sir Günter Kinski, a raptor knight utterly loyal to Vlad Drakov, who commands 10 Falkovnian soldiers using Graf's fortified mansion in the center of the village as their barracks.

Blutfalk (thorp): Nonstandard; AL NE; CL 7; 40gp limit; Assets 80gp; Population 40; Isolated (human 100%)
Authority Figures: Wachekapitan Claus Graf Ftr5/ Drd3, Sir Günter Tanz Ftr6/Rpk1; *Important Characters:* Jonas Jäger (hunter) Com6, Elias Schmid (carpenter) Exp6, Valana Krause (midwife) Sor1

DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE TREEMEN

The small thorp holds another secret, aside from sacrificing innocent people who have the misfortune of visiting their small community to the Willows. Wachekapitan Klaus Graf has used his defiling druidic powers to contact the Green Maiden, and has made an unholy alliance with her.

Every autumnal equinox, the villagers offer a man to the forest, and the Green Maiden, to be her husband. The festivities last for a week, and a man is selected in a lottery a few days before, or if the villagers are lucky, a visiting foreigner is chosen to be the unnatural entity's groom. The groom is then usually drugged with hypnotic mushrooms that ease his resistances, and is celebrated for his remaining days, before the day of celebration when he is blindfolded and staked in an unholy glade, surrounded by spruce trees, deep in the forest. These "willing" men are transformed into a fusion between man and tree by the pseudonatural powers of the Green Maiden and these treemen are utterly loyal to her.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: OCTOBERFEST

This annual beer drinking celebration is set in Aerie; it first begun as a celebration of the autumnal equinox, but later was transformed into a celebration that promotes Falkovnian agriculture and lasts until the first Sunday of October. The days of Oktoberfest coincide with the anniversary of the formation of Falkovnia, and sometimes with Bleak Morning, so Vlad Drakov encourages these celebrations in order to keep the facade of a beloved ruler to surrounding domains.

This festival is renowned across the Core as a beer consuming festival and has begun to attract many people from other domains brave enough to go to Falkovnia to attend this festival. During the festival many tents are set around the walls of the city and the roads are filled with long tables, while plentiful beer and sausages are served from tent tavernas inside the city. Most renowned besides the Märzen or Märzenbier that is served in this festival are blutfalk sausages, sausages alleged to be made of hawk's blood, that are produced in the village of Blutfalk in the north.

Even though the festival is renowned across the Core, it is not rare for people to vanish during the celebration, which has increased its notoriety, making it even more enticing to young nobles in their late teens and young University students from other domains.

This mass of foreigners in Falkovnia, though, means that more Talons and Falkovnian soldiers are placed in Blutfalk during those days. It is not rare for young foreign students to end up in a cell, accused of espionage, so the festival attracts only the very bold, adventure-seeking, ignorant, or stupid foreigners. Falkovnians from other parts of the domain, on the contrary avoid going to the festival, seeing it as a celebration of their servitude and tyranny.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: VLADIK'S FORD

The battle of Vladik's Ford was the greatest loss the Spawn of the Lizard has ever experienced. It was the result of an ingenious plan conceptualized by one of Drakov's generals, Vladik Brückewald. The plan was to construct an underwater embankment where the river was at its deepest but that would still let water flow, a kind of water-camouflaged bridge. This bridge would be used to make a spring attack, something Vladik called "blietzkrieg," to attack the rebels where they least expected. The part of the river that was selected was north of Aerie, where the river almost touches the Seelewald road. According to legend, the right spot was shown to Vlad Drakov himself by a Bloodhawk hovering above it.

While a diversion had been prepared close to Morfenzi, conscripted peasants from all over Falkovnia and slaves were forced to work tirelessly in the dead of winter, filling the depths of Talon river with stones,

constructing the "underwater bridge," under the supervision of Alexander Mensher. Disregarding practical considerations and human life in Drakov's determination to create a strategic new passage to Seelewald forest, Mensher was responsible as hundreds died, their bodies carried downstream.

Because of the anguish suffered during its construction and the subsequent battle, Vladik's Ford is a rank 5 sinkhole of evil. On the eve of the anniversary of the battle of Vladik's Ford, hundreds of dead spirits rise up from the river's depths and attack anyone foolish enough to be able to witness this metaphysical phenomenon. Only the destruction of the underwater stone construction can liberate the hundreds of tortured humanoid spirits trapped in this annual cycle.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE FRAGMENTED SOUL OF BASILISCUS

Basiliscus's being has been fragmented in many parts due to his curse. Some are objects and some are persons. To return to the world of the living, all of his parts must be gathered and placed inside his tomb. Then a ritual needs to be performed so that Basiliscus may be "resurrected" as a pristine ancient dead using the body of his last reincarnation, that of The Basilisk.

The ritual needed to resurrect him can be learned through an inspection of his tomb or a careful study of the Lost Notes of Amrocar, which details how the ritual was decoded from the walls of the tomb by the minotaur wizard Amrocar and lists all the needed elements described in his notes. If all items containing parts of the soul of Basiliscus are used in the ritual, including *The Imperial Bracelet of House Lacertidae*, *The Statue of the Unknown Gladiator*, and its missing head, and the body of the rebel leader known as the Basilisk, then the resurrected Basiliscus could be of formidable power, combining the knowledge of all parts of his soul (meaning that the resurrected version has all the class powers, feats, and skills of all of his reincarnations).

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE WICKER TREE

The adventurers are in search of a missing person, trying to find that person, they come across the village of Blutfalk.

They find that the inhabitants of the village live peaceful lives, a big contrast compared to the rest of the domain's population, and they seem to live in harmony with nature, as they themselves proudly proclaim. They meet with Dorfürer Klaus Graf who explains that they are protectors of strains of fruit trees that prosper in Falkovnia's climate, and that the new strains bring prosperity to the village. While in the village they find clues to the missing person, and research leads them to speculate that when there is a poor harvest, the villagers make a human sacrifice to ensure that the next harvest will be bountiful. They come to the conclusion that the person they are looking for is alive and has been chosen for sacrifice, they go to the person's rescue only to be led to the "Willow Grove."

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE TÄRNANEN MYSTIC

The adventurers learn about the sacrifices offered by the villagers of Blutfalk to the forest. While investigating, they learn about Dorfürer Klaus Graf's druidic powers and his plan to expand the dread plant grove.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE NIGHT OF THE OFFICERS

Alanik Ray was investigating the murder of a prostitute in his hometown of Neblus, who had also been a Kargat agent, infiltrating Falkovnia. His evidence soon pointed to the killer being one of three Falkovnian officers stationed to guard a Falkovnian diplomat. But his investigation had been cut short as the three suspects: Klaus Graf, Wilhelm Kinski, and Günter Tanz were transferred back to Falkovnia. The case in Neblus remained closed until all three officers met in Port-a-Lucine, the city Alanik has moved to. Port-a-Lucine is known as a hotbed of intrigue and as such becomes the foreground for an assassination plot against Vlad Drakov.

Wilhelm Kinski is deeply involved in the plot, while Klaus Graf is aware of its existence but is sitting on the fence, awaiting the outcome.

Sir Tanz is unaware of the plot and remains totally loyal to Drakov. Then another prostitute is found butchered in Port-a-Lucine by the adventurers. When Alanik Ray learns of the murder, committed in the same manner as the first, he resumes his investigation, but the lack of evidence or information connecting the victim with any act of espionage suggests that this murder had a pathological motive. However, his timing is unfortunate as his investigation may uncover the plot of Vlad Drakov's assassination and is he forced to let the suspects leave before concluding who the murderer is.

The assassination plot fails and Wilhelm Kinski is labeled as one of the plot's conspirators and is executed; the other two suspects return to their post in Blutfalk out of Alanik Ray's reach, but not before another dead prostitute is discovered, murdered by the same modus operandi. As it would be too dangerous for him to travel there, Alanik sends the adventurers to Blutfalk to continue the investigation and try to bring the murderer (Klaus Graf) to justice, with the help of "The Knights of the Ashen Bough."

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE GREEN MAIDEN

After defeating Dorfürer Klaus Graf and his tree worshipping cult, the adventurers learn about the existence of a terrible entity that defiles the forests of Falkovnia. After facing some transformed animals and magical beasts, maybe even meeting some of the various good willed fey, they come to understand that this unnatural force of evil is a big threat to the balance of the forests.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE TOMB OF BASILISCUS

The Tomb of Basiliscus was spirited away by the Mists from its location in the Prime Material Plane and was repositioned in the Crumbling Hills of Falkovnia. The tomb is filled with many deadly traps, draconic inscriptions, murals, and hieroglyphics narrating the story of a reptilian being referred to as the Nameless One.

In its first chamber lay the remains of Trelan, still holding the Lost Notes of Amrocar, which are guarded by Trelan's spirit.

After many trapped corridors and chambers someone can discover the tomb's burial chamber, filled with treasures and still holding the mummies of Basiliscus's family and his own; a few pieces of a broken egg lie next to Basiliscus's sarcophagus that still has the "Traitor Emperor's" left hand on its lid.

On the walls of the burial chamber, among the inscriptions, hieroglyphs, and murals are carefully placed glyphs that prevent Basiliscus's resurrection.

Recently Falkovnian miners discovered the doorway to an ancient tomb with a partial draconian inscription, only the following words are decipherable:

"Summon... your soul... once more upon the world"

It will not be long before some greedy Talon overseer of the labor camp decides to order the tomb to be opened to plunder its treasures.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE AWAKENING

Treasures of a reptilian culture have begun to appear, only to be followed by death, as Basiliscus's spirit tries to re-collect his treasure. The treasures are traced back in the Crumbling Hills of Falkovnia.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE BASILISK KING OF THIEVES

A cart protected by Falkovnian soldiers is attacked by the Spawn of the Lizard. The cart is full of treasures from a tomb in the Crumbling Hills. The adventurers are hired by the Falkovnian government to retrieve the treasures, only to find out that the reptilian revolutionary known as The Basilisk is plagued by strange nightmares involving the tomb.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: A SECRET WEAPON?

The Basilisk has accidentally retrieved the Lost Notes of Amrocar and wants to complete a ritual detailed there, believing it will make him stronger. The adventurers may try to prevent him from doing so, or be used to help him discover the items he needs for the ritual to succeed, or even to find the tomb of Emperor Basiliscus.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: KINGDOM OF THE LIZARD

Basiliscus's possessing spirit has learned about his tomb's discovery; he manipulates the PCs to clear his path to the tomb, as he needs to dispel the glyphs that ward the tomb against his resurrection, planning to find the other pieces of his fragmented soul and use The Basilisk as a vessel for his awakening. Basiliscus, the Traitor Emperor, now having transformed into a pristine ancient dead, plans to use the Spawn of the Lizard and his newly acquired powers to take the throne of Falkovnia for himself.

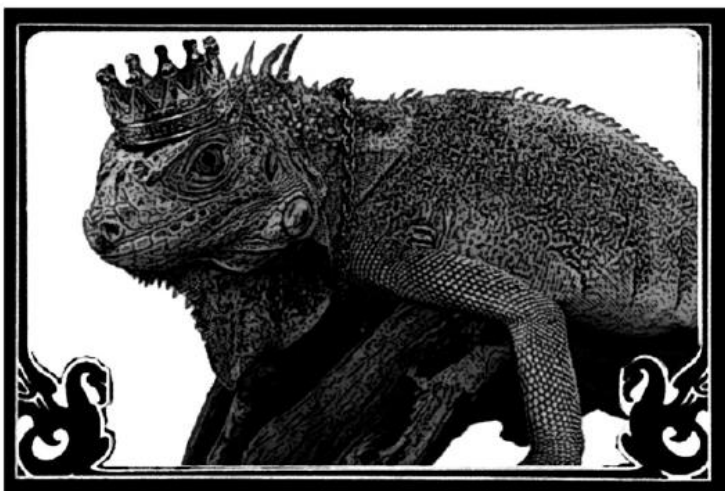
DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE IMPERIAL BRACELET OF HOUSE LACERTIDAE

When Basiliscus became emperor, one of the first things he ordered was the creation of this bracelet. It was created from the finest gold and a seemingly emerald stone carved in the shape of a lizard. Although the bracelet was crafted by the most talented craftsman of the empire, the lizard was created by a powerful bakali alchemist, his name lost in history. The emerald stone was found in a meteor; compared to other emerald stones, its hardness was so great that it took almost four months for the alchemist to pierce it.

The alchemist was instructed to imbue the emerald and the bracelet with the power to protect the emperor's lifeforce. The Imperial Bracelet of House Lacertidae was supposed to work as an alchemical essential coagulant, draining Basiliscus's fading life force, only to be used to return him to life. Instructions for the ritual were inscribed inside the tomb he had already built and then the alchemist was put to death.

Knowing that he would return to life, Basiliscus's only request to Jarak-sinn Emperor Taxis of the house Agamidae, was not to shed his or his family's blood, assuring that his body would remain intact for the ritual of his resurrection when he was entombed. But when Taxis ordered for the Traitor Emperor's left hand to be severed, the ritual was blocked and the emperor's lifeforce was trapped within the bracelet.

When, millennia later, Basiliscus's tomb was discovered and opened by the minotaur scholar Amrocar, the bracelet was stolen by Amrocar's apprentice Trelan. Trelan kept it for decades until fate crossed his path with the gladiator Bakiliskis. Bakiliskis was a direct ancestor of Basiliscus through Basiliscus's son, Radus the Fair, and Bakiliskis was drawn to the Imperial Bracelet. When he wore it, Basiliscus's spirit was transferred to the body of the gladiator Bakiliskis, manifesting as an alternate personality.



The bracelet is considered a cursed item; if worn by someone other than Basiliscus's bloodline, the wearer will try to do anything in his or her power to find one of Basiliscus's descendants and somehow make them accept the bracelet. This curse works as a geas spell, with an infinite duration, until the bracelet's purpose is achieved. The trapped spirit of Basiliscus can also speak to the wearer like using a telepathy spell; a prolonged possession under the bracelet's curse can drive someone insane.

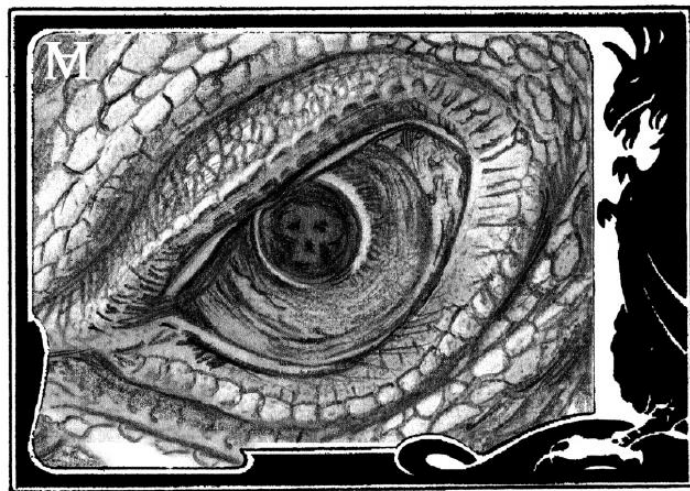
Every month the bracelet is worn, the wearer must roll a madness check as the shared thoughts of Basiliscus, his evil influence, and the probable transgressions that someone may commit under the influence of the bracelet, are enough to drive someone mad.

Characters of good alignment suffer a -4 penalty to their save, while those of neutral alignment suffer a -2 penalty; evil aligned characters still have to roll a check but without any penalty. *DC is $10 + 1/2$ the contacted creature's HD + contacted creature's Wisdom modifier.* If a remove curse spell is cast on an individual under possession or influence of Basiliscus's soul, then the bracelet can be removed without any penalty, although any failed madness checks still apply.

The influence of the bracelet is such that people who once wore it, and voluntarily gave it to someone of Basiliscus's bloodline, are obsessed with obtaining it back. This obsession is developed as the character begins to feel an emptiness as days without the bracelet pass.

Each week the bracelet is out of the character's grasp, he or she has to roll a Will save with a cumulative -1 penalty until the character makes three successive successful saves. *DC $8 + 1/2$ Basiliscus's HD + his*

Charisma modifier. A Remove Curse spell removes any influence of the bracelet.



SOUL OF BASILISCUS

Cursed Soul, Warlock 8: Medium (7 ft. tall); **HD** 8d6; **hp** hosts; **Init** +0 (+host's Dex mod.); **Spd** host's; **AC** host's;

Base +6/+1 Atk + host's Str mod.; **Atk** +6 melee +hosts Str mod. (weapon +host's Str bonus), **Range Attack** +6 (+ host's Dex mod), **Full Atk melee** +6/+1 + host's Str bonus, +4d6 eldritch blast (melee) or +6/+1 + host's Dex bonus, 4d6 eldritch blast (range 60ft.)

SA eldritch blast, brimstone blast, hideous blow; **SQ** beguiling influence, damage reduction 2/ cold iron, fire resistance +3, detect magic, entropic warding, fiendish resilience, see the unseen; **AL** CE;

SV Fort +2 + host's Con mod, Ref +2 + host's Dex mod, Will +6;

Str -, Dex -, Con -, Int 16, Wis 15, Cha 14

Feats: Extra Invocation, Draconic Heritage, Draconic Knowledge, Draconic Persuasion

Skills: Bluff +12, Craft (Alchemy) +13, Craft (Poisonmaking) +8, Intimidate + 12, Knowledge (arcana) +16, Knowledge (the planes) +11, Knowledge (nature) +11, Knowledge (engineering) +11, Sense Motive +7, Spellcraft +7, Use Magical Device +7

Languages: Draconic*, Falkovnian, League Common, Thenol

Eldritch Blast (Sp): Basiliscus is able to use baleful magical energy to deal damage. An *eldritch blast* is a ranged touch attack ray with a range of 60 feet that deals 4d6 points of damage to a single target, allowing no saving throw and is equivalent to a 4th level spell. An eldritch blast is subject to spell resistance and deals half damage to objects.

Detect Magic (Sp): Basiliscus can *detect magic* as the spell at will.

Deceive Item (Ex) : Basiliscus has the ability to use any magic device and when making a Use Magic Device check he can take a 10 even if distracted or threatened.

Fiendish Resilience (Su): Once per day, Basiliscus can as a free action enter a state that lasts for 2 minutes. While in this state he gains fast healing 1.

Beguiling Influence (Sp): Basiliscus has the ability to beguile and bewitch his foes, gaining a +6 bonus on Bluff, Diplomacy, and Intimidate checks for 24 hours. This invocation, if combined with the Draconic Persuasion feat, increases the bonus by +4-1/2 in Bluff, Intimidate and Perform checks before the end of the next round.

Brimstone Blast (Sp): Basiliscus can change his eldritch blast into a brimstone blast that deals fire damage. Any creature struck must succeed on a Reflex save or catch on fire, taking 2d6 points of fire damage for two rounds after the initial brimstone blast attack, unless it takes a full-round action to extinguish the flames. A creature burning this way never takes more than 2d6 points of fire damage in a round.

Blast Shape Invocation (Sp) :Hideous Blow (least blast shape Inv. 1st) As a standard action, Basiliscus can make a single melee attack. If the target is hit, it is affected by an extra damage as if struck by his eldritch blast or his brimstone blast.

See the Unseen (Sp): Basiliscus can use this invocation to see invisible creatures and objects within his range of vision, as well as any that are ethereal, as if they were normally visible for 80 minutes. Such creatures are visible to him as translucent shapes, allowing him easily to discern the difference between visible, invisible, and ethereal creatures.

Darkvision (Sp): Basiliscus has a darkvision of 90 feet.

Entropic Warding (Sp): When this invocation is activated, a magical field glowing with a chaotic blast of multicolored hues swirls around Basiliscus, lasting up to 8 rounds. This field deflects incoming arrows, rays, and other ranged attacks. Each ranged attack directed at him for which the attacker must make an attack roll has a 20% miss chance. Other attacks that simply work at a distance are not affected. Basiliscus leaves no trail for 8 hours and cannot be tracked by scent (he can still be detected by smell, just not tracked).

Voracious Dispelling (Sp): Basiliscus can *dispel magic* at will; any creature with an active spell effect dispelled takes 1 point of damage per level of the spell effect.

Fire Resistance: Because of his draconic heritage he has a resistance to fire based attacks +3.

CURRENT SKETCH

Basiliscus's soul has only one purpose, to discover his descendants and bring himself back to life so he can rule once more. He will use any person to accomplice that, possessing anyone foolish enough to wear his bracelet. Basiliscus is arrogant and calculating; he will usually try to use people around him to accomplish his task, trying to influence and control them to do his bidding. Fortunately, his biggest flaws, his arrogance, excessive confidence, and lack of empathy make it difficult for him to assume the character of a possessed victim for too long, as he is usually discovered and expelled from a possessed body.

For this reason, he is especially wary of priests and will do anything in his power to remove such a person from his company. In general, he refrains from using physical violence, preferring the use of poisons or his Machiavellian intellect to remove any person he sees as a threat.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: *MISTOVARIS*

The PCs are hired to steal the treasure of a merchant or Talon officer. They could be Kargat agents, members of "The Shadow Insurrection" sent by Gondegal to create an incident in Drakov's inner circle to disorganize the government, or Dementlieuse spies.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: TO BE OR NOT TO BE

The Spawn of the Lizard's attacks have begun to be more cruel and devastating. While most of the kobolds are satisfied with the gore they create, taking vengeance on years of mistreatment, some of their leader's close advisors have begun to worry about his new found cruelty. The Basilisk has *The Imperial Bracelet of House Lacertidae* in his possession, and Basiliscus has already taken hold of the rebel leader. The PCs are in a dilemma - do they help destroy one of the most successful resistance groups in Falkovnia, or do they let it continue its atrocities as a measure against Vlad Drakov's rule? Meanwhile, The Basilisk contemplates death and ritual suicide, bemoaning the pain of the struggle and unfairness of life but acknowledging that the alternative might be worse.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE SERPENT'S TEMPTATION

The adventurers discover *The Imperial Bracelet of House Lacertidae* on a random dead body in the forests of Falkovnia, in a monster's nest after a killing it, or on a dead soldier after a skirmish against Drakov's men. A PC begins to be tempted by the spirit of Basiliscus and begins a quest to recollect all of the fragments of his soul, planning to capture The Basilisk alive and perform the "resurrection" ritual in his tomb, turning himself into an ancient dead. If the adventurers manage to save their comrade in arms, they will have insight into Basiliscus's quest and try to stop the bakali emperor from succeeding.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE STATUE THE UNKNOWN GLADIATOR

When Bakiliskis was turned to stone by Amrocar's magic *potion of petrification*, his stationary body remained in his room. With Emperor Ambeoutin X's edict of *damnatio memoriae*, all records of Bakiliskis's rule were erased, all statues destroyed.

The bakali emperor's statuary head was cut off, removed from the body, and thrown away with the rubble of other statues, to be reused as stone. Somehow, both pieces of the statue were drawn into Falkovnia; the head lies somewhere close to the shores of Grashen river in the cave of a basilisk (magical beast), waiting to be discovered.

The body, on the other hand, first appeared when Falkovnia formed by the Mists, in the now vampyre-infested catacombs beneath the Grand Coliseum of Lekar. At first it was named the Statue of the Unknown Gladiator by the gladiators of the arena, since Bakiliskis was usually dressed as a gladiator even when he was emperor.

In recent years, the statue has come to be revered as the depiction of Kord, the storm god and lord of battle, installed there by the god himself to protect his faithful in this godforsaken place. Mistaking Bakiliskis's right reptilian hand and feet as gauntlets and boots made of dragon's hide, the gladiators have been praying to the statue for guidance and luck in the gladiatorial fights. The continuous great emotional significance they give to the statue and emotional resonance from the deaths in the arena above have turned it into a relic.

Beyond its normal relic powers, the statue also has the power to grant a *good luck* spell at will.

If a *detect magic* is directed to either of the two parts of the statue, a faint aura of transmutation magic can be detected around them. It is possible to unite the pieces and make the statue whole with a mending spell. It could also be possible to mend Bakiliskis's severed hand to the statue's torso, if a *flesh to stone* spell is first cast on the severed hand, followed by a *mending* spell.

If a *stone to flesh* spell is cast or *willoshade oil* is anointed on the former gladiator emperor's statue, after the head is back in its place, then "The Dragon" could be returned to life with a *resurrection* spell. Any other use of a *flesh to stone* turns the statue to dead flesh, which begins to decompose.



BAKILISKIS, THE DRAGON

Male bakali Brb 5/Glr 10 CR 17: Medium (5 ft. 25 in. tall); **HD** 2d8+8+5d12+16+10d10+40, **hp** 164; **Init** +0; **Spd** 40 ft.; **AC** 15, touch 10, flat-footed 15

Base Atk +16/+11/+6/+1; **Grp** +22; **Atk** +22 melee (natural +6, weapon +6), **Rage Attack** +24, **Range Atk** +16; **Full Atk** +6/+6/+4 melee (1d6+6 Claw/ 1d6+6 claw, 1d4+3 bite), +4 (1d6+3 tail) (rage attack dmg +2); SA berserking rage 2/day, feats

SQ uncanny dodge, fast movement, feats, trap sense +1, illiteracy; **AL** CE; **SV** Fort +16, Ref +8, Will +6;

Str 23, Dex 10, Con 18, Int 13, Wis 13, Cha 11

Feats: Combat Expertise, Exotic Weapon Proficiency, Improved Disarm, Dragon Tail, Improved Trip, Multiattack, Reincarnated, Improved Feint, Improved Uncanny Dodge, Study Opponent +3, Exhaust Opponent, Improved Coup De Grace, Poison Use, Make Them Bleed, Roar of the Crowd, The Crowd Goes Wild

Skills: Listen +5, Tumble +5, Bluff +18, Climb +5, Handle Animal +6, Intimidate +18, Swim +5, Jump +5, Perform +18

Languages: Draconic*, League Common, Thenol

CURRENT SKETCH

Bakiliskis was raised in the swamps, became a skirmisher for the fanatics of Hith, a slave, a gladiator, a champion in the arena, and finally an emperor. He managed to do that by using the only thing he knows to do best: fighting and killing his adversaries. For him, his physical strength and ruthlessness are his biggest assets; the loss of his right arm wounded deeply his ego, and he usually replaced it with a golden replica of a dragon.

The former emperor has been petrified for more than a century; his body has been dismembered and his mind has been shattered by the experience. If somehow his head is attached to his body and his form transformed back to flesh, he will be a berserk, bloodthirsty killing machine, attacking anything on sight.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: GOLDEN LEGEND

The adventurers have heard of a monster terrorizing the countryside, and leaving people turned into stone behind it, otherwise are hired to find the egg of a basilisk. They manage to kill the magical beast and find its nest, finding the masterfully sculpted head of a reptilian statue. Detecting its magical aura, they try to find the rest.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: UNDERWORLD

While fighting the vampyre-infested underworld of Lekar, the adventurers discover the Statue of the Unknown Gladiator. Sensing its magical aura or learning of its value as a relic, they decide to take it with them. Strange dreams that haunt them or a Vistani reading leads them to the whereabouts of the head.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: MERCHANT'S GAMBIT

A wealthy Falkovnian merchant has learned of the statue's existence and pays a large amount of money to acquire it. Having it in his possession, he is obsessed with finding its head.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: IN THE LIZARD'S CLUTCHES

Basiliscus has possessed the body of an adventurer, close friend or some other NPC. Depending on the circumstance of the person being possessed, Basiliscus may blackmail or hire the party to find the pieces of Basiliskis's statue.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE LOST NOTES OF AMROCAR

The Lost Notes of Amrocar is a leather bounded file of around a hundred pages, full of information about the Traitor Emperor Basiliscus and his tomb. It is the only written account of Basiliscus's history and existence (except the hieroglyphs in his tomb, although they are missing the identity of the one buried there, the name Basiliscus). The Notes also contain a diagram of Basiliscus's tomb and information or speculations on the ritual needed to resurrect the "Traitor Emperor."

The notes are written in Konthian, the language of the minotaurs of Taladas and, unless someone knows that language, the DC for deciphering the notes is 30; a *comprehend languages* spell works normally. There are a few parts written in draconic as well as the inscriptions from Basiliscus's tomb. Among the notes, there is magical information or speculation for the ritual needed to resurrect him - a ritual involving the gathering of all the focuses of Basiliscus's fragmented soul and the living body of his latest reincarnation. The ritual can be performed only inside Basiliscus's tomb.

The notes are protected or are used as a lure by the spirit of Amrocar's apprentice Trelan. Trelan is a special case for an odem, as he is anchored to the notes; he not able to stray away from them for more than a few hundred feet. The notes are usually in the possession of Trelan's latest victim, a "lost one" used by the odem to discover the whereabouts of the *Imperial Bracelet of House Lacertidae* or the dead body of the person he last possessed.



TRELAN

Odem, Small Undead CR 5: Small; **HD** 5d12, **hp** 32; **Init** +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); **Spd** 30ft., fly 60ft (perfect); **AC** 16, (+1 size, +3 Dex, +2 deflection)

Base Atk +6 Incorporeal Touch; Range 5ft by 5ft/ 5ft; **Atk** 1d6 Wisdom drain (Incorporeal touch)

SA Wisdom drain, possession; **SQ** Undead, Incorporeal, natural invisibility, unnatural aura, +3 turn resistance, tongues 1/day; **AL** CE; **SV** Fort +1, Ref +4, Will +6;

Str -, Dex 16, Con -, Int 14, Wis 15, Cha 17

Feats: Dodge, Flyby Attack, Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse (touch)

Skills: Hide +14, Intimidate +12, Listen +10, Search +8, Sense Motive +12, Spot +10, Bluff +4

Languages: League common, Kothian, Hoor, Draconic, Thenol

Trelan is an odem, a malevolent spirit of great willpower, created by his greed, insanity, and obsession to acquire Basiliscus's bracelet, but of insufficient strength to become a full-fledged ghost. Although invisible to normal sight, people who are able to perceive ethereal resonance or have entered the border ethereal see Trelan in his normal form, that of a white vapor, taking a form similar to how a cloud would resemble a minotaur.

Unlike other odems, Trelan has retained the ability to cast one spell in undeath. He is able to cast a *tongues* spell once per day as a 5th level wizard; he uses this power to beguile people that his victim knows and find information on the *Imperial Bracelet of House Lacertidae*.

BACKGROUND

When Trelan, the apprentice of the renowned minotaur wizard Amrocar, stole the *Imperial Bracelet of House Lacertidae* from Basiliscus's tomb he unleashed a great evil into the world. Basiliscus's soul remained semi-dormant for many decades, influencing Trelan's decisions from time to time. Thus Trelan's life was almost destroyed by the time he approached the gladiator Bakiliskis. Basiliscus sensed his bloodline

running in the gladiator's veins and managed to influence the ex-apprentice to give the bracelet to his descendant.

But not even a day passed before the loss of the bracelet weighted on his soul. He wanted to acquire it again but was afraid to confront the gladiator Bakiliskis. When the challenger to the imperial throne came to him for advice on surviving his first night as emperor, Trelan developed a plan to take back the Imperial Bracelet. He persuaded the gladiator to protect himself by purchasing a potion of flesh to stone from his former master Amrocar, planning to destroy the gladiator's statue and then use the *willoshade oil* to bring the dismembered petrified arm back to its true state and take back the bracelet.

But when the plan backfired, resulting in the death of his former master, he was horrified; he knew that now it would be near to impossible to take back his prized possession. He went through all of Amrocar's notes on the tomb and the bracelet and left the city of Kristophan. As he lived in exile, his obsession and guilt were magnified; in the end he became a wreck of a man slowly losing his mind. But even in that state he managed to find Basiliscus's tomb. The following months he studied the tomb and the mummies still laying inside their sarcophaguses. He particularly became intrigued by the dissuasive inscription on the entrance of the tomb, that dire prophecy. He repeated it to himself over and over trying to find a meaning that would not make him feel guilty of releasing the evil of Basiliscus to the world.

In the meantime, Bakiliskis had ordered the collection of Amrocar's notes to be gathered into what became known as the infamous book of Amrocar, but he could find not even one reference to Basiliscus's tomb. He became obsessed with finding it, and ordered the apprehension of the wizard Trelan. A group of legionaries managed to come across the tomb, but were defeated by the wizard. He interrogated the remaining survivor before killing him too, and was informed about Bakiliskis's orders.

He knew that it was time to confront his nemesis and take back what was his, not knowing that the Imperial Bracelet had vanished. He managed to enter the imperial bedroom and used the potion of flesh to stone

to poison Bakiliskis's wine. With delight he saw the dragonman Emperor drinking it and turning into stone, before dispelling his *invisibility* spell, grinning at the shocked gladiator emperor. But to his dismay, Bakiliskis didn't have the bracelet. He used magic to find its whereabouts, but mists were blocking his visions. So, the next time he saw a rolling fog he entered it, and the Mists embraced him.

When he emerged from the Mists, he found himself in a familiar environment; he was inside the tomb of Basiliscus, but when he tried to get out, he discovered in horror that the entrance of the tomb was covered by earth. For the rest of his days, he tried to dig himself out of the tomb, before exhaustion and then dehydration left him helpless on the floor of the tomb's entrance hall. The place where he and the rest of Amrocar's expedition had taken shelter turned out to be the place where he would leave his last breath.

But his life would not end there; his obsession and insanity turned him into an odem, an undead spirit that moves into living bodies and takes control of them. Trelan's odem is still obsessed with finding the *Imperial Bracelet of House Lacertidae*.

CURRENT SKETCH

Trelan roams with the Lost Notes of Amrocar in his possession, restlessly searching for the bracelet. He uses his tongues power to learn as much as he can from other people, and then uses the person possessed to continue his search. He usually uses one person until his poor victim is driven catatonic from the evil deeds it has committed and mental attacks that have been suffered on the person's being, leaving behind an almost soulless shell of a person, before jumping to the next person to be possessed.

Jumping from one person to the other he has left in his path many shattered and broken souls, the blankness of their eyes revealing the emptiness of their souls, having lost the very spark of life. These unfortunate people are in an almost mindless state, having no interest in the outside world, a state know throughout the demiplane as "lost ones."

Victims of Trelan who reach this catatonic state seldom speak, but when they do it is in the periodical use of cryptic draconic variations of the inscription on the entrance of Basiliscus's tomb, even if they didn't speak draconic before. If they knew draconic in life, they may be more expressive, knowing the meaning of the words used, but they cannot communicate anything about the meaning the phrases, or what they refer to.

These phrases, after all, are the result of a madman's obsession; they are the same phrases Trelan created, trying to find another meaning for the inscription written outside Basiliscus's tomb as he was trying to get rid of the guilt he felt for Amrocar's death. This continuous guilt and repetitive obsession of creating a new meaning is what in the end drove him insane. Characters who happen to be possessed by the odem continuously hear the following draconic phrases in their minds, while their helpless bodies search for the bracelet.

Characters who ponder too much of these phrases and their meaning, when heard either by a "lost one" or in their heads before being released from Trelan's possession, or who compare them to the draconic inscription in the tombs entrance for too long (a week), must make a successful Sense Motive check opposed to a Bluff +4 check, as these are the ravings of a madman.

If the victim fails this check, he or she has been driven mad; as with other Madness saves, the degree of failure determines the result (subtract the victim's Sense Motive result from the perpetrator's Bluff result). On the other hand, if a Bluff check is made to discern a secret message in the tomb's inscription and fails by 5 or more, then the false information inferred is one of the above phrases (note that coincidentally some of the phrases turn out to be true).

*“Here the Gods can not at any summons enter, the Nameless One must **remain undisturbed**; do not approach the Nameless One, lest your soul be murdered; **beware of the servant of the ox that comes from towered skies and shall let that Evil once more upon the world.**”*

*“Here the Gods can not at any **summons** enter, the Nameless One must remain undisturbed; do not approach the Nameless One, lest **your soul** be murdered; beware of the servant of the ox that comes from towered skies and shall let that Evil **once more upon the world.**”*

*“Here the Gods can **not** at any summons **enter**, the Nameless One must remain undisturbed; **do not approach** the Nameless One, **lest** your soul be murdered; beware of the servant of the ox that comes from towered skies and shall let that Evil once more upon the world.”*

*“Here the Gods can not at any summons enter, the Nameless One must remain undisturbed; do not approach **the Nameless One**, lest your soul be murdered; beware of the servant of **the ox that comes from towered skies and shall let that Evil once more upon the world.**”*

*“Here the Gods can not **at** any summons enter, **the Nameless One** must remain undisturbed; do not approach the Nameless One, lest your soul be murdered; beware of the servant of the ox that comes from towered skies and **shall let that** Evil once more upon the world.”*

COMBAT

Trelan has the same powers as a normal odem with one weakness; if the Notes of Amrocar are more than three hundred feet from a possessed person, the odem is

forced out of his victim’s body. This does not stop Trelan from trying to repossess his victim if he or she re-enters his “territory.” If Trelan is expelled from his victim’s body, the first thing he will do is try to possess the person who holds them. If the Lost Notes of Amrocar are destroyed, then Trelan is no longer attached to them and can roam freely as any other odem, making him more dangerous; on the other hand, if the Notes are separated from each other, they are all magically transferred inside the leather file, with any pages not attached to the leather-bound file turning to blank papers.

Trelan’s odem can be destroyed only if Amrocar’s Lost Notes, including the leather file, are destroyed and then he is defeated in battle in his natural form. Another way to defeat Trelan would be to find the *Imperial Bracelet of House Lacertidae* and give it to the person the odem possesses to be worn. This would release Trelan’s victim from his possession and lay the odem to rest, but at the same time it would curse the wearer of the bracelet and put him under the influence of Basiliscus, turning the person from being possessed by an odem into sharing a body with the soul of that ancient emperor.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: QUARRY WORRY

The body of Trelan is still trapped inside Basiliscus’s tomb, since the odem is capable of moving just a few hundred feet from where the Lost Notes of Amrocar are. He can move only around that area until the tomb is discovered or opened. The adventurers have come across a Falkovnian quarry, when strange things begin to happen as miners attack each other or one by one are working to death to dig in a specific area of the mine. The PCs may be the ones who discover the tomb of Basiliscus, only to have one of them possessed by the odem.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: MASS CATATONIA

The adventurers encounter, in successive days, “lost ones” reciting different variations of the tomb inscription. Understanding that something is off, as how could different “lost ones” be saying the same things unless the source of their mental collapse is one and the same, they begin to investigate until they discover the odem.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: LET HIM CAST THE FIRST STONE

During a random encounter or investigation, they come by Trelan's newest possessed victim, who attacks them, but upon them killing or capturing the victim, Trelan releases it and tries to possess one of the PCs. If he is successful, he will do anything in his power to find the *Imperial Bracelet of House Lacertidae*. An alternate encounter would be to find the dead body of his last possessed victim.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: SCRIPTURES

The PCs have in their hands the Notes of Amrocar, they begin to investigate the information inside the file, learning about Basiliscus, his tomb and possible scenario of his resurrection. They travel in various places of learning, searching for scholars to help them find a way to avert the "Lizard's Second Coming".

DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE HAND OF BAKILISKIS

When Bakiliskis challenged Emperor Ambeoutin IX, he was under the influence of The *Imperial Bracelet of House Lacertidae* and Basiliscus's spirit. During the last gladiatorial fight against the Emperor previously known as Kommodus, Bakiliskis had a moment of clarity; knowing that something sinister was trying to possess him, he left himself vulnerable to Ambeoutin's attack but at that same time Basiliscus managed to regain control of Bakiliskis's body, trapping the emperor with his net. At the same time, Bakiliskis's hand was severed by the Emperor, releasing Bakiliskis from the ancient bakali emperor's possession.

Bakiliskis, retaining his composure, saw that there was only one way now to survive and drove his trident through Ambeoutin's neck, striking him dead.

As he looked at the stump in his arm, he turned to find his severed hand but it was nowhere to be found; it seemed to have disappeared in the cloud of dust that had risen during the last moments of the battle.

In reality, the cloud of dust that had appeared was another form the Mists had taken to prevent Basiliscus from taking the imperial throne, thus preventing him from achieving his heart's desire. Bakiliskis remained in Taladas, where his obsession for the bracelet drove him mad, while his severed hand and bracelet remained lost in the Mists, a prison for the bakali emperor.

When the Grand Conjunction came to pass, The *Imperial Bracelet of House Lacertidae* had reappeared in Falkovnia, in close proximity to the last of Basiliscus's bloodline. But the Dark Powers still taunted the trapped "Traitor Emperor." They gave a semblance of life to the severed hand, reanimating it as a crawling claw still wearing the bracelet. This way it would be difficult for the bracelet to possess anyone and lead them to find Basiliscus last remaining relative, The Basilisk. Also, since Bakiliskis's Hand could move around, it could be used to torment the odem Trelan, who is endlessly searching for the imperial jewelry, bringing more misfortune and destroying everyone in his path.

BAKILISKIS'S HAND

Crawling Claw; Diminutive Construct: CR 1; HD 1d12, hp 13; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 15 (+ size, +1 natural), touch 14, flat-footed 14

Base Atk +5 claw, grapple +5; Face/Reach: 1 ft. by 1 ft./0 ft. Atk +11; **Full Atk** +5 damage 1d4 Claw

SA Smite fallen, suffocate; **SQ** Blindsight, construct immunities, fast healing 1/rnd, **SR** 10; **AL** NE; **SV** Fort +0, Ref +0, Will -1,

Str 10, Dex 10, Con —, Int 4, Wis 5, Cha 5

Skills: Sleight of Hand+1, Jump +30

Fearsome Speed (Ex): Bakiliskis's hand has an extra partial action per round and its speed is 30ft

Leaping (Su): Bakiliskis's hand is able to do great leaps, gaining +30 bonus to all jump checks, with jumping distances doubled.

Smite fallen (Ex): Bakiliskis's claw can inflict double damage against a prone combatant.

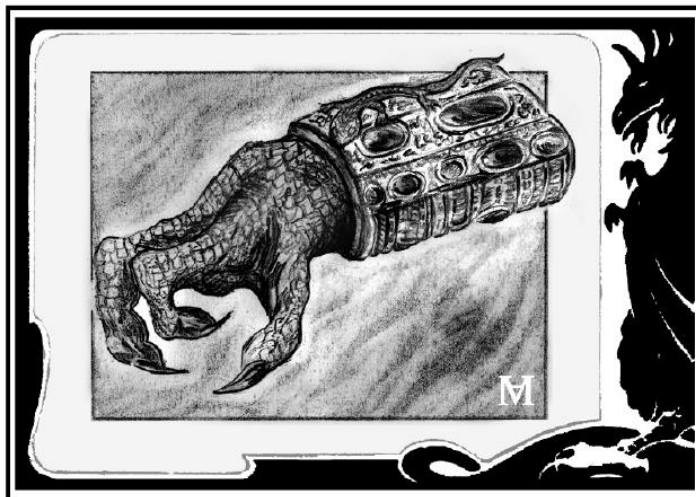
Immunities (Ex): Lacking eyes, Bakiliskis's hand is immune to gaze attacks.

Construct immunities: Immune to mind-affecting effects, poison, disease and similar effects. Not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

Fast healing (Ex): As long as Bakiliskis's hand wears the *Imperial Bracelet of House Lacertidae*, it heals 1 hit point per round.

Strangle (Ex): To attempt to strangle a foe provokes an attack of opportunity from the target, as the hand tries to grapple the target's throat. If that misses, then the hand must make a successful grapple attack with a -4 penalty. If the target is immobilized, unconscious, or otherwise incapacitated, the grapple automatically succeeds and strangulation starts. If the target is stunned, the hand receives a +4 bonus on its attack roll. If the grapple is successful, the hand begins to strangle the target, making a grappling check every round thereafter to maintain the hold. If the target does not break the strangle, the hand gets a +5 circumstance bonus on strangle checks made against the same target in subsequent rounds.

Strangled characters can hold their breath for 2 rounds per Constitution modifier as they struggle to breathe. If a character takes a standard or full-round action, the remaining duration that character can hold his or her breath is reduced by 1 round. After this period of time, the strangled character must make a DC 10 Fortitude check in order to continue breathing. The check must be repeated each round the strangulation continues, with the DC increasing by +1 for each previous success.



When the character fails one of these Constitution checks, he or she begins to suffocate, falling unconscious (0 hit points) in the first round, if strangulation continues and the character fails another Fortitude save he or she is dropped to -1 and is dying. If strangulation continues after that in the third round, the victim suffocates.

Attempting to strangle creatures that do not breathe, such as undead and constructs, is treated as a grapple.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE HAND

The setting is the residence of a wealthy Falkovnian merchant. In the middle of the night, the merchant is strangled to death. The PCs are invited by the merchant's family to solve the crime, as they fear that if the Talons are involved in the investigation, they will probably nationalize the property and execute everyone in the house. They become trapped in the manor, probably because of some urgent curfew enforced to rout out a Kargat agent. Each night, another person is murdered. The disembodied hand of Bakiliskis is the killer, in its search to find The Imperial Bracelet of House Lacertidae, which was acquired a few days before by the merchant. The heroes must solve the mystery and destroy the hand before it manages to get its hand upon the bracelet and disappears. The bracelet is locked in a safe inside the house.

THE SPAWN OF THE LIZARD

The group known as the Spawn of the Lizard was created in 740BC, during the events of the Grand Conjunction. As Kingfuhrer Vlad Drakov disappeared, creating a power vacuum in the government and earthquakes shook Falkovnia, the slaves, seeing it as an eschatological sign of the world to come, revolted and escaped to the countryside, becoming a great internal enemy army for the Falkovnian state. Under the leadership of "the Basilisk" the reptilian and dragonborn slaves managed to survive the Servile Massacre and based themselves in the area from Seelewald forest in the west to the Crumbling Hills in the east.

The group has managed during those years to create a network of underground passages and it constantly moves around the area both overground and

underground. The group menaces the agents and challenges the rule of Vlad Drakov south of Morfenzi and north of Aerie, attacking with hit and run tactics and guerrilla warfare. The trapmaking abilities of the kobolds who make out the majority of the group are used in great effect against Drakov's forces.

The group also has good relations with the goblins of the Crumbling Hills, usually allying themselves with them against their common enemy, Vlad Drakov's troops or humans in general, creating what is referred to as the Coalition of Lesser Humanoids by scholars.

The Spawn of the Lizard may acknowledge "the Basilisk" as their leader but they have a very different structure than other groups or even kobold communities in other domains. They have a council of representatives of different factions within their group; most prominent are the red kobold and dragonborn fractions. The council discusses logistics, battle tactics, and targets for more secrecy; presiding over this council is "the Basilisk."

For communal issues, the decisions are made by an assembly where all individuals have a saying and are considered equal. Differences and conflicts between individuals are usually settled in non-lethal fights or contests. This has led to a lack of deep rooted divisions and grievances within the group.

As far as the group is considered. every member of the group has a role and all individuals are equally important, but the kobold majority is sometimes resentful, as "the Basilisk" is usually the one to decide about which prisoner lives or who dies. This is a form of acknowledgment to "the Basilisk" and a given right by the kobolds to their leader, but it has also created tensions, as the evil nature of the kobolds and hatred for other races sometimes contradicts with their leader's decisions.

This has led to some more evil-natured individuals within the group to constantly challenge "the Basilisk's" leadership; those challenges are usually resolved in non-lethal battle or through the assembly. So far "the Basilisk" has managed to balance the power of the assembly with the power given to him, but usurpers wait patiently for their leader to make a big mistake or a

wrong decision that could make him unfit to preside over the council.



THE BASILISK

Male bakali Brb 5/Ftr 2/ Glr 3; CR 13; Medium (5 ft. 25 in. tall; HD 2d8+6+5d12+21+5d10+9, **hp** 94; **Init** +4; **Spd** 40 ft.; **AC** 15, touch 10, flat-footed 15

Base Atk +11/+6/+1; **Grp** +16; **Atk** +16 melee (natural+5, long sword +5), **Range Atk** +11; **Full Atk** +16/+16/+14 melee (1d6+5 Claw/ 1d6+5 claw, 1d4+2 bite)

SA berserking rage 2/day, feats; **SQ** Scent, feats, Trap sense +1; **AL** CN; **SV** Fort +13, Ref +5, Will +5;

Str 20, Dex 10, Con 16, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 12

Feats: Multiattack, Improved natural attack, Improved Initiative, Combat Expertise, Power Attack, Blind Fighting, Reincarnated, Improved Feint, Study opponent +1, Exhaust Opponent

Skills: Balance+11, Climb +5, Craft (Trapmaking) +6, Bluff +5, Handle Animal +4, Intimidate +12, Jump +12, Listen +8, Survival +8, Swim +14, Search+7, Spot +8,

Read/write, Hide +2, Diplomacy +7, Tumble +7, Knowledge (Architecture) +3, Knowledge (Nature) +3

Languages: Draconic*, Falkovnian, Goblin

CURRENT SKETCH

Throughout his life, the Basilisk has been a freeman, a fighter, a slave, a gladiator, and a freedom fighter, a hero but basically a survivor. He has managed to survive situations that few men or reptiles have managed and has thrived. His intellect and physical prowess have made him a natural leader to the Spawn of the Lizard, though not without any power struggles for the leadership of the group.

Due to the evil nature of most humanoids in his group, there are many who would disagree with his how he commands the group, including sometimes sparing the lives of the humans they capture. As the majority of the group are kobolds, they are resentful of most other races but have a deep respect for the Basilisk as he respects them. But there are times that a challenger will appear for leadership of the coalition of reptilian humanoids.

He sees this as the natural way of the world and doesn't keep a grudge, trying to be as open minded as possible, taking in account the advice of prominent members of the group and also frequently calling for assemblies, for all to decide what will be their next course of action or when some important issue comes up. This doesn't mean that he doesn't know that if he makes a wrong decision, another member of the group might take leadership of the resistance group.

He knows that if that happens there is a large possibility that some of the human-hating extremists within his group may take his place, something he fears will affect all resistance groups in Falkovnia and probably lead to disaster. This internal power struggle has made him become very calculating and sometimes even cautious in his decisions but also has created anxiety for him.

Lately he has begun to be plagued by nightmares; in these very vivid dreams he sees himself as a tyrant not very different than the current tyrant of Falkovnia. He usually wakes up while he is seemingly trapped into a pit, with his former comrades looking down on him.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE BASILISK'S TRUE NAME

No known historical record exists that mentions the name of the Basilisk before becoming a gladiator. Only the Basilisk knows his True Name; the others who may have known it are the rest of the gladiators who fought as the "Kingdom of the Lizard," and they are all buried in one of the massive graves outside the walls of Lekar. Could it be that the Basilisk doesn't reveal his True Name because of some superstition, or even a Tarokka reading by a Vistana Seer telling him never to reveal it? Could the Basilisk's True Name be used against him or even in some dark ritual? If so, is there a way for someone to learn his secret, since he will never disclose such information? Does he even remember his True Name or is it irrelevant what it is?

ADVENTURE IDEAS: IN THE SERVICE OF THE HAWK

Falkfuhrer Mikhail Drakov and the Ministry of the Arcane have deduced that The Basilisks True Name can be used against him. They hire the PCs to find information on the Spawn of the Lizard's leader. They are sent to a search through the records of the Grand Coliseum of Lekar, revealing the names of those who fought by his side in the arena. This could lead them to a large search for gladiator survivors of the arena, none of whom are willing to speak with agents of the Hawk. Maybe they take another turn, leading a great project of excavations of mass graves, trying to find the corpses of The Basilisk's old comrades and adversaries in the arena and summon their spirits to reveal the information needed. Maybe the Basilisk's true name still exists in the recruitment records of the Ministry of War and Defense in the Imperial City of Kristophan and his placement in the Dragonclaw Legion. Could it be that those same records mysteriously vanished from Kristophan only to appear in the Library of the University of Il Aluk in Necropolis or Azalin's Library in Castle Avernus? Or it could be even easier. Maybe the psychics of the Veiled Palm in Aerie could pierce through the rebel leader's mind and find the information the Ministry demands.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE VEILED PALM

In one of recent attacks by the Spawn of the Lizard, one official was captured by the kobolds, and they are asking for ransom so they can support their cause. What the humanoids don't know is that the person captured is one of the mediums of the Veiled Palm in Aerie. Maybe the person captured was Silva Winterhearth, a close associate of Dr. Rudolph Van Richten, making the Weathermay-Foxgrove Twins interested in saving their "Uncle Rudolph's" friend. The adventurers may manage to rescue the captive medium only to find that the leader of the Spawn of the Lizard is the reincarnated soul of an ancient emperor.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: DAWN OF THE LIZARD KING

A member of the Spawn of the Lizard, probably an Aurak Draconian, has discovered the tomb of Basiliscus and has realized that "the Basilisk" may be the ancient unnamed emperor entombed there. Knowing how the reincarnation ritual, works he plans to use it to create the leader he wants to follow.

**BASILISCUS, THE TRAITOR EMPEROR**

4th Rank Ancient Dead Warlock 8: Medium Undead Bakali, (7 ft. tall) **CR 13; HD 12d12; hp 97; Init +0; Spd 40 ft.; AC 27, touch 22, flat-footed 27;**

Base Atk: +6/+1; **Atk** +17/+12 melee 1d6+11 (slam + disease) Str bonus), melee (1d6+11 Claw/ 1d6+11 claw, 1d4+5 bite), **Range Attack** +6 eldritch blast 4d6 (range 60ft.), **Full Atk** melee +17 (melee) +4d6 eldritch blast;

SA berserking rage 2/day, eldritch blast, brimstone blast, hideous blow; **SQ** Invocations, damage reduction 15/+2, damage reduction 2/cold iron, turn resistance +6; **AL** CE; **SV** Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +6;

Str 32, Dex 10, Con - , Int 18, Wis 23, Cha 20

Feats: Alertness, Extra Invocation, Draconic Heritage, Draconic Knowledge, Draconic Persuasion, Toughness, Improved natural attack (Claws)

Skills: Bluff +15, Climb +19, Craft (Alchemy) +14, Craft (Poisonmaking) +9, Hide +8, Intimidate + 15, Knowledge (arcana) +17, Knowledge (the planes) +12, Knowledge (nature) +12, Knowledge (engineering) +12, Listen +14, Move Silently +8, Sense Motive +11, Spellcraft +9, Spot +14, Use Magical Device +10

Languages: Draconic*, Falkovnian, League Common, Thenol

Petrification Disease (Su): If Basiliscus makes a successful slam attack, the target has to make a Fortitude check DC 24 or contract a deadly disease that will turn the victim into stone. The disease's incubation time is 1 day, after which the unfortunate victim begins to petrify. The first symptom of the disease is that the unfortunate's skin stiffens suffering 1d6 points of Dex damage, but having their natural armor bonus improve by +1. In addition, the victim's increasing density causes the victim's weight to increase by +10%. As the disease progresses, the muscles harden, turning into a porous stone, damaging the unfortunate creature for 1d6 Dex points, with a +1 improvement to armor class and +10%

increase in weight. As the skin discolors and turns more stonelike, the victim suffers an additional a -1 Cha damage every day after reaching 2/3 of their original Dex score. If the victim reaches 0 Dexterity, it is petrified and there is no more Cha loss. While so petrified, the victim remains conscious for months until the body dies, as the victim is drained of 1 point of Constitution per month (30 days). When the victim's Constitution reaches 0, it is considered dead.

Casting stone to flesh on a victim infected with Basiliscus's petrifying disease removes all of the effects of the disease (returning the victim's Dexterity, Charisma, natural armor, and weight to normal), but this is a temporary remedy, unless a cure disease is cast as well. If a victim is cured after being completely petrified then Constitution points lost are regained at a rate of 1 each day until the cured victim returns to normal.

Aura of Dread (Su): Basiliscus imposes a supernatural aura that causes opponents to lose all hope, believing the ancient dead bakali is invincible on those who see him. Those viewing the ancient must make a Will save with a DC 20. Failure means that all attack rolls, saving throws skill, and ability checks suffer a -4 negative modifier. The dread persists for as long as the victims can see Basiliscus. Whether the target succeeds or fails, it cannot be affected by the Basiliscus's aura of dread again that day.

Rejuvenation (Su): Basiliscus can draw on the Positive Energy Plane to heal damage at a rate of 1 hit point per minute. He has to remain inert for 1 hour before rejuvenation occurs and then 1 hour after it is complete. That means that if he reaches 0 hit points it takes 5 hours for him to be fully healed and active again. While on this state he is inert and incapable of any action and cannot perceive his surroundings, rendering him effectively helpless. If he has started the rejuvenation process, he cannot end it until it is completed.

Animal Command (Su): The ancient is able to exert control over lizards. Basiliscus can rebuke or command lizards just as an evil cleric can rebuke or command undead. This ability takes effect as if used by a 10th level cleric.

Command Undead: Basiliscus's thirst for power and obedience has given him the ability to rebuke or command undead as a 10th level cleric.

Domination (Su): Those who fail on a DC 20 Will save against the ancient's dominating gaze, fall instantly under Basiliscus's influence for 10 days. The ability has a range of 30 feet.

Vulnerability to exposure (Ex): Because of the means of Basiliscus's death, this ancient dead is vulnerable to any spell that mimics the conditions of his mortal death. Basiliscus is particularly vulnerable to dehydration spells, wind spells, as well as light spells, being affected more and taking double damage from them (e.g., a gust of wind spell renders him prone as if he was of small size, while a sunbeam spell does double damage, plus the additional extra damage for being undead).

Immunities (Ex): Basiliscus as an ancient dead is immune to cold and lightning based attacks.

Fire Resistance (Ex): Because of his draconic heritage he has a +3 resistance to fire based attacks.

Resistant to Blows (Ex): Basiliscus is incredibly resistant to physical attacks. Physical attacks only do half damage, applied before damage reduction.

Turn Resistance (Ex): This ancient mummy is very hard to turn, having a +6 resistance to turning attempts.

Eldritch Blast (Sp): Basiliscus is able to use baleful magical energy to deal damage. An eldritch blast is a ranged touch attack ray with a range of 60 feet that deals 4d6 points of damage to a single target, allowing no saving throw and is equivalent to a 4th level spell. An eldritch blast is subject to spell resistance and deals half damage to objects.

Detect Magic (Sp): Basiliscus can detect magic as the spell at will.

Deceive Item (Ex) Basiliscus has the ability to use any magic device and when making a Use Magic Device check he can take a 10 even if distracted or threatened.

Fiendish Resilience (Su): Once per day, Basiliscus can, as a free action, enter a state that lasts for 2 minutes. While in this state, he gains fast healing 1.

Beguiling Influence (Sp): Basiliscus has the ability to beguile and bewitch his foes, gaining a +6 bonus on Bluff, Diplomacy, and Intimidate checks for 24 hours. This invocation, if combined with the Draconic Persuasion feat, increases the bonus by +4-1/2 in Bluff, Intimidate and Perform checks before the end of the next round.

Brimstone Blast (Sp): Basiliscus can change his eldritch blast into a brimstone blast that deals fire damage. Any creature struck must succeed on a Reflex save or catch on fire, taking 2d6 points of fire damage for two rounds after the initial brimstone blast attack, unless it takes a full-round action to extinguish the flames. A creature burning this way never takes more than 2d6 points of fire damage in a round.

Blast Shape Invocation (Sp) : Hideous Blow (least blast shape Inv. 1st) As a standard action, Basiliscus can make a single melee attack. If the target is hit it is affected by an extra damage as if struck by his eldritch blast or his brimstone blast.

See the Unseen (Sp): Basiliscus can use this invocation to see invisible creatures and objects within his range of vision, as well as any that are ethereal, as if they were normally visible for 80min. Such creatures are visible to him as translucent shapes, allowing him easily to discern the difference between visible, invisible, and ethereal creatures.

Darkvision (Sp): Basiliscus has a darkvision of 90 feet.

Entropic Warding (Sp): When this invocation is activated, a magical field, glowing with a chaotic blast of multicolored hues, swirls around Basiliscus lasting up to 8 rounds. This field deflects incoming arrows, rays, and other ranged attacks. Each ranged attack directed at him for which the attacker must make an attack roll has a 20% miss chance. Other attacks that simply work at a distance are not affected. Basiliscus leaves no trail for 8 hours and cannot be tracked by scent (he can still be detected by smell, just not tracked).

Voracious Dispelling (Sp): Basiliscus can dispel magic at will; any creature with an active spell effect dispelled takes 1 point of damage per level of the spell effect.

CURRENT SKETCH

Basiliscus is a calculating Machiavellian psychopath, raised in an environment of intrigue, plotting, and assassinations in the ancient court of the Bakali Empire. Being born in this toxic environment made him a master of elaborate plots, slowly climbing up the ranks and establishing his position. Believing that his intellect was vastly superior to the rest of the Bakali, he saw himself as the person most fit to rule over the Bakali Empire, but his arrogance and assertiveness were, and still are, his greatest flaws. Though he doesn't enjoy physical violence, preferring to outsmart his enemies he will not refrain from using it if he sees it is necessary, being more calculating of the pros and cons of a decision he makes than the ethics of it. But his lack of empathy makes it difficult for him to calculate all the possibilities of a decision.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE MUMMIFIED HAND OF BASILISCUS

The adventurers may warn the Basilisk, or the Basilisk could have accidentally retrieved an item and wants to complete the ritual, believing it will make him stronger, only to transform him into a pristine ancient dead emperor who wants to use the Spawn of the Lizard and his newly acquired powers take the throne of Falkovnia for himself.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE SHADOW KINGDOM

A force outside Falkovnia - Azalin or even a ruler of one of the domains of the alliance of the Treaty of the Four Towers - enlists the PCs to uncover the missing pieces of Basiliscus so that Vlad Drakov will face a massive internal conflict in his domain and stop his skirmishes on surrounding domains. Naturally, this plan can easily go off the rails with Basiliscus annexing lands from surrounding domains and even establishing a domain of his own.



The Cyclops's Legacy

EXPERIMENTS OF THE MINISTRY OF SCIENCE

BY MICHAEL ADAMIS

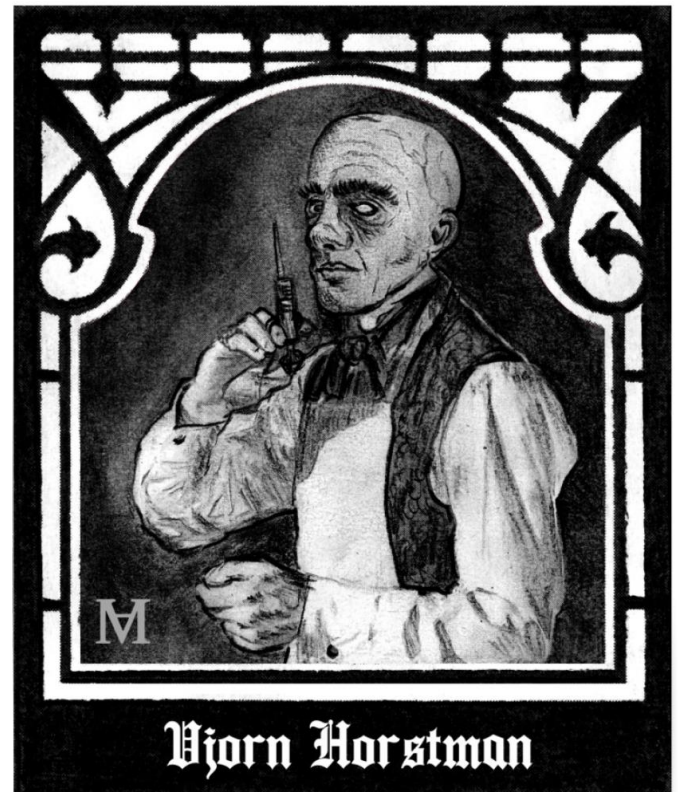
"Someday, he thought, I would like to meet a monster who looked like a monster."

— Ira Levin, *The Boys from Brazil*

In some of the more advanced domains of the demiplane, magic is slowly being replaced by science; in academic circles, spellcasters hide their magical powers behind a scientific facade, in Falkovnia, magic is detested by the domains darklord, and seen by tradition as an art of the weak. But although magic is barely tolerated, thanks to support from Falkfuhrer Mikhail Drakov of the Ministry of the Arcane, another ministry has gained more support from Falkovnia's tyrant, the Ministry of Science.

Overseeing the projects of the ministry is Falkfuhrer Vjorn Horstmann, also known as "The Cyclops," because of a damaged left eye (a result of a failed corporeal purifier) that he doesn't bother to cover. The ministry, under Horstmann's direction, designs and develops new war engines for battlefield use and, although the machines developed are never reliable, the Ministry of Science still receives the lion's share from the government coffers.

Some of these funds are used for other kinds of experiments - experiments involving human guinea pigs. Some of these experiments are successful, such as the Primal Serum that transforms men into werebeasts; others end in scientific failures that create abominations and a few could be so dangerous that they could change everything.



FALKFUHRER VJORN HORSTMAN

Human Artificer 5/ Alchemical Philosopher 7, Medium male, (5ft.56" tall) CR 13;

HD 5d6+7d4; **hp** 35; **Init** +2; **Spd** 30 ft.; **AC** 12, touch 12, flat-footed 10

Base Atk: +6; **Atk** +6 melee by weapon, **Range Attack** +8 (vials of acid) (darts with Primal Serum); **Full Atk** melee +6 (melee) by weapon

SA Cause lycanthropy; **SQ** Alchemical formulas, Infusions, Immune to lycanthropy; **AL** LE; **SV** Fort +3, Ref +3, Will+13;

Str 12, **Dex** 15, **Con** 11, **Int** 18, **Wis** 17, **Cha** 7

Skills: Craft (alchemy) +27, Craft (poison making) +12, Knowledge (arcana) +10, Concentration +17, Decipher Script +15, Heal +20, Innuendo +7, Knowledge (shapechanger) +21, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) +15 (+2), Use Magic Device +10 (+2*)(+4 scrolls), Appraise +10 (+2 potions), Search +10, Bluff +5, Intimidate +7,

Feat: Brew Potion, Spell Focus (Transmutation), Cold-Hearted, Create Device, Logical Mind, Skill Focus (Alchemy), Superior Alchemy, Laborious Training, Disable Trap, Item Creation, Scribe Scroll, Craft Wondrous Item, Craft Homunculus, Craft Magic Arms and Armor, Retain Essence, Artificer Knowledge +9, Artisan bonus (+2*)

Formulas: Corporeal Purifier, Emotional Purgative, Memory Coagulant, Regenerative Salve, Corporeal Purgative, Philosophical Purifier, Primal Serum

Infusions (4/4/2) DC14+spell lvl

Vjorn Horstman rose to power in the Ministry of Science after his intensive study of lycanthropy suggested that soldiers could be enhanced with controllable animal features. Horstman now experiments on criminals, prisoners of war, and anyone else hapless enough to fall under his control. (Vjorn Horstman and the Primal Serum are more fully detailed in the 2nd Edition supplement *Children of the Night: Werebeasts.*)

ADVENTURE IDEAS: A DARKLORD'S CAPTIVE

Frantisek Markov has learned about the Primal Serum's existence and wants to know the secret formula for its creation, believing it can cure him of his curse. He sends some of his most loyal and humanlike creations to go to Falkovnia and kidnap Vjorn Horstman. The PCs accidentally witness Horstman's abduction and, without knowing who has been kidnapped, hunt down the beastmen to Lamordia, where a small ship will take them to Markovia. Or they are offered a large amount of money to help the Falkovnian government take back one of their best scientists.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: KILL THE BEAST

The PCs have been trusted with the dangerous task of assassinating the Cyclops, as his experiments have created too much sorrow to the citizens of Falkovnia.

ALCHEMICALANIMA TOT

We were being hunted by the formidable Talons, when we reached Zapadnost River, as it is known in Patterna, meaning the River of Tears. But you probably know it as Drogach River, in the northern Falkovnian borderlands. The muddy riverbank wasn't helping as it was both making us slower and revealed on our location. We had to swim past the river and pass into the land of the wizard king Azalin, as the Talons wouldn't dare follow us there.

We were aware that Darkon's borders were not defenseless though. Stories of dead men clutching your foot, before slowly emerging from the mud, dragging you down as they were dragged out, and attacking with claws that made festering wounds, were frequent in the veteran filled city of Stangengrad, which we had just run off from. Fortunately, we thought, we had with us Florin Bălan, a Morninglord cleric and bane of the undead, at least that was how he introduced himself to us.

But probably he was a fraud, a con-artist as the rest of us, because when those undead attacked us while we were taking off our armor to swim across, he couldn't do a thing. He took out this rosy pink and golden symbol of his, to drive the dead away, but they continued

walking towards him; one of them actually ran towards him, biting him on the arm.

He screamed in pain until his scream became a moan, before turning to us with dead eyes. Then it was that I saw that these zombies had the sign of the hawk on their forehead. Were they dead Falkovnian soldiers animated by the wizard king of Darkon to defend his kingdom? Or were they actually Falkovnian dead men still loyal to their ruler? Let's say I didn't stay to find out.

-The Great Escape as recounted by Garridan Migra

ALCHEMICAL ZOMBIE

Medium Construct CR 1; HD 2d10+20; hp 31; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 12 (+2 natural), touch 10, flat-footed 12;

Base Atk/Grapple: +1/+3 (slam); **melee +3** melee 1d6+2 (slam); **Full Atk** melee +3 melee 1d6+2 (slam); range 5 ft./5 ft.

SA - SQ Construct traits, darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, construct traits, single actions only, damage reduction 5/slashing, vulnerability to fire, electrical charge; **AL** N; **SV** Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0;

Str 15, Dex 10, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 1

Alchemical Zombies are a creation of Falkfuhrer Vjorn Horstman and the rest of the alchemists working in the Falkovnian Ministry of Science. Unlike other walking dead, the alchemical zombies are constructs, not true undead, since they are not animated by negative energy but by an alchemical formula developed by the ministry. In appearance, they are identical to the rotten walking dead animated by magic, usually wearing dirty torn clothes. The only mark that could possibly identify an alchemical zombie is the mark of Vlad Drakov on their forehead, although there are as many unmarked alchemical zombies as there are marked normal ones.

The Dimorta Serum that is used in the creation of these zombies, combined with the animating force of lightning makes the muscles of these pseudo-undead creatures move. Being brainless animated corpses of destruction, they are unable to follow orders, attacking anything in site. They always attack with a slam attack, using both hands, and are unable to use weapons or make any tactical movement or formation. They were

first used in the Fourth Dead Man's Campaign as cannon fodder, in an effort to confuse the undead of Azalin's forces. Because of that they are usually found along the borders of Darkon or roaming aimlessly in the countryside of Falkovnia.

COMBAT

Alchemical zombies fight like normal zombies: mindlessly and relentlessly. Unless commanded otherwise by their creator, they just lumber forwards and attack the first enemy they meet. Their increased durability makes them intensely hard to take down and thus they are great at surrounding an enemy before they can be countered.

Vulnerability to Fire (Ex): As constructs, alchemical zombies are extremely vulnerable to fire and fire spells, taking double damage from such an attack.

Single Actions Only (Ex): Alchemical zombies, like their necromantic counterparts, have poor reflexes and can perform only a single move action or attack action each round. An alchemical zombie can move up to its speed and attack in the same round, but only if it attempts a charge.

Electrical Charge (Ex): Since they are animated by electrical currents, alchemical zombies get stronger when struck by electricity of any sort. Any attack that deals electricity damage hastens an alchemical zombie (as the *haste* spell) and removes the Single Actions Only ability from it for 3 rounds, with no saving throw.

Not Undead (Ex): Since alchemical zombies are not undead but constructs, they are immune to spells that inflict damage to undead. They are also immune to the powers of a priest's turning or commanding abilities, as well the commanding abilities of greater undead like a lich.

GREATER ALCHEMICAL ZOMBIE

Medium Construct, CR 1; HD 2d10+20; hp 31; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 12 (+2 natural), touch 10, flat-footed 12; Base Atk/Grapple: +1/+3 (slam); **melee +3** melee 1d6+2 (slam), 1d2+2 (bite) or weapon +2; **Full Atk** melee +3 melee 1d6+2 (slam), 1d2+2 (bite) or weapon +2; range 5 ft./5 ft.

SA Poisonous bite **SQ** Construct traits, darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, construct traits, damage reduction 5/slashing, vulnerability to fire, damaged brain; **AL** CN; **SV** Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0;

Str 15, Dex 11, Con —, Int 3, Wis 10, Cha 1

The experiments the ministry did to make alchemical zombies able to follow commands created a better version of the Dimorta Serum, called Dimorta B Serum. Instead of using already dead bodies to be animated, the Dimorta B Serum was used on living, breathing beings. The serum kills but at the same time transforms the victims into animated corpses filled with an uncontrollable rage towards their existence, this uncontrollable rage made these zombies also unable to

follow commands, becoming another failed experiment of the Ministry of Science.

These constructs are more sentient and agile, but also more dangerous and lethal, as the serum that animates them can be transmitted by the zombie's bite like a disease. Anyone who is bitten by a greater alchemical zombie risks having the serum transmitted to their bodies through the zombie's saliva.

Anyone who takes damage from the serum slowly changes into an alchemical zombie unless their body rejects the serum by itself or a *Neutralize Poison* spell is cast at the poisoned individual.



Because of the danger that these creatures posed, most of them were destroyed not long after they were created, but some managed to transmit the serum to living beings who carried the deadly serum outside the walls of the city of Lekar, where they began to spread like an epidemic. Because these zombies were easy to spot, and by enforcing local quarantines and mass burnings, most of these zombies were quickly disposed of.

But somehow the serum managed to transfer to other beings, spreading the pandemic outside of Lekar and into the countryside. While most villages that suffered losses from the disease were burned to the ground, some zombies still exist in the countryside sometimes changing the entirety of small, defenseless villages into bands of roaming walking dead, or burned corpses if the Falkovnian government manages to be informed of the spread fast enough.

Because they still have small remnants of their past lives in their brains, they are able to use basic skills and weapons. The only drawback for the Ministry of Science that these undead-like constructs had was that their brains were so chaotic that they were also unable to follow any order they were given. But that didn't stop the Falkovnian army from using them during the last Dead Man's Campaign in an effort to spread the serum and havoc to the people of Darkon.

(A connection can be made with the 5th edition where Vladeska Drakov's Falkovnia is plagued by alchemical zombies)

COMBAT

Greater alchemical zombies fight better than normal alchemical zombies and are also relentless. Because of their surviving intelligence they are able to understand the languages they knew in life, though they are unable to communicate themselves. Somehow, though, they manage to coordinate when fighting, becoming dangerous adversaries attacking like a group of hungry wolves.

Surviving Skills (Ex): They usually remember at least one surviving non-Intelligence or non-Charisma based basic skill.

Surviving Physical Feats (Ex): Greater Alchemical Zombies usually have one fighter feat they knew in life.

Damaged Brain (Ex): The process of transforming into an alchemical zombie besides being a traumatic experience creates also damage to the brain, as it also blocks the body's neurons. This translates into the alchemical zombie acting as though under the effects of a variation of the *confusion* spell.

01-10 Rage (Str +2, AC -2)

11-20 Zombie acts normally.

21-50 Zombie stands still (flat footed)

51-70 Run towards a random direction

71-100 Attack nearest creature

Poisonous Bite (Ex): The Dimorta B Serum that flows through a greater alchemical zombie's animated body can be transmitted like a disease to a living creature bitten by it. The target of such an attack must make an immediate Fortitude saving throw. If he succeeds, the serum has not been transmitted and has no effect. If the saving throw fails, then the target takes immediate damage from the serum.

Dimorta B Serum: Injected/Injury poison DC 11, Initial damage 1d10 Con; Secondary damage 1d10 Con.

Once per day afterward, the target must make a successful Fortitude saving throw to avoid repeated damage, as the serum inside the target's organism still tries to get a hold on the target. This is fortunately visible, as the target usually becomes very pale and sometimes their hair begins to fall out. Two successful saving throws in a row indicate that the victim has fought off the serum and will recover, taking no more damage. If a target is brought to 0 Con by the serum, then it immediately transforms it to a greater alchemical zombie, joining with the rest and usually attacking its former comrades. If the target is killed before the transformation is complete, then the body reanimates, but as a normal alchemical zombie, the serum in its body no longer lethal.

Not Undead (Ex): Since greater alchemical zombies are not undead but constructs, they are immune to spells that inflict damage to undead. They are also immune to the powers of a priest's turning or commanding abilities

as well the commanding abilities of greater undead like a lich.

Vulnerability to Fire (Ex): As constructs, greater alchemical zombies are extremely vulnerable to fire and fire spells, taking double damage from such an attack.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE MISTAKE

The PCs come upon a band of Falkovnian soldiers, commanded by a Talon, who burn a village to the ground. Horrified, they see bodies being stacked up and burned, some of them still moving. They decide to intervene as archers fire arrows against some villagers who run away from the village, only to realize too late that the village was overwhelmed by alchemical zombies able to transfer their condition to other people and probably spreading a pandemic to the Falkovnian countryside. They now have to fix what they created by joining the Talon and his soldiers and finding the rest of the zombies to terminate them before it is too late.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: PANDEMIC

The PCs enter the Ministry of Science to retrieve something or save a captive. During a fight, one of the alchemical zombie test subjects escapes, slowly spreading the Dimorta B Serum to the ministry. The PCs have to contain the zombies before they get out of the ministry and create a zombie epidemic.

THE DARK MEN

I was forced to enter the dirty sewers of the city of Lekar following that child, to avoid the patrol that was about to spot me moving through the shadows after curfew. The stench was enough to make me hesitate for a few seconds, but not obstruct me from entering; this funk was nothing compared to the foul odor of the vermin infested sewers of Pont-a-Museau. I climbed down the moist ladder until I reached the floor of the sewer. I felt the one I had followed looking at me; I tried to adjust my eyes to the darkness but it was to no avail, so I used a sulfur match to light a small lantern I had on me, when I was stunned, mouth agape, staring at the disfigured hairy creature I had mistaken for a child, who cowed before me.

This unfortunate creature had the basic structure of a human child, but was monstrous. Its face twisted into something resembling a human face and a bat; as soon as I tried to reach it in an unthreatening way, trying to calm it down, the creature spread what seemed to be its cape, but was actually a pair of vestigial wings, and jumped into the waterfall of filth behind it, before disappearing into the darkness.

-The Great Escape as recounted by Garridan Migra

The dark men are an accidental strain of broken ones created by Vjorn Horstmann while developing the Primal Serum, who have escaped his laboratory and continued their existence in the labyrinths of Lekar's shadow city, surviving as failed experiments. These creatures have made a community in the sewers of the city and although at first most of them were a mix between a humanoid and an animal, breeding between themselves has created a race consisting of a cornucopia of animal-like humanoids. These misshapen amalgam creatures have lived for decades in the sewers and are very protective toward each other and especially their children.

Although monstrous in appearance, they are not typically evil as their broken one counterparts are; the community they have created in the sewers of Lekar and the strange passages beneath the city is much more peaceful than the atrocity ridden capital of Falkovnia. If they are shown respect or kindness they will reciprocate with trust and hospitality, although because food is difficult to be found in the sewers, they will not be so ungrudging when it comes specifically to food, as their survival depends on it.

Dark Men Community: Monstrous; AL N; CL 1; 5gp limit; Assets 20gp; Population 80; Isolated (brocken one 100%) **Authority Figures:** Faurer (the Leader) UrDrd3; **Important Characters:** Amaro (thief) Rog2, Setkas (hunter) Rng3

ADVENTURE IDEAS: BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

One of the Dark Men used to be the love interest of one of the PCs, transformed into a beastman. But although the beastman's physical appearance has changed, its soul is still intact. The PCs will try to find a way to undo the transformation, when they learn of a scientist on an isolated island who has the power to transform beat into man.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE CITY BELOW

While trying to escape the Talons, the PCs end up in the sewers of Lekar. There, they catch a glimpse of something or someone stalking them; as they go further into the sewers the feeling of being monitored is ever-present. As they go further into the shadow city of Lekar, they discover the surviving community of Dark Men. Now they have to try to befriend them, as surviving in the sewers is so far their only option.

DIE ÜBERSINNLICHEN

I have no idea how long I was caged in that dreadful place. I could assess time only through my own tiredness. If I felt tired enough to sleep, I speculated that day was over, but because for the first several days I had remained sleepless from anxiety over what they would do to me, I had lost count. The people who worked in that bottle-filled room were working constantly, obsessed with finding something they called "psychic formula," as I heard them speak to each other.

I saw them trying one experiment on a prisoner woman who was caged opposite of me. I had tried to communicate with her when the Falkovnian doctors were not looking, but she never reacted; she had that blank stare, looking towards me but not seeing me at all. It was some time later that that changed, briefly.

The doctors injected her in the head, with a thick white fluid that looked like fat; there was no reaction on her face as they did that. It seemed as if she didn't feel pain, or the pain she felt was nothing compared to what she had endured while the Falkovnians experimented on her. As the doctors checked her vitals, I began to hear a slight whimper; it may sound crazy now but I tell you that I didn't actually feel like I was listening to it, instead

I felt it in my head, as if someone had inhabited my brain and stayed there crying.

With a mixture of horror and amazement, I understood that these blank eyes that stared at me in silence were not so silent after all. Somehow, that woman had invaded the privacy of my thoughts. The whimpering began to change, and it became louder and louder until it became a scream, louder than any scream I have ever heard in my life. Then, suddenly, the screaming in my head stopped as abruptly as the woman's head exploded.

-The Great Escape as recounted by Garridan Migra

**PSYCHIC LOST ONE**

Medium Human, CR 1; HD 1d8+1; hp 8; Init +0; Spd 15 ft.; AC 10 touch 10, flat-footed 10

Base Atk/Grapple: +0/+0 (slam); **melee** +0 or weapon; **Full Atk** melee +0 or weapon; range 5 ft./5 ft.

SA Psionic Power **SQ** Catatonic; **AL** N; **SV** Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0;

Str 10, Dex 11, Con 12, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 3

There are souls in the Land of Mists who have seen unspeakable horrors and haven't survived the trauma, their psyche forever shattered. There are others who, although healthy at first, become catatonic, unable to withstand the pain they suffer from torture, and there are those who are induced into that state under experimentation to unlock the secrets of the mind.

These latter lost souls are the psychic lost ones - victims of the Falkovnian Ministry of Science, in an effort to create a serum that would be able to give Falkovnian soldiers psychic powers. Some of these lost souls are driven mad by the serum, but gain hidden powers of the mind, powers that are useless to them since they have completely lost themselves in the process.

Others are not so lucky; they are detected by the ever-searching entity known as the Illithid-God-Brain and either vanish or are driven mad by horrors no mortal man was destined to ever witness.

Almost mindless, these lost ones have no interest in the outside world. If they survive the experiments and are set free, they wander about, sometimes staying in some place where they feel safe, other times dying from starvation, unable to take care of themselves. They are usually in a catatonic state, having lost the very spark of life that gives meaning to every person's being.

Psychic Lost Ones seldom speak or communicate in any way. When they do, it is often nothing more than a muttered warning, a periodic cry of alarm and terror, or a sudden cry of rage before attacking with all their strength anyone near them, like normal lost ones do. But unlike other lost ones, these accidentally mad, but purposely mentally developed, shells of their former selves can communicate or attack using their shattered minds.

COMBAT

Rage: Lost ones will take no actions to defend themselves from attack and will not normally engage others in combat. The only time they have been known to do so is when they are reminded of the terrors they have seen, usually entering a berserk rage attacking those responsible for the stimulus. In such cases, they attack with whatever weapons are nearby (usually just their hands). The ferocity and suddenness of their rage,

gives them +4 to Str and a -2 to AC, but pose a -1 penalty on their opponent's surprise rolls.

Psychic Powers: A psychic lost one can randomly choose to attack using their psychic attack, if they have one. A psychic lost one usually has 5 power points and one or two powers known.

Induce Madness: When a psychic lost one makes a mental connection with another humanoid the target must make a Madness check, as the horrors that the lost one has experienced and its insane thoughts invade the target's mind.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: A SIGN OF HOPE

The Psychic Lost Ones can be used in any scenario of escape from a Falkovnian prison when all seems lost. Use them as a way for the PCs to gain the key to their cell, or to save them by some psionic power that renders their captors incapacitated.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: SCANNERS

The Ministry of science has managed to improve the Übersinnlichen Serum and have created super-powered individuals capable of telepathy and psychokinesis. These artificial psychics are used in an attempt to stop the resistance group known as the Shadow Insurrection, led by Gondegal.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE REALMS BEYOND

As the PCs are captives of the Falkovnian Ministry of Science, strange occurrences begin to happen in the room. A lone psychic lost one has attracted the attention of the Illithid-God-Brain, and the domain of Bluetspur day by day presses on the psychic's reality, until he is abducted by tentacle like creatures. The PCs witness the abduction or disappearance of the lost one, or maybe the lost one makes a connection with one of the PCs, who witnesses what is going on and learns first hand of the existence of that dreadful realm. On the other hand, the psychic could make contact with all PCs present in the room, thus transporting everyone to the maddening domain of Bluetspur. (John W. Mangrum's article, "The Realms Beyond" can be found in the Kargatane's *Book of Souls*, and can give further inspiration for such a scenario.)

DREAD POSSIBILITY: NEBENWELT

While I was imprisoned in the laboratory cages of the Ministry of Science in Lekar, one of the few people who were able to interact with me was a weary man named Emil Hochburg. Although normal looking at first, except the extreme tiredness that was painted all over his face, he probably had also some kind of mental trauma, because he was always talking about the hordes of walking dead attacking Lekar and how he really had to have an audience with General Vladesca Drakov to pass on vital information he had about destroying the army of the dead. "Armies of the dead attacking Lekar, and a woman general in the Falkovnian army? this man is clearly a lunatic," I thought.

But his crazy ideas didn't stop there; when the doctors of the ministry interacted with him, telling him that there was no Vladesca Drakov in charge, and that he was fortunate that the Kingfuhrer couldn't hear what he was saying, the man demanded to be taken back to something he called The Apparatus, hidden somewhere in the caves of the Crumbling Hills. As you can imagine, the doctors of the ministry weren't patient with him, and used him for their next experiment.

It wasn't until I escaped that I began to question my own mind. You see the man I sought out to help me escape Lekar, a few months later, when I escaped the ministry laboratories, was none other than Emil Hochburg! Although I had seen him agonizingly tearing himself to pieces after an injection, before turning into a pool of flesh, there he was, alive and living free. But that wasn't the thing that horrified me most, because as he talked to me, I got a glimpse of what appeared to be a Talon bracelet hidden under his ragged clothes.

-The Great Escape as recounted by Garridan Migra

Although the Ministry of Science never became interested in Emil Hochburg's weird stories, there was a young alchemist who became intrigued in the madman's views of a parallel world - Reiner Nebenmann. It wasn't long before Reiner found more people believing they had arrived from a parallel world, a world he decided to call Nebenwelt (named after himself). He began to select and research all these

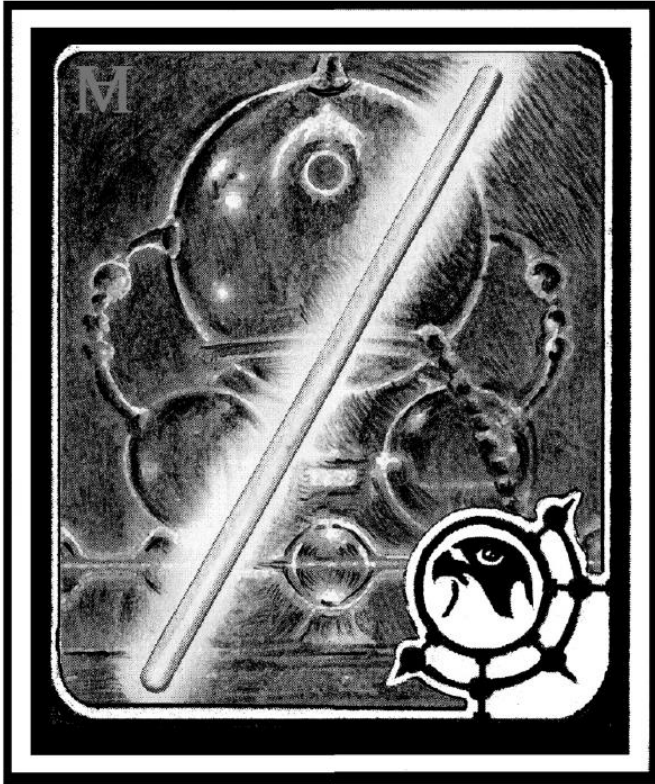
people's accounts, until one day he got his hands an old notebook belonging to someone named only as the Alchemist.

Reading it, he understood that in these notes lay the plans of how to build a massive device capable of the powers of transpossession, soul splitting, or unifying two souls in one body.

To activate the machine, another part was necessary: the Rod of Rastinon, or in some other cases the Rod of Houtras, a variation of the original. During his research, Reiner came upon on some of the writings of Lazarus Ikonnas, and the idea of the shadow world being inspired from the mind gave him the spark he needed for his own creation.

What if there were as many shadow worlds as there are people? And if they were, how could he be transported in one? How could he be transported to a world of his own design, parallel to this one? This idea became an obsession, and he began working even more hours in the Ministry of Science, both to keep up with the ministry's projects and also continuing secretly his own in his free time. The laboratory was essentially his home now; he spent most of his days there, using drugs and serums to keep him awake.

But this reckless, exhausting way of life took its toll on him. He began to have hallucinations, caused by his sleeplessness; it didn't take long before his strange behavior was reported to Minister Vjorn Horstman. He he was thrown out of the Ministry of Science, not long after he had succeeded in creating the key to his mind world, the Rod of Nebenwelt. The rod and Reiner's notes are still within the ministry's laboratories; Reiner is obsessed with taking back his creation and obtaining the resources to find the Apparatus, since no one will ever fund the project of a madman.



THE ROD OF NEBENWELT

The Rod of Nebenwelt is a crystal shaft, two feet long and a half inch in diameter, almost identical to the Rod of Rastinon or the Rod of Houtras; only an Identify spell or a DC30 bardic knowledge, knowledge arcana or spellcraft check can identify it for what it actually is. Silvery sparks occasionally flicker along its length inside, crackling quietly. There is a 5% cumulative chance per round that a deliberate attempt to break the device will work. This transforming crystal of Wondrous Power operates the Apparatus for travelling to a parallel world. Without this rod, the alchemist's machine will only perform transference; But the Rod of Nebenwelt hasn't the power to activate the union and splitting of souls. (This item could be used to connect the old version of Ravenloft with the 5e version found in *Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft*.)

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE

High overlooking the southern pass of the Crumbling Hills and the surrounding lands near the border with Borca, is Castle Falkenstein. The castle is reminiscent of the era of the Silver Falcon Kingdom and is built on a rocky foothill as a Falcons nest. (For more information on Castle Falkenstein check *QtR#4*). There, the Ministry of Science has begun to build the Apparatus, finding the Alchemist's notebook and notes of Reiner.

Understanding the significance of his research, and also that of the Rod of Nebenwelt, they have presented Vlad Drakov with an alternative way of conquest, the conquest of other worlds.

The adventurers either learn of Vlad Drakov's plan or go there on a rescue mission for villagers abducted from the Borcan village of Patterborne. They reach the area where the Apparatus is placed, only to be accidentally transported to the other version of Falkovnia.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: DER DOPPELGÄNGER

The adventurers meet another version of a dead NPC or of one of themselves. Researching, they learn of the existence of the Rod of Nebenwelt and the Apparatus and decide that they have to destroy them both, probably in both worlds.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: DIE GESCHICHTE DES VERRÜCKTEN

The adventurers meet a madman roaming in the streets of Lekar. The obviously demented man is constantly talking about the other world. The man is none other than Reiner Nebenmann, and he tries to persuade the PCs to help him retrieve the Rod of Nebenwelt from Ministry of Science labs. The PCs (and the DM) have to decide if there is actually such a powerful item in the Ministry of Science, or if these are just the ravings of a madman.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: DIE ZEITMASCHINE

The Talons managed to apprehend me and returned me to the laboratories of the Ministry of Science, where I was caged once more. It wasn't long before I was transported, blindfolded, to the countryside. The singing of birds seemed like mourning, for what I expected would be a gruesome death in some kind of experiment

the ministry had devised. When the carriage stopped, I was dragged out for some time; the only change I could feel was the change of temperature and the smell of moisture and bad air.

Then the humming begun, a sound that became louder and louder until it became a droning sound like a billion bees would probably make. They took off my blindfold and I understood that I was within a massive cave. In front of me was a tunnel, built from what appeared to be copper, from the torch light and the sparks that appeared on the walls of the tunnel, the drone was coming from the copper walls as they vibrated against the natural rock of the cave.

“Please enter,” said a gaunt, scary looking man, with his dry skin drawn tightly across his cheek bones. His head and whole visage looked more like that of a skull than the face of a living man, but he was living. I knew that because I had seen him before in the laboratory of the Ministry of Science. I knew who he was from his iconic, white left eye, having not a trace of a pupil or an iris; this was the dreaded Vjorn Horstman, the man most Falkovnians called “the Cyclops,” and I knew then that I was doomed. He came closer to me, examining me with his good eye, surrounded by bushy eyebrows.

“You wanted to escape, didn’t you?” continued the dreadful Minister of Science, “Well now it is your chance,” he said, showing me the copper tunnel, crackling with small sparks of lightning, as I felt my hair being pulled up by the machine’s electric charge.

-The Great Escape as recounted by Garridan Migra, and recorded in Saulbridge Sanitarium by Dr. Germaine d’Honaire 706BC.

THE TIME MACHINE

The time machine is a large copper tunnel constructed in one of the various mine caves of the Crumbling Hills. Built in a rare collaboration between the Ministry of Science and the Ministry of the Arcane, The Time Machine is immovable, as its time travelling powers are based on harnessing the time shifting powers of the tunnel itself, this is probably caused by a time fugue

because of the tunnel’s proximity to the Shadow Rift. The cave’s location and time-shifting powers were found by one of Falkfuhrer Mikhail Drakov’s trusted men, while the Radiant Tower of Lekar was being ransacked by Drakov’s men.

With the help of the Ministry of Science, they have managed to somehow control the powers of the tunnel, for the use of sending people back in time. What they haven’t accomplished yet is a way for those people sent back in time to return back and report, so usually they get reports from various codes in old books. Therefore, both ministries have begun to accumulate a vast number of books in their search for any coded message from the past. The other disadvantage the machine has is that it cannot send people to the future or, even if it could, there would be no way to find out from the future’s past.

When the machine activates, a loud droning noise echoes through the tunnels where it is located; sparks of lightning light up the cave where it is situated, and a cloud of mists appears inside the tunnel. If someone enters the tunnel when the machine is not operating, they will end up on a rocky dead end at the tunnel’s other side, since the copper plates block the cave’s natural powers.

The machine is activated by a series of transparent crystal rods that somehow are combined in a strange system developed by both ministries. Entering when the machine is active sends people back in to a specific time in the past. The reason why Drakov hasn’t used this to fix past mistakes in his campaigns is due to the difficulty of one-way communication between the past and the present, and also that the machine can activate for only a few minutes at a time, so he can’t send large numbers of reinforcements to the past. For now, the volunteers who enter the time machine are sent to gather intelligence, as no one from the past will believe that they are from the future.

There is also one more setback with the time machine - no one can travel before the year of Falkovnia’s formation, which limits the time span of destinations. Vlad Drakov has lost interest in this device, feeling that it is too limited, and has stopped any further funding for

more experiments. For now, the only purpose of this time travelling device is to take Falkovnian spies back in time to gather information that is mostly useless, since every time some new discovery is made by these spies and encrypted so that it can be read in the future gives away information that has been, at the same time of the encryption, revealed in the present.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: DER ALTE MANN

The adventurers meet an older version of an adversary they know, or an NPC. Through this, they learn of the existence of the Time Machine in the future. Afraid of what this could cause to the Demiplane, or even fearing that Drakov could use it to conquer other domains, they plan to destroy the plans of the machine in Lekar.

Or maybe the machine is already being constructed in the time cave of the Crumbling Hills, and must be sabotaged.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: TIME BANDITS

The adventurers learn about the time travelling machine and decide to use it to change something in their past. The machine somehow malfunctions at the last minute, as the Mists cover them and send them to any time or destination the DM wishes. This way the DM can use this device to play any adventure he or she wants, without thinking about the canon timeline.

Special thanks to tomokaicho for insight on the use of the Artificer PrC. for Vjorn Horstman.



BORCA: A LAND OF POISON AND INTRIGUE

BY TOMMASO "MISTMASTER" MAZZONI

Official Name: THE BARONY OF BORCA

Culture level: Chivalrious

Ecology: Full

Climate & Terrain: Continental, Borca is a fertile plain between the Balinok Mountains, the Vasha and Strecura rivers and the Blight Marshes;

Languages: Common, Darkonian, Lamordian, Vaasan, Okrainian.

Religions: Church of Ezra the Preserver

Races: Humans 96%, other 4%.

Governement: Hereditary Aristocracy.

Ruler: Baroness Camille Dilisnya .

Darklord: Camille Dilisnya .

Lightlord: Ivana Boritsi.

Inhabitants: 7 million.

Surface: 47,000 square kilometres.

Analog: XV-XVI Century northern Italy.

Capital City: Levkarest (115,000 in, Standard, N/E),

Important towns: Sturben (89,000 in, Standard, L/E), Chiara (54,000 in, standard, N), Patterbone (30,000, non-standard, L/G)

Borders: North: Richemulot, Falkovnia and Nidala, East: Dorvinia and Barovia, South-East: Lazendrak, South: Gundarak and Invidia, West: Verbrek.

In Borca, the horror is the horror you can find bottled in an apothecary and in the heart of a ruthless merchant.

DOMAIN OVERVIEW

The Balinok Mountains in the south-east and the Blight Marshes in the south-west make up much of the Borcan borders; the last one is delimited by the River Vasha and the River Strecura in the North-west. In the middle we have the River Luna, which cuts the country in two halves. Levkarest, Borca's capital city, lays on the western bank of the southern course of the Luna River. Sturben, the second city in Borca, guards the only crossing on the southern half of the Vasha River. Chiara lays in the Blight Wood, south-west of the Luna River. Patterbone is an heavily fortified town which guards the border with Falkovnia.

THE PEOPLE

Borcans are a shrewd and trade-oriented people. They believe in the value of experience, and usually believe in something only with enough proof. Borcans are familiar with poison, so they are cautious eaters and drinkers. However, they develop a fine sense of taste and smell, which makes Borcan cooking some of the best in the world.

Borcan people know that looks deceive, but they also know that appearance has a value, so they seek both practicality and beauty in their craft. Borcan people are cautious and respectful, yet they know how to hold a grudge. Borcan feuds are prolonged yet discreet affairs, as Borcans favour subtlety over violence. All Borcans

TROPES

Borca is the land of poisons, both literal and figurative; it's a land of distrust and betrayal, where the brighter the smile, the sharper, and more poisonous, is the knife.

know their numbers and how money works; even a Borcan peasant grasps at least a bit of financial and economic matters, making them good bargainers. Borcan riches come from their herbs, their silver mines, and their factories.

History

Age of Creation

During the Clash of the Gods, Ezra found a boy named Boric defending his sister from horrible monsters. Touched by the boy's courage, she saved them. Boric and Borica became the first followers of the Goddess, and spread her gospel in the Core.

Age of Empires

The Olympian Empire conquered much of the Core, and Borca was one of the richest provinces. Ezra was identified with Athena, and what is now Levkarest was once an Olympian city called Athenopolis.

Age of Darkness

After the fall of the Olympian Empire, the Tergs invaded and conquered Borca, persecuting the Church of Ezra. The Borcan noble families kept their independence in present-day Dorvinia and in the mountains of Barovia. The common enemy did not stop the families from fighting among themselves. The most well-known feud was the First Silver Knives War.

The Modern Age

The von Zarovich Crusade freed Borca from Terg domination, the Church of Ezra became legal once again, and Borca became a part of the Kingdom of Barovia. Unfortunately, the rich feuding families of Borca chafed under Barovian domination, and Leo Boritsi tried to assassinate the von Zarovich family at the wedding of Sergei von Zarovich. It backfired, and the Dilisnya, Bosco, and Boritsi families had to pass the Balinok mountains to avoid extermination. Here, they proclaimed the independence of Borca and Dorvinia, and at the end of a bloody war with Barovia, it was recognized under the agreement that the Count-King of Barovia was nominally both Borca's and Dorvinia's overlord, an arrangement which is still in effect. The

Pact between the Borcan houses and the Homefaith was then signed, allowing Borcan merchants to travel the Mists relatively safely. Borca saw four pretty bloody civil wars between the Dilisnya and Boritsi families, called the Second, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Silver Knives Wars, which were ended by the marriage of the eldest Boritsi, Klaus, and the eldest Dilisnya, Camille.

The Current Age

Camille Dilisnya's reign as Baroness of Borca has seen the bloody invasion of Falkovnia repelled thanks to Barovian military support, and the signing of the Seven Towers agreement. Under her shrewd guidance, after the untimely death of her husband and co-ruler, Klaus Boritsi, Borca became a major economic and financial power in the Core. Recently, she has renounced the ancient Borcan Overlordship over the Dorvinian Lordship, after her favourite nephew Ivan, the hero of the war against Falkovnia, successfully rose to power there.

PLACES OF INTEREST

Levkarest is the Core's financial heart, even more than Corvia, and second only to Paridon in Zherisia for importance worldwide. The Boritsi, Desfraya, and Dilisnya Banks and Trade Companies are seated in Levkarest.

Also, Our Lady of the Shield, the great Cathedral of Ezra, the most ancient and splendid Ezrite Temple in the world, dominates the central square of Levkarest. Marsav Hall houses the Government of Borca, and it's where Lady Camille resides. Misericordia, the Boritsi country home and Lady Ivana's current residence, is just outside the heart-shaped walls of Levkarest. The renowned Academy of Style is seated in Levkarest, along with the headquarters of the Borcan State Militia. The ruins of ancient Athenopolis lay under Levkarest, forming a huge labyrinthine complex.

Several inns, hotels, and restaurants dot the city, the most popular being the Dark Lady, Desfraya Manor (owned by the eccentric and very rich noblewoman, Margarethe Desfraya), Rosebud's Thorn, Sun's Peak, and Tinfella Tavern.

Sturben is a trade hub, and houses the main factories in Borca. The Mercantile Guilds prefer Sturben as their seat, as Levkarest is too close to the central power. The Cerulean Hall is the seat of the Guilds. The Green Mirror is a famous inn and restaurant. The local Temple of Ezra is the Azure Cathedral.

Chiara is a thriving mercantile town, which controls the wood market in Borca thanks to its position in the Blightwood. The local Temple of Ezra was built on the ruins of an Olympian-age temple of Athena. The Walker's Leg is the principal inn and renowned meeting place in the city.

Patterbone is a fortified city on the border with Falkovnia, and houses the national militia. The Maiden's Shield, the local temple of Ezra, houses the Holy Order of the Maiden's Shield, which is the military arm of the Church. The Mistway Refuge is the most famous inn in the zone. It is ruled by a rugged veteran of Collodian origins called Benito Spadaforte (Middle-aged human Fighter 6, L/G).

RELIGIONS: EZRA THE PRESERVER

This L/N religion teaches to build strong relationships inside the community, to follow rules, and to participate in public life. Success in any honest activity is seen as proof of Ezra's benevolence, while failure is the price of human fragility, but not necessarily a sin. The Mists are the materialization of the hazards any faithful will find on the road. Traveling and communicating is seen as a way to keep civilization alive. Ezra does not praise stagnation, but teaches her followers to preserve what is good. The Borcan sect is the most tied to tradition and hierarchy; base priests are called Anchorites, intermediate ranks are the Sentires, Arch-Sentires being the most prestigious of them, while the Arch Priest is the Bastion. It's holy symbol is a shield with a belladonna flower and a sword on it. The favourite weapon of the church is the longsword. Ezra's domains are: Community, Law, Mist, Nobility, Protection, and Travel.

In Borca, Ezra's church is the state religion, and it's holy days are official holidays.

THE FAMED AND THE INFAMOUS

Ivana Boritsi

(Human Ermordenung Rogue Courtier 12, N/G) Lady Ivana is Lady Camille's elder daughter and heir, and she is also her first political opponent. A kind, smart, forgiving woman, Ivana's burden is that her touch is poisonous, and that makes her marital life difficult. In spite of all circumstances, she has managed to conceive three daughters, Kla, Natalia, and Alexandra. All of them must live undercover for their own protection, and the inability of hold them close is Ivana's sharpest thorn in the heart. Their grandmother wouldn't hesitate a second to use them against Ivana, and she can touch them without endangering their lives. Ivana has also to bear the luckily distant attention of her morbidly affectionate cousin, Ivan, Lord of Dorvinia. Ivana is a devout follower of Ezra, and counts her uncle as a close ally.

(Adventure hook: Ivana once every year celebrates her triplet daughters' birthday in a secret location, where her mother can't interfere. To keep an eye on the party organization, she offers a hefty sum to the PCs.)

Alexander Manduchi

(Human Alchemist 10 L/G) Lord Manduchi is a scholar and a brilliant alchemist, but his own acquired immunity to poison isn't enough to allow him riskless intimacy with his wife. A truly devoted husband, he makes the best of the difficult situation he is in. He is still searching for a permanent solution.

(Adventure hook: Alexander's research into something to completely block the Ermordenung's poison is near a turning point, and he suspects the Deadly Rose might try to stop him; he employs the PCs as bodyguards to defend himself and his research.)

Bastion Jakov Dilisnya

(Old Human Cleric of Ezra 11 L/N) Younger brother of Camille Dilisnya, Bastion Jakov is the highest member of the Home Faith of Ezra, and he is also a powerful political player in Borca. While fundamentally honourable and loyally devout to the church and its tenets, he is also a refined and ambitious political actor

well versed in the art of navigating the treacherous, poisonous sea which is Borcan politics.

(Adventure hook: Recently rumors of Jakov's worsening health have become insistent, and Jakov suspects his sister of being the rumor-monger. To shut the rumors down he has decided to visit the principal temples in Borca in a pilgrimage-like tour. He employs the PCs as bodyguards.)

Hight Anchorite Claude Dulocq

(Middle Aged Human Heretic Cleric of Ezra 10 L/E) Dementlieuse by birth, Dulocq is the Chancellor of the Council of the High Anchorites, the ruling body of the Borcan Church of Ezra. Dulocq isn't as faithful and orthodox as Jakov is, and he is even more ambitious.

(Adventure hook: Duloq dreams of installing a theocracy in Borca, and he is planning to assassinate the Bastion and any obstacle in his way; the PCs stumble upon his plans by chance, and now they must stop it.)

Captain Victor Momeala

(Adult Human Fighter 8 L/G) The head of the Levkarest Militia is an idealist, a veteran of the Falkovnian invasion, and an honest man. This means there is no one less qualified to that job, being an honest man in a viper's pit.

(Adventure hook: After he put a nobleman trying to bribe him in jail, Captain Victor must use a food and drink taster. But the people trying to kill him are way smarter, and he will need the PCs help if he wants to survive.)

Bevel Boritsi

(Young Adult Human Rogue 5 C/G) Idealistic cousin of Lady Ivana, Bevel is determined to use the family fortune for a good cause. *(Adventure hook: He wants to create a foundation to help those in need. Worried about the people the boy is trusting, Ivana asks the PCs to serve as his guardian angels.)*

Lady Clotilda Taroyan

(Human Adult Arithmancer 8 N) Clotilda is the head of the Tollere Service, an organization of financial

investigators. She is a detached and cold woman with a troubled past.

(Adventure hook: Clotilda in her youth had a relationship with Ivan Dilisnya, the current Lord of Dorvinia, and gave him a son which has been raised by commoners in the countryside. When the boy is kidnapped and his mother is blackmailed, she needs the PCs help to save him.)

Lady Margarethe Desfraya

(Middle-aged Human Feytouched Bard 6 C/G) Lady Margarthe is the anti-conformist aunt of the current head of the House. A patron of the arts, she invests her considerable patrimony in funding worthy causes.

(Adventure hook: Margarethe's Grandmother is a Sidhe, a quasi-immortal elf-like fey from the Shadow Forest. Her descendants inherited a longer life span, some arcane power, and a great beauty, unmarred by time. Whenever her ancestry is called into question by slanderers and gossipers, she uses her wit to retort it against her opponents. However, when a young man seduces her to steal a valuable family heirloom, she ask the PC's for help to recover the stolen goods.)

Lord Robert Tatenna

(Human Adult Aristocrat 7 L/E) The rich and ruthless head of house Tatenna, a young yet most successful Borcan noble house, Robert is a very ambitious businessman. He was recently struck with misfortune when his family manor in Levkarest burned in a roaring fire, killing his wife and forcing him to relocate in Chiara.

(Adventure hook: In truth, Robert killed his wife and burned the manor to cover up the deed; the specter of his wife still haunts him, and he wants to manipulate the PCs to vanquish her without revealing his deeds.)

Garret Tallgallows

(Adult Halfling Rogue 12 C/N) Garret Tallgallows is the most successful thief in the Core; he is wanted in almost all the states of the Core, but not in Borca, where he keeps a low profile.

(Adventure hook: When a bounty killer manages to find him, Garret needs help to save his life, and the PCs may be his best survival possibility.)

Gato Foukai

(Adult Human Ronin 8 L/E) The Rokuma exile Gato is one of the richest men in Borca, and he is in the business of building speculation, with a sinister reputation. Currently, he is interested in the activity of the masked vigilante Nightclaw. Gato may be involved in the activities of the Black Lotus, a Rokuma guild.

(Adventure hook: Gato was exiled from Rokushima Táiyoo because he was not going to kill himself to keep his honour. In Borca, he helped fund a chapter of the Black Lotus, which is slowly gaining control of Levkarest criminal activities. His own building enterprise and a deal with house Dilisnya allowed him to establish quite a strong position. However, the masked vigilante Nightclaw is interfering with his business, and he is trying to manipulate the PCs against him.)

Doran Muchaka/Nightclaw

(Middle-aged Human Vigilante 8 C/G) Doran Muchaka is a renowned socialite during the day and a crime-fighter during the night. In his youth, he was an adventurer, until his brother was killed in Levkarest by a robber. Then he stopped traveling, and he changed his life completely. He is a good friend of van Richten and a supporter of the Van Richten Society.

(Adventure hook: After the death of his beloved brother, Doran invested his resources to crime-fighting. Wearing a fearsome mask reminiscent of a lynx, he fights against powerful criminal gangs, nefarious thugs, and the scheming noble families. As the PCs investigate a mysterious murder, they stumble upon the Nightclaw.)

Kirgo Talnikto / The Jongleur

(Adult Kamii Vistani blooded Half-Fiend Rogue 11 N/E) Camille Boritsi's personal bodyguard, he is also a masked assassin and an half-fiend which often clashes with Lady Ivana and Nightclaw. He conceals his true demonic aspect under his jester attire or using magical disguises.

(Adventure hook: A friend of the PCs is killed. The only clue? A card with a jester hat.)

Arch-Sentire Levin Postoya

(Old Human Cleric of Ezra 9 L/N) Levin is the Former Sentire of Ilvin in Dorvinia, and the current Sentire of Chiara. He would be Jakov's first choice as a successor should the Bastion die, but his health is not as good as it used to be, even if his mind is still sharp and his faith is still strong.

(Adventure hook: Levin had to leave is post in Ilvin because of his strong disagreements with Lord Ivan. The revenge of the mad master of Dorvinia might still strike him by proxy, so he asks for the PC's protection.)

Sentire Geofri Solda

(Middle-aged Human Cleric of Ezra 7 L/N) A wandering missionary in his youth, he was often involved in dangerous adventures. He earned his rank as Sentire of Sturben with his deeds, but he payed for it with many scars; some of those scars, are not visible, but hurt way more. He provides a strong spiritual guide coated in useful practical advice.

(Adventure hook: A demon from the past returns to haunt Geofri. Only Ezra, maybe acting through the PCs, can help him now.)

Captain Marcu Nutretta

(Adult Human Fighter 6 L/E) Merciless, unforgiving, and ambitious, the Captain of Sturben's City Guard is an expert loop-hole abuser, more interested in ensuring his own advancement than in serving justice and upholding the law.

(Adventure hook: A PC's friend is put in Sturben's jail, and captain Nutretta makes the PCs an offer they cannot refuse.)

Gran Maester Iohannes Severin

(Middle-aged Human Paladin of Ezra 8 L/G) The head of the Holy Order of the Maiden's Shield, a war-hero and a man of very strong beliefs, Severin does not care for formalities, and he is a straightforward man prone to offend the wrong person. He resides in the fortified city of Patterbone.

(Adventure hook: Severin has been the victim of several suspicious accidents after clashing against the Baroness.)

Not a man easily intimidated, he is however smart enough to ask the PCs to investigate the matter.)

ORGANIZATIONS

The Black Lotus

This L/E Rokuma criminal organization formed a chapter in Borca, under the blessing of the Baroness. The head of the Borcan branch of the organization is the mysterious Chimamire Notsuki (Ogre Mage Monk 5, L/E), a close ally of the Baroness.

(Dread Possibility: The Dark Lotus Extract. The Black Lotus is going to launch a revolutionary drug, the dark lotus extract, on the market; This drug and its effects are still unknown, but rumors says it will easily become a huge success.)

The Boritsi Trading Company

This L/G business enterprise with interest in the whole Core continent and beyond, the financial power of the Boritsi family made them one of the most influential families in the world. While local representatives may dabble in unsavory activities, the Company maintains a strong ethical code, pursuing profit together with the advancement of the communities it operates in. its CEO is Ivana's younger brother, Anton Boritsi (LG Adult Human Aristocrat 8).

(Dread Possibility: Rotten Apples. A cadre of officials of the BTC may be actively lobbying to divert the bank's funds to unethical activities.)

The Deadly Rose

Borca's L/E secret service and Camille's personal secret police force is exclusively made up of Ermordenung women. Lady Nostalia Romaine (Adult Ermordenung Slayer 9, L/E) directs the Thorns from Sturben.

(Dread Possibility: The Deadly Garden. in the countryside of Levkarest, there is a prestigious female college, the Elenia Windalla's Perfectioning School, where the daughters of Borca's wealthiest families get high quality education. Rumor says that the school is a recruitment and training facility for the Deadly Rose, where future Thorns are selected to be prepared and transformed into lethal Ermordenung.)

The Desfraya Bank

A L/N business bank, headed by the powerful house of Desfraya, they are, together with the BTC, the financial arm of the Ezrite Church. Its CEO is the mysterious Lady Izabelle Desfraya (L/N Adult Aristocrat 2 / Sorcerer 7 of the fey Bloodline)

(Dread Possibility: The Collector. The Desfraya Bank is infamous for its motto, "We will have our due." They are not irrational nor ruthless in collecting their credits, but they always get it. Some say that the bank employs a powerful fey known as the Collector for the most complicated and valuable cases.)

The Dilisnya Business Bank

A L/E aggressive business and financial company with many shadowed operations and a reputation for ruthlessness, it's CEO is Camille's ruthless younger brother, Stepan Dilisnya (Middle aged human L/E Aristocrat 7).

(Dread Possibility: The Sixth War of the Silver Knives. The Dilisnya family wants to stay on the top, and if push comes to shove, they ought be ready to fight a war. Should it start, the DBB can field an army of assassins, thugs and poisoners.)

The Holy Order of the Maiden's Shield

This is a L/G knightly order, which is the military branch of the Home Faith and a central part of Borca's own military force. It is commanded by Grand Maester Iohannes Severin.

(Dread Possibility: The Maiden's Dagger. The Shields are honourable and brave, but often, in Borca, honour is a hindrance. A secret order of assassins, whose existence is a myth even to the Grand Maester, is said to hide inside the Order's ranks and act against any threat which can't be dealt with honourably.)

The Tollere Service

This Neutral organization controls public finances, plays referee between the various companies, and manages the revenue. Lady Clotilda Taroyan is the current head of the institution.

(Dread Possibility: Who controls the controllers? Only the Council of Nobles can appoint and dismiss the head

of the Tollere, and it assembles in Levkarest once every five years. Five years is a long time; what would stop the richest family from bribing the Tollere's agents and functionaries? What if the numbers are counterfeit? Is Borca really so rich?)

THE DARKLORD: CAMILLE DILISNYA

Medium Middleaged Human (Rogue Poisoner 13, N/E)
(130 HP)

Speed: 30 feet

Initiative: +4 (+3 in Marsav Hall)

Senses: Perception +19 (+3 in Marsav Hall); True Sight

Armor Class: 25, Touch 17, Flat Footed 21 (+4 Dex, +8 armour bracers, +3 deflection)

Space/Reach: 1 square /1 square

Combat Maneuver Bonus/Combat Maneuver Defense: +9/25 (+3 in Marsav Hall)

Str: 10, Dex: 22 (18), Con: 12, Int: 22 (18), Wis: 20 (16), Cha 18

Saving Throws: Fort +5 Ref +14 Will +9 (+3 in Marsav Hall)

Special Qualities: Curse of the Dark Lord, Immune: Poison; Detect lies, Use of Poison, Modify Poison, Evasion, Uncanny Dodge, Improved Uncanny Dodge, Rogue Talents (distracting attack, lasting poison, surprise attack, swift poison, deadly cocktail, hidden mind); Ageless Body. Mastery 3, Sinkhole of Evil 3.

Special Attacks: Poisoning Touch (CD 25), Sneak Attack (+7d6), Poisonous Words, Seductive Stare.

Attack: Melee: +2 *Unholy Quick Dagger*: +18/+18/+13 [1d4+2 plus Poison (see Poisoning Touch) (CD 25) and 2d6 unholy damage against Good aligned targets]] (+3 in Marsav Hall)

Range: +2 *Endless Ammunition Darting Ring of Poison* +17/+12 [3 + Poison (Sleep, CD 30) and Poison (See Poisoning Touch) (CD 25)], 20 ft. (+3 in Marsav Hall)

Skills: Appraise (+22), Bluff (+23), Craft (alchemy) (+22, +28 with poisons), Diplomacy (+23), Disguise (+20), Escape Artist (+22), Intimidate (+23), Knowledge (local) (+22), Knowledge (nobility) (+22) Knowledge (religion) (+19), Linguistics (+22), Perception (+21), Perform (oratory) (+19), Sense Motive (+24), Sleight of Hand (+25), Stealth (+22). (+3 in Marsav Hall)

Feats: Iron Will, Skill Focus (Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, Sense Motive, Sleight of Hand), Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (Dagger).

Challenge Rating: 15

Property: Components for 10,000 gp value, 100 pp, +2 *Unholy Quick Dagger*, Headband of Mental Prowess (Intelligence, Wisdom) , Belt of Incredible Dexterity +4, +2 *Endless Ammunition Dart Ring of Poison*, Clock of Resistance +3, +8 Armour Bracers, +3 Protection Ring (House Dilisnya family seal), Dilisnya Silver Teaspoon, a single dose of every known poison in every possible variant and their antidotes.

BACKGROUND

Camille Dilisnya was once an innocent girl, but innocence doesn't last much in a country ablaze in civil war. When she was not even 10 years old, her father and her mother died in front of her, their torsos pierced by crossbow quarrels. Under the tutelage of her shrewd uncle, she became a practical woman, and out of practicality she agreed to marry Klaus Boritsi, putting an end to the Fifth War of the Silver Knives and ascending to rulership of Borca. Camille and Klaus' marriage was a happy one for a while, then he started to cheat on her. She retaliated by cheating on him, but what she didn't tolerate were the rumors and the ribald songs. She killed her husband's mistress, as she flaunted it too much, and Camille will never forgive a direct slight. Growing obsessed with her look, she started to dabble in alchemy, which she used to poison her husband's illegitimate offspring—they were a threat to her own, in her mind—and, finally, Klaus himself. But she did not kill Klaus out of jealousy for his infidelity. No, she killed him because he ignored her plan to have their daughter Ivana marry her favourite nephew, Ivan Dilisnya. Camille's last betrayal was trying to destroy her daughter's happiness by killing Ivana's husband along with her own grandchildren. She did so by transforming the pregnant Ivana into an Ermordenung, a living poison vehicle. But Lord Manduchi was able to save himself and his children. Camille's actions earned her the embrace of the Mists, which fully promoted her to Darklordship.

CURRENT SKETCH

Camille still rules Borca with an iron fist in a silk glove, and she is always at the center of the gossip chronicles. She is in a tenuous relationship with her brother Yakov, who insists on putting the church's interests above his family's. Her subterranean war against her daughter goes on, but Ivana is proving herself to be a better player than Camille thought. That at once makes her proud and enraged. Her goal is to preserve the fortunes of her family and to promote her power.

COMBAT

Camille is loath to engage her opponents directly. She usually prefers to operate behind the scenes. If forced to act herself, her favorite weapon is poison, followed by her dagger, Viper's Tongue.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Poisoning Touch: Once per round she can coat any object with a contact poison as long she has a dose of the poison with her. The DC of the saving throw is 25 or that of the regular poison, whichever is higher.

Seductive Stare: It works like Charm on every humanoid, with the difference that instead of trusting, her people lust after Camille. A DC 25 Will save negates. It does not work on people Camille lusts for.

Poisonous Words: It works like the Rumor Monger rogue talent, but it also allows Camille to actively infect a target with a mental condition as long as the rumor is active: Paranoia, Insomnia, Ochlophobia (fear of mobs) or Crippling Insecurity. A DC 25 Will save negates. The target can repeat the saving throw every day, and can't be influenced two times by the same rumor.

Curse of the Dark Lord: Camille's body is immutable on the outside, but she feels herself getting older. Not only in the mirror, but every time she is alone with a man or woman she lusts for, she can feel her body sagging, and she takes any word as a slight. She has not had a decent intimate relationship since the moment she attempted to kill her daughter's family.

LAIR

Marsav Hall is a luxurious mansion, and its halls bore witness to Camille's most infamous deeds, because of which it became a Rank 3 Sinkhole of Evil. It can bestow the Paranoia, Lust, and Sickened conditions (Will negates, DC 25).

CLOSING BORDERS

When Camille wishes to close the border, black, rose-like flowers grow all over it, and they release a poisonous aroma. Every non-poison-immune person who smells the aroma falls asleep if they do not pass a DC 25 Fortitude save every round for 100 rounds. Camille can close the border up to a month.

NEW ARCHETYPES: ARITHMANCER (WIZARD)

The Arithmancer is a Wizard who learns the magical and divinatory powers hidden behind numbers and mathematical formulae.

Associated School: Divination.

Suggested Opposition Schools: Conjunction, Evocation or Necromancy

Knowledge Is Power (Ex): Your understanding of physical forces gives you power over them. You add your Intelligence modifier to combat maneuver checks and to your CMD. You also add your Intelligence modifier to Strength checks to break or lift objects. This substitutes for Scribe Scroll.

Replacement Powers: The following school powers replace the Forwarned and Scrying Adept powers of the divination school.

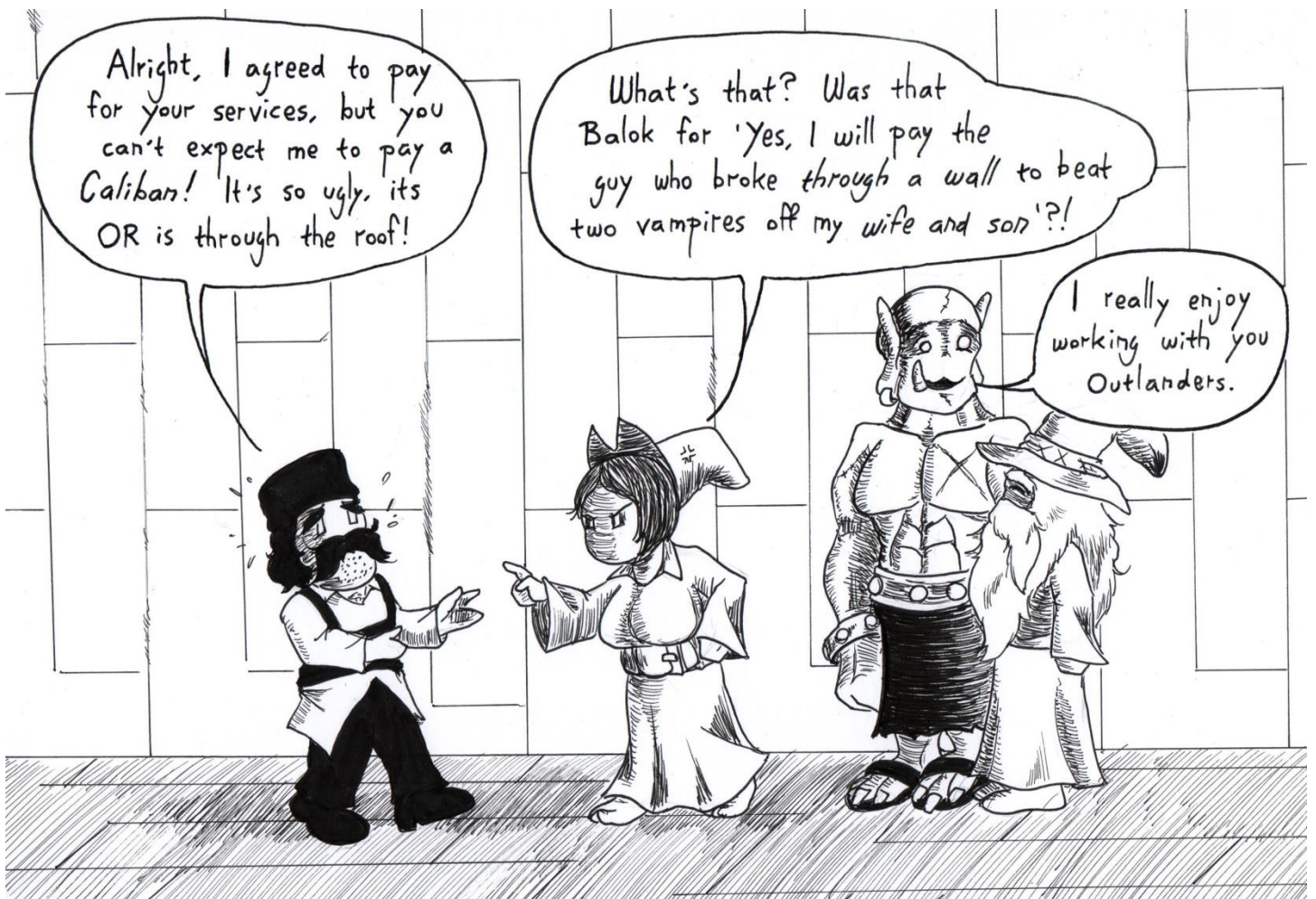
Numerology (Su): You can use your knowledge of numbers to enhance your ability of recognize spellcraft, and through sheer logic you can avoid the Mists' influence. Decrease the regular chances of failure for Divination spells by 2.5 % per level; add half your level to Spellcraft and Use Magic Device checks. At 20th level, when you make a Spellcraft or a Use Magic Device check, you can be assumed to have rolled Natural 20.

Add Numbers (Su): At 8th level, you can increase the number of spells you can prepare. You may prepare a number of additional spell levels equal to the level of

the highest level wizard spell you can cast. For example, if you can cast 6th-level wizard spells, you could prepare six 1st-level spells, two 3rd-level spells, or any similar combination that adds up to a total of six spell levels. These additional spells must be Divination spells.



Moral Outrage Rating...



JUDGMENT ON SILENT WINGS

OWLMAYS IN 5TH EDITION

BY JONATHAN "HELL_BORN" CRAWFORD

Full credit to Hugo Viegas Nascimento, who invented the Owlmay for 2nd edition in the *Book of Shadows* and updated them to 3rd edition in the *Undead Sea Scrolls 2002*. This article would not be possible without them.

LORE

In realms beyond the mists, there exists a sacred sisterhood who have devoted themselves to protecting the wilderness from those who would harm it. Made up of a mixture of rangers and druids, this sorority is most defined by its signature mystical ability; to freely shift between their original human forms and the regal forms of swans. Known as swanmays, the sisters of these orders are found in many lands, and whilst the trappings may differ slightly, their goal remains multiversal.

It should be no surprise, then, that these misty realms have their own branch of the sisterhood... albeit one that has changed greatly.

The Sisterhood of the Silver Feather claims descent from a band of swanmays who found themselves stranded in the Core whilst pursuing a terrible enemy, a mighty undead creature that actively fed upon the life energies of the land around it, slaying and corrupting all plants and animals within its sphere of influence. To make matters worse, their magical tokens, based upon primal magics granted by fey patrons, ceased functioning in this strange, alien land.

Lost and alone, they were found by a new patron; a powerful Arak, in the guise of a great owl, sought them out due to their strange aura of fey magic. Upon

hearing their story, this mighty fey mage offered to become their new patron, and the former swanmays accepted. Though they had to sacrifice their former forms, they found their new owl guises to be worthy replacements, and with their patron's blessing, they swiftly found and slew their target. Unable to find a way home, the sorority decided to simply accept the will of fate and begin their new life in the misty realms.

This was when they learned that magic in these lands always has a price. Their magical powers were already altered from their swanmay origins, which they accepted as natural. But when the first of the "owlmays" bore a child, she found herself the horrified parent of a creature that was half human babe, and half giant owl chick! She barely escaped her former husband with her life, and soon the others of the original sisterhood found they too would give life to such hybrids.

Faced with a dilemma, the owlmays argued as to what would be the correct course of action. Finally, wiser heads prevailed; despite their shocking appearance, the owlmay chicks seemed to bear no innate malice, and the decision was made to bring them up in the tenets of the sorority. Out of fear of the hostile reactions from ignorant strangers, the owlmays withdrew to the deep forests, where they have remained. Whilst the owlmays still seek to recruit worthy women into their cause, the sorority is slowly being wholly replaced by their harpy-like offspring, and perhaps one day it is these feytouched avian calibans who will be all that is left of the Sisterhood.

The Sisterhood is isolated, but found throughout the forests of the Core. Kartakass and Darkon are the primary stomping grounds of this sorority, although they have tenuous but positive ties with both the druids of Forlorn and the Keepers of the Black Feather in

Barovia. Wherever they are found, the Sisterhood strives to protect nature from being despoiled, with a particular focus on hunting and slaying the undead, whom they regard with particular hatred.

Owlmayes can be divided into three groups; rangers, druids, and "born" owlmayes. Both the ranger and druid traditions passed down through the Sisterhood are united by their focus on the assumption of their totemic owl and giant owl forms, although each puts their own distinct spin on it.

Born owlmayes are a startling sight to the natives of the misty realms. They resemble nothing so much as a harpy, having the basic bodily structure of a human woman, but with the legs of a giant owl. Their arms are covered in feathers, doubling as wings that grant them the ability to fly, from which their talon-like hands emerge. Their eyes are large and piercing, with a naturally intense gaze, and a crest of feathers sits atop their scalp in lieu of hair. Whilst they possess enough lingering magic to assume a more human-like shape, retaining human form is straining for a born owlmay, and inevitably they must resume their true shape to rest and recuperate. Born owlmayes are typically both highly wary of outsiders and intensely curious about them, a consequence of their isolated origins. They feel a strange kinship with calibans, but tend to instinctively loathe the deathtouched races.

RANGER CONCLAVE

3rd Level: Owlmay Magics

Starting at 3rd level, you learn an additional spell when you reach certain levels in this class, as shown in the Owlmay Magics table. The spell counts as a ranger spell for you, but it doesn't count against the number of ranger spells you know.

3rd: Cause Fear

5th: Shadow Blade

9th: Enemies Abound

13th: Confusion

17th: Mislead

3rd Level: Owlshape

You gain a spellcasting focus in the form of a feather token. So long as you have this focus in your possession, you can spend a spell slot as a bonus action to polymorph into an Owl. You remain in owl shape for 1 hour per spell level, or until you use a bonus action to revert to your normal form. If your feather token is lost or destroyed, you can create a new one as part of a long rest.

7th Level: Superior Owlshape

When you use Owlshape, you can instead transform into a Giant Owl. Use the stats for a Giant Eagle, but add the Flyby trait and Darkvision 120 feet.

11th Level: Hybrid Owlshape

When you use Owlshape, you can choose to assume a half-humanoid, half-owl form. In this form, you gain a Fly speed of 40 feet and a Climb speed equal to your land speed for the duration of the transformation.

15th Level: Superior Owlmay Magics

So long as you have your feather token in your possession, you can cast spells when in Owl form or Giant Owl form.

DRUID CIRCLE

2nd Level: Circle Forms

The rites of your circle grant you the ability to transform into more dangerous animal forms. Starting at 2nd level, you can use your Wild Shape to transform into an Owl (you ignore the Limitations column of the Beast Shapes table, but must abide by the other Max CR column there). Starting at 6th level, you can use your Wild Shape to transform into a Giant Owl (treat as Giant Eagle with the Flyby trait and Darkvision 120 feet).

2nd Level: Owl's Tactics

When using Wild Shape to assume the form of an Owl or Giant Owl, you can use a Bonus Action to Disengage or Hide.

6th Level: Flyby Strike

When Wild Shaped into an Owl or Giant Owl, when you make a melee attack against a creature, you don't provoke opportunity attacks from that creature for the rest of the turn, whether you hit or not.

6th Level: Primal Strike

Starting at 6th level, your attacks in beast form count as magical for the purpose of overcoming resistance and immunity to nonmagical attacks and damage.

10th Level: Whisper Quiet

When Wild Shaped into an Owl or Giant Owl, you have Advantage on Stealth checks. You also gain Minor Illusion and Prestidigitation as bonus cantrips.

14th Level: Death From the Dark

When Wild Shaped into the form of an Owl or a Giant Owl, you are Invisible.

RACIAL STATS

Natural Inclinations: Dexterity, Wisdom, Charisma

Size: Medium

Speed: 30 feet, Climb 20 feet, Fly 30 feet (from 3rd level)

Superior Darkvision: You have Darkvision to a range of 120 feet.

Sunlight Sensitivity: You suffer Disadvantage on attack rolls and Perception checks based on sight when you or the object of your attack/scrutiny is in direct sunlight.

Winged Arms: You do not take falling damage so long as you are not Incapacitated. From 3rd level, you have a Fly speed of 30 feet, but you lose the use of your hands and arms whilst flying.

Silver Feather's Blessings: You know 1 Druid or Ranger cantrip of your choice.

Human Guise: You have two forms; Owlman and Human. You can shapechange between these forms as a bonus action. In Human form, you lose access to your Superior Darkvision, Sunlight Sensitivity, Winged Arms, and Clutching Talons traits. None of your game statistics, clothing, or equipment change. You are considered to be a Shapechanger for effects that target such creatures.

Clutching Talons: Because of your claws, you have a climbing speed of 20 feet. Your claws are natural weapons, which you can use to make unarmed strikes. If you hit with them, you deal slashing damage equal to 1d4 + your Dexterity modifier, instead of the bludgeoning damage normal for an unarmed strike.



Lampago

A STORY SET IN D&D MODERN

BY: STANTON F. FINK

I

In a spartan, yet squalid living room of a spartan, yet squalid apartment, a cat poked its head through a gap in the cardboard-sealed window. It oozed onto the filthy yet barren floor, silently skittered towards a duct-tape upholstered couch, and leaped up onto it. The liquid animal seeped in between duct-taped cushions, and disappeared. Behind that miserable, tape-mummified couch in that miserable living room, there was a door leading to a miserably small bedroom.

Dominating that miserably cramped bedroom was a dilapidated mattress. Flanking that dingy mattress was a lamp-adorned fruit crate its owner pretended was a nightstand. A beat-up vanity dress with a cracked mirror sat on the far side of the bedroom (if the room could be called that) as though to distance itself from that farce of a decorative afterthought.

A large, redheaded man, no, a living, breathing mountain in pajamas, lay asleep on that miserable mattress. On the crescendo of the mountain's snoring, a button popped off of his pajama shirt, allowing a meadow of thick, white hair to blossom across his vast chest. A thin, little boy, too petite to be called "bony," lay nestled deep in a valley formed in the crook of his brother's massive arm.

The mountain instinctively pressed the boy close to him in a hug. He then placed his shaggy paw-hand over the boy's maimed right hand. With his swollen thumb, the mountain gingerly stroked his brother's scar-puckered knuckles near where the boy's fingers once were. The mountain yawned a mighty, rumbling yawn as another button popped off,

turning his meadow of white into a hairy avalanche of snow that flowed up his bull neck to splash against his craggy chin.

Clutching his whimpering brother to his vast, shaggy chest, the mountain sat up. He pivoted towards his pretend-nightstand, and planted his big, shaggy, bedroom slippers-esque feet squarely on the floor. The mountain let his brother lay in his lap as he switched on the lamp, their mother's lamp. He fumbled for, then fumbled with a plastic phial with his shaggy paw-hands before finally prying that infernal, child-proof lid off with a horn-colored talon that slid cleanly out of the broad tip of his sausage finger.

"Hey Dunc, Duncan," the mountain cooed. "You need your pills."

He stroked Duncan's sand-colored hair. Duncan pried his mouth open a crack to let his brother put his pills in. The mountain then put a water bottle to his brother's lips for the obligatory swig. The mountain slurped down the rest of the water to wash his own pills down. He let Duncan lie back down onto the mattress.

The mountain, in turn, got up out of bed, and shambled towards the door. He shot a brief, venomous glare at the beastly reflection in his cracked vanity mirror.

"Get a life, ugly," he snarled.

In his short death march to the bathroom, the mountain didn't notice, or rather didn't care, that a thin tail was successfully fighting its way out of a tear in the seat of his pajama pants. He was too busy

remembering a time when he still looked human, no, a time when he still *was* human. Back in the glory days as a globetrotting photojournalist, just after his glory days as an all-star college athlete. He remembered that glorious day when he was called into his editor's office to receive his "greatest assignment ever."

"Rudy, my son," Rudy remembered his editor saying. "You're heading an expedition to Yunnan, China to document the Maohu People."

Rudy remembered laughing upon accepting that assignment. No reason really: he was a big laugher in those days. The mountain scowled as he banished that awful memory from his shaggy head.

Rudy stood before his bathroom sink, reluctantly facing down his reflection. Once upon a time, long, long ago, the mountain adored primping and preening and posing in front of his reflection wherever he met it. Those glorious days were so long ago now (but not long ago enough, in the mountain's personal opinion). He stared at that mirror, studying how his scruffy beard and fluffy muttonchops were smothering his once-handsome, once-human face. He never was pleased how his luxurious facial fur made everyone think he was some sort of elderly hipster-yeti, either.

Rudy gently traced the thick tip of his sausage finger around the outline of the reflection of his face, hoping to numb his urge to thrust his ham-like paw-hand through the mirror. He watched his hairy, hair-filled ears growing bigger, steadily emerging from his fluffy sideburns.

It was coming, he realized.

With that realization, the rest of Rudy's pajama buttons popped off as his mighty chest barreled out. A great, seething sea of thickening white fur flowed uninterrupted from his chin down across his mighty chest to his groin.

It would soon be here in... Rudy's tail began slapping against the linoleum of the bathroom floor as he

tabulated how much time he had left. When he arrived at a figure of 13 hours, the shoulder seams of his pajama shirt gave out, finally setting his forest-like mane of red fur loose.

Rudy's scowl softened into a sly smirk. If there was one benefit to *it*, even if it was the only benefit, it was the soul-boiling exhilaration he got from being filled to literal bursting with overflowing power. If he could come back from having his arm, hands, and legs torn off while being filled with ninety bullets, he could get over some silly, existential angst in the morning. He had to. He needed to, for Duncan's sake.

The mountain focused on *its*, no, *his* surging power, and felt his mighty, might-deformed body swell up ever so slightly. He grinned a fangy grin as the bulging muscles of his monster's arm disintegrated the thin fabric of his sleeves. The seams of his pajama pants split open in response to his shifting thighs, vomiting forth fountains of more red fur as they tore apart. As he finally sloughed off the last tatters of his ruined pajamas, he stood there in his bathroom, balancing on his tiptoes, no, standing on his hindlegs.

There, leaning on that miserable sink, in front of that miserable bathroom mirror, was an odd-looking, broad-shouldered, rat-tailed big cat, cloaked in a cape-like mane of red fur and a snow-colored belly, wearing a grinning man's face. Duncan, half-asleep, shambled into the bathroom, and wedged himself comfortably between his brother's belly fur and the rim of the sink. As Duncan armed himself with his toothbrush, Rudy delicately squeezed out a drop of toothpaste for him. The mountain tousled his brother's sandy hair with his great paw.

"Morning, Sparky," Rudy greeted. Duncan grumbled-gurgled in response. The mountain reached for his electric razor, putting it to his fur-hidden chin. After all, it was time for the mountain to don his human disguise.

II

On the far side of that squalid living room, Rudy fussed over a fourth-hand electric stove while Duncan sat half-awake at a card table, their father's card table, waiting with a paper plate. Rudy looked passably human, now that he shaved off his beard and muttonchops, put on his green Wigman's Grocery shirt and apron, hid his paw-hands inside cheap gloves, hid his tail inside his black slacks, and squeezed his hindpaws into shoes. Duncan, meanwhile, looked pert in his school uniform of a blue vest over a black polo shirt and khaki slacks.

"What's for breakfast?" Duncan yawned.

"Scrambled eggs, Sparky," the mountain cheerfully replied. He beamed as he doled out his brother's share of the eggs, silently boastful over how human he made himself look. Rudy then sat down at his father's card table, and began eating his share of the eggs out of his frying pan, his mother's frying pan, face first. Duncan examined his brother's blatantly tigerine ear. He fished out a big, red handkerchief, no a blue bandanna, and tied it around the mountain's head to hide the mountain's tiger ears and shaggy hair. The mountain's human disguise now complete, he paused to give his Sparky a quick hug and a snort of thanks.

Once breakfast was over, their mother's frying pan was stashed in the bathroom sink where it would be washed in the evening, and Duncan's plate was placed in a trash bag mostly filled with red hair. The brothers were then out of their door, carrying between them the trash bag, a dufflebag, and a backpack.

The pair started their largely uneventful trek to the subway station by ramming the trash bag full of red hair into the trash can in the lobby of their apartment building. Next, Rudy held Duncan's good hand as they raced together for three blocks before laughing all the way down the escalator at the subway station. The subway platform was crowded that morning, as it was every morning. Rudy wrapped both of his big arms around Duncan, not so

much to protect his brother, but more to keep his good luck charm closer.

Ever since Rudy fled Yunnan, he loathed crowds with a wordless passion. So much meat crowding together, grinding together, wallowing in a delightful miasma of seductively rancid sweat. The subway cars were, as they always were since Yunnan, an unbreathable swamp of human pheromones ignored by everyone but Rudy. All those aromas of fear, anxiety, and irritation made his eyes water.

"Hey, Sparky," Rudy said as he tried to swallow the suffocating lump forming in his throat.

"Yeah?" his good luck charm replied. The boy shifted in his big brother's embrace, instinctively aware of the mountain's smoldering unease.

"We got rid of the trash, right?" He held his little brother tight.

"We tossed it right when we left, remember?" Duncan pulled his arm free to better hug Rudy's bulging, throbbing triceps.

"Yeah, thanks." Of course Rudy remembered, such was how the first half of his distraction ritual went. He began the second part of his ritual by stroking his brother's sandy hair.

"Hey, look! It's Harry the Hugger and his Toy Boy!"

The mountain noticed the crowd parting around him and his brother. He felt his considerable hackles rise up and shift underneath his Wigman's Grocery shirt. A smelly, filthily dressed man, maybe in his late thirties, was circling Rudy and his little brother like a lone jackal closing in on a cow mired in mud. The smelly man's matted beard reeked of rancid beer and stale tobacco, that odious bouquet making Rudy snort as he scoured his weepy eyes of tears with the back of his shaggy wrist.

"What's the matter, Senator Chester the Molester?" the smelly jackal yapped. "Mad I discovered you with your male escort?"

Rudy blinked the last tears out of his eyes, then glowered at his barking gadfly.

“Please shut up and leave us alone,” the mountain declared. The smelly jackal's laughter turned shrill. Other passengers began to ape the mountain's glowering expression. A tired old woman sitting behind the brothers shuffled the three shopping bags on her lap.

“What are you going to do if I don't, Senator Molllllester? Kill me? Molllllllllllest me?” The smelly jackal kept tittering.

“Just do as he says, and go home, you stinking lush,” the old woman growled.

The smelly jackal leaned perilously close to the brothers in order to better leer at the old woman. Whereupon the mountain reached out with his gloved paw, and snagged that smelly, laughing lush by the filthy neck, hauling him in close. The lush met Rudy's snarling gaze, his tittering laugh evolving into squealing puffs upon realizing that behind that hairy face was an ancient predator, hungry, angry, and not at all human. Rudy let his prey go as the shrieking lush flooded the subway car with salty fear and shrill wailing. Duncan grimaced in disgust and relief.

Rudy wiped his gloved paw clean on his slacks, then hugged his Sparky a little tighter as he drank up the lush's delicious terror, the frantic pounding on the sealed subway door a most soothing victory cadenza.

One of Rudy's coworkers at Wigman's, a nosy, gossippy manager, always pestered him about why, if he detested the subway so much, didn't he just drive a car for his commute. Of course, besides the obvious hints dropped about the problems of trying to afford a car, car insurance, and fuel on a box boy's salary in the 21st Century, the main reason why Rudy loathed driving a car even more than riding the subway was a rather sentimental reason.

Nylund Street Station. Their stop. The brothers hurried out of the subway car and into the Nylund

Street Station. They were behind schedule so he hoisted his Sparky onto his shoulders. He ran up the escalator and ran down the street for two blocks, only slowing down when he finally approached Duncan's school. He set Duncan down, and rubbed his Sparky's hair one last time.

“You be good, today, Sparky.”

“Yes, Big Bro. You promise not to eat anyone?”

“I won't when I'm on my shift. But we're gonna have a fun day tomorrow; wine, women, and drugs! And we'll order a waitress for lunch!”

The two shared one last laugh before Duncan headed through the school gates. Rudy stood there at the entrance, waving to his brother for a minute even after the boy disappeared into the school entrance.

“I'm taking good care of him, Ma,” he muttered. “I'm taking good care of him like I promised.”

The mountain stared at his gloved paw, watching a patch of red fur fight its way out of a seam. He remembered the first time he ate a man. It was an exhilarating experience, addictive, yet exhausting. Rudy ignored the apology of an 8th grader who bumped into him.

Rudy remembered being told he was “chosen to receive a great gift,” and he remembered being told he needed “to earn the right to keep it.” At the time, he was too delirious from pain, and magic herbs, and being alive again to refuse either offer or order.

“Are you going to fart or what?” a 3rd grader asked. He readjusted his dufflebag, and went on his way to Wigman's, the laughter of that 3rd grader and her accompanying grandmother echoing in his hidden, fur-filled ears.

III

When Rudy arrived at Wigman's Grocery, the store was already open and teeming with customers since sunrise. Not that it mattered to Rudy, as he hadn't been assigned to help open the store for months. The mountain made an unobtrusive beeline to the back of the store, then clocked in. He pulled out his Wigman's Grocery baseball cap as he shoved his dufflebag into his locker. He put his cap on as he hurried to the loading dock of the stockroom. Rudy was needed for his special talents, after all.

Despite having been an athlete and a photojournalist, Rudy got his current job as a box boy by calling on a favor owed to him by the store's founder, Bernard Wigman Senior. Bernard Senior felt he owed Rudy dearly as Rudy was one of the few people who took the loving time to teach his beloved grandson how to be and stay a just and upstanding team player. In Rudy's case, he systematically literally beat the teenage pomposity out of Bernard III in high school wrestling and high school football. Six years ago, upon hearing the tragic situation of Rudy and his family, Senior and III were both eager to offer condolences and assistance. Thus, over the overridden protests of the staunchly anti-sentimentalist Bernard Junior, Rudy "The Monster" Kaplan was made "Wigman's Grocery's Number One Box Boy," a title Rudy held uncontested ever since.

In the crowded stockroom, Bernard III, the morning supervisor, warmly shook his Monster's hand, lurid memories of Boston crab holds and concussive tackles ever fresh in his mind.

"Let's get bananas on these bananas!" the supervisor laughed. If Rudy wasn't dead positive that he'd kill him, he would have punted Bernard for using that stale, old chestnut again. And again and again. But the Monster was too polite, and the morning's truckload of fruit wasn't going to unload itself, especially since the store's only working

forklift had been out of commission and out of gas for the past six years.

The other workers swarmed and milled about, lending Rudy half-hearted assistance in the form of unpacking and carrying away the unloaded pallets while shooing away looky-loos. The other staff always marveled over their #1 Box Boy's strength, despite witnessing semi-daily demonstrations for the past six years.

In the middle of toting his eighth pallet (loaded with muskmelon crates), Rudy stopped by the bakery department, and half-knelt down as he set the pallet onto the floor.

"What's the Monster doing?" a baker asked as she watched Rudy arch his back while reaching backwards.

"He's stretching," another baker explained. Neither baker noticed him staring longingly (upside-down) at a big display gondola freshly stacked with bags of freshly baked macarons.

Most of the staff originally sided with Junior in balking over what was obviously a shameless display of blatant nepotism. But, after witnessing the Monster Kaplan at work, coupled with fingering all of the money he saved them from spending on heavy machinery maintenance, they promptly welcomed their #1 Box Boy.

Now that Rudy finished surveying the bakery, he picked up his pallet of muskmelons and returned to his route to the fresh produce department. After unloading his eleventh pallet, he felt III slap him on his muscle-humped back.

"Take it easy there, Monster," Bernard III said as he patted his own, jiggling beerbelly. "Why don't you go on break now?"

"Thanks, B. See you after lunch?" Rudy smiled as he started back towards the lockers. Bernard III didn't answer. As far as he was concerned, III clocked out a long, long time ago when he stupidly hired his high school rival in the stupid hope of finally one-upping

said rival. In fact, Ill even (secretly) figured that the Monster could do everyone's job, from his to Bert's in accounting and Angie's in the floral department, and still come out looking like Mr. Universe on steroids.

Wigman's #1 Box Boy decided that he'd spend his break catching up on mop duty. After he pulled on a pair of elbow-length rubber gloves, he wheeled his cleaning cart around the store, swabbing the floor here and there with his mop, trusting people not to notice that his mop bucket was empty of water. He made a wide and leisurely arc in the bakery, then headed to the ladies' restroom. Rudy set a plastic caution cone in front of the door before wheeling his cart inside. Now alone, Rudy dumped his mop bucket full of ill-gotten goodies onto the restroom counter. He never visited the employee lounge, let alone eat there. While the other staff appreciated his work at the store, they made sure he understood that they wouldn't be caught dead socializing with him. Of those staff who could be bothered to remember Rudy's past, the only reason they could think of why The Monster Kaplan would come crawling back to this urban podunk of a hometown, just to beg his high school rival for a submenial job, was a future-eating scandal. And they didn't want to taint themselves by mingling with a steroid-mutated scandal jockey. Other employees not in the know simply avoided mingling with a man who looked, smelled, and shed like a Siberian in summertime Tampa.

Rudy surveyed his goodies: an heirloom tomato, a carton of grapefruit sherbet, a box of macarons, a rainbow trout, and his prize of prizes, a really fatty cut of steak that the store butcher thought she had thrown out. He clutched his steak with both gloved hands and rammed it into his waiting mouth. Rudy knew the real reason why the other employees shunned him: they were sore he never had the stomach to join them in their gossip. After all, he felt it was a fair trade if he let them believe whatever they wanted to believe about him if they never bothered him about discretely using the store as his

personal pantry as revenge for being paid less than minimum wage. He gobbled up his tomato, tore into his trout, slurped on his sherbet, and wolfed down a big handful of macarons. He looked up from the sink to meet the shocked gaze of an elderly lady in a purple mumu. Her mouth hung open in apparent horror over seeing a man in the ladies' restroom. Rudy hurriedly tossed his uneaten treasures into the trashcan.

"It's not what you think, ma'am!" he apologetically sputtered. "I was just examining produce!" And then his sideburns miraculously bloomed into mighty, snow-colored muttonchops right before the elderly lady's eyes. He quickly realized that the old woman was now officially beyond calming or reasoning, what with the way she was inhaling. Rudy braced for the worst as he clutched his baseball cap as the silver-haired banshee began imitating an air raid siren.

Wigman's Grocery's ladies' restroom filled up with managers, looky-loo clerks, and the balding, mustachioed afternoon supervisor, Bernard Wigman Junior. Now that she was safe, the banshee leaned into the beanpole arms of Dougal Bixby, Wigman's Grocery's #2 Box Boy.

"Oh, my stars! This pervert monster was doing some satanic masturbation ritual right before my very eyes!" Dougal pulled out a handkerchief for her while some of the managers began shooting Rudy and each other asking glares. "He was using a fish and potions and cookies and blood! See? Look at him! Look! He's turning into a monster right before our very eyes!"

Managers and clerks, even Dougal, all started sharing a dirty laugh. Rudy felt his hackles crackling through the skin of his spine, creeping up out from the back of his shirt collar to merge with the back of his shaggy scalp. Everyone went respectfully mute the moment Junior gave everyone his fish-eyed glower of doom.

Ma'am," Supervisor Junior began. "Wigman's Grocery has no rules or policies barring employees

from performing their work-related duties in restrooms of opposite genders."

Supervisor Junior sighed, and all of the assembled employees stiffed into more appropriately somber and solemn expressions.

"But, but he's, he's...!" the old lady continued protesting.

"Mr. Bixby, please escort the nice lady to the customer service lobby and give her a \$15 gift card."

The supervisor sighed again, and everyone promptly took their cue to follow Dougal and the old lady out of the ladies' restroom. Junior tugged on his mustache as he turned to Rudy.

"Mr. Kaplan, you know you're late for your shift at the coffee bar, right?"

"I... I can explain, Mr. Wigman! I... I can pay for the gift card, too!" Box Boy #1 stammered.

"Mr. Kaplan, you know you're late for your shift at the coffee bar, right?"

"Oh, uh, yes, sir!" Rudy anxiously wheeled his cart out.

"And Mr. Kaplan," the afternoon supervisor continued.

"Yes, sir?" The mountain paused.

"Next time you enjoy your bonus on company time, please remember to take the time to lock the door so we hopefully won't get another PR disaster like we did today, okay?"

"Understood, sir!"

If it were up to Junior, he would have fired that Charles Atlas hairball a long time ago. In fact, if it were up to him, he would have fired the hairball, Bixby, his own miserable son, and everyone else, everyone else, a long, long time ago. But that would require defying the wishes of the store's executive director, and defying the executive director would, in turn, require defying his father's dying plea that

Junior never defy the executive director. If Bernard Wigman Junior never found it within his heart of hearts to defy his father during the 54-something years he knew him, he wasn't going to bother trying now, either.

IV

"That's the lamest hand-turkey I've ever seen!" Duncan's classmate Percy declared. Duncan rolled his eyes. He could feel the larger boy's breath in his hair as Percy hovered over him.

"So are you going to help me improve by, like, helping me grow back my fingers?" Duncan asked.

"Your lame hand-turkey is the lamest hand-turkey in the whole world!" Percy mocked. "You deserve an F forever, lame-o!"

Duncan sighed. So much for the lie about Art Class being some sort of sanctuary.

"If you're not going to help, Percival, could you do everyone a favor by going back to Hell?"

Percival's veneer of childishness flaked away as he grabbed a double fistful of Duncan's vest, hoisting the smaller boy out of his chair.

"What did you just say, assfruit?" the bully demanded.

"Percival Schloss! Unhand him!" Mrs Currant shouted. Percival fearfully hesitated at the Art Teacher's command, and continued holding his victim up. "Immediately!" Percy let Duncan drop to the floor. The Art Teacher, angry, arose from her desk to waddle over to the two miscreants. "What is the meaning of this?"

"Duncan told Percy to go to Hell!" a third student gleefully volunteered. Mrs Currant's paunch quivered in infuriated anticipation while she readjusted her spectacles.

"Mr Kaplan, is this true?"

"I'm very sorry, Mrs Currant," Duncan apologized. "I didn't realize Percival was teaching Art Class instead of you. I'll remember next time."

Percival's cheeks flushed pink as Mrs Currant's buttery jowls quaked carmine.

"I will tolerate neither violence, nor insolence in my classroom!" the priggish woman shouted. "To the principal's office with the both of you!"

The two insolent students obediently filed out of her classroom as per their teacher's orders. By the time the two were out of earshot, Percival jabbed his nose into Duncan's ear.

"You're going to die for this, assmunch, you know that?" the bully hissed.

Duncan ignored his tormentor as he continued his death march to the principal's office. The principal, fake-sternfaced, opened the door of his office in anticipation. So began, no, so continued this farce of school "justice."

All throughout his latest trip to the principal's office, Duncan pretended to contritely take to heart the principal's gentle chidings for being disrespectfully facetious, and pretended to listen intently to the principal impotently threaten Percy with expulsion for the thirty-eighth time that school year. Internally, Duncan remembered the first time he saw his brother kill a man. He tried, he tried and failed to picture that revenant of memory with Percy's face. He tried to to replay that phantasmagorium again and again, starring Mrs Currant as his monster brother's victim, then the principal, and even that nagging pest, Ballpeen. But, nothing. That bloody tableaux remained immutable, every gory detail pristine. Not that it mattered.

This farce of justice was almost over, as Percival was winding up his inane melodrama of false remorse and crocodile tears. The three'o'clock bell rang, and the principal pardoned the two little criminals. Duncan politely fake-smiled, nodding in false obeisance. Percy wiped his face clean of crocodile

tears and crocodile snot, and both insolent students promptly evacuated the principal's office.

Percy followed Duncan, vengefully intent on making the smaller boy suffer as payment for not being a good, quiet, little victim who didn't humiliate his bullies. Duncan, in turn, weaved and bobbed out of Percy's way, ignoring the bully in order to focus, instead, on retrieving his backpack.

"You're gonna die, Assmunchlan!" Percy taunted. "You're gonna die, and I'll even kill your gay-assed brother, too!"

Duncan stood still and let his facade crack a little.

"Just go away," he said as Percy finally snagged hold of his hirt collar.

Having fallen into this impromptu trap, the smaller boy clamped his good hand onto the meat of Percy's forearm. With a swoosh of Duncan's maimed hand, the bully suddenly found himself sitting painfully on the ground. Percy grew crimson-faced as he hauled himself back onto his feet, preparing himself to pummel that brat for daring to strike him. But then he saw Duncan's maimed hand was actually a sandy-furred paw tipped with four, fishhook-like talons. Percy then realized his vest and his polo-shirt were torn open, the pallid-peachskinned flesh of his skinny chest exposed to the world.

The bully blanched, then shrank away from the smaller, paw-handed boy as he watched a fifth talon erupt from Duncan's thumb.

"Just please go away, Percy. Okay?" Duncan repeated. The bully responded with a squeal of fright, galloping away down a hall. Duncan stuffed his now-regenerated hand-paw into his pocket a moment before Ballpeen approached him.

"What's his problem?" Ballpeen wondered, handing Duncan his backpack. Duncan made a noncommittal shrug as he accepted Ballpeen's gesture.

"I think I broke his heart."

"You're weird."

The two boys' journey to Wigman's Grocery was uneventful, marred only by Ballpeen's rambling lecture uselessly advising Duncan about how to best deal with bullies. They entered the store, and discreetly fought their way through the afternoon crowd towards the coffee bar. Duncan and Ballpeen got in line behind a raven-haired young woman. When Ballpeen realized the barista was a large, grizzily-faced man with snow-colored muttonchops and a big, fluffy, snow-colored goatee, he nervously excused himself from the line. An improvement for Duncan; one less witness for when he broke the embarrassingly bad news to his brother. Brothers made eye contact, Duncan mouthed "It's happening again," cautiously waving his regenerated paw. Rudy went blank-faced.

"Hey, Yeti!" shouted a surly, espresso-starved teen. "Quit stalling with my almond milk-foam cocoa latte!"

"I'm sorry, ma'am," Rudy apologized, composing himself for a moment before grabbing the wrong handle to spray his rubber-gloved hand-paw with steam. Other espresso-starved patrons whipped out their phones to assault the yeti with a volley of blinding, silent lightning in the giddy hopes of capturing the clumsy barista's expressions of hilarious agony for meme-tastic posterity.

"Mr Kaplan," Junior's voice dully thundered over the store speakers. Rudy rolled his eyes and shuddered. The raven-haired woman cocked her head as though remembering something. "Mr Kaplan, please report to the manager's office."

"Aw, crap," he darkly muttered. "Ma'am, I will be right with you."

"What about my latte?"

"He will be right with you," the raven-haired woman repeated as both Kaplans left to the manager's office.

Rudy entered the office to find Junior arguing with his grandson, Vice-Executive Director Ballpeen.

"Grandpa, I don't understand: why did you let the Monster man the coffee bar?" Ballpeen demanded.

"I told him to so he can expand his-"

"No, Grandpa, the Monster is expanding enough already! Don't you remember that he's not allowed in any food prep departments?" Ballpeen plucked a generous tuft of red and white fur out of Rudy's throat. "He sheds! The last time Daddy let him work in the deli, we then had to throw out two-hundred bucks' worth of ruined salami, AND we had to pay twenty-thousand dollars in fines because people complained to the health department about getting his hair in their sandwiches, too!"

Junior gave Rudy a fear-filled glance of sincerest regret.

"Uh, um, you can clock out early, hairball, I mean Kaplan," Junior verbally stumbled.

"Yes," Ballpeen agreed. "Grandpa will cover your shifts for you for today and tomorrow, too." Junior escorted his towering underling to the door. "If Grandma finds out about this, she's going to make me scrub the toilets with your mustache."

As penance, Junior gave the Kaplan Brothers two bottles of soda before going back to face the growing throng of restless, disgruntled coffee bar patrons. Having clocked out, and his dufflebag over his shoulder, Rudy ushered himself and his brother out through the store's loading bay.

V

Sodas and each other in hand, er, paw, Rudy and Duncan walked down a crummy-looking street. As the two put more distance between themselves and the loading bay of Wigman's Grocery, the neighborhood gradually evolved from dingy and dilapidated to grime-caked and vermin-infested.

"So," Rudy finally said after a second swig of courage, er, root beer. "How'd you get your paw? Did you..."

"Percy was hassling me again," Duncan confessed. "And, I, uh, I got mad."

The mountain pulled his paw out of his brother's so he could wrap his big arm around Duncan's shoulder. Rudy emptied his root beer with a third swig.

"Did you hurt him?"

"I, uh, I don't think so."

"Good, 'cause I would've killed him." Duncan responded to his brother's gallows humor by sullenly nursing his orange soda. Time for round 2. "Want me to? I'll give you a discount!" Rudy threw his bottle into the air, and punched it across the street.

"No."

"Then what's buggin' my Sparky?" Rudy hugged his Sparky tighter as they approached a seedy, rundown gym with an illegibly faded sign.

"Is, uh, is my paw gonna, uh, stay like this?" Duncan finally asked. "Or, is it, uh, um..."

"Gonna fall off?" Rudy rubbed his Sparky's arm as they walked into Quinn's Gym. "I don't know, I really don't know. I'm sorry."

The other patrons of Quinn's Gym – poor, grungy, and health-conscious – ignored the entrance of the mountain and his brother, as they always did. After all, everyone in Quinn's Gym was there to use the machines, or lift weights, not to socialize or snoot at other patrons.

Rudy and Duncan mercifully found themselves alone in the locker room. Which was great, as Rudy's condition mandated privacy whenever he needed to change disguises. And trying to use the gym's restroom, let alone having his brother come in there with him to help change into his workout outfit, was like trying to do the turkey trot in a sarcophagus. Duncan instantly swapped his school uniform for his track suit, then as Rudy sat down on the locker room bench, helped the mountain off with his shoes. Hindpaws now too big for sneakers. Forepaws

swelled up and burst out of Rudy's gloves. *It* was coming. Soon. Rudy grabbed one, then two pawfuls of his T-shirt, then husked himself of it, exposing his great and massive, striped, sweat-spiked torso. He smiled a fanged, yet sort of reassuring smile as he scratched his Sparky's head.

"Don't worry, Sparky. I've got more at home."

Rudy slithered out of his slacks, then stared at his shaggy lap. Duncan fished out his brother's workout disguise of a hoodie and sweatpants while Rudy sat there, looking like, no, *as* a tiger wearing a morose mask. Duncan laid his brother's clothes on Rudy's lap. The mountain drew his Sparky close, grinding his shaggy chin into his brother's sandy hair.

It would be here, maybe in two hours if he could relax.

Duncan grabbed his brother's tail, five foot long now, and stroked it.

Hood on, tail discreetly tucked into his sweatpants, now Rudy and Duncan were ready to work out. The brothers began by taking turns delicately unloading their day's collective aggravations into the gym's only punching bag. Duncan wore adorable little boxing gloves, and he filled the gym with a humming tat-tat-tatting that hovered just above the clankings and gruntings. Rudy pretended he was wearing big, furry boxing gloves. When it was the Monster's turn, he gently hammered away at the bag, filling the gym with a wall-shivering cadenza. The other patrons slowly halted their clankings, and courteously ceased their own beastly grunting in respectful deference to the Monster's own godlike exhalations. And then silence.

"Whoa, easy there, big buddy!" Quinn, the owner, playfully cautioned, his leathery hand on Rudy's shoulder. "Let some of my other customers have some punches before you wear out another bag out."

Rudy shared a laugh with his friend as he and his brother switched turns and places again. As Rudy

guided his brother's rhythm, three of Quinn's newest clients strolled into the gym. Something about this trio of swollen gymrats was reminiscent of Rudy, or rather, reminiscent of both the person Rudy used to be, and of the person Rudy should have been – that is, had either person been a pompous twat incapable of shoving his ego through a door.

The muscular trio haughtily surveyed their new rent-a-playpen, searching for suitable new vict – er, workout partners. A burly old man at the leg-press. Too deaf, maybe too surly to be safe. An overeager food stamp warrior whizzing away on the gym's only working treadmill. Too sweaty, too smelly. Another old man in a hoodie at the punching bag. Delicious. With a jailbait grandkid. Perfect. The three were going to milk their new playpen playmates for all their worthless worth before the intolerance of “jealous (other) people” got the three banished yet again.

“Yo, Farthole McYetiass!” one gymrat bellowed. He shared a snarl of disappointment with his swollen cohorts when Rudy deliberately failed to acknowledge the taunt. Quinn pointed angrily.

“Don't go hasslin' my good customers!” the owner warned.

“Hey, Grampa!” a second gymrat taunted. “Where ya taking Jailb-”

Rudy's paw-cum-giant fist connected with that second gymrat's sternum, granting that bloated bully the power to fly, occipitus-first, into the gym's only stationary bicycle.

“What the hell did you do that for?” the third gymrat shouted. His fallen comrade twitched and gurgled blood from inside the wreckage of the bike.

“I'm just pissed my man Kaplan did not kill the shitty lot of you!” Quinn roared. The first gymrat placed his hand on Rudy's shoulder in a gesture of fake friendship.

“We're only horseplaying, man,” the first gymrat lied. Rudy placed his paw on the gymrat's offending

hand, oh so easily sinking his unsheathed talons deep in between metacarpal bones.

“Don't touch me,” the mountain rasped. The weeping gymrat withdrew his bleeding hand to his chest, unsure whether his pierced hand or impaled ego hurt worse. Quinn grabbed hold of one of the gymrats' tanktop straps.

“Listen, garbage: take your garbage and never come back here!”

Back in the safety of the locker room, Rudy slumped back onto the bench as Duncan hurriedly packed their stuff into their dufflebag. The mountain shivered as he finally gave up fighting back his Change. He sighed as his shoulder seams tore open, bleeding thick, sweaty fur.

“Oh, gods, Duncan, I'm too late,” Rudy moaned.

“No, we'll be fine. The subway's a, uh, uh couple blocks,” Duncan comforted him, snagging his brother's big, trembling paw. Rudy's arms tore free of his shredding sleeves, now hulking tiger's forelegs.

“I can't make it, Dunc,” Rudy said as his white bearded-chin jutted further out. He stood up on his hindlegs, sloughing off his suddenly-tattered sweatpants as he reared a still-growing height of eight, no ten feet. “Just go home.”

“But...”

“I'll be fine. Go,” Rudy said, his voice deepening into a soothing growl. Duncan tearfully hesitated as his brother's snout pushed out of his face and beyond his hood. The mountain smiled, a sly cat's smirk. But then that smile turned awful, filled with a mosaic of bloody teeth. Duncan looked behind to see the third gymrat standing before the pair, the petulant man's petulant face frozen in a mask of disgusted curiosity.

“What the Hell kind of freak are you?”

The Monster stepped in front of his brother just as his disintegrating hoodie sweatshirt popped off his still-growing tiger's chest. That giant, bipedal tiger

took a wobbly step forward, easily towering over both brother and gymrat. The Monster drank up the fear in the room with a snuffling rumble, but stopped himself before he got heady and forgetful: he had tasks to do now, after all.

“Go. Home.”

Rudy then dropped to all fours, his tiger's jaws an inch away from the gymrat's face, his forepaws sunk deep into the lockers behind his terror-soaked prey. The gymrat dropped to his butt as he started squealing. Rudy let his prey escape squealing out of the gym, to let him marinate. The giant tiger escaped, himself by squeezing out of a high window. Duncan quickly gathered up the tatters of his brother's ruined disguise, then followed Rudy out the same window after barricading the locker room door with a chair.

The gymrat hurled himself screaming into a busy street. Honking cars, screeching tires, and cursing motorists helped dim his terror. For a moment. Then he caught a glimpse of red fur, heard a snarl just beyond the tumult of stopped traffic. A whiff of cat musk, though, set him back on his heels, racing across the intersection for the illusionary safety of the far sidewalk.

The screaming bodybuilder barged into Wigman's Grocery under the silly notion that would find sanctuary there from his new bogeyman. The gymrat plowed through the line at the coffee bar, and, while fending off the flailing, angry people he purposely bowled over, he snatched up a boy to rescue, no, to use as a human shield.

“Lemme go!” a squirming Ballpeen shouted.

“Shut up, k-”

Gymrat and Ballpeen both fell as the gymrat tripped, but Ballpeen, alone, impacted with the floor. To the boy's side was a bright yellow sportshoe, one of the ones worn by his abductor, lying on its side in a puddle of fresh blood. Ballpeen looked up to see a great, big shaggy tiger, bigger than a pickup truck,

perched high on an aisle shelf. Dangling from the truck tiger's bloody jaws was the broken corpse of that gymrat. A swish of its long, long striped tail, and tiger and prey were gone. Ballpeen wailed as his grandfather picked him up to carry him away from that awful, awful puddle.

VI

The raven-haired woman carried her twenty-minute cocoa-coconut caramel almond milk latte, and a bag of groceries and lunch back to her raspberry red convertible parked in a parking complex some three blocks away from Wigman's Grocery. There was always some gruesome, overarching reason that dragged Angelique Bauers back to the hellishly bland urban podunk that was her ex-fiancee's hometown, and Angelique could guarantee – with money, even – that it was not the fifteen-dollar meatball submarine from Wigman's delicatessen “made with imported salami.” Her smartphone started singing again. Ah, now there was her reason why she was back here again, what with her editor, Billie, calling for another update from his star reporter for the investigation into a certain Senator Castlethorn's money laundering scandal. Something at ground level outside of the parking complex made her drop her bag and fish out her singing smartphone. A bodybuilder was dragging another bodybuilder by the armpits into the backseat of a gold-colored Ford Kob. As she gawked at the first bodybuilder get into the driver's seat, she wondered if she just saw the aftermath of a murder.

“Ay, Tone-tone, your bro's gotcha back,” the first gymrat comforted, desperately ignoring how uncomfortably still his comrade lay in the backseat of his Kob. The first gymrat blinked his eyes free of more tears again, adjusted his rearview mirror, and didn't notice the black tufts of hair bleeding out of the back of his hand.

From her view in the second story of the parking complex, Angelique began taking pictures of what

she reasonably assumed was the aftermath of a murder. The Kob's engine revved to life for half of a moment just as a pickup truck-sized tiger rammed its telephone pole-like forelegs deep into the Kob's hood. She continued clicking away with her phone even as she watched that giant tiger silence the Kob's screaming driver by trampling the car roof flat. And then, the giant tiger paused in mid-stomp to look up at its audience. It, no, he, Angelique knew it was a "he," stared up at her as though he knew her. God help her, she stared back because she realized she knew that bloody-mouthed cat, too. The beast anxiously twitched his tail, and then leaped away.

Afternoon soon matured into evening. Most of the faculty at Saint Germain Elementary School had already left for the day, leaving only the principal and the janitor to clean and lock up. The principal was going to let the janitor lock up after he finished his review of the rooms. Right after he disabled and reset the alarm going off in the student records office. Ten steps into student records, the principal ran back out, hollering and waving his long arms as though he just saw the Devil, himself. If the Devil was a big, giant tiger tearing up filing cabinets like poorly secured boxes of cat treats, that is.

Percival Schloss was being put to bed without dinner again that night. Not because he'd been a naughty boy yet again, though. This time, it was because he was too incoherently inconsolable to eat anything since coming home that afternoon.

"But Mommy!" Percy pleaded tearfully. "Duncan's a monster person and he said he's gonna get me!"

Percival's mother coyly smiled as she carefully arranged her son's beloved army of stuffed animals and action figures in her son's Corvette bed.

"Now Percy," she calmly began again for the twentieth time. "Duncan Kaplan isn't out to get you, and monster people don't exist." She kissed her still-crying son's forehead. "Go to sleep, and tomorrow, I'll fix you blintzes and cream of millet, your favorite."

She pulled Percy's blankets and covers up to his chin.

"But Mommy!" he continued to bleat. His mother ended that conversation by turning off the lights as she strode out of her son's room.

"Sleep tight, my little angel."

Being a hip and trendy super mom was getting to be really tiring for Percy's mother that night. If it wasn't for the fact that she'd lose her alimony check, she would have gladly palmed her beloved little hellion off of his big hellion father years ago. Percy's mother parked her yoga-tightened derrière at the dinette set table of her apartment's kitchen. She considered hiring her little angel a nanny, but that would probably cut into her alimony paradise. She poured herself a brandy snifter of boxed rosé. Next week, she'd consult Percy's TCM pediatrician about prescribing him an herbal formula to dial his disturbed little shen down a notch. Percy's mom hefted her pink chalice high in a toast to her latest victory in competent parenting, then let her filled snifter explode on the floor.

"MOMMY!!!"

Percival's mother tripped over a chair, then slapped and stomped herself bloody peeling herself off of the shard-trapped floor in a mad dash to her son's room. When she turned the lights on, she realized she was not in her son's room anymore. Broken furniture. Torn bedding. Crushed toys scattered everywhere. Percy's Corvette bed, smashed in two. A blood-splattered blanket. She half-heartedly shambled towards the big hole where the window used to be. The hole her precious, precious little angel left her world through. Percival's mother picked up a big tuft of red and white fur.

Angelique sat in her convertible, having been sitting in her convertible for hours, wracking her brains while ignoring Billie's stream of increasingly frantic texts and voice messages so she could review and re-review her gruesome photo shoot from that gruesome afternoon. She knew that tiger, but how did she know him, how did he know her, and who

was he? She accidentally swiped beyond her last picture of the tiger, bringing herself to her silly picture of that clumsy, yeti-like barista at Wigman's Grocery. She realized she knew that old man, and by some dark miracle, she realized, no, she knew that he and that cat monster truck tiger were the same creature. But why and how? The only old man she knew who had that same shade of soft auburn was one Horace Kaplan. And Horace couldn't have been the barista, as he was five feet, five inches in elevated combat boots, paunchy, painfully cleanshaven, and dead six years ago in a car accident that claimed his entire family. A second accidental swipe brought up a decade-old selfie of herself and Horace's eldest son, her ex-fiancé.

"Rudy?"

Angelique sat there, chewing on her half-eaten fifteen-dollar sandwich, and sipping on her hours cold latte, ruminating on how her fiancé was still alive, and had aged 50, 60 years into a hulking, semi-geriatric yeti over the course of half a decade.

Duncan walked up the street towards his apartment building, his brother's dufflebag slung over his back, his arms full with a box of pizza and a bag of Chinese takeout. His brother's breakfast for tomorrow, and leftovers from his dinner tonight, respectively.

Duncan entered the perennially dark lobby, trundled past the perpetually dormant elevators, and made his way into the stairwell. Duncan opened the door to his squalid apartment, and set his load of food on the card table, his father's card table. He shambled into the bathroom, ignoring the frying pan that had sat in the sink all day as he pulled off his sweatshirt. Sandy fur covered his right arm up to his shoulder, and was pooling in sand-colored clumps on his chest even as more sandy fur was slowly coating his left arm.

There were now five of those damned cats when Duncan, still shirtless, plopped himself onto the duct-taped couch. His brother's doings, though he had no desire nor ability to question, blame or even criticize anything his guardian did to protect the both of them. Rudy poked his head through the window, lifting the cardboard up with his snout before squeezing himself through the frame. The giant tiger leaned onto that much abused couch as best he could so he could lay his head on his brother. Duncan laid his head on top of his brother's, and wept into Rudy's mane.



CITY OF RAVENLOFT

COMPILED BY M. T. KELLY

CONCEIVED BY FIVE, MANOFEVIL, EWAN CUMMING, ROTIPHER OF THE FOS AND OTHER
DISTINGUISHED FRATERNITY MEMBERS

The city of Ravenloft is a conglomeration of domains found in official Original Ravenloft.

The Darklords are segregated into various turfs, all of which are physical manifestations of the black nature of their lords and/or curses (if not their actual 'lair'), and are bound to those areas just as they seem to remember always being. However, during semi-regular conjunctions, signified by the tolling of bells from the city's massive central clock tower, the dark lords are *temporarily* granted freedom from this restraint and are able to wander anywhere in the city. What they do and how they go about doing it is entirely up to the dark lords' unique perspectives. Some of the dark lords are warring for lordship of the city, others are enacting their wildest fantasies, while others still are working things that just can't be explained. The so-called "City Hall", housed around the base of the forbidding clock tower, acts as a demilitarized zone and all of the dark lords are free to enter and conduct their business as they please, regardless of the bells.

The City itself is an incorporated seaport city made up of five boroughs: North, South, East, West, and Central. These borough are each broken up into territories, all of which have their own forms of government and policing. To the east stands a large sheer grey peak which divides a river in two. The north fork flows around the north side of the mountain and through the city dividing the North borough from it. The south fork flows around the south side of the mountain and does the same for

the South borough. To the west, lies Ravenloft Bay, a wide harbor with a smattering of islands.

DOMAIN LORDS OF RAVENLOFT CITY

Domain, lord, alignment, species, and class.

ARAK - ΥΠΚΙΩΤΗ

In the caverns beneath the streets just east of the Barovian quarter in the Central Borough live a tribe of drow. No one knows their story, or much more than that they exist.

ARKANDALE - ΝΑΘΑΝ ΤΙΜΟΘΥ (CE WEREWOLF)

Along the eastern riverfront of the Southern Borough, a famous ship's captain moves freight up and down river on his notorious steamship.

BAROVIA - ΣΤΡΑΗΔ ΒΟΝ ΖΑΡΟΒΙΧ (LE ANCIENT VAMPIRE NECROMANCER)

The Barovian quarter is in the Central borough, the oldest part of the city just west of City Hall. On a hill in the center stands Ravenloft Manor, the oldest property of the oldest founding family of the city. The current heir, Count Strahd IX, is a reclusive eccentric who is known to be looking for a wife. The county of Barovia was absorbed into the city when it was incorporated but the title and authority remain within Barovia. The people who live there still pay taxes to the Count.

BLAUSTEIN - BLUEBEARD (LE HUMAN FIGHTER)

On the northern point of the waterfront on the east edge of the Western Borough, just south of Rokushimatown, lies the neighborhood of Blaustein. Mostly middle class seafaring families, its most notable citizen is a former sea captain named Bluebeard who has had the worst luck with wives.

BLUESPUR - ILLITHID GOD-BRAIN (LE)

Madness Mountain, the tall sheer grey peak to the east of the city, is a lifeless hunk of rock. All efforts to quarry the stone of the mountain have ended badly, some with cave-ins, others avalanches, some just mysterious disappearances. The uneducated superstitious masses of the city avoid it and the wiser, wealthier, citizens look for safer ways to further their fortunes.

BORCA - IVANA BORITSI (CE HUMAN), IVAN DILISNYA (CE HUMAN)

Borca is a merchant's quarter in the Southern borough. It includes one of the city's finest marketplaces and its jeweler's and garment district. Ivana Boritsi is one of the most storied beauties in the city, and one of the most reclusive. Her cousin Ivan Dilisnya is a well-known eccentric man about town.

CAVITIUS - VECTA (LE DEMIGOD/LICH)

A rumour within certain arcane circles say that the Clock Tower was once the sole focus of a twisted, power-hungry madman who sought to unlock its deepest and darkest secrets. An entire lifetime (some say unnaturally long) was spent in mind-boggling experiments, yet resulted only in consuming the poor fool's blackened soul. Such a waste of talent, that.

DARKON - AZALIN (LE LICH)

Ruler of almost the entire North Borough. There is only one area outside his influence, but it is small. Azalin's territory is the most diverse of the city with elves, dwarves, gnomes and humans living and

working together. Azalin's official title is Lord Chancellor of the city of Darkon. This city was officially absorbed into the greater city of RavenLoft during its incorporation but the title and its authority still remain official within Darkon City. Azalin commands the most efficient and effective police force in the city. They are known as the Kargat. Azalin even commands the loyalty of Darkon's street gangs, who are known as the Kargat irregulars. Only Drakov the Hawk has ever managed to put together a fighting force capable of successfully challenging them. Darkon city is also an educated place with one of the best universities in the city.

DAVION - DAVION THE MAD (CE HUMAN MAGE)

In an old abandoned house in the Cental Borough lives an old forgotten madman.

DEMENTLIEV - DOMINIC D'HONAIRE (THE HUMAN ENCHANTER)

University sector. Western Borough just east of the waterfront. Most enlightened part of the city. Many experimental public schools open.

DEMISE - ALTHEA (UNKNOWN MEDUSA)

Along the northeastern most part of the peninsula which forms the northern edge of Ravenloft bay, known as the northern strand, there is a strange network of caverns where people are said to disappear.

DOMINIA - DR. DACLAUD HEINFROTH (UNKNOWN)

An island located along the northern coast of Ravenloft Bay, off the shipping lanes, where Dr. Daclaud Heinfroth runs one of the cities asylums

DORVINIA - IVAN DILISNYA (CE HUMAN)

A square in Borca where Ivan Dilisnya is known to wander.

FALKOVNIA - VLAD DRAKOV (THE HUMAN FIGHTER)

The Falkovnian Quarter. A poor but proud neighborhood between the university sector and the

Barovian quarter. Drakov the Hawk runs this part of town like an iron-fisted dictator. (base model-Bill the Butcher from Gangs of New York) Drakov is a vicious racist against non humans and frequently leads his gangsters across the north river over the bridges into the Northern Borough to attack the elven, dwarven and gnomish communities. Drakov goes by an honorary title like the Colonel McCormick who once ran the Chicago Tribune but never served a day in the armed forces. That title may be left up to the DM. (Suggestions: Captain, Major, Colonel, General, Lord, Sire, Boss, Chief, DM's choice) Drakov has NO respect for firearms. If a street fighter or operator begins to make a name for himself with a firearm, Drakov calls him a coward in a way that will be heard. If the person in question wishes to avoid a loss of face, he must meet Drakov face to face in the street without his gun. Bricks, bats, axes, knives, broadswords, THESE are the weapons Drakov respects and he is very good at getting other fighters to meet him under his rules. He WILL make allowances for WOMEN to use firearms as he considers woman frail and in need of equalizers. The Falkovnian Quarter has one of the finest and most strictly regulated vice districts in the city. The whores are notorious for being both submissive and skilled. Drink is also easy come by but drugs are strictly forbidden and NO ONE crosses Drakov. There is also precious little sneak thievery in the Falkovnian Quarter. Drakov will abide whores but not thieves. There have been those who battled Drakov and survived. One was Bluebeard. In his ship's captain days, he and Drakov crossed swords on the north riverfront. It was a fine beating for both of them. When Bluebeard retired, Drakov let him be, a gesture of respect to a man who lived by the same rules. Another was Tristan Hiregaard. They had a certain Eliott Ness/Al Capone adversarial relationship before Hiregaard became preoccupied with Malken. For now Drakov and Malken silently allow for one another's existence but as the cities two greatest vice lords, both know that one day they'll have to settle things between them. Both seem content to leave that day 'til it comes. Drakov

also had a rather vicious confrontation with Adam which it took him weeks to recover from. There was also a fight with Lord Soth once upon a time. No one knows what that was about.

FORLORTI - TRISTET APBLAŃC (THE GHOST/VAMPIRE)

On the north riverbank of the south river between the Barovian Quarter and river, stands an old abandoned estate no one goes to.

GHASTRIA - SHEZEN D'POLARŃO (THE/CE HUMAN FIGHTER)

In the southern part of Ravenloft Harbor, sits the isle of Ghastria, owned by the D'Polarno family. They are said to have one of the finest collection of paintings in the city.

G'HEŃŃA - YAGŃO PETROVŃA (LE HUMAN PRIEST)

One of the islands in Ravenloft Harbor has been taken over by a religious sect led by the pious Brother Yagno. They are a closed community and keep to themselves.

GUNĐARAK - UNKŃOWŃ

This a district that recently became part of the Barovian quarter. There are stories of a Gundar family that used to rule it.

HAR'AKIR - ANHKŃEPOT (LE/CE GREATER MUMMY)

On the sandy peninsula that forms the the southern shore of Ravenloft Harbor called the Southern Strand, there is a tall ancient structure which seems to predate the whole city. It's another one of those places that very few come back from investigating and fewer still of those who do, discuss it.

HAZLAN - HAZLIK (CE HUMAN INVOKER)

Along the Northeastern edge of the South Borough, along the south river, may be found the Hazlani district. This district is sharply divided along ethnic lines. The wealthy Mulani hold absolute power over the Rashemani, mostly through ruthlessness, though the Rashemani outnumber the Mulani 100 to 1. It is

a strongly marginalized community that is very distrustful of outsiders, like New York's Chinatown or Little Italy.

HOUSE OF LAMENT - UNSPECIFIED (SPIRIT)

There is a rumor about a ghostly mansion that pops up on the street corners on the borders between the districts.

ICATH - TSIEN CHIANG (THE HUMAN WIZARD / NECROMANCER)

Toward the far western sector of the northern part of Ravenloft Harbor, there is a strange forested island where strange ships (Chinese junks) are seen to come and go from the sea beyond. No one knows what happens there.

INVIDIA - GABRIELLE ADERRE (THE HALF-VISTANI ENCHANTER)

The Vistani section, also called Gypstow. Located in the West-central section of the Southern Borough. All Vistani activity in the city moves through here. Also a closed society with its own language and customs, yet strangely, The Vistani seem to want to found communities elsewhere.

ISLE OF THE RAVENS - RUMOURED FEMALE MAGE (UNKNOWN)

About midway down the Southern Strand is a small mysterious forested island where many black birds nest.

KALIDRAY - THAKOK-AN (LE HALF-ELF TEMPLAR / PSIONICIST)

Recently, the assistant curator of Ravenloft's esteemed Museum of Darkon published her findings detailing a land and people from an age yet to come. She claims to have proof of such a place, yet her article on the whole was dismissed by her peers. She was discredited as a result, fired from her position at the museum, and her current whereabouts are unknown.

KARTAKASS - HARKON LUKAS (THE WOLFWERE BARD)

Just west of the Hazlani section may be found the Theatre district. There are many different facets of the budding music industry located here, most notably Tin Pot Street where all the songwriters live. Harkon Lucas is a well-known performer here.

KEEPING - TRISTESSA (CE BANISHEE)

In the northeastern corner of the Central Borough, there is an empty abandoned opera house where mournful singing can often be heard.

LAMORDIA - ADAM (CE FLESH GOLEM)

The Lamordian quarter is the only part of the Northern Borough that Azalin doesn't rule. It encompasses the north waterfront down to the mouth of the North River and up the river to Vuchar street. Most of the district is made up of docks and the various businesses involved in seafaring but the entire northern part of this quarter is called the hospital district, though it actually includes hospitals, asylums, and the city's medical college. Victor Mordenheim is a well respected physician in this area. The Mordenheim estate is at the exact northwestern corner of the Northern Borough. The cliffs beneath it have many caves in which a terrible monster is said to live. This monster is also said to terrorize the docks and the sewers.

LIFFE - BARON EVENSONG (UNKNOWN)

A rumored island in the bay no one can seem to locate or find any information about.

L'ILE DE LA TEMPETE - MONETTE (LE WEREBAT)

At the very point of the southern strand, there is an island with a lighthouse on it. The lighthouse succeeds in getting most ships into the harbor from the sea but there are exceptions.

MARKOVIA - FRANTISEK MARKOV (LE HUMAN)

A quarter mile out onto the Northern Strand, the sea cliffs drop down to a level plane where the ground alternates between swampy and grassy. Some time

ago a man named Markov attempted to open a zoo on this part of the strand. Exotic animals were shipped in, but the zoo just never took off.

MORDENT - WILFRED GODFREY (CE GHOST)

The entire west end and waterfront of the West Borough is part of the neighborhood of Mordent. Mostly upper class, this area is definitely considered uptown. The only place of any mystery is a peculiar house that sits on a hill overlooking the harbor. It is another part of the city that is abandoned and avoided.

NIGHTMARE LANDS - UNKNOWN (THE NIGHTMARE COURT)

There are many who have strange dreams in the City of Ravenloft. Researchers have identified several recurring images. Scholars who try to study this phenomena almost invariably begin to suffer from it.

NOCTURNAL SEA - MEREDOTH (CE HUMAN NECROMANCER)

Ravenloft harbor empties into the Sea of Sorrows. Fishermen and mariners all have stories of many strange things in that body of water.

NOSOS - MALUS SCCLERIS (THE HUMAN FIGHTER)

Just south of the Southern river, just east of the city proper, in the shadows of Madness Mountain, lies Nosos Camp, a crude company town dominated by the mining company, Scleris Industries. The company is always right in this place and many and loud are the complaints from city dwellers about the waste dumped into the South River. The so-called "Miner's District" is a filthy sprawl inhabited by poor, overworked, selfish, pasty-skinned roughnecks. This place is barely controlled anarchy. Only the greedy rich can tolerate such a miserable compost of humanity, and their lavish masquerade balls are perhaps their ultimate (and guarded) escape from the dregs beneath their feet. The mining baron Malus Sccleris does what he wants, when he wants, and none dare object. This more than lucrative

company has recently garnered the attention of many of the city's deep-pocketed investors. Yet a bidding war is quickly brewing between Chancellor Azalin's agents and those representing the Falkovnian Ministry of Science. As a result many of the other investors are suddenly losing interest. Others are silently standing by, hoping this war of words will develop into open street riots. With luck, the aftermath will drive acquisition costs low but spike profit high.

NI DALA - ELENA FAITH-HOLD (LE HUMAN FIGHTER)

A low stone wall along the west side of the Theatre district divides it from this neighborhood of mirthless, uneducated butchers and tanners. Local toughs decked out in monastic-looking attire regularly patrol the streets, enforcing religious decrees as set forth by a woman calling herself "The Knight Protector". Punishment is harsh, and very public. A bitter, age-old rivalry with the Theatre District's wandering performers always ends in violence and bloodshed. The water fountain in the centre of this district doubles as a gathering area for gossip and debate amongst the workers and their families, but only when they are out of earshot of the Knight Protector's enforcers. This Knight Protector's reputation is impressive. She is the only woman in town who ever fought Drakov the Hawk to a standstill. There was no clear winner and neither feels the need to pursue the matter. Some women come to her hoping to learn fighting in a man's world from a master. They either become members of her gang or vanish.

PHARAZIA - DIAMABEL (CE HUMAN FIGHTER)

In a waterfront pub of some repute is a drunken sailor who is known to babble on from time to time about an encounter he had with a man he calls "Rudy". The sailor claims that one night this man entered the pub in rather dire straits, frantically asking questions about some jeweler in some area of the city. The sailor's recollection of the specifics varies with each telling of his story. His warning however, does not. This jeweler is said by Rudy to

possess a strange gem that when viewed draws the eye to a queer, blood red swirl within its depths. Before long it will claim that person's soul, trapping it in an upside-down land where angels are demons, and other such embellishes added to the story by the drunk every time it is told. The proprietor of the pub allows the sailor to spew his story from time to time (usually when his other entertainment has cancelled or is running late), but is known to toss the man out into the street when the drunk becomes overly aggressive in the defense of his story.

SARAGOSS - DRAGA SALT-BITER (THE WERESHARK PRIEST)

The Graveyard of Ships. Along the Southern Strand lies a kelp infested stretch of coastline where the shipping companies dump all of their derelicts. It has become a large lagoon of kelp-encrusted wrecks. There are rumors of people living in the surfaced hulks, but these are shark-infested waters. Anyone who spends much time here is taking their lives in their hands.

SCAENA - LEMOT SEDIAM JUSTE (THE HUMAN ILLUSIONIST)

There are many theaters scattered throughout the city, some old, some new, some in use, some abandoned. There are stories of a theatre company that just pops up in random theaters, puts on a show, and no one in the audience is ever seen again.

SEBVA - TIYET (THE UNIQUE MUMMY)

There is another ancient structure on the far sandy part of the Southern Strand. It is believed by some that these ancient buildings, long forgotten, represent a long-lost civilization. (Note: some believe the Atlanteans settled the island of Manhattan millenia ago. It is the basis for many modern science fiction stories.)

SITHICUS - LORD SOTH (THE DEATH KNIGHT)

On the south-eastern edge of the Southern Borough, south of the Hazlani district stands the only elven community outside of the Northern Borough. A

nearly traditional elven city, it resembles a large forested park sprawled over 20-30 square miles. There is a tall structure shaped like a blackened, twisted rose along its southern edge where nothing grows. No one outside the community knows what it is, and no one inside it will say. There are rumors of an armor-clad warrior with burning red eyes that stalks the lanes of this place. Another thing no one can verify.

SOURAGNE - ANTON MISROI (THE ZOMBIE LORD)

The Northern Strand does not end in land but in swamps. Many people with dark skin live out in this area. They have strange customs and accents. On a clear night, many of them can be seen dancing around bonfires from clear across the bay on the docks.

STAUNTON BLUFFS - SIR TORRENCE BLEYSMITH (THE GHOST)

At the point where the Lamordian Quarter, the Necropolis Cemetery, and uptown intersect, there stands a tenement called Staunton Court. It is housing for poor working families but not a slum. The people live in peace and dignity so long as they stay off the top two floors. No one talks about what's up there.

TEPEST - THREE HAGS (THE ANNIS, THE SEA HAG, THE GREEN HAG)

Between the edge of the Central Borough and Faerhaaven street lies the area known as Tepest or the Tepestani district. It's a rough part of town but there are three old sisters who are known to be kind to strangers. Those in the know, however, know they supply most of the drugs in Faerhaaven street.

TOVAG - KAZ THE DESTROYER (THE ANCIENT VAMPIRE AVENGER)

In the broad gallery overlooking the Council Chamber at city hall, a vast mural painted by one of the city's early master artists depicts the legendary Battle Without End: the grueling climax of the war

that established Ravenloft's status as a free city and political and economic powerhouse. Its bold, harsh, and painfully realistic depiction of the brutality and chaos of warfare, as rank after rank of city infantry charge toward the viewer in the vanguard of their bloody-armored, grim commander, is so evocative that some claim that the attackers actually lean forward out of the painting at times, to shanghai the unsuspecting and conscript them into their ceaseless, bitter conflict.

RICHMULOT - JACQUELINE RENIER (CE WERERAT)

Also called the Thieves' Quarter. Some years ago, Drakov the Hawk ran this north-central area of the South Borough in addition to the Falkovnian Quarter. When Drakov grew tired of the sneak thievery in his territory and gathered his men to drive them out, There was an epic battle between the gangsters and the thieves on the bridge over the South River between the two areas. Claude Renier, then the leader of the thieves, ended the battle by setting the bridge on fire and leading the retreat into the thieves quarter. The fire spread to the river docks on both sides and only ended when the bridge and docks collapsed into the River staining this part of it black. The bridge was never rebuilt and the two areas have been separate ever since. Jaqueline Renier, Claude's granddaughter, is now the leader of the 'Rat Clan' as the Renier family and its affiliates are known. They are the biggest gang of thieves in the area and are on the lay for anything. A 'lay' is a particular method of thievery and there are different names for each one. An 'angler' drops a hook down behind a door to lift a crossbeam. A 'bludget' is a small to teenage girl who's trained to pick pockets. A 'badger' works with a prostitute to seduce a client, then picks pockets while the client is occupied. The Rat Gang practices every known form of thievery and comes up with new 'lays' all the time. There is no part of the city that is safe from their depredations save Drakov's, and then only because they've had all they want of him.

VALACHAN - BARON URIK VON KHARKOV (LE NOSFERATU VAMPIRE)

The southernmost area of the waterfront are the Valachani docks in Southern Borough. This area is completely dominated by the Panther Shipping Company and it's reclusive magnate, Urik von Kharkov. There is not a single person who lives there who does not work for the company in some capacity or another but because all are taxpaying citizens of the city, it can't be called a company town like Nosos. Humans with dark skin, who might otherwise suffer prejudice in other parts of the city, often come here looking for work, though Von Kharkov is very much a corporate tyrant.

VECHOR - EASAN THE MAD (CE WOOD ELF WILD MAGE)

On the street corner where the districts of Invidia, Borca, and Verbrek intersect, there is a peculiar five story high tenement. This is perhaps one of the greatest mysteries in a city full of them. Strange noises are heard and strange lights seen at all hours of the day and night. Clearly SOMETHING is going on on there, but all attempts to investigate what that might be have met with a great mix of disturbing results. Some investigators came out naked, some, wearing each others clothes backwards, some with large capital 'E's on their foreheads, and then there were the ones that didn't come out at all. The list goes on and on. There have even been instances where the building mysteriously moved to some other part of the city somehow, though it always seems find it's way back. There ARE people living in there. They leave for their work every morning, never looking the same way twice, all of which doesn't seem to bother them. They are very calm and stoic people.

VERBREK - ALFRED TIMOTHY (LE WEREWOLF PRIEST)

There is a place in the central west part of the Southern Borough that almost no one lives in. It is a four or five block area filled with abandoned buildings, most notable among them, a church filled with broken stained glass windows. Many of the

shards of remaining windows depict wolves. It is believed that there is a pack of wolves living in this place. They feed on the stray rats, cats, and dogs of the city and of course whatever people might stumble into their territory.

VOROSTOKOV - GREGOR ZOLNIK (CE LOUP DU NOIR LYCANTHROPE FIGHTER)

On the other side of the north fork from Madness Mountain rises a large forested mountain that almost perpetually snowbound. There are some hardy folk who live on this mountain outside the city limits.

WILDLANDS - KING CROCODILE (CE CROCODILE FIGHTER)

Between the failed Markov's zoo experiment and the swamps of Souragne, there is a large grassy plain where some of the exotic animals have reproduced and laid their claim. The entire area is filled with lions, gorillas, and elephants. Any attempts to study them, however, have been driven off by a large salt water crocodile that has made its home off the coast there. The few people who have managed to get there and back have returned with bizarre stories of the animals TALKING!

ZHERSIA - TIMOR - HIVE QUEEN (CE MARIKITH QUEEN), PARIDON - SODO (CE DOPPLEGANGER)

South of the Valachani docks, where the southern strand starts, OUTSIDE the city limits, lie the two worst slums in the area. Far worse than any poor neighborhoods within the city, these are foul-smelling, filthy, disease ridden, labyrinthian streets, worse even than Nosos. The stories that come out of these areas are perhaps the most bizarre in the city.

SEA OF SORROWS - CAPTAIN PIETER VAN RIESE (NE/LI/CE FIFTH MAGNITUDE GHOST)

At irregular intervals the famed ghost (?) ship *Relentless* docks at the city docks, takes on new crew members, and then sails off into the Mists. Some say taking ship on the *Relentless* is a way to escape the city forever, but given that the most

common destinations of the *Relentless* are rumored to be a) nowhere, b) Hell, not many are willing to find out.

SRI RAJI - ARIJANI (RAKSHASA)

The northernmost docks of the southern borough belong to a spice merchant with ships in the port. He maintains an estate with a large garden, temples and home, with his spice warehouses and a company of sellswords guard it. Though glib of tongue regarding the spice trade, Arijani is a harsh and private man spending most of his time in his compound, stalking his gardens, planning his schemes.

JACK KARTI, FARELLE

A famously bad-tempered tinker wanders the city, sticking mostly to the southern borough but venturing farther afield from time to time; he's always followed by a swarm of feral dogs. He claims to hate the city, hate people, and to hate every new invention he sees; still, he never leaves the city and has a reputation for being able to fix just about anything, getting a tremendous stream of business even though he offers a constant stream of verbal abuse to his customers.

ROKUSHIMA TAIYOO - UNKJOWTI (FOUR BROTHERS) (UNKJOWTI SHUJIN)

The Rokushima district is one of the most bizarre areas of the city even in a city filled with bizarre places. It is formed at the mouth of the North River. As the river flows through the city, it breaks into a delta as it enters the harbor, forming two small island just off shore. Sometime in the past, exactly when is lost to history, builders took advantage of this land formation to extend the waterfront, via a stone bridge, across the gap between the North and West Boroughs. Great piers extend out into the bay from the exact southwest corner of the North Borough, the two islands, and the exact northwest corner of the West Borough. Somehow, some decades ago, all of this prime commercial real estate fell under the control of one company led by one man known as The Shujin. No one outside the

company knew what that title meant though there were many stories. This 'Shujin' apparently came from a faraway land and spoke a different language, but his company brought rice, silk, spices, and gunpowder into the city. His was probably the most profitable commercial venture in the entire city. He did not hire city workers though. All of his employees, he imported from his homeland. Before long, the four wharves, the stone bridge, and a few of the surrounding blocks became known as Rokushimatown. It is an insular community with its own language and customs though everyone wants what they have to trade.

About a decade ago, the wise old Shujin passed away. Sadly, he did so without naming his heir. His six sons immediately began to squabble over their inheritance. These squabbles became more and more intense as elements within the company began to fall in behind each of the brothers. This conflict culminated in a huge armed battle between the factions that spilled out onto the wharves and bridge and caused great bloodshed and no end of consternation within the rest of the city. When that first battle ended, after days of pitched street fighting and the destruction the bridging wharf that connected the two north wharves, the one that connected the two south wharves, and the death of two of the sons, Rokushimatown had been split into four separate areas each ruled by one of the sons and his followers, or his Gumi as they came to be known. The four 'gumis' have each claimed one of the wharves and the corresponding segment of trade that went with it. The Beikoko Gumi controls the North Borough wharf, the Chuugoka Gumi, the North Island wharf, the Eikoku Gumi, the South Island wharf, and the Roshiya Gumi, The West Borough wharf. It is common knowledge within the city that each of the four sons is trying to seize control of the entire company. It became clear to everyone when the shore gumis cut off land traffic to the island wharves and the island gumis responded by cutting off river traffic to the shore wharves. There have been similar incidents since. The gumis quickly learned that these things tended

to interfere with profits so they began to confine their street battles to after midnight and the gumis are as fierce street fighters as any other gang in the city. The wharves have been built up into virtual fortresses/palaces and none of the four sons would dream of destroying any of the other wharves or the bridge. Those are parts of their inheritance and for them, it's all about birthright.

NECROPOLIS - DEATH (UNKNOWN)

On the northwest corner of Darkon City, ironically, right next to the hospital district, stands one of Azalin's most notorious failures. Once the city's largest and most often used cemeteries, Azalin's attempt to use the undead to free himself from his prison left this area devoid of life. Every plant and animal is dead here and the buried corpses rise and move about after sunrise. Anyone foolish enough to try to approach this area feels themselves dying and if they manage to cross the border, they perish only to rise after the next sunset and undead.

SHADOWBORN MANOR - EBONBANE (LE DEMON POSSESSED BROADSWORD)

In the northeastern corner of the neighborhood of Nidala stands a large manor that never seems to decay. The Night Protector and her gangsters steer clear of it but not one who's ever tried to shelter here has ever been heard from again.

THE SHADOW RIFT - THE FEY

City Hall. Located between The Falkovnian and Barovian quarters, on Division Street, stands a palatial building with a tall clock tower with is commonly known as city hall. Most people think the city bureaucracy is run by uptown clerks. What no one knows is that every office in city hall is occupied by the shadow fey. These mischievous creatures amuse themselves by causing minor strife in the city in any way they can. Anyone may peacefully approach this building from the north or the south via Division Street which is recognized as neutral territory by all in the city of from the barovian quarter to the west. It is unwise to try and approach

in through the Falkovnian quarter to the east, however.

COUNCIL MEETINGS

The tower clock tolls, and Darklords within the city are called to the council. Every one of them comes under magical compulsion that none of them can fight, then when they get there and take their seats, they suddenly look up and think 'Oh God, We're HERE again.' There isn't really a lot of business done at these meetings. These people aren't in the practice of doing business with each other. Mostly there's just a lot of curses and threats exchanged across the table, largely because no one can get out of their seats or use their attack magic or projectile weapons. This is all to the delight of the fey who are just twistedly mischievous enough to keep doing it.

CROSSING BORDERS

Every once in a while, when the tower bell rings, they Fey lower the barriers that keep the Darklords imprisoned in their territories. The Darklords immediately know that if there's anything they want to do outside their territories, that's the time to do it. A Darklord that crosses out of their territory into another's must do so carefully, however. They immediately lose all their Darklord powers while the lord of the invaded territory retains theirs, so an invading Darklord can quickly find themselves at the mercy of the invaded Darklord, depending on power levels. Most Darklords who cross a border during these times will make a deal with the invaded Darklord ahead of time if they can so that they may be assured of success in their business. Others never have reason to leave their territory. If a Darklord, i.e. Drakov, invades another's territory with hostile intent, they have until the bell tolls again to do what they set out to do. If the bell tolls again, the invading Darklord is still inside the invaded territory, and the invaded Darklord closes the border, the invading Darklord may cross back across the closed border, but any who came with them are at the resident Darklord's mercy. If a Darklord dies on another's territory, they are raised

back up in their own territory with memories of an ignominious defeat.

CARNIVAL - ISOLDE

The Carnival is a sort of floating domain that moves through the city at will. It's mistress is a storied beauty named Isolde who seems to collect strange characters. The Carnival is remarkable for its ability to move throughout the city putting on shows with or without the approval of local Darklords. Confrontations between Darklords and Isolde have been known to happen, but no one knows what occurs when they do. Isolde is also never part of the council meetings.

ON THE STREETS OF RAVENLOFT CITY MAY BE MET:

Domain, name, alignment, species, and class.

- All (any road) - Headless Horseman (CE)
- Any - Andres Duvall (NG bardic 'lich')
- Any - Mayonaka (CE eastern vampire)
- Arkandale (wanders) - Natalia Vhorishkova (CE werewolf)
- Barovia - Jacqueline Montarri (NE cursed human)
- Barovia (wanders) - Tara Kolyana (CG human monster hunter)
- Barovia - The Ice Queen (LE spectre)...fix her up like Fighting Fantasy's "Caverns of the Snow Witch"?
- Barovia - Vladimir Nobriskov (NE true werebat)
- Bluetspur area - Athaekeetha (CE illithid vampire)
- Borca - Nostalia Romaine (LE ermordenung)
- Carnival - Amelia ("The Vampiress") - (NG human)
- Carnival - Blade Brothers, the - (CG human fighters)
- Carnival - Charlotte ("The Fire-Eater") - (CN human thief)
- Carnival - Claude Rivale/Importun ("The Imp") - (CN/NG human fighter)

- Carnival - Creeplings, Crawlers, and Fidgets - (N stray animals)
- Carnival - Crimson Rose, the - (N human thief)
- Carnival - Familiar, the - (N human child)
- Carnival - Fates Three, the - (Leer - NG human fighter; Pry - NG human thief; Scream - NG human thief)
- Carnival - Hermos ("The Foreman") (NG human)
- Carnival - Illuminated Man, the - (N human priest)
- Carnival - Isolde ("Mistress of the Carnival") - (CG greater eladrin/ghaele)
- Carnival - Madame Fortuna/Fortune - (CN human thief)
- Carnival - Mister Question Mark - (N wax golem)
- Carnival - Mola Kravvan ("The Living Skeleton") - (N human thief)
- Carnival - Organ Grinder, the - (NG human fighter)
- Carnival - Pickled Punks - (CE monstrous infants)
- Carnival - Professor Pacali - (NE human arcanist)
- Carnival - Raja Singh ("The Hideous Man-Beast") - (LE/NG infected wereleopard)
- Carnival - Rasuild Kravvan ("The Gargantuan") - (NE human fighter)
- Carnival - Roman Olzanik ("The Geek") - (LE human)
- Carnival - Silessa ("The Snake Mistress") - (CG elf wizard)
- Carnival - Tenira Courant ("The Squid Woman") - (NE seawolf fighter)
- Carnival - Tindafalus - (NE ravenloft fetch)
- Carnival - Tindal ("The Amazing Soul-less Man") - (N human illusionist)
- Carnival - Tosk ("The Brute") - (LN orc fighter)
- Carnival - Wood'n-Head - (CG human wizard/eremite)
- Church of Ezra, the - Tara Kolyana (LG human anchorite)
- Darkon - Henri Milton (CE maledictive wereboar)
- Darkon - Ratik Ubel (N revenant thief)
- Darkon - Salizarr (CE meazel)
- Darkon - Styrix (NE night hag)
- Dementlieu - Alanik Ray (LN elf thief/detective) and his partner Dr. Arthur Sedgwick (unknown human?)
- Dementlieu (the House of Wax)- Alexandre du Cire (NE wax golem)
- Dementlieu (Port-a-lucine Opera House) - Angel Pajaro (CE half-elf pathologic werefox)
- Dementlieu - Living Brain, Rudolph Von Aubrecker (NE)
- Dementlieu - Professor Arcanus (CG maledictive weregorilla)
- Falkovnia (wanders) - Gondegal (CN human warrior/avenger)
- Falkovnia (wanders) - Ivan Dragonov (CG loup-garou ranger/monster hunter)
- Falkovnia - Dr. Vjorn Horstman (LE human wizard/Minister of Science)
- Falkovnia - Vladimir Ludzig (CE vampyre)
- Har'Akir - Abu al Mir (NE true werejackal)
- Har'Akir - Senmet (LE greater mummy)
- Invidia - The Midnight Slasher (CE human madman)
- Kalidnay - Palik (NE thrax)
- Kartakass - Mother Fury (CE true mountain loup-garou) and The Howling Clan (werebeasts/wolves?)
- Lamordia - Merilee (NE human girl vampire - Adam's companion)
- Lamordia - Victor Mordenheim (LE human scientist/surgeon)
- Mists - Mist Ferryman (NE)
- Mordent - Dr. Rudolph Van Richten (LG human thief/monster hunter)
- Mordent (wanders) - George Weathermay (NG/N human ranger/fighter/monster hunter)

- Necropolis - Hilda and Friedrich Kreutzer (LG human mages/spiritualists)
- Necropolis (Tidmore)- Hilde Borganov (LE true wereray)
- Nova Vaasa - Desmond LaRouche (CE half golem)
- Nightmare Court, the - Ghost Dancer, the (LE guilt/shame)
- Nightmare Court, the - Hypnos (LE suggestion/mesmerism)
- Nightmare Court, the - Morpheus (CE imp confusion/shock)
- Nightmare Court, the - Mullonga (LE fear/apprehension)
- Nightmare Court, the - Rainbow Serpent, the (LE mistrust/suspicion)
- Nova Vaasa (the Clinic for the Mentally Distressed, in Egertus) - Dr. Gregorian Illhousen (NG human chief physician)
- Nova Vaasa (the Clinic for the Mentally Distressed, in Egertus) - Dr. Harrod Tasker (LE human physician)
- Nova Vaasa (the Clinic for the Mentally Distressed in Egertus) - Mandalain (CE night terror)
- Order of Guardians, the - Brother Dominic (NG cleric)
- Richemulot - Gestalt (CN flesh golem), creator: Dr. Simone Couture
- River Dancer (showboat) - Larissa Snowmane (NG human druid)
- Sea Gypsy (ship) - Captain Andre de Sang (CE maledictive wererat) and his crew (all wererats)
- Souragne - Chickenbone (LN human voodan)
- Souragne - Sandovor (NE maledictive werecrocodile)
- Sri Raji - Jahed (LE weretiger)
- Sri Raji - Radjiff Chandor (CE maledictive weretiger)
- Tepest - Blackroot (CE treant)
- Tepest - Jugo Hesketh (CE ghastr ghoul)
- Tepest - Meeka (N pathologic catwere)
- Underground Labyrinth (Tower) - The Phantom Lover (LE)
- Unknown - Aggregate Golem (N flesh golem), creator: Dr. Cyrus Vannen
- Unknown - Angeliq (CN unscarred flesh golem), creator: Karl von Salzburg
- Unknown - Automatic Man, the (NE mechanical golem), creator: Howard Lumley
- Unknown - Azenwrath (CN spell-rune treant golem), creator: the wizard Kyall
- Unknown - Chaperone (NE feline patchwork golem), creator: Bethany Jamieson
- Unknown - Doppleganger Golem (CE "super-golem"), creator: Emil Bollenbach (LE golem creator)
- Unknown - Lucre (NE coin golem), creator: unknown (Ezekiel Barckarl)...I'd like to change this thing to a wishing well golem...
- Unknown - Lumina (N stained glass golem), creator: Brother Landall Dolan (priest of Ezra)
- Unknown - Min'kins (NE various taxidermy nightmares), creator: Lian de Loranche Punchinel (NG artificer/cleric)
- Unknown - Transient Golem (fog/mist golem), creator: unknown
- Unknown - Sheneya (CE maledictive werecobra assassin)
- Vechor - Ahmi Vanjuko (CN mechanical golem)

ADVENTURE HOOKS IN THE CITY OF RAVENLOFT:

1. Despite (or because of?) your heavy workload, your significant other has made plans for you to go visit the Carnival. You can't quite remember the promise they have said you made, but the possibility of another argument is not an option. The fact that their friends were already invited and are heading over to your place as this 'reminder' was given probably doesn't help, and has you agreeing. What harm is there in going to a carnival?

2. One of your old school mates has come to you and asked for you to accompany them as they deliver a package on behalf of their employer to Faerhaaven street, of all places. Due to the reputation of that place, it is obvious that they are asking you to go along for backup. "A quick drop-off", is what they told you. And payment up front. A nice sum in fact. This should be interesting, as they've also invited several other old chums that you'd like to catch up with. But, do be sure to arm yourself before you leave...you have a life to get back to.

3. Preparing food for the students of Dementlieu is not an easy job, nor is it a well-paying job. Everyday you find yourself coming up with reasons for you not to quit, or checking the list of reasons you've already scrawled on that piece of paper you keep on yourself at all times. And now, rats. That's all you need. It has fallen to you (in not the politest of ways) to find and eliminate this problem. But work doesn't do itself (as the red-faced head chef is so quick in reminding you), and an exterminator was sent for. His subsequent report of ungodly amounts of rat dung down in the cellar is not your concern. But when he doesn't return after about an hour or so, it now is. Useless fool. And all because of bloody rats. Where's that list again?

4. A new book has come out entitled "Ruin Rat: The Private Life of Benjamin Reade", and amongst certain circles has risen a debate as to whether this work is biographical in nature or just another penny dreadful. The title character, an ex-soldier-turned-monster hunter, has inspired several of the younger generation into assembling study groups, and in your particular case, it is a source of renewed strength. It has taken several weeks, but finally your group has gathered enough 'evidence' to begin your next investigation. In the abandoned house overlooking the harbour, known to the westend as "The House on Gryphon Hill"...

5. The University of Lamordia has issued its annual EF Assignments. The Expeditionary Force is a group of individuals selected from all departments, but the majority are drawn from both the Research / Development and Security departments. This year the assignment is three-pronged: a trip to investigate why the zoo failed in the Markovian district (investors want to build a case against its current owner and want irrefutable scientific evidence as to why it didn't launch), to obtain several botanical specimens in Tepest (which are said to be rather unique), and finally to investigate both flora and fauna of the so-called "Wildlands". The team has a limited amount of time to reach its goals, thanks in part to bureaucratic red tape. Failure usually means your livelihood and untold embarrassment among your peers. Some of the members of previous teams have been known to commit suicide rather than return empty-handed. Or, so you've all heard. Several of the first time members are beginning to show signs of stress and a result, and even some of the veteran members of the team are starting to feel the heat, knowing that the interdepartmental specifics don't always match on missions such as these. Departmental briefings are to be held tomorrow morning, before the full team assembly at noon.

6. Rumor has it that a fellow by the name of Resnik, a man not known for any sort of contribution to society, has been found dead. Initial eyewitnesses are said to have witnessed him clutching an unusually large coin to his chest, and the look of on his face...it was enough to have swooned those possessed of a lesser constitution. But when the authorities arrived, there was no coin to be found. It was just old miserable Resnik himself, beat to a bloody pulp. Nobody has yet offered an explanation as to how he came to be soaking wet...



SCENES FROM A STARVING LAND

NEW NOTES ON G'HENNA

BY IAN FORDAM

INTRODUCTION

The scenes presented here take place in 745BC, immediately before the 2nd Edition adventure *Circle of Darkness*.

MIRGAU'S MESA

"You've not heard of Mirgau, then? Mirgau, Prophet of the Provider?" Kushar's expression was scornfully amused; ah, the ignorance of foreigners! "Of course you haven't. So let me tell you.

"Five years ago—though it feels much longer—the Severing shook the world. To protect us, Zhakata tore G'Henna free from the temptations of the faithless, and he has held us in his misty maw ever since. As you can imagine, this was a time of great terror among all the people. Perhaps it is blasphemy to say so, but even the priests were afraid! We did not know what we had done wrong, but surely some great sin been committed. Fortunate indeed we are to be guided by the steady hand of Lord Yagno Petrovna, Prophet of Zhakata."

Kushar must have caught the expressions of his audience. He wagged a stern finger at them in chastisement. "Prophet of *Zhakata*. *Zhakata* the *Devourer*. Not the Provider. For—as Lord Petrovna has told us—the Provider does not exist. The sin we had all committed was worshipping that false aspect. No longer would we do so. The Devourer, and the Devourer alone, is the true aspect of Zhakata. The

Hands of Zhakata, that branch dedicated to the Provider, was disbanded.

"Most of the Hands did not protest, but a few did. Those Hands who ran the Hospice announced that the Hospice would remain open under their care. They must have feared that the Swords would be sent to attack them, but no. The Swords simply boarded up the Hospice, and they killed anyone who attempted to escape. Within five days, the last of the Hands had made their final sacrifice to the Devourer, to judge from the cessation of their cries.

"Others were more cautious. Mirgau led a group of Hands, more loyal to him than to Lord Petrovna, out of the city and into the Outlands. Far, far they went, south to the mesa which now bears Mirgau's name. Atop that mesa they made their new home, and there Mirgau continued to preach the prophecy of the Provider.

"The Swords came, of course. Mirgau was ready. He had chosen the mesa in part because it was defensible. A falling rock acquires great speed, and so it strikes with impact greater than the strength of any helmet. The Swords attempted to assault the mesa, and they failed, so they retreated. Not far, however, because they realized that the blasphemers could not descend. Although the mesa was defensible, it offered little food and no water. Perhaps the hermits could collect eggs from those birds which nested atop the mesa, but there were not many birds, so there could not be many eggs. As for water, across the duration of the siege there was

only a single storm which blew through. The hermits must have collected water from the rain, but there could have been only so much to collect.

“Birds brought Mirgau bits of food, or so it is claimed by those fools who still long for the blasphemy of the Provider. But either they were wrong, or the birds brought some very little bits.

“Once a week had passed after the last time any of the Swords had spotted motion atop the mesa, the Swords made another attempt to scale it. This time no falling stones knocked them from the narrow trail. They reached the summit unharmed. There they found the hermits, all dead of starvation or thirst, Mirgau among them.

“And they left the bodies there where they had fallen.”

DM'S NOTES

BRANCHES OF THE CHURCH

The Inquisition is the most powerful and most infamous branch of the Church of Zhakata. However, there is more to the Church than the Inquisition.

The *Mind of Zhakata* is the second-largest branch. It operates the so-called University of Blessed Zhakata, which is closely tied to the Zhukar Library of Enlightenment.

Junior priests comprise the *Voice of Zhakata*, serving as messengers for the Inquisition. Officially they have no power, but they do have the ear of the Inquisition, so it would be foolish to mistake them as powerless.

The *Milk of Zhakata* operates the orphanages, which means they're in charge of the early indoctrination of the young.

Since women are forbidden to serve in the Inquisition or the Mind, the branch known as the *Brides of Zhakata* provides a place way for pious

women to serve Zhakata in quiet contemplation. Or so the Church claims, anyway.

The *Hands of Zhakata* were dedicated to Zhakata the Provider. However, after the Severing—which is what G'Hennans call the Great Upheaval—the Hands of Zhakata were declared apostate. Some of the Hands converted to other branches and gave up active worship of the Provider. Others fled Zhukar instead.

The Inquisition was originally known as the *Will of Zhakata*, but nobody uses that name any longer, not even the priests themselves.

THE LIBRARY OF ENLIGHTENMENT

The Library of Enlightenment stores a record of the Word of Zhakata, including all of the Yagno Petrovna's sermons and visions. The Library is run by an elderly priest named Kazimir Shvek, the last surviving member of the First Circle. The First Circle is what G'Hennans call those men who first encountered Yagno Petrovna in the wilderness and listened to the Word.

Kazimir Shvek has been recording what Petrovna says for forty-three years. He has survived within the Church by appearing harmless, but he is not. As the last surviving member of the First Circle, he has Yagno Petrovna's unquestioned protection, and he takes advantage of it. Although his evils usually affect only one person at a time, that makes his actions no less evil.

Over the years Shvek has written approximately half of the texts in the Library, which means that he has fundamentally shaped the intellectual discourse within the University for decades. He has learned to mimic Petrovna's voice well enough that very few people even suspect this deceit. As for Yagno Petrovna, perhaps he knows of Shvek's writings, perhaps he does not. If not, then Petrovna's jealousy over the revelations which Shvek has transcribed may prove his undoing.

GRANTED ABILITIES OF A PRIEST OF THE WILL OF ZHAKATA

- turn undead (1st level; +1 bonus versus ghouls and ghosts)
- *inflict hunger* (3rd level; 1/day/level)
- *Zhakata's Claws* (5th level; 1/day)
- *reveal shapeshifters* (7th level; 1/day)

NEW PRIEST SPELLS

Inflict Hunger (Abjuration)

Level: 2

Sphere: Healing/Necromantic

Range: 10 yards/level

Components: V, S

Duration: 1d6 rounds + 1 round/level

Casting Time: 5

Area of Effect: 1 Creature

Saving Throw: None

The subject of this spell suffers grievously painful hunger pangs. They suffer a +2 penalty to armor class and initiative, and they perform all actions at a -2 penalty.

If the subject is under the influence of a *potion of vitality*, the spell and the potion are both negated. However, if a *potion of vitality* is consumed by someone under the influence of this spell, the spell is negated without impacting the effects of the potion.

Zhakata's Claws (Invocation)

Level: 3

Sphere: Combat

Range: 10 yards/level

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 3 rounds + 1 round/level

Casting Time: 5

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: None

This spell is very similar to *spiritual hammer* except for two differences. First, the priest using the spell

attacks as a warrior of the same level. Second, a successful hit inflicts slashing damage of 1d6+1/hp per caster level.

This spell has no effect upon priests or paladins of Zhakata.

Reveal Shapeshifters (Alteration)

Level: 4

Sphere: Charm

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 3 rounds/level

Casting Time: 2

Area of Effect: 1 Creature

Saving Throw: Negates

This spell is close akin to *suppress lycanthropy* (see *Domains of Dread*, p.191) except for the following modifications:

- It is not reversible.
- It affects shapeshifters of any sort.
- Its victims are forced into a recognizably non-human, non-natural state. For example, lycanthropes enter a hybrid state (even if they don't normally have one). Impersonators turn to goo.

Inflict Starvation (Abjuration)

Level: 4

Sphere: Healing/Necromantic

Range: Touch

Components: V, S

Duration: 1d6 rounds + 1 round/level

Casting Time: 7

Area of Effect: Creature touched

Saving Throw: None

This spell is a stronger version of *inflict hunger*. Its victim suffers the effects of that spell as well as 2d8+1 hp damage.

If the subject is under the influence of a *potion of vitality*, the spell and the potion are both negated. If a *potion of vitality* is consumed by someone under

the influence of this spell, both potion and spell are negated, and the consumer regains 1d8 hp.

THE MIRACLE OF THE MESA

Healing spells cast upon Mirgau's Mesa always restore the maximum number of hit points. The mesa is haunted but in an unusually benevolent way.

THE FANGS OF ZHAKATA

"I was drinking at the Sideways Goat the night that the Fangs raided. I know you're a foreigner, so you don't know the Goat, but it was a tavern back in the days before the Church decreed that only properly licensed guesting houses could provide food. It's still the sort of place that makes its money on drinks rather than rooms. That afternoon Deza Cozma—he's the High Priest here in Dervich—had decreed that the next day would be a Fasting Day, and so the Goat was full of people imbibing their fill of beer and whiskey before dawn arrived.

"So the front door bursts open and a group of men rushes in. Most of the men have those armbands which mark them as Swords, but the two in front are wearing uniforms, black with red piping. There's no mistaking that they are the Fangs of Zhakata. The one in the front is older, so I know he must be Goju Cojec, the senior Fang. The one just behind must then be the junior Fang, Vancho. Goju Cojec looks like steel. Vancho, despite his tidy uniform and his youth, has something of a hermit's madness upon his face.

"Immediately I start a desperate attempt to recall what heresies I might have committed recently, not because I think they are after me, but because what if they were? The only thing keeping me from panic is that Goju Cojec has not drawn Nicu Osovei's sword. Vancho's hand is on the hilt of his own sword, though, so panic is still a possibility.

"Goju Cojec's voice is winter-cold as he announces, 'I'm looking for a man called Teviz. He stands accused of heresy.'

"I didn't know this Teviz, and I'm willing to bet that most of the people in the Goat didn't either. Given that, if Teviz had just stayed still, maybe he would have escaped notice. Not that he moves, not immediately, anyway. But he... does something.

"You know that warm rush which hits when whiskey settles into your blood? It's like that, except it grows hot, angry hot, the kind of hot that makes you want to hurt someone. The Fangs of Zhakata, for example. I was one of several dozen men who rose to their feet, ready to tear the Fangs to pieces, never mind that just thinking such things is extremely stupid.

"Even though he's surrounded by angry drunks, Goju Cojec doesn't care. He fixes his gaze on a particular man at a particular table. It's like he can see the heresy that this man just committed, or maybe he can hear it as if it had been spoken aloud. That's when Teviz knows he's caught, and so he panics and leaps up from his seat.

"At that Vancho moves. Goju Cojec does too, throwing himself into a crowd of drunkards to keep us from slowing Vancho down. Vancho steps onto a chair and then onto the table where Teviz was sitting, and he's drawing his sword as he does so. It's not Nicu Osovei's sword, but it's still been blessed by the priests of Zhakata the Devourer.

"I'm lucky because I'm one of the men that Goju Cojec is blocking, and I'm not one of the men rushing at Vancho. One of them dies at the end of a wide swing. Another one, at the far end, is also wounded, maybe not fatally. Even enraged with drink, the crowd hesitates. They give Vancho enough room to spring from the table to the bar, and he runs along the bar, and then he lunges for Teviz.

"You know that warm rush I mentioned? It drains away as soon as Teviz dies, leaving behind a feeling that's something like a hangover and something like regret. I'm not completely sober, but I'm not as drunk as I had been moments before. I'm not the only one. We all fall back as quickly as our feet will carry us.

“Goju Cojec looks at Vancho, and without any inflection whatsoever he says, ‘It’s difficult to interrogate a corpse.’

“Vancho shrugs. ‘We’ll take him to the priests. They’ll figure something out.’

“Goju Cojec gestures, and a pair of Swords move into the Goat to haul Teviz’ body out. The other two bodies are left where they fell.

“Both Fangs look back at us as they leave. Goju Cojec gives a look of warning and disappointment, and that is bad enough. Worse yet is Vancho’s dark look. He is angry that we didn’t give him reason to keep hewing.

“That’s what I think I saw, anyway. It’s hard to tell. I was very drunk at the time.”

DM'S NOTES

PALADIN ABILITIES OF THE FANG OF ZHAKATA

The Fangs of Zhakata are the paladins of Zhakata. They answer to the Warder General of the Swords of Zhakata, who answers directly to the Prophet himself, Yagno Petrovna. In theory, then, the Fangs are above the politics of Church and Swords alike, although in practice they are often given missions which serve the Inquisition or other factions.

Technically the Fangs of Zhakata have no ability requirements. In particular, very few Fangs over the years have ever had a 17 or higher charisma. However, because nobody would be appointed who is not an accomplished warrior and leader, most Fangs meet (or nearly meet) the usual ability score requirements for a paladin.

Similarly, the Fangs of Zhakata have no alignment restriction. However, most Fangs are chosen for their faith and obedience, which means that they are lawful. Also, the Church of Zhakata being what it is, most Fangs are evil.

A Fang of Zhakata possesses the following granted abilities:

- *detect heresy* (at will)
- +2 bonus to all saving throws
- immune to disease and hunger
- lay on hands (heal 2hp/level/day)
- *reveal shapeshifters* (1/day)
- *inflict starvation* (1/week/5 levels of experience)
- aura of protection (10' radius, heretical creatures and shapeshifters attack at -1)
- cast priest spells, starting at 10th level
- 20% magic resistance when bearing the *sword of Nicu Osovei*

Note that a Fang's granted abilities include neither turning undead nor summoning a war horse. The Fangs do not operate independently enough from the rest of the Swords to attract their own group of followers.

The *detect heresy* ability may be used to detect the influence of deities other than Zhakata the Devourer, including heretical aspects of Zhakata such as the Provider. Any such priest casting a spell or using a granted ability will be detected as heretical, as will any person under the effects of such spells or granted abilities. Holy items, magic items, and paladins dedicated to other deities will always be perceived as heretical.

As befits the paladin of a god of deprivation, the Fangs of Zhakata keep no personal treasure or money. They may use any magic items granted them by the Warder General. In particular, the senior Fang always carries the sword of Nicu Osovei.

At any given time, there are only two Fangs, the senior and the junior. However, this restriction may be only convention, not a true restriction.

GOJU COJEC

10th level human paladin of Zhakata

Str 15, dex 14, con 18, int 14, wis 15, cha 17

hp 110, hd 9d10+3, ac 5 → 3, th 11, al LN

Granted abilities: see above

Special: longsword specialization (2 slots, +1 to-hit/+2 damage, 2 attacks/round); single-weapon fighting style (-1 bonus to AC)

Spells: cure light wounds, purify food and drink

Equipment: sword of Nicu Osovei: longsword +2/+4 versus shapechangers (1d8/1d12, sf5 → +3 to-hit, 1d8+4/1d12+4, sf3, 2 attacks/round); chainmail +1 (AC5 → AC4)

The senior Fang of Zhakata. Dedicated to his god, of course, but he's not boneheaded about his devotion. Known among the people of G'Henna for being reasonable, at least as Fangs go.

Goju Cojec probably learned his thoughtfulness during his eight years serving as junior Fang under Dinu Lupescu. Lupescu was notable for both his reasonableness and for surviving as a Fang for thirteen years. In the end he was defeated not by mongrels or kobolds or shapeshifter or heretics but by his own faith. He voluntarily starved himself to death as a failed sacrifice to undo the Severing.

Although raised with privilege, Goju Cojec suffers increasing guilt over the benefits he enjoys and which others do not. He remains fervent in his belief in Zhakata... but he grows increasingly concerned about how the priests interpret doctrine.

VANCHO

8th level human paladin of Zhakata

Str 12, dex 17, con 15, int 14, wis 13, cha 15

hp 72, hd 8d10, ac 5 → 2, th 13, al LE

Granted abilities: see above

Special: longsword specialization (2 slots, +1 to-hit/+2 damage, 2 attacks/round)

Equipment: longsword +2 (1d8/1d12, sf5 → +3 to-hit, 1d8+4/1d12+4, sf1, 2 attacks/round); chainmail (AC5)

The junior Fang of Zhakata. Vancho was born to a woman who cleaned for the Church of Zhakata, and when his mother died, he was raised by the Milk of Zhakata at an orphanage, becoming thoroughly indoctrinated. He came to the attention of the Sword of Zhakata after savagely beating a much larger boy who had expressed heresy. Vancho joined the Sword, eventually rising to become one of the Fangs of Zhakata.

Vancho is a bully. Fortunately for the people of G'Henna, he is the junior Fang, and he still heeds the orders of Goju Cojec, the senior Fang. He looks forward to the day that Goju Cojec's softness proves fatal.

THE SWORD OF NICU OSOVEI

The sword originally wielded by Nicu Osovei, the first Fang of Zhakata. It is now wielded by the senior Fang. It is a *longsword +2, +4 versus lycanthropes and shapechangers*.

If wielded by a mongrel or kobold, Nicu Osovei's sword acts as a -2 cursed weapon. If wielded by a lycanthrope or other shapechanger, it acts as a -4 cursed weapon. In either case, a roll of natural 1 indicates that the sword has twisted to strike the wielder instead.

When wielded by a Fang of Zhakata, the sword of Nicu Osovei provides 20% magic resistance to its bearer.

However, the most curious feature of Nicu Osovei's sword is its ability to keep its wielder alive beyond normal limits. The wielder remains fully conscious and functional until his or her hit points reach -10, at which point death occurs as normal.

DANCERS OF THE VINE

The Dancers of the Vine are a mystery cult which operates in Dervich and the Fertile Valley. The Dancers worship an aspect of Zhakata which they call either the Imbiber or sometimes the Liberator. The cult's emphasis is less upon the denial of food and more upon the consumption of alcohol, particularly wine. The loss of rationality is the sacrifice they offer to the Beast-God.

The Dancers of the Vine consider themselves to be faithful worshippers of Zhakata. However, the Church of Zhakata in Zhukar would consider the Dancers to be dangerous heretics if the Church in Zhukar paid enough attention to realize that they exist. On the other hand, the Church in Dervich does know about the Dancers, and they have requested assistance from the Fangs of Zhakata in dealing with this threat.

In most matters the Dervich Merchants' Guild provides a counterbalance to the Church in Dervich. However, the widespread revelation of the existence of the Dancers would allow the Church to assert its power in the effort to suppress this new heresy. Anything which strengthens the Church weakens the Guild, and so the Guild considers the Dancers to be a threat to their prosperity—except for those merchants who belong to the Dancers, of course.

Very little is known about the Dancers. However, their priests have demonstrated a remarkable granted ability. They can exacerbate the drunkenness of nearby people and twist their victims' emotions accordingly.

FORT GRASU

"It's brilliant!" Iosif Breban declared. "It's a wonder that nobody thought of it sooner!"

In the captain's absence, Sergeant Zoran was the highest-ranking soldier at Fort Grasu. It wasn't supposed to work that way. There were supposed to be two lieutenants, and at least one of them was supposed to command the fort whenever the

captain was absent. However, Captain Anzya never left the fort without Lieutenant Deshka at her side, and Captain Anzya always dismissed the second lieutenant—whoever he might be—at summer's end, leaving the fort understaffed all winter. Or, more honestly, staffed exactly how the captain preferred.

Ordinarily Sergeant Zoran took satisfaction from having command of the fort, but command also left him in charge of entertaining any guests who sought lodging at the fort. Tonight, that responsibility included fellows like this Iosif Breban, who was too loud and too proud and entirely too impressed by his own ideas.

Zoran rumbled, "So you paid the Church in Zhukar a sum to take charge of a chain of prisoners? And you marched them north to Dervich, where work-gangs are explicitly forbidden to accommodate the Guild's belief that making prisoners labor deprives a lawful citizen of a job?"

"Yes! Not everybody in the Guild agrees with the Guild's stance. And work-gangs are only forbidden in the city proper. Outside of Dervich, I was able to find any number of people willing buy—er, *hire*—a work-gang. Among the Vintners and Farmers especially. I wasn't up north any more than two weeks, and now I'm heading back to Zhukar with a full purse, hoping to fit in another trip back and forth before the winter hits."

"You're very ambitious," Zoran said, as if it were a compliment. "However, I can think of three obstacles to your plans—"

First, undermining the Guild was a fine way to end up in a Dervich prison, especially when the Church would not support him either.

Second, based upon Zoran's six years in the Run, winter absolutely would not give him time for another trip.

Third—

The doors to the dining hall opened, and Captain Anzya marched in within Lieutenant Deshka at her side. The patrol had returned, just in time for food from the kitchen and warmth from the hearth. Many of the Swords raised their mugs and cheered a greeting. “Captain! Deshka!”

Iosif Breban blinked. “They’re *women*?”

Zoran decided not to laugh in his face. Instead, he rose to his feet and called out, “Captain! We have a guest!”

By the time the captain and the lieutenant reached the head table, Iosif Breban still had not hidden his disbelief. Captain Anzya maintained a politely civil expression. Deshka smirked outright, and as soon as Zoran finished the introductions, she sauntered off to sit with some of the corporals and privates.

“She’s very young for a lieutenant,” Iosif Breban observed. He didn’t mean it to be noticed as a criticism.

“She is,” Anzya agreed. “On the other hand, nobody in the Sword knows the Jackal’s Run as well as Lieutenant Deshka does. She grew up here.”

Before their guest could pursue that line of thought, Zoran interjected, “Iosif Breban has an idea that he’s very proud of,” and Iosif Breban was only happy to elaborate.

When he had finally run down, Anzya said, “So you bought and sold slaves.”

“Yes!” Iosif Breban replied. “Isn’t it a brilliant idea?”

The next morning Iosif Breban rode out from Fort Grasu and eastward across the steppes. He did not make good time, but then his horse was not a terribly good horse. When he stopped for a midday bite, he was surprised to see a rider catching up to him from the west. He was even more surprised to see it was Captain Anzya, riding a considerably better horse than his own.

“You scared me, Captain,” Iosif Breban admitted when she drew near. “I thought you were the Jackal

herself, come out from the Run to rob and murder me.”

“You don’t need to worry about the Jackal,” Captain Anzya reassured him, except that she didn’t actually sound reassuring.

“What are you doing, so far from the fort?”

“Providing a distraction.”

“Huh?”

She drew her sword and aimed it directly at Iosif Breban’s throat. “I don’t approve of slavery.”

“But they were criminals!”

“Or at least somebody said they were criminals. Perhaps they even were.”

“Can’t we discuss this like civilized people? Over bread, not blades?”

Captain Anzya smiled sadly, like she had reached the end of a joke that didn’t turn out to be as funny as she had thought. “As I said, you don’t have to worry about the Jackal,” she said. “You have to worry about me instead. And Deshka.”

The hint of sadness in her voice gave him hope that he could talk her out of whatever harm she intended to cause him, but then he heard something that stripped him of that hope: a deep, gravelly purring, as from a very large cat.

DM’S NOTES

THE SWORDS AT FORT GRASU

Fort Grasu was built in 735BC at the behest of the Dervich Merchants' Guild, which was tired of losing their best wares to the bandits of the Jackal's Run. The original commander, Captain Grasu, was killed by kobolds in 738BC, and the fort was officially named in his honor. Captain Anzya took command that summer, and she has held the fort ever since.

In 739BC, Captain Anzya and her Swords tracked down and killed the bandit known as the Jackal. According to rumor, the Jackal's widow has subsequently taken his position and his nickname. (This is traditional; the most prominent bandit in the Run always claims that title.) However, the new Jackal has proven to be a much more moderate raider than her predecessor. She claims only a third of all food transported through the Run. Many merchants simply surrender her share and continue on without violence.

Captain Anzya has been tasked with hunting down the Jackal, but she has no intention of succeeding at her task. After all, she is the Jackal. The story of the Jackal's widow is entirely fictional, a rumor that Captain Anzya spread to obscure her own assumption of the role. In addition, her second-in-command, Lieutenant Deskha, is a wereleopard. Years ago Deskha was orphaned by Swords from Zhukar but taken in by Captain Anzya, and Fort Grasu has become her home. Those Swords who are loyal to Captain Anzya know and keep her secrets; those who prove insufficiently loyal never learn any secrets, and they find themselves reassigned to Zhukar at the end of the summer.

Attentive observers may note that the villages of the Jackal's Run have experienced less starvation during the winter since the latest Jackal claimed the title.

HOUD OF ZHAKATA

	Living	Ghoulish
Climate/Terrain	G'Henna	G'Henna
Frequency	Rare	Very Rare
Organization	Pack	Pack
Activity Cycle	Day	Night
Diet	Omnivore	Omnivore
Intelligence	Semi- (2-4)	Semi- (2-4)
Treasure	Nil	Nil
Alignment	Chaotic Evil	Chaotic Evil
No. Appearing	1-8	1-2

	Living	Ghoulish
Armor Class	6	4
Movement	12	12
Hit Dice	2+2	4+3
THACO	19	17
No. of Attacks	1	1
Damage/Attack	1d10	2d8
Special Attacks	Disease	Disease, Paralysis
Special Defenses	Nil	Undead Immunities
Magic Resistance	Nil	Undead Immunities
Size	M (6' long)	M (6' long)
Morale	Steady (11-12)	Fearless (19-20)
XP Value	120	650

Hounds of Zhakata are dogs the size of mastiffs, bred by the priesthood of Zhakata in his guise as the Devourer. Their hides are desert tan, dappled with darker spots, and their sparse, bristly fur is black. Their howls carry. Given their excellent noses, they are used as both watch dogs and for tracking prey. They are very aggressive dogs, known among the priests for turning on their handlers. Not often... but sometimes.

As if ordinary Hounds of Zhakata aren't bad enough, some of them arise after death as ghouls. Ghoulish hounds never obey their former masters. They exist only to consume. Really, the only good news is that living hounds never interact with ghoulish hounds.

LYCANTHROPE, WERELEOPARD, STOW

Climate/Terrain	Outlands of G'Henna
Frequency	Rare
Organization	Tribal
Activity Cycle	Any
Diet	Carnivore
Intelligence	Low to High
Treasure	K
Alignment	LN → LE

No. Appearing	3-18
Armor Class	5
Movement	18
Hit Dice	5
THACO	15
No. of Attacks	3
Damage/Attack	1d4/1d4/1d6
Special Attacks	Hamstring
Special Defenses	+1 or better weapons to hit
Magic Resistance	Nil
Size	M
Morale	Steady (12)
XP Value	True 650, Infected 420

The wereleopard of G'Henna is frequently mistaken for a werejaguar, except that there is nowhere in G'Henna where an actual jaguar would live. In truth, its phenotype more closely resembles the snow leopard than the jaguar or even the common leopard.

In most respects the wereleopard of G'Henna is identical to its counterparts from elsewhere in the Land of Mists. However, unlike the wereleopards of the *Ravenloft Monstrous Compendium Volume III*, the G'Hennan wereleopard has three aspects: human, feline, and hybrid.

Wereleopards are vulnerable to ebony wood (and other woods of the *Diospyros* genus, including the date-plum persimmon found in the Blade and Hotath mountains). Of course, a +1 or better weapon will also harm a wereleopard.

Nutmeg, the spice, is a chemical allergen to wereleopards.

LYCANTHROPE, WEREWEASEL

Climate/Terrain	Outlands of G'Henna
Frequency	Rare
Organization	Pair

Activity Cycle	Both
Diet	Carnivore
Intelligence	Very
Treasure	Nil
Alignment	LE → LN
No. Appearing	1d8
Armor Class	6
Movement	15
Hit Dice	3+2
THACO	19
No. of Attacks	3
Damage/Attack	1/1/1d4
Special Attacks	Drain Blood
Special Defenses	See Below
Magic Resistance	Nil
Size	M
Morale	Steady (11)
XP Value	270

Wereweasels live upon the steppes and foothills of G'Henna, particularly near the Hotath and Pekkau Mountains.

As usual for lycanthropes, true wereweasels have three forms: human, animal, and hybrid. A hybrid form appears very similar to a giant weasel, except that its facial features are more human, its tail is shorter, and it possesses opposable thumbs. True wereweasels have total control over their shape-shifting. They spend most of the winter in animal form and most of the rest of the year in human form.

Infected wereweasels have no control over their shape-shifting. They automatically assume hybrid form when the temperature drops too low, and they revert to human form when the temperature rises again. Spells such as *cone of cold* can force a sudden, if brief, change of form. After prolonged exposure to cold (on the order of days), the infected wereweasel

is forced into animal form and, worse yet, it loses its human-level intelligence until the weather warms up again.

Wereweasels are experts at contortion, which allows them to, well, *weasel* out of tight places.

Grapes, including raisins and grape juice, are the chemical allergen for wereweasels. Grape juice that has been fermented—that is, wine—is no longer immediately deadly, but it will make a wereweasel very sick. Fortunately, their excellent sense of smell, even in human form, usually allows them to avoid their allergen.

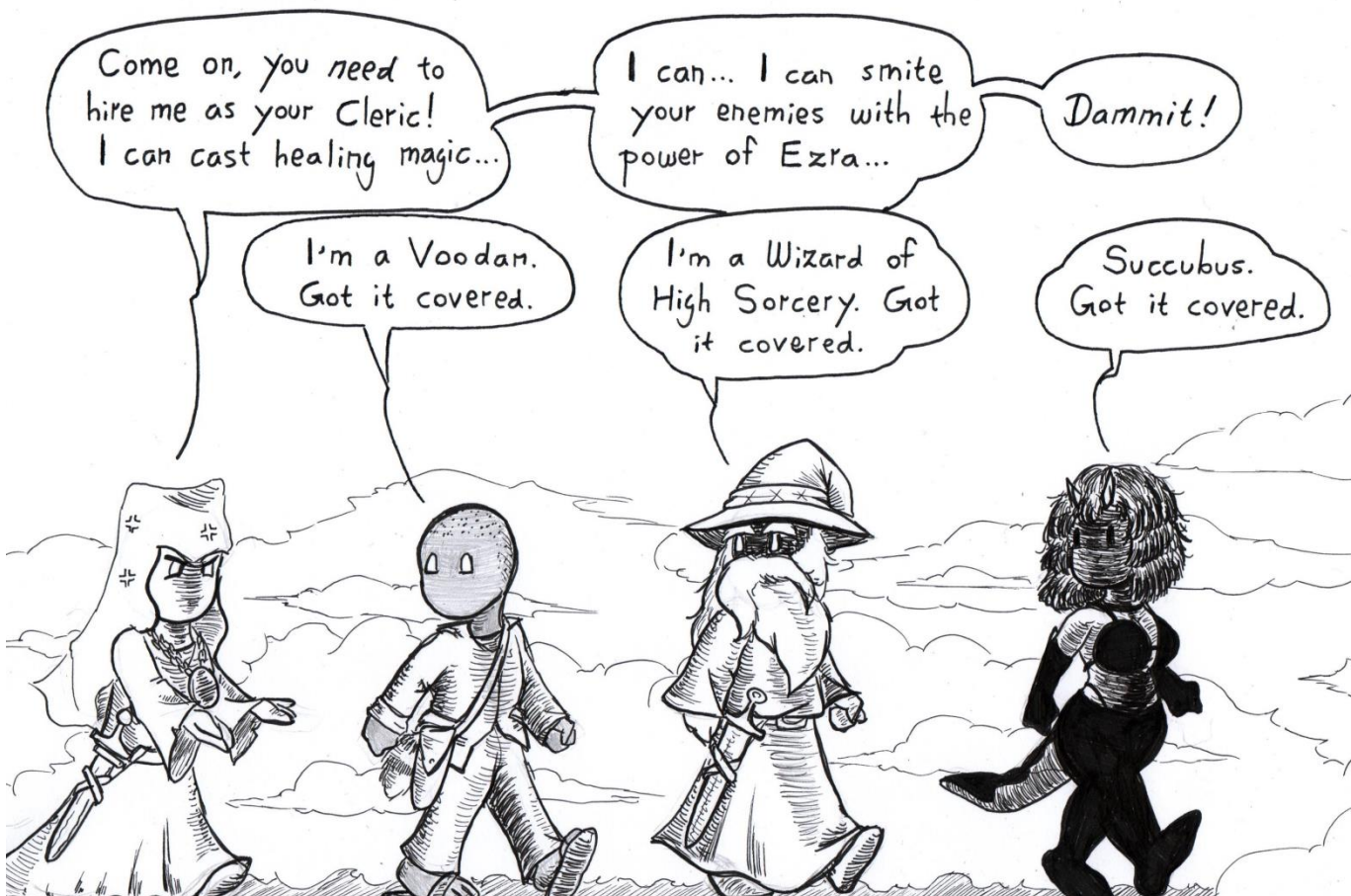
A silver or +1 magic weapon is required to harm a wereweasel.

Like their mundane kindred, wereweasels drain blood from their prey. The round after a successful bite attack, they will cling to their prey and automatically drain 1d6 points of damage per round until killed or otherwise dislodged. The wereweasel will shake a drained victim, inflicting a -2 penalty on any action they might take.

However, wereweasels prefer to avoid combat which does not favor them. They will gladly retreat and wait for more vulnerable prey.



Surplus To Requirements



THE CONCH SHELL OF SORROWS

NEW HORRORS FROM THE DEPTHS

BY MICHAEL ADAMIS

*"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives.
It is the one that is the most adaptable to change."*

– Charles Darwin

Ominous clouds had just shielded the University of Richemulot from the sickle moon's light when a light flickered in the University's library. The light was barely visible from the outside through the large windows of the library, as if sheltered by darkness. Among the endless silent corridors of books, the smell of old parchment and leather, a large shadow appeared on the north wall of the library's reading hall. It began moving around the tapestry-decorated walls of the room, creating an illusion of animating the images sewn in the tapestries.

A squeaky sound broke the silence; a small rat was walking along the recently lit chandelier, casting its shadow on the tapestries as it circled the massive candelabra. A sudden burst of light from one of the candles made the tiny creature fall to its death, as it landed on a fine-sewn woolen Hazlani carpet with an elaborate design of glyphs and arcane symbols. The smell of charred hair and flesh was striking.

"Filthy pest" muttered an old man wearing a black robe, decorated with purple silk and an ermine collar. His breaches and a tailcoat were barely visible as he poked the tiny animal with a black wooden cane to make sure it was dead. The cane's head, silver, in the shape of an owl, matched with the white owl perched on his shoulder. The snowy owl spread its wings and flew overhead looking for more rodents.

A thin man, appearing to be in his mid-thirties and of medium height, with sharp features and a long, straight nose manifested from the shadows of the hall, wearing

a long, black cloak and holding a broad-brimmed black hat.

"Make sure every rat in this room is exterminated, before we begin the review of a controversial, but interesting, report I acquired recently!" the cloaked man ordered, as he looked around with his pitch-black eyes barely visible through his smoked glasses. His pallid gray skin, visible only on his face and hands, was covered with ebony marks, like old bruises; they seemed to move around like an amoeba, separating and then combining themselves, making his skin look sickly but alive as if it was somehow animated by its own life force. As he uttered these words, his shadow somehow multiplied itself, as the amoeba-like spots on his pale skin and a portion of the shadow separated and, with a simulacrum of life, began moving around the hall, as if searching for more of those eavesdropping rodents.

"I am sure, Elder Brother Tarnos, that none of these filthy vermin are within earshot. I've exterminated every one of them using a personal variation of a spell from Briel's Book of Shadows, which I developed a few weeks ago," said another man, stepping out of the shadows, all dressed in black. His coffee-colored skin, black hair, and amber, mesmerizing eyes made his Valachani heritage obvious, but there was something exotic in his features that made him even more beautiful than the typical Valachani.

"So, what about this one?" asked the black-robed man, his robes contrasting with the fringe of snow-white hair

tied back in a long ponytail, as he continued to poke the dead rat with his owl-headed cane. "I guess your copy of Briel's ramblings, besides its alicorn remedies, neglected to inform you that rodents can be found also in chandeliers," said Lord Balfour de Casteelle, his head turned at an impossible angle, looking with smugness at the tall Valachani man behind him, and piercing him with his large, golden, owl-shaped eyes. The badinage was not ill-suited; the wiry old president of the University of Dementlieu knew that the spell Jan Mikkelson had just used was from the forbidden school of necromancy, and not some new shadow version of it - all the better for the ongoing experiment the Umbra had planned for him.

"I guess that was the last one, Lord de Casteelle. I left it especially for you. What is the way you prefer your mice to be cooked again? Hmmm... Medium rare, I presume, from the looks of it," replied the Valachani, obviously irritated by Lord Balfour's remark and retaliating with an insult. Lord Balfour de Casteelle turned his body to face Mikkelson's direction, staring constantly at the young wizard as he did, in an effort to intimidate him. He was tempted to don his magical hood and give this Valachani upstart a lesson, but resisted.

The fate this young fool would ultimately face would be far worse than a scare, and the experiment that the highest echelon members of the Fraternity had orchestrated was far too important to be jeopardized for a minor insult or, better, an insult from a minor man. Jan Mikkelson was doomed and he didn't even know that he was just bait, no less than a worm. The thought satisfied Balfour de Casteelle, as he gathered his composure, returning the insult with a smile.

"Enough of this extermination chat!" said a silver-haired man in his mid-fifties dressed in obsolete clothing, who had just entered the reading hall through the shadows. The light of the chandelier above was reflected slightly on his balding head and his sunburst gold chained medallion. "If you don't mind, I shall cast a spell so no one outside our circle can listen to what we have to say. After all, this is a reading room and the library rules say we have to be quiet, don't they?"

"Well said Count, but I cast that Soundproof spell myself around... a minute ago... centered on that table over there," said a short, rosy-cheeked, round-bodied man

manipulating a finely crafted silver pocket-watch, with his elegant long fingers. A small nod of his head showed the direction of his spell, but his eyes were fixed on the silver gearwheel ornament in his hands. His round form had also appeared through a shadow, his expensive Dementlieuse clothes, in blue and gold, contrasting with the disappearing shadow behind him.

"So, I guess we may begin now," commented Tarnos Shadowcloak, casually pulling a tuft of his long, straight, black hair off his right cheek and placing it behind his ear.

"If I may ask in advance - from whom is this report, and why were you so eager to meet here Brother Tarnos? It must have been quite important for you to leave your experiments in Vechor and insist that I should leave Mordent at such short notice and in haste," asked the fey-touched looking man still nervously contemplating his watch, apparently waiting for the meeting to end.

"Although I may have distracted you from an important task, Brother Malcolm, and I sincerely apologize for that, you will find that what I will read to you is of the outmost importance," said Shadowcloak, his pinched, thin-lipped mouth forming a smirk. "It appears to be from Cedrik Paddock," the elder Umbra continued, the smirk still visible on his face, but his eyes still black and impenetrable lacking expression, in expectance of the argument soon to follow.

"Oh... that one..." said Count Wilhelm von Lovenhorst, skeptically touching his trimmed mustache and a sharply pointed goatee in a gesture of arrogance.

"Don't be so judgmental, brother. Don't forget that Brother Paddock gave us invaluable information on the Abber Nomads and their resistance to illusions."

"I haven't forgotten, Brother Tarnos, as I haven't forgotten that we still haven't finished our debate on the subject of whether the Abber Nomads can pierce through the illusions made by the Watchers in Shadow or if, as you claim, they experience reality as we do and the Watchers in the Shadow truly change reality by mental effort."

"If I may add," said Malcolm Scott still looking anxiously at his watch, "There is absolutely nothing that materialistic freak has offered to our cause since his

acceptance within our fold. The only thing he has done all these years is to spend resources for his failed alteration experiments.”

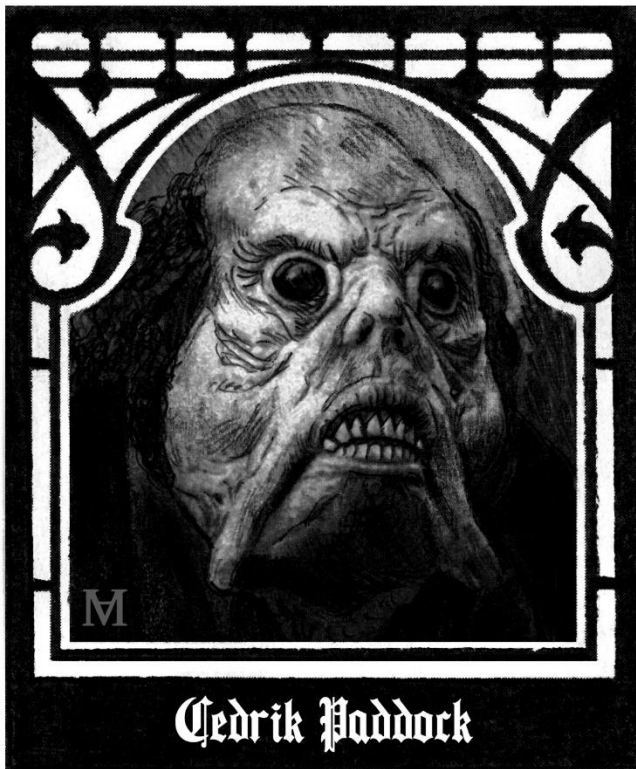
“Also, don’t forget that he was a pupil of that traitorous van Rijn. Who says he is not still working for that lich?” said Jan Mikkelson angrily, with his heavy Valachan-accented voice emphasizing the word “lich.”

“Gentlemen!” the firm voice of Lord Balfour was heard so loudly that would have surely had echoed in the empty dark corridors of the library, if it wasn’t for Scott’s silence spell. “Brothers,” he continued with a calm voice, “You have begun to argue before even hearing what the report is about. I know that Brother Paddock is a wedge issue within our enlightened community, but we have to admit that his treatise on the Abber Nomads and the Nightmare Lands was ground breaking, even if he himself returned a bit off, if

not utterly mad. I believe there will be much debate and argument after the presentation of the report, and don’t forget that some of us are anxious to return to their homes.” Lord Balfour conceitedly stared at Malcolm Scott, who was still fixated on his watch. “So shall we begin?”

Everyone sat around a reading table in the middle of the silence spell. Their attention, aside from Scott, who was still trying to calm his anxiousness, playing with his elegant pocket-watch, was to Tarnos Shadowcloak, who was slowly untying and opening a leather file. From within he took out Cedrik Paddock’s notes, among them was a letter registered to the Umbra. He took off his smokey dark glasses and placed them on the table. His inscrutable eyes seemed motionless as he began to read.





CEDRIK PADDOCK

Male human Master

Sage2/Trans4/Druid5/FoS1/MasterOfManyForms3

(Complete Adventurer variant, p. 58)

Hit Dice: 2d6+5d4+8d8+15 (65 hp)

Initiative: +2

Speed: 20 ft. (4 squares), swim 35 ft.

Armor Class: 13 (+1 natural, +2 Dex), touch 12, flat-footed 11

Base Attack/Grapple: +8, 2 claws +4/ bite +3

Attack: 1d6+1 (claw), or +9 1d6+1 (cane)

Full Attack: Claw 1d6+1/1d6+1; bite 1d4

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Spells

Special Qualities: Amphibious

Saves: Fort +9, Ref +7, Will +19 (+23 Madness) the reason why his mind managed to survive his journey in the Nightmare Lands

Abilities: Str 13, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 11

Skills: Concentration +8, Listen +4(6*), Spot +4(6*), Swim +4, Search +3, Knowledge (nature) +7#, Knowledge (Ravenloft) +10, Knowledge (history) +8,

Knowledge (Religion) +4, Knowledge (Arcana) +14, Knowledge (Nightmare Lands) +15, Survival +7(+9#NL), Move Silently +5(9*), Hide +5 (9*), Decipher Script +10, Diplomacy +13#, Heal +4, Sense Motive +7, Bluff +6, Gather Information +6, Craft (Alchemy) +10, Hypnosis +8, Intimidate +3#, (*underwater)(#synergy)

Feats: Scribe Scroll, Alertness, Iron Will, Endurance, Open Mind, Serpent's Venom, Extra Wild Shape, Spell Mastery, Silent Spell

Languages: Zherisian*, Draconic, Mordentish, Abber, Vaasi

Challenge Rating: 13

Alignment: Neutral Evil

Languages: Zherisian*, Mordentish, Abber

Signature Possession: *FoS signet ring, Immovable Rod (cane)*

Amphibious (Ex): Cedric can breathe both air and water he can survive underwater up to 11 hours.

Fraternity Sigil Ring: *deeper darkness* three times per day as a free action.

Camouflage (Ex): Since Cedrik's scales blend with underwater plant life, while immobile, he is able to remain unseen in this environment: it takes a DC 24 Spot check to notice his presence.

Blindsense (Ex): Cedrik can locate all creatures underwater within a 30-foot radius. This ability works only when he is underwater. While lurking under a boat for three minutes, he can also use this sense to estimate precisely how many persons are in a boat and their location.

Improved Wild Shape (Su) 5/day Cedric can turn himself into any Small, Medium, or Large animal, humanoid, or monstrous humanoid for 5 hours and back again. Changing form is a move action and doesn't provoke an attack of opportunity. Each time he uses wild shape, he regains lost hit points as if he had rested for a night. The form chosen must be familiar to him.

Shifter's Speech (Ex): Cedric can speak normally (including verbal components for spells) regardless of the form he takes. Furthermore he can communicate

with other creatures of the same kind while in wild shape.

Nature Sense (Ex): A druid gains a +2 bonus on Knowledge (nature) and Survival checks.

Trackless Step (Ex): Cedric leaves no trail in natural surroundings and cannot be tracked. He may choose to leave a trail if so desired.

Resist Nature's Lure (Ex): Cedric has a +4 bonus on saving throws against the spell-like abilities of fey.

Spontaneous Casting: Cedric can channel stored spell energy into summoning spells. He can "lose" a prepared spell in order to cast any summon nature's ally spell of the same level or lower.

Toxic Bite (Ex): Cedric may spend a usage of wild shape to gain a toxic venom on his bite attack. The toxin is Fort save DC 17, 1d6 Con/ 1d6 Con

Woodland Stride (Ex): Cedric may move through any sort of undergrowth (such as natural thorns, briars, overgrown areas, and similar terrain) at his normal speed and without taking damage or suffering any other impairment.

Druid Spells: DC 13+spell lvl, 5/4/3/2

Favorite spells: *Create Water, Cure Minor Wounds, Detect Magic, Detect Poison, Read Magic; Entangle, Jump, Obscuring Mist, Shillelagh; Barkskin, Bull's Strength, Flaming Sphere, Delay Poison; Cure Moderate Wounds, Water Breathing*

Arcane Spells: DC 12+spell lvl, 4+1/4+1/3+1/2+1 (one additional spell from Alteration, no spells from Abjuration or Necromancy) (Spell Mastery Spells+) : *Acid Splash, Arcane Mark, Dancing Lights, Daze, Detect Magic, Detect Poison, Flare, Ghost Sound, Light, Mage Hand*, Mending*, Message*, Open / Close*, Prestidigitation, Ray of Frost, Read Magic; Charm Person, Enlarge Person*, Expeditious Retreat*, Hypnotism+, Jump*, Silent Image, Disguise Self, Comprehend Languages, Mage Armor; Alter Self*, Bull's Strength*, Darkvision*, Spider Climb*, Web; Gaseous Form*+, Rage+, Suggestion, Tongues*

Lore: As a master sage Cedrik has acquired a talent for picking up assorted facts, historical trivia, and random

legends, just as a bard does with bardic knowledge. Paddock's bardic knowledge check is +12.

Cedrik has a frog familiar named Forsc

Poison Dart Frog Dread Companion CR 1/4; HP 27; NE ;Sz Fine Animal; Init +3; AC 23 (+2 nat, +8 size, +3 Dex), touch 21, flat-footed 18; HD 4; Fort +0, Ref +5, Will +1; Speed: 10 ft. (2 squares), climb 10 ft., swim 5 ft. Melee bite +11 (1d8+10 plus trip +11); Space 1/2 ft.; Reach 0 ft. Base Atk +0; Grp -21; Sp Att Poison; SQ Amphibious, low-light vision; Abilities Str 1, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 7, Wis 13, Cha 6; Feats: Alertness; Skills: Climb +13, Hide 0, Jump +10, Listen +3, Spot +3, Swim +11; **Deliver Touch Spells (Su); Share Spells (Ex); Improved Evasion (Ex); Empathic Link (Su) Bright Skin (Ex):** A creature that spots a poison dart frog rolls a DC 5 Wisdom check to realize it is poisonous.

Poison (Ex): Ingested, Fortitude DC 14, 2d6 Con/ 2d6 Con

BACKGROUND

Cedrik was born in 717 BC to a middle-class family in the countryside of Zherisia. His father, Matthew Paddock, was a veterinarian and adamant adherent of the Divinity of Mankind who had very strict rules on the way his children's upbringing should be, with extreme racist views. His father always forgave Cedrik's younger brother, River, for any misdeeds and Cedrik was sometimes punished for his brother's actions as the elder who "was responsible for his brother's actions too." His mother, Agness, was a sweet but frail woman from whom Cedrik had always had to compete for affection with his younger brother, who she adored.

What his parents didn't know was that their second child, River, was actually a cuckoo-born offspring of a dread doppelganger who impregnated their mother in the guise of his father. When his brother's awakening started, he was a witness of one of these transformations; naturally, his parents didn't believe him but "River" felt threatened by his "sibling" and also read the Cedrik's fear of him. He managed to take Cedrik's form and destroy their father's library. Matthew, furious, sent both his children into boarding schools. "River" was sent to Gracebridge, a few miles from their house, while his older son was sent to a boarding house in Dementlieu. Later, he gained a

scholarship at the University of Richemulot where he began his studies in psychology and philosophy, but after a year he changed his studies, enrolling in the Department of Anthropology with professor Erik van Rijn, and soon he was selected by Erik as his apprentice in alteration magicks.

After getting his degree, he began his doctoral studies, focusing on the Abber Nomads, and was introduced to the Fraternity, which endorsed him with funds to follow an Abber tribe to the Nightmare Lands, as they were interested in the constantly altering realities of that domain. He was accepted by the tribe and lived with the Abber Nomads for some time in the Terrain Between. Feeling more accepted by this tribe of perceived “uncivilized” people than he ever was with his family, and seeing that Zherisia’s so-called civilization was just a facade of abuse, he embraced the Abber philosophy, which in principle was similar to that of the Fraternity, but had difficulty accepting their way of living and their shutting down of all the possibilities of Enlightenment.

In his eyes, they were still semi-intelligent animals, and although their minds were freed from the “illusions” of physical reality, it was more as a way of survival in a hostile environment than an enlightened state. He saw that they lived with an apathy of the world around them and he could not understand how they didn’t care about things they could not explain. His thirst for knowledge and power made him abandon the tribe and become a disciple of an Abber nomad by the name of Powah. Under the teaching of Powah, he learned how to control the powers of nature and was guided into the world of dreams to uncover the secrets of his mind. During a sleep quest Cedrik’s dream self reached the level of an enlightened dream and managed to uncover the secrets of his unconscious and discover his “brother’s” real nature.

This realization changed his way of thinking dramatically, recognizing the power that exists in the transformation of one’s self. He became obsessed with learning the secrets of changing his form, becoming a master of many forms, believing that he could reach his true self through his transformations. His sense of self was no longer dependent on his outward form, but to his soul. He abandoned the Abber shaman and

managed to return to the University of Richemulot in 742.

Upon returning he learned that his family had vanished in the Mists after the Grand Conjunction, along with his family estate. He didn’t shed a tear; for him, they were gone years before. His thesis on the Abber Nomads gave him the position of lector of Anthropological studies and Abber Nomad philosophy at the University of Richemulot. Although his report on the Nightmare Lands was welcomed by the Fraternity of Shadows, his views on internal change through external transformation and his more materialistic experiments placed him into a fringe within the Fraternity of Shadows. He is looked down upon by Fraternity members, perceived as some kind of an oddball, probably having gone mad from his long exposure to the shifting illusions of the Nightmare Lands.

When, in 759, Erik betrayed the Fraternity, Cedrik was scrutinized, as he was the traitor’s closest associate and even though there was nothing found against him many members began to mistrust Cedrik. All these issues have slowed, if not stopped, Cedrik’s ascension within the Fraternity. For the past year, as an expert on both the physiology and psychology of transformation, he has been researching some strange incidents connected with a patient in Saulbridge Sanitarium and the small seaside town of Ravienne in Dementlieu.

CURRENT SKETCH

Since his outward appearance doesn’t mean anything to his sense of self, he welcomes his transformation by the shell’s reality wrinkle as a step closer to enlightenment, and of reaching his true self’s potential. He does not know the source of the transformation yet, but he is in the process of discovering the radius where the transformations happen and the exact point of its source. He moves around the area, spending his nights in an Abber Nomad tent on the borders of the reality wrinkle’s radius. He has figured out that the transformation is reversible, as he has already reverted closer to his original form, having some hair growing on his head, but this is information he is not willing to share with anyone, as it could be used for manipulation purposes. He hopes that the results of his report to the Fraternity will make him more respected within the organization.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE LOST BROTHER DREAD

When his family disappeared in the Grand Conjunction, Cedrik speculated that his brother was lost with them, but that was not the case. His “brother,” the doppelganger Ripa, didn’t visit his family house in the summer of 740 BC, on his vacation from the boarding house, but was in Paridon with his mentor. Ripa has been a successful imposter since then, scaling the ranks of doppelganger society. Ripa has changed many forms for decades but has never had the same satisfaction as his first successful transformation, his own brother.

Cedrik is the imago of Ripa; he had lost contact with Cedrik since the Grand Conjunction, but then, somehow, he read about his thesis on Abber Nomads.

Since then, he has been obsessed with finding him, but because of Cedrik’s nomadic way of living, he eludes him

DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE HUMAN DOPPELGANGER

Cedrik’s obsession with shapechanging and the loss of self has, in a way, made him into something similar to a human doppelganger, but one who can actually take any form, even that of another doppelganger, something that Sodo, the darklord of Paridon, only managed to do by using a *Hat of Disguise*. That makes him one of the most accomplished shapechangers in the Land of Mists. But while he has managed to do, so he has lost his humanity; his true form is that of an amorphous gray mass similar to an ooze.

To the Esteemed Fathers of the Fraternity,

If you are reading this, then our Brother Alfred Larner has deciphered my report and has deemed the information within to be worthy of your attention. Herein, I describe my ongoing research, which I have been focused on for the past three years.

In contrast to my previous research and essays on the Abber Nomads, the current research is not of an Anthropological nature on one of the many cultures found in the Misty Shadow Lands, but focusing at first on a body transformation phenomenon that led me to a totally different conclusion than I expected. But I assure you that even if the subject is different, it is of vital importance to our cause.

This phenomenon that I previously mentioned came to my attention three years ago when I was summoned to the Saulbridge Sanitarium by Dr. Sean McClintock to offer my scientific opinion on a peculiar creature that was institutionalized in his mental asylum. The creature was captured by fishermen in Glenwich, a village on the Ashen sandcliffs of Mordent that is threatened to be swallowed by the Sea of Sorrows. The fishermen were about to put down the creature, if not for the intervention of Douglas Danton, a visiting anchorite from the Chapel of Pure Hearts. The holy man’s persistence to spare the creature on the grounds that even a creature belonging to the Legions of the Night is not beyond redemption, persuaded the fishermen not to end the creature’s miserable existence and it was given unto the care of the anchorite.

The subject of the beginning of my inquiry was taken to Saulbridge Sanitarium, where he was given to the care of the alienist Dr. McClintock with the insistence that this creature was a victim of a terrible transformation - one that had not only altered his form but had shattered his mind as well. Dr. Sean McClintock took in the creature, having some experience with a similar situation a few years before. He had taken under his care a man accused of murder by reason of the man being delusional. Although violent and homicidal, it was deemed that the cause was his delusions and shattered mind, and so he didn’t deserve to be hanged, under what we could call “law of lunacy.”

When I arrived at the clinic, Dr. McClintock insisted on telling me his theory of what he called the realms beyond. You all know gentlemen of the land that existed south of Hazlan, Barovia, and the Nightmare Lands before the Great Upheaval, Bluetspur. Bluetspur, like the Nightmare Lands, was indeed a place of madness, where only a few of the people who traveled there managed to return, and most of them were later institutionalized, having lost their minds.

There is a distinct difference, though, between that place and the Nightmare Lands, as the Nightmare Lands is a shifting place of phantasmal realities. It is not barren and it is habituated by humans, the nomads I had successfully detailed in my thesis many years ago. Bluetspur, as most of you know is, a desolate wasteland of rocks, where no man is able to survive its barren

surface and lightning-filled nights. There are also stories of squid-like or octopus-faced creatures living there, and Dr. McClintock believed these creatures exist, even if he had no proof of their existence.

Dr. McClintock insisted that the creature he had institutionalized now was probably a victim of the land of Bluetspur, as the patient I mentioned before, a man by the name of Marcu Vasilis, had been. Although he had no evidence to indicate that this was the case, he insisted. He also insisted that although Bluetspur had disappeared, it had not gone. His theory is that Bluetspur had moved beyond our senses, as if the Watchers in Shadow had decided, for their own reasons, that Bluetspur should be placed beyond our vision. Dr. McClintock believes that people who seek the powers of the mind and discipline their mental powers to explore the psychic realms, can reach to the realm beyond and contact the inhuman mentality of the creatures who live in the underground passages and caves of Bluetspur.

I have to say that Dr. McClintock is a notable scholar who has collected a vast number of interviews with people detailing the plains and underground caves of Bluetspur - people who have witnessed the underground denizens of that maddening land devour the brains of men, and also make experiments in what I would call "biomancy," the alteration or, better, merging of the forms of two or more different creatures. As much as I would also be interested in learning more about these experiments, their witnesses have utterly lost their minds, so it is only at your discretion and mine to believe them or not.

Dr. McClintock believed that this subject was a victim of one of these "biomancies," a mix between a man and a fish, as he described it. He was sure that the subject had somehow been transported to Bluetspur, where he was experimented on until he was completely altered. His state of mind, however, was the only proof the doctor had. That was one of the reasons he asked for me; the alienist knew about my exploits with lands of "altered realities," as he called them, and said that my research, along with Dr. Gregorian Illhousen's, had been groundbreaking for the development of understanding what some of his patients had gone through, which could sometimes lead to their complete recovery.

While we were walking towards the patient's cell, Dr. McClintock said that he had read my anthropological study of the everchanging Nightmare Lands, as well as my research on bodily alterations, during my time at the University of Richemulot, while I was under the supervision of that traitorous Van Rijn. The latter, leading to my treatise, *The Physiological and Psychological Effects of Transformation*, a paper I published around a decade ago but that has never gotten the attention it so deserved, was the main reason he had asked for me.

As a side note, I have to say that, although Dr. McClintock has gathered a lot of knowledge about the realms beyond, he would not qualify for membership to the Fraternity of Shadows, even if the massive amounts of information about Bluetspur he has gathered prove to be true. The reason is that he lacks the persistence to follow through his investigations practically, as he has let his moral compass dictate his scientific research. Fortunately, I have no such issues, as nothing could dissuade me from acquiring more knowledge; the importance of our cause is too great for petty concepts of morality.

He took me to the room where they kept the creature; it wasn't a regular psychiatric cell with cushioned walls to protect the patient. The first impression I had from the room was its dampness and the smell of moisture. The windows of the room were shut and covered with fabric, and only the faint light of lanterns illuminated it. The room was larger than a cell, being used before as a gallery for the works of patients; the marks on of absent frames were still visible on the walls. But that was not the only thing visible on the walls, as they were filled with strange symbols and writings, some of them overlapping the others, all of them written in a spiral form. This was not some wallpaper, but the charcoal drawings and writing of a madman.

Centered in the room was a normal brass bathtub; the whole atmosphere of the place looked out of place. Inside the bathtub, a fishlike humanoid stood still, apparently sleeping, until it opened its eyes and screamed with a high-pitched noise that passed through the water and filled the room. The orderlies of the asylum calmed the subject by giving him a sedative injection. As I examined it, I could not discern any

attribute that could classify the subject as human. It had large fish eyes and a bulky humanoid form, its whole body was covered in scales, and its hands and feet were webbed. The subject exuded an invasive odor, like the smell of a dead fish, when trimethylamine oxide breaks into derivatives of ammonia, and it was coated by some oily substance like a slime.

I used a probing spell to check for any magical aura of alteration or illusion magic on the subject but I found none. It seemed the subject was of another humanoid race, never discovered before. I was intrigued to study the subject more, with my first task being finding whether to classify it as a humanoid or a beast, so I asked Dr. McClintock whether it would be acceptable for me to stay longer in the sanitarium and study the subject more. I offered him strawberry-flavored pastilles of dapplewort that proved useful, lowering his mental defenses. I was inclined to use many enchantments on him daily, and continued giving him dapplewort in many forms, so as to be able to work in his sanitarium, something I wouldn't have been able to do without the Fraternity's support, in providing me weekly with that substance.

As I continued my study, it was obvious that the subject was amphibious, as it would sometimes get out of its bathtub and write on the walls of the ex-gallery room. I stayed in the clinic for a few more weeks, studying the subject physically at first, taking blood samples or vivisectioning non-life-threatening parts of its body to understand its functions and nature. The water-filled bathtub, in which the subject stayed for most of the time, was important for the subject's survival, as I discovered.

If left for long hours out of the water, its skin would slowly dry and it would end up having spasms, as its lungs dried out. It proved useful to keep the subject moist with wet towels, and the regular moisturizing of its head with a bucket of water. Although the subject was amphibious, its natural place seemed to be immersed in water, so I ordered for the construction of a glass and brass tube, with a water pump pumping fresh sea water into the tube, to keep the subject under a regular supply of fresh water. I wouldn't be able to do this without the Fraternities funding, but it proved useful for what would follow.

Something else that I found baffling, in the beginning, was the absence of genitalia on the subject. If it was indeed an example of some new race, how could this creature reproduce? Then it was when I began rethinking Dr. McClintock's theory on biomancy. What if the subject had been altered, but not through magical means but purely through scientific ones? But I wouldn't have to wait long for answers, as something really out of the ordinary happened, that intrigued me even more to studying the creature.

One day, as it stayed immersed inside its water tube, the subject began to suffocate; fortunately, I was there to witness it and unlocked the lid of its tube. It got its head out, gasping for air as if had been drowning before. As I examined the subject, I saw that the creature's gills had disappeared from its neck. Was this some kind of adaptation that manifested on the subject, in order to survive without water? And if yes, had my experiments caused this sudden change in its breathing habits so as to avoid being locked inside the tube, in a desperate attempt to find a way to escape and not be hurt again? Was this some kind of forced adaptation, a variation that began after the subject's domestication? Or was the subject under some kind of hybridism affect that changed the creature's body as the full moon shapechanges a man into a lycanthrope?

Interested to find out the truth behind the origin of the subject, I stayed and continued monitoring it for months. Its adaptation skills were remarkable, as the subject was rapidly adapting to its new environment. The webbing on his hands and feet contracted day by day until they vanished completely. Month after month, there were more changes, as the subject was slowly taking new form, or should I say now, reverting to its true form. Because, as strange it may sound, the subject was in fact a human before its transformation, as Douglas Danton had insisted and Dr. McClintock believed it to be.

As the scales on the subject's body began to retract, vanishing after a few months, and the shape of the subject's face turned more human-like, the effects of the transformation on the subject's mental state was obvious. The subject was catatonic, with a loss of sense of both self and surroundings, another soul added to those the common folk refer to as lost ones.

The question now was, how could this be, since its change to that of humanoid fish form was not the result of some magical effect nor the result of a maledictive curse, nor a combination of both like the terrible darkling transmutation spell Allisandro's Binding Curse, since there was nothing that the subject did to have its curse be lifted or dispelled. Its transformation, as hard as it is to comprehend the mechanics, seemed to be a natural process. But what could have caused such an evolution so rapidly, and if it was indeed a natural process, why had the subject's psyche and sense of self-being, been shattered? (Irreversibly, if I may add.)

The subject's transformation normally would have to be the result of generations of adapting to a new environment, and then, even if that was so, how could the subject de-adapt and re-adapt to another environment so fast? Which was its true form now, the human form of an old man that the subject was re-adapting to? The fishlike humanoid he was before? Or were they both his natural forms? And if they were both natural forms, why was the subject just a shell of a man? Was the subject like this since birth or was the subject's soul destroyed in the process of transformation?

Now there was the more difficult task of figuring out if the subject's psyche was always like this or if its mental state was inflicted by the trauma of transformation, as those not accustomed to the process of changing form could find the experience traumatic. And if the latter was indeed the case, then I had an obligation to help cure the subject so I could get the answers I needed.

As the subject began therapy, it became obvious that something natural, but at the same time unnatural, had happened to it. It was then, while I was trying to pierce through my subject's psyche, that I understood that the only way of communication the subject was capable of were the charcoal scribbles it drew on the walls of its room. I used a spell to try to decipher the many layers of strange writings and doodles on the walls, but nothing made sense, as the subject's madness made the words and symbols on the walls meaningless. But even though the scribbles were chaotic, written without any animus, I could discern a pattern in the way they were written or drawn.

Everything the subject drew or wrote followed a spiral formation, creating many coils one over the other. What was interesting was that the points that all the plane curves wound around, and moved ever farther from, were recurrent. There were five recurring symbols drawn in the middle of every spiral, as if all those scribbles the subject wrote had five recurring starting points. I thought of the number five, as it is known that it has a special importance in the Ezran religion. Maybe this was some kind of sign for the believers of that religion; maybe the subject's only sense of self was still clinging to faith and to its goddess, hoping for some kind of salvation.

I used my comprehension spell once more, trying to focus only on the starting point of each coil on the room. Familiar letters began to appear through my decipher spell, letters that, through their combination, could mean only one word. To be precise, not a word but a name, a name that inspired dread in my very being; that name was Dagon. Some of you Esteemed Father's may know of the relic known as the Spear of Dagon, retrieved by the Mordentish adventurer and explorer Jerome Delacroix and his companions, in an effort to destroy the undead High Priest Ishud.

Some of you may better remember that ancient name from our Brother in the Shadows Dommer Zoltan Demir's essay on the obyrinth - that eldritch race of demons, so ancient that they predated mortal life, and even the existence of the gods. I managed to get a copy of Zoltan's essay to learn as much as I could about the demon Dagon; below is a summary of the information I got from our brother's writings.

Many millennia ago was the Age Before Ages, in a time not long after the creation of the multiverse, when the deeper layers of the Abyss were still quivering in the aftershock of birth, a time before the tanar'ri, before mortal life on the Material Plane, a time even before the gods themselves came to be. The primeval Abyss was infested by the first races of demons - the obyriths. Demons so bizarre that simply looking upon their strange shapes could drive a mortal insane, and even the cosmos itself was horrified by their presence.

In the primal depths of the Abyssal oceans, this life was particularly fecund and foul, so foul that even most of the obyriths avoided those deeper layers of the Abyss, for then

these realms were too hostile even for a formidable race such as they. The obyriths were cruel, maddening creatures of great malevolence who had truly alien thought processes. In the absence of outside threats, they had spent much of their time in power infighting, making war with each other and conducting political schemes for power, fighting among themselves for the various territories and layers of the Abyss until the Queen of Chaos united some under her leadership, while others continued fighting against her and each other. Then came the time were all surviving obyrith lords joined her cause - all but one.

In an immense realm of endless black water, a hideous, shadowy shape watched them all, observing silently as the time of great change it felt approaching drew near. And when millennia went by and the surviving obyriths fled back to the Abyss, being hunted to near extinction by the eladrin court, this shadowy shape watched and waited.

The time of the obyrith had come and gone. the Abyss belonged now to a new breed of demons, the tanar'ri, yet the shape knew that this time would come to an end as well. Dagon, called the Prince of the Depths, waits, patient and potent, in his realm, the Shadowsea, 89th layer of the Abyss, confident that when the tanar'ri fall, he will still remain, as he has done since a time when the gods themselves were but a possibility in the infinite.

Could it be that this ancient entity had entered our demiplane and begun altering the population of these lands? or is it possible that this obyrith may be one of Watchers in the Shadows, watching us here as he had for many millennia watched the demons of the Abyss? I knew that this information was vital to our cause so I continued an intense therapy on the subject to learn more, or at least figure out where the subject came from. It was then, during an intense electroshock therapy, that the subject uttered the first words he ever spoke while under my care: Lamar Orne.

Apparently, the subject came to some kind of self-recognition as he muttered what apparently was his name. Unfortunately, these words were the last ones I heard him utter, as that mist worshipping anchorite Douglas Danton arrived at the asylum, demanding the release of my subject. It was somehow falsely revealed to him that my subject was subjected to torture. How

can the necessity of experimentation for the progress of knowledge be characterized as torture?

I tried to calm down the ignorant anchorite, casting an enchantment on him, but he resisted. Then it was that he drew out a crystal orb attached on a silver chain, which enlarged as he focused on it. I felt him looking into my soul and it didn't take long for me to make the connection. This must have been the Soul Searcher Medallion that has been described in Prof. Agrippa's Scrying and the Nature of Visions, surely a prized possession for the Guignol Museum of the University of Dementlieu.

I decided to take more drastic measures, in an effort to gain the medallion and obstruct the anchorite from taking my subject, and the information I could get from him, away from me. I decided to change into one of my most formidable forms, but I was ensnared inside a mist that made my movements extremely slow. The anchorite managed to escape me, taking the lost one with him; knowing that Danton would have much support in Mordentshire I managed to persuade Dr. McClintock to not include that day's incident in his diary.





DOUGLAS DANTON

Male Cleric5/ Anchorite Inquisitor4 (Heroes of Light - pp14-16)

Hit Dice: 9d8+30 (64 hp)

Initiative: +1

Speed: 30 ft.

Armor Class: 12 (+2 Dex), touch 12, flat-footed 10

Base Attack/Grapple: +6/+1

Attack: +11 melee (1d8+4, +2 long sword)

Full Attack: +11/+6 melee (1d8+4, +2 long sword)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Spells

Special Qualities: Spells, Immunity to enchantments

Saves: Fort +11, Ref +4, Will +11

Abilities: Str 16, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 13, Wis 17, Cha 18

Skills: Concentration +10, Decipher Script +4, Diplomacy +17, Knowledge (arcana) +9, Knowledge (planes) +4, Knowledge (religion) +6, Knowledge (monster lore) +10, Sense Motive (Wis) +11, Gather Information +6

Feats: Blessed, Iron Will, Skill Focus (Concentration).
Ethereal Empathy, Weapon Focus (longsword)

Challenge Rating: 9

Alignment: Lawful Good

Languages: Mordentish*, Balok

Cleric Spells DC 13+ spell lvl: 6 / 4+1 / 4+1 / 3+1 / 2+1 / 1+1 (Cleric Domains Mists, Protection)

Favourite spells: *Cure Minor Wounds, Detect Magic, Guidance, Light, Purify Food and Drink, Virtue; Bless Water, Cause Fear, Command, Hide from Undead; Augury, Calm Emotions, Shield Other, Zone of Truth; Dispel Magic, Invisibility Purge, Obscure Object; Discern Lies, Tongues; Atonement*

Signature Possession: long sword +2, soul searcher medallion

BACKGROUND

Douglas Danton is a man in his early thirties, born in 722 BC in Crawford Manor in Mordent. The child of one of the manor's female guards, Anne Griffin, and the castle's steward, Rook Danton. Douglas grew peacefully in Crawford manor. The landlord, Sir Inghram Crawford, like all Crawfords before him, spent most of his youth in devotion to Ezra, wanting to become a knight and set out for adventure. But upon news of his father's death, he returned to Crawford to assume his responsibilities as landlord. He married Amelia Green, the daughter of a fellow knight. Unfortunately, she died during the birth of their second child, Bran.

Although Sir Ingham's eldest child, his daughter Alinda, was expected to become a knight and assume control of the manor upon her father's death, his son Bran did not so aspire. He would regularly play tricks on the other inhabitants of the manor. Being around the same age and growing up together in the manor, they had become close friends, but Douglas didn't approve of

Bran's practical jokes; he wanted to become a knight like Sir Crawford, and since he was a young boy, followed the code of morality of a knight and devotion to Ezra.

When Alinda had just begun training to become a knight under her father's tutorship, a murder was committed in the manor. The household's master-at-arms, Corbett Morten, was found murdered at the castle's chapel. At that time, Sir Crawford was eating dinner with some guests he had invited to give them shelter from a stormy night. As Sir Crawford and his guests were trying to find who the murderer was, it became obvious that some entity had infiltrated the household, taking Bran's form, trying to find an amulet.

After the perpetrator was revealed, and the real Bran was discovered, it was obvious that the traumatic experience had scarred the thirteen-year-old child. Douglas vowed that he would do the best he could to protect all those affected by the Legions of the Night, but at the same time understood how easy it was for someone to be accused of something they didn't do, seeing that not everything was black and white. He grew up taking care of his childhood friend, who had lost any sense of self preservation. One night, Bran was nowhere to be found; searching through the castle grounds, the servants found him dead. Apparently, he had committed suicide, jumping from his bedroom window.

With one of the successors of the Crawford line, and Douglas's best friend, now dead, Douglas sought refuge in his devotion to Ezra. Seeing the spread of Ezra's word as important to protect everyone from the Legions of the Night, including themselves, he decided that this was his calling instead of becoming a knight. He left Crawford Manor and traveled to the Chapel of Pure Hearts. Seeing the importance of finding good in everyone so as to triumph over evil, he became an anchorite and, after finishing his test of virtue, became an anchorite inquisitor, gaining powers to see the world with unclouded eyes.

Since then, he has traveled far and wide, helping those in need, but also gaining a reputation amongst the anchorites of his sect. His charisma and skills in diplomacy earned him the position of speaker of his sect, and he attended the Bastions' Council in 740 BC,

with Bastion Vladimir Denisovich, earning the respect of members of the other sects. He is speculated to be the successor of Bastion Sarlota Otrava, as she has unofficially let it be known that her successor will be Mordentish. A few years ago, he joined the Blessed Army of Ezra, after an encounter with Alinda Crawford, who has been a knight of that secret branch and, following his family's tradition, he has followed her as her servant everywhere.

Through his years as an anchorite, he never forgot the house he grew up in, going back several times to visit. The last visit he made was when Alinda was summoned back to Crawford Manor, as her father was very ill. On his deathbed, the old knight gave his blessing to his daughter, proud of the woman she had become, and to Douglas he gave a medallion in the form of a small crystal orb hanging from a silver chain. He said that this is the medallion that helped them uncover the source of evil that attacked his household all these years ago. Now he was offering it to Douglas to help him in his quest to redeem the fallen and cleanse the world of evil.

Douglas left Crawford Manor once more towards the Chapel of Pure Hearts; on his way to the chapel, he traveled through the sea-threatened fishing village of Glenwich. There he encountered some fishermen dragging a fishlike humanoid from the sea. Using his diplomatic skills, he managed to save the creature and felt that this was no creature belonging to the Legions of the Night but something else. Using the medallion Sir Ingham gave him on his deathbed, he saw that this creature was once human, somehow transformed into the form of a fishlike humanoid.

He went to Mordentshire and visited the Saulbridge Sanitarium, telling Dr. Sean McClintock what had happened. Douglas knew that, a few years before, the alienist had defended a specific individual named Marcu Vasilis in court and had him committed to his sanitarium indefinitely instead of being hanged for the murder of one his companions in a local tavern. He had known his companions and knew that something abnormal had happened to him.

Dr. McClintock has introduced Douglas to his theories and knowledge about Bluetspur. Believing that this altered fishlike human may be another victim of the

Realms Beyond, a human who, while exploring the psychic realms, contacted something beyond the limits of their world and was transformed in this state. He insisted on keeping the fishlike humanoid and contacted a renowned scholar of transformative abnormalities to see if they could cure the poor soul.

Douglas agreed and left the poor man in Saulbridge Sanitarium. His duties with the clergy kept him occupied beyond Mordent for some time, but he never forgot of the man he had saved in Glenwich. When at last he managed to return to Mordentshire, he paid a visit to the sanitarium. There he was greeted by Dr. McClintock with news on the man's recovery.

As soon as Douglas stepped into the room and saw the former fishlike man, in the form he had seen him with the help of his medallion, a weird sensation came over him; he felt the emotional content in the room overwhelmingly, as if there was some kind of dark ethereal resonance left in the walls of the chamber. There was a psychic imprint of emotions of fear and pain left on walls of the man's room. Douglas felt nauseated by that, as he understood that there was much torture committed in this very room, and recently. He turned to the scholar that Dr. McClintock had just introduced to him and held up his medallion.

As Douglas pierced through the outer form of the man who was introduced as Cedrik Paddock, he was bewildered by what he saw, or actually didn't see. He saw an amorphous mass, changing constantly from one form to the other; it appeared as if Cedrik Paddock had no true form. Looking at Dr. McClintock, he saw an aura of enchantment around him; obviously this amorphous mass of a man had cast some kind of spell on the doctor so that he could conduct his tortures or, as he called them, experiments.

Douglas saw the surprised expression the amorphous man gave, as he locked his eyes on the medallion. He must have recognized what it was, and then Douglas felt an aura trying to cloud his mind, but Douglas's thoughts were clear; no enchantment could affect him as long as his devotion to Ezra was pure. He turned to the man metamorphosing before him and summoned a fog around his adversary. While the amorphous creature was slowed by the mist that began to slowly fill the room, he took the old, tortured Lamar Orne, the

man he had saved from the fishermen, and left the sanitarium. Since then, he has divided his time between caring for Lamar, trying to find a way to cure him of his madness, and his other duties as a wandering anchorite.

CURRENT SKETCH

Douglas Danton is a calm, low profile holy man with an absolute devotion to Ezra. He may, at first impression, look like an introvert, but his social skills are remarkable, gaining the trust he so much deserves. Since the death of his friend Bran, Douglas has been filled with guilt, something that he constantly tries to hide behind his devotion to Ezra. Now, as he sees it, he has a second chance to amend for his self-proclaimed past mistake or sin, of losing Bran.

He constantly takes care of Lamar, trying to keep him safe from the amorphous Cedrik Paddock, not realizing that Cedrik has no further interest in his former subject. Douglas has become a bit paranoid, traveling from place to place trying to protect Lamar from the shapechanger. As far as he knows, Cedrik could be anyone he meets, so usually one of the first things he does upon meeting anyone is to secretly use his Soul Searcher Medallion on them. Although Cedrik hasn't been hiding behind the form of any person, Douglas has discovered many Legions of the Night that way. His reactions to what he sees using his medallion depend on the creature found.

Protective ward (Sp): Once per day, Douglas can generate a protective ward as a supernatural ability on someone he touches. The target of this protection gains a +9 resistance bonus on his or her next saving throw. Activating this power is a standard action. The protective ward is an abjuration effect with a duration of 1 hour.

Expeditious retreat (Sp): Once per day, Douglas can cast the *expeditious retreat* spell

Light (Sp): Douglas can cast *light* at will

Candle communion (Sp): Once per day, at sunset, Douglas is required to report his activities to his church. He can do that by lighting a candle and focusing on it.

Detect Virtue (Sp): With a successful wisdom check (DC 20) Douglas can tell if a willing person is Innocent, Moral, or Penitent.

Shield of Ezra (Sp): Three times per day, Douglas can summon a luminous mist to surround and protect him. This effect lasts for 9 rounds and grants him the ability to have 25/+5 damage reduction against metal weapons.

Immune to charms (Su): Douglas is immune to charm spells or any other power that simulates spells of enchantment.



DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE UNKINDNESS OF RAVENS

Crawford Manor is located east of Blackburn Crossing and north of Newbury River, a tributary of the Arden River originating from Richemulot. The raven-filled manor is centered around a White Tower that was originally built on a path in the forest, in a long-forgotten kingdom from the world where Mordent originated. The knight Bertram Crawford was granted the tower and the lands around it as a reward for his services by the local lord centuries ago, when Mordent was still part of the Prime Material Plane. As Sir Bertram restored the tower and expanded it into a castle, he felt he was too old to defend the lands he was placed to protect, as well as his family.

He claimed a boon he was offered years before, during his adventuring days, by a murder of wereravens, when he had saved one of them from burning at the stake by some villagers, and returned the lycanthrope to his people. He asked the wereravens to protect his castle and family after his death and they agreed, sending six of their strongest to be bound to the castle forever.

To protect the wereravens from hunters, he ordered that no one in his lands was to harm or kill a raven or any other black bird, under penalty of death.

Only Sir Bertram and the few master builders knew of the true nature of the six protectors appointed at his castle, and every one of them took the secret to their grave. The protectors were appointed to various stations at the castle and continued to protect the family and the castle for many generations, always bound to the castle. Douglas's father Rook is one of these wereraven protectors, meaning that Douglas is a true wereraven, as are all the children sired by the wereravens to continue the lineage of protectors of the Crawford family.

Unlike most lycanthropes, the magical bond created between the wereravens and the Crawford family, which ties the wereravens to the castle, prevents their children from assuming their lycanthropic heritage before their wereraven parent dies.

As soon as the wereraven parent, dies the next descendant in line begins to have visions of Crawford Manor, and is under the effect of a *geas/quest* spell that compels him or her to return to the ancient household. On the next full moon, the newly appointed protector shapechanges into a wereraven and is initiated into the manor's secrets by the other wereravens of the manor. After its first transformation, the new wereraven is forever bound to Crawford Manor protecting the manor's grounds and family until its death.

Over the mantelpiece of the manor's great hall, there is a portrait of Sir Bertram Crawford; under the painting there is a brass inscription reading "The Death of Ravens Shalt Though Abhor, Lest the Crawford Line be Nevermore." Although read as a peculiarity of Sir Bertram, the Crawfords honor the decree as a tradition. If any crow or raven is harmed or killed within the Crawford lands, the act is indeed punishable by death. What no one knows, not even the wereravens that protect the castle, is that the boon offered to the Crawfords also holds a curse.

If indeed all six of the manor's wereraven protectors are killed, then the Crawford family will not only be unprotected and fall from power but the family will end, the curse claiming the life of all Crawfords.

This is in fact what happened to Bran Crawford; he fell victim to the curse, after one of the wereravens was murdered by an

evil vengeful spirit, falling into a catatonic state until he committed suicide. The current head of the Crawford Manor is Lady Alinda Crawford (female human Fighter4 / Blessed Defender3 (Heroes of Light p.26-28)), Bran's sister, who inherited the manor, and the duty of protecting the lands surrounding the castle, when her father Sir Ingham passed away some years ago. Lady Alinda is unaware of the castle's history and that she and her growing family are protected by wereravens.

(The adventure "The Unkindness of Ravens" by Jason Kuhl can be found in *Dungeon Magazine* #65.)

DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE SIX ARTIFICERS

In chapel of Crawford Manor, on the ground floor level of the White Tower, before the chapels altar, lies a single blocked marble sarcophagus. The lid of the marble casket is carved in the image of a sleeping knight, resembling Sir Bertram's portrait in the manor's grand hall. The sarcophagus is decorated with a relief depicting scenes from the heroic life of the manor's first lord. If someone presses the raven shield in a scene where Sir Bertram defends a kingdom from an evil-looking army, a secret door on the side of the sarcophagus reveals a narrow and steep staircase going further down into the undertower passages of the castle.

There lies an ancient crypt of the people who build the White Tower and a dark well. By entering the well someone could discover the actual tomb of Sir Bertram Crawford; the tomb is guarded by six spirits (second magnitude ghosts). In life they belonged to clan MacDuncan, a clan of renowned stone masons who were sent by their king to build Crawford Manor, as payment for an old service owed to Sir Bertram, in defending the king's kingdom. The masons loved their creation so much that they pledged themselves to Sir Bertram, spending their remaining lives in Crawford Manor.

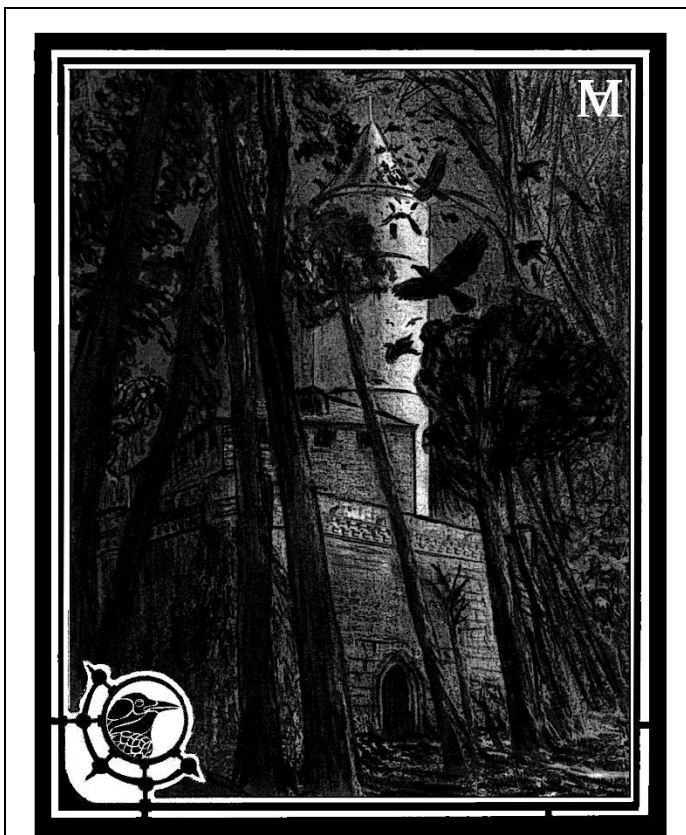
But the pledge they gave to the lord of Crawford Manor tied their spirits to him and they couldn't cross to the other side; instead, they became ghosts protecting Sir Crawford's tomb, forever protecting the tomb and unable to go anywhere else.

Although bound to protect Sir Bertram, even in his tomb, the spirits haven't pledged themselves to protect his family, living above as the wereravens do. They see themselves as guardians of the underground passages and Sir Bertram's tomb, and would attack anyone attacking them or disturbing their lord's skeleton.

The masons know about the pact Sir Bertram had made with the wereravens and thus, know that if all six wereravens are killed, the Crawford family will cease to exist. They believe that the only way to escape their undead state would be the fall of Crawford family. The ghosts are not sinister, plotting against the Crawfords, but they will not hesitate to give information on the prophecy of ravens, hoping that one day someone will come to kill the wereravens, thus bringing an end to the Crawford family and freeing them from their eternal servitude.

The ghosts would not do anything against the Crawfords unless they have to defend Sir Bertram's tomb or themselves. In a way they leave everything to chance. The truth is that even if the wereravens are killed and the Crawford family is no more, the masons will still be bound to their oath of protecting Sir Bertram. The only way to be freed from their pledge and undead state is for the lady or lord of Crawford Manor to release them from their oath while being on the grounds, underground or not, of the White Tower.

(Originally, in the adventure "The Unkindness of Ravens" the stone masons were all dwarves.)



DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE WHITE TOWER

The original part of Crawford Manor known as the White Tower was built in an ancient, long-forgotten kingdom many centuries before Mordent was brought to the Demiplane of dread. The White Tower was built there to guard a safe passage along the forest's deadly marshes, safekeeping the kingdom for many generations. The thirteenth lord of the castle was a mighty warrior who had pledged himself to the service of that kingdom's long forgotten king and the protection of his lands and family.

When a war with a neighboring kingdom began and the king's castle was about to be sieged, the king sent his family to the warrior's White Tower in the marshes, for safe keeping, in case he lost the war. When the warrior was informed of his king's death, he felt he had escaped the bounds of his oath and contacted the enemy's forces. After being offered gold and lands by the king's enemies, he delivered the king's family to them. As the queen was dragged with her children out of the White Tower, she spat in the warrior's face and uttered a curse.

*"You pledged an oath to your king in disdain
The stones and grounds of this keep I reclaim
As bound you were till your king's own demise
Bound to us you are if you're wise."*

The warrior laughed at his queen, but it wasn't long before the curse began to affect him. He began seeing visions of his king's death, of being dismembered, the king's body parts tossed in various places, along with visions of the king's family. With the visions came a horrible sickness that would go away only when the mighty warrior began searching for the king's family in a desperate quest to make amends for his actions. He roamed the land alone in his quest to save them from his king's enemies, slowly dying as each member was executed.

Anyone who pledges an oath of servitude to the Crawford family while on the grounds of the old White Tower is bound to that oath as if under a *geas/quest* spell. Since most oaths of service occur in the manor's chapel, located in the White Tower's ground floor, the tower's curse applies to all of the guardsmen and men-at-arms of Crawford Manor. Depending on the oath taken, the curse is able to block someone's passage to the next life, binding them to an unlife of servitude. The only way someone can be released from this oath, or curse, is for the lady or lord of the castle to release them from that oath while being within the White Tower's grounds.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE LOST GHOST WARRIOR

The PCs encounter the ghost of the mighty warrior, with antique armor and weapons. If they talk to him, they will discover that he used to be the lord of the White Tower, many centuries before Crawford Manor was built. He is desperately searching for his king's family members in the marshes of Mordent. The PCs may want to begin an excavation in the marshes in an effort to find the ancient skeletons of the royal family and lay the ghost warrior to rest. On the other hand, the Ghost Warrior's story may give them clues as to how to release the spirits of the six masons in the underground passages of Crawford Manor.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE OATH

The PCs pledge an oath to the lady or lord of Crawford manor, for some service, while being present in the manor's chapel. As long as they continue to follow their quest, they are fine, but if they happen to do something that doesn't involve their quest, they suffer the effects of a geas spell. The PCs are not released even if their quest has been successful, instead they feel obligated to return to Crawford Manor. The PCs have to discover what source of sorcery has bound them to this noble family of knights.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE LOST ONE AND THE INQUISITOR

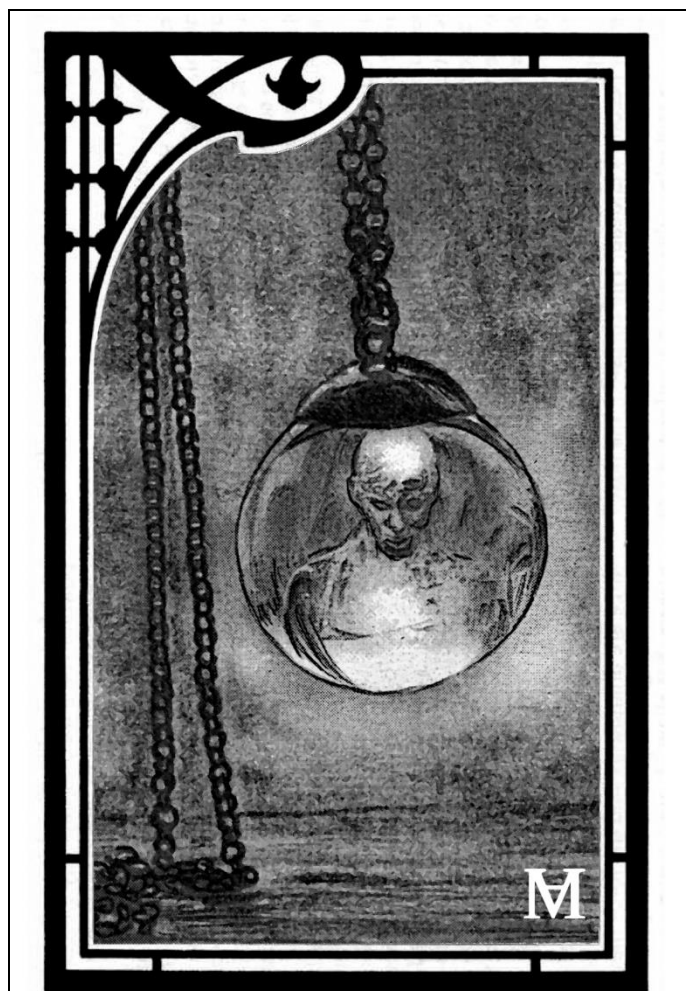
Rumors have begun to circulate about the anchorite inquisitor who unmistakably discovers the Legions of the Night. In some places, the stories of the Inquisitor and his Lost One squire have created legends around his name. It won't be long before some of the shapechangers who feel threatened by the soul-searching duo form an alliance to get rid of them both.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE WERERAVEN

Douglas Danton lends the Soul Searcher Medallion to one of the PCs for some quest. While using it, the PC accidentally gets a glimpse of Douglas's true form, that of a wereraven. Douglas, shocked by the PC's findings, tries to discover how this could be possible; the mystery leads them to Crawford Manor.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE SOUL SEARCHER MEDALLION

The Fraternity of Shadows has learned of Douglas's possession of the Soul Searcher Medallion. It won't be long before they decide to acquire that prized possession for themselves, or maybe Lord Balfour de Casteelle wants it for Guignol Museum's collection of magical items. They begin a hunt for the item described in Prof. Agrippa's *Scrying and the Nature of Visions* and Cedrik Paddock's notes.

**Soul Searcher Medallion**

The Soul Searcher is a small, fragile, crystal orb mounted in a pendant on a plain, silver chain. When the medallion is held and concentrated on, the crystal grows to a size about two feet in diameter. Its weight and size after becoming so enlarged are such that anyone with less than a Str 16 requires both hands to hold the globe aloft. When concentration is broken, the orb immediately reverts to its normal one-inch size and weighs about 3 ounces. The medallion has the same powers as the one described in Prof. Agrippa's *Scrying and the Nature of Visions* (and *Van Richten's Arsenal I*).

Its story traces back to the beginning of the formation of Mordent in the Land of Mists, where it was found by a band of adventurers in the House on Gryphon Hill and used to save the people of Mordentshire from the terrible events that unfolded in 579 BC.

Later, it was passed from generation to generation until it ended up in the hands of a hedge wizard living in the place now called Tumbledown. The wizard lived in semi-solitude, working as a healer, curing the villagers that lived close to him and secretly protecting them from the menaces of the Lightless Wood.

But one of the villagers had seen the magical orb and coveted it for himself. One summer night, after a period of natural drought and massive waves of mosquitos that brought illnesses to the villagers, the envious villager blamed the wizard for their misfortunes. The villagers created an angry mob that stormed the wizard's cottage and set it on fire, trapping him inside. While choking in the burning smoke inside his cottage, the wizard, filled with rage and betrayal, cursed the villagers.

His spirit, unable to rest, inhabited the leaf-stuffed body of a scarecrow, it's hollowed gourd face glowing from within, as though illuminated by a candle, and with a will to exact vengeance on those who wronged it in life. The scarecrow's first victim was the villager who wanted to steal the medallion. The deceitful villager had gone to the burned cottage to find the medallion. But as he found what he was looking for, on the burned man's corpse, the scarecrow attacked him with a bolt of lightning, as it had retained its magical powers after death, and took back the medallion.

The scarecrow, called to the villagers, hunted them one by one until he slew every one of them. His vengeance now complete, the malicious spirit was unwilling to let go of its new body and continued to wander, continuing his magical research and bringing death and woe whenever it went. The villagers of Mordent created stories about the restless spirit, calling him Mr. Gaunt. When, decades ago, a raven stole the Soul Searcher Medallion from the restless scarecrow, Mr. Gaunt was drawn to Crawford Manor and, seeing that it was populated by ravens, he knew his prized possession was there.

Discovering a secret passage under the manor, he learned about the wereravens that protected the knightly household and, believing they had stolen his medallion, decided to find it and punish the thieves.

He managed to infiltrate the manor and killed one of the ravens, then polymorphed the landlord's son Bran into a raven and took his form. Eventually Mr. Gaunt was discovered by a band of adventurers and destroyed.

The Soul Searcher Medallion was found and, with its help, they discovered the bird that was Bran, who crowed his own name constantly, and returned to human form. But the terrifying transformation shattered the boy's mind; he became catatonic, able to speak only his name, becoming one of the lost ones of the Demiplane of Dread until his suicide (or rather, an attempt to fly, having lost his sense of self and believing he was still a raven). The medallion remained in the possession of Sir Ingham Crawford until it was passed down to Douglas Danton on his death bed.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE SCARECROW

Though the evil spirit was discovered by the adventurers, he wasn't destroyed. He managed to escape, transferring his spirit into a dummy scarecrow that stood near the manor's east wall. Mr. Gaunt (scarecrow W9) is essentially immortal, bound to the medallion that was the reason for his death. As long as the medallion exists, the wizard's spirit will continue to come back, trying to acquire it. If he does acquire it, he will continue his wanderings of death and destruction.

For years, he has stayed in the area, taking residence in the village of Crawford. Knowing that Sir Ingham knew of the medallion's powers and that he could be discovered, he kept a low profile trying to find a way to infiltrate the manor again. When, a few years ago, the aging knight died, he felt he was drawn away from Crawford. It wasn't long before he understood that a wandering priest of Ezra had it in his possession. Fearing the holy man's power but also his regular use of the medallion, Mr. Gaunt waits patiently for the day when he will be able to have possession of his medallion.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE SYCOPHANT

Mr. Gaunt, in the guise of a respected member of the local community of a village, begins a campaign against Douglas Danton. Mr. Gaunt manages to convince the local population and maybe even the adventurers, to turn against Douglas's lost one protege, in an attempt to take the Soul Searcher Medallion back during the chaos (maybe by taking Lamar's form as he had done with Bran decades before.) It could even be possible that Mr. Gaunt accuses Douglas of being a lycanthrope, something he denies until the Soul Searcher Medallion proves him wrong. Now the PCs have to decide if they are going to defend the wereraven against the villagers, as Sir Bertram had done centuries ago.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE PUMPKIN LICH

Following a trail of destruction, the PCs find out that it seems to be left in the wake of the visits of the renowned Inquisitor and his Lost One companion. As they investigate, they figure out that some other force is behind these events, identifying it to be an undead magic user. Believing Mr. Gaunt is a lich, they have to discover his phylactery, only to learn that the Inquisitor has it in his possession. Now they have to persuade the holy man to give up the magical item that helps him save people from the Legions of the Night and to redeem some of those Legions, in order to lay to rest just a single one of them.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE APPARATUS

As Mr. Gaunt is a direct descendant of one of the heroes that saved Mordentshire in 579 BC, it could be possible he has valuable information on the events that brought Mordent into the Demiplane of Dread. He might be searching for the manual he knew existed from the bedtime stories his parents used to tell him when he was young; maybe he wants to use it to build the Apparatus and become alive again. It could be that he owned the Alchemist's Diary detailing the construction of the device and the PCs are hired to hunt him down to find more information on the device or the manual.



...

As I was robbed of my subject, the only thing left for me was to continue my investigation and research on the matter, not in the clinic but out in the field, and to discover the origin of my stolen subject's transformation. I left the next day for Port-a-Lucine in an effort to trace Lamar Orne's family, since the name was clearly Dementlieuse. I went to Rue du Soleil and after being granted entrance the Public Hall of Records, I began my search for Lamar Orne's origins, the only piece of information I had to continue my research on his transformation. It didn't take long to find his family's whereabouts and track them down.

The Ornes are a family with a long sailing history, living in the docks of Port-a-Lucine. I introduced myself as a government official interested in the subject's whereabouts, on the false pretense of some lost will that was recently discovered, which had him as the sole beneficiary. My subject's daughter-in-law, who looked completely ordinary by the way, although still in mourning revealed to me that her father-in-law had passed away a few months before, around the same

time he was discovered in fishlike form in Glenwich, something I naturally didn't disclose to her.

She told me that her father-in-law had been placed in a retirement home in the town of Ravienne, north of Port-a-Lucine and that the family had begun a legal dispute with Thibodeaux's Rest Home for neglecting their duties in taking care of him. She said she couldn't say more, except that she showed me a letter addressed to her husband from the retirement home. The letter was sent by the director of Thibodeaux's Rest Home, Dame Dominique and stated the cause of death of Lamar Orne as being lost at sea - a convenient but also truthful way to avoid disclosing any more details about the incident. I was back on track; I knew that Dame Dominique would have the answers I was looking for.

I didn't waste any time, travelling north to the fishing village of Ravienne. The village is like a natural fortress against the elements of nature, it is situated in a small natural gulf, surrounded by three high wind weathered rocks. A small keep rests on the south rock of the village and walls extend from one rock to the other, forming a very well-fortified place against pirates, or any beast that comes from the Lamordian swamps in the east. The people seem to be wary of strangers, as they are not really talkative, creating an atmosphere that something is off with this place.

Thibodeaux's Rest Home is built on a jagged rock on the north of Ravienne, on another gulf. Saw-like rocks protect the gulf from the large, cold waves coming from the north, creating a tranquil place where the old seamen can enjoy the calmness of the sea. Dame Dominique is a fascinating, mesmerizing woman. I was so enthralled by her beauty that I didn't notice at first that she is unable to walk; instead, she uses a wooden wheelchair to go about the resting house, making sure everyone is comfortable, while several volunteers from Ravienne, all in their youth, attend those under her care.

Although I thought at first that Ravienne would not have the answers I wanted, I soon discovered that this was the place I was looking for. As the sun fell under the horizon and I fell asleep in Ravienne's only inn, Profond, I experienced one of the most vivid nightmares I've ever had, and don't forget that I had lived in the Nightmare Lands for quite some time. At first, I thought it might be the influence of the Nightmare Court, as it is described

in the writings of Dr. Illhousen, but when I woke up, I understood that this was something different. It wasn't just some nightmare invading my dreams, but instead a nightmare invading reality.

When I woke up, my feet and hands had developed small membranes, like those of a frog; naturally I wasn't horrified by the experience, as a master of alteration I know that the external form each of us has is irrelevant, with our sense of being just a mask. As I am able to change whenever I want to some other form, I didn't let these cosmetic changes take me out of my research; instead it became the tool with which I was able to continue.

Since then my transformation has progressed significantly, I have found a place near the village of Ravienne, to stay in close proximity to the village, but also continue my research unhindered. So far, I have managed to conclude that these transformative nightmares occur in an area enclosing the village of Ravienne. By moving daily from place to place and staying out in the periphery of the village at night, I have managed to conclude that there is some kind of alternate reality invading the area nightly, not very different from the realms beyond McClintock theorized about.

I have managed to chart the effects of this nightly effect. I conclude that it is in radius around the village and that, as with the coils in Lamar Orne's doodles, the answer must be in the center of this radius. My theory now is that this alternate reality that invades Ravienne is centered on a creature or object; on the other hand, the nightmare I experience each night that the transformation progresses is becoming all the more vivid, and involves unspeakable horrors in the depths of the ocean. Could it be that the answer is in the depths of the Sea of Sorrows? What if this effect is the result of a reality wrinkle invading reality?

And while I theorize, I will tell you my final theory which I know may sound a bit radical. What if this outsider force existed long ago in the Sea of Sorrows, and now somehow has been condensed by the Watchers in the Shadows, forcing an alteration of reality? I believe the answer to this question is within the center of this phenomenal coil around Ravienne. I await instructions

of how to proceed, and hope that you will give me more resources to find the point of the spiral.

Your Brother in Shadows

Cedrik Paddock

RAVIENNE

The small fishing village of Ravienne is located on the coast of the Sea of Sorrows, north of Port-a-Lucine, close to the borders with Lamordia and the town of Leidenheim. This small fishing community is surrounded by large rocks around a natural bay and has been a safe haven for ships caught in storms between Ludendorf and Port-a-Lucine. Although the village began to thrive by selling medicines and herbs to the inhabitants of Leidenheim, that stopped as Lamordians who visited the village began to vanish, never to return.

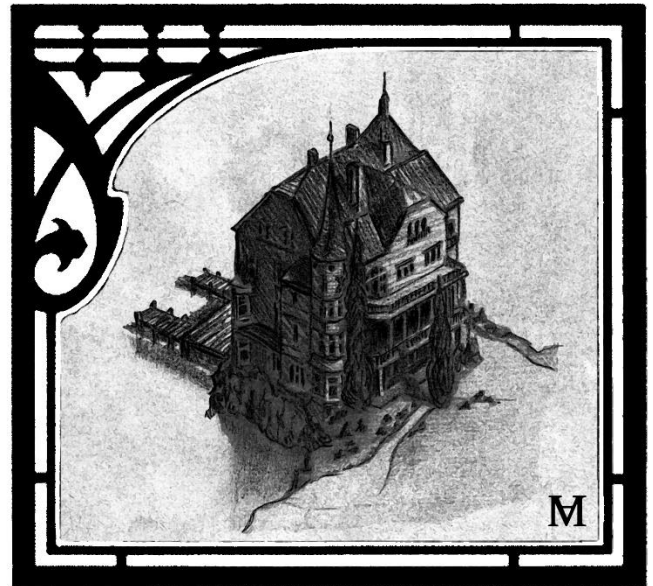
While Ravienne seems to be an ordinary village - the people who walk the streets are helpful and kind - in contrast, those who stay inside their houses peek at the street through their windows, before closing the curtain fast when foreigners become aware of them. This is why there is always a feeling of being watched, especially during the night.

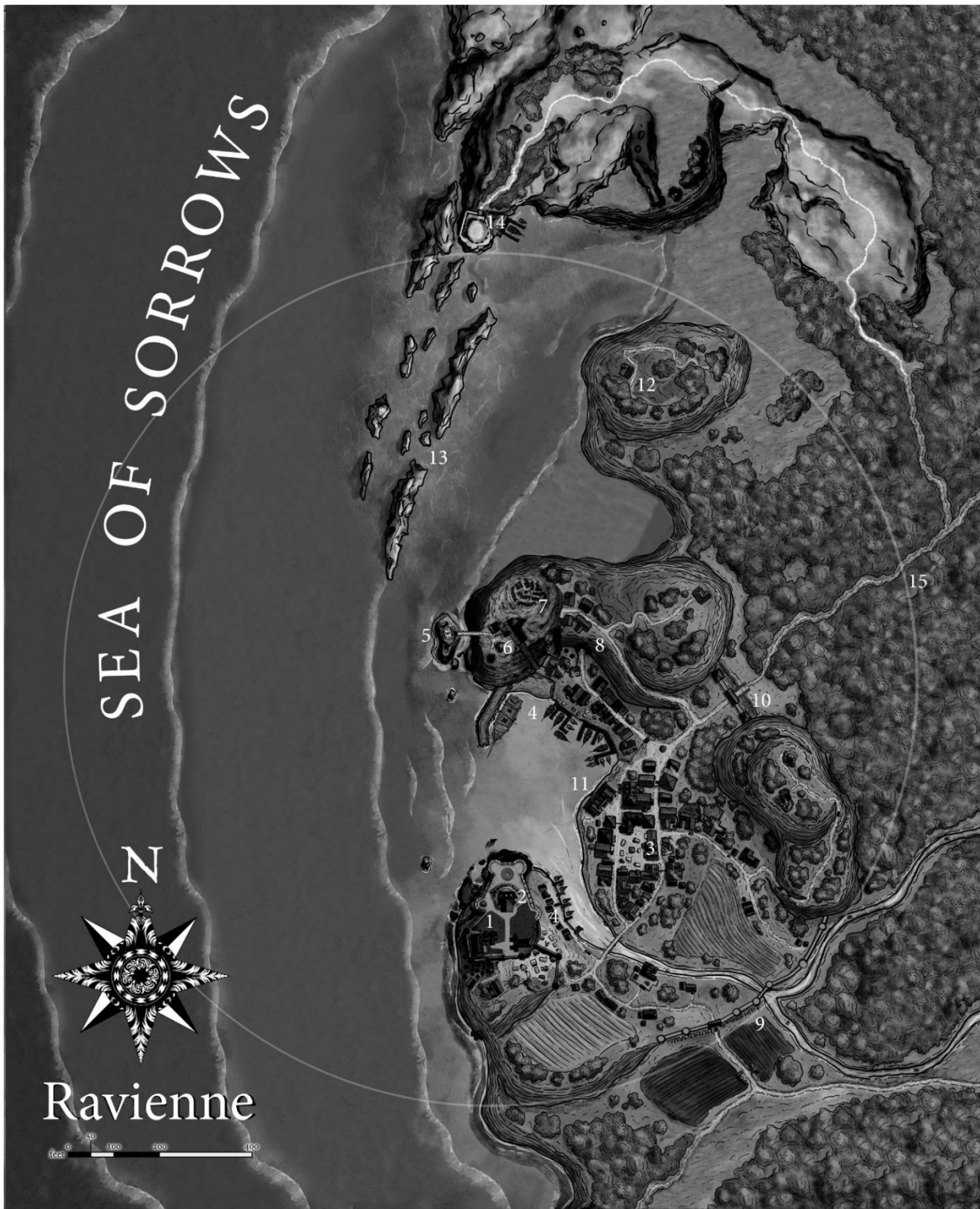
The other thing that is strange is that there are no children running through the streets of the village; in fact, no children younger than sixteen exist in Ravienne. The reason is that those born in Ravienne are born as monsters. The villagers will claim that their village is cursed, blaming the citizens of Leidenheim for their misfortune. They claim that when people travelling to Ravienne through the marshes from Leidenheim began to vanish, the Lamordians blamed them for it and put a curse on their village. They claim that the Thundering Carriage, a ghostly apparition, is to be blamed for all those Lamordians lost and they are innocent.

The truth is more sinister, though, as most of the villagers have become unwilling members of a cult to the demon entity known as Dagon, and they live under constant fear of becoming one of Dagon's so-called children, people altered into fishlike monstrosities, if they are unwilling to serve him and sacrifice foreigners to him.

Ravienne (thorp): Nonstandard; AL CE; CL 9; 40gp limit; Assets 80gp; Population 80; Isolated (human 75%, CoD 15%, reavers 5%); *Authority Figures:* Gouverneur Roman D'Altrousse, Sergeant Jonas Gouffre Ftr5; *Important Characters:* Sabine Nouvièvre (innkeeper) Com2, Monsignor Guy Malamere Pr2/ToD1

The cult leader is Dame Dominique, an aging widow whose husband was "lost at sea" several years ago and who runs Thibodeaux's Rest Home (see "Olerick's Colloquial Guides Part Three: Hospices and Healers," by Jeremy Roby, *Quoth the Raven* #16).





Ravienne

- | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Old Fortress | 6. Abandoned Temple of Ezra | 11. Hôtel Abîme |
| 2. Mason de Gouverneur | 7. Cemetery | 12. Abandoned House |
| 3. Marketplace | 8. Cave entrance | 13. Reavers Rocks |
| 4. Docks | 9. South Wall | 14. Thibodeaux's Rest Home |
| 5. Lighthouse | 10. North Wall | 15. Conch of Dagon Radius |

1. Old Fortress

This fortified, crumbling keep was built ages ago in the bay, as a base for the Dementlieuse navy to protect trading ships from pirates. Although most of the castle is a pile of rubble, the cannons placed on the walls are still functioning. The keep's warehouse is still intact and filled with cannonballs and gunpowder that are used, rarely, to defend the village from pirate raids.

2. Maison de Gouverneur

Gouverneur Roman D'Altrousse was Dame Dominique's lover when she was still married to Lord Lamar Thibodeaux, who was then the governor of Ravienne and protector of the trading route. He was the first person to fall under her sway and helped her enforce her will upon the people of Ravienne. The Governor's Manor is a beautiful building filled with aquatic frescoes and statues of sea creatures. A fountain overlooking the sea rests on its north side, with the image of a triton riding a dolphin, attacking an invisible enemy with his trident.

3. Marketplace

This is the center of Ravienne and the only place where one can spot one of the transformed residents of Ravienne outdoors.

4. Docks

Years ago, this was the base of operations for the Dementlieuse navy. Now it is used as a stopover for ships traveling towards or from Lamordia or any of the islands found in the Sea of Sorrows, for protection against a coming storm. Usually, the crew of these ships are left undisturbed so as not to draw too much attention, but occasionally an accident can occur.

5. Lighthouse

This three story tower is still being used. The man responsible for it is Thomas Silage, an old retired seaman with a hook hand and one of Dame Dominique's most loyal subjects.

6. Abandoned Temple of Ezra

Monsignor Guy Malamere was a devoted cleric of Ezra from the Dementlieuse sect. His studying of esoteric knowledge was used by Dame Dominique to manipulate

him and he began doubting his faith or who Ezra actually is. His willing conversion to the worship of Dagon made the citizens of Ravienne lose faith, and consolidated Dame Dominique's power over Ravienne. The young priest still pretends to be an anchorite in the presence of foreigners, but the neglected church is an indication that things are not as they should be.

7. Cemetery

The cemetery seems even more abandoned than the church itself. The graves are all dated to many decades past, raising the question if anyone has died since then in Ravienne, and, if yes, what do they do with the bodies?

8. Cave

This cave opening leads into a complex of corridors and natural rooms. These caves are connected underground with the sea, in an underground lagoon where the rituals of the cult of Dagon occur. The caves are where the transformed Children of Dagon live.

9. South Wall

This towered wall, along with the North Wall fortifications completed the natural protection of the bay from pirate raids on land; they are still weaponized with cannons, as a precaution for the event of a Falkovnian invasion.

10. North Wall

Sergeant Jonas Gouffre, an old member of the gendarmerie and the few men under his command live in the barracks located in these fortified moated walls. He became easily enthralled by Dame Dominique and helped her bring terror and madness to Ravienne. When he walks in the streets most people avoid him.

11. Hôtel Abîme

Sabine Nouvièvre takes care of this large but mostly empty inn, positioned in the center of the bay and having a beautiful view of the Sea of Sorrows. The few visitors to the inn are assessed for their strength and, if they are deemed to be easy targets, are attacked during the night to be sacrificed to Dagon.

12. Abandoned House

This abandoned house belonged to Sauvemer family, who were brutally murdered years ago, terrorizing the townsfolk before the real terror begun. It is sometimes used by Cedrik Paddock.

13. Reaver's Reef

A school of reavers has made this reef and the protruding rocks its home for more than a decade, following the calling of the *Conch Shell of Dagon*. Although the reavers don't attack people who swim in the area, having a constant supply of meat offered to them by the villagers of Ravienne, they will attack anyone foolish enough to swim to their nest.

14. Thibodeaux's Rest Home

This four-story seaside villa has been converted to a retirement home, as described in "Olerick's Colloquial Guides Part Three: Hospices and Healers" by Jeremy Roby in *QtR16*, which was the inspiration for this article. A central elevator mechanism provides access to the various rooms of the villa for the old seadogs living here and for Dame Dominique, who uses a wheelchair to move around and hide her deformed legs.

15. Conch Cell Radius

This is the radius the *Conch Shell of Dagon's* transformative effect, which is centered in the underground lagoon within the caves of Ravienne.



DAME DOMINIQUE

Female human Bard2/ Aristocrat3/ Cleric3/ Thrall of Dagon4

Hit Dice: 6d6+6d8 +12 (60 hp)

Initiative: +7 (+9 in the sea)

Speed: 30 ft., swim 30 ft. underwater jet 200 ft. (40 sq.)

Armor Class: 13 (+3 Dex), touch 13, flat-footed 10

Base Attack/Grapple: +2

Attack: Tentacles 1d4+1

Full Attack: Tentacles 1d4+1

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Spells, Improved Grab,

Special Qualities: Amphibious, Bardic Knowledge +2

Saves: Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +7

Abilities: Str 12, Dex 17, Con 13, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 20

Skills: Appraise +7, Bluff +17, Climb +3, Diplomacy +10, Intimidate +17, Knowledge (nature) +5, Knowledge (history) +8, Knowledge (planes) +10, Knowledge (religion) +5, Perform (sing) +17, Perform (Conch shell) +8, Sense Motive +2, Swim +9, Listen +6, Handle Animal +8, Use Magic Device +16, Spot +1, Search +2, Move Silently +3, Hide +3

Feats: Athletic, Improved Initiative, Persuasive, True Believer (Dagon), Thrall of Demon (Dagon), Otherworldly Countenance

Challenge Rating: 9

Alignment: Chaotic Evil

Languages: Mordentish*, Abyssal

Song of Dagon (Su): 2/day, Dominique can invest any spell with the sonic descriptor as she casts with Dagon's song. This manifests as a low, bass rumbling sound that seems to resonate deep within the bodies of all those affected by the spell. Any creature that fails its saving throw against a sonic spell enhanced by the song of Dagon immediately takes Wisdom damage equal to the level of the spell.

Thrall of Dagon (Su): Once per day, Dominique can gain +1 luck bonus on an attack roll, skill check, ability check, level check, or saving throw

Otherworldly Countenance (Su): Dominique is stunningly beautiful; her appearance can be terribly unsettling for

those upon whom she focuses her attention. Twice per day, as a full-round action, she can attempt to distract a target within 30 feet by focusing her attention upon it. The target must be able to see her and can resist her distracting appearance by making a Will save DC 21. Failure indicates that the target is fascinated for as long as she remains in its line of sight.

Special: Her appearance is so striking that it's difficult to hide. She takes a -2 penalty on Disguise checks.

Sea longing (Ex): Dominique has an overwhelming obsession with the sea. If she is not immersed in sea water for a day, she grows irritable, distracted, and disoriented, suffering a -2 penalty on all Wisdom-based skill checks and on Will saving throws and suffers a 1d4 temporary Con damage as her body starts to dry out. While on the sea or under its waves, however, she becomes invigorated and gains +2 morale bonus on initiative checks and Reflex saves.

Entropy (Su): Once per day as a standard action, she can channel a bolt of Abyssal entropy as a ranged touch attack, dealing 3d8 points of damage. Half the damage is sonic damage, and half is unholy damage that cannot be reduced by sonic resistance or immunity.

Tentacles of Dagon (Ex): Dominique's mouth hides a pair of squid-like tentacles that do 1d4+1 damage plus grab

Improved Grab (Ex): If she hits an opponent of any size with her tentacles, she can start a grapple as a free action, without provoking an attack of opportunity, she has a +4 bonus to start and maintain a grapple.

Jet (Ex): Underwater, she can expel water from her gills to jet backward once per round as a full-round action, at a speed of 200 feet. She must move in a straight line, but does not provoke attacks of opportunity while jetting.

Blasphemous Incantation (Su): Eight times per day, Dominique can channel Dagon's unholy will by reciting an Abyssal poem. All good creatures within 30ft. must succeed on Fortitude save DC 18 or become sickened (taking a -2 penalty on all attack rolls, weapon damage rolls, saving throws, skill checks, and ability checks) for 5 rounds.

Ink Cloud (Su): While underwater, she can emit a 10-foot-radius cloud of ink once per hour as a standard

action. This cloud provides total concealment. The ink persists for 1 minute, with all vision within the cloud being obscured. Due to this dark gift, her blood is jet black in color.

Voice of Rapture (Su): Dominique's voice has a strangely calming, deep basso quality that seems much deeper and commanding than it should. Any language-dependent spells she casts have their save DC increased by 1.

Tentacles (Ex): Dominique can use one of her tentacle legs to either do slam attacks which deal 1d6 damage or to wield light or one-handed weapons.

Abyssal Habitat (Ex): Dominique is immune to pressure damage from descending into even the greatest of oceanic depths.

Bard spells DC 15+ spell lvl: 3/4/2

Dancing Lights, Daze, Detect Magic, Lullaby, Message, Read Magic; Cause Fear, Hideous Laughter, Hypnotism, Obscure Object; Calm Emotions, Suggestion, Beckoning Call;

deric Spells DC 12+ spell lvl: 4/3+1/2+1 (Domains Entropy, Blackwater)

Favorite spells: *Read Magic, Guidance, No Light, Preserve Organ; Cause Fear*, Command, Slow Consumption, Sanctuary; Vision of Entropy*, Death Knell, Hold Person*

Dominique cannot turn or rebuke undead

BACKGROUND

Dame Dominique was brought into this world in 707, into a poor family working on Councilor Phillip Muliere's family estate; her name then was Marie Jourdain. Marie's incredible singing talent and beauty didn't go unnoticed by the Councilor and Patron of the Arts. Not long after her singing was heard by the Councilor while tending the garden, she became his protégé, becoming an upcoming star of the Grand Opera Nationale. Some people presupposed that she had a sexual relationship with that foppish sycophant, but that was never proved or witnessed.

She was so attractive that it didn't take long for Dominic d'Honaire to notice her and be enamored with her, arranging "random" encounters with her. Naturally, that made him all the more repulsive to her already

disgusted indifference. Knowing that by refusing the advances of the newly appointed Chief Advisor, her career at the Port-a-Lucine Opera House would be over anyway, she decided to leave the city. But as she planned to leave, she felt she was followed, or actually stalked. Wherever she went, she had the feeling that people were watching her. When the boatman she had employed to take her to the fishing town of Ste. Luciennes made an indiscreet suggestion that he would take her to Domaine d'Honaire, she knew something was off, and jumped overboard.

The waves and currents carried her to the open sea, where she was, by sheer luck, saved by a fishing boat from the coastal town of Ravienne. The only thing she uttered before passing out was "Dominic." The fisherman brought her to Ravienne, where he presented her as "Dominique" to the local lord, a wealthy merchant captain Lord Lamar Thibodeaux. Pretending to have no recollection of what had happened to her, she adopted the name Dominique, and Lamar, fascinated by her looks and "innocence" took her under his wing. After a few months they married and she came to be known as Dame Dominique.

Lamar was constantly spoiling his wife with expensive presents, something she welcomed, and Dominique began to believe that someone was watching over her, and she felt grateful to that unnamed power for her good fortune. She had managed to escape Port-a-Lucine, her life saved by a random boat and now she was richer than she could ever have imagined to be as an opera singer. And most importantly, she wouldn't have to work again in her lifetime. But there was something that was missing from her life, the adoration of the crowd, and without it she didn't feel fulfilled. Also, her husband had started to annoy her, asking for "sexual compensation," in her opinion, for the things she was offering her. She feigned emotional attachment to him but instead she started having an affair with a young sailor who worked for her husband, by the name of Marinus.

All that changed, when one day her husband brought her a present: an obsidian conch shell Lamar had bought from an auction in Borca. She was fascinated by the relic's master craftsmanship and felt renewed and

excited by her present, so she capitulated to her husband's sexual whims. Then the murders began. The first ones to be slaughtered were the Sauvemer family; the brutal scene's description passed from mouth to mouth, terrorizing the townsfolk. The second night, the Remys followed; Constable Plourde asked permission from Lord Thibodeaux to ask for help from Port-a-Lucine. Dominique, fearing that her identity might be exposed if someone from the city recognized her, volunteered to go to Port-a-Lucine herself. As she and her husband were in town for the seasonal celebration at the time of the second murder, and so were not suspects, it was agreed that she would deliver the message herself to the Port Authorities of Port-a-Lucine, who are responsible for all coastal towns.

Dominique took a boat with Marinus, but instead of traveling to Port-a-Lucine, she went to the coastal Ferme Lacroix vineyard, between Ravienne and Port-a-Lucine, stopping there for an aperitif. Using the excuse of it being too late to continue or to return to Ravienne, she arranged to spend the night in a guest house. The following day, they sailed back to Ravienne, only to learn that another attack had happened the previous night, in a house close to their villa. Marinus, although feeling guilty about not going to the authorities in Port-a-Lucine, didn't say a word to Lord Lamar. He was intimidated by Dominique, who said that if he did, their secret would be revealed and her husband would have to regain his honor with the use of dueling pistols.

That night, Dominique woke in Thibodeaux villa from the noise of a pistol. Cautious, she went downstairs only to find an enormous scaly creature dismembering what appeared to be Lamar. The creature took notice of her and turned towards her, with menacing eyes and sharp teeth, clenching the obsidian conch in his hand. Dominique began to recite a poem about the sea, fascinating the reaver, and managed to communicate with it. The scaly was the leader of the reaver clan terrorizing the area, and they came out to an agreement. The clan would spare the town for the theft, if they converted to the religion of Dagon, Prince of the Darkened Depths, and sacrificed one human each season to Dagon, offering the victim's body for their consumption.

Once more, Dominique had managed to change her fortunes, and she now knew by whom she was protected. Dagon had saved her from d'Honaire, Dagon had led her to Ravienne, Dagon had saved her from the dullness of her husband and let her inherit lordship of Ravienne, Dagon had saved her from this creature, and Dagon would give her what she longed for, the adoration of the townspeople of Ravienne.

She used her newly acquired fortune to create an impressive library of knowledge on demonology in order to uncover the powers of *The Conch Shell of Dagon*. She discovered the nature of the transformations that befell her remaining household servants, and with the use of Dapplewort and her talents of persuasion she created the Order of Dagon.

She used the relic and its power of transformation to manipulate the people of Ravienne into submission, by moving the relic into a coastal underground cave close to Ravienne, so that the townspeople would begin to transform, manipulating them into abandoning their faith to Ezra and following the order of Dagon. She got rid of all those who opposed her, either by sacrificing them to Dagon, transforming them into reavers, or driving them utterly mad. Step by step, the Order of Dagon grew until all the remaining townspeople of Ravienne became worshippers of Dagon.

To avoid drawing unwanted attention towards the seasonal sacrifices, she turned her seaside villa into the Thibodeaux's Rest Home, a retirement home for old sea dogs, in "honor" of her husband, who was "lost to the sea." Several youths, mostly young, beautiful women, from Ravienne, volunteered to help Dame Dominique take care of her charges. The relic's reality wrinkle protects Ravienne from Chief Advisor d'Honaire's obedient, while the Rest Home itself is outside of its reality wrinkle. Recently, she deciphered a combination of ceremonies she believes these can create a Wild Tide Portal, an event that can happen every 720 years. Dame Dominique's transformation rituals have transformed her legs into tentacles, she hides them with long dresses and by use of a wheelchair, although she doesn't need one.

ADVENTURE IDEA: THE THUNDERING CARRIAGE

The citizens of the small town of Leidenheim are still bitter over the disappearance of some of their relatives. Firmly believing that the townspeople of Ravienne are responsible for their family members' disappearance, they hire a group of adventurers to investigate. While the adventurers travel towards Ravienne through the marshes, their movement is slowed by a sudden storm. They manage to find shelter in a lonely country inn, the Thistle & Bonnet (see *Van Richten's Guide to Ghosts*). While staying there, they witness the existence of the Thundering Carriage, as Van Richten had in 727 BC. Reaching Ravienne, they learn a legend that says that the Thundering Carriage carries the spirits of Dr. Mordenheim's victims, or the spirits of bodies he stole, leaving their spirits trapped in the world between. The villagers are adamant that the Lamordians, having no belief in the supernatural, believe they are responsible for the disappearances. Of course the truth is that the townspeople of Ravienne are indeed responsible for the disappearances, and manipulate the PCs into a wild goose chase after the Thundering Carriage.

ADVENTURE IDEA: A HELPING TENTACLE

The PC's discover one of the altered victims of *The Conch Shell of Dagon*, or maybe they come upon Douglas Danton, who has traced the source of Lamar's transformation to Ravienne. There is also the possibility that "Lamar" is actually Marinus, filled with guilt about Lamar Thibodeaux's death and grief about his involvement in Dame Dominique's scheme to control Ravienne. Lamar is recognized as soon as they enter the village and are seen as a threat to the Order of Dagon.

ADVENTURE IDEA: VISITING MADNESS

One of the PCs has an old relative or retired friend living in Thibodeaux's rest home. He pays a visit to the old sea dog, only to discover that something fishy is going around in Ravienne. Things get even weirder as the visiting PC is plagued by vivid nightmares that begin to call into question reality itself.

ADVENTURE IDEA: FISHY BUSSINESS

The PCs have travelled to Leidenheim, after rumors of the existence of the Loud Man of Lamordia (see *Van Richten's Guide to Ghosts*). While investigating the lake outside the town, rumored to be the haunting site of that babbling spirit, they encounter a lone reaver. Pleading for his life, he bargains for it in exchange for valuable information. The reaver is an exiled member of the school of reavers living in the reefs of Ravienne, and seeking vengeance, for his what he sees as unfair treatment, he has decided to use the PCs to reinstate himself to the reef, and maybe even become leader of the school of reavers plaguing Ravienne.

ADVENTURE IDEA: ON "LORD-GOVERNOR'S" SERVICE

The town of Ravienne hasn't payed any taxes since the Order of Dagon took over. Because of *The Conch Shell of Dagon's* reality wrinkle, whenever Dominic D'Honaire has sent any of his obedients there to investigate, he loses any mental contact he has with them and they usually vanish or end up dead or worse. Lord-Governor Guignol summons the PCs and entrusts them with the mission to find out what the hell is happening in Ravienne.

On the other hand, the PCs may be *obedient* themselves and the relic's reality wrinkle may be used to suppress D'Honaire's powers, while at the same time placing the PCs inside the eye of the storm.

ADVENTURE IDEA: SPECIAL DELIVERY

An inventor has tasked the PCs to deliver his masterpiece, an automatic mechanical wheelchair, from Neufurchtenburg to the Thibodeaux Rest Home.



M

DREAD POSSIBILITY: COEVOLUTION OF OBSOLETION

In The Cuckoo's Egg dread possibility, Count Wilhelm von Lovenhorst's "disappearance" was part of an experiment to make one of the Fraternity a darklord. The experiment seemingly failed, but in truth, the Dark Powers have transformed the Count into their puppet and employ him to sabotage the Fraternity's efforts. With this new plan, the Dark Powers are using the Count to persuade the Fathers of the Fraternity to follow up on Paddock's research, taking them down a false track that could possibly lead to the Fraternity's destruction. If the Conch Shell of Sorrows is discovered, and brought to the Guignol Museum, there could be a massive attack on the University grounds by the Caller of the Deeps. Then the Fraternity will be exposed for what it is: a dangerous secret society, and this could be the end of this seemingly scholarly fraternity.

THE CONCH SHELL OF DAGON**CHAOTIC EVIL RELIC OF THE DEEP**

The Conch Shell of Dagon is a large, ebony-black sea shell with a glassy texture that resembles that of volcanic glass, commonly known as obsidian. Its size is around sixteen inches long and nine inches wide, and it weight 3 lbs. A part of the essence of Dagon is inside the shell, absorbing any light reflected into the darkness of it'

aperture. *The Conch Shell of Dagon* has a hole in its spire, near the apex, and can be used as a wind instrument by blowing into the shell as if it were a trumpet. Pitch is adjusted by moving one's hand in and out of the aperture; the deeper the hand, the lower the note, as the hand appears to vanish in the darkness of the aperture.

This relic has its origins in the 89th layer of the Abyss, known as Shadowsea, a deep and perpetually dark ocean, realm of Dagon, Prince of the Darkened Depths, a god-like being made of manifest entropy and elemental energy, who rules the Shadowsea from inside an amorphous slimy palace, inhabited by giant sea worms and luminescent gliding creatures. The realm was connected to the deepest trenches of Gaping Maw, the layer of the Abyss ruled by Demogorgon.

In ancient myth, when the first primordials arrived in the Abyss, the demon lord Dagon was already there, lurking in the depths. When Demogorgon went to claim the shard of evil, Dagon rose out of the Blood Sea to challenge him for control. During the battle, Dagon's black, inky blood spilled inside a conch shell at the bottom of the trench and remained there for eons.

When Dagon appeared on Toril below the surface of the Sea of Fallen Stars and the waters in the west of Maztica, *The Conch Shell of Dagon* was transported with him. With it, he infested the dreams of those who swam in the Sea of Fallen Stars with nightmares.

He planned to overcome a pantheon of sea creatures and achieve their divine powers. To reach this goal he brought the depths of the seas under the control of his servants and their forces, commonly known as "Those who Sleep Below", with the use of long-forgotten eldritch magic. *The Conch Shell of Dagon* was one such magical item. With it, he restricted the influence of the deities of the shalarin in the Sea of Corynactis, on the west of Maztica.

The next step was the creation of "wild tides" to sweep large numbers of shalarin into the Sea of Fallen Stars, where his minions could slaughter them. The first wild tide began in 1509 DR with the opening of the Wild Tide Portals connecting the two ocean realms. Many shalarin were swept into the Sea of Fallen Stars, where many died under the attacks of Dagon's servants. The rest

were only rescued by the intervention of enemies of Dagon.

Dagon repeated this tactic every 720 years and after the fourth and final tide, the shalarin of their homelands near Maztica had all but abandoned their gods because they had grown silent. Instead of the gods, they began to venerate the demon Dagon, and his cult became the dominant religion in the Sea of Corynactis, while the shalarin of the Sea of Fallen Stars cut off travel between their communities. But it was too late, and the cult of Dagon had already taken root among their ranks. It grew in secret, making the relic even stronger with more powers.

In time, it became powerful enough to attract the attention of the Dark Powers, and was transported to the Land of Mists in 630 BC. Dagon's essence in the relic was too strong and hard to contain, and it created an enormous reality wrinkle in the Sea of Sorrows. As the number of Dagon's worshippers declined dramatically, so did the attention of the Dark Powers to the relic and, in the aftermath of the Grand Conjunction, the Dark Powers managed to contain Dagon's essence to a few hundred yards, while the Sea of Sorrows continued to exist, now having a darklord to replace the vacuum of power. There at the bottom of the sea, it was revered by aquatic creatures, who recognized its significance, until it was lost during the Grand Conjunction.

It resurfaced many years later in a mine in Falkovnia, in some strange tomb among other relics and treasures. These were taken by orders of the state to neighboring Borca to be sold in an auction. Michel Thibodeaux, a wealthy merchant from the coastal town of Ravienne bought the Conch Shell for a large sum of money, a present to his beautiful wife Dominique. A few months passed, until one night a clan of reavers started a series of attacks on Ravienne, drawn by the relic, killing dozens of people until one night they attacked Michel's seaside villa.

When his wife Dominique discovered a large reaver mutilating her husband's dead corpse she became cautious but also fascinated by the creature before her, recognizing the raw beauty of its animalistic instinct. When the fishlike being turned to attack her, holding the Conch in its hand, she managed to soothe it, and

with amazement the creature realized that it could understand her language.

The reaver clan leader and Dominique made a dark pact that night; the reavers would spare the town if the townspeople joined the Cult of Dagon and sacrificed one person each season to the demon lord. When some people began to transform into fish-like humanoids, Dominique professed that only Dagon could protect them from the hideous transformation, thus she converted most of the people in the town, while non-believers were sacrificed or were fully transformed. Those transformed to reavers joined the rest of the clan while the children of Dagon moved to the underground caves of the area. The ceremonies were masked as a seasonal sea festival while Dominique turned her house into a house for elderly seamen to attract people that would not be missed, victims to the sacrificial ceremonies. *The Conch Shell of Dagon* is used as a conduit for the sacrifices, in ceremonies during the festival, and is located in a cave that can be accessed through an opening overlooking the sea and an underwater tunnel that connects the cave with the Sea of Sorrows, which the reavers use.

POWERS OF THE THE CONCH SHELL OF DAGON

Caster level 20th

Calling to the Deeps once every 720 years

Dagon's Curse 1 time per day

Maddening Nightmare 1 time per day

Tongues 1 time per day

Deeper Darkness 1 time per day

Sound Burst 3 times per day

Comprehend Languages at will

To activate these powers, the user must know how to play the specific tunes for them to work. The reavers know the tunes and have taught them to Dame Dominique and the Children of Dagon. In the case of the *Calling to the Deeps*, there is a specific ritual that must be performed on six successive nights, involving the sacrifice of six humans or demihumans and dripping blood into the darkness of the shell's aperture before blowing a different tune each night. *Dagon's Curse* needs some part of the victim (hair, nails, pinch of blood) thrown in the shell's aperture to function. In addition to its relic powers, any character whose

alignment is within one step of Chaotic Evil who blows the relic can create a sound that acts as the *Countersound* spell. If *The Conch Shell of Dagon* touches an elemental of any water description the elemental must roll a Will save or be surrendered and absorbed to the darkness of its aperture.

CURSE OF THE CONCH SHELL OF DAGON

Each time someone blows the relic (usually to activate its powers) he or she must roll a successful Will save or have his or her alignment change one step closer to Chaotic Evil. The change affects first Law and then Ethos. Since the change is involuntary, the person affected must also roll a Madness Check. Those characters who turn to Chaotic Evil automatically become faithful followers of the Prince of the Darkened Depths. Also, each month *The Conch Shell of Dagon* is close to the sea, there is a 5% chance to attract evil sea creatures such as reavers, sahuagin, and skum but also of larger aquatic aberrations, including chuul and morkoth, to its location.

WAYS OF DESTRUCTION

The Conch Shell of Dagon can be rendered inactive if it is transported to the mainland, miles away from the sea. This, however, holds the risk of having it returned close to the sea by people who are unaware of its powers, as happened in the past. The best way to rid the world of this powerful relic might be its submergence into the same material that created it: lava. So probably the best way to destroy it is by throwing it in a volcano. There are three volcanos in the Core: the two mountains of Darkon, Mount Nirka and Mount Nyid, which became active again after the Requiem, and the Molten Hollow, hidden deep within the caldera mountain of Demise. Though Demise is closer to Ravienne, its close proximity to the sea makes that journey more dangerous as a way to dispose of the relic.

There is also a theory that *The Conch Shell of Dagon* can be destroyed by another powerful relic: *The Spear of Dagon*. Not much information exists about *The Spear of Dagon* or it's whereabouts; the only thing that is known about it is that it was quested for by the hero Delacroix in his quest to slay an entity known as High Priest Ishud. A man known as Moag the Apothecary, who desired the relic for himself offered to remove a curse that was put upon one of Delacroix's companions. But as the legend

goes, the offer was never accepted and that was the last known mention of the relic's existence.

TRANSFORMATIVE REALITY WRINKLE

After the Grand Conjunction collapsed, the Dark Powers managed to contain the reality wrinkle of *The Conch Shell of Dagon* to around 1 mile. The reality wrinkle was condensed, but the power the relic exerted did not diminish, and it begun to warp the reality around it. Since the purpose of the relic is to gather more faithful for Dagon, every human or humanoid contained within its reality wrinkle that is not a follower of the demon prince transforms slowly into an aquatic humanoid. If the non-worshipper is of chaotic alignment, then he or she is transformed slowly into a bloodthirsty reaver, while if it is of any other alignment, the transformation results into a fishlike humanoid form resembling that of a kua-toa: a Child of Dagon.

Each day a non-worshipper of Dagon sleeps within the reality wrinkle of *The Conch Shell of Dagon*, he or she must roll a successful Fortitude save or be subject to some kind of bodily transformation. This transformation is not necessarily permanent it can be reversed by a *limited wish* or *wish* spell, or a succession of *restoration* spells, one spell for each stage of transformation, if the character leaves the reality wrinkles area of effect. To revert to normal, a character must stay away from the relic's reality wrinkle for a *full month* for each *stage* of transformation he or she has suffered. If a character fully transforms into either aquatic creature, the only way to return to normal is via a *wish* spell. Those who fail their save are plagued by terrible vivid nightmares involving the darkest depths of the sea, or sea creatures trying to get a hold on them. They wake up in fright only to realize at some point that some part of them has transformed into something else. In the first stage of transformation, the parts that have being transformed are not always easily visible. In these cases, an observer needs to make a successful Spot check to realize that something is off.

The DM decides or rolls a dice to see which body part transforms each night a character sleeps within the shell's reality wrinkle. If a character is transforming into a **reaver**, roll **1d8**, if the character is transforming into a **child of Dagon**, then roll **2d4**.

There are five stages of transformation for each body part; for a complete transformation into either sea creature, the victim has to reach stage five in all body parts. This means that the minimum time for a full transformation is more than a month.

The first time a character's transformation reaches a stage with an asterisk, roll a madness check.

Reaver Transformation Table		Child of Dagon Transformation Table	
1d8	Body Part	2d4	Body Part
1	Neck/Lungs	2	Neck / Lungs
2	Skin	3	Skin
3	Eyes	4	Mouth / Teeth
4	Hands	5	Limbs
5	Mouth/ Teeth	6	Other
6	Limbs	7	Eyes
7	Muscles/ Bones	8	Special
8	Other		

Stage Eyes (Reaver)

- 1 Bulging eyes
- 2 Orbital hypertelorism, distance between eyes is increased
- 3* Eyes grow larger and black, they cover most of the eye, OR+1
- 4 Eyes can change their lens shape to see clearly in water Spot check +4 while underwater
- 5 Blindsense, can locate all creatures underwater within a 30-foot radius.

Stage Hands (Reaver)

- 1 Nails turn black
- 2 Nails become bigger
- 3* Nails fall off and are replaced by claws 1d2 damage
- 4 Claws become bigger 1d4 damage
- 5 Claws become even more powerful 1d6 damage

Stage Mouth / Teeth (Reaver)

- 1 Lips thicken and look like they are swollen
- 2 Mouth becomes bigger, Teeth become pointy
- 3* Mouth expands, develops more rows of teeth, bite does 1 damage, OR+1

4 Teeth grow triangular like that of a shark, bite does 1d3 damage, OR+1

5 Jaws become stronger bite does 1d4+2 damage

Stage Limbs (Reaver)

- 1 Feet and Hands develop small membranes between fingers
- 2 Feet and Hands become webbed, +1 bonus on Swim checks
- 3* Feet and legs become bigger +4 Move Silently checks, +2 bonus on Swim checks
- 4 Hands and Feet become fully webbed, legs become bigger -10ft speed on land, swim +30ft ,+3 bonus on Swim checks, OR+1
- 5 Limbs fully develop to accomodate swimming, speed becomes 20ft swim 60ft, +2 bonus on Swim checks May take 10 on swim checks even when threatened or distracted.

Stage Muscles/ Bones (Reaver)

- 1 Skin becomes tighter muscles become more visible
- 2 Body becomes hunched, character grows taller a few inches
- 3 Muscles develop more but brain becomes smaller, +1 Str, -1 Int, gains 1 foot in height
- 4 +1 Str and -1 Int, if character was size S he becomes M, Improved Grab
- 5* Character's brain shrinks more and muscles grow +3 Str, -3 Int, he becomes a brute

Stage Other (Reaver)

- 1 Skin gets a darker hue
- 2 Ears become larger
- 3 Ears change shape, +2 Listen checks underwater, OR+1
- 4* Skin turns green immobile remains unseen in underwater thick vegetation DC 24 Spot check to notice, +4 Hiding checks while underwater OR+1
- 5 Ultra sonic speech, can communicate with reavers without humanoids hearing anything

Stage Neck / Lungs (Child of Dagon)

- 1 Small lines appear on character's neck
- 2 Skin on neck becomes shrivelled while lines on neck become bigger
- 3* Character develops small gills and can breath in water for 1 hour, OR+1
- 4 Character's gills become bigger can breath water for 1 hour / Con point
- 5 Characters lungs transform to breath water normaly, can survive out of water for 1 hour / Con point

Stage Skin (Child of Dagon)

- 1 Skin color becomes paler, if already pale becomes grayish
- 2 Body hair begin to fall small scales appear on arms and legs
- 3* Alopecia, character grows scales and skin toughens, gains a +1 natural armor class, OR+1
- 4 Scales grow stronger, pigmentation based on their emotional state, gains a +2 natural armor class
- 5 Character's scales becomes tougher, gains a +3 natural armor class

Stage Mouth / Teeth (Child of Dagon)

- 1 Lips thicken and look like they are swollen
- 2 Mouth becomes bigger, Teeth become sarper
- 3* Mouth expands, teeth sharpen more, bite does 1 damage, OR+1
- 4 Teeth grow longer, bite does 1d2 damage
- 5 Jaws become stronger, bite does 1d4 damage

Stage Limbs (Child of Dagon)

- 1 Feet and Hands develop small membranes between fingers
- 2 Feet and Hands become webbed, +1 bonus on Swim checks
- 3 Feet become bigger and soft +3 Move to Silently checks, +2 bonus on Swim checks
- 4* Hands and Feet become fully webbed, legs become bigger -10ft speed on land, swim +20ft, +3 bonus on Swim checks, OR+1
- 5 Limbs fully develop to accomodate swimming, speed becomes 20ft swim 50ft, +3 bonus on Swim checks

Stage Other (Child of Dagon)

- 1 Ears become larger
- 2 Body becomes hunched
- 3* Body grows taller or shorter 1 foot closer to 5 feet height, Ears take another shape +2 Listen checks, OR+1
- 4 Body reaches the height of 5 feet and becomes more hunched, Con +1, Ears enlarge +2 Listen checks
- 5 Ears become even larger +3 Listen checks, muscles grow stronger Str+1

Stage Eyes (Child of Dagon)

- 1 Bulging eyes
- 2 Orbital hypertelorism, distance between eyes is increased
- 3 Eyes become bigger, can change their lens shape to see clearly in water Spot +2 underwater
- 4* Eyes turn yellow and can move independently, Spot and Search checks +4, OR+1
- 5 Keen Sight, can see moving invisible and ethereal creatures or objects but exposure to bright light blinds the character for 1 round and takes a -1 circumstance penalty on all attack rolls, saves, and checks while operating in bright light.

Stage Special (Child of Dagon)

- 1 Character has a short temper whenever confronted with treachery, underhandedness, insults or baseless accusations must make a will save or fly into a violent rage and attack verbally or physically
- 2 If a character reaches a quarter of his original hit points enters a mad rage attacking any enemy he gains a +2 bonus on melee attack rolls and melee damage rolls.
- 3* Slippery, character secretes an oily slime that makes him difficult to grapple, Escape Artist +8, OR+1
- 4 Oily film makes the character resistant to electricity 10, and immune to webs but smells like fish
- 5 Character automatically fails a madness check but is immune to mind effecting spells

If a character rolls a special transformation roll on two consequent times the transformation takes a new turn as the transformative power of the Conch Shell of Dagon becomes more extreme, slowly transforming the individual into a broken one, an amalgam of man, fish and octopus. If a second special consequent roll is rolled

the character becomes a broken one and its description changes to aberration.

Roll 1d6 to see which part of the body changes first and then for the second change choose one more capability from the Broken One template.

1 One leg becomes a tentacle, the character gains a slam attack 1d4+3 but moves 5ft slower, OR +6

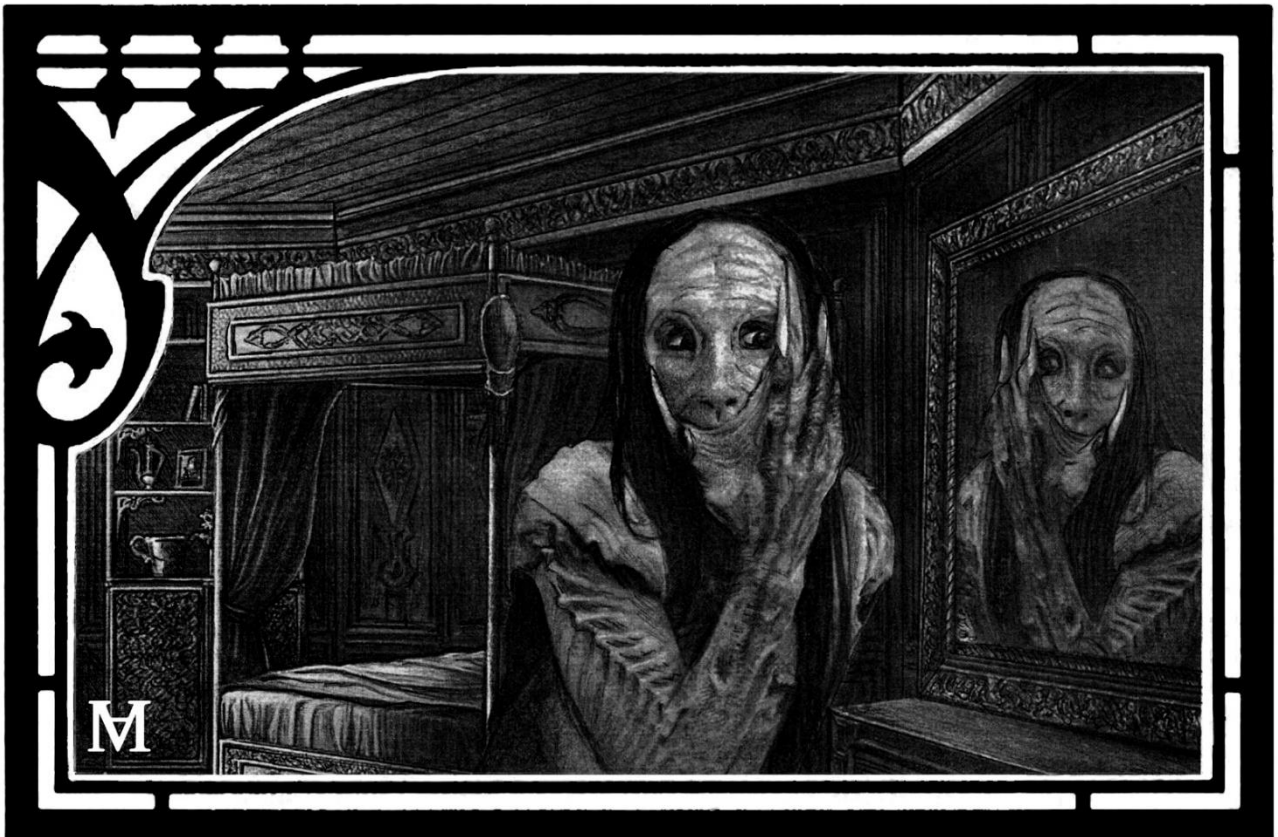
2 The character's body becomes soft, rubbery and pliable like a mollusk's, characters can flatten their body allowing them to slip into spaces with at least a 1-inch gap, OR +6

3 One arm becomes a tentacle, character can attack for 1d4+3 damage but loses any feat that needs the use of that hand. If the tentacle hits its target, it may immediately attempt to grapple it without provoking an attack of opportunity as if having the Improved Grab (Ex) ability. If it wins the grapple it establishes a hold and may immediately constrict the foe for damage equal to its base tentacle attack, OR+6

4 Character's skin gains chromatophore cells that can change color based on the character's activity or surrounding gaining camouflage when standing still DC 24 spot check to notice, +4 Hiding checks, OR+1

5 Torso grows a swarm of tentacles. They grasp and entwine around creatures within 5ft holding them fast and crushing them with great strength. Every creature attacked must make a grapple check, opposed by the grapple check of the tentacles. Once the tentacles grapple an opponent, they may make a grapple check each round to deal 1d6+4 points of bludgeoning damage. OR+6

6 Head transforms into a swarm of tentacles resembling an eyeless illithid, the character gains blindsight. Once the tentacles grapple an opponent, they may make a grapple check each round to deal 1d4+3 points of bludgeoning damage. OR +7



ADVENTURE IDEAS: A MIND'S EYE

The PCs stay in Ravienne and experience a traumatic transformation. They have to find the reason for their change before they lose themselves trying.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE FAMILY

That dear octopus from whose tentacles we never can escape, nor in our inmost hearts ever quite wish to - this is the power of Dame Dominique. She manipulates people into service, becoming the center of adoration and keeps everyone grappled within her tentacles. The PCs, after years of being terrorised by the Thrall of Dagon and her Order, decide to intervene when an Ezran Inquisitor visits the small town.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE SPEAR OF DAGON

The adventurers are on a quest to find the relic known as the Spear of Dagon, but as they progress in their search, they have the feeling that they are being watched by a group of strange creatures. Dame Dominique also covets the spear, although its powers are not known. She is sure that the combination of these two relics may unlock even more powers for her, maybe even summoning Dagon himself.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: LADY OF THE SEA

Bluebeard has seen through one of his spying Blaustein Gems a mesmerising woman in Ravienne. Although he has tried to use his dream powers on her more than once, she seems to resist his call for some reason. He has thus decided to travel to Ravienne himself to meet in person the so-called Lady of the Sea.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: DIOSAMBLE†

Frantisek Markov has heard rumors about the transformative powers of a small village on the coasts of Dementlieu. Wanting to learn more about this, he is planning to send his broken ones on an expedition to Ravienne. The PCs are caught within what is seen as a war between aberrations.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: METAMORPHOSIS

Frantisek Markov, after corresponding with various intellectuals and scholars of the core, has discovered the existence of a master of forms. His informants have located him in the area surrounding the fishing village of Ravienne. It won't be long before he sends his servants to kidnap Cedrik Paddock, in an effort to learn the secrets of transformation, and if the altering scholar doesn't provide them, then maybe a dissection could reveal everything he needs for his experiments.

CHILD OF DAGON**Medium-Size Monstrous Humanoid (Aquatic)**

Hit Dice: 2d8+2 (11 hp)

Initiative: +0

Speed: 20 ft. (4 squares), swim 50 ft.

Armor Class: 16 (+6 natural) or 18 (+6 natural, +2 heavy wooden shield), touch 10, flat-footed 16 or 18

Base Attack/Grapple: +2/+3

Attack: Shortspear +3 melee (1d6+1) or bite +3 melee (1d4+1)

Full Attack: Shortspear +3 melee (1d6+1) and bite –2 melee (1d4)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Mad Rage

Special Qualities: Adhesive, amphibious, keen sight, light blindness, resistance to electricity 10, slippery

Saves: Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +5

Abilities: Str 13, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 8

Skills: Craft or Knowledge (any one) +4, Escape Artist +8, Listen +7, Move Silently +3, Search +8, Spot +11, Swim +9

Feats: Alertness, Great Fortitude

Environment: Temperate aquatic

Challenge Rating: 2

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Often neutral evil

Advancement: By character class

Children of Dagon are twisted beings who used to be non-aquatic humanoids, but were totally transformed by the aura of the Conch of Dagon. The most telling feature of Children of Dagon is their skin, which smells like rotting fish and is covered with fine scales. Looking like a pudgy cross between a fishman and a frogman, they have large mouths, elongated hands and feet with webbing to help them swim. Their oversized, staring eyes tend to swivel in different directions. They are typically of pale grey or greenish coloring, though those transformed from people with darker complexions can have darker coloring, even dark brown. They are about 5 feet tall and weigh 160 pounds, but this appearance is deceptive, because children of Dagon

are tough and strong. They usually wear robes or loose clothes in general that can be removed easily.

Children of Dagon are god-fearful fish-folk who follow Dagon's priests more out of fear than loyalty. Children of Dagon are extremely suspicious, as well as duplicitous, betraying trust for their own benefit so long as they believe they can do it successfully. They would easily turn against the priests of the Cult of Dagon if they know they will get away with it.

The physical transformation, usually breaks them mentally, and as a result madness is a common ailment amongst them. Children of Dagon are not all necessarily evil, but within the Cult of Dagon they do not possess anywhere near enough willpower to oppose the reavers and humans. When separated from these societies, the Children of Dagon could adopt neutral or good philosophies such as pacifism.

Electricity Resistance 10 (Ex): Children of Dagon are naturally resistant to electricity.

Immunities (Ex): A child of Dagon is immune to mind-affecting spells.

Keen Sight (Ex): A child of Dagon has excellent vision, thanks to his two independently focusing eyes. His eyesight is so keen that he can spot a moving object or creature, even if it is invisible or ethereal. Only by remaining perfectly still can such objects or creatures avoid notice.

Slippery (Ex): A child of Dagon secretes an oily, slimy substance that makes him difficult to grapple or snare. Webs (magic or otherwise) don't affect a child of Dagon, and they usually can wriggle free from most other forms of confinement.

Light Blindness (Ex): Abrupt exposure to bright light (such as sunlight or a daylight spell) blinds a child of Dagon for 1 round. In addition, he takes a –1 circumstance penalty on all attack rolls, saves, and checks while operating in bright light.

Mad Rage (Ex): A child of Dagon that has 3 or fewer hit points gains a +2 bonus on melee attack rolls and melee damage rolls.

Amphibious (Ex): A Child of Dagon can breathe both air and water, though they dry out quickly. They can survive out of the water for 1 hour per point of Constitution. (After that, refer to drowning rules in Chapter Three of the Dungeon Master's Guide).

Natural Armor Bonus (Ex): A child of Dagon has a +6 natural armor bonus to Armor Class because of his scaly skin.

Racial Bonuses: A child of Dagon has a +8 racial bonus on Escape Artist checks and a +4 racial bonus on Search and Spot checks.

Children of Dagon Characters: When a humanoid is turned into a child of Dagon, he gains two levels of monstrous humanoid, which provide 2d8 Hit Dice, a base attack bonus of +2, and base saving throw bonuses of Fort +0, Ref +3, and Will +3 if higher.

Adhesive Liquid: The oily substance that a child of Dagon secretes can, with a successful Alchemy or Brew Poison check and the cost of 20gp for special materials, be turned into an adhesive liquid, capable of holding fast any creatures or items that touch it. It remains sticky for up to three days, or until it actually catches something or someone, whichever comes first. Pulling free an object or limb requires a DC 20 Strength check. With a successful Alchemy check DC 25 someone can identify the components for a solvent and with a successful second check DC 15 he can create one.

NEW SPELLS

DAGON'S CURSE

Transmutation [Evil]

Level: Sor/Wiz 5

Components: V, S, M

Casting time: 1 action

Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Target: One humanoid creature

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell transforms one humanoid into a reaver; the transformation takes five days (one stage per day). The created reaver has no recollection of its previous life, attacking even friends and family members and the caster has no control over the reaver. The spell can be reversed, turning the target back to normal with a *remove curse* spell. Casting this spell requires a powers check.

Material Component: Fish eggs mixed with target's blood

MADDENING NIGHTMARE

Illusion (Phantasm) [Mind-Affecting, Evil]

Level: Madness 4

Components: V, S

Casting time: 10 minutes

Range: Unlimited

Target: One living creature

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Will negates; see text

Spell Resistance: Yes

You send a hideous and unsettling phantasmal vision to a specific creature that you name or otherwise specifically designate. The nightmare prevents restful sleep, leaving the subject fatigued and restless to memorize spells. The nightmares are so vivid that the subject must make a Horror check -7 penalty upon waking up. The difficulty of the spell save depends on how well you know the subject and what sort of physical connection (if any) you have to that creature.

Knowledge	Will Save Modifier
None	+10
Second hand (you have heard of the subject)	+5
Firsthand (you have met the subject)	+0
Familiar (you know the subject well)	-5

Connection	Will Save Modifier
Likeness or picture	-2
Possession or garment	-4
Body part, lock of hair, bit of nail, etc.	-10

Dispel evil cast on the subject while you are casting the spell dispels the nightmare and causes you to be stunned for 10 minutes per caster level of the dispel evil.

If the recipient is awake when the spell begins, you can choose to cease casting (ending the spell) or to enter a trance until the recipient goes to sleep, whereupon you become alert again and complete the casting. If you are disturbed during the trance, you must succeed on a Concentration check as if you were in the midst of casting a spell or the spell ends.

If you choose to enter a trance, you are not aware of your surroundings or the activities around you while in the trance.

You are defenseless, both physically and mentally, while in the trance. (You always fail any saving throw, for example.)

Creatures who don't sleep (such as elves, but not half-elves) or dream are immune to this spell.

Casting this spell requires a powers check.

CALLING TO THE DEEPS

Conjuration (Summoning)

Level: Chaos 6

Components: V, S, F/DF

Casting time: Special

Range: Special

Effect: One summoned creature

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

This spell can be cast only close to a large body of water such as a sea or an ocean. It takes the ritualistic sacrifice of six human or demihuman beings on six successive nights to summon an extraplanar creature in the deep, black places of the ocean. The corpses and magics create a malevolence that forms itself a body out of the black, cold waters of the blackwater trenches. The Caller of the Deeps leaves the deep oceans of its genesis and travels

towards the area where the ritual was performed, driven by a horrible hunger, seeking life and light to consume. Anything that is encountered during its travel is pulled down into its ravenous maw.

The conjurer has no control over the Caller of the Deeps and it cannot be summoned into an environment that cannot support it.

Casting this spell requires a powers check.

COUNTERSOUND

Abjuration [Mind-Affecting]

Level: Clr 3

Components: V, S

Casting time: 1 minute

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Target: 30-ft-radius

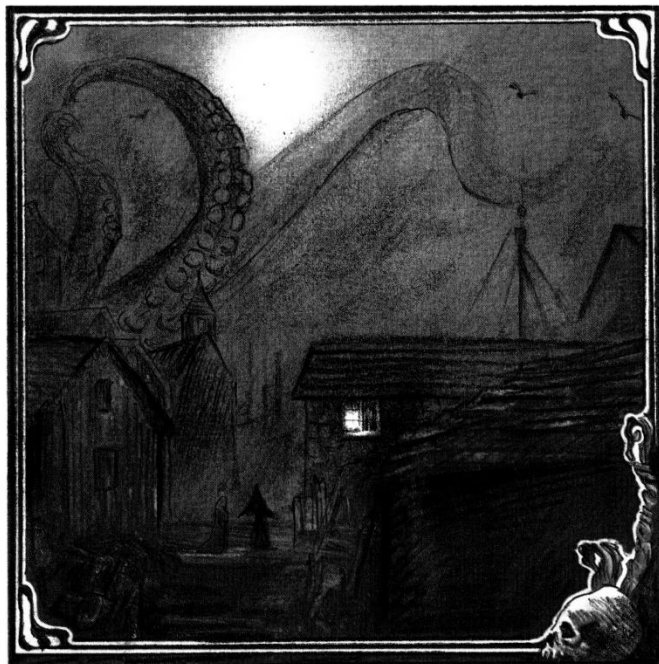
Duration: Concentration

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

This spell creates a sound that can counter magical effects that depend on sound (but not spells that simply have verbal components). Each round of the countersound, any creature within 30 feet of the caster (including the caster himself) that is affected by a sonic or language-dependent magical attack may make a caster level check (1d20 + caster level) against a DC of 11 + caster level of the effect, use the caster level check result in place of its saving throw if, after the saving throw is rolled, the caster level check result proves to be higher. If a creature within range of the countersound is already under the effect of a non-instantaneous sonic or language-dependent magical attack, it gains another saving throw against the effect each round it hears the countersound, but it must use the caster level check result for the save. Countersound has no effect against effects that don't allow saves. The caster may keep up the countersound for 10 rounds.

CALLER FROM THE DEEPS



Colossal Elemental (Water)

Hit Dice: 27d8+378 (500 hp)

Initiative: -1

Speed: swim 70 ft. (14 squares)

Armor Class: 15 (-1 Dex, -8 size, +24 natural), touch 3, flat-footed 15

Base Attack/Grapple: +12/+44

Attack: Tentacle +29 melee (3d8+16)

Full Attack: 2 tentacles +29 melee (3d8 +16)

Reach: 95 ft./95 ft.

Special Attacks: Constrict 3d8+16, enervating grip, improved grab

Special Qualities: Damage reduction 15/-, darkvision 60ft. elemental traits, *sirens call*, *summon watery ally*

Saves: Fort +22, Ref +2, Will +4

Abilities: Str 42, Dex 9, Con 38, Int 15, Wis 12, Cha 18

Skills: Concentration +35, Listen +15, Spot +15, Swim +42

Feats: Combat Reflexes, Improved Natural Attack (tentacles), Swim-by Attack, Weapon Focus (tentacles), Awesome Blow, Power Attack, Augment Summoning, Rapid Swimming, Empower Spell-like Ability (*enervating grip*), Empower Spell-like Ability (*siren's call*), Quicken Spell-like Ability (*siren's call*), Great Cleave

Environment: Any aquatic

Organization: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 18

Treasure: None

Alignment: Neutral evil

In the deep, black places of the ocean, strange things come to rest. Corpses, cast-offs magics, even light itself is pulled into these places and consumed. Little wonder then that sometimes, in such places, a malevolence grows. Impelled by the rot of the things of the light and driven by a horrible hunger, this thing becomes impatient waiting for the tides of the sea to pull the world above it down into its ravenous maw. It forms for itself a body out of the black, cold waters where it found its genesis and leaves the blackwater trenches of the deep oceans, seeking life and light to consume.

A caller from the deeps has the ability to call things to itself so it can consume them. It often lures sailors overboard with its call, enwrapping them as they leap into the cold water, and feeding on their life's warmth. When endangered, a caller from the deeps has the ability to summon aquatic creatures to defend it.

A caller from the deeps maintains a very simple technique for hunting. It begins by calling its prey to itself, using *siren's call*. It then grapples those who enter the water, drowning them. Should any manage to put up a fight to endanger its serenity, it summons a creature to defend itself and distract any adversaries. Only if its opponents fight their way past this summoned minion or manage to directly engage the caller itself will this creature focus its full attention and might on them.

Constrict (Ex): A caller from the deeps deals automatic tentacle damage with a successful grapple check.

Enervating Grip (Su): While dealing damage in a grapple, a caller from the deeps also drains the vitality of its target. Those who take grappling damage from a caller from the deeps must make a DC 24 Fortitude save or take 2 points of Constitution damage. This save DC is Constitution-based.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, a caller from the deeps must hit with a tentacle attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking attacks of opportunity. If it wins the grapple, it establishes a hold and can both constrict and use its enervating grip ability.

Elemental Traits: A caller from the deeps has immunity to poison, magic sleep effects, paralysis, and stunning. It is not subject to critical hits or flanking. It cannot be raised, reincarnated, or resurrected (though a *limited wish*, *wish*, *miracle*, or *true resurrection* spell can restore it to life).

Siren's Call (Sp): Three times per day, a caller from the deeps can use a *siren's call* effect (DC 20, range 140ft.)

Summon Watery Ally (Sp): Once per hour, a caller from the deeps can summon a Medium water elemental or a Large shark. This creature remains for 10 minutes or until slain. This is equivalent of a 4th-level spell. If an elemental is summoned it gains +4 bonus to Str and Con.

Summon Drowned (Sp): As a free action, the caller of the Deep can summon 1d12 Drowned to aid it. The Drowned arrive in 1d4 rounds and will attempt to grapple or shove targets into the water and towards the Caller. The Caller cannot have more than 12 Drowned under its control at any time.

Swim-By Attack: While swimming it can take a move action and another standard action (such as an attack) at any point during the move. It cannot take a second move action during a round when it makes a swim-by attack.

Skills: A Caller of the Deep has a +8 racial bonus to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

SIREN'S CALL

Enchantment (Compulsion) [Mind-Affecting]

Level: Bard 3, Seafolk 4, Sor/Wiz 4

Components: V, S

Casting time: 1 action

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Target: One creature/ 2 levels, no two of which can be more than 30-ft apart

Duration: 1 round/ level (D)

Saving Throw: Will negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

The targets of this spell hear a sudden, distant song that instills in them a longing for the sea. Those who have heard it compare it to the song of a siren.

A target who fails a saving throw against this spell moves immediately toward the nearest stretch of ocean that it can find and attempts to completely submerge itself in the water. This flight will be by the safest means possible, withdrawing from combat, fighting defensively, and not passing through threatened areas. The target will only fight if someone actively attempts to prevent it from following through with its search for the ocean; if this fight is with an ally, the target is granted a second saving throw off the effects of the spell.

In some environments, this means that those affected simply flee in the direction of the nearest coast. Along a shoreline, targets often plunge into the surf. Aboard a ship, they leap overboard. If the subject has no idea where to find a substantial body of water, it simply chooses a random direction and continues until the spell expires.

Once the spell's subjects are in the water, they begin swimming towards the deepest part of it they can reach, immersing themselves completely and

refusing to come up for air, though they hold their breaths as long as they are able.

DROWNED ONE



Medium undead (aquatic)

Hit Dice: 4d8+4 (22)

Initiative: -1

Speed: 15 ft., swim 30 ft.

Armor Class: 12 (-2 Dex, +4 natural), touch 8, flat-footed 12

Base Attack/Grapple: +3/+5

Attack: slam +5 (1d6+3)

Full Attack: slam +5 (1d6+3)

Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Drowning

Special Qualities: Darkvision 60ft; perception +0, staggered, undead traits, resist fire 10

Saves: Fort +1, Ref +0, Will +4

Abilities: Str 14, Dex 6, Con -, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 10

Skills: Swim +10, Climb +0

Damage reduction: 5/slashing

Feats: Toughness

Environment: Any aquatic

Organization: gang (2-4) or crew (6-11)

Challenge Rating: 1

Treasure: None

Alignment: Neutral evil

These pale, waterlogged undead are the animated remains of the Caller's victims, cursed to swim in the darkness for eternity. They are mindless creatures, who serve the Caller by bringing it prey to devour. The Drowned One can be of any type, but they are usually humanoids who lived near water and appear much as they did in life. Aquatic creatures are immune to the Caller's siren song and so seldom fall victim to its depredations.

Staggered (Ex): A staggered creature may take a single move action or standard action each round (but not both, nor can he take full-round actions). A staggered creature can still take free, swift, and immediate actions. A creature with nonlethal damage exactly equal to its current hit points gains the staggered condition.

Undead Fortitude (Ex): If damage reduces the Drowned to 0 hit points, it must make a fortitude save DC 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is from a critical hit. On a success, the Drowned One drops to 1 hit point instead.

Fire Resistance (Ex): The water-logged condition of the beast's flesh means that fire-based attacks cause only half damage.

Vulnerabilities (Ex): Lightning, electrical, and cold-based attacks inflict double damage.

Drag to the Depths (Ex): On its turn, the Drowned One will attempt to Grapple a creature. If successful, it will use its remaining movement to drag the grappled creature towards the Caller from the Deeps that summoned it. If the target is not already in the water, the Drowned One will attempt to drag or push the target into the water.

ADVENTURE IDEAS THE BIG BANG

The PCs are on board a trading ship, heading towards Port-a-Lucine; the ship is transporting gunpowder from Lamordia. Somehow the Caller of the Deeps is summoned, threatening the village.

The PCs can use the gunpowder in the ship to destroy the colossal elemental.

ADVENTURE IDEAS: THE COMING END

Undead have begun to appear on the coasts of Sea of Sorrows, attacking fishing communities. It seems like something bigger is about to happen, though.

“This is absolutely absurd,” shouted Jan Mikkelson; fortunately, Malcolm Scott’s inverted silence spell protected them from Count Wilhelm’s angry reaction if they had been heard. *“I have to agree that Cedrik Paddock’s theory is really farfetched,”* said Lord Balfour de Casteelle, clinging to his silver headed cane, *“but if I may add, he did give us information on things he deemed less important, such as the whereabouts of the Medallion of Soul Searching.”*

“I may sound provocative, but I have to say I am being honest.” The calm voice of Count Wilhelm von Lovenhorst, combined with the respect he so much deserved, drew the attention of the rest of the Umbra. *“The theory that the Watchers in the Shadows may be ancient demons or even a single entity from many millennia ago, is not so far-fetched. I think we should pay close attention to the findings of this brute. I suggest we should indeed sponsor his research, and maybe ven send some brothers to investigate with him,”* continued Count Wilhelm. There was a gleam in the count’s eyes that went unnoticed by the rest of the Fathers of the Fraternity of Shadows, especially Malcolm Scott, who was still anxiously looking at his elegant pocketwatch. *“I must say I am surprised by your support of this renegade member of the Fraternity, Count, but I must say that I totally agree with you,”* Tarnos Shadowcloak spoke with genuine surprise written all over his face. *“And if I may add, Cedrik Paddock has always been considered a bad apple, but his progressive theories never fail to amaze me.”* *“Well, if everyone else agrees, maybe we should look more*

into Paddock’s theory, but I insist that we should also pay attention to that anchorite he mentions, his medallion would be a very good addition to the University, as well as to our cause.” The tone in Lord Balfour de Casteelle’s voice made him sound a bit indifferent to Paddock’s research.

“I agree with Lord Balfour - the medallion is of the outmost importance. You never know when Death and his Unholy Order of the Grave might send agents against us. They might be immune to our powers of illusion, but we are not to their shapechanging abilities. Then again, if it is the majorities decision to follow up Brother Cedrik’s theory, I am not against it.” With the last words of the fey-touched Malcolm Scott, all remaining members of the Umbra turned to the youngest among them. Jan Mikkelson’s ember eyes burned intensively, *“Even if I don’t agree with that frog’s research, I am curious of what lies in Ravienne so I will also vote that we should look more into it.”*

Shadows filled the reading hall of the University of Richemulot’s Library, and as the last shadow disappeared as fast as it had appeared, and the chandelier was extinguished, the only thing that remained was the smell of old parchment, leather, and dead rats laying on the carpeted floor.

Special thanks to tomokaicho and Rock for insight and corrections on NPC stats.





INVIDIA: THE LAND OF CONFLICTS AND DEMAGOGY

BY TOMASSO "MISTMASTER" MAZZONI

OFFICIAL NAME: THE KINGDOM OF INVIDIA

Culture level: Chivalrous

Ecology: Full

Climate & Terrain: Temperate. Invidia is a fertile plain crossed by many rivers; the Nharov River separates Invidia from Gundarak, while the Serpent's tongue and the Breadth Forest marks the southern border.

Languages: Common, Invidian, Barovian, Low Vaasan, Sithican, Verbreker, Kartakassian dialect, Patterna.

Religions: Cult of Hala, Iron Church, Church of Ezra the Preserver. Vistani Religion, Wolfwere religion, Paka religion.

Races: Humans 95% (of which one third are Vistani Bloodied), Wolfwere 3%, Paka 1%, Other 1%.

Government: Hereditary Feudal Monarchy.

Ruler: King Malocchio Treholani under the regency of his mother.

Darklord: Queen Mother Gabrielle Aderre-Drakov-Treholani.

Lightlord: Lady Isabella Aderre.

Inhabitants: 8 million.

Surface: 75,000 square kilometers.

Analog: XVII Century Italy.

Capital City: Karina (95,000, Standard, N/E),

Important towns: Beltis (65,000, Monstrous, L/G), Curriculo (72,600, Non-standard L/N), Endari Koorah (22,000, Non-Standard, N), Tancos (42,000, Monstrous N), Valetta (87,000 in, Standard, N)

Borders: North: Borca, North East: Lazendrak; East: Gundarak and Barovia; South: Sithicus, South West and West: Kartakass.

DOMAIN OVERVIEW

Invidia is a vast fertile plain, with three forests inside its borders and several rivers. The principal cities, Karina and Valetta, lay on the edge of the navigable Serpent's Tongue River, Karina at the point where the Noisette River forks, giving birth to the Serpent's Tongue. The ancestral and holy capital city of the Vistani people, Endari Koorah, lies well protected in the deep of the Breadth Forest. The fortified city of Curriculo defends the border with Gundarak, while the Wolfweres consider their capital city to be the industrious city of Beltis, on the edge of the Noisette River. The other main minority of shapeshifters in the kingdom, the Pakas, live together in Tancos, on the southern shore of the Nharov River, controlling the Tepurch Forest. The Massive fortress of Castle Loupet sits in the center of the Vulpwood.

TROPES

Invidia is a land that explores the evil of manipulation, politically engineered conflict, and demagoguery.

THE PEOPLE

As Invidia is the Vistani's homeland, it has the highest number of Vistani people in the Core, and the relationship between regular Invidians and Vistani is complicated. While Vistani cooking, clothing, hairdressing, architecture, and jewelry are

very popular, Vistani people are seen with suspicion, as they do not conform with the majority, clinging fiercely to their traditions. Since Vistani often travel, many non-Vistani Invidians tend to opportunely forget that they are Invidia's native population. The other relevant minority are the shapeshifters, which are, in the eyes of Invidians, divided in two groups, the Wolfweres, and all the others, mainly the Pakas, who are seen with suspicion and distrust. The Pakas are viewed as capricious but charming, while Wolfweres are seen as Invidia's champions. Invidians are a very religious people, with a rich folklore, and a long oral tradition. Invidians practice intensive agriculture and are core-wide exporters of wine. Olive oil is their second most exported commodity and grain the third. Invidian breeders are also chicken and egg producers. Invidia's land is extremely fertile.

History

Age of Creation

In the age of Creation, Hala, the all-mother, heavily pregnant, flattened the land now known as Invidia while giving birth to her children, warring twins Zhakata and Ezra, cunning Zaganta, the Lord of Cats, and loyal and wise Fenris, Grandfather Wolf. Her tears generated the rivers, and her afterbirth gave the land its fertility. Hanuvar, the Father of all Vistani was the last to be born, and Hala married him, and bore him Vistan; From Vistan and Hala herself six children were born, Boem, Kaldresh, Manusa, Qarginti, Teginta and Vanatra.

Age of Empires

During the age of Empires, Vistan, the Father of all Tasques and tribes, with his children, defeated the Olympian empire and established the Vistani Kingdom. But a Calamity struck the prosperous kingdom, a Calamity ushered by the first Dukkar, and so the Wandering started; The Pakas and the Wolfweres formed permanent communities in Invidia.

Age of Darkness

In the Age of Darkness, people of Terg descent colonized the land. Invidia was the last redoubt of the Terg Empire and at the end of the age, after the death of Emmett II, the last Terg Emperor, at the Battle of Vallaki, fought against Strahd I, the Devil of Barovia, Invidia fell into anarchy.

The Modern Age

In the modern Age, the Wolfweres helped the Invidian Treholani Dynasty to win independence from Barovia, which conquered Invidia under Strahd III the Conqueror, and precipitated Invidian attempts to conquer Verbrek. They have enjoyed broad acceptance in Invidia.

The Current Age

The current Wolfwere leader Matton Aderre managed to stop his brother-in-law Harkon Lukas from violently sizing power. King Bahkolis III Treholani has recently died after the loss of the province of Kartakass, and his son Malocchio, under the regency of his mother, queen-mother Gabrielle, have instituted an increasingly centralized government that is, in spite, of the Queen 's Vistani heritage, increasingly persecutory against the Vistani themselves.

PLACES OF INTEREST

Karina, the Heart of Invidia, is a beautiful city, which took the best fruits of the various civilizations which inhabited the land - Vistani, Olympians, Terg, Barovians, Wolfweres and Pakas. It is filled with strong Barovian-style fortifications, blended with Terg-style gardens, Vistani pavilions, Olympian-style temples, stout and practical wooden and stone houses and house blocks in the simple Wolfwere style, and refined and extravagant manor houses in the Paka style. From the city, a paved road leads into the deep of the Vulpwood, where the massive Castle Loupet, house Treholani's fortress is seated. On the northern shore of the Noisette River are the famous

Karina's Vineyards, from whose grapes Invidia's most famous product, Karina's Red Gold Wine, is produced. Both the Iron Dome of Zakhata and the Ezrite Cathedral of our Lady of the Pictures are in Karina, which houses a massive city hall where nobles meet. A Lord Steward minds the ordinary business of the city from the Claw Shield Palace in the center of the city, near the City Hall; the current Lord Steward is Lord Radu Gerdank. The city is divided into six districts: the smallfolk-inhabited Maze, Upper Class Commons, where the temples and the City Hall are, Business Oriented Warehouse, Entertainment oriented Wine Garden, Bustarde, the Vistana Ghetto, and Kleine Falkovnia, the Falkovnian District.

Many inns and taverns dot the city; the most famous are the Black Swan, the Clock's Tick, the Crimson Dagger, the Golden Fields, the Laughing Maiden, the Platter and Candle, the Raven's Roost, the Shield and Boar, the Silver Star, the Silver Wolf, the Traveler Inn and the Wild Boar. The most distinguished building of the city is the Pale Tower where the Karina Art College is seated. The Curious Museum is seated in the basement of the Pale Tower.

Valetta is the agricultural heart of Invidia, and it is its most Terg-like city, as it was the capital of the Terg Empire and is dominated by the Iron Church, so much so that the Pave of Invidia, Tatiana Valydova, resides in Valetta's Stronghold of the Faith. The Broken Axe is the main Inn of the city, owned by retired militiaman Mikal Taliet; Baron Ianni Valmonde rules the city from the old crumbling castle of Wyvernstingfort. Recently, a small chapel of Ezra and a charity opened up to help the poor and the orphans of the overcrowded city; Baron Ianni's wife Lady Ronda von Brausch is a sponsor of Anchorite Klaus Radiza.

The fortified city of **Curriculo** guards the way towards Gundarak. It was built at the end of the Age of Darkness and heavily fortified during Barovian domination; today it houses the largest part of the Invidian Militia, and a chapter of the Steel Fangs, the elite Wolfwere militia. A small temple of Zakhata,

the Iron Chapel, has opened in the city. From the Green Tower of the fortress, Young Marcellus von Brausch rules the city as Baron and Commander, with his recently widowed mother Jelena advice. His mother often resides outside the walls, in the Green Gold Manor, a country estate famous for its green olive field. Curriculo's Central Market houses the Guild of the Merchants and the city's two main inns, the Lady's Veil and the Plowshare inn.

Endari Koorah is the mysterious Vistani holy capital. Few non-Vistana have ever been allowed there, at least inside the inner walls. Once a glorious metropolis, Endari Koorah is today a mere shadow of her past. Still, one can admire that past in the maze-like ruins of the old city. Vistana tribes still maintain the old temples and the Hall of Judgements where once each year the Gathering of the Great Raunies meets. The Ruling body of the Vistani People, the Council of 13 meet here; every tribe maintains a Gathering Hall in Endari Koorah; Non Vistani are usually restricted to the business district south of the walls, where you can find the Inns, the most famous of which is the World's Serpent. Olyvar Aderre, as the current High Captain of Endari Koorah is the Baron of the city.

Beltis is the Wolfweres' capital. The city is designed to accommodate them both in wolf and human form. Patches of forest with wild game are maintained between the various districts; The Smiling Fangs is the main inn of the town; its owner, Cyrus Lukas makes it a point of pride of the fact he never takes his human form if not strictly necessary. That is the principal attraction of the inn. The Temple of Grandfather Wolf, the Wolfweres' principal deity is a shrine deep in of the biggest patch of forest. The Stone Den houses the city's Baron, Matton, the current Alpha of the Invidian Wolfweres.

Tancos is the Paka Capital, and is arranged for the comfort of the cat people; the city is full of tall and narrow walkways, poles where they can sharpen their claws, catnip bushes, and many simple shrines

to the Cat Lord, their primary deity. The Pakas live in large extended families, and the houses are organized to allow any member its independence. Human quarters are more traditional. Many of the inns in the city belong to Bela Ghuitai, the richest person ever known in Invidia.

RELIGIONS

Cult of Hala: Invidia's most ancient faith, the Cult of Hala is a Neutral Good religion centered around the figure of Hala the All Mother. She teaches her followers to live in harmony with nature, to be helpful to their community, mindful of elders, respectful to any life form, and thirsty for knowledge. The priests are called Sisters, Mothers, or Witchwives. The cult's holy symbol is a circle with eight smaller circles, her favorite weapon is the quarterstaff. Her followers are smallfolk, midwives, and scholars. Her Domains are Animal, Arcana, Healing, Knowledge, Plant, and Protection.

Iron Church: this LE religion is the Invidian branch of the ominous Vaasan Church of Zakhata the Lawgiver; it is the primary religion of the Terg-blooded Invidians, and it teaches to obey the laws and to respect authority. Also, it preaches blood purity if not outright segregation. The Invidian head of the church is the Pave of Invidia, who is confirmed by the Stal'noy Kulak in Kantora, Nova Vaasa. It is popular among militiamen and conservative portions of the privileged class. The symbol of the church is an Iron-cast book with a black gauntlet on it. Its favored weapon is the spiked gauntlet. The granted domains of the faith are Evil, Law, Nobility, Strength, and War.

Church of Ezra the Preserver: This Lawful Good Religion is in communion with the Borcan branch of the faith, with the Arch-Sentire of Karina being confirmed by the Bastion of the Faith in Borca. The Church teaches righteousness and moral strength, and bravery when facing injustice; the church is popular among the lower echelons of the middle

class and adventurers. The holy symbol of the priesthood is a shield with a laurel and a longsword, and the longsword is their holy weapon. The domains granted to the Clerics are: Good, Law, Nobility, Mist, Protection, and Travel.

Vistani Religion: The Vistani's main Deities are Hala and Hanuvar: The Mother of All (Neutral Good) and the Father of Vistani (N). According to Vistani Tradition, Hala teaches respect for her creations and love for family and kin; her favorite weapon is the Quarterstaff, her domains are Community, Good, Healing, Knowledge, Plant, and Protection. Hanuvar teaches distrust for strangers, to protect each other, to forget neither slights nor kindness, and to be smart and creative. He created the Mists to protect his children, his symbol is a wagon wheel, and his favorite weapon is a Shortsword. Domains: Animal, Artifice, Liberation, Mist, Strength, and Travel. Raunies and midwives often venerate Hala, while Captains venerate Hanuvar.

Their child was *Vistan I*, the first Vistana King (LN; holy symbol: a crucible. He teaches his followers to follow his laws and taboos, and to preserve the Vistana style of life and culture. His favorite weapon is the Mace; his domains are Knowledge, Law, Nobility, Rune and Strength.) All Vistana pay at least lip service to him.

Vistan's Children were:

Boem the Trickster (CN) (Symbol: a flute and a purse; Domains: Chaos, Luck, Travel and Trickery. Favored weapon: Dagger)

Kaldresh the Skilled (LN) (Symbol: Bridles on a Hammer with a rolled bandage; Domains: Animal, Artifice, Healing and Law. Favored Weapon: Warhammer)

Manusa the Learned (N) (Symbol: a Clock in a seer's globe; Domains: Knowledge, Magic, Mist and Nobility. Favored Weapon: Quartersraff),
Qarginti the Dreamer (NG) (Symbol: a pen crossed with a paintbrush on a lantern; Domains: Charm, Good, Rune and Sun. Favored Weapon: Blowgun)

Teginta the Strong (LG) (Symbol: A Shield with a Cudgel and a Crossbow; Domains: Good, Law, Protection, and War. Favored Weapon: Cudgel)
Vanatra the Spitefull (CE) (Symbol: an opened eye with a bloody tear; Domains: Chaos, Destruction, Evil and Plant. Favored Weapon: Flail)

His Grand-children from Boem are:

Corvara the Thief (CN) (Symbol, a cut purse with gold coins falling out; Domains: Chaos, Darkness, and Trickery. Favored Weapon: a dagger)

Najat the Singer (CG) (Symbol: a flute; Domains: Chaos, Charm, and Good. Favored Weapon: Rapier)

From Kaldresh:

Equaar the Tamer (N) (Symbol: bridles; Domains: Animal, Earth, and Strength; Favored Weapon: Net)

Kamii the Crafter (LN) (Symbol: A Hammer; Domains: Artifice, Fire, and Law; Favored Weapon: Warhammer)

Vatraska the Healer (LG) (Symbol: a roll of bandages; Domains: Good, Healing and Law; Favored Weapon: Dagger)

From Manusa:

Canjar the Wise (N) (Symbol: a seer's globe; Domains: Knowledge, Magic, and Luck; Favored Weapon: Dagger)

Zarovan the Mysterious (CN) (Symbol: a Clock; Domains: Chaos, Mist, and Travel; Favored Weapon: Longsword)

From Qarginti:

Giorag the Outsider (NG) (Symbol: a lantern; Domains: Good, Protection, and Travel; favored Weapon: Quarterstaff)

Xellinth the Rebel (CG) (Symbol: a Pen crossed with a Paintbrush, Domains: Chaos, Good, and Liberation; Favored Weapon: Dagger)

From Teginta:

Kulshev the Hero (NG) (Symbol: Cudgel on a Shield; Domains: Good, Protection, Strength; Favored Weapon: Cudgel)

Lefaire the Avenger (LN) (Symbol: Crossbow on a Shield; Death, Destruction, and Law; Favored Weapon: Crossbow)

From Vanatra:

Mortu the Mourner (LE) (Symbol: a blood-red tear; Domains: Darkness, Evil, and Law; Favored Weapon: Axe)

Vehrtieg the Outcast (CE) (Symbol: An opened eye; Domains: Chaos, Evil, and Luck; Favored Weapon: Dagger)

Wolfwere religion: The Wolfwere Religion is animistic, and it is centered around Grandfather Wolf, the eldest spirit in a vast pantheon. Grandfather Wolf is a Neutral Good aspect of Fenris, and he teaches his followers to love their family, and to be loyal with their friends but cunning and shrewd with their enemies. He also teaches the importance of stories and legends. His Domains are Animal, Community, Darkness, Good, Knowledge, and Trickery. His favored weapon is the dagger (fang), his symbol is a wolf head with a laurel crown. Bards, Scholars, and Poets venerate him even among non-Wolfweres.

Paka religion: The Paka Religion is ancestor worship; each extended Paka family has its own pantheon but all Pakas counts Zaganta, the Cat Lord as their line's progenitor. He is a CN deity of freedom, shelter, independence, and cleverness who teaches his followers self-reliance and sharpness of mind. His symbol is a cat's paw's print, his Domains are Animal, Chaos, Liberation, Travel and Trickery, and his favorite weapon is the Spiked Gauntlet (claw). Thieves, merchants, travelers, and con-artists, even among not-Paka, often venerate the Cat Lord, and he is also invoked for protection against vermin.

THE FAMED AND THE INFAMOUS

King Malocchio Treholani-Aderre-Drakov

(Half-fiend Canjar Vistani-Blooded human Youth Sorcerer Fiendish Line 10, CN) The ten-year-old king of Invidia, a beautiful black-haired boy with one green and one azure eye, is, in truth, the son of the Gentleman Caller, a powerful Incubus Fiend. However, he is still an innocent child; he is prone to capricious flicks of cruelty but he tends to be kind with people who are kind with him. He has powerful, yet not totally controlled, sorcerous powers. His teleportation powers are a challenge for his tutors and his mother, as he tends to skip his ceremonial duties and studies. His mother is cultivating his demonic side and hate for the Vistani People, often with harsh and abusive methods, but his Grandmother Isabella is opposing this influence. Will Malocchio become the next Dukkar and bring a new doom on the Vistani people or will he become the new Vistan the Great?

(Adventure Hook: after yet another harsh punishment, Malocchio teleports himself right into the middle of a conflict between the PCs and some bandits.)

Madame Isabella Aderre

(Old Canjar Vistani-Blooded Human Wizard Diviner 15, NG) The mother of the Queen Mother, Lady Isabella is a shrewd old woman, very proud of her Vistani heritage, with a strong gift of the Sight, and a great knowledge of the magical Vistani tradition. Thirty years ago, the Matriarch of the Aderre Vistani Family lived in Falkovnia, where she was the Great Raunie of her Tasque. There, to save her people from persecution, she accepted to become the fourth wife of the Kaiser-Fuhrer Vlad Drakov; She gave him a daughter and he was not as displeased as he usually was; the complications of the delivery robbed her of her fertility, but as long as he could exploit his wife's gift, he was happy. Their daughter was his insurance policy, and he spoiled her rotten; but Isabella couldn't keep helping that evil man's

dreams of conquest, so, one night, she took her 7-year-old daughter and led her people into the Mists. In Invidia, she became one of the most respected leaders of the Vistani, but her daughter never forgave her for the loss of her life of luxury, and she became the worst enemy of Isabella's people. Isabella's burden is the perpetual hate her daughter reserves for her, while she unconditionally loves both her and her children. Her good influence is all that has kept her grandson from becoming the next Dukkar, the bringer of the Vistani's Doom.

(Adventure Hook: A very worried old Vistani lady ask the PCs help to find her missing grandson.)

Lord Radu Gerdanok

(Middle Aged Lefaire Vistani-Blooded Human Fighter 9 LN) Lord Radu is the Steward of Karina and one of the most prominent nobles in Invidia; he is loyal to the crown, but recently his working relationship with the Queen Regent is deteriorating, as he is a staunch defender of the traditions of the kingdom against the Crown.

(Adventure Hook: Lord Radu is proud of his ancient Lefaire Vistani ancestry and often hinders the Queen-Mother's discriminatory projects, so it should not surprise anyone when he fell grievously ill. Suspicious of some foul play from the queen, his faithful aide asks the PCs to find a cure.)

Arch-Sentire Keith Delalune

(Middle-aged Human Cleric of Ezra the Preserver 10 LG) This Dementlieuse man who currently heads Ezra's Church in Invidia has lived for more than a decade in Karina, and was an advisor of King Bakholis prior to his demise; the Queen Regent distrusts and despises him. He is trying to defend her faithful's interests and to curtail the growing influence of the Iron Church.

(When masked thugs wearing the Iron Fist of Zakhata start to assault followers of Our Lady of the Mists in Karina, the Arch-Sentire asks the PCs to investigate.)

Sikar "Scar" Tabor

(Adult Human Vistani-Blooded Corvara Rogue Mastermind 7, LE) The most powerful Thieves' Guildmaster of Karina is a Tarakata, a "Darkling", a convicted criminal of his Vistani's tasque. He does not talk often about the transgression that led to his conviction, but it seems tied to the T-shaped scar on his face. He does not seem particularly embittered against Vistani people, though. He is cautious and pragmatical and he prefers corruption and persuasion to black-mailing and intimidation. He is cold, smooth-talking and very rarely uses violence; when he does, it is in the quickest and most effective way it's possible.

(Adventure Hook: When the PCs stumble onto Sikar's operations, he offers them a deal.)

Captain Ian Deuseni

(Adult Human Fighter 6, NE) Captain Deuseni of Karina's City Watch is a corrupt man, easily bribed and always looking for a way to put more coins in his purse. Recently he has become a close collaborator of the queen-Mother herself.

(Adventure Hook: when the PCs are wrongly accused of a crime they did not commit in Karina, they get a deal from the City Watch captain - just a little favor, and he will clean their slates.)

Katrina Zimmerman aka The Midnight Slasher

(Young Adult Human Vigilante LN) Katrina is a seemingly innocent seamstress but she hides a dark secret. Her parents, a barber named Dieter Zimmerman and his wife Ingrid, Falkovnian dissidents in exile, were brutally assassinated before her eyes, but while the assassin was looking under the bed where she was hiding, she took her father's razor which had fallen from his dead body and slashed the assassin in the throat, killing him. Traumatized, she swore to never allow other children and families to suffer what she did. A seamstress by day, when night falls, she puts on a black hood, a black cape, and a red mask and stalks the roads of Karina, especially the Falkovnian district, armed with her father's razor. She fights

criminals of every kind, but while she spares the lives of thieves and the like, she stalks and kills any certified assassin, especially if that person threatens families or children. She leaves poetry, written in blood on the bodies of her victims, whether dead or unconscious. Her brutal ways have attracted attention from the Mists, which granted her uncanny sight and hearing. Her eyes, when she becomes her Slasher persona, change color intermittently.

(Adventure Hook: Late in the night of Karina, the PC are surprised by a well-organized ambush and risk being overwhelmed, but a mysterious figure with a sharp razor saves their lives.)

The Engineer

(Old Human Wizard Clocksmith 13 L/N) This old mysterious wizard lives in Goldenfinger, the clocktower in Karina, where he works as the royal family's personal tinkerer. No one knows his true name.

(Adventure Hook: This old Wizard does not remember his past or his true name; he only remembers the sound of clocks. When they first meet him, the PCs are convinced that they have already seen his face before, but when and where?)

Arkhiyepiskop Alexey Ulnev

(Middle aged Human Cleric of the Lawgiver 7, LE) The Arkhiyepiskop of Karina is a dull, loyal and obedient man, and serves the interests of the Iron Church skillfully, if without any particular distinction; however, he has recently started to take the initiative in several ventures which have highly benefitted the Church.

(Adventure Hook: The Pave of Invidia finds this sudden change of attitude quite suspicious, especially because it happened after the Queen-Regent visited the Arkhiyepiskop's abode; she offers a good reward for the PCs to investigate discreetly on the matter.)

Majordomo Zachary Beauchamps

(Old human aristocrat 7 LG) This loyal old man serves as the Majordomo of Karina and he is a loyal servant of the king and of the Queen-Mother. He is unaware of the subtle enthralling magic the latter is using on him, and he cultivates the illusion that one day the beautiful Gabrielle will one day marry him. A bit of a peacock, he often renovates his already vast wardrobe, sparing no expense to stay fashionable.

(Adventure Hook: someone has stolen the rare Icatheze silk that the Majordomo wanted to have a new outfit made from. He will reward generously anyone who can get it back.)

Baron Ianni Valmonde

(Adult Human Aristocrat 6, LG) The baron of Valetta is a kind and hard-working man, who never accepted the cruel tenets of the Iron Faith; his marrying an Ezrite wife contributed certainly to making him an enemy of the Pave, who constantly plots to undermine his rule.

(Adventure Hook: Baron Valmonde's project for a new mill, which would make his peasants lives easier, is disrupted by bandits. The Pave of Invidia has knowledge of the assaults but she has also made veiled accusation that Valmonde is too soft. He offers the PCs a generous amount of money to help him to solve the problem.)

Lady Ronda von Brautsh

(Human adult Aristocrat 4, LG) The beloved young wife of Baron Ianni of Valetta, she is a kind and generous woman, deeply devoted to Ezra. She is currently pregnant with their first child. She is the late Baron of Curriculo's sister, and young Baron Marcellus's Aunt.

(Adventure Hook: Lady Ronda is worried about her unborn child's safety as a healthy child would be seen as a blessing from the gods which would discredit the Pave's campaign against her. She asks the PCs to help her.)

Pave Tatyana Valydova

(Old Human Cleric of Zhakata the Lawgiver 12 LE) The Pave of Invidia has been in service as a priestess in Valetta since the days Bakholis's father King Jundor II Treholani reigned on Invidia. Recently her hard work seems to start repaying itself as the Queen Regent is starting to favor the Iron Church above the other faiths. Regrettably, the Queen Mother is of questionable lineage, but Tatyana is old and wise enough to be able to ignore this unsavory detail for the greatness of the Lawgiver. Zhakata willing it, soon she will be able to cleanse Invidia of the cursed hybrids once and forever; one of the few female Paves in the male dominated Iron Church, she has even greater ambitions, especially since news came from Kantora of the worsening health of the Stal'noy Kulak.

(Adventure Hook: Someone tried to assassinate the Pave of Invidia. With no shortage of enemies and theoretical allies who could be responsible she pays handsomely if the PCs have some answers.)

Imri "Ratcatcher" Tulijip

(Young Adult Paka Rogue 4 CG) This bright smiling blond boy, whose true form is that of a big white cat with great golden eyes, works part time as a pest controller in the sewers of Karina; he knows a lot of things from the popular district of the city and gladly lends a hand to people he deems to be in difficulty.

(Adventure Hook: Finding themselves in a dire situation in Karina's sewers, the adventurers get some unexpected help from a big white cat.)

Mikal Taliet

(Adult human Fighter 5, LN) The owner of the Broken Axe Inn in Valetta, Mikal is a retired officer of the militia, and a veteran of the Kartakassan Independence War. Haunted by the atrocities seen and done during the conflict, he drowns his sense of guilt with music and food.

(Adventure Hook: Mikal harbors an irrational fear of wolves which extends to Wolfweres. When a rogue

wolf pack is told to be savaging herds in the area of Valetta, he offers a reward for any head of wolf they bring him.)

Sentire Klaus Radiza

(Middle-Aged Human Cleric Cloistered Priest of Ezra the Preserver 7, LG) The Sentire of Valetta is a noble and altruistic man, and a vibrant preacher, whose aim is to help the poor in Valetta; his growing influence is seen with great concern by the Iron Church, who have their headquarters in Valetta.

(Adventure Hook: Klaus's latest project, a new orphanage with a school and a playground, is meeting subtle hinderances from the conservative establishment of the city, led by the Pave herself. Since the Baron can't act without solid proof, the Arch-Sentire asks the adventurers to investigate the matter.)

Baron Marcellus von Brautsch

(Young Adult Human Werewolf Fighter 5 LN) The young heir of the von Brautsh family and the Baron of Curriculo, Marcellus is a sober young man, who was deeply affected by his father's untimely death; he is working hard to manage to live up the legacy of a beloved father, maybe too hard. He doesn't know he is a Werewolf, thanks to the magic amulet gifted to him by his mother; he also does not remember his murdering his own father.

(Adventure Hook: Affected by nightmares during the night, the Baron asks the PCs to go to Endari Koorah and ask the Vistani seers for a solution. The answers they will find might not be to their liking.)

Jelena Valmonde, widow von Brautsch

(Adult Human Aristocrat 6, N) The sister of Baron Valmonde, Jelena is a wise, if detached, person. She does much of the household administration, and she was the one to suggest modernization for the tradition cultures of their farmlands. She still wears black clothes and mourns her dead husband. She dreads that her son might one day learn the truth

about his father's death, and she is ready to take extreme measures to prevent it.

(Adventure Hook: Someone stole her son's amulet and in 7 days there will be the full moon. She desperately pays the adventurers a large sum to retrieve the amulet in time.)

Pyotr Stanislov

(Adult Human Cleric Evangelist of Zhakata the Lawgiver 5, LE) Malevolent yet charming and silver tongued, the Fane (head priest) of Curriculo has already gained the ear of the young Baron; He is working hard to gain his trust in order to increase the Iron Church's influence, but so far without avail. His activities have been recently disrupted by the founding of the Falkovnian trading post, as the Falkovnian state religion, the Iron Falcon Church, is viewed as heretical by the Iron Church.

(Adventure Hook: Fane Stanislov has been targeted by agents of the Falkpo, the secret service of Falkovnia and decided to pit the adventurers against his enemy.)

Ambassador Reuben Weirmer

(Middle-aged Human Knight 8, LN) Lieutenant Weirmer lost an eye during the last Dead Man's Campaign against Darkon, and became a diplomat; he is hammering down a treaty between Invidia and Falkovnia and he has taken residence in Curriculo, since Karina's Falkovnian quarter is made up of exiles and harbors no sympathy for the Kaiser-Fuhrher. He has meanwhile established a flourishing trading post; while loyal to his sovereign, Reuben is more interested in the well-being of the people he commands. For a Falkovnian officer, Reuben is surprisingly well-mannered and cultured.

(Adventure Hook: Lieutenant Weirmer is seen as a useless cripple in Falkovnia and he strives to demonstrate his value; however he still has clear moral boundaries and he doesn't approve of the means used by the Falkpo agents. He asks the PCs to

discreetly stop the latest Falkpo scheme, which he deems unnecessarily cruel.)

Lord Steward Radu Szecti

(Adult Human Fighter 7 LN) Curriculo's competent Steward was not born a noble, and he worked hard to gain what he has today. He is honest and loyal but surely would not miss a chance to advance himself further, like marrying the widowed mother of his liege lord.

(Adventure Hook: Lord Radu is livid when the expensive gift he had prepared for Lady Jelena is stolen; the PCs are then charged with the task of retrieving it.)

Ser Szefan Czerneich

(Adolescent Human Cavalier of the Lion Order 3 LG) At just fifteen, he saved little King Malocchio's life, when the young King had teleported himself in the wrong place; King Malocchio insisted on knighting him and he sent him as his personal envoy to Curriculo, stubbornly refusing his mother's arguments against it in front of the council, at the price of getting a spanking once they were in private. He sees the king as a little brother, and in spite of his young age he has already proved himself worthy of his title.

(Adventure Hook: Ser Szefan is a member of the Order of the Iron Sting, a secret order of knights born to protect the Invidian Monarchs and their subjects; on a mission for the order to uncover a clandestine operation of the Queen's Men, he enlists the PCs' help.)

Valeria Ieleni

(Young Adult Werewolf Rogue 5 CN) Valeria, usually appearing as a jolly, slender mummer with silver hair, is an accomplished entertainer, jester, and juggler, and a Werewolf, her real form that of an elegant silver grey shewolf. She came to live in Curriculo couple of years ago, after a successful, if brief, stint in the Wolf's Fang in Beltis. She is a spy

master and thief for hire working for the highest bidder.

(Adventure Hook: Valeria is in trouble, and through a common friend, she contacts the PCs for help; she has information they might find useful.)

Baron Olyvar Aderre

(Adult Human Vistani Blooded Canjar Sorcerer 8 Arcane Bloodline NG) The current High Captain of the Vistani in Endari Koorah, Olyvar, a tanned, slim man, usually dressed in traditional yellow clothes, is related to the king through his mother and grandmother's side. Olyvar is a thorn in Gabrielle's side since his status of Baron allows him to shield his people from her spite.

(Adventure Hook: Olyvar spends more time at the mysterious World Serpent's Inn than at his manor house. When the PCs visit the inn, the baron offers them a drink, and a story...)

Madame Illyana Sarandowa

(Venerable Human Vistani Blooded Mortu Cleric Cloistered Priest of Mortu 10 LE) This wrinkled, hunchbacked lady is well past her one hundredth birthday, and has ruled her Tasque as Great Raunie for half of her long life. People who mistake her for a frail harmless lady are in for a big surprise when she shows them her shrewd mind and her great magical powers. Her curses and her prophetic powers are legendary.

(Adventure Hook: The Mortu Tasque traditionally preserves the ashes of all Vistani who have died, in the Graveyard of Endari Koorah. When the spirits of the dead start to grow restless in the Graveyard, Madame Illyana makes the PCs an offer they can't refuse.)

Baron Matton Blanchard

(Adult Greater Werewolf Fighter 8, LG) The Baron of Beltis is a loyal and brave servant of the crown, and a most effective alpha for his pack, if a bit of a traditionalist one. Matton challenged his own Alpha,

his brother-in-law Harkon Lukas, out of loyalty for the Treholani Dynasty, and he is rumored to be the queen-mother's latest lover.

(Adventure Hook: Matton IS the Queen-mother's latest lover and the father of 6-year-old Lucita. As the seventh birthday of his daughter comes closer, Matton knows that the secret won't stay a secret, as Greater Wolfweres transform for the first time when they are 7 years old. As it is customary, he is preparing a gift for his daughter's first transformation, but the Queen Mother does not agree with his choice, and now his gift, a form-adapting cloak, has been stolen. He asks the PCs to get it back.)

Cyrus Lukas

(Old Wolfwere Cleric of Grandfather Wolf 8, CG) The owner of the Smiling Fangs in Beltis is a big, friendly grey-furred wolf, missing an eye, who never takes human form. He entertains his guests with many accounts of his tricks and exploits. His easy-going attitude belies his inner sadness; he was the uncle and the father figure of the infamous Harkon Lukas and lost his eye at his own beloved nephew's hand.

(Adventure Hook: When an assassin starts to kill and flay young wolfweres, Cyrus asks the PCs for help to investigate outside of the official channels.)

Baron Bela Ghuitai

(Old Paka Rogue 7, N) A short, fat, old man, head of the Trade Guild, and the richest person in Tancos, Baron Ghuitai is the Patriarch of a vast Paka family and a shrewd business man. While not a pious man, Bela is a paragon of virtue for the Cult of Zaganta the Cat Lord, which values shrewdness, success, and self-reliance above all.

(Adventure Hook: Once a day, Baron Bela takes his true form, that of a fat grey cat, and goes for a stroll in the park near his manor. In spite of his private militia, someone managed to kidnap him and magically prevent him from turning back in human form. As a cat, he has managed to escape his

kidnappers and now, a fat, snarky, talking grey cat asks for the PCs' help.)

Karnil "Demon" Luhantar

(Middle-aged Oracle of the cat Lord 5 CE) Charismatic but also a complete lunatic, this Black-furred Cat takes only rarely the guise of a tall, crazy-eyed and black-haired human woman; She leads a band of unscrupulous merchants who use unsavory tactics to deal with rivals.

(Adventure Hook: Karnil sees every non-Paka as vermin and prey, and she is ready to exploit them. One of her victims asks the PCs for help.)

ORGANIZATIONS

The Queen's Men are a NE secret police in the personal service of the Queen-Regent; they are a vicious organization of thugs, assassins, and enforcers. Their symbol is their Queen's personal banner, the Zwei Falk tiara.

(Dread Possibility: The Gentleman's Men - Are the Queen's Men truly her men? What if is someone else, maybe a powerful fiend, who is the true leader of the ruthless enforcers?)

The Council of 13 is an organization which is the ruling body of the Vistani People and is composed of the 13 Great Raunies, the spiritual and mystical rulers of each of the 13 tasques, even the loathed Vehrtieg. The agents of the council are called Goraga, "Lonesome" in Patterna, and are immediately recognizable because they are the only Vistani who travel alone in Black wagons.

(Dread Possibility: The Vistani's King - after the Doom, Vistani people had no more kings or even a royal family; every 50 years the Council of 13 gathers and tries to elect a new King, but in exactly the way first King was elected, by all of his Children and Grandchildren, so the new king must be elected by unanimity. But Zarovan will never vote for a non-Zarovan, and Vehrtieg will never vote for a Zarovan;

with the new Royal gathering come close, someone is plotting; the election of a new Vistani King would shake the balance of the whole Core.)

The Wolf's Fang are a LN elite order of Wolfwere fighters under the direct command of the Crown. The current leader of the fang is Captain General Charek Dalluk (Wolfwere Swashbuckler 10, LE) a harsh but competent leader.

(Dread Possibility: A Jackal in wolf's clothes - The captain general's loyalty may be not towards king and nation, but towards the queen-mother. What if he is a Queen's Man in disguise?)

The Knights of the Iron Sting are an LG Knightly order devoted to the Kingdom of Invidia, and their symbol is a steel-grey scorpion. The head of the order is sir Lothar Alkion (LG Human Paladin 8)

(Dread Possibility: The Poison - The Poison is a legendary fallen knight of the Iron Sting who allegedly sold their soul to a demon. The current Poison may be a high-ranking knight and no one would know it.)

THE DARKLORD: GABRIELLE TREHOLANI-DRAKOV-ADERRE

Medium Adult Human Canjar Vistani-Bloodied (Sorcerer Maestro Bloodline 15, NE) (HP)

Speed: 30 feet

Initiative: +4 (+3 in Castle Loupet)

Senses: Perception +19 True Sight (+3 in Castle Loupet)

Armor Class: 25, Touch 17, Flat Footed 21 (+4 Dex, +8 armor bracers, +3 deflection) (+3 in Castle Loupet)

Space/Reach: 1 square /1 square

Combat Maneuver Bonus/Combat Maneuver

Defense: +6/28 (+3 in Castle Loupet)

Str 8, Dex:18 (16), Con 12, Int 19 (15), Wis 14, Cha 25 (21)

Saving Throws: Fort +9 (+6) Ref +14 (+11) Will 14 (+11) (+3 in Castle Loupet)

Special Qualities: Curse of the Dark Lord, Maestro bloodline, Perfect Voice (Understand and be understood by any creature with language), Inspire (Sp) Greater Heroism 1 x day]], Gaze of the temptress, Sinkhole of evil III, Protected Kin. Special Attacks: Evil eye (DC 26), Maestro bloodline [Beguiling Voice (Ex, 7/day, As daze, 1 creature), Fascinate (11 rounds) (2/day) (DC 24)]

Attack: Melee: +1 Unholy dagger +7 (1d4; crit 19+, +2/+2d6+2 vs good Alignment) (+3 in Castle Loupet); Ranged: +1 Endless Ammunition light crossbow +12 (1d8+1, crit 19+, range 80') (+3 in Castle Loupet)

Skills: Bluff +28, Diplomacy +25, Disguise +11, Intimidate +15, Knowledge (arcana) +11, Knowledge (local) +9, Knowledge (nature) +9, Perception +7, Perform (sing) +25, Sense Motive +17, Spellcraft +12, Use Magic Device +25. (+3 in Castle Loupet)

Feats: Defensive Combat Training, Dodge, Eschew Materials, Extend Spell, Greater Spell Focus (Enchantment), Lightning Reflexes, Skill Focus (Bluff and Diplomacy), Still Spell; Spell Focus (Enchantment), Voice of Wrath

Known Spells:

Cantrips: Resistance, Mage Hand, Read Magic, Message, Light, Prestidigitation, Dancing Lights, Ghost Sound, Detect Magic

1st: Disguise Self, Ventriloquism, Charm Person, Anticipate Peril, Unprepared Combatant, Vanish

2rd: Hideous Laughter, Blindness/Deafness, Scare, Detect Thoughts, Touch of Idiocy, Unnatural Lust

3rd: Suggestion (DC +1; Perfect Voice), Deep Slumber, Major Image, Dispel Magic, Hold Person

4th: Charm Monster, Confusion, Seeds of Influence, Shout, Terrible Remorse

5th: Charm Person, Mass; Dominate Person, Hold Monster, Feeblemind, Sleepwalking Suggestion

6th: Suggestion, Mass (DC +1; Perfect Voice), Repulsion, Symbol of Distraction, True Seeing

7th: Insanity, Power Word Blind, Walk through Space

Daily Spells 1st:14, 2nd: 8, 3rd:7, 4th:7, 5th:7, 6th:7, 7th:5

SL:15, Save DC 17+Spell Level, (+2 Enchantment Spells, +1 Language-dependent spells)

Challenge Rating: 19

Proprieties: Zwei Falcon Tiara (+4 Int, +4 Cha, +4 Disguise Checks) +3 Cloak of Protection, +3 Ring of Protection, +8 Armor Bracers, Ring of Wizardry I; +1 Unholy dagger, +1 Endless Ammunition light crossbow

BACKGROUND

Gabrielle was born a princess in Falkovnia, and she has never understood why she had to leave her luxurious life and her daddy behind, or, to put it better, she has never wanted to understand why. No amount of explanation her mother could give her was ever enough for her and one day she managed to get in contact with her father, the Kaiser-Fuhrer of Falkovnia, Vlad Drakov himself. In his letters, Drakov seemed to be everything she remembered as a little girl, back when she had to leave him at seven years of age, kind, tender and worried for her. Her mother tried to explain her that Drakov was anything but kind and that he was manipulating her, but the young, ambitious and deluded sorceress followed his advice to seduce and marry the King of Invidia, Bahkolis III Treholani. She thought that being Queen would have made her happy, but her marriage was loveless, partly because her husband was infertile, and partly because, as Queen consort, she was unsatisfied with her position. Desperate to have a child, she asked for magical help from her mother, but the Council of the Thirteen Raunies forced Isabella, to refuse, as a child of the Aderre main line would have brought a great risk for the Vistani people. Feeling betrayed by her own people, she fell victim to another manipulator, the Gentleman Caller, who gave her the son she wanted. The king named the boy Malocchio, which means "Mismatched eyes" in Patterna, upholding House

Treholani tradition to name their children in Vistana fashion, much to Gabrielle's annoyance. Initially glad to finally have an heir, King Bahkolis started to grow suspicious of the boy's magical powers. Initially, Gabrielle distracted him by funding the Kartakassian independence movement, then she found a lover and gave birth to a second child. Finally, she managed to kill her husband off; as Queen Regent, she tried to vent her hatred for the Vistani, but her own son, thanks to the care of his beloved grandmother, opposed her. In a final act of spite she tried to assassinate the Council of 13, who retaliated cursing her to be eternally unsatisfied; The Mists rose to seal this sentence.

CURRENT SKETCHES

Gabrielle is the Queen-Regent of Invidia but her power is checked by other advisors, first of all her own mother, whom she has to tolerate because of her curse. Gabrielle does love her children, but is often mentally and physically abusive with Malocchio and overprotective of Lucita, her younger daughter. She has diplomatically allied the kingdom with Falkovnia, allowing the opening of an embassy in Karina; Her goals are the destruction of the Vistana people, to mold Malocchio in the perfect heir for her father, to raise Lucita as a perfect little princess and finally to live a true love story.

COMBAT

Gabrielle disdains combat, preferring bribery, seduction, blackmailing, and using other people to do the dirty job. If forced to fight she will use her magic to force the strongest opponent onto her side before subduing the rest.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Gaze of the Temptress: (EX) Every sentient being who looks at Gabrielle must attempt a Will saving throw, DC 24, or that creature will consider her not a menace as long as she does not attack them.

Protected Kin: (Ex) Gabrielle is immune to any form of Vistani magic.

Curse of the Dark Lord: Gabrielle can't directly harm a Vistani Blooded individual, except her own children, plus she is unable to judge correctly the intentions of men she is attracted to and her bond with her children will always sour thanks her own actions. She also lost her vestigial True Sight.

Lair

Castle Loupet is the massive fortress of House Treholani and is the principal stage for Gabrielle's intrigues and betrayals and is a Rank 3 Sinkhole of Evil, able to bestow the Charmed, Slumbering, and Confused condition (DC 24 Will Negate).

Closing Borders

When Gabrielle wishes to close the borders, people who try to pass grow increasingly anxious if they don't pass a Will save, DC 27, each round (you need 3 minutes to pass the border, so 30 saving throws); after three consecutive fails, people panic and run in the opposite of the direction they were going to. Gabrielle can close the borders for up to one month.

Dread Alternatives

Vistani-Blooded Player Characters

Vistani-Blooded is an inherited template any human can have.

A Vistani-blooded character must choose between two feats: Mistwalker, or True Seer. (see below)

A Vistani-Blooded with the Mistwalker feat has a 20% increased chance to be victim of the Lunatio Curse that strikes 50% of Vistani-blooded people.

A Vistani-Blooded with the True Seer feat increases by 20% their probability of being noticed by the Mists.

Evil Eye: a Vistani blooded character can cast one of the following spells 3 times a day, plus their spellcaster ability modifier (choose one between Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma): *Bane*, *Daze*,

Misfortune. DC: 12+1/2 character hit dice+chosen ability modifier.

Curse of Vengeance: once per day, a Vistani-Blooded person can lay a Curse of Vengeance on a subject who wronged them (DC 12+1/2 hit dice+chosen spellcaster ability modifier)

Tasque modifiers A vistani-blooded human belongs to one of the 13 Tasques, each tasque gives +2 Bonus in one ability score and to two skills which are always class skills for the character.

Canjar +2 Int, +2 Knowledge (Arcana) +2 Spellcraft.

Corvara +2 Dex, +2 Sleight of Hand, +2 Stealth.

Equaar +2 Cha, +2 Animal Handling, +2 Knowledge (Nature).

Giorag +2 Con, +2 Escape Artist, +2 Survival.

Kamii +2 Int, +2 Craft (Any), +2 Profession (Any)

Kulshev +2 Str, +2 Climb, +2 Diplomacy.

Lefaire +2 Dex, +2 Intimidate, +2 Sense Motive.

Mortu +2 Wis, +2 Knowledge (History), +2 Perception.

Najat +2 Cha, +2 Linguistic, +2 Perform (Any).

Vaatraska +2 Wis, +2 Craft (Alchemy), +2 Heal.

Vehrtieg +2 Cha, +2 Bluff, +2 Disguise.

Xellinth +2 Int, +2 Bluff, +2 Perform (Oratory).

Zarovan +2 Int, +2 Spellcraft, +2 Use Magical Device.

FEATS

MISTWALKER

Prerequisite: 5 Ranks in survival or Vistani-Blooded or Mist Domain as a class ability.

Benefit: The chance of getting lost in the Mists (usually 50%+5% for every 6 miles after the first 6) is halved. The Chance of successfully using the Mists as a portal (usually 20%) is increased to 50% less 5% for every 2 people the character brings with them, if those people do not have this feat themselves.

Special: a character with the Mist Domain can get this feat up to two times, bringing the base chance of getting lost down to 10% and the base chance to navigate the mists successfully up to 75%; A Vistani-Blooded character can get this feat up to three times and get the base chance to get lost down to 0 and the base chance to Navigate the Mist up to 100%

NAVIGATE THE MIST

Prerequisite: Mistwalker, 9 Ranks in Survival.

Benefit: A character with this feat can attempt a Survival Check DC 20 (30 for places they never visited before, +2 for each two characters without the Mistwalking feat they take with them) a success allows them to ignore the usual chances of getting lost in the Mists or ending in a different place than the one they aimed to. Doing so is a taxing task, and a character who attempts it more than once a day must make a Will save DC 20 + 5 for each additional time; on a failure the character becomes fatigued.

PARTING THE MIST

Prerequisite: Mistwalker, Navigate the Mist, 13 Ranks in Survival.

Benefit: the penalties for bringing characters without the Mistwalker feat along is negated for up to five characters, and the base DCs are lowered by five.

TRUE SEER

Prerequisite: Spellcaster Level 5 or Vistani-Blooded.

Benefit: the usual chance for divination spells to fail or to give false information (11-50 % and 1-10%) is halved. The character can use divination school items like scrolls and wands like they have the spell in the known spell list. The character can also make any knowledge check like he has ranks in that skill.

Special: A Vistani-Blooded character can take this feat up to two times; the probability of getting false information drops to 0 and failure goes down to 1-10.

IMPROVED TRUE SEER

Prerequisite: True Sight, Spellcaster level 9.

Benefit: The character chooses one Divination School spell up to level 3, and he can use it 3 times a day as a spell-like ability with no chance of failure.

GREATER TRUE SIGHT

Prerequisite: True Sight, Improved True Sight, Spellcaster level 13.

Benefit: The character can use True Seeing as a Spell-like ability and reduce any one chosen divination spell's (up to three times) normal chance for failure to 0.

VISTANI SOCIETY AND ROLES

Vistani Society is centered around the extended family, or Vardo. Vardos are usually formed by three or more Vistani families ruled by a Captain and a Raunie.

The Captain is the executive leader of the Vardo, providing them with a leader, a manager, and a spokesperson. The Raunie is the spiritual leader, the scholar, the teacher, the judge and the healer of the Vardo, acting as the captain's councilor and adviser. The Raunie is always a spellcaster, often a divine one.

The Raunie and the Captain are usually in some sort of relationship (Familiar, or romantic). Raunies and Captains can be male or female, it's a false perception that the roles are gender based; another false myth is the idea that a male Vistani Blooded with the sight are killed as soon as it's discovered. Some Vardos did that on the false assumption that the Dukkar, the embodiment of evil for the Vistani People, is born as Sight-gifted male but the Council of 13 have firmly condemned such actions; at least three Dukkars in history have been female (see below).

The Tasque is a group of Vistani who claim to have a common semidivine ancestor; they wear similar colors and follow common specific traditions. Each Tasque recognizes a Great Raunie who chooses their successor before they die, and in time of need the Captains of all the Vardos of the Tasque gather in Endari Koorah to elect a First Captain, who stays in charge as long as the emergency continues.

Vistani have three layers of laws: Vardo laws are enforced by the Captain and by the Raunies; a Darkling condemned for it can simply change Vardo; Tasque laws are customs which define the Tasque, like the Zarovan pact with Barovia, or the Mortu's oath of protecting the peace of Vistani dead; Darklings convicted for that are banned from every Vardo of the Tasque.

Vistan's Code is the holy law of all Vistani and whoever breaks a single article of it is not considered of the blood again until they atone.

The Vistani Code Says:

- 1) No Vistana shall ever kill another Vistana, unless to defend their family, their life, their friends and their Vardos.
- 2) No Vistana shall betray their people to the Giorgios.
- 3) No Vistana shall directly harm a child

4) No Vistana shall ever shed blood in Endari Koorah.

5) No Vistana shall ever violate a Vistana's rest places.

6) No Vistana shall ever harm a Giomoto (a friend of the Vistana people) if not to defend themselves, their families, their friends and their Vardos.

7) No Vistana shall ever remove the curse another Vistani bestowed rightfully on a Giorgio.

8) Every Vistana shall help other Vistana and Giomotos, but not Darklings, in their time of need.

9) Every Vistana shall help to fight against an enemy of the Vistana people.

10) Every Vistana shall abide to the decisions the Council of 13 makes.

The 13 Tasques are:

Canjar

The Canjar Tasque is the Scholar oriented Tasque; the Sight runs strong in this tasque and powerful wizards hail from their number. The Tasque had a strong presence in Falkovnia before their Great Raunie Isabella Aderre lead them to Invidia. They also have a strong presence in Hazlan, where they maintain a school of arcane arts, and in Darkon. The Tasque is prevailingly stable.

Corvara

The Corvara Tasque is one of those who help give Vistani a bad reputation, as they believe that Giorgios (non-Vistana people) are untrustworthy, and should always be taken advantage of; they don't exclusively engage in thievery and cons, however, often employing themselves in honest mercantile activities. They are one of the most diffuse tasque in the core, maintaining a strong presence only in Collodi and in Pureterre; they are prevalently nomad and their Great Raunie is Michel Clopin, the King of

Scoundrels of Pureterre (Adult Vistani-Blooded Corvara LE Bard 10).

Equaar

The Equaar Tasque is the Tasque who breed animals, horses, donkeys, mules, cattle, poultry, pigs, dogs, cats, birds, and snakes; they are also great hunters. Prevalently nomad, they have a strong presence in Tepest and Verbrek. Their Great Raunie is Madame Erina Virdisk in Tepest. (Old Vistani-Blooded Equaar Druid 12 N)

Giorag

The Giorag Tasque is the Tasque of the explorers and wanderers, and they are the Tasque one could meet outside the Core, where Vistani have, unsurprisingly, a better reputation. They have a strong presence in seafaring cultures like Zeindost, Zherisia, and Mordentshire. Very prevalently nomadic their Great Raunie is a New Zherisian explorer called Norton Seeder (Old Vistani-Blooded Giorag Cleric of Giorag 13)

Kamii

The Kamii Tasque is the Crafter Tasque, famed for its artisans, alchemists, tinkerers, seamsters, jewelers, carpenters, woodcarvers, and smiths. They are usually able to integrate with any non-Vistani community; the most stable of the Vistani Tasques, it has a strong presence in Lamordia, in Espinada, and in Darkon. The Great Raunie of the Tasque is the famed Lamordian woodcarver Madame Amelia Eisenhard (Middle-Aged Vistani-blooded Wizard 10 LN)

Kulshev

If the Corvara contributes to the negative stereotype of the Vistana, the Kulshev Tasque is often seen by ignorant giorgios as too good to be really Vistani. They make a living offering their muscles to honest work; they never deny their help to people in need and they never miss a chance to lend their hand when they can.

They are prevalently nomadic and they are the smallest tasque, Madame Magda Kulchevich (Middle-Aged Vistani-Blooded Kulshev Warpriest of Kulshev 11, NG) is their Great Raunie.

Lefaire

If the Corvara are responsible for the Vistani's infamy as an inherently dishonest bunch, their fame as a vindictive and curse-prone people is tied to the Lefaire Tasque. The Lefaire are the most rigid and stern in their relationship with the Giorgio; they work as bounty hunters and mercenaries, but they have rigid standards. They are mainly nomadic and they have a surprisingly strong presence in Falkovnia where the racist Kaiser-Fuhrer has begrudgingly come to respect their abilities. They are respected for their impartiality and always are entrusted to administer justice between the various Tasques. They often serve as Goragas, the agents of the Council of 13. Their Great Raunie is the infamous killer for hire, Karson Bloodwheel (Old Vistani-Blooded Lefaire Magus 12, LN)

Mortu

The Mortu Tasque is as feared as the Lefaire one but more for their almost flawless prophecies (seldom of bright and happy endings). They are the keepers of the past and they are the warden of the spirits of Vistani dead. They also work as undertakers, gravediggers, and cemetery keepers, and are known for their extended knowledge on the restless dead. They are mainly settled and have a strong presence in Invidia, Darkon, Gundarak, and Borca, and their Great Raunie is the feared Madame Illyana Sarendowa.

Najat

The Najat Tasque is the Tasque of the entertainers and of performers; they are surprisingly welcome almost everywhere, as they bring good fun and a nice distraction from routine. The Najat are equally divided between settled and nomadic; they have a strong presence in Kartakass and Espinada.

Their Great Raunie is Rosalita Cayetan, a dancer from Espinada (Adult Vistani-Blooded Najat Bard 12 CG).

Vatraska

Vatraska is the Tasque of healers, both of bodies and minds; they are renowned also among non-Vistana for their medical ability. They are mainly settled and they have a strong presence in Darkon, Invidia, and Markovia. The Great Raunie is Madame Marika Girani (Venerable Vistani-Bloodied Vatraska Cleric of Vatraska 15 LG).

Vehrtieg

The infamous Vehrtieg Tasque is loathed by all the other Tasques, besides the Mortu one. Vehrtieg were blamed for the doom, and they hate all the other Tasques other than Mortu. They try to oppose the other Tasques but still observe the Code of Vistan and for this they are still admitted in the Council of 13. They are mainly settled, as they are the only Tasque that manages to integrate in Giorgio society; Vehrtieg Vistani are sparse in all the Core, and the Vehrtieg Great Raunie is Madame Altaria Kalvatrine (Old Vistani-Bloodied Vehrtieg Witch 13, CE)

Xellinth

The Xellinth Tasque is a thorn in the side for many nations of the Core as they are poets, satirical writers, and journalists and they are always ready to make fun of the powerful and to act as forces of change against stagnant societies. They are nomadic and persistently strong in those nations they are less tolerated in, like Darkon, Falkovnia, and Invidia. Their Great Raunie is Karl Antarlch (Old Vistani-Blooded Xellinth Sorcerer 13, CN).

Zarovan

The Zarovan Tasque was the Vistani King's Tasque, and it still covets their lost throne; they are allied with Barovia and put their divinatory and travelling abilities to the service of the Count-Kings.

The Zarovan are still nomadic but thanks to their natural magical powers are often employed by Barovian merchants. The Great Raunie of the Zarovan Vistani is Madame Eva Radanovich (Old Vistani-Blooded Zarovan Summoner 14, CN)

THE DUKKAR

The Vistani personification of all evil is the Dukkar; a Vistani-Blooded individual with a powerful Sight, The Dukkar has already appeared six times in the world. The first one was Hyskosa, a Vehrtieg Seer who allegedly unleashed the Doom; the following three: Ariana the Poisoner, Hernak the Bloodied and Syntra, Mother of Pain, all created hazards and monsters that became enemies of the Vistani people. Grannika the Whisperer almost created a civil war between the Vistani People, and the Last Dukkar, Zirnak of the Crying Blade almost succeeded in killing off the Council of 13.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE TOMB OF HYSKOSA - HYSKOSA

The Doom-bringer was the first Dukkar and was the cause of the Diaspora of the Vistani. The Council of 13 still gathers over his sealed tomb, but is he really dead? What evil power is kept in the depths of the Tomb?

DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE POISONER'S INHERITANCE

Ariana the Poisoner, a Kamii, was the Second Dukkar and she was infamous for her alchemist work; her lab was burned when she died but her secret journal survived, and it contains all her dangerous secrets.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: HERNAK'S POOL

Hernak, the Third Dukkar, a Lefaire consumed by his wish for revenge, was a Vampire, and he used to bathe in his victim's blood to empower himself. In a secret place under Endari Koorah, the unholy pool still lingers, preserved by magic; who knows what terrible power that blood still hides?

DREAD POSSIBILITY: DAUGHTERS OF PAIN

The fallen Equaar and Fourth Dukkar, Syntra, was a fallen Druid who violated the natural order to create terrible monsters, but she lost control of them; some of her earliest creations still wait in secret caves, ready to emerge and continue their creator's job.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: WHISPERS FROM THE MISTS

The Fifth Dukkar, Grannika, a Najat with a silver tongue, now roams the Mists whispering words of betrayal and madness to any unfortunate visitor.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE CRYING BLADE

The terrible weapon wielded by the Corvara Zurnak, the Sixth Dukkar, was lost the day of the assassin's defeat, until today.....



Comoarã Is A Spellthief, You See



STUDENTS OF SYLVAN SORCERY

FEY MAGIC SUBCLASSES FOR RAVENLOFT

BY JONATHAN "HELL_BORN" CRAWFORD

INTRODUCTION

Many and myriad are the creatures imbued with magical potency as their innate birthright. Mighty dragons captivate minds and souls with their presence, loathsome fiends repulse those not similarly twisted of spirit, celestials wield the bright magics of the heavens, and elementals embody the fundamental magics of creation itself. One clade of creatures so imbued often goes overlooked amongst these more overtly intimidating beings: the humble fey. But just because they do not flaunt the destructive and flashy powers of their counterparts does not make them weak. The fey are spirits of nature, cousins to the elementals, and made more formidable by their ability to weave illusions and crush the weak-willed to their own desires. There is power there... and where there is power, there are those who seek to use it.

The misty realms are isolated from the planes. Most beings of magic are lost to these gloomy, shrouded lands, far removed from the cosmic tides. But the fey are still here; an entire civilization of shadow-tainted fey-kin, the Arak, rules a gloomy faerieland known as the Shadow Rift. And with so little competition, those who seek magic are often willing to gamble with their souls and their sanity against the whims of the fey...

ARCANE TRADITION: SIDHE SCHOLAR

Wizards have long sought magical power wherever it rests, and where it most frequently rests is amongst the minds and spirits of magical beings; celestials, fiends, elementals, and fey. Of them all, fey are the beings most likely to treat with mortals, if only for sport, passing on their secrets of manipulating the arts of magic. Whilst they may at a glance seem similar to warlocks who have sworn fealty to archfey patrons, the wizards known as Sidhe Scholars tend to have a less intimate relationship, typically forswearing a singular patron and instead bartering, begging, borrowing, and stealing scraps of mystical lore where they can find it. Whilst Sidhe Scholars often favor enchantments and illusions, long regarded the provenance of the fey, they also display a mastery for primal magics normally associated with druids, and in some worlds, these fey-tutored mystics are all that remain of the once-noble druidic traditions.

In the realms of mist, Sidhe Scholars are often tutored by shadow fey of the Seelie court, chosen on a whim or as a result of far-reaching plans on behalf of their fey patrons. Exceptions are typically trained either by hags or by the rare "sylvan" fey found in the woodlands of the Core. Many Sidhe Scholars swear oaths to a single tutor, becoming multiclassed Warlocks of the Archfey, whilst others are glamourweaver sorcerers who temper their powers with more conventional arcane training.

To the Tepestani, this tradition represents the epitome of the wizard in their culture; whilst very

few Sidhe Scholars actually dwell in Tepest, those Tepestani who flee their domain and seek the wizard's power are most likely to gravitate towards this tradition. The Forfarian family ApMorten also practices this tradition, keeping alive fey-tutored arcane traditions that stretch into the murky past from their home in Longshanks Hall.

LEVEL 2: PRIMAL MAGIC

From 2nd level, you can learn Druid spells as if they were Wizard spells. Other wizards cannot learn your Druid spells from you, unless the wizards are also Sidhe Scholars or the spells they wish to learn are otherwise also Wizard spells.

LEVEL 6: BONUS SPELLS

At 6th level, you add the spells Alter Self, Enhance Ability, Plant Growth, and Polymorph to your spellbooks, if they are not there already.

LEVEL 10: FAE TRICKERY

From 10th level, you can cast the spell Polymorph without expending a spell slot once per short rest. You can also Speak with Plants and Speak with Animals, as per the spells, at will.

LEVEL 14: WALK THE LIFE SPIRAL

From 14th level, when you fail your third death saving throw, you can immediately return to life with 1 hit point remaining. Once you have used this trait, you cannot use it again until 1 week has passed.

DRUIDIC CIRCLE OF THE FIRST WORLD

Druids and the fey often have close ties, for both are fundamentally defined by their connection to the primal powers of nature. Druids often take to revering fey as patron spirits, and some druidic sects take this view so far that they devote themselves not to nature but to the courts of the fey as a whole, viewing them as the true personifications of nature's power and mind. Such sects are known as the Circle

of the First World, seeking to increase fey influence and acting as operatives for archfey patrons. Many of these druids also become warlocks, and even those who don't possess more arcane traits than their kinsfolk.

In the misty realms, the Circle of the First World is found in the realm of Forlorn; members of the so-called "Oak Faction" are typically either druids of this Circle or of the Circle of Dreams, united by their shared belief in the powers of the fey, and their reverence for the fey. Outside of Forlorn, druids of this Circle are typically loners from lands visited by the shadow fey.

LEVEL 2: FEY WITCHERY

When you choose this Circle at level 2, you gain a bonus Cantrip chosen from the Wizard spell list.

LEVEL 2: NATURAL RECOVERY

Starting at 2nd level, you can regain some of your magical energy by sitting in meditation and communing with nature. During a short rest, you choose expended spell slots to recover. The spell slots can have a combined level that is equal to or less than half your druid level (rounded up), and none of the slots can be 6th level or higher. You can't use this feature again until you finish a long rest.

For example, when you are a 4th-level druid, you can recover up to two levels worth of spell slots. You can recover either a 2nd-level slot or two 1st-level slots.

CIRCLE SPELLS:

Your tutelage under the fey grants you access to unique spells unavailable to most druids. At 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 9th level you gain access to the spells listed below.

Once you gain access to a circle spell, you always have it prepared, and it doesn't count against the number of spells you can prepare each day. If you gain access to a spell that doesn't appear on the

druid spell list, the spell is nonetheless a druid spell for you.

3rd Level: Charm Person, Tasha's Hideous Laughter

5th Level: Invisibility, Misty Step

7th Level: Hypnotic Pattern, Major Image

9th Level: Hallucinatory Terrain, Polymorph

LEVEL 6: FAERIE FRIEND

At 6th level, you gain Find Familiar as a bonus spell. However, all familiars you summon must use the Fey creature type. Additionally, you gain Sylvan as a bonus language.

LEVEL 10: NATURE'S WARD

When you reach 10th level, you can't be charmed or frightened by elementals or fey, and you are immune to poison and disease.

LEVEL 14: FEY COURIER

When you reach 14th level, fey creatures sense your connection to the powerful amongst their kind and become hesitant to attack you. When a fey creature attacks you, that creature must make a Wisdom saving throw against your druid spell save DC. On a failed save, the creature must choose a different target, or the attack automatically misses. On a successful save, the creature is immune to this effect for 24 hours.

The creature is aware of this effect before it makes its attack against you.

SORCEROUS ORIGIN: GLAMOURWEAVER

It is common knowledge in most worlds that sorcerers generally trace their powers to either interbreeding with powerful magical creatures, or otherwise being exposed to the energies of a creature that can innately manipulate magic. Whilst dragons are notorious for such activity, the fey are no less keen to share their gifts, nor any less

vigorous in sharing their bloodline. In some worlds, the wizardly traditions of enchanters and illusionists may have emerged from these fey-blooded sorcerers, to whom the manipulation of the mind comes naturally.

In the misty realms, glamourweavers are largely found wherever the Arak deign to mingle their blood with that of mortals; Tepest sees an ironically large number of these sorcerers born there, although those who survive are invariably those who fled their homeland after their powers first began to manifest. Glamourweavers are also very common amongst the Forfarrians; invariably marked by red hair, these are the indigenous sorcerers of their homeland, where magic is strongly tied to gods, the primal forces of nature, or the fey.

LEVEL 1: TERRIFYING Mien

Starting at 1st level, you can spend 2 sorcery points to emit a mystical aura of pure fear. This affects a 30ft sphere centered on you, and forces all hostile creatures within the area of effect to make a Wisdom save (DC 8 + your Charisma modifier + your Proficiency bonus) or be Frightened of you for 1 minute.

LEVEL 1: FAERIE CHARMS

Starting at 1st level, you learn additional spells when you reach certain levels in this class, as shown in the Faerie Charms table. Each of these spells counts as a sorcerer spell for you, but it doesn't count against the number of sorcerer spells you know.

Whenever you gain a sorcerer level, you can replace one spell you gained from this feature with another spell of the same level. The new spell must be either an enchantment or illusion spell from the sorcerer, warlock, or wizard spell list.

1st: Faerie Fire, Charm Person

3rd: Pass Without Trace, Invisibility

5th: Hypnotic Pattern, Tiny Servant

7th: Hallucinatory Terrain, Greater Invisibility

9th: Animate Objects, Modify Memory

LEVEL 6: BAG O' TRICKS

Starting from 6th level, whenever you complete a Long Rest, you can swap out a single spell of castable level from your Spells Known list for a Wizard spell of equal or lower level. The swapped spell must belong to the Enchantment or Illusion school.

LEVEL 14: 7 LEAGUE STEP

Starting from 14th level, you can spend 4 sorcery points as an action. For 1 minute after doing so, you can teleport 60 feet as a bonus action. Once you have used this trait, you must complete a long rest before you can use it again.

LEVEL 18: CRUSHING WILLPOWER

Starting from 18th level, by spending 3 sorcery points when casting a Sorcerer spell, you can impose Disadvantage on Wisdom saves against that spell.



*Even Chaotic Evil Has
Literary Standards...*



THE CONFERENCES OF VICTOR GAGNÉ

PART THE LAST: OUR FINAL CONFRONTATION

BY BENJAMIN BAUM AND MARK BARTELS

PROLOGUE: CAT AND MOUSE

Dense fog was not an oddity in Paridon.

Fog brought danger in many forms, in the one city of Zherisia. Predators lurked in it, creeping up on prey unable to see more than a hand's reach. It blended with soot and other airborne filth, bringing tears, coughing, and diseases of the lung. At times it blended with the Mists, and then people disappeared—or even parts of the city did, all in silence.

Foggy nights in Blackchapel district often meant dead bodies found in the morning, as footpads grew more violent in response to the opportunity to strike unseen, or else to their own visceral dread. The innocent and those who did not fancy their chances in *melée* tended to hide behind lock and key, waiting out the darkness and murk, twitching at every creak and scratching sound in their decrepit homes. Of course, since the first appearance of the Shadow Killers, there were less dead bodies found after nights of dense fog. This was a comfort to no one at all, as sometimes homes were found broken into and stripped of all life instead.

The Mordentish gentleman striding through Blackchapel on this foggy night seemed to be either unaware of the terror and danger all around him, or else to be confident that he could handle whatever the dark world saw fit to hurl at him. His tailcoat

flapped behind him like a great pair of wings as he walked through the slums, buildings looming out of the fog like decrepit giants, their windows gaping like empty eye-sockets and toothless mouths. His head was crowned with faded, coppery hair that parted neatly on the left side of his head, and a twinkley-eyed smile graced his visage.

Bent Tom had been tracking the gentleman for nigh on half an hour now, and he was growing both annoyed and confused with his target. Fancy gentlemen did not come to Blackchapel to sightsee, they came to do *business*. Except this one was not heading for one of the cheap brothels or the opium dens, he was just walking around. He looked all purposeful, but he wasn't going anywhere in particular, he just kept going in loops!

For a while, Bent Tom had been worried that the gentleman was a decoy for the Peelers, and so he'd hung back, watched and waited. Blackchapel was his home, and no-one and nothing was better'n him at lurking and shoulder-thumping here. When no Peelers showed their big feet, he decided this gentleman was just a nutter—and he closed back in. Bent Tom didn't know why the gentleman had come walkin' round where he had no business bein', and he din't care. It was dark out, it was foggy, and even though Bent Tom knew he could fix a face-stealer and outrun a Shadow Killer, he wasn't keen on doin' it if he din't haveta. So he was gonna stab this gentleman nice an' tidy 'tween the ribs, touch the heart through the lungs-like, an' then he'd filch

whate'er din't look too recognisable an' creep back ta his den, then tomorra he'd—

'Hello, Tom.'

The words just popped into Bent Tom's head, and for a moment his mind touched that of ... something awful. A moment, no more, but that was enough. All that was Bent Tom, all that had ever been Bent Tom, shattered into sharp-edged pieces in the face of that dreadful Purity, the abyss of utter malice that opened up in his head and shattered his inner cohesion.

It seemed to him that he screamed, or at least that parts of him did, but he couldn't be sure because he was crying, no singing, no calling for his mother, no ... No, actually he didn't know what he was doing, what they were doing, as he spiralled apart and down and down into his inner void. Darkness rushed up to meet all the parts of him that had survived that dreadful touch, and there were not nearly enough to fill up that horrible maw closing its teeth on him. Before consciousness faded, the myriad shards of Bent Tom the butcher's son, who became a footpad after his mother disappeared in the night and his dad got hung for being drunk and disorderly, heard that horrible voice again.

'Goodbye, Tom.'

The Mordentish gentleman moved on, by all appearances completely unaware of the minor tragedy that had occurred behind him, heedless of the gut-wrenching screams issuing from the throat of what had been not a good person, but a person all the same. He moved past buildings abandoned and inhabited, his stride sure and his attitude carefree. When shadowy silhouettes started pacing him, just barely visible through the fog, it did not seem to affect him.

Eventually, the dapper gentleman came to a small courtyard, where a dead tree stood sentinel over a scene of neglect. Cobblestones had been pulled from the ground, and bricks from the walls all around. A bench of rusted metal drew a stark circle around the

corrugated tree-trunk. It was here that he turned, smiling amiably at the shadowy figures, which had paused at the edge of the courtyard—save one.

The shadow stepped forward and into sight. She was a tall apparition in red armour, dragon's wings unfurling at her shoulders. No, she was a slender woman with intricately curled hair in the Dementlieuse style, dressed in red velvet. But no, she was a dark-skinned Rajian woman in an austere *sari*, a bright red dot in the middle of her forehead.

She was a woman who looked like a Hazlani Mulan, except she had allowed her dark hair to grow long and luxurious. Only her forehead was shorn, to expose an intricate tattoo in scarlet ink. She looked the Mordentish gentleman up and down—then cupped her hands around a thin cigarillo and lit it with a match. She blew out a perfect ring of smoke and made a sound of genuine enjoyment before addressing the gentleman: "I suppose this is the bit where I'm supposed to go, *'I have you now, my pretty!'* and run at you pell-mell, is it?"

She made a casual gesture, which caused the other shadows to melt back and out of sight. Without saying a word, she smoked her cigarillo down to the butt, ground it under her foot, and lit another. A faint smell of opium started to suffuse the haze on the air. *Then* she spoke: "It's a neat trick, I'll give you that. Best yet, I can't see how you're doing it. You clearly do know him—laid eyes on him in the past few days too—but we've recently been in contact with the man."

She grinned without humor, the glow from the flaming end of her cigarillo making the expression ghoulish. "Very intimate contact. You're not Victor Gagné."

His eyelids—edges tinted like cloth darkened by a splash of water—narrowed around his deep blue eyes. He parted his teeth, putting overlong canines in sharp contrast with the dark void of his throat, and making quite clear the reason for his pale skin and somewhat hollow cheeks. "Forgive me if I am not impressed that you know who I am not," he

replied sardonically. “Do you care to hazard a guess, or is the suspense unbearable?”

The eyes of the Mulan woman blazed bright red, and when she exhaled smoke again, it reeked of brimstone. “My dear fellow,” she said, “if the suspense were *unbearable*, you would know it. *Intimately.*”

Her crimson eyes bored into his. “In the end, it all boils down to elimination—and simple observation. Not many men would have the brass *cojones* to challenge me here.” She pointed her finger at the stranger. “And not many men stink of rust and Imp ... *story-thief*. Go on. Tell me that I’m wrong.”

“You never have to ask me to lie to you,” the false Victor replied, the smile refusing to fade from his face. “You should know that by now.” He began to give a pleasant chuckle, but the sound swiftly was consumed by the crackling of flame. A fire of abnormal vibrancy curled around his form, hiding him from view in a veil of orange and red, shot through by transient greens, violets, and azures.

As swiftly as it came, the fire peeled back and died away, leaving a wheelchair-bound older gentleman—still laughing—in its place. A fine burgundy vest of gold-brocaded cloth peeked from the front of his finely tailored robe, which was exceeded in its whiteness only by his hair. He peered at the Mulan woman through wire-rimmed spectacles, his golden irises thrown open to admit light to his pupils. “It is nice of you to come out and greet me,” he said.

“Well-met and all that, I suppose,” the Mulan woman said, with dry sarcasm. She lit another cigarillo and looked at the elderly man with half-shuttered eyes. Half-shuttered and glowing like embers behind blood-stained glass. She blew out another ring of fragrant smoke, then her form flowed and shifted. A beanpole woman with wild, red hair, dressed in a garishly yellow coat and hat, took another drag of the cigarillo.

Then she cupped her elbow in one hand and spoke, conversationally: “Really now, old man. You come

here, to my city, and mess with my things while I’m here? Because of what happened back when we first met? Honestly. I’ve done much worse things to less deserving people than you and your pets, but you’re the only one to keep nipping at my heels like this. You, my good sir, have a serious problem with overreacting.”

He inclined his head slightly, perhaps in acknowledgment. “I am accustomed to a certain level of respect, I’ll grant. Every time I try to act in good faith, you see fit to insult me. I tell you I have no money to steal, and you carve a scar into my companion—a scar that lingers to this day. Rupturing your eardrums was both justified, and the least I could have done.”

The woman bared her teeth in a not-smile. “Respect is a two-way street, old man. I was not amused when you tried to harvest my darling Clementine. Her tale is not for you to end. The way I see it, I still owed you a bad turn for that one.”

“Your daughter’s collection would have been appropriate compensation for what you did to my companion in the first place, without provocation,” Ciphramir said, eyes narrowing.

“Putting my mark on your apprentice to recall her by was only good sense, based on what I saw in her mind,” the fiend countered. “That one bears watching. In some ways, she is far crazier than I am—than we are, *old friend.*”

When Ciphramir’s gaze leveled out again, his smile was a bit more perfunctory. “Agreeing to collect a man from the Shadow Rift for you was still rather forgiving, in light of our history. Did you expect me to also forgive the loss of my home? Destruction of property is a favor easily returned.”

The fiend’s eyes blazed red, and she shape-shifted again, becoming the fashionable Dementlieuse woman; dark, oiled ringlets coiled about her shoulders like affectionate snakes. Her voice was calm and penetrating, her eyes cool and dark. “I would say your problem is getting out of hand, to be

honest, *mon fils*. Coming here like this, tampering with poor Victor, so soon after the news we just received from Castra? Perhaps you should look for some help to regain control of your emotions.”

She took a supple, swaying step closer to the man. “You might consider looking for a qualified therapist, poor thing. My couch is always ready to receive new ... patients.”

His grin brightened once more, now with bemusement. “For your sake, I must decline. You don’t have the time.” Bracing his arms, he adjusted his posture. “Besides, would you really want me to rein in my unbridled generosity? I have yet to repay your poisoning me with your blood, but I could perhaps call it even anyway.”

“*Poisoning* you, poor little thing?” the fiend repeated. “The audacity! We shared with you our precious essence, and a sensation fit to be recorded for posterity. Where is our thanks for paying you such a fine honour ... little firebrand.”

Abruptly, the fiend’s shape *flickered*, going from face to face to face, as if the intellect behind those crimson eyes was having some trouble in deciding which identity to show the man in the wheelchair. Perhaps surprisingly, the face that won out was young and fair, her crimson eyes haunted but steadfast. “Enough of this,” Genevieve Schlosser said, her voice trembling with rage. “*Enough games!*”

The look the girl cast at Ciphramir was one of undisguised loathing. “What have you done?” she demanded to know. “Where is Victor Gagné?”

THE TALE COLLECTOR—EGRESS

The shroud across the city was light that morning. The thin layer over the rooftops of Blackchapel began to burn off, revealing the small garden shed to the sky. The light wormed its way through a chink in the shed’s roof to wanly illuminate my face, and that barest touch was all I needed to awaken. My eyes

flew open, and I could feel my pupils contract to the size of pinpricks. I threw up a hand to block the feeble ray, and an instinctive hiss leapt from my mouth, from the darkness within me.

At my side, there was a surge of startled movement. For a moment, my slow-beating heart quailed at the sight of a nigh-featureless, grey-skinned creature with over-long arms and fingers. Just a moment; then it modestly averted its face, muttered “Sorry,” and ... changed.

The creature—the doppelganger—went from alien to human in a bare instant. Grey skin became a sun-starved pallor. Mousy brown hair grew from a bald scalp. Small, black eyes became an alert brown. From the alien, the blood-chilling, to ... ordinary. Easy to overlook.

My skin crawled, but I tried not to let it show on my face. Likewise, my mind roiled. How many beings like Paloma were there, just in Paridon? The way she spoke about her people implied they were malicious in nature, and used humans to increase their own numbers. I shuddered to think how they might be using their gifts of impersonation, considering that I had never heard of them before I encountered Paloma in the dungeons of the Retreat, the den of the Red Haunt ... where she had wept bitter tears over her shattered bonds with her human family. Where she had done her best to help me, had fought in my defense.

What right do I have left, to judge others based on their appearance or the crimes of their kindred?

I remembered two little children, weeping at the death of their mother, trying to fight me off—and now my heart quailed with shame. “You do not need to apologize,” I said, dragging the words up out of my gut. Hesitant at first, I put my hand on her shoulder and gave it a reassuring squeeze.

She gave me a grateful smile in response and clambered to her feet, then reached down and helped me up.

“We should leave here,” she said, voice dropping to a whisper. “Before the home-owners wake up and call the Peelers on us.” She looked down at herself, mouth twisting into a rueful smile. “I need to replace my clothes, too.”

I had not paid much attention to Paloma’s attire before, but she was right. What had apparently once been austere robes of black, suited to a taller frame, hung on her current guise like a tattered tent. There were several holes that looked to have been made with a sharp knife; even after Paloma’s transformation, the skin underneath those cuts looked ... bruised, somehow. A memory popped into my head: Katia Schlosser’s laboratory with its collection of exotic scalpels, and the lumbering *Assistent Nummer Dreizehn*, who had brought me the outfit I now wore.

Paloma first blushed, then grew pale, and drew those cuts in her garment closed with her hands. The cloth seemed to almost shimmer and then to knit itself back together, but I sensed no arcane energies in effect. There was a ... falseness about the wholeness of the cloth, somehow. Next, Paloma tucked away her holy symbol, showing a doppelganger in the squared circle, hiding it within her collar. “We should go,” she repeated, and eased open the door of the garden shed in which we had slept.

We crept out of the backyard, and never made the acquaintance of its owner. Or owners. There was a house, small—but then a lot of Paridon’s citizens are forced to huddle together in homes that are actually too small for the number of inhabitants.

There were not many people out on the streets yet, most of them workmen on their way to a day of bone-grinding labor, but we already drew stares. I noticed Paloma shivering slightly whenever people looked at her, her shoulders hunching and her face averted. “We should decide where to go,” I whispered, as I tried to walk in such a way as to shield my companion from the stares. “If we can get

to the Mordentish Embassy, I can get us out of the city.”

“There are those of my kin at the embassy,” Paloma said bluntly. “Keeping an eye on the diplomatic traffic, looking for ways to enrich my species at the expense of yours. You can go there—I’ll guide you—but there is no escape through the embassy for me. My people would not want me to leave Paridon. I’ll happily turn renegade, but I have to do it carefully.”

“If not by the Embassy,” I asked, “how do you intend to leave the city?”

“I will assume a shape,” she replied, shrugging. “Pretend to be a worker on one of the merchant-trains leaving the city for the Core. It should not be too difficult. Many people move into and out of Paridon every day, importing food and exporting finished goods.”

She flinched, and added: “I won’t assume a real person’s identity! I’ll make someone up. I won’t—I do not want to hurt anyone. Please believe me, I can easily make someone up. This face I wear now, it does not belong to a real person. As long as my kindred do not spot me, it will be fine. I will be careful.”

Fine and careful in leaving, but after escape comes life outside. I knew I would be dealing with such matters after my long misadventure concluded, though I at least had a prior life I hoped was not lost to me. Paloma had nothing of the sort in the Core, and rather than consider my own ill-formed ideas of what I would do once I was out, I deflected my attention to Paloma’s situation: “And once you have escaped, where do you intend to go?”

“If you can secure passage by the Embassy, and I could join you once you are outside the city walls,” Paloma whispered, the words leaving her mouth as though she had to struggle to draw them out, “could I—would you mind if I joined you there? If I traveled with you as far as Mordent? Or at least until we were outside of Zherisia? I doubt—I doubt my clan would go to the trouble of tracking me outside the city,

but—I would rather travel in a group. You needn't look after me once we're in Mordent or, or wherever we wind up. I'll leave you alone, go my own way. Just..."

Her voice faltered and she averted her eyes from mine. Thin threads of blond hair snaked through her locks, blazed scarlet, dimmed back to mousy brown. She shuddered, eyes squeezed shut for a moment.

I was entirely out of my depth with regard to understanding what ailed her. I had an intuition that her fluctuation of form was triggered by trepidation, but it certainly could have been an illness or injury that those of relatively static form could not experience.

The former I had a hope of doing something about. "You are quite welcome to travel with me, for as long as is wise," I assured her, the words rushing a bit haphazardly into the air. To assure myself, I added, "Are you ... feeling well?"

"I am afraid," she replied, simply. "I am very afraid, for I am going to be alone, and far from everything I have known."

She turned to face me, here eyes filled with a mixture of distress and determination. "I ask you forgive my weakness, Victor Gagné, but even creatures like myself can fear isolation and the demands of the future. Even we can dread the loss of home, no matter how horrible it is become."

I was familiar with her feelings, and once again I felt confronted by my future. I had only been gone for a matter of days as far as my friends and colleagues were concerned, so they had no reason yet to suspect anything was amiss with me. However, even if I could go back without causing a fuss, had I changed too much to stay?

"You don't need to apologize," I said, trying not to fixate on these awful matters, "and you are not alone, especially not in being afraid." I tried to shake my head clear. "Shall we make our way to the Embassy?"

"If we're going, then we should collect a few things," Paloma said. "There are some books at my house."

Her lower lip trembled for a moment, then firmed as my companion scowled. "I will not serve the cause of the Masters—of my kindred anymore. When we get to Mordent, I will—I will hand those books over to those who can use them best. I heard about the man called *Van Richten*. He is from Mordent, yes? Those books could help him."

"A most prudent idea," I responded, "but..." I paused, wondering how best to continue. "... you should know that his nieces continue his work. Doctor van Richten himself has been missing for several years now."

"I see," she said. She shook her head. "Well, he did dangerous work. Dangerous, but important. I will present the books to his heirs, then."

She hesitated, then shrugged and quirked a smile. "I also have some clothes and a little money in my house, some reagents. We could benefit from collecting those, but we'll have to move quickly and carefully. I have been a prisoner of the Red Haunt for a while now; there is no telling whether my clan is still looking for me, or might be watching the house."

"Wait," I said, forestalling her as a memory tickled me. "Is there a cemetery near here? Holy ground?"

Paloma blinked, surprised. "Yes. It's a pauper's yard, though. Why do you ask?"

"A pauper's yard will have to do," I said, one hand lightly brushing the skull in my pocket, which I had taken from the chamber of the World Engine. "I had best not carry this gentleman with me into the Embassy."

"Ahh," Paloma sighed. "This way."

The pauper's graveyard was small and shabby, small markers become grubby from exposure to the smog and the fog, standing in crooked rows and marking the site where ashes had been spilled or buried. As final resting places went, it wasn't much of one, but

Paloma assured me that the Celebrants of Mankind kept it consecrated and tended it regularly.

"I do not know your convictions in life, sir," I told the skull as I quickly dug a hole for it in the little yard's unyielding soil, "but I hope this will be better than to languish in the Retreat. Rest you well."

We buried the skull of the Red Haunt's nameless victim, and Paloma spoke a couple of prayers—and then we were off again without looking back.

Following Paloma's directions, we wove through the tangled streets and alleys of Blackchapel, making our way. Paloma's house was ... not what I had expected. It was small and unobtrusive, just one little house among others. From the outside, it looked neat and tidy. As we sneaked in through the back door, I could see there was a training yard with combat-circles drawn on the ground in chalk. The inside of the little house was neat and tidy, too, almost ... sterile.

"I don't have a great need for ... things," Paloma explained without prompting. She shrugged, her expression helpless. "I grew up poor. Then, things became just ... loot. Of deception and theft. I keep what is needful, no more. Please follow me."

The first place she brought me was the kitchen, where we raided the pantry. Fortunately, none of the food was repellent by its very nature; it was all simple food, cured meat cut from cattle, cheese with a little mold on it, bread that was going stale. We ate and drank whatever food was not spoiled, and Paloma packed up the rest in oil-paper.

"Let's each take a share," she suggested, having produced a couple of shopping bags from the kitchen cupboard. "You never know how long it will take you to see the ambassadors, and we might both get hungry."

With our bellies sated, Paloma took me to what turned out to be her bedroom. There was a narrow bed there, which looked unslept in. There was a dent in the blankets, which suggested someone occasionally spent time sitting down on it. An old-

fashioned wardrobe provided Paloma with a change of clothes, which she slipped into without any noticeable embarrassment, and without bothering to ask me to turn around—which I did hastily in response.

Paloma made a mirthless sound. "Ah – apologies. I remember modesty, but it became a moot point when I learned my true nature. My appearances, my disguises, are masks and outfits in their own way, as they cover my natural form."

"Fair enough, fair enough," I said, my back still turned. "I suppose even my instinct to politely avert my eyes is a construct of society as well." With a half-smile that went unseen, I added, "It is not a habit I can see myself breaking anytime soon."

"There are worse habits," she replied, philosophically. "I am clothed now. You can turn around at your leisure."

When I did so, I saw Paloma sitting on one knee by the bed. For a moment, I thought she might be at prayer, but her actions were more prosaic. It turned out there was also a loose floorboard at the foot of the bed, from under which Paloma retrieved a slender volume, which she tucked into her clothes without comment.

"If you don't mind my asking," I began, "what are these books you are retrieving about?"

"One of the two is what you might call the holy book of my people's faith," Paloma replied. "If, indeed, you can call it a faith. It is a philosophy, a guide for exercise and study. It is a path to divine power without the involvement of a god or a fiend. You are familiar with Paridon; I'm sure the concept does not sound wholly unfamiliar to you. The other book contains alchemical lore unique to my people ... although there are suspicions that other kinds of shape-shifters might be able to use the fruits of the procedures. I do not know that any of my kin have ever shared lore with outsiders."

“Van Richten’s heirs can probably learn much of my kin from those books, or at least devise measures to counter the power locked in their pages.”

From the bedroom, Paloma guided me to a tidy and well-stocked alchemical laboratory. I saw all the standard equipment, some of the paraphernalia of Alchemical Philosophy, and a setup that looked wholly unfamiliar.

“Take whatever you need,” she urged, gesturing to the various alchemical supplies and the bookcase. “I have to get the dangerous books from the basement, and there are wards on it. Best I go in alone; they’re set to let me pass, and it will be faster than undoing them.”

I voiced my agreement, and after she left, I turned my attention to the laboratory—rather than to the fact that the number of books she was collecting exceeded the number she had explained. Modesty may have been alien, but I surmised that privacy was not; if she didn’t want to tell me what the first book was about, I wouldn’t press her.

In the laboratory, I would have liked to have found quintessence, but the equipment seemed to be devoted to the production of purgatives. A few vials of emotional purgative were at hand, and though they weren’t particularly useful—especially without knowing the emotion they were meant to purge—I took them for their monetary value.

Among the lesser alchemical items, I recovered a pack of tindertwigs, some smokesticks, and two sealed flasks I presumed were alchemist’s fire. I also identified a vial of night drops—despite their surreptitious nature, it would seem that Paloma’s kin could not see in the dark. Neither could I, since my return from undeath, so I took the vial for my own use.

The mysterious apparatus was more perplexing. There was some sort of coded labeling scheme at play with the different components. While meanings were largely obfuscated, I did divine one particular dichotomy: one half of the equipment bore labels on

iron plaques, while the other half bore plaques of tin. The two different sorts of labels were never mixed in application, so I surmised that there were two separate processes going on in this setup. An iron-labeled case of full vials suggested that only one process had been in recent production. For further study, I pocketed three of the vials.

I heard a noise somewhere in the house; the tinkling of glass. Had Paloma already returned? I left the laboratory, walking into the central corridor—and found myself face to face with a man with a nondescript face, dressed in dull, grey clothes. He was holding a cudgel in one hand, and he was giving me a dead-eyed stare.

Defensively, I began to back away from him. “Who are you?” I asked, but I was answering the question myself. A squatter? A burglar? The landlord? Nay, I had the sinking feeling that another of Paloma’s kind stood before me.

“Nevermind none’a that,” he said as he casually plodded after me, slapping his cudgel against the palm of his empty hand. “Whatcha got in yer pockets, yer honor, that’s what I wanna know. An’ ye know what they say: the fella with the weapon gets ta arsk the questions.”

An instinct made me duck just barely in time to dodge a swing from another cudgel. There was a second man, almost identical to the first one in every way, who had sneaked up behind me!

“I have no money!” I objected as I backed away from them down a side hallway, struggling to remember any kind of spell I might use in this situation.

“Then we’ll just cut yer up an’ sell yer fer longpork,” the two men chorused, a smirk on their lips that did not reach their dull eyes. They started to advance on me—and a strong hand grabbed me by the shoulder and pulled me back. Paloma *flowed* into the space I had occupied a moment before, the magical quarterstaff we’d found in the Retreat in hand.

"I don't recall inviting you two into my house," she said in a bland tone.

"You were not to *leave* this house without permission," the two men chorused, their eyebrows drawing down in a frown. "You were not to bring anyone here. Cede the meat to us. Fight us now, and it's trea—"

Paloma spun the quarterstaff so quickly that it became a blur, and cracked one of the two in the skull. Even as he staggered back, the other one darted forward, cudgel swinging at Paloma's wrist. It bounced off of an invisible barrier of some sort.

He wanted to disarm her—they want her alive for something?

"Run, Victor!" Paloma shouted without looking back at me. She snapped her staff up in what I recognized as an *en garde*-position, and from there spun into a series of jabs and swings that forced her standing opponent to move back. "There's more of them coming! Get away!"

I took two hesitant steps back away from the confrontation, almost turning to run as instructed—I seemed fairly useless, after all. Instead of making what would surely have been a wise break for it, I pulled one of the sealed flasks from my bag. With a shout of, "We should get away together!" I pitched the flask past Paloma, past her nearest assailant, and it broke against the second man, who was coming back forward. There was a *whoosh* of fire as he was engulfed, and burning fluid splashed upon the back of the nearer man as well. Now aflame, both men howled in unison.

There was a *pang* sound from the more distant burning man, then a dark green plume of noxious fumes began to well up from the fire. I surmised that some vessel in his clothes had overheated and ruptured, and now its contents were interacting with the alchemist's fire—a new and unexpected danger. Copious volumes of the gas began to choke the corridor, and I could feel my eyes and lungs start to sting.

"I said RUN!" I heard Paloma shout. She coughed a couple of times, then chanted a spell. Heels drummed against the floorboards and I heard the sharp crack of breaking bones. But whose bones? I did not know, and I could not advance.

Blinded and with lungs afire, I felt my way along the wall, hoping in vain to stumble across a way out. Gripping a door jamb, I paused, and as I tried to decide whether to gamble on going through it, a hand caught my wrist. There came a voice: "With me, Victor, with me!" A series of coughs came next, as the vapors affected the speaker, then the hand began to pull. Too ill to think beyond, *the speaker knows me*, I did my best to follow the pull. Further down the hall we went, then there was a turn to the right. The floorboards became cobbles beneath my feet, and as I took a blurry look at the outdoors, I heard the door slam behind me.

The pull continued, around another corner and down a knot of dark alleys. I was at first obliged to follow, doing my part to escape the assailants, but as my vision cleared and my chest ceased to burn, it gradually dawned on me that I did not recognize the dark, hatted figure leading me on. Alarmed, my caught arm performed a flowing trick of its own, and when the black water turned back to flesh, I was grabbing the wrist of my impromptu guide. Abruptly, I pulled the person to a stop, augmented by a stern query: "Who in the Hollow are you? Where are you taking me?"

Snagged, the stranger turned to me on the rebound from his forward motion. Now I saw it was a man, close to my height, but made slightly taller by the bowler hat he wore over his wavy, dirty blond hair. His bluish-green eyes were watery, presumably from the fumes he had dragged me from, and still his somewhat aged face returned a stoic expression. There was a drawn out pause—or at least I felt one—and in it a strange sense of near recognition.

Then his voice broke the silence, lightly accented by Lamordian roots: "I am Georg, here to collect you; deliver you from evil. At your option..." He gestured

down the alleyway with his free hand, which carried a peculiar wooden cane.

But the unique nature of his implement was unimportant in that moment. Those words he said; I knew them. Those same phrases had been the first used by Ciphramir when we met, and I knew it was no coincidence.

That assurance aside, I did not automatically comply. “No, I ... I left Paloma behind. I have to go back.”

“For the doppelganger?” Georg asked incredulously. He looked at the sky, then both ways down the alley. “We don’t have the time. It is well equipped to find its own way.”

“How did you...” I began, but he held his free hand up to silence me. As he transferred the cane to the hand I had snatched, I had a moment to take in its shape. The top of the shaft bent at a right angle, turning into a long, flat handle. From the end opposite the shaft, a long, curved length of wood depended, forming a large hook that made the cane appear as an axe in profile.

“The same way...” His empty hand delved into his breast pocket to retrieve a monocle on a chain. “...that you can tell I’m human.” He presented this to me, and I set it against my own eye.

Through the lens, I saw his face, hands, hat, and cane as they were, but he was not unchanged. His remaining clothes—shirt, trousers, waistcoat, and overcoat—which had been indicative of the Zherisian middle class, now looked distinctly Lamordian in style. This did not alter them much—the two styles are quite similar—except for the overcoat, which turned from cotton to leather and grew to nearly dust the street.

I had but a few moments to study before a sudden tug popped the monocle out of my eye’s orbit. After Georg tucked it back away, he pulled a new thing from under his coat: a collapsed *chapeau claque*, which he handed to me as well. “You should change too.”

I took the hat, and released him so I could expand it to its proper height. Once upon my head, my clothes changed to match, and I seemed the model Zherisian citizen. “Brilliant,” I replied, “but I am not going with you yet.”

Georg’s brow furrowed in annoyance, and he grumbled a few curses as he dug a pocket watch out and checked the time. “Fine,” he said, shoving the watch back where it came from, “but you’re not going back either.” He jabbed the cane at me emphatically. “Stay right here. I’ll look for your doppelganger.” He put his open hand over his face, then drew it down and clenched it into a fist as he spoke the words of a spell. His shape grew indistinct, then he completely vanished. I heard him take off at a run, and knew I was alone.

Had I a clear idea of the path we took, I would have disobeyed almost immediately. The best I could do was to reach the end of the alley in the direction I heard him go, then stood helplessly at the labyrinthine intersection. A distant commotion could be heard, but the direction was not clear enough to risk seeking it out. For five long minutes, I hoped dearly to see Paloma round one of the corners so I knew she was safe.

Instead, I felt a hard point dig into my chest. “Did ‘right here’ move while I was gone?” Georg faded into view before me, the foot of his cane pressed into my sternum.

I grabbed the stick and pushed it away. “Where is she?” I asked peevishly.

“When I got there, I found two doppelgangers choked to death in the hallway, casualties of the fumes. Four more were crawling through, looking for something.” He clapped me on the upper arm and got a firm grip. “No sign of that staff. Your friend is in the wind, and we should be too.”

Disappointed, but at least assured to some degree, I let him turn me back into the alley. There was not much we could do to find her ourselves, but if we

got to Ciphramir, I was sure something could be done.

Like cotton packing around fragile cargo, a dense fog enwrapped the factories of Riverside. The faintest hint of morning sun barely touched the wet cobbles, which I suppose suited the two of us just fine as we dodged across the lane from the alleys of Blackchapel. Into the shadows of an ironworks we dove, our black attire making us nearly one with the darkness. Hurrying, scurrying, we wended our way deeper into the commercial heart of Paridon.

Georg's path tended south, aiming to leave the industrial complexes of the factory district behind. That would mean Riverside Square was fast approaching, and I could only assume the Docks were to follow. It was unfortunately easy to anticipate such a course out of the city. It was almost unnecessary to have us followed ... and yet we were.

I would not have noticed our airborne tail on my own. Gulls came and went in the sky above us, and spotting the one that never broke line of sight for more than a bare instant would have been a great feat of observation, especially for one more focused on the streets and buildings. In fact, a second bird had to arrive to draw my attention upward.

We were mere minutes from Riverside Square when I heard the raven's caw. In answer, a distressed squawk painted a picture in my mind an instant before I looked up to see my vision reflected in the sky: the unsteady gull high above us was flapping its wings wildly, trying to regain control as the raven circled around for another dive. With another corvine battle cry, the raven swooped in once more, raking its claws across the gull's back.

Having had quite enough of this, the gull entered a dive of its own, perhaps aiming to find shelter among the buildings below. Rather than pursue, the raven veered off, and a moment later, I lost track of it.

A flash of light; a crack of abrupt sound—the gull tumbled to the ground before us. Dead. As it came within a half-dozen yards of the rooftops, a line of lightning had leapt from the very masonry to meet it. Murmurs went up from the thickening populace of the street, demonstrating how many others shared my confusion.

Cutting through the susurrus, Georg's voice issued a command: "Look at me; do as I do. It is time to change." Turning to him, I saw he had grabbed the brim of his hat on the left side with his right hand. Sliding his grip across to the right, his attire changed around him; the coat became a vest, his trousers turned to a rougher make, and the bowler on his head melted into a flat cap.

Mimicking his motion, my clothes shifted in a similar manner. This subtle magic drew far less attention than the spontaneous electrocution of the gull—a distraction so timely as to be suspicious. "That gull," I said. "It seemed an overwrought diversion."

"That was not the only purpose," Georg replied as he dug into his pocket. "It is as that phrase; killing two birds with ... well, one real dead bird." He didn't laugh, nor even crack a smile at his wordplay. His hand returned with the pocket watch, and he read its face as he continued, "We are rid of that flying spy, and by the time we are through the Square, a replacement won't be able to pick up our trail." Stuffing the watch back away, he added, "Keep the pace, and don't lose me in the crowd."

The press of people in Riverside Square was no less overwhelming than I remembered; I had participated in a brief exchange program during my days at the University of Dementlieu. In fact, the crush of humanity about me this time was most certainly more oppressive than before—I had come to the city in the days before the Zherisian countryside vanished, and was present when they did. Seeking security at the Mordentish Embassy was something with which I had firsthand experience.

I know a mathematician in Mordent who develops theories about the motions of crowds, looking for

patterns in the ebb and flow of the individuals moving about. He had viewed this particular square on several distinct occasions, and viewing it myself once more, I began to pick up patterns myself—not in motion, however, but in dress. As Georg and I pushed and wormed our way through, I picked out no less than five pairs of men dressed exactly as we had been before the shift in garb, and I could not see very much of the Square through the throngs. If there were many more like them, the task of a stalker to pick up our trail would be difficult indeed.

Already, Ciphramir seemed far less the innocent old wizard he first appeared. His reach was long, with an operation at his command. I had the uncomfortable sense that he might be more alike to the Schlossers than he would have me believe. How fortunate it is that they are not on good terms.

Contrary to my earlier expectations, Georg's path did not cut toward the Docks. Instead, we made our way to the Paridon Bridge, across the poisoned Nodnal River. We were to travel through the Bowels, then. I thought perhaps he meant to reach one of the old gates, leading into the Mists. Given how I first reached Ciphramir's house—which I knew to stand no longer—this seemed logical, though difficult, seeing as those gates would be sealed.

However, our journey through the Bowels crept ever southward, until the decrepit, vandalized wall segregating the Southshore borough from the rest of the city loomed over us. We aimed for a door—the wall's only door, proclaimed by signage to be Jack's Way. On approach, Georg began to mutter an incantation, and at no more than his words, the padlocks holding the door shut sprung open and jumped out of their housings, clattering to the ground. As if by a slight kick, the door itself swung partially ajar.

"Oi!" a shout cut through from above. "You can't go through there!" Above us, a roof patrolman of older stock had spotted Georg's arcana. A whistle came out from his collar, and he sent two sharp blasts into the air.

"*Dakje mech!*" Georg grabbed my arm. "Come on! We are not waiting around!" More whistle blasts and shouts to stop came as he pulled me toward and through Jack's Way into the Southshore. On the other side, we broke into a run, shooting out of the alley, across the street, and into an alley once more.

Shortly, another alley split off from ours, but we passed it—not for very long. Pulling me to a stop, Georg hissed, "One more change, quick!" The both of us swiped the brims of our hats once again, and our vests lengthened, regained sleeves, and the buttons split into a double-row. Our hats now became more helmet-like, and Georg's cane shortened to a mere baton.

We were now the picture of Zherisian policemen.

Georg took off back the way we came, and I followed suit, assuming he had a plan. Footfalls echoed ahead, and I could see three more patrolmen coming down the alley after us. As they came nearer, I feared our ruse would crumble the very moment they called out to us, as neither of our accents would pass.

To my great relief, the ploy operated wordlessly. The three approaching policemen diverted down the alley we had passed before, seeing us and assuming the trespassers had not gone our way. With their backs to us, we simply passed the side-alley by, and went back to the street. "Hats off," Georg instructed me. "Foreign dress won't be as conspicuous here."

He had the bowler and the *chapeau claque* away in his coat before we came into view. The elderly roof-watcher had crossed the wall and come to the building's edge to observe the street. In our actual clothes from this distance, we slid right under his notice. We simply joined the traffic as it flowed toward the Docks.

We were not beyond all notice, however. We drew several eyes as we went, both of us being too upscale of dress for the borough, which could be a slum in its worst areas. I had the dubious fortune of not carrying much to steal. My spellbooks were

valuable, but I did not fancy them to be the sort of thing that a footpad would think to lift. Georg, on the other hand, did carry small valuables, but after the first urchin to reach in his pocket was lifted by the wrist to look him in the eye, there were no further incidents. In short order, we came upon the checkpoint to enter the Docks.

Under normal circumstances, we would likely have been questioned, and subjected to some level of search if we seemed suspicious. People on their way out of the city had an easier time of it than those on their way in. I was still nervous, though, as I didn't know what spies—be they doppelgangers or servants of the Red Haunt—might patrol the checkpoints.

Normal circumstances were not to be. As we approached, Georg kept checking his pocket watch, walking more slowly as he did. Intermittently, he glanced over his shoulders from the corners of his eyes. The crowd had no patience for this, and many people were starting to flow around us. All the while, the low, wooden building came nearer, as did the small passage through it which we were bound to enter.

When Georg's pace normalized once more, we had the misfortune of walking right before two loud men, who were nattering on about the sorry state of the borough. Each took turns heaping blame on the foreign element that kept spreading, one complaining that the expansion of Freak Street would soon put calibans next door to him, the other claiming that the half-Vistani would soon curse all of the stores out of business, and so on. It was exceedingly ignorant discourse, and quite tactless to have in the open, in earshot of many who were being indicted by it. As the queue formed before the checkpoint, the men lined up right behind us, making an already anxious wait even less tolerable.

Steps forward came at irregular intervals, as people with more or less complicated business were filtered one-by-one into the Docks. Many long minutes passed, with the bigots always at our backs, before

we were next in line. As we waited for the man in front of us to get through his interaction with the guards, I attempted to distract myself by regarding the newcomers to the Southshore, leaving the inbound checkpoint to my left. Laborers came by, as well as immigrants, and just as the man before us was being allowed out, three men with dark hair came in, speaking to each other in *patterna*—half-Vistani. They looked like they belonged to the Captains of the Mists to me, and as it happened, that was exactly what the two boorish men behind me were talking about now. They were describing the organization in unflattering terms, and the incoming Captains heard them straight away.

The Captains came over, icily asking the men what they meant by their epithets and accusations. The men's eyes registered surprise and unease, but rather than back down, they brought bravado to the forefront. They doubled down on their assessments of the Captains and half-Vistani in general, seemingly daring these Captains to cause a stir about it.

The invitation was accepted. One of the Captains pushed one of the loudmouthed pair, and he started to yell and push right back. Tempers rose, language devolved into a crossfire of derogatory insults, and now the flow of people in the street became disordered. People entering from the Docks were stopping to see the commotion, and people trying to leave were blocked by the five angry men.

Being adjacent to the checkpoint, the argument couldn't escalate into true fisticuffs before the guards intervened. The ones who had just let the Captains in rushed over, as did the ones controlling the outgoing passage, and the quarrelsome quintet was surrounded, with its most physical participants being pulled bodily back from each other.

It was in this confusion that Georg and I were able to walk through the checkpoint, unnoticed. As with the copycats in Riverside Square, the scene was an uncanny demonstration of forethought, almost too perfect to be of human design. Right in the middle of it, however, I knew it was no accident.

We walked through the Docks, beyond the businesses and onto the piers, constantly moving farther toward the fringes. The further out we went, the thicker the fog got, refusing to burn off under the sun's rays. I stuck close to Georg, making sure we didn't accidentally wander in separate directions. Hooded laborers periodically appeared out of the fog, pushing barrows and carts along, unloading docked ships, stacking crates and barrels, and performing other such tasks as befit the locale.

Fewer and fewer workers passed us as we made our way along the most extreme stretch of the pier Georg had chosen. All that did were going in the opposite direction, back toward land. We were far out into the harbor now. It was treacherously misty, and if Georg hadn't been walking before me, I would have feared to fall off the unexpected end of the pier with every step. As it was, I actually expected to soon find the wood beneath my feet replaced with flagstones, and an incongruous front door to appear before us. It wasn't the most logical expectation, given that I witnessed the destruction of Ciphramir's mist-bound house.

Instead, a shape loomed out of the fog on the left side of the pier. It looked to be a large creature, with a snarling maw of teeth and two outstretched claws. It held still as we approached, however, and once I caught the glimpse of a ship's hull spreading out behind it, I knew it was a figurehead on a bowsprit. Nearer now, I could tell it had a feline head, but its skin was broken up into scales, and its forelimbs were webbed, making it appear as a strange fusion of hunting cat and sea monster.

As I regarded it, a shape came through the fog and landed on the carving's head—it was an albatross. It stared right back at me, squinting its eyes and cocking its head as though it were sizing me up. It spread its wings and stretched its neck forward, looking as though it meant to fly straight at me. Ultimately, it did not, but it kept adjusting its footing to aim in my direction, never letting the threat of attack lessen. I walked on after Georg, but the bird's

antics kept me unnerved and looking over my shoulder.

A gangplank slid slowly across the pier before us as the ship rocked from side to side. Onto this Georg walked, and I followed suit, both apprehensive about this mysterious vessel and assured knowing Ciphramir's hand was in this. It was a fragile assurance, I admit, for though he had only helped me before, he hadn't exactly had the time to show any more sinister side he might possess.

I heard movement on the deck of the ship, of many hands doing their jobs. Ropes were being pulled, tied down, and let out. Winches were creaking as loads were lifted, lowered, and dragged. Barrels were being rolled along the boards, some of them sloshing as they went. Nearing the top of the gangplank, I came to see many of these activities, though only at the edges of my vision. My entire focus was on the lone man in the middle of the deck, sitting in a wheeled chair.

"Welcome aboard the *Sea Cat*, Victor," said Ciphramir, his bright, golden eyes piercing the fog to greet me. He was backed up against the main mast, with a thick wooden board wedged under the front of his wheels, thus keeping him safe from rolling with the motion of the ship. As we came closer and the fog obscured him less, I could see he was wearing the same benevolent smile he had given me when we first met.

He extended a hand to me in greeting, and I took it in mine. "I am beyond grateful to you, and to Georg," I said, nodding in his direction, "for coming back for me. But..." I paused, considering my next words carefully. Ciphramir waited patiently, not looking at me with concern, but merely the raised eyebrows of curiosity.

Finding my words, I continued, "... there was another I escaped the Retreat with, whom I had hoped to leave the city with. She and I were separated just before Georg found me. Is it in your power to find her as well?"

Ciphramir's smile faded into a look of careful consideration. "Perhaps," he replied. "However, my preparations to retrieve you are now spent, and I dare not send anyone into the city again. I'll not further test the Red Haunt so close to her home, not this day."

Crestfallen, I started to retract my hand from his, but he held on a moment longer. "I did not say I would do nothing at all. Tell me about her."

Hope returned. "Her name is Paloma ... but there is no description I could give you to recognize her by. She is a doppelganger."

Unlike Georg, Ciphramir didn't react with incredulity or derision at the idea of finding her. He just continued to listen patiently, so I went on. "She was carrying a unique staff, with hummingbirds and kingfishers twining up its length. As long as she keeps it, it may be used to know her by."

"Last known location was a house in Blackchapel," Georg interjected. "A trail might be picked up there."

Ciphramir nodded, and reached out into the air. There, with a quiet whoosh of feathers against air, a raven—the same raven that attacked the gull, perhaps?—swooped down to perch on his hand. He brought it near him, and began to whisper in its ear. "Find Fenraed in Nossos," he instructed. "Tell him he must search Paridon for the doppelganger Paloma, she of the hummingbird and kingfisher staff." He then held the bird out to Georg. "Tell Yissith where the search begins, then send her on."

Georg approached and extended his hand, which the raven hopped onto. He too began to whisper to it, giving it directions as he strode toward the opposite side of the ship. Once there, he tossed the raven outward, and it took to the air, disappearing again into the fog.

Behind me, I heard the gangplank being drawn onboard. A distance away to my right, a voice bellowed orders to the crew, who unfurled a select

few sails to catch the wind and turn us away from the dock.

"I promise you, Victor," Ciphramir said, as he bent over to pull the safety board out from before his chair, "if she can be found, she will be, and I will then do what I can to bring her to safety." He turned himself to his left, and carefully rolled toward the back of the ship. "Come along with me to the cabin."

"Where is the ship going to take us?" I asked, following him.

"The ship is heading for the Mists, to go about its business. It will not be taking us anywhere beyond that. When you are made ready, we shall leave it behind and enter my home."

Before us, the quarterdeck emerged from the fog. To the right and left, stairs led up to it, and between these stairs was a doorway. Georg had reached it ahead of us, and when he opened it, light spilled out onto the main deck. Beyond, lit by oil lanterns and lined with paintings and displays, was a long hallway—too long for the length of the ship that remained. Georg stepped through, closing the door behind him.

"You have rebuilt? Already?" I asked, remembering what little of Ciphramir's abode I had seen before it collapsed into the Mists.

"Indeed," Ciphramir replied. "It was no mean feat, and there was a lot to replace, but I had the luxury of magic to quicken the assembly. I had simply called it 'home' before, but a friend of mine dubbed its reincarnation 'Twice-Risen Manor,' and that has stuck."

Just as we reached the door, I caught sight of a silhouette on the quarterdeck, standing at the ship's wheel. It stood tall and broad-shouldered, with a wide-brimmed, plumed hat upon its head, but no more could be discerned. I turned my gaze back to the door, which Ciphramir was now opening...

... not onto a hallway, but into a cabin.

It was well-furnished, with gorgeous wooden furniture, and lit by torches in wall sconces—clearly magical flames, otherwise the beams they were mounted beneath would be marked by soot and char. As I followed Ciphramir inside, I saw a table laden with truly artful maps, an open cabinet bearing many pristinely polished sextants and mariner’s astrolabes, and—far less explicable—a stack of large, golden bowls in the middle of the floor.

As I closed the door, Ciphramir separated the bowls. Each was of fine make, but simple, with perfectly sculpted form, light amounts of decorative scalloping around the edge, and no tarnish, dents, or other signs of wear. “Before we enter Twice-Risen Manor, I do have to imperil your feelings of welcome,” he said, arranging the bowls as space permitted—two on the floor, and one on the table, after the maps were relocated to a bed in the far corner. “What do you have on you that was present at the Retreat?”

“Well,” I began, taking stock of my scant possessions, “my clothes, first of all, which Amourette Schlosser sewed for me.” Ciphramir’s eyebrows ascended again, now in mild surprise and wariness. “My spellbook as well, and a refurbished copy made by Imogen Schlosser.” These I brought out from their hiding places to show. “I was also given this amulet...” I trailed off, for as I reached into my collar to bring the item forth, I found no chain about my neck. I set the books down beside the bowl on the table, and began to pat through all of my pockets. I knew I had the red amulet, a disk with the image of a curled fox etched into its surface, on me when I left the Retreat. I had felt its weight most of the morning, but ... somewhere between Paloma’s house and arriving at the *Sea Cat*, I must have lost track of it. Perhaps I was robbed on our way out of the Southshore, but could a pickpocket have really taken it without my noticing? It seemed unlikely, but something happened. Perhaps it was taken from me as mysteriously as it first appeared, in the claw of that succubus sculpture in the Retreat. Whatever the reason, I certainly did not have the amulet anymore.

Even stranger, I didn’t have any feelings of loss. I was confused, but the unpleasant sensation of knowing a possession is missing was absent. “I ... I must have lost it,” I murmured.

“Ah ... a shame,” Ciphramir replied, then proceeded with business. “I ask, because I don’t want anything brought along that the Red Haunt has seen, that could be tracked. Not without taking certain countermeasures first, that is.” He reached for my spellbooks, but pulled up short of touching them. “The spellbooks—may I?” I assented, and he picked them up. “These will need to stay on the ship for a while, not more than the night.” He placed them on the bed, beside the maps. “The clothes can be dealt with far faster. I expect—shoes, socks, trousers, shirt, waistcoat, tailcoat...” He was counting on his hand in an odd manner: thumb down alone, index finger down alone, thumb and index, middle, thumb and middle, middle and index. “I apologize, but there are undergarments as well, I take it?”

Embarrassingly enough, I had to admit there were not. When the golem *Nummer Dreizehn* handed the garments to me, I had not dared ask. Ciphramir, however, took this as positive news. “That is one less thing to worry about, then. No more than an hour will it take. Would you please place everything but the shirt and breeches in this bowl?” He pointed to one of the two on the floor.

I was not eager to disrobe again, not since my examination by Katia Schlosser—nor since the last awful dream I had in the Retreat. I did comply, and did feel somewhat fortunate that complete surrender of my garments was not required ... yet.

Ciphramir examined the clothes, feeling the fabric, flexing the soles of the shoes, twisting the buttons, and grudgingly giving subtle indications of appreciating the fine workmanship. He then went to the side of the room and opened a crate there, from which he drew two bolts of cloth, one of gray, the other of black. A small bag followed, which clicked and jingled as he set it in his lap, as well as a few spools of diversely colored thread, silver among

them. Finally, he pulled forth a pair of old, worn out leather shoes, black like the ones I had removed. All of these he brought to the bowl on the table, tossing in the thread and shoes, dumping out the bag, which was full of many different types of buttons, and laying over it all a healthy layer of each color of cloth. The partially unrolled bolts were laid on the floor by the table.

Next, Ciphramir began chanting and passing his hands over the contents of the table bowl. Vapors rose from the bowl, of black and gray, with tiny flecks of silver, and I stepped nearer to look. Inside, holes were being eaten in the cloth, as the fabric turned to smoke under the influence of his spellcraft. A thin silver stream, its source hidden, leaked out from under the edge of the disintegrating cloth, and I knew the threads were being affected in the same manner.

He moved his focus to the bowl holding my clothes, and the fabric-fog drifted down toward it. As it neared, a fog of similar color began to bleed from holes forming in the tailcoat. Where the holes in the raw cloth grew constantly as material was eaten away, the holes in the tailcoat did not expand far. Instead, they moved about, with the incoming vapor replacing material on one side as quickly as the material was taken from the other. Little by little, Ciphramir was replacing the components of the garment.

With this started, he made a backhanded sweep toward the final bowl, as though casting something away. The vapors from the tailcoat now spilled over there, and began to coalesce. What had been fine cloth now gathered into a tumorous pile of frayed detritus. Without any semblance of order, the bits of cloth simply agglomerated into this useless clump. Without the aid of further magic, there was no hope of the material being of any use.

This went on for forty minutes, with Ciphramir's focus turning from the tailcoat, to the socks, and finally to the shoes in turn. In the aftermath, my clothing appeared unchanged, but I knew that

wasn't true. The materials in the table bowl all looked motheaten, and what had been the original materials of my clothes now sat dejectedly in the final bowl, beyond mundane repair. "Now is the time for the rest of it," said Ciphramir as he laid the finished articles across a nearby chair. "Why don't you borrow one of Captain Dvarik's robes from the closet for the time being."

I opened the wardrobe and looked over the selection. There were heavy fur coats, flowing silk kimonos, kaftans of soft camel undercoat—altogether too luxurious a collection for a sea vessel, though in keeping with the aesthetic of the well-kept cabin. After placing my shirt and breeches into the bowl, I wrapped myself in one of the kaftans—it was the first garment of Pharazian origin I had seen in person, so I took the opportunity for a novel experience.

Ciphramir, who had been politely turned around during my change, now commenced with casting his spell upon the final two articles, replacing the cloth, buttons, and threads of the shirt and breeches. As he worked, I felt a tickle on my neck, and reached up to pull a hair from the collar of the kaftan. It was short and dark, and when I examined the collar more closely, I saw a great deal of this hair gathered upon it. Examining it, I came to feel that it was closer to animal fur than human hair, and I wondered what creature the captain kept that shed on these robes so. Perhaps a cat, as I knew Ciphramir himself to possess. It might even be in the room with us, hiding under the bed.

Once Ciphramir's magic was done, as I changed out of the kaftan and into my original—well, perhaps not anymore—clothes, I asked, "If you mean to do this with the spellbooks, is there a risk that the contents will be damaged?"

"With the proper caution, they will be alright," Ciphramir answered, once again facing away from me. "That sort of caution takes time, so you will need to be apart from them for longer." He chuckled. "If the wait for spellbooks seems long, imagine how

long it would take to safely perform that magic upon a living thing! If I could perform a miracle like that, well ... I wouldn't need this chair."

He reached down, and lifted a wad of ruined fibers from the waste bowl. "What is your opinion on the puzzle of the grandfather's axe?" he inquired. He started pulling the clump apart in his hands. "If I could take this material, and put it in the shape of your clothes again, which suit would be the original?"

"An old and confusing thought experiment," I replied as I shouldered on the tailcoat. "I do feel that the original matter must count for something." A small epiphany occurred to me then, and I continued, "It does, doesn't it? You said this was to keep the items from being tracked. If these clothes were truly the originals, would there be any point to this activity?"

"Ah! Exactly!" he cried, turning about to meet my gaze with a broad smile. "Divinations won't be looking for the clothes you wear now. The anchor of familiarity and identity has been sabotaged by the replacement. Soon, the spellbooks will be made safe from her as well."

"But she could just as easily track me directly," I rejoined, my mood deflating in an instant.

"Indeed, but that we have to live with," Ciphramir said, his tone serious, yet not defeated. "Other protections will keep you safe in my home, and I'll have another protection for you when you leave." He went to the door then, and opened it onto the deck. "But before you leave, you will have to enter! Come along."

Out on deck once more, Ciphramir closed the cabin door after us. Following a brief pause, he opened it again, revealing the hallway Georg had entered just over an hour ago. He rolled through, then bid me enter. "One to disembark the *Sea Cat*. Welcome to Twice-Risen Manor."

THE SEA CAT

The *Sea Cat* is a frigate that was built in the Mists, using the reality wrinkle of the water imp Thalsefelis as her foundation. She can dive under the water as if under the effect of a *submerge ship* spell (*Spell Compendium* page 211), and she can also alter the appearance of her hull and sails to disguise herself as if by a *mirage arcana* spell. Additionally, the ship is cloaked in deadly anti-divination magic. Anyone attempting to use a spell of the scrying subschool to perceive the interior of the *Sea Cat* is struck by a *greater dispel magic* and a *weird* spell, both as if cast by a 20th level spellcaster. Other divination effects that attempt to ascertain information about a subject (such as *status* or *prying eyes*) are struck by *greater dispel magic* once they cross the edge of Thalsefelis' reality wrinkle, and spells that locate a target (such as *locate object*) are blocked by the edge of Thalsefelis' reality wrinkle. His reality wrinkle is only 500 feet in radius, and he can range away from the *Sea Cat* as long as she remains within it. If the *Sea Cat* leaves Thalsefelis' reality wrinkle, she breaks apart and sinks.

Two *rods of force* (*Magic Item Compendium* page 173) are mounted on the quarterdeck at the rear of the ship, where they can be used to blast enemy vessels or to place *walls of force* in front of pursuing ships to disable them. A door at the base of the quarterdeck opens on the cabin of Captain Dvarik (see The Circle of Ciphramir sidebar), but to Ciphramir and a trusted few, this door can open on the first floor of Twice-Risen Manor. Below the main deck are two gun decks and a hold. Each gun deck has six external hatches to each side, with three *blast globes* (*Magic Item Compendium* page 152) set below each hatch. These blast globes are specially keyed to reform in their housings beneath the hatches, and they can only be directed against targets outside of the ship.

Ciphramir ushered me into a hall with another door at its end. There were various artifacts hanging on the walls, and I dawdled slightly to look at them.

Here was a spear, the haft made of a black wood I did not recognize, the blade like a miniature scimitar. Opposite it hung a papyrus scroll marked with spindly cuneiform script, whose content I intuited was a mathematical formula using a base four system. Next to that hung a strange thing, a web of thread suspended in a circle made of thin strips of wood. A single glass bead hung in the web, gleaming like a baleful eye. Beyond that, a feather that gleamed and shimmered like a flame—and turned out to radiate heat when I approached.

“I thought all your souvenirs lost when your old house dispersed into the Mists,” I marveled.

“They were,” Ciphramir replied, and for a moment a shadow lay over his features. Then he smiled, dispelling the moment. “I am blessed with generous friends. They sent me these items from their private collections as housewarming gifts. Of course, their friendship proved far more warming than mere items, but even so, they do create a nice atmosphere, don’t they?”

From the hallway, we passed into the foyer. It was a large, wood-paneled room. To either side of us were closed doors, one directly adjacent to the foot of a staircase that climbed the right-hand wall to reach a landing along the back. Three doors opened off the landing, and one stood below it. It felt ... hauntingly familiar.

On one wall hung a painting of a mountainscape, whose grim peaks must be those of lost Mount Grysl. Next to it, a shelf full of exquisite Vos nesting dolls, which was flanked on its other side by a tapestry with a uniquely Darkonese symbology... Two spears, crossed over a shield of wooden slats, covered with a pale, striped hide. The fanged skull of some prehistoric feline.

The sense of familiarity became eerie, and I repressed a shudder. Of course the items were not the same, but they were similar. And they were all positioned in such a way that the foyer of Twice-Risen Manor looked very similar to that of my host’s previous abode. This suggested either a yearning to

recreate what was lost, or else a certain rigidity of mind that struck me as unappealing.

“I want to show you my office,” Ciphramir said, pointing to the third door on the landing from the stairs. “I actually have something of yours up there.” He looked at me, his face almost sheepish—a perception augmented by the white hair on his head and face. “Would you help me up to the landing again?”

As I pulled him backward up the stairs, I used some of my breath to ask, “Why exactly did you put stairs in your house, and your office at the top of them? Even after rebuilding, I might add.”

He was helping me this time as well, and still his voice did not sound as though his exertions gave him any difficulty. “I know it isn’t practical, but I do like the aesthetics of a grand staircase.” He made some tsking noises. “The real oversight was not including a ramp when I rebuilt. Perhaps I ought to renovate.”

There was a rattle from one of the doors on the ground floor, and it swung slightly ajar. Pushing through the opening came a little, black face, streaked with white; the head of a badger. It looked up at us, its attention drawn by the repeated clunking noise, and came the rest of the way through. The dark gray body that followed after the head was immense, sloshing about in an almost liquid manner as the obese little mustelid waddled over to the base of the stairs. With its jaw hanging open in an excited grin, it began hauling itself up after us. Though it was alone, it certainly was carrying the weight of a second creature, and so it did not gain ground on me and Ciphramir.

“It’s good to see you, Oedohl,” Ciphramir called down to the pursuing badger. First a cat, then a bird, and now this squat little tagalong; the master of Twice-Risen Manor clearly liked to keep pets. Smart ones, too; a raven that knew speech, and a badger that could open doors!

As we finally reached the landing, I saw behind me the lounging form of his cat, Somnirot. Its head was

up, and its half-lidded eyes were regarding the two of us with what felt like contempt; we had been making too much of a scene to let it rest. Foiled in what seemed to be its sole purpose in life, it came to its feet, stretched, and sauntered over to us. No longer occupied with the climb, Ciphramir reached out to pet the indolent little beast, then rolled himself toward the door at the other end of the landing.

As he brought his silver key out once more, I had an acute flash of *déjà vu*, recalling when he made that very door collapse into a coffer as he made ready to flee before the coming of the Red Haunt. There was something else too, something Charissa had said not long afterward.

“Ciphramir,” I said, my words halting him before he inserted the key into the lock, “are you able...” My nerve faltered, for what I was about to say would be a wildly offensive impugment of his motives. I tried again: “Would you be capable of draining me of knowledge and life...?” I stopped myself from adding “like an orange,” so as to not so closely parrot the demon’s words.

He raised one eyebrow, no longer smiling. “Did the Red Haunt tell you such things? I do hope you are taking her words with a grain of salt, after everything that has happened.” He wasn’t angry, but I still felt poorly for having asked my question. “Have no fear, I cannot distill you in such a way. She is casting aspersions, based on wild misinterpretation.” Now his smile returned, and he added, “And I am glad for it. The less she knows, the better.”

Focusing once more on the door, he inserted the key. Rather than three turns to the right, as he had done before, he only turned it once to the left, then removed the key and tucked it away. He then grasped the golden handle—which once must have been decoratively carved, based on the appearance of the plate around it, but had somehow become almost entirely smoothed by use—and opened the door inward.

I followed him through that sigil-etched door into a moderately spacious room, significantly larger than the Captain’s cabin, but slightly less expensively furnished. What furniture there was—a desk facing away from the right-hand wall, a chest of drawers against the wall by the door, a bookshelf covering the entire opposite wall—was fine, of that I have no doubt, but little effort had gone into maintaining it. The desk bore scrapes on its sides from what I presume were encounters with the wheelchair, the drawers looked to have gone unvarnished for quite some time, and the shelves sagged so severely that they would surely keep that shape even without any loads. Completing the image was the floor, scuffed heavily by transit.

There were three truly remarkable things which caught my eye in this room. First and least among them were the books on the shelf. They were of various dimensions and styles, but they skewed large, and I caught sight of protective runes tooled into many of their spines; runes to keep off water, to kill bookworms, to harm those who opened the tomes without permission. They were spellbooks, nearly every single one of them, I believe. It was not the Library of the Retreat—I would wager that there were at least as many spells and formulae spread through that amazing collection—but it was an incredible concentration of such tomes in this one room. It may have rivaled the spellbook collection of the vampire Delthirius, whose longer shelves had not been so tightly packed, nor necessarily solely populated by grimoires.

As Ciphramir rolled past the bookshelf and around the opposite side of his desk, the second thing came to my attention. Behind the desk, behind him, the wall was covered in parchment. A long, wide scroll cascaded down the middle of the wall, with thinner addenda sealed to its sides with wax and unfurled horizontally from it. A spidery, angular script was arranged in strict ranks and filed across its surface, the sharp, dark lines, written in a mixture of red and black ink, giving the impression that the very words

could only be written in anger, or some similar mood.

There was movement around my feet, and the badger and the cat came around either side of my legs. They too looked upon the scroll, and went a few paces beyond me to sit and stare. As I walked past them and examined their expressions, they bowed their heads in unison. Had it only been the cat, I would have thought it was tiring again, but instead, it seemed as though they were paying their respects.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: HONORED BY IMPS

Before being appointed Margrave, Ciphramir worked as the High Barrister of the Low Court, effectively the main liaison between Othrir and the Lower Planes. It was his duty to represent Othrir's interests as they pertained to interplanar affairs in fiendish territories. Given that the spirits of slain members of Othrir's ruling class had to spend extended periods of time in the Lower Planes while their bodies reconstituted, their interests in those regions were extensive.

Near the end of his long tenure, he completed a landmark argument which actually went so far as to result in a complex addendum to the Pact Primeval (see *Fiendish Codex II: Tyrants of the Nine Hells* page 4), the document which codified the rules of Hell since time immemorial. The main purpose of this addendum arranged for the treatment of souls belonging to Othrite half-rakshasas (see *Dragon Magazine* issue 313 page 96) and tiger masks (see *Dragon Magazine* issue 300 page 64), who were not guaranteed the endless reincarnation of their masters. However, Ciphramir added obscure amendments of his own; minor modifications that seemed innocuous or nonsensical to most, but added up to make a measure of difference in the lives of one class of Hell's least denizens: imps.

Most of the other barristers in the team that formed the addendum could not really say what the imps gained from it. There are some rumors that their position has been renegotiated to a form of

indentured servitude, guaranteeing promotion, mortal incarnation, or freedom after enough time has been spent in service. In truth, the benefits are more mercurial, and likely only understood by the imps themselves. In any case, they have been eternally grateful to Ciphramir since that day. In contrast, many greater denizens of Hell found these mysterious boons to be beyond insulting to the infernal order, but thanks to non-retaliation agreements laid down by his predecessors in the Low Court, Ciphramir cannot come to harm over his work as High Barrister. It is speculated, however, that his promotion to Margrave was partially meant to take him out of the Low Court to appease angered devils.

As a result of his accomplishment, all imps originating from the Hells of his homeworld feel indebted to him, and he has many of them under his employ. Regular imps; bloodbag, euphoric, and filth imps (*Fiend Folio* page 97); choleric, melancholic, phlegmatic, and sanguine imps (*Dragon* issue 338 page 32); other lesser-known varieties (see the New Monsters section below); all have answered his call at some point or another. There is no pact that keeps them under his influence; they serve of their own free will. Even imps from Hells not connected to his world are liable to come to respect him, once word of his deed reaches their ears. Conversely, his presence offends most greater devils that become aware of his work, and they will have nothing to do with him. Assassin imps (*Denizens of Dread* page 118) are not found among Ciphramir's infernal aides, as they are creatures of the Mists, and true imps do their best to protect Ciphramir from such impostors.

Some imps of particular note among his associates are

Somnirot: A sloth imp that lounges about Ciphramir's home all day and night, taking the form of an orange domestic tabby cat. Despite his laziness, he serves a critical purpose, as it is upon his reality wrinkle that Ciphramir has built his house.

Somnirot's reality wrinkle allows Ciphramir to impose stability on the Mists and move his home through domain borders.

Since the events of this tale, Ciphramir has created a *third eye conceal* (*Magic Item Compendium* page 141) which has been fused into Somnirot's skull. This has given Somnirot's cat form an eye-shaped blaze of white fur on its forehead. The *third eye* has been modified to allow Ciphramir to bypass it if need be.

Oedohl: This bloodbag imp overcame a lesser variant of the disease fiendburn (see the Fiendburn sidebar), and now his blood carries the power to suppress infections of the fiendburn virus. He prefers to trundle about in the form of an obese badger.

Skeever and Squalimous: When Ciphramir first crossed into Darkon, its curse began to eat away at his memories. As his quite long story was scrawled into the Book of Names, Azalin's familiar Skeever took notice, and came to know of the great service Ciphramir had performed for all imp-kind. In an act of gratitude, Skeever tore out and burned the Book's section on Ciphramir, and managed to warn him about the nature of Darkon. After that, Ciphramir and Skeever formed a lasting alliance, with Skeever performing Book-related services for Ciphramir. First and foremost, Ciphramir occasionally asked Skeever to provide him with accounts from the Hall of Records, giving him access to the true stories of particular people claimed by Darkon—the Red Haunt among them. Once only, Skeever collaborated in abetting infiltration of Castle Avernus so Ciphramir could access the Book and scratch out his name with a quill of law. In this way, Ciphramir rendered himself immune to Darkon's memory drain.

After Skeever's demise during the Grand Conjunction, Ciphramir developed a rapport with Azalin's new familiar Squalimous, and now Squalimous slips information from the Hall of Records to Ciphramir. When necessary, Squalimous can remove accounts from the Book that have to do with Ciphramir's servants and favorites, but Ciphramir knows to limit this sort of activity, lest

Squalimous get into trouble and be kept from accessing the Book of Names.

Thalsefelis: A water imp that accompanies the *Sea Cat*, preferring the form of an albatross when the ship is above the waves and a sea turtle when it is below. He serves the same purpose as Somnirot, but with respect to the ship.

The third and most perplexing thing was on a wooden plate on Ciphramir's desk, held under a bell jar slightly larger than my head. Inside, a pale membrane shifted and curled upon itself—phased *through* itself, even. It was like gossamer, spectral paper, flowing in a smooth, complicated geometric form, its edges trailing in ways that could not be easily followed by the eye. I stood, jaw relaxed and open, trying to make sense of the curious substance.

Words cut through: "Do you want to touch it?" Ciphramir was looking up at me, his hand poised over the handle of the jar. I nodded, and he lifted it away.

At first, I felt nothing. There was no texture, no chill, no buzz of energy. I tried to take it between my fingers, pinching it gently, and then I did feel some pressure. Evidently, it had some resistance to compression. Still, that was all, and I pulled back so Ciphramir could cover the strange thing once more. "What is it?" I asked.

"According to the creation myths of my homeland," Ciphramir replied, "The creation of the elements did not go as planned. As the fourth element was drawn from the forge, it ignited and was nearly destroyed. There was not enough left to use, so the Creator took the base fire that sprang forth—abundant as it had become—and named it the fourth element in the original's place. Precious little of the Lost Element survived, and it was given no name in the course of Creation, making it unique among all things." He gestured at the bell jar. "If you would believe it, this is a piece of that element."

Far out of my depth, I did not know what to believe. The story seemed fantastical, but for lack of a better

explanation for this bizarre membrane, it seemed as good an answer as any. It was also an origin myth I had never heard before, and I would have asked him what land it came from, had he not already occupied himself looking through his desk drawers.

“Ah, here you are,” he said, drawing a book into view. He set it down on the desktop, and I recognized it immediately, to my great surprise. “*The Theory and Production of Exudates*,” he said, “A Thesis submitted to the University of Dementlieu, May the Fifth, 745 BC.” He turned it so the words were right-side up to me. “Why in the world would something as interesting as this get suppressed?”

It was a good question, with answers that I didn’t fully agree with to this day. My advisor and the examination committee thought that the production of potions which took effect on those *around* the imbibers could have significant consequences, not all of them good. “My advisor explained his reasoning by example,” I replied. “Suppose a man brews a *fireball* into a flask, then drinks it in the midst of an unsuspecting crowd. New opportunities for destruction were evident—but not really more than magic already provides.” I shrugged. “But when they said they would accept it and graduate me, I felt an argument with my teachers over publishing my work was not prudent, nor something I had the nerve for. I accepted my doctorate, and let the matter be. How ever did you get ahold of this?”

“I know quite a lot of people, and am very convincing,” Ciphramir said. “In very particular circumstances, I happen to agree with your advisor. If Harmony Schlosser had found it first, I think great evil would have come of it.” He pushed it toward me. “It is yours to keep, unless you want me to hold onto it.”

I did not doubt he could keep it far safer than I could, but the personal attachment won out. I picked up the book. “Thank you, I will.”

I heard the rattle of a door handle behind me, and I turned to see a portal in the far wall I had missed before. It loudly creaked open into the next room,

and at first, I thought the individual opening it to enter Ciphramir’s office was a young lad. The short, brown hair—a bit shorter than mine, in fact—that laid flat across the head, along with the black trousers, white button-front shirt, and dark blue waistcoat, created a fair illusion, but the vague hint of a figure within those clothes brought a modicum of doubt. My suspicions were deepened by the jeweled, silver dragon cuff that curled around the right ear, but though it hardly seemed like the sort of thing a man would consider wearing, I must admit that it was far from conclusive. Nor did any of the other jewelry—six pearl buttons down the waistcoat, a pair of gold cufflinks also in a dragon theme, three rings, and a chain pinned between the lapels of the shirt—give a real indication of gender.

The newcomer smiled at me, and I saw that the four upper premolars—the two pairs of teeth just behind the upper eyeteeth—had been replaced with silvery metal. Then the teeth parted, and the voice that came through them made my mind up instantly. “Ciphramir told me we were expecting a guest,” she said, then strode across the room to extend her hand in greeting. “Pleased to make your acquaintance. My name is Federlin. And you are?”

I grasped her hand—the contact between us partially blocked by her fingerless, indigo gloves—and shook it. “Victor Gagné,” I answered. “Pleased to meet you as well.”

Her vibrant, green eyes looked over my shoulder to Ciphramir. “You brought *him* back?” she asked, a jocular smile across her face. “Wasn’t having our house collapse once enough?”

She was obviously teasing him, but I felt a pang of guilt nonetheless. “I am very sorry for my part in that. Were you present when it happened?”

“Don’t apologize, Victor,” Ciphramir cut in from behind me. “It was *my* fault for trusting the Red Haunt.”

Federlin brought both of her hands out to the sides, and slightly up, adding an inclined head to make a

gesture of concession. “I am just saying you might be bad luck,” she told me. “Until we are sure, I would prefer you did not visit *my* house. I was there at the time of the incident.” She then addressed Ciphramir: “And I will be going back soon. I just stopped by to make some edits.”

“Are you sure you cannot stay for a while?” Ciphramir entreated. “I thought perhaps you could join us for luncheon later. And I could use help replacing the matter in Victor’s spellbooks.”

“Nay, I really must go. I have things I must attend to. I’ll return for the spellbooks tonight, and try to make time for supper tomorrow.” Very forwardly, she grasped my elbow and guided my hand into hers for a shake farewell. “In all seriousness, it is very nice to meet you. I hope I do receive you at my house one day. I think you would find it quite agreeable.” She gave me another warm, light-reflecting smile, and turned to walk out onto the landing. “Until we meet again,” she said, looking back over her shoulder.

“Farewell,” I replied, and the door swung shut behind her. The last glimpse I caught through it was of Oedohl, who had slipped out just ahead of her, and was looking up at her with its eager, almost dog-like grin. The overly friendly creature hardly behaved like a badger at all.

I heard the uncoiled squeak of Ciphramir’s chair, and he passed me by on the right. “As long as you are up here, come along and see the library.” He rolled through the open door Federlin had entered from, and Somnirot plodded slowly after him.

On passing into the next room, my first impression was of stepping into a schoolhouse. The space was arranged in a manner reminiscent of a classroom, with ten rows of ten desks each, all turned toward the right side of the chamber. Their tops were slanted like drafting tables, and each had a hinge at the back, suggesting that a storage space was under the desktop.

There was no blackboard at the head of the room, but there was a lone desk that was turned opposite

the others, where some leader might sit. A long, low cabinet of drawers was along the wall behind it, each handle surmounted by a brass plaque. The drawers were too small to hold most books, but perhaps an assortment of scrolls could lie within.

The wall opposite the door opened on the sides of several rows of shelves, the aisles between them extending far out of the room. There was something quite odd about how they were arranged, something that looked peculiar, but I couldn’t yet put my finger on it.

Ciphramir rolled around the front of the room to reach the other side, his chair being too wide to go between the desks. “This is where I keep all of the memoirs; all of the stories I have collected.” He swept his hand through the air, and the shelves *moved*. To the left they went, revealing more and more aisles that hid beyond the edge of the opening in the wall. As I watched, I saw that the aisles were not moving all the way back, and I surmised that there was a second layer—indeed, perhaps a third layer, given how long the avenues had seemed before—behind the first that had not been set moving.

Now that I was looking more closely, I slowly came to realize what had been bothering me a moment ago. It was hard to tell, given that the aisles naturally seemed to converge by the nature of perspective, but it became apparent that the aisles were not actually parallel, and the shelves became closer together the deeper in one went. In fact, I suspected that each layer was a concentric ring, with the outermost now revolving about the other two. The curve of the outer edge was almost too gradual to spot, which suggested that the great disk of books that laid before me must be quite large. It was impressive engineering and arcana together, though still not the Library of the Retreat—why do I continue to compliment that blasted place?

Then Ciphramir, a proud grin on his face, brought his hand *up*, and my jaw dropped for the second time in that suite of rooms. The shelves *lifted*, revealing that

the floors of the aisles were the tops of shelves *below*. As the levels rose, one after the other, it became clear that each ring had several floors, with their shelf positions staggered relative to the ones above and underneath. To think, Ciphramir had packed this entire collection into a box on his lap!

He thrust his palm out toward the shelves, and they came to a stop, looking nearly as mundane as they had on my entry to the room, though now the aisles of the second ring no longer aligned with those of the first. "I don't get to show it off very often," he said. "I have come to take it for granted, but I do enjoy seeing the novelty of it play across others' faces."

"It is..." I began, then found no apt words. "I have seen nothing of its like. The desks then are for writers to add to your collection? I take it this space must be filled often, to swell your library so."

"Not often at all, actually," he replied. "I am very protective, and don't allow many access to my literary hoard. These are reading desks, ready for the day I have many more visitors than is ever likely. If you know what you are looking for..." He slapped his hands down on the arms of his wheelchair. "... or you can't fit down the aisles to browse, you simply think of the book you want, and open the desk to get it." He rolled to the head desk, and ushered me over.

When I got there, he opened it, showing that its inside was empty but for several pots of ink. He closed it, concentrated for a moment, then opened it again, revealing that a thick, leather-bound book had appeared. It bore a single rune on its cover, of uncertain origin and meaning, and down its spine was a name, which I craned my neck to read: *'Laurent d'Merat.'* "Who is he?" I asked.

"A good question," Ciphramir said, and he levered open the book about a quarter of the way in, showing two blank pages. As he turned them, unveiling more empty paper, he continued, "He has not come to tell his tale, yet, and it is frankly too early to get it. Some day, though ... some day."

INKCHILDREN

Ciphramir has spent ages collecting stories, but despite his immense collection, he always wishes for more. In every tale, he sees characters whose perspectives went unrecorded, and he longs to know what treasures their lives would offer. Even the accounts he possesses can leave him wanting, as a narrator may skip details Ciphramir wanted to know. In his efforts to resolve these issues, he created the inkchild.

An inkchild is born, and lives life like any other being, but its soul has strong magic grafted to it, a special substructure lying in wait to translate the being from flesh and blood into the written word. One day, each inkchild is destined to be reduced to nothing more than a story, sucked away into a memoir (see *New Magic*) to be read and enjoyed by a cruel magician.

Despite its sorcerous nature, an inkchild has no special abilities. That would interfere with the natural progression of its existence. As a result, it is rather difficult to conclusively identify an inkchild without possessing the book it was bound to at birth. Necromancy that directly tampers with the soul might find the hidden dweomer.

Nevertheless, inkchildren are affected by the forces that manipulated their essence. They take to reading quickly if presented the opportunity, and can use Decipher Script untrained. They never risk drawing a false conclusion from failed checks with the skill, and they even gain an automatic attempt to decipher any script they look over, like an elf passing by a secret door. Even inkchildren whose upbringing left them with extremely limited vocabularies have the capacity to speak verbosely and express themselves perfectly, but episodes of such eloquence are generally triggered by stress and go unnoticed by the inkchild.

Ciphramir has created a few thousand inkchildren throughout the Dread Realms over the years, hoping to harvest a vast trove of tales and perspectives for his library. They are among the most convenient sources of information, much more practical to access than normal mortals. However, no matter how wide a web they cast for their creator, they do not completely solve his intellectual plight. They are a step on the path to more comprehensive story gathering.

“Come,” Ciphramir said in a genial tone. “I do believe it is past time I fulfill my obligations and feed you. It must be about lunchtime.”

Right on cue, my stomach growled. Breakfast—satisfying, though stale as it had been—seemed an eternity ago. Before that, my last meal had been ... it had been the meaty porridge that Katia Schlosser had brought me before my examination at the Retreat.

‘You have choices,’ a voice echoed in my memory; the voice of a vision, conjured by an impossible machine in the dungeons of the Retreat. ‘A lot of them are bad. You can choose not to hurry up and get your ass down to the cellars. You can choose to wait for what the Schlossers will do to you. I can’t stop them. I won’t try again after this. They’ll be sure to either train you up or else tear you to shreds with their experiments. I’m sure they’ll feed you lots more delicious blood, either way.’

A shudder of cold loathing crept up and down my back. Where had the blood come from? Which poor prisoner had the Schlossers bled to fill my belly and speed my healing?

Ciphramir did not appear to have noticed my moment of visceral horror; he was chatting amiably while he moved toward the door. He only paused to scoop up Somnirot and deposit the little beast in his lap; the cat immediately curled up and went to sleep.

“I really should have guests more often, lest I lose all faculty with being a proper host. I am just so busy with my work. There are so many tales that are simply lost, with no one but their protagonist ever any the wiser. Oh—would you help me down again, please?”

Back down the stairs we went, with me struggling to contain Ciphramir’s descent. From the foyer, Ciphramir guided me to his private dining room. Its size was more intimate than extravagant, but it was an elegantly appointed room. A table, carved from a single piece of some unfamiliar, reddish wood, gleamed like a mirror. There was a fire on the hearth, over which hung two moose heads, one male and one female, both masterfully preserved by a taxidermist’s hand. Golden tureens and dishes containing all manner of food stood waiting, as did plates of Rokuma porcelain and cutlery decorated in the finest Mulan styles.

“Come, sit, please sit,” Ciphramir said, as he waved me to a chair left of the head of the table. There was no chair at the head itself, for obvious reasons, as my host took that position himself.

“Help yourself, do,” he said, smiling. “I thought we’d keep things private after your recent exertions. Later, if you feel up to it, it would be my great pleasure to call more of my friends to Twice-Risen and introduce you.”

I paused halfway through ladling Barovian *borscht* onto my plate. “Are many of your friends great wizards like yourself?” I asked.

“Some are, Federlin—my former apprentice—among them,” Ciphramir replied, “and all know at least a little of the art of magic. However, we all have different foci, and their interests take them in many different directions. We manage to meet up from time to time, and we always have exciting stories to tell each other. Go on, eat! You must be famished.”

He was not wrong. It pained me to admit it, but Katia Schlosser had been right when she said I would need a lot of food in the coming days to aid my recovery. I

had two servings of *borscht*, realizing only afterward that the color had entranced me more than the flavor. Next, I ate a large serving of Invidian *pasta* with thin strips of pork and a sauce of mixed tomatoes and ground beef. It was spiced to perfection and I wiped the plate with a heel of bread, yet I still felt hungry. There were vegetables, both fresh and pickled ones from Valachan; I made sure to have plenty. I gorged myself on pieces of chicken and slices of beef; boiled in a cream sauce, rotisserieed, roasted with mushrooms. Speaking of mushrooms, there were plenty; many of them unfamiliar to me, but all of them utterly delicious with the various sauces provided—or so they should have been.

I could taste all the food, and it was excellent. I should have been completely satisfied, yet I was not. Something was missing, and I knew exactly what it was. The Schlossers had disguised it as broth and blended it into a porridge, and it had satisfied me utterly.

‘Will it always be like this?’ I wondered, quietly horrified. *‘Am I never going to be able to simply enjoy my food again unless I give in to the Hunger?’*

My cutlery stopped moving as that depressing thought struck home. I felt unhappy. I also felt bloated, my stomach straining against my waistband; empty plates and bowls were piled up in front of me, and most of the dishes had been emptied as well. As I noticed that so were the majority of the bottles on the table, I realized I was also starting to feel drunk. There had been sugary Dementlieuse red wine, a dry Borcan white wine, some fruity liquor from Sithicus... How much had I had?

Ciphramir, who was just finishing a rice dish with diced pork, gave me an amused smile. “It seems I was right,” he lightly teased me, “you *were* famished. Perhaps you would like a chance to sleep it off?”

“Tha’—that would be – good,” I stammered, as the amount I’d drunk started to really hit home.

To my dull embarrassment, Ciphramir now had to help me up out of my chair, and placed my hand on his shoulder for support as he guided me back to the foyer and down another corridor. Somnirot was still snoozing on his lap as we went, which lent an additional sense of the comical to our situation.

On the way, we passed a painting that gave me pause.

“That’s—that’s you,” I slurred, pointing feebly at the image of a seated boy—no; Federlin again—with a man standing behind her, one hand on her shoulder in a patriarchal manner. “You’re – up.”

“An artistic fiction, I’m afraid,” he replied, shrugging. “Dementlieu can be so provincial about these things. In truth, our positions were reversed for the sitting.”

Speaking of artistic license, a small detail caught my eye—the hand on Federlin’s shoulder, and one of her hands as well, bore solitary gold rings. When I had met her, she wore three, as did Ciphramir right that instant—a signet ring with a stylized flame, a platinum band with a scale pattern, and alone on his right hand, the gold band. None of Federlin’s other jewelry had been altered, making this change oddly conspicuous. In any other circumstance, I would have thought this to be a marital portrait, with only the wedding bands left on the fingers. However, it seemed unlikely; they had been master and apprentice—perhaps the rings were meant to signify that bond. Ciphramir had admitted he came from a place far removed from my knowledge, so I could very well have been misinterpreting an unfamiliar custom.

Aside from that, there was the age difference to consider. Federlin was perhaps my age, but Ciphramir appeared to be more than eighty. There are certainly older men who seek out younger brides, but many of them make a point of having others know their good fortune. Ciphramir did not seem the type.

We went on, and soon passed another painting, one that made me start with fear and stagger back until

my back hit the wall. The painting was an image of a fiend, outlined against a storm-tormented sky of purple and grey. She was black of hair and eye, pale white of skin, with slender antlers like a roe deer stabbing up at the brooding sky. Its face was wicked beauty incarnate, its body sinful desire made flesh—and it took me a heart-stopping moment to realize this was not the demon that had tormented me at the Retreat. They were clearly cut from the same cloth, but their facial features were different, and this creature was dressed in form-fitting leather armor and red silk. One vicious scar ran up from its right eyebrow and vanished under the hairline; another ran from the left corner of the jaw across to the right collarbone, bisecting it. This painting was of a different creature altogether.

“Ah, my apologies,” Ciphramir tutted as he returned to my side. “Can you imagine that I *forgot*...?”

“Why—why do you even have this?” I asked, heart still hammering against my ribcage.

“A reminder,” Ciphramir replied. “A reminder that evil seldom comes alone.”

“You mean there’s more than one like the Red Haunt?” I asked—and could have kicked myself for the stupidity of the question. I *had met* the creature’s daughter, Clementine! By the gods, how many of them might there be, if that monster was breeding at its leisure?!

“Do not concern yourself too much, Victor,” Ciphramir reassured me. “In all my time, I have never met more than three of her kind, nor even heard rumors of others. And compared to the Red Haunt, the other two are... Well. You would not find them to be very impressive. Come along, let’s get you to your room.”

I do not know why I did it, but I looked over my shoulder as we moved on. Something had caught my eye, and only in that backward glance did I realize what it was: one of the antlers on that painting had not been painted on. It was a genuine antler, fixed in

place with fine, metal wires. ‘Not very impressive,’ indeed.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: ROE-HUNT

The Red Haunt is not the only devoratrix in the Demiplane of Dread. The one that generally calls itself *Roe* entered the Demiplane in 740 BC, in Ghastria. She was delighted to find herself cut off from Shar, but found Ghastria to be claustrophobic, bland, and wholly unsuited to her hungers and ambitions. She soon departed the island domain for the Core.

Roe hugely enjoyed her time in Dementlieu, where she dabbled her fingers in the schemes of both aristocrats and criminals, and took over a minor nobleman’s estate. Having reduced the estate’s ruling family and servants to Hollow Men, Roe was just starting to look around for new challenges when she sensed the presence of the Red Haunt. True to her *tanar’ri* nature, the devoratrix decided to match her strength against that of her kinswoman and establish dominance.

What should have been a simple opening move—Roe attacked an old man who did work for the Red Haunt in Châteaufaux and turned him into her own Hollow Man—blew up in her face in a spectacular fashion. As it turned out, the old man had been a key agent in a scheme spun not just by the Red Haunt, but the Centurions of the Night. The Red Haunt might have played with her junior a bit before swatting her down if all she had done was bother her; since she had interfered with Centurion business, however—and had absorbed some knowledge relevant to that Order’s plans—her fate would not be so merciful: Mr. Black, the most frightening of the Centurions of the Night, was dispatched to deal with her.

Roe barely managed to escape her estate, having sustained a cut to the throat that might well have finished her, and which left her with a permanent scar.

She managed to get away from the hunters—barely—but discovered that she had been neither forgiven nor forgotten. Twice she tried to set herself up in a new home, first in Borca, and later in Kislova; both times, Mr. Black and his hounds turned up on her doorstep and she had to run again.

Desperate to rid herself of her pursuers, Roe made another mistake; she tried to ally herself with an enemy of the Red Haunt. Ciphramir was not interested in the fiend's initial overtures, and Federlin took extreme offense when the creature tried to seduce her husband in a more direct fashion. Again, Roe had to flee, bearing a permanent mark of her defeat; the antler she lost remains a part of Ciphramir's collection and stubbornly refuses to regenerate.

Exhausted, frightened, and now fully aware of how weak she was compared to her enemies, Roe returned to Ghastria and prepared to make her last stand. To her confusion, no one has bothered her on Ghastria—yet. Gradually, a certainty is growing in Roe's fiendish mind that her enemies have still not forgotten about her; they are content to leave her in the one place in the Demiplane of Dread where she least wishes to be. Stuck in a domain she finds repellent, and too frightened to leave for greener pastures, Roe constantly tries to concoct schemes to rid herself of—or ingratiate herself with—her enemies. She trains herself in order to grow stronger, studies every scrap of lore she can get her hands on, and tries desperately to keep herself entertained without angering Stezen d'Polarno to the point that he sees a need to get rid of her. She has even started praying to Shar to aid her in her need—and to her not inconsiderable consternation, her prayers have been answered with power, which she has incorporated into a new fighting style. The fiend does not understand why her dark goddess would aid her after her betrayal, and fears the price she will have to pay, but for now she needs every scrap of power she can get. Ironically, Roe has become much more devout since her exile to the miserable

Ghastria than when she regularly attended her goddess in person.

Roe may never rise to the level of the likes of Ciphramir or Federlin, but she is definitely becoming a force to be reckoned with in her own right. Only her stark terror at the prospect of facing her old enemies has kept her from realizing this is the case. All it would take is one foolhardy and unprepared band of adventurers to let the devoratrix see what she is now capable of.

Roe: CE female Devoratrix Rogue 4 / Cleric 5 (Shar) / Sacred Fist 5

Land-Based Powers: *Alchemical Vampirism* (Kislova), *Drain Passion* (Ghastria), *Mass Charm* (Dementlieu), *Poison Touch* (Borca). The Kislovan and Ghastrian powers can be found in Ryan Naylor's *Van Richten's Monster Hunter's Compendium*, on pages 143 and 141, respectively.

Phylactery: Roe's phylactery is a square tile of black basalt, with an Abyssal glyph engraved into its center. The glyph is, simply, the letter 'R.' Roe has warded the tile against detection and harm as best she can, and hidden it underneath the floor of her lair; a surviving basement of the razed and desecrated church in East Riding. By now, the basement is Roe's own shrine to her dark goddess, desecrated and warded by her magic, and guarded by a handful of carefully-chosen undead guardians and Hollow Men.

Finally, we arrived at what Ciphramir declared was to be my room while I was his guest at Twice-Risen Manor. It was a good room, from what I could tell through my alcoholic haze. There was a nightstand with a candle, which Ciphramir lit with a casual gesture ... and there was a bed. Yes. Bed was good. Pyjamas, too. All very good.

"Rest well, my friend," Ciphramir said. "I shall see you in the morning."

“Thank you,” I managed to slur while I tugged at my buttons. I barely noticed the door close as I struggled to get out of my clothes and into the fresh pajamas. All very good. Nice, clean sheets. Good. I slipped under them, pulled up the covers after missing no more than two times, and closed my eyes.

They flew open of their own accord when I realized a weight had settled on the bed with me, but it was only Somnirot, Ciphramir’s cat, not a black-haired, black-hearted demoness. Seeing that painting must have shaken me worse than I thought.

“Go on,” I muttered, “push off. Why didn’t you stay with Ciphramir? Go find your master.”

The little beast ignored me with the arrogance native to cats, and curled up on my chest. I grunted, annoyed, but felt too tired and too drunk to really do anything about it. Besides, his weight was negligible and his little body was warm. Soon enough, Somnirot started to purr softly, and the sound was very pleasant. I drifted off to sleep, the cat still lying on top of me.

Briefly, a memory of a fluffy duckling crawled across my inner vision, but it was too little, too late. Sleep. Blessed sleep.

INTERLUDE: THE DONOR

Ciphramir’s wheelchair glided down the dark hall, propelled before the steady tread of Georg. At his approach, the third door on the left soundlessly swung open, releasing a wan light, and he turned in with his cargo.

Perched on the chest of Victor, Somnirot turned his heavy-lidded gaze to the newcomers. At their arrival, Ciphramir closed the book in his hands, then rose from his seat at the foot of the bed. As he set the thick tome beside the single candle on the nightstand, he said, “Most timely of you.”

“Too early,” yawned Somnirot in dissent. He stood and stretched, then walked a circle upon his living

bed. On resuming his seat, he set about kneading the alchemist’s stomach.

In the wheelchair was a man with skin the color of coffee, his body short but rangy. There were several signs for the educated eye that he had suffered privation in childhood, but someone had fed him properly in more recent days, and seen to his physical development. His skull was smooth, owing to the attentions of a razor, but he wore a close-cropped beard and mustache. Thin, twisting scars marked his cheeks, too regular to be the traces of accidental injuries. His arms and legs were bound to the chair, and his mouth was gagged. Tattoos wound down his arms from the shoulders, coming to an end on the backs of his hands; black serpents made of thin, repeating glyphs. His eyes flicked across the bedroom—across the talking cat, across the sleeping form of Victor, across the three dull golden bowls on the floor, across the man whose chair he now occupied—but he didn’t let his confusion show.

Then again, he didn’t have to.

“I know,” Ciphramir said. “This would appear to be the strangest interrogation chamber.” He crouched down in front of the bound man. “But allow me to disabuse you of that notion. You wouldn’t tell your story to me when you were first collected during the excitement in Castra, and I won’t force you to talk now.”

The man’s face stayed neutral, but Ciphramir continued on. “I don’t need to resort to anything so clumsy as coercion.” He tilted his head to the side and searched the man’s face with his gaze. “Do not bother trying to push me out. I’m not taking it from you that way either.”

Ciphramir reached out and grasped the man’s shoulder. “I would like to untie you, but this procedure is very delicate, and I can’t have you moving about.” He pulled, folding the man over and exposing his back. “I feel some guilt for this. I know what it is like to lose mobility in one’s legs, and it is most distressing.” Ciphramir reached out with his free right hand, and its fingers curled backward.

Black-striped, orange fur sprouted from the sides and erstwhile palm, while black pads formed on what used to be the backs of the hand and its fingers. A sharp claw on his index finger began to count down the man's vertebrae. "I also know from experience exactly where the damage must be done."

At that, the man jerked against Ciphramir's grip, but the old man's unaltered left hand held fast. "Please don't squirm," instructed Ciphramir. Three more vertebrae were ticked off, then Ciphramir drove his claw into the next soft spot. A low, muffled groan pushed past the gag.

Ciphramir started counting back up the spine. "Sorry," he said. "Truly, for this next part is a grotesque unfairness." His count finished, and he pierced the man's spine once more, eliciting a pained whimper. "The function of my arms has never been severed."

Ciphramir pushed the man back into an upright position. Distress was barely managing to creep into the man's face, contrasting with the stonefaced observance of Georg behind him. Leaning down, George started undoing the bindings holding the man's arms to the chair, while Ciphramir bent to untie the man's feet, with his right hand human once more.

With that task done, Ciphramir picked up one of the bowls from the floor and set it in the man's lap. It was a fine thing, with complex, overlaid webs of glyphs covering its inner and outer surfaces. A pool of quicksilver lay in the bottom, and into this Ciphramir laid the man's right hand. "That's most of it," he said, then reached out toward Georg. "The flask, please."

Georg reached into his coat and handed over a stoppered glass receptacle, which Ciphramir opened and poured over the man's limp hand. The black liquid had an unpleasantly salty aroma, and the weak shine in the quicksilver was completely stifled by the murk. "All of the components are prepared" he said, satisfied.

Next, he turned to the three-compartment satchel he had left by the foot of the bed, which would normally hang under his chair when he occupied it. Out from its main pouch he drew a small stool, which he brought to the bedside. Upon this was set another of the strange bowls, alike to the first, and into it he draped Victor's right hand. One last bowl stayed on the floor, empty but for the flowing metal each had in common.

From his pocket, he pulled a silver ring, and he leaned across the bed to place it on the index finger of Victor's left hand—much to Somnirot's chagrin. "Watch it!" the uncanny feline hissed. "What is that for?"

"You can keep him asleep," Ciphramir explained, "but you can't feed him." He returned to his satchel and pulled a big, squat urn—made of stone and lidded with wood—from the central compartment. "Nor can you stall his kidneys, and I won't have him awakening soiled."

Pushing this cryptic container under the bed, he added, "Or suspiciously obstructed."

He looked back to the unbound, unmoving man in his wheelchair. The faintest hint of bewilderment was now mixed into the complex and partially repressed expression playing out around the gag. "Well guessed," Ciphramir said, sporting an impressed smile. "Indeed, this is going to take a long time." He patted Victor's arm. "I have been the subject of this procedure myself. Rather tedious, yes, and I had to hold very still. It wasn't unpleasant though, just a bit of a unique tingle."

Then Ciphramir approached his unwilling guest, his expression less cordial, almost grave. "What you will feel, I cannot say. I have never attempted this with a live donor before."

At that, the man's eyes went wide; his gaze jumped to his hand, then flashed to Victor's. No more guarded emotions, only fear.

“Don’t worry,” Ciphramir assured him. “You will tell me all about it, after a fashion.”

Now, the spell was begun. Ciphramir passed his hands above the donor’s, intoning arcane phrases all the while. In response, a mist of pink and red began to rise from the man’s flesh, and one of black came up from the water below. Cutting through the gag, like dragon’s breath through cobwebs, came the tortured scream.

Somnirot’s ears laid flat against his head, and he clamped them down with his paws to shield them. “Lords of the Nine!” he bawled. “For my sake, take his voice!”

Ciphramir went on unfazed, now making passes over Victor’s hand. To this the flesh-vapors came, and just before they touched, Victor’s hand began to give off vapors of its own. An exchange began; where the new mist rose, the incoming flow spiraled into the widening gap in the skin. Victor’s sleep went on, seemingly untroubled.

The agonized howl went on as well. Georg, behind the poor man, dipped his head and closed his eyes. His hands came up to the back of the chair, where his fingers began to drum out patterns, as if on a keyboard. Whether this truly helped him shut out the terrible noise... No, certainly not.

Finally, Ciphramir’s hands came to the third bowl, and he curled his fingers as his palms turned to the ceiling. Here gathered the grayed flesh-vapors of Victor, and in memory of their former arrangement, they set about reforming. But the barest scrap of skin took shape, growing at a crawl as matter was painstakingly stripped from both slumbering subject and distressed donor.

And still the shrieking went on.

After an hour, his voice had been completely yelled out.

Another two, and his hand was sweating crimson, having become porous by loss of substance.

More than five hours in total had passed when the man’s death came. The bowl was fuller now, the fluid principally red. Victor’s bowl was unstained, but the vague suggestion of a hand forming in the third could not hold blood, and so a few droplets flecked the quicksilver pool.

After two days, the spell was complete. The foreshortened arm of the donor perched on the rim of the first bowl, over a coagulated pool. In the second, Victor’s arm hung limp, seemingly as it was at the start. Still, he slept. Somnirot also, still upon Victor’s chest, now undisturbed by the silent man in the wheelchair.

In the third and final bowl lay a hand. Its terminus looked to be alike to that of the donor’s arm, but in all respects, the hand looked like Victor’s. Perhaps it was; after all, it was all of the same flesh, all in the same order.

Aside of the sleeper, the corpse, and the cat, Ciphramir was alone; Georg had left long ago, given leave once the donor’s heart stopped. The old mage was tired, but he didn’t look it, skilled as he was in deception. He collected the urn from below the bed and the ring from Victor’s finger; their job was done. Victor’s right hand he laid by the alchemist’s side on the bed, and the disembodied hand he relocated to the nightstand, allowing him to collect the bowls beneath them. These he stacked under the first on the dead man’s lap, then he reclaimed the disembodied hand, opened the door, and pushed the laden chair out into the hall.

Over his shoulder, he addressed the orange cat on Victor’s chest. “Enjoy the last eight hours of your nap.” Somnirot raised his head and blinked groggily, but said nothing in response.

Footsteps echoed down the hall as Ciphramir closed the door to Victor's room behind him. Ciphramir smiled pleasantly at the approaching Georg. "A tad late this time," he admonished.

Georg gave a half-smile back. "Apologies, my friend. Shall I take the handles?"

"Yes, thank you," Ciphramir replied. "Come by my chamber in six hours with the left hand. I want to rest before I bring them to the Scrivener."

"Of course," Georg said. "Shall the rest go on ice, or would you prefer it cured?"

"Nay," said Ciphramir. "It pains me to waste it, but I want him cremated and spread in the Mists. If she sorts out the mess in Castra and realizes he is missing, I don't want to risk keeping him around."

"Burned like the ships in her harbor, then." Georg nodded his assent. "Still won't trust your wards against her? They are stronger now."

"So is she," Ciphramir said forebodingly.

On that dark note, the two parted ways.

ELISION: LITTLE TYRANT

Somnirot lay upon the mortal's breast, dozing yet not fully asleep. There was a task that needed doing, after all; the prisoner must be suppressed, kept dormant. With the lord of the house absent, the imp dared not slumber *too* deeply.

Still, he was comfortable. Comfortable, and growing more so by the moment. It seemed to the drowsy imp that a warmth was spreading through the chest upon which he lay. Only when the gentle warmth had fully enveloped him did this strike him as strange. Why would this half-dead prisoner be warmer now than at any point before? So warm ... so comfortable ... so ... soothing.

The imp's head nodded without his input, his chin bumping against Victor Gagné's chest. Against something hard, covered by his shirt. Something

warm. Something that started to vibrate. Even with sweet sleep trailing its seductive fingers over his brain, Somnirot's fiendish mind translated the vibrations as speech. A feminine voice, speaking in the hated Abyssal—comprehensible, but vile in its randomness.

Somnirot stirred, ears drawing back in annoyance, but then the meaning of those words trickled into his awareness. "*Little tyrant,*" the voice whispered, seeming to be the very essence of lethargy. "*Little Prince of the Nine. Darkness lies upon the land. Now is the time to sleep. To dream. Lay down your weary and troubled head and dream of being mighty and cruel.*"

The dream stirred to life in his mind. He saw himself in a beautiful, dimly lit palace in the City of Dis, grown huge and mighty on the suffering of his victims, his old master Zortzivayne ur-Tzaemgar foremost among them. Legions of slaves tiptoed around a bed that groaned under his mighty bulk, doing everything for him, freeing him from the need to so much as lift a finger. Legions of imps massaged and soothed him. Dread incenses perfumed the air. A sweet voice sang a lullaby that spoke of darkness and stillness, of clouds covering the uncaring moon in perfect silence.

"*Darkness,*" the voice whispered. "*In Darkness is my strength. Lie at peace in my darkness, little tyrant. Dream and be still.*"

It was an attack. Even half-asleep and sinking fast, Somnirot realized he was under attack. '*Ciphramir,*' he thought, his mind reaching out to the Margrave. But his thoughts seemed to be wrapped in layers of black gauze, scented with the essence of night-blooming jasmine. A great web was being woven around and around his thoughts by a spider too vast for him to comprehend.

The name of its web was Sleep, and Somnirot's slothful essence had no defense against it. With a supreme effort of will, the imp let himself fall off the mortal's chest and onto the floor. He scabbled and

clawed toward the door. ‘*Ciphramir*,’ he thought again, trying to reach the old mage’s mind.

Darkness welled up within him, a great mind seizing his thoughts the way an adult might clasp the hand of a child before it could close around something sharp. “*Little tyrant*,” it whispered, and then it sang its lullaby. Somnirot spiraled down into sleep and Darkness.

The beautiful dream of his palace in Baator was not there to welcome him. There was a place of sharp-edged shadows and cold light, a clearing in a forest of dead trees beneath a full moon. In the shadows, there was a vixen the size of a mastiff, her eyes glowing bright green as they fixed on Somnirot’s cat-form. And he could not transform.

“*Little tyrant*,” a nightmare voice growled. “*I will repay.*”

THE TALE COLLECTOR—AUDIENCE

I came to a vague sort of consciousness as a scratching noise wormed its way into my ears. Turning my head, I saw Somnirot stretching up the door jamb, reaching for the handle. But a moment more, and he began to tip, then slid along the door to flop narcoleptically upon the floor. Honestly, I was surprised that the practically comatose feline hadn’t been on my chest when I awoke.

I was also surprised that I wasn’t violently hung over, but I certainly was not going to overthink such good fortune.

My feet touched something—two somethings—at the end of the bed. My gaze wandered down to find my spellbooks returned, both old and new. I sat up—and heard a strange jingle, felt a familiar sensation of cool metal on my chest. Looking down my collar, I saw the fox amulet had returned to me. This turn of events brought me unease. Was it cursed so I could not be rid of it? Was it meant to track me, as Ciphramir feared?

Then, I happened on a new line of thought: had the amulet hidden itself? Did it ... *understand* what Ciphramir intended to do? I would sympathize, if one could do so with an object, but I was torn, for I would be responsible if something bad happened because of the amulet’s presence. I hemmed and hawed ... then elected to keep the amulet’s return to myself. It had served me well in the Retreat, and I did not feel like parting with it again.

I dragged my original road book toward me, not quite ready to trust Imogen Schlosser’s gift. Preparing my spells was made difficult by a paresthetic tingling suffusing my right hand. I daresay I slept on it at some point in the evening, though it had simply been by my side when I woke up. Problematic as the intricate gestures had become, I worked through steadily, preparing a battery of incantations primarily focused on defense and escape. It is not that I feared Ciphramir and his manor, but the memory of the Schlossers’ assault on its predecessor was ample motivation to be ready for flight.

With that task completed, I set both volumes on the nightstand and shed the pajamas in favor of my prior attire. Before buttoning up my waistcoat, I slipped my original roadbook between it and my shirt, keeping it close in case of an emergency. Its reincarnation would stay in the room, for now, and I stacked my thesis upon it, as if to hold it at bay.

After relocating the orange cat to the bed, I opened the door and stepped out into the hallway. Save for the décor, it was empty, and without direction, I was faced with the choices of either retracing my steps to Ciphramir’s office, or wandering into the as yet unseen corridors to my right. As I pondered, a sound came from that mysterious direction. It was a succession of low, quiet tones, difficult to make out at the given volume, but unmistakably musical. Though it was certainly not a harp—it sounded more like a pipe organ—I was reminded of Genevieve, whose music had greeted me in my first waking hours at the Retreat. Whether this new sound

should be of comfort, I did not know. I took a few steps toward it, curious to find its source.

Then came another sound from behind me: rolling wheels, and uncoiled metal axles. I made an about face at the very second Ciphramir came around the corner at the other end of the hall. He greeted me with a warm smile, and cheerfully said, “Ah, you timed your waking perfectly! Did you sleep well?”

“Most restfully,” I replied, then forced myself to stop rubbing my right hand. It still felt strange, but it was the only ill thing that followed me from my sleep. There had been dreams, truly dark visions, though they had not been able to disturb my slumber. Nor had they been my usual nocturnal fare. I did not see the corridors of Untenturm, the vile Worm that had torn free of my abdomen, the woman whose life I took in the tunnels of Delthirus, nor the demonic inhabitants of the Retreat. Instead, I walked a blasted plain, with intermittent balls of fire descending from the sky to detonate in the middle distance. I followed the bank of a tainted, red river, passing windswept skeletons of things not human. A small red man, with wings, horns, and a stinger, occasionally flitted into view on the opposite bank. I caught sight of him licking the backs of his hands, then scratching his ear with his back foot. He noticed my gaze, grinned at me, and laughed.

How my trek ended, I cannot say. The resolution of the dream is not but a blur in my mind. I recall the vague hint of a large shape chasing the little man away, yowling, but no more. Despite the unique and memorable imagery, I haven’t seen that dreamscape or the little man any night since.

If Ciphramir was aware of my polite half-truth—and he seemed the type to know—he kept it to himself. “Excellent. Come, let us eat breakfast. I have something to show you, but not on an empty stomach.”

As I followed Ciphramir back the way he came, I inquired, “I heard music down the other way; where is it coming from?”

“That is Georg, practicing,” he replied. “He has a positive organ; a small thing, compared to what he is used to. Fortunately, it had been moved out of my home several weeks prior to our first meeting, and so escaped the fall of the house. A most agreeable coincidence indeed.”

Suddenly, the familiarity that had been nagging at me fell into place: It was time, a more than twenty year time difference that had obscured my memory. To be certain, I asked, “What is Georg’s surname?”

Ciphramir looked up to me, curious at my own interest. “Talbann,” he answered. Seeing the recognition on my face, he smiled and added, “You know the name.”

Indeed I did. The organist had been renowned throughout certain circles of the western Core in my youth, before he vanished from the public eye. “My parents and I saw him perform in Mordentshire but two weeks after I turned fifteen,” said I. “What became of him? I had heard he was a casualty of the Upheaval.” I was caught between confusion and amazement, with a tinge of concern, as my suppositions now had a habit of jumping to nefarious conclusions. I did not truly think Ciphramir had stolen the musician ... but I couldn’t yet drop the thought either.

“Nay,” said Ciphramir. “A casualty, ‘tis true, but not of the Upheaval.” His mouth made a firm line, which twisted slightly in consideration. “Later, perhaps, you should ask him yourself. It is not my place to say.”

Soon after, we arrived at the dining room, where our prior settings had been prepared. On each plate, three eggs had been deviled and perched by the rim on the left. Opposite them were four thin, fatty slices of pork jowl, fried to perfection. These two sets flanked a pair of crêpes, rolled around whipped cream and raspberry curd. It was quite sumptuous, but again, the meal lacked a certain sense of satisfaction. I started to realize that I might never be completely sated by normal food again.

I finished before Ciphramir, who was taking his time to savor the pork jowl. His slices were slightly thicker, but had a narrower cross-section. I speculated that they came from a slightly different breed of swine, with a dissimilar shape of head. From a carafe between us, I poured some more milk, politely giving myself something to do as I waited.

With the last piece gone, Ciphramir gave each of the fingers on his right hand a quick, mildly indecorous suck. That done, he took up his napkin to polish them. Meeting my gaze, he said, "Pardon me," with a grin. He cast down the napkin and took his last swallow of milk. "Are you finished?"

In turn, I drained my glass and confirmed, "Indeed. What business is next?"

"Your business, should you wish it," he replied. My look became questioning but an instant before he went on: "You are welcome to stay in Twice-Risen Manor for an extended time, but after being kept by others for so long, I expect you may wish to be on your way." He rolled himself back from the table and turned away. "But think carefully and tell me, what way is that?"

I rose and followed him as he left the room. As he navigated the halls that would lead to his office, I thought the question over. First and foremost, I wanted to go home, return to the university, and reclaim my old life. But could that be? I was a dhampir, a blood-drinker. And if that was not reason enough, I had been marked—four times. The Falkovnian spectre who had started my journey, the Worm that scrambled my insides, the brined vampire that brought me into his fold, and worst of all, the Schlossers, who seemed to have a vested interest in all three of the others. I wasn't safe anywhere.

Then, in forming that list, I started to fixate on its second member. The Parasite was the one that had harmed me most deeply. Delthirius may have made me a monster, but the Worm did the same thing to Nikolai, my friend, and took him from me. In fact, my subsequent misfortunes were precipitated by

meeting the Worm (though that is an argument I could take backward until it reduced to the absurd).

Beyond my personal reasons, the Parasite was also an existential threat, bent on destroying the world. Delthirius and the Schlossers had the same goal, it is true, and perhaps were a more organized threat, but that also meant the solitary Worm was more manageable. Furthermore, the Schlossers wanted to capture the Worm for their own purposes, and to let that happen would make a bad situation worse.

The answer, it seemed, was clear, and when I came to stand by Ciphramir's desk, I spoke my mind: "My way is following the Worm. It stole my oldest friend, it means to end our world, and I have to stop it before the Schlossers catch up with it."

Behind the desk, Ciphramir nodded somberly as he moved the bell jar holding the mysterious, shifting substance from the desktop to a deep drawer on his left. "Do you know where you must go?" he asked.

I took a deep breath. "Falkovnia, I suppose. It meant to pass Stangengrad on its way to Darkon. Perhaps I can find its trail there." My certitude faltered at the task I now described. Could I truly hope to catch a creature that rode people? That stole bodies? Its horse and cart were more conspicuous, but were they remarkable enough to trace? Add to that the inhospitable land itself, and the endeavor seemed ordained to fail.

Ciphramir brought me out of my spiral by producing his key once more. Its silver flash in the light caught my eyes, and the reflections on its surface held them. Rather than the wooden browns of the room, I saw stripes of orange and black. They rippled, but through their own motion or the motion of the key, I could not tell.

Ciphramir leaned to his right, stretching toward another deep drawer with the key. There was no hole for it, but without perturbation, he proceeded to touch the key tip against the wood just below the handle. After a moment's pause, he drew a great circle across the front of the drawer, and it let forth a

hissing sigh. The key was tucked away, and he tugged on the handle.

Unexpectedly, the drawer's face tipped forward, as though hinged at the base. The rail-mounted drawer box behind it had a sizable cavity in its front—a magical space no doubt; more sophisticated and spacious than a false bottom—and a strong orange glow spilled forth from it.

Ciphramir reached in, and when he drew back, his hand was on fire! I took a step back, frightened by the red and orange flame enveloping his fist. It was clearly sorcerous, being shot through with occasional and short lived bursts of green, blue, and purple, and once I was sure his hand was not being consumed and he was not in pain, I became a mite calmer, yet remained uneasy. It called to me, not unlike blood—a sinister beckoning; a duplicitous promise. I felt that it wanted to give me something, but not charitably.

With his gaze fixed on me, Ciphramir held out the Flame in my direction. His fist loosened, his fingers spread, and he pulled his hand from the fire. In the air between us, it hung detached, churning with palpable power. "This can show you your Worm," he said.

"What ... what is it?" I stammered. I made no move to approach the floating fire.

"A gift and a responsibility, granted to me long ago, before I came to the Core," Ciphramir answered. "Through it, you can see other places—you can *be* other places. For a short while, that is." He reached for it with both hands, but did not touch it again. "Reach forth with both hands and take it. Think carefully of this Worm, and you will be beside it. Figure out where it is, and pull yourself back."

Apprehensively, I stood stock still. As I regarded the Flame, I asked one more question: "Is it safe?"

The answer I knew before he spoke: "No." He propelled himself around the flame and gripped my arm. "But I am here, ready to step in, just in case. Don't let fear stop you, but let it protect you."

I was far from reassured, but I was fortified by his words. Steeling myself, I stretched both of my hands toward and into the fire. It coursed back along my arms, and as it flowed across my body, my mind's eye held my last clear image of the Worm, covered in my blood and convulsing its way across the shadow-dappled forest floor.

The room around me was obscured by flame as it enveloped me from head to toe. Crackling overwhelmed my ears, and I felt myself go adrift...

I brushed past something in the inferno.

Something else as well, mere moments later.

A pressure on my shoulder, unmistakably a hand grasping me feebly. I advanced, and it fell away.

I had the sensation of pushing through a crowd. I could see none of them, but I felt they were there. Most of them were barely aware of me; they seemed faint and half-dead. I was uncomfortably reminded of the void where the thralls of Delthirius slumbered through their days. But there was no Pulse here, no tether shackling me to another mind, no flood of dark emotions.

Most of the things around me dully stood aside as I moved forward. Some wanted my help, but somehow I knew it was too late for them. What little thought they had left turned to sorrow, for I was approaching the edge of the inferno. They could never leave this place.

The flames parted, and I left the sad things behind.

With the flickering orange veil no longer blocking my vision, I found myself face-to-face with a snarling snake, its open mouth as tall as my face. Gasping and stumbling backward, I found myself passing *through* a counter. As the immobile snake continued to give me a glassy-eyed stare, the sound of tavern chatter filled my ears, and the scent of stale beer wafted up my nose.

Tearing my eyes away from the taxidermied leviathan on the wall, I first looked down at my body. A thin veneer of that unnatural fire danced across me, concealing my form. Casting my eyes about, I saw that no one else in the common room registered my presence, which was rather hard to believe, given the flickering coat I now wore. In fact, I suspect my blazing manifestation was purely for my benefit.

There were eight people about me, six of them gathered about two separate tables. Four dwarves on my right played a game reminiscent of checkers, using heavy stone pieces, while two human men in travel attire debated the next day's journey over their near-empty tankards. The remaining two were before me, one at the counter, and the other behind it. The first—a surprisingly short woman of half-elven ancestry with a long braid of brown hair—negotiated with the second—a gray-haired barkeep with his right eye perpetually squinted—regarding accommodations for the night.

Which one was the Worm? At first, I had little clue; it could have been any one of them. Perhaps one of the traveling men had yet to find out his friend no longer accompanied him. Mayhap the barkeep would abandon this place under sinister influence come morning. Or perhaps the dwarves had an unseen new companion. There was nothing to go on—until a new detail made its way into my nose: the scent of sweet fenugreek, and a bitter odor beneath it.

The Worm had a bad habit, especially for an impostor. With my nose, I followed this pipe-smoke scent-trail back toward the counter, to the side of the half-elf, where it was strongest. She seemed quite amicable, smiling and making polite conversation with the barkeep. As I stood beside her, trying to see through her, she paid the man for room and board, as well as stabling for her horse and carriage—a horse and carriage I suspected were familiar to me. Still, I saw nothing of the Worm in her.

The barkeep ducked down, rummaging below the counter. In that instant, her demeanor shifted. Halfway through a swallow of ale, her esophagus reversed, pumping the fluid back into her tankard. Her face, previously pleasant in expression, fell into a scowl of unbridled, misanthropic hatred. The Worm was a good actor, but he couldn't stand playing the part for long.

When the barkeep straightened up, the Worm reset its dead mask in an instant, smilingly accepting the key proffered by the old man. The elven suit stood and moved toward the back, where a staircase waited to bear it to the second floor. Follow it I did not, for the exact location of the Worm in the inn was of little consequence. Instead, I headed for the front door, for the location of the inn itself was of vital importance.

I reached for the handle, but my hand found no purchase as it flowed around and through the rough iron. I paused, racking my brain for a method of opening a door I could not touch ... then gave a light snort of self-derision and walked through it. Outside, the night air smelled of decayed vegetation, and a wide dirt track stretched away from the entrance, flanked on both sides by reflections of the starry sky—I was in a bog.

I took two steps forward, then turned about to regard the building I had just come from. It wasn't large for a two story building, nor comely for a place of rest, but still passably well built for a building in a swamp. A sign above the door—which depicted an ugly, quadrupedal beast with a spiked tail, leathery wings, and an uncannily human-adjacent face—read “The Manticore's Tongue.” I wasn't immediately familiar with the place, but I certainly had enough to go on: a marsh, presumably the Boglands of Darkon, and the name of an inn. Surely, my environs could be easily found. It was time to pull ba—

A splash, then a sharp whisper: “*Quiet!*”

The voice came from around the side of the inn, to my right. Toward it I crept—then resumed a normal

pace once I remembered that I could not be perceived.

Around the corner, I saw three figures approaching a large shape beside the inn. It was rounded on top, almost half again as tall as the silhouettes nearing it, and I could tell by the scant moonlight that it wasn't an outbuilding; it had wheels, and a single step depending from its end. The immense horse was gone, but I still recognized the carriage that I once drove at the Worm's behest.

One of the figures mounted the step, and tried to open the door into the carriage. "*Locked,*" the man said, quietly. "*Magic, most likely.*"

"*Want me to knock it?*" asked another man in the group. I was very close to them now, but the night obscured details of their features.

"*Worm's not stupid,*" whispered the third; a woman. "*Might warn it, get it out here. Might be a worser trap behind.*" My heart stalled in horror; these were no common thieves.

She continued, "*Don't know what we know, though. Carve in under the seat. Box's back there.*"

The skulks started to move to the front, following her orders. They knew too much—things that went missing from my head while I was a prisoner in the Retreat. They were here for the *contact crystals* and *exacerbation manacles*—and their success was not acceptable.

But I was an insubstantial, unseen flame; what could I do? My mind raced—then I felt the things again, crowding behind me. I looked, and a thin veil of fire separated me from a number of the near-dead presences. I couldn't see them beyond, but I knew they were reaching for me. On instinct, I reached through the fire, grabbed a hand—a hand larger and rougher than my own—and pulled.

Through the flames stepped—nay, slithered—a horrid sight; an immense snake, possessed of two mighty, humanoid arms. Its scaly left hand released my own, and its right came forward into view, with a

scimitar as tall as me in its grasp. Gasps and curses from the direction of the carriage told me that I wasn't the only one seeing the great serpent-thing, which let out a murderous hiss as it shot toward the three burglars.

"*Worm!*" one of the men shrieked.

"*Not the worm! Kill it before the Worm comes! Call the Master!*" the woman ordered.

The second man, the one who had offered to *knock* upon the coach's locked door, took a step forward and chanted a spell. Bolts of energy, tainted red and black, flared from his hand and blasted the serpentine creature.

The spell ... did not resound with me. I could see it being cast, could see the bolts of power striking and very briefly staggering the creature I had brought through, but I could not sense the energy, could not analyze or recognize it. Just looking at it was like fumbling into a deep abyss and made me feel ill.

Finally seeing the thieves, briefly illuminated by each burst of power, staggered me in a different way. They were not among the living. Rather, they looked like bog-corpses. The clothes and equipment they wore were modern, but stained with the filth of the swamp and their own rotting bodies. And yet they moved and spoke like the living...!

The serpent-thing swung its scimitar, cutting the spellcasting corpse nearly in two. The woman—female—undead leapt up, boots crashing into the serpent's face, twin shortswords in her hands. Her attack looked pitiful in the face of my monstrous ally's bulk, but actually managed to knock it back a few paces. Steel struck steel as the two monsters started fighting, with the second male soon joining in. He wielded a heavy mace, studded with spikes.

I was both awed and horrified by the violence, but something drew my attention. The spellcaster was not yet dead—re-dead? Although his body had been bisected at the waist, he was dragging himself along with his hands, whispering something I just barely

understood: “... *encountered resistance, but we have found the coach, bring the rest, bring the rest before it gets away!*”

There was a ripple of magic behind those words, carrying them further than the Mage’s undead lungs could account for. And then there was an answering ripple, which passed through me. I heard the words of the ‘master.’ The voice was smooth, cultured, musical. It spoke for a mind that was fierce, predatory, and *hungry*; I felt sickened by the touch. “*Understood, my son. We are coming.*”

The two corpses and the serpent continued to clash and shriek. Acid abruptly erupted out of thin air, engulfing all. All three corpses howled, not with pain but with rage, as their bodies boiled away. My monstrous ally also felt no pain; if anything, the sensation brought it more to life, undeniably ravaged though it was. It reared and rounded on the source of the scouring blast—and was swatted away by titanic force.

I turned, and beheld the Worm in its new disguise, running toward the coach. Behind it, the inn had erupted into chaos, people shouting, doors banging, and shutters slamming shut. Its eyes narrowed as it looked in my direction, and I knew that it sensed the powerful magic about me—I imagine I was quite fortunate to have escaped its notice in the tavern, as a matter of fact. It still failed to see me, though, which I divined from its darting, unfocused pupils. With a thrust of its hand and an utterance of power, it tried to unbind the spell upon me.

To no effect. The Flame did not gutter, and still I stood. Disbelief spread across the Worm’s face, and it gnashed its stolen teeth in consternation. It drew breath for a stronger spell—but something made it turn its attention elsewhere.

Faintly, barely audible below the thrashing of the serpent-man as it extricated itself from a nearby tree, there came the sound of drums. Marching drums. The kind used by armies to set the pace. The Worm gazed out across the swamp, lips writhing,

brows furrowing, and recoiled as it came to some realization.

“Let your servants come, watcher.” It jabbed an accusatory finger in my general direction. “No force shall have the better of me.”

It made ready to hurl a new spell, but I did not stay to see it. I pulled myself back, and the Flame took the world about me from sight. I felt something large and scaly come in at my heels, and knew that I took my brute with me, to rejoin the sad, dead herd.

Back into the inferno, pushing past the things. This time, they were more stiff, less responsive.

No matter; I was on my way out.

Another grip, this one on my forearm. I pressed on, but this time I was held back.

More hands came out from the crowd, seizing my neck, limbs, and lapel. Anxiety rose, and I struggled against them. A new memory, being held fast by the empty-eyed attendants of Untenturm, came to the surface.

Together, the prisoners of the Flame began to pull at me. In a final panicked wrench, I tried to resist the inexorable draw.

To no avail. The presences bore me through, toward a new border. With a shove—I would call it vindictive if I thought them capable of such feelings anymore—I was propelled through the curtain of fire.

I took three stumbling steps before my balance was regained. A step more across the bare stone floor beneath me would have taken me over the edge of a precipice. The darkness below caught my attention and held it rapt, for it was not merely unfathomable and absolute, but there was *force* to its existence. My ears rang as I peered into the black beyond; there was this sense of forthcoming, some

impending event bearing down upon me, and I held my breath in dread anticipation.

Clouds of dust hung in the dark, eerie and unmoving. Staring at the nearest one, I began to make out denser clumps, shapes in the suspended particles. Two long streaks diverged from the center, and split into five short branches each near their outer ends. I had the distinct impression of a face in the dust, a bulbous clod with the vaguest resemblance to a naked skull.

I shuddered and pulled my gaze out of the pit, surveying the room around me. It was immense, with a vaulted ceiling perhaps a hundred feet above me, from which hung two long rows of white-burning braziers. I stood on a deep ledge, half again as wide as the chamber was tall, and a thick bridge stretched across the black pit to another ledge, near alike to the one on which I stood but for the presence of a titanic throne. From this distance, I supposed that it stood far taller than me, at least thrice my height. I feared to meet the being that would take such a seat, and meet it I would if I lingered too long...

... for I looked down to see I was no longer an apparition of flame, but my flesh and blood self, fully present in the great hall.

Two open archways on the right and left walls flanked the throne, while a single, intricately carved stone gate stood nearer to me, directly aligned with the bridge and throne. I approached, taking in the woven knotwork in high relief on its surface, the esoteric sigils running along the strands, and most of all, its immensity. I gave it a push—all my might behind it, of course—and it budged not a fraction of an inch. Toward the throne, it seemed, was the only way out.

I cursed myself for not preparing a spell of enlargement, to bring more force to bear against the door. A spell to sculpt stone was sorely missed as well, though I suspected a door such as this would be protected against such tricks. However, I had prepared a spell to slip through cracks as a ground

fog, and into my pockets I delved. Out came my component pouch, and from there I drew a scrap of gauze and a tindertwig. I scraped the twig against the door, setting it alight and sending a thin curl of smoke into the air.

Then, a brief roar of flame to my side, and an armored hand painfully dashed the components from my grasp. Recoiling with a startled cry, I took in the dark-clad knight standing beside me. Black metal encased his—presumably his—entire body, which stood taller than me by an entire foot, and two sharp blades curved down from the back of his left gauntlet. His face I could not see, for a helmet shaped like a goat's head, complete with immense, curled horns, concealed his features. Indeed, there did not even seem to be eye holes in it. He gave a low, bestial growl, and I turned and ran from him.

Across the bridge I went, my ears ringing once again as I passed over the emptiness below. A wetness formed in my nose and trickled onto my lip, and there came an iron scent that set my once-dead nerves afire—for the first time in my life, my nose had bled.

On the other side, I came to an abrupt halt, for I had approached the throne. Nothing was upon it that I could see, but I felt something there all the same. Some terrible force, powerful beyond my reckoning, was present in the chamber, but it was invisible. It was not allowing itself to be seen by me.

The slow tramp of iron boots came to my ears, and I risked a brief turn to see the armored figure slowly crossing the bridge, not in any hurry. With my guard misplaced and my back to the throne, however, I felt five large fingers curl about my body—four from the right and a larger one from the left—pinning my arms to my sides. Unneeded, the awful knight dissipated in orange and red flame before my very eyes, sent back to dwell with the other bygone souls in the Flame.

I fought the urge to cry out again, lest the grip about me tighten and prevent my next breath in. The hand I could see—if indeed a hand it could be called. Each

finger was tipped with a long, black talon, and the backs were covered in orange fur, which paled to white as it transitioned to the inner surface. I thought it to be a right hand, based on the arrangement of the fingers, but as I was lifted into the air and began to be turned to the right, I realized that no right hand would comfortably or naturally make such a motion.

Turned about, I did not scream, but all of my breath was silently let go, for I found myself face-to-face—a face half as tall as my body—with the lord of the chamber. A titanic tiger’s head looked back at me, with eyes of red-orange, mixed with fluctuating inclusions of other colors. Its nostrils flared as it took in my smell, then a gust of blisteringly hot air ruffled the legs of my trousers.

“Once-Dead.” Its voice was low, but hollow; an echo of distant thunder carried through a forest of charred trees. I could see its mouth moving in my peripheral vision, but I did not hear it with my ears. The word blew like a wind through the deepest corridors of my mind.

“Unpalatable.” This new word was not particularly comforting. Struggle against its grasp would likely have been no good, but I was too transfixed by the titan’s focus to try.

“Where. Are. You?”

My thoughts ground against each other like icebergs, slowed to a crawl by the bizarre question. How was I to know where I was? I was in the grasp of a colossus, trapped in a sepulchre beyond mortal knowledge—perhaps beyond Ezra’s sight, for that matter. Without an answer, I stayed silent, and the claw tightened painfully.

“Where.” I started to descend, the face rising above me. There was a crackling sound below me, and my feet became uncomfortably warm.

“Are.” I was passing its shoulders, which were garbed in rich cloth, a vestment of such craftsmanship that all the aristocrats of Dementlieu

would swoon at its expense. It was open at the neck and down the chest, and the tiger fur of the behemoth was starting to recede. It gave way to hard, black bone, and heat rushed up across my body and face, making me cringe away.

“YOU?” Its rib cage, devoid of sternum and open wide like a bear-trap, belched forth the roaring Flame before me. Its tongues lapped at me from afar, and I could now smell smoke that was curling off of my clothing. Heat played across my skin, which I felt was certain to catch next.

But still I watched, and as I cooked, the flames parted in a roiling circle. Within the red and orange, there now bloomed a field of gray—the Mists rippled in the midst of the conflagration. It thinned, then parted as well.

There was Ciphramir’s office, his desk, him in his chair, and a man on fire—me, engulfed in a wicked Flame that did not burn. In that instant, I understood the question; it wanted to know where I *really* was. I had been projected into the stone chamber, through the power of the Flame, and what could only be the Flame’s master was trying to find it.

I had no time to contemplate why, for the scene rushed toward me. The claw let go. I hurtled through the gap in the Flame, through the ring of Mist, and toward my standing body.

With a mind-jerking flash, I found myself knocked flying, sprawling onto the wooden floor. Ciphramir looked down at me from his chair, his eyes wide with surprise and concern. He propelled himself toward me, ducking his head below the Flame which still floated in the air where I once stood. “What happened?” His tone was urgent. “Are you alright?”

Scared, disoriented, I took a moment to collect myself. I was breathing hard, my heart pounded in my chest—the fastest it had ever done since my return from undeath. However, there was no blood on my lip, no scorching upon my clothes, no

tenderness where my arms had been seized. It was as if I had never been there—and I suppose I hadn't; not in body.

"I'm—I'm not hurt..." I began, but then I noticed how ill I felt. My hands trembled, my skin was a new shade of pale, and my energy was drained away. "... but I'm ... empty."

Ciphramir took my hand. "The Flame uses your energy. You will recover fully by tomorrow." Despite this assurance—which could have been delivered as a warning *before* I touched the Flame—his gaze did not become calmer. "But what expelled you so violently?"

I brought my feet toward me and shifted my weight onto them. As he helped me to stand, I answered, "I left the Worm; I tried to come back, but the things in the Flame took hold of me. They brought me to some greater creature." An ache developed in my head as I spoke, and I put my free hand to my temple. "It was huge, and I think ... I think the Flame is a part of it."

Ciphramir's grip tightened. "You caught his attention." It was not a question, but his next sentence was: "He drew you beyond the Mists, to his throne room?"

Turning to regard him, I saw that his face was less apprehensive, but still very intent. "I suppose," I replied, bewilderment seeping into my voice and mind. "It wanted to know where I was. It was searching..." I eyed the Flame nearby with great suspicion and restrained terror. "Can it ... see us?"

Ciphramir followed my gaze, then waved a hand at the Flame, as though casting it away. It sizzled through the air, delving behind the desk, where I heard a sharp slam and a rising hiss, which cut off sharply.

Back to me Ciphramir turned, and brought his hand together with the one already grasping mine. "After all this time, I wasn't sure he could see. But I want you to believe me—meet my gaze." I did, locking my

eyes onto his golden ones. He swiftly took his glasses out of the way of this connection, and returned the responsible hand to mine once more. "Believe me that he will not come here. He has a world to oversee, and we are not worth his time."

I wanted to trust his words, but ... "It was *looking* for me, though," I replied. "If it is looking, I fear it will try to find me."

Ciphramir shook his head, his eyes never leaving mine, nor blinking. "Finding and arriving are not always the same. Mayhap he now knows where you are, and I am sorry to have put you in such a position, but that is the worst of it. Knowing of you won't draw him from his affairs."

That sentiment was less reassuring, and I momentarily thought I ought to have taken his first assurances. Still, there was some semblance of logic to his words, and he seemed to know what he was talking about—a potentially disturbing statement in and of itself. Besides, fixating on what I could not change was far from productive, so I forced myself to relax, with minimal success.

Seeing some modicum of my resolution, Ciphramir smiled, then finally blinked. "Now," he said, giving my hand a single, firm shake, then releasing it to reseat his spectacles. "What about your Worm? Where was it?"

I had almost forgotten. "Oh, ah ... I was in a swamp, Darkon's Boglands, perhaps." I closed my eyes and lightly bit my lower lip in concentration. "And there was an inn; the Manticore's Tongue." I looked to Ciphramir once more. "Do you know it?"

"Not well or recently," he said, "but the Manticore's Tongue—and thus your Worm—is in Viaki." He rolled backward, then turned to wheel himself behind his desk. "All of that mucky ground—but there must be a suitable entry in the forests to the east, near the edge of the Vale of Tears." Looking back to me, he added, "The question is, shall I prepare to see you off?"

It felt sudden. I felt unwell. My right hand was still a little numb. But I might not have long before the Worm moved on. Still ... “I would be charging in, alone and fast.”

Ciphramir nodded, and his gaze dropped contemplatively. “If you are to hunt it down, you will need to take every advantage you can.” From below his desk, he drew a tall glass flask. It was nearly empty, but for a rust-colored crust that covered patches of its rim and inner surface. “You will not, however, need to be alone. If the doppelganger wishes to find you, I will help her along, but until then...” He held the vessel out to me. “Take this to Georg’s room, and decide what you are willing to do.”

Taking the flask into my hands, I recognized that residue by hungry instinct. I was mystified and a mite offended, but I left for Georg’s room as asked. Cryptic as Ciphramir was being, he was also being open—in contrast with those who sneaked blood into my food—so I resolved to listen first and decide later.

INTERLUDE: THE SCRIVENER

Less than two hours before Victor’s rose that day, while Somnirot still lounged on his ribcage, Ciphramir entered his office. Away from his desk, toward the library door he went, traveling with a purpose.

Once beyond, he wove between the slanted desks, not toward the front, but toward the shelves. Into an aisle he went, and the second ring aligned to allow him to push deeper. The third ring did the same at his approach, but he had other plans. “The lowest level,” he said, and the third ring rose before him. Up and up it went, one staggered level of shelves after another rushing by, before it came to a stop.

Ciphramir stepped into the third ring, and strode further inward, until the central stone column blocked his path. “All the way down,” he commanded, and the third ring descended. “A half

turn as well,” he added, and it began to revolve about the column.

The third ring came to rest just as a black, wooden door spun into view. It had a knob in its center, large and made of brass, with a hand print stamped into its surface and an eye etched into the palm. With both hands, Ciphramir reached out for the door, and they turned into backward claws once more as he did so. Placing their furred backs against the wood to either side, he brought his thumbs and forefingers into contact, creating a triangle about the knob without touching it. With a bit more light pressure, his hands passed into the wood of the door, and he stepped forward to follow after.

He emerged from what appeared to be a bare stone wall, under a decorative archway. Endless scratching and scabbling greeted his ears, as well as the occasional shuffling of loose parchment. These sounds were consistent with being in a hall of scribes, but there was another, stranger sound, the sound of burbling fluid, like a brook or waterfall.

Down the walls flowed rivulets of black ink, descending between wall-mounted desks to the ground level, where it gathered in a black pool whose level never rose or fell. At the desks, stacked one atop another all the way into the shadow-cloaked vault indeterminately far above, were hands—only hands—writing furiously.

They did not write with quills. Each had a nib extending from its index finger, which it would periodically jab into the inkfall when letters became faint. A few hands turned at Ciphramir’s entrance, their fingers spread to reveal their palms. A bulbous gemstone glimmered from a slit in the skin of each, not unlike an eye between squinted lids.

From the arch which parted the circular inkfall, a catwalk extended just over the surface of the ebon pool. Ominously perched at its end was an altar, where there lay a single implement between two pits in its surface. Ciphramir walked forward to claim this implement: a wide, obsidian dagger, its hilt wrapped in worn leather strips. In its place, he laid

two hands—one right, one left—produced from his coat.

With the care of a surgeon, he drew the dagger across the palms of the two hands, lightly nicking the metacarpals beneath the skin. He then laid the dagger back down between the hands, and reached into the pit on the right of the altar, from whence he drew two metal nibs.

Slowly, he drove a nib beneath the nail of the first finger on the right hand, then he did the same to the left. Of their own accord, the palm slits spread open, revealing damaged musculature and bone. Like the mouths of small birds, they were open expectantly.

Ciphramir's hand dove into the pit on the left of the altar, and out with it came two ovoid tiger's eye gemstones. These he placed squarely in the middle of each wound. In response, the split skin reached up and around the stone, enveloping it in an unholy mockery of a blink.

With the vile process complete, the fingers began to flex and test their ranges of motion. Up into the air they drifted, suspended by an invisible force. They hung before Ciphramir, regarding him with their gleaming gaze.

He met their eldritch eyes with his. He pointed to the left hand (which hovered to his right). "I want everything from this one, but start with the time the fire ship entered Castra's harbor," he said. "I want an idea of what the experience was like from their perspective."

The left hand floated away, to the nearest desk. Each desk bore a drawer of paper, which never ran empty, and from one of these the hand drew two sheets. It returned to lay one on the altar, then it rose into the darkness with the other. Far above, beyond sight, it found a desk to write on.

"You can tell this one is special, I see," Ciphramir said to the hand that remained. "It is a new test for you; its owner is still alive, more or less."

The faux eye in the palm blinked slowly, then the hand descended to the pool of ink. It dipped its finger nib ever so gently, drawing up the perfect amount of ink, then returned to perch on the page upon the altar. It sat on its other fingers like a hideous scorpion, its index finger raised as if to strike the page.

Perhaps five other eyes around the chamber read the words off of Ciphramir's lips: "There is much I want to know, but first I would hear what befell him in the vampire's lair. He is starving himself, and I catch glimpses of some strong memory that keeps him so abstemious."

The index finger stabbed down and wrote two words at the head of the page: *The Shadow*. With a slight hop, it brought itself down a line, and began to write in earnest—

taLaR moveD TO his MAster'S sIdE. "Yes We do, my lord." LOCKing eYes with Me, he procEEded to ExeRCisE his FREED tonGue, Saying, "noW leT's Get To yOUr Meal. MuSt be fAMisheD AFter Four days, right?" HIS eyeS went to THE CHildren'S mOTHER, and A neW sNEer CrawLed inTO place. "sTARt with HER. NOw."

Ciphramir looked on with mild concern. "Hard to digest, is he?"

The hand paused, and floated up a ways to better survey its work. The fingers flexed a few times, then it descended to flatten them on the altar. It tilted the rest of its hand up, bending the fingers back farther and farther until they gave a salvo of popping sounds. The hand then shook itself out and resumed its place on the page, now writing slower and more deliberately.

Following along, reading upside down, Ciphramir spent the next two hours with his mind on Victor and the vampire who turned him. The sadistic monster Talar—a tale the old mage scorched away

himself. He could collect story after story, but some would always slip out of his grasp. Interviews, inkchildren, the Scrivener; all these worked wonders, but still he needed more. The gaps were a limitless disappointment.

But none of that now. Now was the time to enjoy what he did have. Now was the time to read the tale of Victor Gagné.

THE SCRIVENER

The Scrivener is a horrific construct made by Ciphramir to extract stories from the deceased. It can access the life memories of any creature whose severed hand is incorporated into it, and it spends its time recording all it can about its constituent parts. Over time, it has grown to immense size, containing several thousand individual hands. Many are old, exhumed from crypts and graveyards whose keepers are unaware of what was taken. Many more are fresher specimens, taken from victims of Ciphramir and his associates. Over time, the Scrivener has learned from the countless memories at its fingertips to think on its own, and to use magic.

Mechanically, the Scrivener consists of 32 swarms of necromancer knuckles (see *Dungeon* magazine issue 127 page 87) organized under a hive mind of Int 20, which can cast spells as a 16th level wizard and as a 12th level archivist (see *Heroes of Horror* page 82). It casts all spells silently, and it possesses no spellbook, simply preparing spells from thousands of dead memories. Additionally, it can take up to three simultaneous standard actions in a turn, allowing it to hurl spells at an accelerated rate.

The Scrivener has never left its lair in Ciphramir's library since its creation, and it has no ambition to at the present time. The door to its chamber is only operable by a rakshasa or a tiger mask whose hands have turned backward. If the knob is handled, it metamorphoses into a malevolent beetle and attempts to kill the one touching it (treat as a *scarab of death*).

THE TALE COLLECTOR—NIGHTMARE

From my granted chamber, it was no hard task to follow the organ music. As I passed a painted fan on my right—scenes of eagles, thunderheads, and wingless, serpentine dragons playing out in its folds—the constantly low tones were alternating rapidly, dancing up and down the bass register. The melody slowed down as a black uniform and sturdy musket—both of unfamiliar design—went by on my left. Now, simple two-note chords predominated, and moving accents below slowly walked across the keys beneath. The overall mood of the piece was almost funereal, and it took my focus from my surroundings.

My only excuse for not realizing what was happening sooner is that my mind became preoccupied with dark thoughts of the hunt before me and the cruel Hunger within me. What was I to do, to keep my new appetites fed during the journey that lay before me? And would I see Paloma again? Had she even survived the battle with her kindred?

These and other such unpleasant thoughts kept me occupied during my walk—and then I noticed that I had been walking for far longer than I should have. At almost the same time, I registered the sound of ... splashing as I walked. Glancing down at my feet, I saw to my considerable surprise that the floor was covered in perhaps an inch of black water. The instant my eyes registered the liquid, so did my nose; a faint stench of mingled attar and rot rose from the waters, making me gag.

I blinked tears from my eyes, rubbed my face ... and when I opened them again, the water was gone, the corridor back to normal. The door to Georg's chamber was close at hand.

Was I so tired that I had hallucinated that odd scene just now? Or was it some darker force? I turned my attention to the music once more—now two distinct lines strode away from each other in a stately manner, then periodically slid back together across all of the intervening notes—but no sense of

enchantment came to me. Despite its theme, it was just music.

There was no indication that the piece was drawing to a close, so I proceeded to knock—yet, I did not disrupt the melody beyond. The organist played on, without any startlement evinced in his performance. Momentarily, I feared that my knuckles had not made sufficient impact on the wood to be heard, but then came a single call over the sound of the pipes: “Come!”

Turning the handle and stepping inside, the volume climbed in absence of the damping wood between me and the source. On the same wall as the door, Georg sat at what seemed to be a large cabinet with an attached bench. Two panels, standing open at the front, flanked a few inset ranks of metal pipes, and two keyboards presented themselves below. However, rather than play host to Georg’s hands, they sat untouched, and his palms were flat against the bench to brace him.

Below the bench, Georg’s feet tapped their way across a wide pedalboard, in an amazing display of dexterity and coordination. He wore a pair of heeled shoes, which allowed him to wander across the keyboard, alternating heel and toe to depress the keys, or to play two nearby notes at once with a single foot. Furthermore, they provided the protection needed to comfortably rake his toes across the keys for his frequent glissandi. Had I not seen it with my own eyes, I would not have thought such playing could be done without the hands.

I had stalled in the doorway, and without turning his head, Georg brought a hand up from the bench to point at a chair behind him. “Sit,” he bade.

Closing the door behind me, I took the offered chair, and continued to listen. Beside me was a small, octagonal table, covered in handwritten sheet music, and behind me was a canopy bed with the curtains drawn. An armoire beside it, a chest at its foot, and a bookshelf full of papers—more music, most likely—on the wall to the left of the organ made up the last of the furniture.

It would be inaccurate to say that the music took me back. Indeed, his marvelous techniques of the feet were a new experience. What did take me back was being in his presence; to see the great Georg Talbann in concert again. When he finally took his hands off of the bench and applied them to the manuals, the memories became nearly tangible—my father to my left, my mother at his other side, in the midst of more than a score of attendees seated in the ballroom of Heather House. A positive organ much like this one had been acquired, loaned for the occasion by a Dementlieuse patron of the arts. Lord Jules Weathermay himself was seated in the front row, alongside his son-in-law Daniel. Absent were the latter’s two daughters, but children barely three years of age were an understandable omission from the cohort of invited guests.

There came a final, grandiose, major chord, then silence fell. As the scenes of my youth faded from my mind’s eye and my true surroundings filled in, Georg swung his feet around the bench and faced me. He looked to the stained flask in my hand, then into my eyes, but before he could speak, I said, “Exceptional. It is wonderful to hear you play again.”

This actually seemed to disarm him somewhat. He leaned backward, two fast blinks flashed across his face, then he presented a hesitant, partial smile. “I thank you,” he returned. “Few remember.”

“It has been a long time since I saw you last,” I said. “Forgive me, but I cannot help but wonder why that is.”

His eyes wandered across the floor, and he heaved a slow sigh. “For the same reason Ciphramir sent you with that flask.” Pointing past me, he instructed, “Open the chest and bring me the pump.”

I rose and did as he asked, opening the chest to reveal its contents. Within, I found that nearly half of the volume was taken up with glass vessels like the one I had brought. Many were empty, and many were full, their crimson contents beckoning me and diverting my attention. Mustering my will, I focused on the contraption that sat beside them, an unusual

and complex metal stopper. A crank handle extended from it, as did two sets of waxed canvas tubing, both of which ended in a needle—it was a sanguine pump; I had seen such things before, used by men of medicine. This is what had filled the flasks.

As I brought the pump over, Georg elucidated the matter. “My blood is thick; it runs slowly through my veins.” He took the pump and the flask, and affixed one to the other. “Two years before the Upheaval, on the third day of February—a fateful date I remember quite well—everything came to a stop. My heart couldn’t move the sludge, and my brain starved.” He was out of his coat, and now rolled his sleeve up past his elbow. “The cord ... I should have mentioned that. Get the cord for me.”

I returned to the chest, and came back to him with a length of thick twine, which he proceeded to tie very tightly around his upper arm. As he searched himself for a vein, a needle in his other hand, he went on. “Though I lived, I couldn’t move myself. My body no longer obeyed me. Unable to walk, unable to play, I wallowed in misery for months.” He selected a spot and inserted the needle, then began to work the handle of the pump. Around and around it went, sending a steady stream of red blood into the flask. I winced and averted my eyes, and he kept on speaking. “Then Ciphramir found me. He knew my work, and saw my state. By his magic—the same magic he used on your possessions—he pieced the ruined portions of my mind back together. With my control restored, I found that much of my skill was still there, and I have worked long to replace what was missing. I can make music once more, and I love him for that gift.”

He looked up from his pumping, and I brought my eyes back to meet his gaze. “This is why you are here. I have too much blood, and you have a use for it.” His eyes went back to his work, and he added, “Should you wish it.”

We spent the next several minutes in silence, he pumping, I trying not to be hypnotized. It was hard to think as the blood continued to flow, though the

basic premises and questions I had to contend with flitted about, unresolved. *Preying on the living is wrong; Georg isn’t prey, and must be bled for his health; to drink blood is to become more like the Legions of the Night. Can I control myself? Is the power of my condition valuable enough to warrant the risk?*

He finished, and directed me back toward the chest. “Bring me gauze, please.” On handing him a pristine, white roll of the fabric, he removed the needle and undid the cord; a single rivulet of blood escaped him. The gauze wrapping began swiftly, and though a small, red stain blossomed on the cloth, the binding did its job.

All this was medical, sensible, but as the free blood formed a drop that threatened to fall and stain his trousers, he traded the professional for the uncouth. His other hand darted in to collect the blood on his finger, then went straight to his mouth. Having cleaned his fingertip, he then bent to draw his tongue across the thin blood-track on his forearm, wiping it up to the edge of the bandage. I was taken aback—by him, and by the intruding desire to have been the one to taste that ruby trail—but it was the fastest option at his disposal. His sleeve came back down, and was buttoned closed at the cuff. Finally, he approached the chest himself, to put away the sanguine pump and find a proper stopper for the newly filled flask.

The lid was shut before he turned to me, and he put both hands—and thus the flask—behind his back, concealing its distracting allure from my view. “The aid of me, and the aid of my blood. That is what I offer,” he declared, then stepped forward, coming within arm’s reach. His face stayed neutral, but not dull. His eyes were alert, boring into mine as if he intended to extract my decision before even I knew it. “Would you avail yourself of these things?”

In that moment, only my continued breathing, slow and trembling, showed that I still lived. The pieces of the puzzle swam about, not settling into place. There was so much help that I needed, but how much

could I afford? “Your aid would be a boon,” I began, but when he brought the flask back into sight, the rest of the sentence became nothing but the motion of my jaw.

I recollected myself and tried again, “But your blood ... I do not know I can.” I placed my hand on the flask, on his hand as well, and pushed it to the side. Understanding the message, he put it back behind him.

He gave a slow nod. “The former offer does not hinge on the latter, but continue to think on it.” He came forward past me, and placed the flask on the table amid the sheets of music. On returning to the bench of the positive organ, he sat facing me one last time. “Is there anything else you would know?”

My closed lips tensed and shifted, sliding over my teeth in a way I imagine looked quite strange. Half-questions and poorly formed thoughts tried to take shape in my mouth, but nothing coalesced fully. Nothing worth expressing was ready. “No,” I replied. “Thank you for your offer, and most of all, your music.”

For the second time, he smiled in his ill-used, incomplete manner. “Good day,” was all he said, and as I went to the door, he swung himself into position to play once more.

THE CIRCLE OF CIPHERMIR

There are many who have done Ciphramir’s bidding without even knowing it, but not all of them are inkchildren. By the graces of his inner circle, Ciphramir may access a multitude of servants who can work his will at their apparent master’s behest.

Ciphramir’s inner circle does not consist of subordinates, but of what Ciphramir insists are friends. In his long years of travel through the Dread Realms, he has earned the trust and admiration of a number of interesting and enterprising individuals. With his assistance and connections, these individuals have become dark figures of note throughout the Demiplane.

Each of Ciphramir’s friends has his or her own interests and goals, but they trade favors among themselves to advance their plans more effectively.

Most of Ciphramir’s friends are humanoids, and all of those who are demonstrate their dedication by becoming tiger masks. This involves being scarred on the chest by Ciphramir’s claws in the Ritual of the Blackened Tiger, but the rest of the pageantry associated with the position (wearing masks in his presence and only speaking Infernal to him) is dispensed with. In keeping with tradition, they are trained in the preparation of humanoid flesh for consumption.

In addition to Federlin (see *Who’s Doomed*), Ciphramir’s inner circle includes (but is not limited to):

Abram Horrox (wizard 3/tiger mask 2/erudite [Complete Psionic page 153] 5/cerebremancer 2+):

The original Abram Horrox was born in Staunton Bluffs, and came into temporary ownership of one of the fragments of Nightblood’s phylactery before they were drawn into Liffe. He was taken and absorbed by the God-Brain of Bluetspur several years ago, but that hasn’t stopped the rest of him from working toward ultimate power. Inspired by the fragmentation of a single lich into a multitude of lesser entities, the Abrams wish to bring multiple liches together into a single, greater entity. However, as extant liches are unlikely to be so cooperative, the Abrams have been infecting victims with their own personality via the *mind seed* power (*Expanded Psionics Handbook* page 119). Eventually, enough Abrams will have the might to become liches and perform their great experiment. Given their frequent use of powerful psionics, the mightiest Abrams remain constantly under the effect of *dimensional anchor* spells to avoid being abducted by the God-Brain again.

Captain Dvarik (male caliban warmage 10/tiger mask 5): Dvarik was born in Martira Bay, and worked low wage jobs along the docks. He was often derided for his hideous appearance, and he felt trapped in his social station. Ciphramir granted Dvarik an antidote to both, giving Dvarik freedom as a pirate, and transforming his appearance via the path of the tiger mask (which both altered Dvarik's normal appearance to be more tiger-like, and granted limited shapeshifting abilities). Now, Captain Dvarik and the *Sea Cat* oversee Ciphramir's interests at sea.

Fenraed Arvi (male human rogue 3/sorcerer 3/tiger mask 4/cancer mage 10): This unwholesome man runs a mining operation in Nosos. His enterprise turns little profit, however, as what money he makes from successful mines gets wasted on supporting mines from which only useless pitchblende can be extracted. This substance gets alchemically refined into a bizarre yellow powder that he covets more than gold. He is often spotted wearing a black uniform and a beaked mask, ostensibly to keep himself safe from disease—though truly to keep his numerous illnesses away from others. Through the Iron Way (see *Zherisia Gazetteer* page 10), he keeps subtle tabs on Paridon, where Ciphramir's associates are otherwise loath to go for fear of the Red Haunt.

Georg Talbann (male human expert 6/fighter 2/arcanamach [Complete Arcane page 63] 5/tiger mask 2): Born into a well-to-do family in Lamordia in 708 BC, Georg Talbann was musically inclined from an early age. He was a pipe organ prodigy, and traveled the western Core performing in cathedrals and private halls during the 730s. Tragically, he suffered from an abnormal thickening of the blood due to polycythemia (see *New Illnesses*), and was incapacitated by an apoplectic stroke in 738 BC, rendering him paralyzed and unable to play. Ciphramir, who had attended some of Georg's concerts, found him and repaired the brain damage so that he could play again. This has made Georg the most devoted of Ciphramir's colleagues.

Having fallen out of the public eye, Georg is in an excellent position to perform surreptitious tasks throughout the Dread Realms, and to prepare him for this role, Ciphramir had him trained in the Hazlani arcanamach tradition (see *QtR 13* page 95), the secrets of which had been extracted from an unfortunate inkchild. Furthermore, Georg wields a darkwood axe permanently enchanted with an *ironwood* spell, and carved with a large void in the axe-head to act as a tripping hook. When not given direction, Georg spends his time composing and experimenting with new keyboard techniques, which he publishes under a series of pseudonyms.

Rothistre Somennos (female Sithican elf spirit shaman [Complete Divine page 14] 6/bard 6/tiger mask 3/geomancer [Complete Divine page 41] 4): Rothistre is an anthropologist, and currently focuses her efforts on understanding the secrets of the *bitterkinder* (*Gazetteer IV* page 116). Inspired by Fenraed's discussions about the immune system, Rothistre developed magical techniques which cause the *bitterkinder* to fail to recognize her as a stranger, allowing her to move among them and study them without being attacked. She is also capable of influencing their activities, and has moved some of their camps to guard sites of interest so she can study them without interference from other scholars.

I departed Georg's room, intending to return to my own and collect my thoughts after everything that had happened. Barely had I gone five steps before I registered splashing noises—and an unwelcome cold sensation on my ankles. Looking down, I saw the black water had returned, and it stood higher now. The unclean stench of the grave rose from it, mixed with rose-oil so strong that it was anyone's guess which made me gag the worse.

Then I noticed the splashing sound continued even though I stood still. It came from behind me. Instinct screamed at me not to turn, but too late; looking back, I saw the corridor stretch back into an

unfathomable distance, and a boat was being piloted along the black stream by a tall figure in a hooded robe.

"Life, Victor Gagné," it called out in a voice like the crumbling of rotting bone, *"but not for you."*

Almost, I lost control of my bladder. For a moment, I was trapped in a hideous nightmare, which had come after silver had pierced my heart with frozen fire—and here again was Death, punting along his boat so he could bring me to the Grey Lands.

I did what I had not been able to do in the dream; I turned from the approaching boat and ran as fast as my legs could carry me. Where was the door to my room? Strike that, where was the door to Ciphramir's chambers? Surely the master of the house could free me of this apparition, this waking nightmare? And even if he could not, I wanted to be nowhere near Death again so soon!

As I ran, the walls of the corridor transformed into slick, water-carved stone, and darkness fell. I wheezed out a single Word of Power, the cantrip causing my hand to shine like a torch. The waters had risen while I ran, so that now I was wading through a cold river that reached up to my waist. The current was sluggish, but persistent, and I frequently found myself almost slipping. I had no idea how long I had been running, or how far, but the boat was still behind me.

When my mage-light illuminated a stairway carved into the tunnel wall, granting access to an elevated side-corridor, I nearly wept with relief. Was I anywhere near Ciphramir's chambers? I did not know. Truth, I did not care; I just scrambled up the stairs and ran down the passage.

Soon enough, the sounds and stench of the river faded behind me. The corridor curved gently to the left as I went, and the air grew warmer. It continued to grow warmer until it became unpleasantly hot. Sweat broke out on me in a dozen places, soaking every thread that the river had missed. And then I

heard the first crack of leather against flesh, the first grunt of pained rage.

My run turned into a walk without conscious input from my brain, and I listened carefully. The whistle and crack of leather against flesh and the sounds of mingled agony and fury came from somewhere up ahead, and the air continued to grow warmer. A coppery scent, mixed with the stink of sweat, filled the air like perfume. My eye-teeth ached and lightly pricked my lower lip. Blood. The coppery scent was the aroma of blood.

The tunnel continued to curve to the left. When I came to its end and the chamber opened before me, I was surprised in spite of my caution. Although I had expected something like the scene that unfolded before me, it still shocked me and caused pity and horror to well up in the bottom of my stomach.

In the center of a rough-carved chamber, a red-haired woman was suspended between five taut chains. Two connected metal rings around her wrists to a corresponding pair of rings hammered into the ceiling; two connected rings closed around her ankles to rings driven into the floor; the final one linked to a metal collar around the woman's neck, and it attached to the wall opposite the doorway in which I now stood.

The woman was naked, but now it was not politeness that compelled me to avert my gaze. The sight of her back and upper thighs, torn again and again by whips and gushing blood, drove my eyes away, down to the floor. It was a vision with appeal for only the most vicious and repulsive of sadists.

Below, three women took turns lashing their prisoner with cruel whips, the leather set with studs of sharp glass. A fourth woman lay kneeling before the prisoner, and I threw my hands up before me to block the spectacle of her practically rolling in the blood as she supplicated the torture victim. The three torturers and the supplicant were oddly indistinct, and not only because I was loath to look upon them. I knew all were women—each of fair form, though cheapened and overshadowed by their

monstrosity—but I could say nothing about their appearances save for the color of their leather garb. Black, grey, and white were the three torturers' form-fitting outfits; red was the color of the supplicant.

"Break and obey me!" the torturer in black demanded as she whipped the prisoner with the kind of force usually reserved for breaking the will of wild animals. The awful blow and its dreadful sound drove me back—into the wall where once the corridor had been.

"Play with me," purred the torturer in grey as she wound her whip around the prisoner's upper thighs in cunning loops and curls. I turned from the scene entirely, hoping to spare myself the awfulness for a short time.

"Feel my love," sighed the torturer in white, and I heard her lash gently swish through the air, then rake across flesh.

"Let us devour one another," moaned the supplicant in red, and I retched upon the stone, overwhelmed.

Break – Play – Love – Devour. The four words repeated over and over again, time seeming to speed up as the torturers' motions became a jerky blur in the corner of my eye, the crack of individual whips blending into a continuous note of pain. I wanted to do something, say something, but I was frozen by the images that continued to play in my mind's eye.

Though time raced, it was not headed to a swift end. Rather, it threatened a blistering eternity. There was no retreat, not through the stone, and not within myself. I could not unsee, even as I refused to look—and so I had no choice but to face the repugnant scene, and make the agonizing reality stop. I forced my eyes to turn back, and pulled forth the last flask of alchemist's fire. I pulled back my arm, making ready to strike the strong torturer in black. There was no further plan but to fight.

But I was interrupted. My mage-light winked out, stealing the cruel sight from my eyes—a mercy far too late in coming. I staggered forward, into the dark, and sensed that I was in a far greater space than I had seen before. Someone—something?—many someones?—moved around me. I could smell an animal stench, heard the *click-click-click* of nails against the stone floor. I whirled round and round, trying to pinpoint the source of the sound. The sound of whips and suffering was gone, but words boiled out of the darkness and intruded on my ears.

"Why won't you see how much I love you? Why do you fight it? Please stop this!" a woman's voice begged, and I could hear the love throb in every word—love and despair. "Just give in to me, and all your pain will be at an end. I will take care of you, love you, uplift you."

Whatever moved around me started to run, panting.

'You do not forget the suffering of the victim.'

"Love," a different woman's voice replied, scorn and loathing dripping from every word. "You call ... 'this' ... love."

"Open your mind," the first voice begged. "See what I am trying to give you. Release. Peace. Transformation..."

"I have had *enough of transformation!*" the second voice hissed.

There was a sentiment I found I could agree with. I started to chant another Word, but a crack opened in the darkness. It was a doorway, through which red light spilled, and a fox stood outlined against the glare. Without looking back at me, it trotted through the doorway.

Away went the flask, and with frantic energy, I dug the fox emblem from the neck of my shirt, seeking to regard its curled form. Then, as my eyes looked back after the real fox that had vanished from my sight, I let the amulet fall. I ran forward, yelling as I did: "What are you showing me? *What is this for?*"

I staggered through the doorway and into another room. Or rather, I fell into another room. A marble altar broke my fall, jarring my body and eliciting a groan of pain from my lips. My body felt unnaturally heavy, and I flopped, limply, onto my back.

An endless sky, shot through with rolling clouds and plumes of fog, seemed to stretch around me in all directions. The altar upon which I lay stood on top of an impossible pillar, and an equally impossible stairway led up to it as it spiraled around the pillar; this much I could see from the corners of my rolling eyes.

“You will worship me,” a smug, intensely masculine voice thundered from the heavens. “You will scream your delight of me. We have nothing but time, and I have never failed to make my property adore me.”

“I will never worship you,” a voice rose from the depths, darkness welling up to turn the blue sky to black. All the clouds vanished, torn asunder by that voice, and I lay illuminated by the gibbous moon and winking stars. The north wind caressed me and I was so cold.

“I will *never* worship you!” the voice repeated. “When you hear me scream, you hear only my hatred, only my pain.”

“Pain shall become a delight to you as we explore your body together,” the male voice declared, his voice a purr of amused innuendo that turned the sky blue. “You will laugh and sing in honor of my glory and the pleasure I bring you.”

My stomach turned. I could feel my disgust of this man—of this sort of man—in the most visceral way. The ill feeling almost clouded my perception of the reply.

“When I sing, it will be because I have slaughtered you like a *pig*,” the woman countered, darkness rising up once more. “Your blood will stain my hands, and I will crush your entrails beneath my feet.”

“Why can’t you be happy?” wept the woman who had proclaimed her love.

“There is no happiness left within me,” the darkness replied, cold and angry. “None. There was none when you trapped me. There shall even be none when I walk out of here, and your blood is upon my hands. But I *will* be free. All words will fade.”

For a time, there was silence. I lay in the dark, staring up at unfamiliar stars and feeling a familiar lethargy. When I realized why it was familiar, horror wormed its way through the numbness and I struggled to rise—in vain. I had felt like this at the Retreat, when the nightmares of a black-haired demoness had come to me. And now I knew they had not been simply nightmares.

As fear caused my heart to pound, a sound rose from the depths. It was the slap of skin against stone. My rolling eye saw a form climb up the stairs. A woman, was my first impression, walking on all fours. Then more details presented themselves as she grew closer, and I struggled more—still in vain.

What I had thought was a leather cloak was a pair of pale wings. A hairless tail trailed behind the woman as she crawled ever closer. Small horns poked up through red hair that fell down in curls and waves. Both the creature’s fingers and toes bore claws. Not the Red Haunt, but a demoness all the same.

I sobbed, struggling to hurl myself off the altar, to draw breath for a spell. Nothing. I lay pinned, helpless, while the incarnation of evil padded ever closer like some monstrously misshapen dog. Until finally, she clambered up onto the altar and straddled me. Her skin was the color of mocha, her face beautiful beyond measure. Her body was sinful desire made flesh, even stained with sweat, grime, and blood. Silver and leather amulets dangled from a rough, iron collar about her neck. It might even be cold iron, considering the welts on her skin I could see where the collar touched her flesh.

The demon’s eyes were cold, arrogant, intelligent lamps of bright emerald, regarding me the way an entomologist might some unusual bug. Pale wings spread, occluding the sky.

“Remember,” she said.

Then she slapped my face so hard that my vision blurred. I blinked away tears, and the fiend straddling me was darkly beautiful, her skin white as chalk and her hair a halo of black instead of fire. I was held fast in her grip, and I remembered—remembered...

Fear. My darkest fear. Of the potential to lose and suffer. A pain I never wished to bear—and I refused to.

I screamed at the memory, casting it away before I could know it truly, and the laughing fiend slapped me again. When the tears faded away, I found myself sitting in a cave. Fireflies cast a fitful, green glow upon the stone, illuminating both the lack of an exit and the presence of a young woman in a sleeveless shirt and mannish trousers, who sat against the wall opposite. Her face was pressed to her knees, her arms wrapped around her legs. She rocked to and fro, whispering “No, no, no,” over and over.

Her feet were bare and bruised. There were cuts and tears in her odd clothes, through which I could see injuries that seemed to have become infected. And all the time the girl just kept whispering her unspecified denial.

I went to her, crouched before her. All of my attention was directed her way, to her condition, and away from the threat of memory. “My ... what happened?” I busied myself worthlessly searching my clothes. “Can I do any... I wish I had quintessence...”

The young woman looked up, her face streaked with tears, her eyes feverish with some madness. When she spoke, however, her voice was clear and cold: “Leave. Me. Alone. This place is awful enough *without all you people never listening LEAVE ME ALONE!*”

She rose to her feet and kicked at me, striking a glancing blow that still knocked me back. I expected to crack my head against the stone wall, but instead

found myself falling *through* it. Out of control, I tumbled through the darkness—

‘In darkness is thy strength’

—and fell into light, onto a surface both soft and yielding. A bed. My bed in the room Ciphramir had given to me! Gasping for breath, I patted myself with both hands. I seemed to be intact, my clothes dry. No stench of animals, nor of death, nor of a demon’s embrace.

I just started to relax when there was a faint tremor in the floor. Memories of Ciphramir’s other house flooded into my mind, of the way it had trembled and broken apart into the Mists. A crack suddenly bisected the floor, admitting a plume of Mist before it re-sealed itself.

‘All words will fade,’ a voice whispered in my ear. *‘Remember.’*

INTERLUDE: ALARM

At the head desk of the writing room, Ciphramir was himself scrivening. A large book, its cover of the finest leather, was open before him, and a double-ended, mithral pen was in his hand.

Have a new key made for your back door, he wrote, his script an artful collection of large loops, precise angles, and beautifully distinct symbols. *Bury it in the dirt nearby, marked with a cluster of three rocks so you do not lose it. You do not want to find yourself locked out again.*

He shut the book, which had a name down its spine. The man who bore that name had never met the master of Twice-Risen Manor, and nor had his mother, but she had met the sharpened point of the pen in Ciphramir’s hand. On the cover of the book, a single sweeping rune he called *s’Ceth* was embossed. Ciphramir always initialed the memoirs in his library.

Into his lap went the book and pen, so that he could lift the desktop and place them in the space beneath. Once shut again, he willed the book to its

place on the shelves, and the pen to its drawer behind him. Now, he needed another book, and another pen; a petty thief needed to have a brilliant insight into where a man hid his extra key. Many small edits were to come, and in the shuffle, something larger would slip through the cracks, destined to land in clawed hands.

The door from his office flew open, and through it came Federlin, interrupting his thoughts. Her abrupt entry was followed by an urgent declaration: "Ciphramir, there is fetid water seeping under the cellar door!"

Ciphramir's head snapped in her direction. "Water? From the Chthon?" He rose from his wheelchair, discarding the pretense in the face of this bizarre incursion. "What in the eldest name of Hell... Find me Somnirot!"

The orange cat was still on Victor's bed, in his otherwise empty room. The only sign of Victor was his gift from the Red Haunt, the spellbook he left on the nightstand. Had there been a search, no other sign of him would have been found in the house.

That was not to be. Ciphramir picked Somnirot up in his arms, and touched the false feline's mind with his own. Immediately, the old wizard's eyelids drooped, his head nodded, and he swayed on his feet. A fey, eldritch laughter rang in the halls of his great mind. Taunting him.

A shuddering breath in, a shake of his white-crowned head, and his eyes flew wide with rage. "*Who is in my house?!*" he howled, a hint of an animalistic roar creeping into the lower range of his voice. His only answer was the laughter, fading into the distance. With his weight on his toes, he cracked his heels together, and both he and Somnirot vanished.

In the bare instant Somnirot was between origin and destination, being siphoned through the Mists, Twice-Risen Manor shook to its very foundations.

There was a pulse through the air as Ciphramir and Somnirot came to occupy space in Georg's room. The near simultaneous shudder of the house had already interrupted his music, and as soon as he registered their presence, he wheeled about and came to his feet before them. "My lord, what is happening?"

Ciphramir was looking down at Somnirot in his arms with concern and fury, the latter not directed at the unconscious cat. "Something has seized the Chthon, and has pulled Victor into it." His gaze came up to regard Georg. "You must find him for me, so I may cleanse Somnirot's mind."

Georg cocked his head inquisitively. "Do I understand correctly ... am I to be sent alone?"

His master nodded once. "Outside of my control, neither Federlin nor I can provide safe passage through the Chthon. I will provide what stability I can, but order will not be restored until I can expel him."

Georg gave a shallow bow. "So shall I serve."

"Good," said Ciphramir, and his eyes returned to Somnirot. "Gather your supplies posthaste, along with everything I prepared for Victor—and his new spellbook; I don't want it in my house—and go through the cellar door." He walked to Georg's chair and sat, gently stroking his striped, orange servant.

Georg took his pack from the armoire. Much had already been prepared, but he added more clothes. He went to the chest and transferred his pump, as well as an assortment of blood-laden flasks, the freshly filled one among them. The pack gained no weight. Another like it waited in Ciphramir's room, which Georg would get subsequently. He took up his axe—which many have mistaken for a cane—and *bolted* down the hall. Ciphramir had spoken, and Georg would not fail him.

In the organist's absence, Ciphramir spoke again. His words were orders, but not for his servants' ears. His arcane commands were for the force raging through Somnirot's subconscious, bidding it to be calm. He

pushed, but gently, shaping the flow of the nightmare rather than attacking it with all his might.

The time for might was not yet at hand.

THE TALE COLLECTOR – EXPULSION

I backed away from the section of floor that had broken and then re-knit itself. Was it really happening again? Or was this but an echo I was being subjected to? My second spellbook—the Red Haunt’s gift to me—was there on the nightstand, but I abandoned it again, seizing my thesis instead, and dashed out into the corridor.

Dashed out—into a tunnel with walls of rough, uncarved stone. Cold, dark water washed over me, chilled me to the waist. A stench of rot and attar hung upon the air, and specks of luminous green fungus dotted the walls and ceiling like malignant stars.

I turned left, and saw the tunnel recede into the distance, side-passages branching off. A sole torch flickered at the limit of my sight, like an orange, luminous eye. I turned right and saw the same. Left again, and this time there was a short passage that ended in a cavern.

I blinked; rubbed my eyes. When I opened them again, the passage had the smooth walls of a sewer pipe, and it ended in a big fork. Something was very wrong here, and the door to my room had disappeared.

Doubt could have paralyzed me. Terror could have bidden me weep and sit in place. Instead, I pushed myself to forge ahead. The fork was two ways at first, then turned to three in the space of a blink. By the time I reached it, it had become two once again, and after some hesitation, I went to the left, which seemed to smell less foul.

Sounds started to pursue me; splashes and grunts that made me fear alligators in the sewers; chittering that made me dread swarms of rats on the hunt; an

eerie whistling that drew closer, receded, faded, and returned again; the sounds of travelers walking, speaking in loud voices. More than once I considered trying to run toward those sounds, but I feared they would merely prove to be bait in some awful trap.

At one point, I heard a nonsensical exchange of words, uttered by familiar-seeming voices:

“I am telling you, I have no money to give you, and neither does my apprentice. There’s no point to this altercation. You should save your energy and just go hunt somewhere else.”

“Might as well, me ole crippled pal. But I’m feeling a mite peckish. Maybe I’ll just carve off a drumstick for the road—”

Then there was a scream, followed by a rumbling snarl.

I moved on, trying to build a map of the maze in my mind as I did, or at least to find a pattern in its shifts. I would not give up. Never give up. Ever. There was a trick to every maze, I just needed to keep my wits about me and find it, reason it out.

“You are but stone,” I muttered as I eyed a crossroads ahead, the central passage receding into darkness. “My mind is greater than cold, wet stone. I am going to—”

My voice faltered at the same moment that my forward movement came to an abrupt halt. In the darkness ahead, two lights had kindled. Green eyes, staring at me. Cold; intelligent; arrogant. There was a shifting, as of wings – no, not ‘as of!’ They *were* wings, pale, draped about the shoulders of the figure that walked toward me out of the darkness.

It was the demoness with the iron ring about her neck, the succubus who had straddled and struck me, plunged me into that vision of—*Nonono I don’t know I don’t knowww~!*—of the Red Haunt. Skin the color mocha, her body covered only by the ring around her neck and the amulets hanging from it; hair all the colors of the sunset, spilling down onto her shoulders in waves and curls; small horns jutting

from her forehead and a hairless tail stirring the dark water behind her. Incongruously, it struck me that the demoness was actually *shorter* than I, the water reaching up to her belly-button where it only reached my waist. She was moving more slowly than I had been, but she *was* moving.

Moving toward me.

“Stay back!” I shouted, starting to fumble in my pockets for the alchemist’s fire once more. “I’ve got...” My pockets were submerged, and the vials were slick with whatever filth permeated the swill I stood in. “... damn it—just keep back!” Still she advanced, and I had no new command or threat to coerce her anew. I simply cried out, “*What do you want?*”

I backed away, putting the wall at my back—and the demoness just waded past me. She glanced at me in passing, no more, and moved on.

She was headed toward a forking passage that had not been there before. Over the left-hand passage, a stylized tiger had been carved into the rock. Over the right-hand passage, a fox. Both beasts appeared to be baring their teeth at each other in a silent snarl—and when I looked back down, the demoness was gone. Instinct told me she had moved down one of the passages.

I expected the fork to disappear the instant I blinked, but it remained in place. There was a tension in the air. Someone or something was waiting for me to choose one or the other. The tiger ... or the fox.

I felt that I could turn away from the choice if I wanted. No one was forcing me to go anywhere, and I could turn my back on the fork and proceed under my own power. Then again, this was the first thing in the maze that had not been shifting around.

Also, I was damned tired of all the confusion and mystery. I needed answers—no, I *craved* them. So the question became: which passage to choose? That blasted fox had led me a merry chase to uncomfortable places, so I had reason to doubt its

trustworthiness. Then again, tigers were man-eaters, and I had just recently seen the most horrible countenance of that dread Lord in the Flame, who wore a tiger’s head. It seemed an overly spectacular ill omen.

“At least there are foxes in Mordent,” I sighed, aggrieved, and made my way down the right-hand fork. The walls around me took on the sheen of brick, covered in muck and carved with archaic writing. Somewhere behind me, there was a rumbling crash, and I knew the Way of the Tiger had collapsed.

I waded onward, the only sounds my own splashing and the lapping of the water against the walls. Spots of luminous lichen barely let me see where I was going. The walls were slime-covered brick and they *stayed* slime-covered brick, but the ground started to slope upward underneath my feet. Finally, it rose enough that I found myself walking along a raised path, well above the foul-smelling waters.

The path ended at another fork, both branches dark, both of them smelling like an animal’s den. Little distinguished one passage from the other; there was no pictogram or glyph above, no change in style or workmanship, not even echoing footfalls, be they bare and slapping or shod and tapping.

But then, thinking of feet, I crouched down to look at the floor. Behind me, wet shoe-prints indented the slime and stopped at my heels. Just to the left—facing the fork—a second set of footprints walked alongside, with claw marks at the ends of each toe. An uncanny feeling, as though she had been walking beside me the whole way, came into my mind, but I shrugged it off as I saw the footprints continue past and down the left fork.

Strangely enough, two more sets of tracks came back from the left fork, against her direction of travel, then turned about to trail off down the right fork. They were far smaller, with one set the prints of a domestic cat, and the other the prints of something larger, and canine. They took long strides, and I surmised that the classical tale of dog chasing cat

had played out here—a fair while ago, for no echoing barks or yowls came back at me from the right-hand path.

Perhaps I could claim some force possessed me to keep following the trail of the succubus. Or perhaps there was some logic that swayed me; after all, a sturdy, riled-up dog could be dangerous and unpredictable, whereas the succubus had not yet gone so far as to threaten my life.

Some logic, indeed, but I admit it wasn't quite so palaverous: she might be of few words, but a dog *couldn't* answer my questions. I followed, and soon enough, I caught up.

She stood at the end of the passage, face impassive, eyes unreadable. For some reason, I felt none of the terror I had felt for her until now, only growing annoyance. Did her lips quirk in the ghost of a smile? Or was that merely the prelude for when she opened her mouth and started to sing? Her voice was low, husky, and trembled with some terrible emotion beyond grief and hope:

“I have a wager’ the brave child spoke

The fisherman laughed, though disturbed at the joke.

‘You will drink what I drink but you must equal me

And if the drink leaves me standing,

A soul shall go free’

‘I have here a cask of most magical wine

A vintage that blessed every ship of the line

It’s wrung from the blood of the sailors who died

Young white body adrift in the tide’ ”¹

The demoness walked toward me, eyes seeming to be first empty as glass, then suddenly full of a terrible intensity. She raised her hands to my shoulders, light as doves, and angled her head. The stench of her—sweat, filth, blood—washed over me, yet did not disturb me. Her lips parted again, revealing sharp canine teeth. Like a wolf, or a vampire, or—or a dhampir.

By the song and the baring of her neck—not simply a side-effect of angling for mine with her fangs—I knew it to be an invitation, and with the blood smell in my nostrils, my teeth *yearned* to accept. I wavered, my Hunger holding me fast, but all of the alarms of sin, corruption, and surrender to the darkness shrieking at me to push away.

Then came a new push, and new hands on my shoulders to deliver it. From behind me they crept in, closer to my neck than hers, and a voice followed them. *“Drain her,”* came the hateful Talar’s cruel instructions. At once, I saw the red hair of the succubus as the red hair of my first victim. I even thought her face changed to match a little bit. A phantom pain by my left wrist, as of a little girl’s fangs, and the feeble percussion of a small boy’s fists on my back. I screamed in horror, and drew away—

Only to stop. As I pressed back into the hands, I did not feel two thumbs pressed into the sides of my spine. Instead, they jabbed my shoulder blades—*outside* of the region flanked by the other fingers. The hands at my back were *backward*, like the hands of the Master of the Flame.

It was a trick, a vicious reverse compulsion. The entity behind me wanted me to recall Talar, the children Tylene and Mereth, and their poor mother; to be repelled; to not drink. For whatever reason it did this, it was not out of concern for my well-being—it was something more selfish. Some web of intrigue that it wanted to wrap me in. In self-defense against this new threat, I did...

I did the unthinkable.

¹Sting, ‘the Soul Cages’

I pulled the demoness to me, wrapping my arms across her back and holding her tight against me—a painful embrace for her, no doubt, given the scars my hands now pressed, and made worse when I sank my fangs deep into her neck.

As the second pair of hands withdrew, with an inhuman roar of foreign curses fading away after them, the demoness' mouth met my neck in turn. Her fangs slid into my flesh, but shallowly, not cutting in with the same ferocity my jaw insisted on applying. I bled into her mouth, slowly, and though my head became a mite light, I wasn't drawn into blackness. Unlike the first time I was bitten, those long weeks ago by the monster Talar, there was a ... for lack of a better word, gentleness ... to this bite.

Becoming self-conscious, I loosened my mortal vise-grip on her throat, endeavoring to mimic her lighter touch. Only then did I become aware of the tastes flowing over my tongue.

It started as normal blood; rich, with a strong taste of iron tickling my tongue. Hints of something strange and not altogether pleasant popped up, blending with that iron flavor. But it was still hot and vital blood, pulsing into my mouth and down my throat—until the hints became a bold statement. Abruptly, the blood did not so much spurt as it leaped into my mouth, moving as though with a will of its own. It was thin as wine or water now, its taste sweetly tart. The sensation of something forcing its way down my throat set it heaving and convulsing; I snorted, drops of the liquid stinging my nostrils. Stinging ... *burning!*

I seemed to be drinking not blood, but fire! The liquid roared its way into me, stinging and searing me on the way down, slammed into my belly and erupted there! Fire flowed along my veins, consuming me from within, and I opened my mouth to scream—and as soon as my fangs left the flesh of the succubus, the pain was gone, as though it had never existed. There was only a short stab of discomfort as the creature dislodged her own fangs from my flesh and released me.

I staggered, and the demoness was already walking away from me. Some of the scars had broken open where I grabbed her, causing thin threads of blood and pus to trickle down her back. My hands were stained by a mixture of those humors, and I unthinkingly wiped them on my trousers.

“Stop,” I demanded, letting my blood-stained lips go unwiped. “Stop! Why are you doing this? Where are we? Why do you keep showing me things without explaining anything?”

No answer. Only the succubus, walking away from me at a steady pace. Muscles played beneath the skin on her back and upper thighs; wicked scars of whip and fist criss-crossed over them.

“Are you—are you Brightwell?” I asked while I followed after her. “Are you the one the Red Haunt worships?”

No answer. No hesitation. The creature strode on, shadows enfolding her.

I stopped walking and pulled the red amulet from my collar; screwed up my courage; spoke: “I do not worship you. Are you here because of this? Because of—this *gift* I received at the Retreat? You can have it back. I do not want to owe you anything, I just want to go free.”

She turned around. There was a look of approval in her eyes, and she sang again:

*“If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended—
That you have but slumbered here
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend.”²*

²William Shakespeare, ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’

"I don't understand," I said, feeling helpless. "I don't understand you at all."

"Nor should you," a familiar voice spoke up from behind me. For a moment, the muscles in my shoulders seized up and spasmed.

I forced myself to relax, to ask the question: "Why are you here, Genevieve?"

The youngest face of the Red Haunt sauntered into my field of view and sank to her heels. She looked ... happier than she had in the Retreat. "You know, I don't think I am," she replied. "I'm just here, so far as I'm here, because I'm the first person to be nice to you and truly mean you well in days. And very horrible days they were, too."

"That makes no sense," I chided her. "Your other selves meant me—*did* me terrible harm."

She grinned at me, crimson eyes twinkling merrily. "Dreams seldom make sense," she said, her tone light and teasing. "And no matter what my sisters had in store for you, I truly mean you well, Victor."

"This is not a dream!" I protested. "I am awake!"

"Not *your* dream," Genevieve corrected me. "*Her* dream."

She bounced to her feet, spun around once, and struck an odd pose with her head thrown back and her arms cast wide. "*There are! No! Answers!*" she shouted, echoes traveling away from us and bouncing back from the unseen distance. "Only choices!"

"Whose? Hers?" I asked.

"Maybe hers, maybe yours," Genevieve replied, shrugging. She inclined her head. "Maybe his."

Off past the succubus, in the direction Genevieve indicated, I could see a figure coming through the dim space toward us. There was a flicker of light, something small and circular that glinted in his hand, and he pressed it to his face. A monocle; one that made his view of us perfectly clear, I knew. The one

who came, mystically cutting the shadows in one eye, was Georg.

"*Nä'glück,*" he said; *no-luck*, meaning *unfortunate one*. "If you mean to end Ciphramir's indifference to you, attacking his home was a fine choice." He had been looking at Genevieve as he said these things, and now he looked at the succubus in his path. He was holding his cane by its shaft, with both hands, and now its axe-like nature was unmistakable. His pace quickened, and as he skirted by on her right, he swung high, bringing the sharp, wooden blade across her head—to my instinctive shock and dismay. For a moment, she shrank back from the blow, and Georg moved to interpose himself between her and me.

The flame-haired succubus turned and regarded Georg with one bright green eye. The other was an empty socket, oozing black blood and bile. No, it was hidden behind a black leather patch. Her lips parted, exposing those wolf's teeth, and she declaimed what seemed like nonsense poetry:

*"Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies,
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?"*

What the hammer? what the chain,

In what furnace was thy brain?

What the anvil? what dread grasp,

*Dare its deadly terrors clasp!*³

Georg cried out, grasped at his face—and his shoulders wrenched unnaturally, spilling him to the ground. Wisps of smoke rose from his face, from under his tightly-closed eyelids, and he cried out again. Great pulses of force started to strike him ... like hammers.

“No!” I shouted. “Stop!”

Both demonesses turned to look at me, eyes of emerald and ruby seeming to stare into my soul.

I swallowed. “He was just trying to protect me... I’m sorry he did you harm. Please. Just ... just let him go on his way, and I’ll continue along mine.”

They continued to stare at me. The force-strikes paused, but the air still hummed around him, as though it anticipated a further beating.

I tried again. “I do not ... wish to dream of this. He was once... He still is one of the world’s greatest musicians. And he is part of one of my best memories. Give him a chance to be the great man I knew him as.”

The hum died, and the invisible blows did not recommence. Georg howled no more. The smoke thinned, and ceased to seep from his eyelids, but he still did not open them. One hand jittered across the slimy floor, patting its way injured and blind until it met the axe once again. He held it firmly, but did not raise it against anything, perhaps meaning only to be sure it was there. His other hand weakly rose into the air, and he rasped out, “Vi—Victor...”

I came to his side and grasped his arm. “I’m here. Let me help you up,” I said. He held me tightly in return, but made no effort to pull himself up.

Instead, he spoke, but his words made no sense in the moment: “I’ve found him.”

A loud crack, a shuddering of the brickwork beneath me, and there came with it a snarling voice. It bade earth to shift, a dream to end, and interlopers to be banished. It boomed forth, not from the darkness, but from my very bones. The vibration built between and within Georg and me, pushing back on the shadows, making the floor shift and sink. A great wind, unfelt by either of us, buffeted Genevieve and the succubus, trying to keep them back as the two of us descended.

I tried to pull Georg, to heave both of us from the pit forming around us, but he was nothing but dead weight. Both Genevieve and the succubus were forced a step back, and the floor dropped an entire foot in an instant. I didn’t want to leave him to fall, and I doubt I could have without liquefying my arm; his hand clung to me with unnatural tenacity.

The tremors intensified as the demonesses rallied, pressing closer against the wind. The descending ground seemed to stutter and slow, as though their nearness fought against the will of the thunderous voice. Two steps from the succubus, and two from Genevieve, then the wind drove harder, making the latter take one back.

Another two steps from the succubus, now into the pit, and as she reached out to take my shoulder once more, the floor quivered, but held firm. Her wings were contorted painfully behind her, the wind trying to rip them away. A low groan, of rock approaching its breaking point, began to grow underneath the demanding voice, which I could feel trying to crack the succubus’ bones where she touched me.

Genevieve had managed another half-step forward, but the wind held her from advancing any further. Her eyes were screwed up against it, with tears streaming back from them. The skin of her face

³William Blake, ‘the Tyger’

rippled in response to the opposing force, and try as she might, she could come no closer.

The groan was rising, now competing with the voice to dominate the space, and I knew it was all going. This was the brink of disaster. I had been there once before, when leaving the Retreat, and it had been Genevieve who pulled me back. For this, I knew I wanted her with me too.

My arm turned to dark water. I would slip it almost out of Georg's grasp, then catch his hand once more with mine after I had lengthened my reach just enough to catch Genevieve's hand as well. That is what I meant to do.

Instead, as the bones left my fluidic arm and the connection between me and Georg dissolved, the voice and the wind died. Genevieve fell forward into me, and only the counter-force of the succubus kept the two of us from tumbling onto Georg.

Then the floor fell away. All of us tumbled into the dark.

A rush of wind I could feel, a soft glow of ... moonlight?

The ground rose to meet me once again, and with a breathtaking slam, blackness overtook me once more.

INTERLUDE: THE TYGER AND THE VIXEN

Ciphramir felt the shift in the magic gripping Somnirot. It was weakening, drawing away as Victor and that cursed amulet fell out of the Chthon. The old man's spell had broken, and his aim had been poor and knocked about, but the war of wills had done its job. Order would return soon.

In the mean time, cats will play.

Instinctively, he pounced, tried to sink his mental claws into the entity that had dared intrude upon his sanctum. Time in the Chthon slowed to a crawl,

holding the fading vestige back. His mind touched something, and he saw...

"Who are you?" he snarled at the demonic vision in his mind. "One of her servants? Do you think you can get away with invading my home like this? You may be on your way out, but for as long as I wish, you will remain *lost!*"

At that 'lost,' a torrent of compulsions, couched in phantasmal visions, rose to drown the presence the Margrave had sensed in his loyal servant's mind. Onward they rushed, trying to boil the being's deeper thoughts to the surface, even as a sharp talon sought to pry a hole in the forefront of its mind and spill the secrets forth. Rushed ... and passed right through. Eerie, mocking laughter filled Ciphramir's head, made it ring like a bell.

He growled, furious, and redoubled his assault. The evil visions played scenes of another succubus: Clementine, daughter of Charissa. A terrible, red chain had tangled around her feet, its links yowling as they brought her hard onto her knees. A knot of black tentacles sprung into being, seizing her limbs and twisting her wings, and the chain disentangled itself to rear back, like a serpent preparing to strike. Where it had been interrupted in the real course of events, the apparition now lashed at Clementine with its serrated links, dismembering her one piece at a time. As she was rendered into parts, the voice of Ciphramir tore through the screams: "This fate awaits you, once you are found."

The vile shadow-play had much sound and fury, but its teeth once again passed right through the presence. The grip of time also slipped, and the exit it had already begun resumed. It was fading ... like fog at dawn.

"*Tyger, tyger,*" the presence whispered at Ciphramir, right before it disappeared completely, "*burning bright. She is waiting for you, out in the night, who put scars on your woman and filled you with fright.*"

In Ciphramir's arms, Somnirot's entire body tensed. His eyes flew wide with terror, and he sprang away,

the claws on his back feet digging furrows in Ciphramir's hands. The furrows closed almost instantly as Somnirot tore out of the room and down the hall, but he would be begging forgiveness not long hence for clawing the Margrave.

Not that Ciphramir would be angry about it. Even as he felt the pain and his connection to the Chthon broke, the only thing he felt with regard to Somnirot was amazement—the little beast hadn't moved with such energy in its entire life.

Next, his thoughts turned to what he had just experienced, and he sat in Georg's room, brooding. For several minutes, he was silent, the encounter playing over and over in his head.

Then, "Tyger, tyger," he muttered. "Someone knows a lot more than she ought to."

THE TALE COLLECTOR – AWAKENING

'The dream has been banished, but has yet to end.'

I felt brick beneath me again. My hands searched the surface underneath me, probing through grime and over fissures as I came to realize my surroundings were much the same as before. Farther afield they went in their search, and soon enough, my left hand met another, one with finer fingers; the fingers of a harpist. The hand grabbed mine, and gave it a reassuring squeeze.

My eyes opened, and I saw Genevieve not far away, propped up in a seated position by her arms. Around us, the floor was depressed and shattered, as though a great fist had punched down upon it with titanic force. Georg was nowhere to be seen, and I didn't yet spy the succubus either. I sat up, then rose to my feet. As she did the same, I asked, "What happened?"

Genevieve looked around, her gaze casting about in the dark. "We fell ... from a place we weren't wanted. Now..." She turned back to me, fixing me in

her vermilion eyes. "... we are where *she* is welcome."

I knew those last three words, had spoken them once.

"What of Georg? Did you see what became of him?" I asked.

Genevieve shook her head. "I think his time here is done, and I feel mine draws to a close too."

I regarded her with concern, most of it for her. Some was reserved for me, and my impending loneliness. "Will you be alright? Do you think you will be safe, where you are going?"

"There are no answers, Victor," Genevieve said. She walked over to me and pressed a little kiss on my forehead. "Only choices, and the power to make them. Or not. Be well. Thanks to you, I have dreamed of being my own self for a little while, and that is precious."

"Can you help me leave this place?" I asked. "Help me get back home? Or onward to Darkon? I need to find the Worm."

"Follow her for a while," Genevieve said, pointing into the shadows. There, the flame-haired succubus had reappeared. "Walk in her dream and awaken with her." Her face turned serious, and the expression and her voice remained for a moment after the rest of her abruptly vanished. "Or rather, walk in her nightmare."

Once again, I was alone with the demoness. She approached, and passed me to my right. She had both eyes again, neither one regarding me. Above her collar, deep gouges—my teeth marks—still wept blood that seeped down her skin. Discomfited, I wiped my mouth with the heel of my hand—then, unthinkingly, cleaned my hand with my tongue. How Georgish of me.

We walked for a time, the brickwork turning to unworked stone around us. At times, we were forced to crawl when the ceiling grew low. Then there was a

breeze of natural wind that greeted us, a whiff of the outside, of green growing things, of hay, of cooking oil and burning pitch. Smells of life and civilization!

I wanted to quicken my pace, but the demoness abruptly stopped and stood staring. Looking over and past her, I saw a cave partially open to the night sky. There were people there, dressed like simple peasant folk, though the style was unfamiliar to me. They were laughing happily as they readied foodstuffs and casks of cider and beer, and piled up wood around a stake ... to which was tied a woman with red hair.

At first, the woman hung limp, clearly unconscious. Then a man clambered onto the pyre and casually ripped away her garment, exposing her to the cold air and the stares of his fellow boors. In its place, he hung a necklace of corn leaves. He waved the torn dress like a flag as he climbed back down, and there was a jolly cheer.

Either the cold air or the noise caused the woman to stir. Head lolling drunkenly, she stared at the villagers before her, tried to move and realized that she could not. "What," she rasped, struggling to focus on a young girl who was pouring oil on the pyre, "what are you doing? I ... *helped* ... you. I cured the disease!" There was a horror and a sense of despair in her voice that tugged and twisted at my heartstrings.

"And it's right grateful we are!" the girl said, smiling. "Now ye can help us some more, by bein' our sacrifice to the gods and whatnot. We'll have a fine harvest next year, thanks to you, so please be thanked an' right welcome."

"You're ... killing ... me," the redheaded woman protested. Her eyes were wide, her face pale.

"No worries!" the girl said, chuckling. "It'll hurt a bit now, but you'll be so happy when yer ashes go into the earth an' ye become our harvest fer the next year! You'll see. You'll be a blessin' in our bellies, an' part of the village fer evermore. You'll be so happy!"

One of the folk knocked the bung out of a cask, and there was more cheering. It was a picnic. They were going to burn a woman alive after she had saved *their* lives, and they ... were having ... a picnic!

'You do not forget the suffering of the victim.'

"No," the woman at the stake said, and she started to struggle. "No! No!"

"Tha's good, get it all out now," the girl advised. "Less screamin' later. 'Bye now, an' thanks again. I'm just after gettin' the flint." She skipped away.

"NO!" the woman at the stake howled. "*NO! I WILL NOT! AID ME! COME TO ME! KILL THEM ALL!*"

The peasants paused about their festivities. I heard a little child say "That's not very nice." And then the night erupted in furious yowling and screams.

'You always repay the tyrant.'

Cats. The peasants were being absolutely mobbed by enraged cats. Not just house cats; there were also bobcats, what looked like a handful of plains cats—and then the stiff, reeking bodies of undead felines, moving slower than their live kin, but with the same vicious purpose. I saw the menfolk try to fight off the swarming bodies, to protect their wives and children. I saw women throw themselves bodily upon their children to shield them. Nothing worked. They were mobbed and torn apart. All of them.

"Call them off!" the girl from before screamed at the woman on the pyre. She flailed at the furious cats with a stick, and was managing to keep them off for the moment. Her face was pale and terrified, tears running down her cheeks. "Please stop it! Don't do this! I was your *friend*! I'm sorry! We'll let you go! Please stop it! *I'm sorry! Please!*"

The woman on the pyre stared down at the girl, her expression terrible. She spoke, and my heart wrenched at the pain in her voice, the disappointment and despair: "Die. *Die, all of you, and be not even a memory upon this foul land! Take her!*"

Cats piled onto the girl, who cried out ... entirely too long. The ropes frayed and burst, but the woman screamed. Her fingernails blackened, lengthened to claws. Pale wings sprouted from her back and shoulders, webbed like a bat's. A tail sprouted from the end of her spine.

"No!" she cried out, horrified realization in her voice now. "Oh, no!"

'In darkness is thy strength and thy torment.'

The woman-turned-demon wailed at the heavens, spread her wings ... but the earth yawned wide beneath the pyre, and she fell. In the instant before the earth closed on her like a great maw, I thought I saw the Mists swirling in the depths.

"All words ... fade," the flame-haired demoness whispered into the silence that followed after the cats dispersed, their victims abandoned to the night like so much garbage.

"Was that you?" I asked. "Did that happen to you? And the, the torture? Those four women were whipping you? *What happened to you?*"

"Time is an illusion," was the only answer I received. But the demoness turned to look at me, one eye once again covered by a leather patch. In the remaining eye, there was pain, there was sorrow, there was bone-deep confusion that the world could be this way. I found that I could relate.

"Words ... fade," she said again, and I got the feeling that she was trying to communicate something essential. "Meaning remains. Or *nothing* remains. I have seen you in my ... dreams."

She closed her eye and gagged, hands clutching her stomach. Her stomach, which was marked by pregnancy scars, just as her back had been marked by the whip. I heard voices in the wind, two women talking:

"Here he is! Isn't he handsome? Your own darling, baby boy. Is his father handsome, too?"

"You ask stupid questions, woman. Let it drink, then take it."

"Are you sure? Really sure?"

"It needs the colostrum."

"No, I mean are you really sure you want to give him up? Look at how beautiful he is, how perfect and precious. Look at his little fingers and toes—"

"Either you'll take him or someone else will, you daft old FOOL! I cannot be a mother to this thing! I CANNOT!"

There were ... many scars on her stomach.

So much of what she showed had nothing to do with me. Was this echo another fragment of questionable relevance? Then again, it came as she addressed me ... mayhap it was more than coincidence. "Do you ... see me with this child?" I inquired, pointing up into the air, for lack of a better place. "Do you want it sought out? How would I know it?"

"I have seen you in my dreams," the demoness said again. When she looked up at me, she was ... not a demoness. She was luminous. "But this dream is nearly over," she said, her soiled flesh turning into pearly luminescence and the filth sloughing off of her. Light oozed off her like steam.

"Who are you?" I asked. "What are you? Why are you showing me these things?"

"Sharpen your fangs. Toughen your muscles. Hone your mind," she said, ignoring my questions while she grew brighter and brighter. "Dream your own dreams, not mine. And remember: the war will not come tomorrow; it will not come next year, but it will come. Remember: RUN."

The light became too bright to see, and I raised my hands to ward it from my eyes. When the radiance faded, I found that I laid at the bottom of a chasm, but I could see the way forward by the light of the full moon. And it led upward.

I brought myself to my feet, every muscle aching as though from taking a great impact. I *had* been dreaming ... at least for the last part. Slowly, carefully, I followed the moon, seeking the surface.

Around a fold of rock, a dark lump sat motionless—at least, that was my first thought. It had arms and legs, and as I regarded it further, I saw the rise and fall of a chest, breathing. Alongside it, partially sticking into the moonlight, was a rod with a hooked end. A large hook, shaped like the head of an axe.

I approached Georg, and for the first time noticed that he had two packs slung over his shoulders. These were underneath him, and made him look like an upended turtle. I shook his leg, and he gave a short groan. His eyes opened, and he hauled his head against gravity to see what woke him. His eyes spilled shiny tears—in the light I would see they were bloodshot, but intact. “We’re ... out,” he croaked.

I grabbed his hands, planted my feet in front of his to keep them from sliding, and pulled him upright. “But where are we?” I returned.

He stumbled a bit as he got his footing, then awkwardly squatted to pick up his wooden axe. “Where Ciphramir meant to throw us, if we are lucky.” So it had been Ciphramir’s voice, breaking the floor and sending forth the wind. He was trying to protect me from the dreaming demon ... and I had disrupted him at the last moment. We could be very far afield, if his control had been broken badly.

Together, the two of us continued toward the moon. The bottom of the chasm sloped up, bringing us ever closer to the surface. Along the way, Georg handed me one of the packs—prepared for me by Ciphramir, I was told. Inside was more space than should have been possible, and many things awaited me—among them the spellbook I had received from the Red Haunt. I removed it, nearly pitched in back into the dark ... but then I tucked it into the pack again. It might have its use, some day.

Two things that were not in my pack were food and water. That was in Georg’s, and I sat looking out over the ragged, mountainous terrain as he searched for his provisions. There was a road in view, beyond some hills, which Georg thought might be the Via Strigos. Assuming we were in Darkon, we had landed far to the southeast of the Boglands.

Georg was pulling out one thing after another, first a bedroll, then a coil of rope, and finally a flask, all the while cursing about how jumbled the contents had become in the fall. As he kept on, I regarded that last item; the stopper, the height of it, the crust about the rim. It was the flask he had filled before me, still intact despite the jostling.

When he noticed I had taken and unstopped it, he paused in his search to watch. Under his gaze, I tipped it back, taking two swallows and no more. Against my lips, some of the coagulated blood on the rim rubbed off, and my tongue scraped it away as I put the stopper back in. There was something odd about the solidified dregs; they burned a bit, like spice added to a dish. The rest of his blood didn’t do that ... but I had no guarantee he had been the only one to use that flask.

The blood coursed through me, and the soreness in my muscles faded away. I held back a sigh—I didn’t want to start enjoying myself that much—and returned the flask to him. He tucked it away, rummaged a bit more, and brought forth a canteen. He drank first, passed it to me, and as I took my own draft, he asked, “How do you feel?”

I thought about it, then gave a small chuckle. “I feel like these past several days have been the worst month of my life, and it isn’t over yet.”

The weeks before we could hope to catch the Worm; the unknown years until the Red Haunt’s terrible War; no, it was far from over.

It was the longest, most painful beginning I had ever had the displeasure of experiencing.

EPILOGUE: SHADOW AND FLAME

“What have you *done*?” Genevieve Schlosser demanded to know. “Where is Victor Gagné?”

Ciphramir gave Genevieve a pitying look. “The nice one surfaces,” he stated. “I wish I could put your mind at ease, but as long as your sisters are listening, I am afraid I have nothing to tell you.”

“*Enough!*” the demon girl screamed. “*Games!*”

Her rage seemed to set the fog trembling, and the shadowy figures faded back into view as if on cue.

“So much for diplomacy,” Ciphramir tutted, “not to mention conversation.”

The girl screamed again—and leaped at him, hands contorting into claws, and dragon’s wings unfurling at her shoulders. Armed and armoured warriors came boiling out of the fog at her back, and the incongruous wail of bagpipes and predatory screams filled the air.

Goblyns? Goblyns! Ciphramir chuckled once again, and as the claws fell, the unnatural Flame rose once more about him. Before a single strike could land, his body was burned away.

Beyond sight, a silhouette of fire flickered as Genevieve’s claws passed through what to layman’s eyes was thin air. The silhouette stood tall—on two legs—and though its cast was humanoid, the vague suggestion of its head was more akin to a beast. A large feline, perhaps.

In the middle of the chaos, Ciphramir stood bodiless, feeling the thoughts around him. None came from Genevieve, nor from many of the other assailants—doubtlessly among the undead or the created. The goblyns, however, thought more loudly than they yelled. As they swarmed about, alien bubbles of thought burst into the forefronts of their caterwauling minds; orders from their mistress. With each flash of command, a bit of perspective slipped through. *Vantage*, Ciphramir thought to himself. *Not*

among them, as she would like me to think, but above.

More orders, more sparks of insight, and a clearer picture began to form. Ciphramir’s silhouette looked to a tall rooftop to his left, and with a moment’s focus, his manifestation flickered into existence upon it, vacating his earlier place on the ground.

With a flare of brilliant orange, the old man in the wheelchair came into being on the roof, the dying flames revealing hands already twisting in the gestures of a spell. There were words of power, rising in volume at an alarming rate, until there came from his mouth a final shout: “REMEMBER *THIS*, OLD FRIEND?”

The words, encapsulated in visibly shaking air, streaked into the center of the courtyard. High above the heads of the soldiers below, a terrible, subcontrabass noise detonated like the thunderclap of the End Times. Windows were blown shattered into the surrounding buildings, and walls sagged as vital brickwork cracked irreparably. Many goblyns and other creatures of darkness laid flat upon the ground, blood running from their ears—at least. Some of them were not to rise again.

On top of a building on the opposite side of the courtyard, the air blurred and great wings unfurled, framing a body wrapped in a simple peasant smock. Lillian Schlosser’s upper lip curled in derision. “*Of course* I remember that, old man. Do you think I’m stupid or something? Honestly. *Yemiri-yagh at-vagh ortok! Brightwell! Amiri-yagh vash aushtok vash Brightwell yagh! Uraa!*”

Power, dark and unholy, washed across the troops still lying below. The goblyns still alive rose, injuries knitting themselves back together. Somewhere in the fog, the din of the bagpipes set up again, and the monstrous creatures set muskets to shoulder and started shooting at Ciphramir.

Amid the spray of mystically deflected musket balls, Ciphramir set his own song against the drone from below. The words he sang were in monotone, then

dropped in pitch for the last two syllables. As punctuation, he scuffed the heel of his hand up his forehead, then presented his palm to the demon priestess. As he repeated the chant once more, the Red Haunt *screamed*. Boils built on her skin, then erupted, issuing plumes of blackish steam and goutts of pus.

“Are you glad you can still hear me?” Ciphramir called across to her.

The fiend looked up at him, eyes lamps of malice, and ... smiled. “Pain,” she said, as though quoting something, “is weakness leaving the body. Also, it is an old, old friend.”

“Weaken the story-thief!” one of the surviving creatures in the courtyard shouted, its voice eerily emotionless in spite of its volume. “Break his defenses!”

Voices sang, voices chanted, voices prayed to Brightwell. Spells crackled against Ciphramir’s magical protections and savaged at them, sought weaknesses to widen into cracks, even while bullets continued to *zip* and *ping* against his defenses. Down below, some of the troops were casting other spells on those still recumbent or struggling; a curative effort.

“Will your apprentice weep for you, *story-thief*?” the demon roared from her vantage point, shape shifting, changing. “Will she weep when I carry her the tale of your fall? Rest assured”—the Red Haunt assumed the form of Imogen Schlosser—“*she will not have time to weep for long!*”—and appeared to split into a multitude of herself. The swarm of fiendish spellcasters beat its wings and rose up into the night air.

For a moment, Ciphramir’s vision blurred, the number of demons in the air seeming to double, then triple. He shook his head, dispelling the moment of confusion. “Carry her whatever tale you will,” Ciphramir called back to her, his hands twisting through the motions of another spell. “She is not one to weep over ffectshion!” With that last slurred

word, a quintet of simple force darts streaked toward the swarm of Imogens. Four of the images were snuffed out instantly, but one—the real Imogen—took the strike without dissipating. Little good this did, however, as she soon was lost among the last four images.

“So mighty! So proud!” the Red Haunt shouted from above, wings beating as swiftly as a hovering falcon’s. “But do you feel *strong*, old man? Do you feel *fighting fit*?”

Nay, he did not. His focus drifted as a cloud formed in his mind. His eyelids fluttered, and he took in a deep breath to center himself—to little avail. The gas rushing through his nostrils reeked of opium. “I s-see you took-k ... a unnnique lessson on the dange-angers of ssecondha-hand smoke,” he stammered.

“I should thank you, old man!” the Red Haunt exulted. “You were a splendid lesson on the importance of preparation during my formative years! Bravo! But in the end, I *am* a demon.”

The fiendish Mage cast a spell that seemed to crash and resound within Ciphramir’s mind. It was an incantation of Denial, a magic that denied magic. All the images of the Red Haunt snapped back into one, outlined against the moon. The bullets continued to sing out, and all the creatures in the courtyard that had been spared death so far appeared to be up on their feet again—and *some were scaling the walls, headed for him!*

“I am *tanar’ri!*” the Red Haunt exulted, shape shifting into the form of Charissa Schlosser as she swooped down toward Ciphramir. The dark nimbus of Denial clung to her as she bore down on him. “I will tear you apart *with my own claws!*”

She laid into him relentlessly, striking him over and over again. With his magic gone, every scything blow struck home and drew blood. His perfect white robe was rent and stained crimson. Each deadly stroke sent his wheeled chair backward a short way, and Charissa kept stepping forward, staying close. With a final cruel slam to the shoulder, the chair

overbalanced, spilling Ciphramir backward onto the hard rooftop.

The pain was dulled, but it held Ciphramir's attention, granting him some new clarity. Battered and broken on the ground, he still saw fit to start laughing. With great effort, his voice was clear once more: "I need no claws. I have brought an end to far greater *tanar'ri* than you, with only promises as my weapons. I assassinated them with their own greed." He struggled to bring his head up, and locked his golden eyes on the Red Haunt one last time. "See my handiwork, and know it well."

In defiance of Denial, the Flame rushed forth once more, eating away Ciphramir, his toppled chair, and every drop of blood and scrap of torn cloth. The discrete blazes gathered, swirled about, and withdrew to reveal a hideous, toady brute of a demon. Even as the roof creaked under its weight, the hezrou gave way to more Flame, and was replaced by a larger fiend. The roof groaned in resentment of its mass, and it answered with a pig-like squeal from its tusked, porcine face as the disproportionately small wings on its back beat excitedly.

The fiend's eyes narrowed as she transformed into her primal form, black hair swirling about a face with all the beauty Evil could muster, opal-decorated antlers stabbing the night sky. But she said nothing; she merely watched.

A third and final time, the Flame swallowed the face Ciphramir presented. Swelling, roaring, the Flame finally burst open to disgorge a monstrosity beyond the magnitude of the first two. Two terrible, red wings unfurled behind massive shoulders, from which extended four awful arms. The elongated, orcish face leered at the Red Haunt over a horrid, pincer-flanked mouth that slavered where the beast's stomach ought to be. Under the titanic bulk of the klurichir—terror of balors—the building finally lost the will to stand.

The Red Haunt was in no danger of falling; her wings picked up where the rooftop left off. The

abomination before her might have saved itself in a similar manner, but no. Instead, the Flames devoured it once more, and there was left no trace of Ciphramir.

In silence, the Red Haunt shifted into the form of the Centurion, dragon's wings holding her aloft above the ruin of the collapsed building. Then she made a sweeping gesture, which caused the billowing dust to freeze in place; a screen of dirty grey in which images appeared. "You have seen," she said, "you have heard."

'Yes,' the watching figures replied, one by one. *'We have consensus. We agree that this is not just a personal vendetta for you. The one who burned our harbor is worth killing.'*

"Excellent," the Centurion said. She turned to the image which was most dreadful, even to her. "Mr. Black. Will you take up the hunt?"

The figure of her fellow Centurion of the Night seemed to consider the thought. Then he shook his head.

"A shame," the Centurion said. "I will bring my files on the story-thief to Castra, once my business here has been concluded. We have much to discuss, and hunters to appoint."

'Yes,' the other Centurions of the Night agreed, one by one. *'We will discuss our observations,'* one offered. Then their images disappeared, and the Red Haunt released the dust to billow and fall as it would. Below, her troops were already digging each other and themselves out, providing first aid where it was needed.

The fiend regarded the space where Ciphramir had been and spoke a single word, clear and cold: "Punk."

Coda: Two Households

Back in the study of Twice-Risen Manor, the *Flame of Othrir* receded from Ciphramir's body. He pulled his furred, backward claws from the small, floating mote, and stumbled back, catching himself against the wall.

Federlin, who had sat by to watch over him, stood and rushed to his aid. "What happened?" she asked, her voice shot through with concern.

Ciphramir's head—now in its true shape, like that of a tiger—loll'd drunkenly. His ears lay flat, and his voice rumbled out with a snarl: "Poison in the air. I nearly lost consciousness."

"You might have been *consumed*," she replied as she led him to his chair. "I don't know that I could have pulled if off of you, had you lost control."

He slumped into his seat. "He's not done with me yet." His golden gaze looked up at Federlin as she got behind and started pushing him out of the room. "My body will remember where it really was soon. My mind is already clearing." He waved his hand, but not to stop his former apprentice from conveying him. Once more, the Flame streaked into its cavity in the desk and was sealed in.

"Fortunately," Federlin said, "your judgment was clear enough to bring you home safely." She leaned down, pressed her face into the fur of his cheek, and gave him a kiss.

He turned his head, and met his wife's mouth with his whiskered muzzle. "A relief, surely," Ciphramir replied as he drew away. He adjusted his position, then shook his head. "But my judgment wasn't perfect. I showed powerful cards in my hand; faces of victims I brought to my master. If she jumps to the right conclusions and thinks far enough ahead..."

"Rest now," Federlin interjected. With her right hand—its fingers twisted backward in devotion to her husband—she proceeded to scratch behind his

ears. A low, pleased growl thrummed through Ciphramir in answer. "Worry tomorrow."

Behind them, the door to the study swung shut and locked of its own accord.

In the depths of the Retreat, a voice sang.

Once, its owner had been a nursemaid. She had raised many children; good ones, bad ones, lazy and energetic ones. She had played games, changed diapers, kissed and bandaged boo-boos, tended fevers, and sung songs. The children always used to love her songs, all the children did. In the end, one of those fevers had passed on to her. While the child lived, she had been in a bad way, and her employer had decided that it was cheaper to hire a new nursemaid than nurse an old one back to health.

The Red Haunt had found her body in an alley, and now it was here. Cold. Embalmed. Yet still moving, still performing its essential duties. Still ... singing, at the side of a crib.

"Am I intruding?" Madam Schlosser asked as she appeared in the nursery, shadows clinging to a body that was wicked desire made unholy flesh.

The nanny did not register her appearance, did not stop singing—not until the precious baby in the crib raised a hand that was equal parts chubby and imperious. Its eyes were as black as the Madam's, and even at this tender age, there was a marked resemblance between them. The gorgeous little tot opened its mouth and uttered a string of noises that would have sounded like gibberish to a human; its lack of teeth and muscle control was hampering its ability to communicate.

But that was not an obstacle to Madam Schlosser, who glided into the room and scooped the baby up into her embrace. Her black garment shifted and *warped*, granting the baby access to a nipple, and it drank greedily. The demon smiled in a surprisingly benign fashion, and skillfully burped the child before transferring it back into the crib.

For the second time, the infant uttered a stream of noises, its eyes focused on its mother.

“No, I did not,” Madam Schlosser replied. “Your Daddy is nowhere to be found in Paridon. He has escaped.” She smiled without showing teeth, flecks of *blacklight* dancing in her eyes. “This serves our plans admirably.”

The baby gurgled and babbled again, waving chubby little fists in the air, and the demon stroked its soft head. “Do not worry,” she said. “You are maturing quickly. Soon, you will be able to go look for your Daddy. By the time you are ready to go, you will also be ready to do to him whatever you wish.”

At this, the baby blinked sleepily. It waved a hand at the undead nanny, who picked up her lullaby at exactly the point she had stopped before, and then lay down. When the aspect of the demon that was also referred to as ‘*Mother*’ gently tucked it in and pressed a single, black-lipped kiss on its forehead, the Infant, child of demon and *dhampir*, Red Haunt and Victor Gagné, closed its eyes. With a happy little sigh, it drifted off into sleep. And dreams.

This Does Not End Here.

POSTLUDE: ALL WORDS FADE

Paloma started into wakefulness; an alien sensation now, as sleep had become unavailable to her with the Change. The only things that had come close were exhaustion-fueled bouts of unconsciousness, such as she had endured after escaping from...

“Victor!” she gasped, and tried to sit up. Nausea scythed through her belly. When strong, gentle hands urged her to lie back down, she did not bother to struggle.

“Drink this,” a shy voice mumbled, and a cup was pressed against her lips. She sniffed at the liquid lapping against her mouth, then gulped it down. A curative potion, the kind she’d brewed herself for her ... clan.

“Where am I?” she asked. She was having trouble seeing; her vision was blurred, and even with the medicine inside of her, her insides were a solid mass of discomfort.

“You are in our home, in our guest room,” a kind voice replied. A cool hand caressed her forehead. “We pulled you out of your own before the other doppelgangers came, and we have mended your worst injuries and ailments. We shall attend to the rest presently. You did well to *delay* the poison gas, but you should not have stayed to fight in it.”

“I had to save ... my friend,” Paloma said. A thought occurred to her, and she feebly touched her own face. She was in her natural form. In front of strangers. Non-doppelgangers, from the sound of it.

“Oh, gods,” she whimpered, terror surpassing a lifetime of indoctrination by first the Divinity of Mankind and then the Divinity of Masters.

“Be at ease, Paula Lomax,” the kind voice said, the hand continuing to stroke her forehead. “You are among friends here. *Not* quislings; friends.”

“How can something like me be among friends?” Paloma whispered, afraid and confused.

“We are your friends because our augury guided us to you,” the kind voice said. “Our calling brought us to save you. I would be honoured if you would think of me as a brother in the same order. My name is Simon Keysmith. My friend’s name is Pjotr. He, also, is a brother in our order.”

“I do not even know what your order *is*,” Paloma protested.

“You found it all the same,” Simon said. “You found it all alone, in the dark, trapped in your pain and sorrow. You found the key to free yourself. An insight that told you the capacity to achieve Divinity is not found in one...”

“It is in all,” Paloma whispered, a great relief and wonder blossoming inside her, like a flower opening its petals to the sun.

“And all words fade,” Simon added. “In the silence, only *meaning* remains.”

Paloma ... relaxed. As she did, Simon started to chant spells of healing, and her vision cleared. Seated on one side of her was a handsome human man approaching middle age, his face marked with laugh-lines and care-lines, his hair peppered with grey. On her other side sat a well-groomed Caliban in well-tailored clothes. He also laid hands on her and started to chant healing spells.

“Brothers,” she said as her pain faded away and life kindled anew, “there are things I must tell you, warnings I must impart. For the sake of all.”

More Words Await, Until the Fade.

NEW ILLNESSES

FIENDBURN (DC 20)

The fiendburn virus attacks the immune system of the host, killing the very infrastructure meant to fight back against infections. While it is incredibly deadly to mortals, it is truly terrifying to fiends, who become more tied to the land as the disease runs its course.

Transmission: Fiendburn is primarily a blood-borne disease, meaning that getting infected bodily fluids on wounds or mucous membranes risks infection. Naturally, it can also be spread through intimate contact. There is also a second, much more dangerous method of transmission via ethereal resonance (described under Treatment).

Incubation Period: 1 week

Effect: Every day the subject fails its save, it takes 1d4 points of Constitution damage, and must make another save to prevent one point of damage from becoming permanent drain. If the subject is also a fiend with a reality wrinkle, then it gains 1d4 corruption points, and the radius of its reality wrinkle is cut in half. Once the fiend gains 22 or more

corruption points, its reality wrinkle dissipates completely.

Treatment: No amount of saving throws can shake fiendburn; a sufferer cannot recover naturally. To make matters worse, it is incredibly difficult to cure. If a *remove disease* or *heal* spell is cast on an afflicted individual, the disease shields itself by crossing into the Ethereal Plane and riding the subject’s ethereal resonance. When this happens, all adjacent creatures producing ethereal resonance are exposed to the disease. To prevent this, the patient must be subjected to a *dimensional anchor*, kept in the area of a *dimensional lock*, or somehow temporarily prevented from generating ethereal resonance.

There is a milder strain of the disease, called lesser fiendburn. It deals only 1d2 points of Constitution damage (never drain) with every failure, and it does not affect reality wrinkles or increase corruption indices. Additionally, the afflicted individual can fight the disease off with three successful Fortitude saving throws in a row. It cannot cross into the Ethereal Plane to avoid curative magic. Anyone who fights off a lesser fiendburn infection is immune to fiendburn.

There exist two methods of keeping the disease dormant without curing it. A character with the Brew Potion feat and the spell *suspend disease* (*Book of Vile Darkness* page 106) can make potions (market price 50 gp) that prevent the imbiber from suffering the effects of fiendburn, but this does not make the subject less contagious. The blood of a being which has recovered from lesser fiendburn has the same effect, albeit it is not useful for other diseases, as the potion would be, and in most cases, it must be transfused intravenously.

Prevalence: Currently, there are only three beings carrying fiendburn. The first is its creator, Fenraed Arvi (see the Circle of Ciphramir above), who carries the disease unharmed by virtue of his odious powers. The other two are Victor Gagné and Ciphramir, whose infections are kept inactive with immunized blood. Ciphramir gets his blood from

Oedohl, and Victor receives his dose of blood from Georg Talbann.

POLYCYTHEMIA (TRAIT)

Polycythemia is a disease characterized by heightened concentration of red blood cells. It is not transmissible, however, so the rules space it occupies is that of a trait (see *Unearthed Arcana*) instead of a standard disease. As the red blood cell count increases, the blood becomes more viscous, and can form dangerous clots. This presentation is highly simplified in comparison to the actual medical condition.

Effect: The subject gains a Blood score, which starts at 0, and can never be greater than the subject's Constitution score. Every day, the subject makes a Fortitude save (DC 10 + half the character's Hit Dice + 1 for every 2 points by which the Blood score exceeds 10), and if the subject fails, he adds 1d6 points to his Blood score.

Any time the subject would take Constitution damage or drain, the points are first deducted from the Blood score. Any points of damage or drain in excess of the current Blood score are dealt to the subject's Constitution score as normal.

If the Blood score is greater than or equal to half of the subject's Constitution score and the subject fails his Fortitude save, he suffers a -1 penalty to Autohypnosis, Concentration, and Control Shape skill checks for the day due to headache. If the Blood score is greater than or equal to three-quarters of the subject's Constitution score, the penalty applies to all Intelligence based skills as well.

If the Blood score equals the subject's Constitution score, and the subject fails his Fortitude save by at least 5, then he suffers a stroke. He immediately takes 2d8 points of Intelligence damage, and must make another Fortitude save to avoid half of this becoming permanent drain. He also drops to -1 hit points and is dying. He may stabilize and be brought to 0 hit points, but he remains disabled until all Intelligence lost to the stroke is restored.

Treatment: Unless the subject is in the habit of taking Constitution damage regularly, he needs special medical attention to keep his blood viscosity down. Ideally, he ought to be attached to a sanguine pump (see *Van Richten's Arsenal* page 19) daily to have his Blood score reduced to a manageable level, which means the condition is best handled in Renaissance level domains.

NEW MAGIC

AUTOMATIC CHAMBER POT

Price (Item Level): 200 gp (2nd)

Body Slot: —

Caster Level: 7th

Aura: Moderate (DC 18) conjuration

Activation: see text

Weight: 20 lb.

The squat, simple, stone urn is sealed with a wide wooden plug, into which is burned a stylized knot.

Highly useful for bedridden individuals, the *automatic chamber pot* takes care of certain necessary bodily functions via teleportation of waste. The *automatic chamber pot* is activated by placing it under a person's bed or chair. When a person lying on the bed (or sitting in the chair) needs to urinate or defecate, the chamber pot instantly removes the waste matter and stores it inside itself. The chamber pot can contain up to two gallons of material.

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *dimension door*.

Cost to Create: 100 gp, 8 XP, 1 day.

BREW EXUDATE [ITEM CREATION]

Prerequisites: Brew Potion, caster level 5th.

Benefit: An exudate is a special form of potion that is processed by the imbiber, then takes effect on his or her surroundings. An exudate can contain any spell of 5th level or lower that you know which affects a non-shapeable area, specifically a burst, emanation,

or spread that is not a line or a cone. Brewing an exudate takes 1 day per level of the spell. When you create an exudate, you set the caster level, which must be sufficient to cast the spell in question and no higher than your own level. The base price of an exudate is its spell level × its caster level × 50 gp. To brew an exudate, you must spend 1/25 of this base price in XP and use up raw materials costing one half this base price.

When you create an exudate, you make any choices that you would normally make when casting the spell. Whoever drinks the exudate is the point of origin for the spell's effect, but is not affected.

Any exudate that stores a spell with a costly material component or an XP cost also carries a commensurate cost. In addition to the costs derived from the base price, you must expend the material component or pay the XP when creating the potion.

Flame of Othrir

Minor Artifact

Body Slot: — (held)

Caster Level: 20th

Aura: Strong (DC 25) divination and necromancy

Activation: move (manipulation) and swift (mental)

Weight: —

Swirling with unnaturally vibrant reds and oranges, periodically marked by fleeting streaks of green, blue, and purple, this free-floating fire seems to beckon with its waving form, promising visions of untold vistas.

Only the most trusted servants of the Grand Duke of Othrir are gifted with a *Flame of Othrir*. These insubstantial devices are the ultimate reconnaissance tool, allowing the user to view distant lands, and even project himself to these places. However, the fire is also hungry, and exacts a price on those using it.

A *Flame of Othrir* floats in place, but can be moved by plunging a hand into it and carrying it around; it does not burn the flesh. If both hands are plunged

into the *Flame*, it activates, enveloping the wielder. This initial contact costs 1 point of Constitution and grants an hour of use. Constitution taken by the *Flame* is not lost immediately, but when the user disengages from the flame, all Constitution spent is dealt to the wielder as temporary damage. Immunity to ability damage does not spare the user, but creatures without Constitution scores cannot activate the Flame of Othrir.

When the current time period lapses, the user can choose to disengage (a swift action), or allow it to siphon more Constitution. If the user spends the same amount of Constitution as was used to buy the last period of use, he gains a new period with only half as much time. Alternatively, the user can spend twice as much Constitution to gain the same amount of time. Thus, every user starts with 1 hour of use, and at the end of the hour can spend 1 point of Constitution to gain another half-hour, or 2 points to gain another hour. If he went with the half hour, he can gain another 15 minutes by spending 1 point of Constitution, or another 30 minutes by spending 2. If he went with the hour, then he can spend 2 points to gain another half-hour, or 4 points to gain another full hour. If the user spends as much or more Constitution than he has, his body is consumed by the *Flame* at the end of his current span of time.

While engaged with the *Flame*, the user can think of any location or object he has at least seen (even through forms of scrying), or any person he has met, and he manifests invisibly and incorporeally at the location or near the subject. If the location, object, or person was disguised by illusion or transmutation when he interacted with it, or it went through significant changes since last he saw it, he fails to manifest. For example, he cannot manifest in a castle that has since collapsed, nor can he view a doppelganger he only met in human form.

While manifested, he can see, hear, and smell as though he were present at the site, and can be aided by spells that augment perception (such as *detect magic*, *deathwatch*, *discern lies*, and the like). From his perspective, he appears to be standing there, and

he can move by simply walking about. He is not tied to his original target, and can wander where he wills. Any creature capable of seeing invisible beings perceives the incorporeal form as a writhing flame in the approximate shape of the wielder.

Instead of just viewing the location, the wielder can choose to physically manifest there, as if by the spell *astral projection*. In addition, he can take the shape of any creature that has used the *Flame*, as though by the *veil* spell. When viewed with *true seeing*, he appears as a silhouette of the shape he takes, made of pure fire.

Finally, while manifested physically or otherwise, the wielder can call upon beings that have been consumed by the *Flame of Othrir*. Any being that has lost all of its Constitution to the *Flame* can be physically manifested at the site viewed (with an undamaged Constitution score) for as many rounds as it has points of Constitution. These rounds need not be used all at once, and they regenerate slowly. Every month, each imprisoned soul regains one round of manifestation. Only one creature can be manifested at a time (not including the wielder himself).

A *Flame of Othrir* is a very powerful device, and it may in fact be possible to use it to peer beyond the Mists. This would be a highly taxing activity, however, and might drain the wielder even faster than normal. Furthermore, these devices are entirely under the control of the Grand Duke, so piercing the Mists may invite his notice.

Prerequisites: A *Flame of Othrir* is a minor artifact, and cannot be crafted.

FOURFOLD SIGN OF BRIGHTWELL

Price (Item Level): 96,000 gp (20th)

Body Slot: Throat

Caster Level: 10th

Aura: Moderate (DC 25) evocation, illusion, necromancy, and transmutation

Activation: see text

Weight: —

A disc of red metal marked with one of the symbols of Brightwell, a silvery metal chain attached, falls into your hand. You can feel the power tingling against your fingertips, and know in your heart of hearts that it is a dark power—and you have almost no control over it whatsoever.

The *Fourfold Sign of Brightwell* is a special wondrous item only bestowed on a rare few among the faithful, if for no other reason than the fact that it is difficult to create and impossible to control by the wearer. Apart from its ability to open barriers in holy places of Brightwell, which is always active, the *Fourfold Sign* activates its effects randomly, and only in response to external stimuli that affect its wearer, when that wearer is incapable of defending or otherwise helping themselves in any way.

In game terms, roll 1d100. The *Fourfold Sign* activates its 3rd or 4th effects only on a roll of 100.

By its very construction, the *Fourfold Sign of Brightwell* is excessively difficult to detect as a magical item. It can be used as a normal holy or unholy symbol by a worshiper of Brightwell. Its special powers are the following:

If the wearer is in a holy place of Brightwell and faces closed, locked, and/or barred doors, windows, passages or portals of any kind, forcefully presenting the holy symbol against any such obstruction will cause it to open.

When worn against the skin, the *Fourfold Sign* may choose to painlessly merge with and hide itself *inside* its wearer, as per the Assassin spell *absorb weapon* (*Spell Compendium* page 61). It tends to do this when the wearer meets new people who are not immediately trusted (unless meeting someone who has the wearer's full trust, absorption occurs on a roll of 41 or higher on a d100). While absorbed, the amulet cannot be felt under the skin, and does not restrict the wearer's range of motion in any way. It cannot be found even with a careful search, and the nature of its construction makes it difficult to detect

by magic. It will emerge again once the wearer is alone, upon entering a holy place of Brightwell, or when activating its 3rd or 4th effects.

If the wearer is mentally impaired in any manner, be it through magical, psionic, or scientific *enchantment*-type effects, the *Fourfold Sign* may draw the one keeping hold of its wearer's mind into a debilitating *nightmare*, as per the spell. This is a magical attack with a caster level of 10, and is successful a duration of one (1) hour.

If the wearer deals a killing blow to an enemy, be it in melee or ranged combat, with a weapon, unarmed or natural attack, magic, or psionics, and dedicates the kill to Brightwell, the *Fourfold Sign* may transfer some of the slain enemy's life to the wearer. This effect manifests as though the wearer had struck the enemy down with a *vampiric touch*, as cast by a 10th-level spellcaster.

The way these effects manifest is unusual; both wearers and targets of its effects have mentioned hearing *voices* when the *Fourfold Sign* manifests its abilities; some human and sorrowful, some demonic and furious, others impossible to comprehend. In all cases, these voices offer no explanation; they only offer threats to enemies and terse directions to wearers.

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, Shadow Weave Magic, Insidious spell, *absorb weapon*, *deeper darkness*, *knock*, *nightmare*, *vampiric touch*, *Nystul's magic aura*; must have Brightwell as a divine patron.

Cost to Create: 48,000 gp, 3,840 XP, 96 days.

INKCHILD MEMOIR

Price (Item Level): 176,000 gp (24th)

Body Slot: — (held)

Caster Level: 20th

Aura: Strong (DC 25) conjuration, divination, enchantment, and transmutation

Activation: see text

Weight: 3 lb.

The thick book is bound in the supplest leather, and monogrammed with the majuscule glyph s'Ceth of the Othroï script. Tooled into the spine is a name, the name of whom the book is about. Within, the finest penmanship you have ever seen shifts across the page, telling the tale of a mortal's life—its entire life.

Upon creation, an *inkchild memoir* is quiescent, waiting to be bonded with a soul. To activate it, the owner must first fashion (or hire someone to fashion) a special double-ended fountain pen out of mithral. This device costs at least 1,000 gp, owing to the intricacy of its workmanship, and its Craft (Metalworking) DC is 25. One end of this pen is dedicated to ink, and the other is dedicated to blood.

Next, the owner must acquire the bones of a professional scribe and reduce them to charcoal, then use the material to create ink. After filling the pen's ink reservoir with this concoction, it must be stabbed into a female who is in the first trimester of her pregnancy. As the ink flows in her veins, an ounce of her blood must be collected and preserved.

When she comes to term and gives birth, the owner of the memoir must fill the second reservoir of the pen with her blood, and use it to scribe the birth name given to her child upon the first page of the *inkchild memoir*. An *inkchild memoir* can be bonded to only one being, but multiple births can be accommodated by multiple memoirs. The same pen may be used for more than one memoir. Once this is done, the memoir activates, and the child becomes an inkchild. If the name is not written within 24 hours of the birth, the child is immune to being bound to an *inkchild memoir*.

At first, the memoir holds only minor power. The owner can use it as a focus in conjunction with spells like *scrying* or *discern location*, which allows those spells to function unerringly with regard to the bonded inkchild. Once per day, the owner can use the associated pen and a pot of scribe-bone ink to write a *suggestion* into the memoir, which affects the inkchild regardless of distance. The Will save DC for the subject to resist is only 14, so the

effectiveness of this ability diminishes as the inkchild grows.

Should the inkchild die, the memoir can be reassigned to a newborn within a week, releasing the original inkchild and creating a new one. If the memoir goes unassigned and the inkchild returns from death (living or undead) before the week is out, the memoir remains bonded to the inkchild and continues to function normally (and an undead inkchild is not immune to the memoir's *suggestions*). If the week passes and the memoir is not reassigned, it becomes nonmagical forevermore.

More horrific is the effect the memoir has when touched by the inkchild. For every round the inkchild is in physical contact with the memoir, it confers one negative level (even to undead inkchildren). These negative levels dissipate over the course of an hour if contact is broken. When the negative levels equal the inkchild's HD, the inkchild is physically siphoned away into the book, forever lost.

After absorbing its bond, the *inkchild memoir* becomes a reliquary for the inkchild's life story. A reader may peruse its contents to gain a general account of the inkchild's experiences, but the memoir can do better than that. A reader with the mithral pen can ask the memoir any question, and the writing will call upon the inkchild's memories to scrawl an answer. One question may be asked per round, but there is no limit to the number of questions asked, and the memoir's answers are given as though the inkchild's memory were perfectly clear.

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *probe thoughts* (*Spell Compendium* page 162), *secret page*, *suggestion*, *trap the soul*.

Cost to Create: 88,000 gp, 7,040 XP, 88 days.

MEMORY KEY

Price (Item Level): 49,500 gp (18th)

Body Slot: — (held)

Caster Level: 15th

Aura: Strong (DC 22) enchantment, evocation, and necromancy

Activation: see text

Weight: —

This simple silver key is polished to a mirror sheen, without the barest hint of tarnish. The reflections in its surface don't resemble your surroundings, but they do seem familiar, like half-recalled scenes from your youth.

A *memory key* is a device that refuses to be used by anyone other than its owner. Upon creation, anyone can shed a drop of blood on the key and spend five minutes concentrating to be designated its master. This process comes with a cost, however, as the master must identify a short memory of personal significance to forget. The key records the memory, then suppresses it and conceals it in some obscure part of the mind.

Whenever a creature attempts to use the *memory key* to open a lock or bypass a ward, it first tries to identify the creature by contact, comparing the blood underneath the creature's skin to the blood it first received. If that fails, the key simply doesn't operate, refusing to turn or otherwise not triggering the bypass mechanism of the seal. Sufficiently powerful transmutation effects (those capable of changing the subject's creature type) can fool this check. If the true owner has been altered in some permanent way that makes the key stop working, he or she can shed another drop of blood upon it and concentrate for five minutes to try and reset its record.

If the creature passes the blood test or tries to make the key reset its blood record, the key searches the creature's mind to find the hidden memory and checks the memory against its copy. If the memory matches, the key accepts the creature as its master

and operates normally. If the memory is not present, not hidden, or has otherwise been tampered with, the key detonates, destroying itself and trying to take the impostor with it. The creature is enveloped in *blackfire* (*Spell Compendium* page 29), and everyone in 60 feet is affected as if caught in the area of three discrete *prismatic spray* spells.

As an alternative to binding the key to a particular person on creation, a creature with its own *memory key* can touch it to the new *memory key* and concentrate for five minutes to slave it to the already bonded key. A *memory key* slaved in this fashion can only be assigned a master or reset with the assistance of the master key and its owner.

Whether a key is slaved or not, the owner can hold the key and concentrate for five minutes to relinquish ownership and regain the lost memory.

Crafting a *memory key* does not also create an associated magical lock. *Memory keys* are created to fit existing locks, which must be magically protected on their own. A *memory key* for a mundane lock is little protection at all, as the lock can be picked, or a physical copy of the key can be made that works just as well. For added security, a lock should be enchanted to only accept a unique *memory key*. *Memory keys* can also be associated with more esoteric defenses, such as bypass conditions for magical barriers.

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *blackfire*, *modify memory*, *prismatic spray*.

Cost to Create: 24,750 gp, 1,980 XP, 50 days.

THE RED GARMENT

Price (Item Level): 40,000 gp (17th)

Body Slot: Body

Caster Level: 15th

Aura: None

Activation: see text

Weight: 5 lb.

The original red cloth of this raiment has not been seen by mortal eyes.

Stitched and enchanted by Amourette Schlosser, the *red garment* is in fact the only garment worn by all aspects of the Red Haunt.

In its true form, the *garment* is a set of a simple robe, skullcap and slippers, all made of red cloth. However, its true form has not been seen since its initial creation; the *garment* changes shape at the whim of its wearer, changing to match her own shape-shifting. The *garment* is self-cleaning and self-mending, and mimics a full ensemble including such millinery, shoes and underwear as required.

The *red garment* is also the main reason why the Red Haunt's longer stays in specific Domains no longer alert the local Darklords. In times gone by, Imogen Schlosser would from time to time cast *wish* to mask her reality wrinkle. Now, the Red Garment does the same thing. Every day the Red Haunt enters or remains in a Domain, the local Darklord has only a 25% chance to detect her reality wrinkle's presence at all, and a 5% chance to pinpoint its location. Any other Outsider who wears a *red garment* would reap the same benefit.

A few copies of the *red garment* have been made, most of them for the use of shape-shifting Centurions of the Night. On rare occasions, Amourette has been known to make a *red garment* for non-Centurions as a reward ... or as a trap. As the sole known creator of *red garments*, the Red Haunt alone is immune to its ability to hide its wearer's presence.

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *greater invisibility*, *greater object glamor*, *limited wish*, *mending*, *Nystul's magic aura*, *unseen servant*.

Cost to Create: 20,000 gp, 1,600 XP, 40 days.

REPLACE*Transmutation***Level:** Sor/Wiz 6**Components:** V, S, M, F**Casting Time:** 10 minutes; see text**Range:** Touch**Target:** One object up to 1 cu. ft. per level; see text**Duration:** Instantaneous**Saving Throw:** None**Spell Resistance:** No

A dark vapor begins to rise from the ingots and leather strips in the bowl, and it wafts toward the short sword in the next bowl over. Just before contact, a vapor begins to rise from the sword and arc toward the third bowl, where it begins to accumulate in a mess of metal and flakes from the grip. As the raw materials evaporate and the refuse agglomerates, the sword in between appears untouched.

This spell uses raw materials to replace the components of an object on a molecular level, effectively resulting in no functional change to the target object. The original materials in the object gather in an unordered heap, too mixed together to be of any use.

Certain objects present a challenge to the spell. If the target object is incorporated into another object, it can be targeted without affecting the larger object, but it must be possible to either place the larger object entirely within the bowl (see the focus below), or to place the part of the larger object attached to the target object in the bowl. Thus, the blade of a sword could be targeted without the hilt, as could be the arm of a mannequin (without putting the whole mannequin in the bowl), but a wall-mounted scone would have to be detached first. The complication of attachment extends the casting time to 20 minutes. A target object can be enchanted, but the casting time of the spell becomes 24 hours to accommodate the delicate work of replacing the materials without disrupting the

existing magic. Magic items incorporated into larger objects suffer no additional adjustment to casting time. Artifacts and living things cannot be affected by this spell.

For mystical purposes relating to identity, the *replaced* item is new. It has no prior owners, no history, and no one but the caster has yet seen it firsthand. As such, it can no longer be found by *discern location* or *locate object* by those who had seen it before, it is of no help in the possession of one attempting to cast *legend lore*, and the *object reading* psionic power reveals no information about it. As time passes and the object is handled and used, it can accumulate owners and history naturally, but everything from before the casting of *replace* is lost.

Replace can be used to make delicate repairs or modifications. In order to do so, a copy of the parts to be repaired or modified must be crafted by some other means (mundane or magical) and placed among the raw materials. The caster then designates these copies to be the models for their corresponding parts in the target object, and the spell will recreate the object with these parts in place of the originals. This has its limitations, as the modifications or repairs are only as good as the copies made. A change cannot be made by this spell that does not already physically exist. Be that as it may, this does have practical application; for example, even though the spell cannot fix a broken spring in a clock without an unbroken spring being among the components, the clock does not need to be disassembled to effect the repair.

Material Component: The materials needed to craft the target item. If the materials provided are insufficient to craft the target object, the caster senses this at the beginning of casting the spell, and can choose to abort without using the spell slot.

Focus: Three metal platters or bowls made of an alloy of lead and gold, each worth at least 500 gp. The first bowl holds the raw materials, the second holds the target item, and the third bowl collects the

waste material. Each bowl must be large enough to contain the materials and the item.

REPLICATION BOWLS

Price (Item Level): 37,800 gp (17th)

Body Slot: — (held)

Caster Level: 20th

Aura: Strong (DC 25) transmutation

Activation: see text

Weight: 10 lb. per bowl (30 lb. total)

This set of metal bowls is made with unearthly skill. Several layers of lattice-like glyphs are stacked on top of each other upon each bowl's surface, giving it a webbed appearance. A puddle of quicksilver flows freely in each bowl, yet it will not spill out, no matter how far the bowl is tilted.

These bowls may be used as the focus for a *replace* spell, and make the spell more powerful.

First, the use of these bowls allows the caster to affect living creatures with *replace*. Living creatures are entitled to a Fortitude saving throw and spell resistance to resist the spell. Flesh and organs to be used must be fresh or magically preserved. By designating some of the materials as the model for the spell, the caster can duplicate the effects of a *regenerate* spell, healing damaged organs and body parts. However, the replacements are not identical to the originals, which can lead to side-effects, even if the replacement is biologically compatible with the target creature. For example, *replacing* a single mangled leg with the leg of a taller person can leave the target lopsided; *replacing* parts of a damaged brain with another brain could restore mobility, but not necessarily skill, and could implant foreign memories and instincts (or just fail catastrophically). The ramifications of such mishaps are under the DM's discretion. Alternatively, a caster might intentionally try to modify a subject, but that would be a dangerous, imprecise, unpredictable endeavor. Casting *replace* on a living creature takes 48 hours.

Second, the caster can expend an additional 5th level spell slot while casting *replace* to convert the waste material into an exact copy of the target object. The copy does not retain magical properties, and replicating an entire living creature in this manner results in making a corpse (though having a corpse identical to the living target certainly could be useful). Spells seeking the target object or creature will target the replica, as it contains the original materials.

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *fabricate*, *polymorph any object*, *replace*.

Cost to Create: 18,900 gp, 1,512 XP, 19 days.

VICTOR GAGNÉ'S OPTIMIZED WOLFSONG

During his student years, Victor was approached by a highly embarrassed Bard, who told him he was having trouble mastering a spell taught to him by a masterful Kartakan Meistersinger. Together, they pored over the spell's mechanics, and Victor managed to add some safety measures, though not to completely de-fang the magic. The Bard left, completely satisfied, and Victor never suspected that he might have made an enemy for life out of Harkon Lukas if that Darklord ever finds out what he did.

Enchantment (Compulsion) [Mind-affecting]

Level: Brd 4, Sor/Wiz 4

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Personal

Area: 1 mile radius/caster level emanation, centered on you (see text of *wolfsong*)

Duration: As *wolfsong*

Saving Throw: Will negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell functions exactly like *wolfsong* (*Ravenloft Gazetteer 1*, page 117), except in one respect: all wolves attracted by the spell arrive with an attitude of Friendly toward their summoner. They may be moved to perform tasks with successful Handle Animal checks, and are likely to come to their

summoner's immediate defense if they find them under attack.

So long as the summoner does nothing to sour the wolves' attitude, they continue to be Friendly until the duration of the spell ends, at which point they depart in peace.

Note that the wolves' attitude toward anyone in their summoner's company is not guaranteed.

NEW MONSTERS

HYOSCTERA

A blasphemous union of corrupted plants and undead insects, the hyosctera is Federlin Cossutari's attempt to mimic the immortality of Ciphramir. Hyoscteras are created from base vegetation, twisted into a facsimile of human skin, flesh, and bone, caught halfway between life and death. A swarm of reanimated bees, imbued with a restless soul, then infests the body, and the plant shell rises to give this soul renewed existence, unaffected by the rigors of time.

As if this horrid transformation were not enough, the hyosctera was not simply constructed to escape age. The plant body contains the pattern needed to replicate itself, imprinted upon toxic pollen that the swarm collects. Should the hyosctera be destroyed, the swarm can take flight to seek out and pollinate some secluded vegetation, which is then warped into shape of the original body. Destroying the bees is a necessary step in permanently vanquishing the hyosctera, but it is not sufficient, for the tainted pollen can be extracted and given to trusted allies, who may then contaminate plants manually to achieve the same end. Until all of a hyosctera's pollen is destroyed, it can return.

Fortunately, Federlin is the only human hyosctera in existence, and she has kept only two prototypes: a mandrill named Caspian and a worg named Lûrrek. She keeps these two and her research safe, and is not keen on seeing more hyoscteras in the world. If a

sample of pollen were taken from any one of these three and subjected to *break enchantment*, the pollen would lose its connection to the hyosctera and be rendered nearly inert. In this state, a magician might be able to shortcut the process by imprinting another creature's essence onto the pollen. So far, Federlin's monopoly has not been compromised in such a manner.

"Hyosctera" is a portmanteau of "Hyoscyamus"—the toxic plants called henbanes—and "Hymenoptera"—the insect order which contains bees, wasps, sawflies, and ants.

Creating a Hyosctera

"Hyosctera" is an acquired template that can be added to any living, non-plant creature (referred to hereafter as the base creature) of at least Small size—anything smaller cannot host the swarm.

A hyosctera uses all of the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Size and Type: The creature's type changes to plant. Do not recalculate base attack bonus, saves, or skill points. In its normal form, size is unchanged.

While in swarm incarnation, its type becomes undead rather than plant, and it also has the swarm subtype and is Fine size, which influences how wind affects it.

Hit Dice: Increase base creature's racial HD by one die size, to a maximum of d8. If the base creature's racial HD are already d8 or larger, do not change them. Do not increase class HD.

The creature's swarm incarnation has its own hit points, based on the same number of HD as the base creature but using d12 hit dice. Do not factor the base creature's Constitution modifier into these hit points, as the swarm incarnation has no Constitution score.

Speed: When in swarm incarnation, the base creature has a land speed of 10 feet and a fly speed of 60 feet with perfect maneuverability.

Armor Class: A hyosctera has no base adjustment to its natural armor, but it can adjust the toughness of its hide. See lignoderm under special qualities.

When in swarm incarnation, the base creature's natural armor bonus becomes +1, and it also gains a +8 size modifier to Armor Class.

Base Attack/Grapple: When in swarm incarnation, the base creature cannot grapple or be grappled. See the swarm subtype for details.

Attack and Full Attack: The base creature retains its normal attack modes, and gains a touch attack that it can use once per round.

When in swarm incarnation, the base creature lacks its normal attacks. Instead, the hyosctera has a swarm attack. This attack automatically damages any creature in the hyosctera's space when it ends its move.

If the base creature's natural attacks are treated in a manner that allowed it to overcome damage reduction, it retains that ability with its swarm attack in swarm incarnation. For example, if the base creature's natural attacks are treated as magic for the purposes of overcoming damage reduction, its swarm attack is also treated as magic for this purpose.

See the swarm subtype description for more details about the swarm attack.

Damage: A hyosctera without natural weapons has a touch attack that deals 1d8 + the hyosctera's Constitution modifier acid damage. A hyosctera with natural weapons can use its touch attack or its natural weaponry, as it prefers. If it chooses the latter, it deals 1d8 + the hyosctera's Constitution modifier points of extra acid damage with one natural weapon attack.

The amount of damage a hyosctera deals with its swarm attack is based on its Hit Dice, as shown on the table below.

HD	Damage
1-5	1d6
6-10	2d6
11-15	3d6
16-20	4d6
21 or more	5d6

Space/Reach: When the base creature is in swarm incarnation, it has a space of 10 feet and a reach of 0 feet. It cannot make attacks of opportunity, and it provokes attacks of opportunity when it enters a creature's space. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and moves through other creatures' squares without impediment and vice versa. The swarm can move through holes and cracks large enough for its component Fine creatures.

Special Attacks: In its normal form, the hyosctera retains all of the base creature's special attacks, and gains the breath weapon and draining bubble special attacks. When in swarm incarnation, a hyosctera loses all the special attacks of the base creature and gains the distraction, swarm, and poison special attacks. Saves for these abilities have a DC of 10 + $\frac{1}{2}$ the hyosctera's HD + the hyosctera's Charisma modifier, unless otherwise noted.

Breath Weapon (Ex): A hyosctera's breath weapon is a 30-foot cone of psychotropic spores. Those within the cone who fail a Fortitude save take 1d4 points of Wisdom damage, and perceive all other creatures as being surrounded by duplicates for the next minute. Each creature appears to have 2 duplicates plus 1 for every 3 HD the hyosctera possesses (to a maximum of 8 duplicates at 18 HD); the effect is similar to a *mirror image* spell, except that these duplicates do not disappear when struck. This effect is non-magical and mind-affecting. *True seeing* and similar magic will not pierce the hallucination, but *neutralize poison* would remove the spores from the victim's system. The DC for the Fortitude save is 10 + $\frac{1}{2}$ the hyosctera's HD + the hyosctera's Constitution modifier. A hyosctera may use its breath weapon

once per day; this ability cannot be used in swarm incarnation.

Unlife Bubble (Su): The area around a hyosctera is treated as *desecrated* (see the spell description on page 218 of the *Player's Handbook*). This effect extends 5 feet per HD of the hyosctera.

In an emergency, a hyosctera with at least 8 HD can “pop” this bubble as a swift action. In this event, the *desecrate* effect goes away, and every living creature formerly in its area gains one negative level (two negative levels if the hyosctera has at least 16 HD). For every negative level bestowed in this fashion, the hyosctera gains 5 temporary hit points, which last for up to an hour. Hyoscteras generally flee immediately after popping their bubbles, as it takes 24 hours for the bubble to reform and the *desecrate* effect to return, which leaves them somewhat vulnerable (see turning vulnerability under Special Qualities).

Distraction (Ex): Any living creature vulnerable to damage from the hyosctera's swarm attack that begins its turn with the hyosctera's swarm incarnation in its square is nauseated for 1 round; a Fortitude save negates the effect. Even with a successful save, spellcasting or concentrating on spells within the area of a swarm requires a Concentration check (DC 20 + spell level). Using skills requiring patience and concentration requires a DC 20 Concentration check.

Swarm (Ex): As described under the Attack and Damage entries above, the base creature in swarm incarnation has a swarm attack.

Poison (Ex): Swarm attack, Fortitude save, initial and secondary damage 1d6 Dex.

Special Qualities: The base creature retains all special qualities and gains the half-life, lignoderma, pernicious pollen, swarm incarnation, and turning vulnerability special qualities. When in swarm incarnation, it also gains the hive mind and immune to weapon damage special qualities. It loses the special qualities of the base creature that rely on the

base creature's shape or abilities it lacks in swarm incarnation.

Half-Life (Ex): Even though a hyosctera is a living plant, it is tainted with necrotic energy. It is healed by negative energy and harmed by positive energy as though it were undead, and it is immune to energy drain.

Hive Mind (Ex): A hyosctera with this ability is immune to any spell or effect that targets a specific number of creatures (including single-target spells such as *disintegrate*), with the exception of effects that command, control, turn, rebuke, bolster, or destroy undead specifically. A hyosctera in swarm incarnation is affected by turn and rebuke attempts as a non-swarm undead creature of the base creature's HD.

Immune to Weapon Damage (Ex): Weapon attacks are useless against a swarm of Fine creatures.

Lignoderma (Ex): At will, a hyosctera can harden its skin into a woody layer, giving itself an enhancement bonus to natural armor. This replicates the effect of the *barkskin* spell (using the hyosctera's HD as its effective caster level), except that it lasts as long as the hyosctera wills it, and it is non-magical.

Pernicious Pollen (Su): Hyoscteras create a mutagenic pollen that twists plant life in their image. The pollen can be applied to a dense 5-foot square of plant life, which will turn into a new body for the Hyosctera over the course of 1d8+2 days. If the Hyosctera's swarm incarnation is present to inhabit the body, or if the Hyosctera and its swarm incarnation have been destroyed, the Hyosctera returns to life in this body. In the latter case, the Hyosctera must acquire a new swarm (see turning vulnerability below). If the Hyosctera's swarm incarnation does not bond with the body within an hour of its formation, it rots away.

If a plant creature comes into contact with the pollen, the pollen afflicts it like a disease with an incubation period of 1 day. Every day, the afflicted plant creature must make a Fortitude save (DC 10 +

½ hyosctera's HD + hyosctera's Constitution modifier) or take 1d6 points of Constitution damage. The affliction lasts for 1d8+1 days, and cannot be cured with a *remove disease* spell. A *heal* spell would be sufficient to cure the affliction.

Swarm Incarnation (Su): When the hyosctera is killed, its consciousness takes refuge in the swarm of undead bees that lies dormant within. This gives the hyosctera the physical characteristics of the swarm, which is at full health. The swarm can emerge from the body as a standard action. Since this ability is supernatural, a hyosctera is prevented from awakening the swarm and transferring its consciousness while caught in an antimagic field. If the swarm is dispersed by damage, the hyosctera is destroyed.

Turning Vulnerability: A hyosctera whose unlife bubble has popped or otherwise been suppressed is affected by turning or rebuking as though it were undead, as manipulations of the swarm within affect the entire creature. If it would be destroyed by a turning attempt, it instead loses its swarm and all abilities relating to its swarm incarnation. It can gain a new swarm of undead bees by finding a hive and spending an hour pheromonally luring the bees into its body to be warped by negative energy. A hyosctera without a swarm is vulnerable and terrified, as it is more likely to die permanently.

Abilities: Increase from the base creature as follows: Con +2, Cha +2.

In swarm form, the base creature's Strength becomes 1, its Dexterity increases by 2 points per size category change (not counting Colossal to Gargantuan or Gargantuan to Huge). In particular, a Medium hyosctera gains +8 to its Dexterity score while in swarm form. A hyosctera in swarm form has no Constitution score.

Skills: A hyosctera in swarm form gains a +10 bonus on Disguise checks to act like a normal grouping of its constituent creatures. In swarm form, the swarm creatures' new size, speed, and ability scores can

affect skill bonuses. A hyosctera in swarm form loses the ability to speak.

Feats: When the base creature is in swarm form, it cannot benefit from feats that rely on attacks (such as Power Attack and Combat Expertise), special attacks of the base creature, or other abilities the base creature cannot use in swarm form.

Challenge Rating: If the base creature has 7 or fewer HD, same as the base creature +2. If the base creature has 8 or more HD, same as the base creature +3.

Level Adjustment: Same as the base creature +6.

IMP, DROWNER

CR 3

LE Tiny outsider (Evil, Extraplanar, Lawful)

Init +3 **Senses** Darkvision 60 ft; Listen +7, Spot +7

Languages Infernal, Aquan; long-time residents of the Nocturnal Sea may know Xalote.

AC 20 (+2 size, +3 Dex, +5 natural), touch 15, flat-footed 17

hp 13 (3 HD), fast healing 2; **DR** 5/good or silver

Immune poison

Resist fire 5

Fort +3, **Ref** +6, **Will** +4

Speed swim 60 ft. (12 squares)

Melee 2 claws +8 (1d4 plus drowning touch) and tendrils +6 (poison)

Space 2-1/2 ft. **Reach** 0 ft.

Base Atk +3; **Grp** -5

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th; DCs are Charisma based)

At-will — *detect good*, *detect magic*

1/day — *suggestion* (DC 15)

1/week — *commune* (CL 12th, six questions)

Abilities Str 10, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 14

SA Drowning touch, poison

SQ Alternate form

Feats Multiattack, Weapon Finesse

Skills Diplomacy +8, Hide +17, Knowledge (any one) +6, Listen +7, Move Silently +9, Search +6, Spellcraft +6, Spot +7, Survival +1 (+3 following tracks), Swim +8.

A drowner imp has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

Alternate Form (Su): A drowner can assume another form at-will as a standard action. Common forms include octopus, eel, barracuda, and stingray.

Drowning Touch (Su): A creature touched by the drowner's claws or otherwise physically contacted by it in an alternate form is subjected to a targeted *dispel magic* as cast by a 10th level caster, but it only affects spells that confer the ability to breathe underwater. Unlike a normal targeted *dispel magic*, this also affects magic items carried by the creature that allow it to breathe underwater, suppressing their effects for 1d4 rounds if the *dispel* check succeeds.

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 13, initial damage 1d4 Dex, secondary damage 2d4 Dex. The save DC is Constitution-based and includes a +2 racial bonus.

Where a water imp (see below) is marked by mild aquatic adaptations, a drowner is distinguished by a form comparatively alien to the norms of imp-kind. Just behind its fanged jaw, a cluster of frilled spines pulses, working to pull oxygen from the water. The thumb and forefinger of each hand have outgrown the other fingers, and resemble wicked, crab-like claws. They still possess wings, but matters get worse below the torso, as the standard legs and stinger have been replaced by a mess of tendrils. A few—perhaps four to six—are tentacles about as thick as the creature's forelimbs, while the rest are

significantly thinner, resembling the filaments that trail from jellyfish. Drowners are miserable creatures, denied the ability to tread on land or breathe air, and they hate everything that can.

Strategies and Tactics

Drowners approach swimmers in the form of innocuous marine animals, and attempt to make physical contact to use their drowning touch. Once its victim starts to panic, it assumes its normal form to pinch with its claws and rake with tendrils, swimming away quickly if it gets struck. Many like to lair near sharks, in the hopes that the wounds they inflict attract the more dangerous beasts.

To draw a victim away from a group, a drowner can employ its *suggestion* ability, either directly forcing the victim to wander off, or making the victim do something innocuous (perhaps drop an important item into the depths) that leads it away.

Ecology

Drowners prefer deep oceanic waters. Most are found in Stygia. Rarely, they have entered the River Styx and been swept to other locations in the Lower Planes. They often enter the Material Plane in the service of spellcasters among the evil aquatic races, such as sahuagin and kuo-toa, where they provide a conduit to the infernal powers. However, their helpfulness can be impacted by their jealousy over their masters' ability to breach the surface.

Typical Physical Characteristics: A drowner's torso is typically a foot long. Its thicker tendrils extend another foot, while its thinner tendrils can reach another foot beyond the thicker ones. They weigh 8 pounds.

Typical Treasure

Drowners rarely collect their own treasure. They may lair around shipwrecks containing valuables, as such sites tend to attract hated terrestrial explorers.

Drowner Lore

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (the planes) can learn more about drowners. When a character makes a skill check, the following lore is revealed, including information from lower DCs.

DC 18: Drowner imps are a type of imp that lives in the depths, more removed from the land than water imps.

DC 23: Drowner imps cannot breathe air, and they hate those that can. They are a deadly hazard to any terrestrial creature that plumbs the depths with the help of magic, for their touch dispels such respiratory effects.

Imp, Envy CR2

LE Tiny outsider (Evil, Extraplanar, Lawful)

Init +3 **Senses** Darkvision 60 ft; Listen +7, Spot +7

Languages Infernal and one mortal language

AC 20 (+2 size, +3 Dex, +5 natural), touch 15, flat-footed 17

hp 13 (3 HD), fast healing 2; **DR** 5/good or silver

Immune poison

Resist fire 5

Fort +3, **Ref** +6, **Will** +4

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 50 ft. (perfect)

Melee sting +8 (1d4 plus poison)

Space 2-1/2 ft. **Reach** 0 ft.

Base Atk +3; **Grp** -5

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th; DCs are Charisma based)

At-will — *detect good*, *detect magic*, *invisibility* (self only)

1/day — *suggestion* (DC 15)

1/week — *commune* (CL 12th, six questions)

Abilities Str 10, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 14

SA Poison, soul exchange

SQ Alternate form

Feats Ability Focus (Soul Exchange), Weapon Finesse

Skills Diplomacy +8, Hide +17, Knowledge (any one) +6, Listen +7, Move Silently +9, Search +6, Spellcraft +6, Spot +7, Survival +1 (+3 following tracks).

Alternate Form (Su): As the common imp.

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 13, initial damage 1d4 Cha, secondary damage 2d4 Cha. The save DC is Constitution-based and includes a +2 racial bonus. While suffering under the effects of this poison, the victim is acutely aware of things others have that the victim lacks.

Soul Exchange (Su): As a full round action, an envy imp can form a bond with a willing creature. It may only form one bond at a time, and it must wait 24 hours after breaking a bond (a free action) to form a new one.

The bonded creature may use *magic jar* as a spell-like ability once per day. The effective caster level for this ability is 10th, and the DC of the Will save to resist possession is 19. This DC is based on the imp's Charisma modifier, rather than that of the bonded creature.

Rather than a gem, the bonded creature uses the imp itself as the *magic jar*. In turn, the imp leaves its body lifeless and gains control of the bonded creature's body as if by *magic jar* until the effect ends. If the bonded creature's body is destroyed, the imp's soul returns to its body, but it remains comatose until the bonded creature's *magic jar* effect ends, at which point the bonded creature's soul passes on.

These little green devils are not content with their own lives, and prey on those who are similarly dissatisfied. Envy imps enable such people to take the lives they want for a time, and the imps live their lives in exchange. Most of the time, their eyes are hungry, black pits, but they flash green when they

see things they desire, or bond with an envious mortal.

Strategies and Tactics

Envy imps generally don't seek to fight, but if one cannot find envious individuals to bond with, it will try to sting a victim without being caught, hoping to induce jealousy and create a suitable victim.

Ecology

Envy imps are also referred to as spy imps by some, for their body stealing power has espionage applications. This is their primary use in Hell, where greater devils give envy imps to their trusted servants to help them keep tabs on their less trusted servants. However, since it would be a great affront to the infernal hierarchy to give imps access to the bodies of their more powerful brethren, magic is often employed to keep the imps powerless in their masters' bodies. As such, envy imps yearn to migrate to the Material Plane and work to corrupt envious mortals.

Typical Physical Characteristics: Though its skin tone and eyes are distinctive, an envy imp differs little from others of its kind, standing about 2 feet tall and weighing about 8 pounds.

Typical Treasure

Some envy imps like to collect a few trinkets from their bonds, as tokens of the lives they have led. Others only see such treasures as reminders of lives they don't have, and refuse to keep anything of the sort.

Envy Imp Lore

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (the planes) can learn more about envy imps. When a character makes a skill check, the following lore is revealed, including information from lower DCs.

DC 15: Envy imps desire many of the opportunities mortals take for granted, and so they come to the Material Plane to corrupt envious mortals, making tainted offers of fulfillment.

DC 20: Envy imps can grant a mortal the ability to possess others, allowing them to live other people's lives. In the process, the envy imp usurps control of the mortal's body to fulfill its own desires.

Imp, Gluttony

CR 3

LE Tiny outsider (Evil, Extraplanar, Lawful)

Init +3 **Senses** Darkvision 60 ft; Listen +7, Spot +7

Languages Infernal and one mortal language

AC 20 (+2 size, +3 Dex, +5 natural), touch 15, flat-footed 17

hp 13 (3 HD), fast healing 2; **DR** 5/good or silver

Immune poison

Resist fire 5

Fort +3, **Ref** +6, **Will** +4

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 50 ft. (perfect)

Melee sting +8 (1d4 plus poison) and 2 claws +6 (1d4) and bite +6 (1d6)

Space 2-1/2 ft. **Reach** 0 ft.

Base Atk +3; **Grp** -5

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th; DCs are Charisma based)

At-will — *detect good*, *detect magic*, *invisibility* (self only)

1/day — *suggestion* (DC 15)

1/week — *commune* (CL 12th, six questions)

Abilities Str 10, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 14

SA Poison

SQ Alternate form

Feats Multiattack, Weapon Finesse

Skills Bluff +8, Diplomacy +4, Disguise +2 (+4 to act in character), Hide +17, Intimidate +4, Knowledge (any one) +6, Listen +7, Move Silently +9, Search +6,

Spellcraft +6, Spot +7, Survival +1 (+3 following tracks).

Alternate Form (Su): A gluttony imp can assume the form of a humanoid infant at-will as a standard action.

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 13, initial damage 1d4 Wis, secondary damage 2d4 Wis. The save DC is Constitution-based and includes a +2 racial bonus. While under the influence of this poison, a victim's memory is confused to the point that it cannot realize that a transformed gluttony imp is not its child. While the imp is in infant form, the victim is *charmed* by it. If the victim's Wisdom score is at least 5 points lower than normal, it remains charmed even if it sees the imp in its natural form.

Additionally, a victim of this poison experiences strange food cravings, such as rotten meat and dirt. When in the presence of a craved substance, the victim must win an opposed Charisma check against the gluttony imp to avoid eating the substance.

Obese and ravenous, gluttony imps enjoy nothing more than to be fed and cared for by other creatures. Their most common tactic in the Material Plane is to creep into a home, poison a new mother, and take the shape of a baby. The venom addling her mind tricks her into nursing the imp like it is her own child, and it drives her to consume bizarre, almost inedible materials that the imp wants. Inevitably, the imp cannot be satisfied by this alone, and will eat the mother's real child, and then eventually the mother herself.

Strategies and Tactics

While in the care of a mortal mother, a gluttony imp does its best to use her as a shield. If it feels threatened enough to take its natural form, it stings opponents and retreats to her arms for protection. Once its foes are unconscious, it gorges itself on them.

Ecology

In the Hells, gluttony imps live lives of predation and scavenging. They track down small fiendish animals and devour them, or they follow around greater denizens of Hell and feed on their leftovers. Some have been conjured to the Material Plane by wizards who use them for pest control, but more sinister spellcasters sometimes use them to punish women who spurn them and marry another.

Typical Physical Characteristics: A gluttony imp is about 2 feet tall in its natural form and weighs 16 pounds.

Typical Treasure

Gluttony imps only value food, and they don't keep it for very long. Particularly fortunate gluttony imps might acquire magic items that create food.

Gluttony Imp Lore

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (the planes) can learn more about gluttony imps. When a character makes a skill check, the following lore is revealed, including information from lower DCs.

DC 15: Gluttony imps are ravenous beasts that eat anything they come across. They are also excessively lazy, and would rather other creatures went to the trouble of procuring their meals.

DC 20: Gluttony imps can take the shape of humanoid infants, and attempt to insert themselves into the cradles of mortal mothers, to be raised and fed much like a cuckoo. Their venom confuses the minds of victims and gives them strange cravings.

IMP, GREED

CR 2

LE Tiny outsider (Evil, Extraplanar, Lawful)
Init +3 **Senses** Darkvision 60 ft; Listen +7, Spot +7
Languages Infernal and one mortal language

AC 20 (+2 size, +3 Dex, +5 natural), touch 15, flat-footed 17

hp 13 (3 HD), fast healing 2; **DR** 5/good or silver
Immune poison

Resist fire 5

Fort +3, **Ref** +6, **Will** +4

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 50 ft. (perfect)

Melee sting +8 (1d4 plus poison) and bite +3 (1d6)

Space 2-1/2 ft. **Reach** 0 ft.

Base Atk +3; **Grp** -5

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th; DCs are Charisma based)

At-will — *detect good*, *detect magic*, *invisibility* (self only)

1/day — *suggestion* (DC 15)

1/week — *commune* (CL 12th, six questions)

Abilities Str 10, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 14

SA Poison

SQ Alternate form, pouch of holding

Feats Dodge, Weapon Finesse

Skills Hide +17, Knowledge (any one) +6, Listen +7, Move Silently +9, Search +6, Spellcraft +6, Spot +7, Survival +1 (+3 following tracks), Sleight of Hand +9.

Alternate Form (Su): A greed imp can assume the form of a satchel, knapsack, purse, or other small personal container at-will as a standard action. In this form, treat it as a tiny animated object.

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 13, initial damage 1d4 Cha, secondary damage 2d4 Cha. The save DC is Constitution-based and includes a +2 racial bonus. While affected by this poison, a victim becomes more avaricious and takes notice of valuables in the

possession of others. If it has an opportunity to steal something that it wants, it must succeed on an opposed Charisma check against the greed imp to resist the impulse. Nothing stops the greed imp from acting where its victim shows restraint, however.

Pouch of Holding (Su): The throat pouch of a greed imp can be used as a *bag of holding* type I, accessed through the imp's mouth. If the pouch is ruptured from the inside, the imp immediately drops to -1 hit points and is dying.

Greed imps have long, grabby fingers and a grotesquely large double-chin. This immense, pulsating dewlap and the devil's tendency to squat give the greed imp a toad-like countenance. Their throat pouches are even larger on the inside, allowing them to accumulate the things they steal and conveniently transport them.

Strategies and Tactics

Greed imps rarely care to attack, preferring to steal without being noticed and get away. If they do decide to fight, they generally attempt some sort of ambush. Greed imps have been known to take the shape of an open bag and reveal their little hoards of valuables. When a creature reaches in, the imp takes its normal form and bites down hard, then commences stinging until it feels its life is in danger.

Ecology

Some lords of Hell use greed imp colonies as vaults, compactly storing artifacts and valuables in the creatures. These colonies often have their movement restricted, lest things get lost or stolen. In the Material Plane, individual greed imps often serve evil spellcasters—particularly disciples of Mammon—in a similar capacity. For this service, they often demand shiny trinkets, which can lead to them getting so stuffed that they can't hold their masters' possessions.

Typical Physical Characteristics: A greed imp in its natural form is 2 feet tall (though it almost never stands straight) and weighs about 8 pounds.

Typical Treasure

Depending on the local availability, greed imps can be flush with stolen valuables. A greed imp in an area too poor for it to accumulate wealth generally moves on.

Greed Imp Lore

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (the planes) can learn more about greed imps. When a character makes a skill check, the following lore is revealed, including information from lower DCs.

DC 15: Greed imps are avaricious little monsters that steal anything of value that is not nailed down. They are the favored imps of the cult of Mammon.

DC 20: Greed imps can store things in their throat pouches, which contain large extradimensional spaces.

Imp, Lust CR 2

LE Tiny outsider (Evil, Extraplanar, Lawful)

Init +3 **Senses** Darkvision 60 ft; Listen +7, Spot +11

Languages Infernal and one mortal language

AC 20 (+2 size, +3 Dex, +5 natural), touch 15, flat-footed 17

hp 13 (3 HD), fast healing 2; **DR** 5/good or silver

Immune poison

Resist fire 5

Fort +3, **Ref** +6, **Will** +4

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 50 ft. (perfect)

Melee sting +8 (1d4 plus hedonic overload)

Space 2-1/2 ft. **Reach** 0 ft.

Base Atk +3; **Grp** -5

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th; DCs are Charisma based)

At-will — *detect good, detect magic, invisibility* (self only)

1/day — *suggestion* (DC 15)

1/week — *commune* (CL 12th, six questions)

Abilities Str 10, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 14

SA Hedonic overload

SQ All-around vision, alternate form

Feats Dodge, Weapon Finesse

Skills Diplomacy +8, Hide +17, Knowledge (any one) +6, Listen +7, Move Silently +9, Search +10, Spellcraft +6, Spot +11, Survival +1 (+3 following tracks).

All-Around Vision (Ex): A lust imp can see in all directions at once. Because of this, it has a +4 racial bonus on Search and Spot checks, and it cannot be flanked.

Alternate Form (Su): As the common imp.

Hedonic Overload (Su): A victim stung by a lust imp must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or take 1d4 points of Wisdom damage. It must also make a second save at the same DC, or one point of Wisdom damage becomes almost permanent drain (see below). Both DCs are Charisma based and include a +2 racial bonus. Hedonic overload floods the victim's mind with ancient memories of infernal pleasures, and until it fully recovers, it can take no pleasure from average mortal activities. This confers a -2 penalty on all Charisma-based checks, as well as any skill check involved in an activity the victim used to find pleasurable. This penalty can be negated for 24 hours by engaging in some sort of debauchery.

If the victim takes the point of Wisdom drain, it becomes immune to further hedonic overload until the drain is cured. After a week without curing the Wisdom drain, the drain goes away in the middle of the night, and a newborn lust imp crawls out of the victim's mouth. The victim typically has a disturbing nightmare about suffocation, but still does not awaken. The new lust imp generally stings the victim and flies away, hoping to perpetuate the cycle. A

victim stung by its own newborn lust imp's first sting automatically fails both of its saves against hedonic overload.

Lust imps appear vaguely feminine in proportion and bone structure, but are otherwise genderless. More immediately noticeable are its two faces: the normal face on the front of its head, and the upside-down, mindless, leering face on the back of its head. This second face is all that remains of the male of the species.

Strategies and Tactics

A lust imp prefers to convince a pleasure-seeking mortal to accept its sting willingly, immediately causing the victim to fail both Will saves. If it is threatened, it tries to sting as many targets as possible before fleeing, hoping to maximize its potential offspring.

Ecology

Lust imp society is concerned with hedonistic excess and experimentation with debauched pleasures. It used to be ruled by lust imp males, who kept the females as chattel. Eventually, the females rose up and overthrew the males, then used dark magic to devour their essences. In Hell, they often assist interrogators, but many recognize that these creatures are better suited to corrupting mortals on the Material Plane.

Typical Physical Characteristics: Lust imps in their natural forms are typically just under 2 feet tall and weight almost 8 pounds.

Typical Treasure

Lust imps sometimes take substances or devices meant to convey sensations, such as backscratchers, hallucinogens, and thumbscrews. After a while, they usually get bored with these things and leave them behind.

Lust Imp Lore

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (the planes) can learn more about lust imps. When a character makes a skill check, the following lore is revealed, including information from lower DCs.

DC 15: Lust imps are wicked creatures that lure mortals with promises of pleasure. Their sting can overload a victim's mind and numb it to regular pleasures. They have two faces, and can see out of the backs of their heads.

DC 20: The face on the back of a lust imp's head is the last remnant of the male of the species. The females rose up over their male oppressors and slew every last one, absorbing them in the process. In order to reproduce, they must transfer some infernal essence into victims of their hedonic overload, which leads to a new lust imp coalescing and escaping the host over the course of a week. Since the new lust imp stings the victim before leaving, outside intervention is needed to keep the victim from continuing to spawn lust imps.

IMP, PRIDE

CR 6

LE Small outsider (Evil, Extraplanar, Lawful)
Init +3 **Senses** Blindsight 60 ft; Listen +7
Languages Infernal; telepathy 100 ft.

AC 22 (+1 size, +3 Dex, +8 natural), touch 14, flat-footed 18

hp 33 (6 HD), fast healing 4; **DR** 5/good and silver
Immune poison

Resist fire 10

Fort +6, **Ref** +8, **Will** +6

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 50 ft. (perfect)

Melee sting +10 (1d6 plus poison) and 2 claws +8 (1d6) and bite +8 (1d8)

Space 5 ft. **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +6; **Grp** +2

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 9th; DCs are Charisma based)

At-will — *detect good, detect magic, greater invisibility* (self only)

2/day — *suggestion* (DC 17)

1/week — *commune* (CL 15th, eight questions)

Abilities Str 10, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 18

SA Paralytic shriek, poison

SQ Sightless

Feats Mindsight (*Lords of Madness* page 126), Multiattack, Weapon Finesse

Skills Diplomacy +13, Hide +16, Knowledge (any two) +9, Listen +10, Move Silently +12, Search +9, Spellcraft +9, Survival +1 (+3 following tracks).

Paralytic Shriek (Su): A pride imp can emit a paralytic shriek as a standard action. Once it shrieks, it cannot do so again until 1d4 rounds later. All creatures other than prideimps in a 20 ft. radius burst centered on the imp must make a DC 17 Will save or be paralyzed for six rounds. Each round on its turn, a victim may attempt a new saving throw to end the effect. (This is a full-round action that does not provoke attacks of opportunity.) The save DC is Charisma based. This is a sonic, mind-affecting effect.

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 16, initial damage 1d4 Wis, secondary damage 2d4 Wis. The save DC is Constitution-based and includes a +2 racial bonus. Those afflicted with this poison feel superior to other creatures like them, which inflicts a –2 penalty on all Charisma-based checks (except for Perform, Use Magic Device, and Use Psionic Device).

This sense of superiority is so pernicious that it distorts the sort of interpersonal behaviors the victim finds reasonable. For example, actions that would harm other creatures of the victim's type become acceptable *suggestions*.

Sightless (Ex): A pride imp is immune to gaze attacks, visual effects, illusions, and other attack forms that rely on sight.

Prideimps consider themselves to be the epitome of imp-kind. In fact, they view otherimps as little more than food. They have vibrant purple skin and no eyes, because according to them, they are above sight.

Strategies and Tactics

A pride imp uses its paralytic shriek to incapacitate foes, then tears into those who are still active. If one of these targets succumbs to the imp's poison, it uses its *suggestion* ability to make the target attack the paralyzed victims in exchange for the imp's approval and favor.

Ecology

Most prideimps do not serve other devils, and spend their time prowling the Hells for otherimps to eat. When they aren't devouring others of their kind, they follow more esoteric pursuits in pride imp enclaves, delving into forbidden subjects that many mortals are not even aware of. Truly arrogant mortal diabolists summon prideimps to serve them as status symbols, but when their familiars try to eat those of other diabolists, their relationships deteriorate rather quickly.

Typical Physical Characteristics: Prideimps generally stand 3 feet tall and weigh about 12 pounds.

Typical Treasure

Prideimps believe material wealth is beneath them, and accumulate no treasure.

Pride Imp Lore

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (the planes) can learn more about prideimps. When a character makes a skill check, the following lore is revealed, including information from lower DCs.

DC 18: Prideimps believe that they are superior to all otherimps, and use this to justify feeding on them. They hunt by sensing minds, and they can emit a sound that paralyzes creatures.

DC 23: It is thought that pride imps may once have had eyes, but chose to remove them. Some pride imps have been known to say that they have already seen everything worth observing. They busy themselves discussing inscrutable planar topics most sages do not even recognize.

IMP, SKYCURSE

CR2

LE Tiny outsider (Evil, Extraplanar, Lawful)

Init +3 **Senses** Darkvision 60 ft; Listen +7, Spot +7

Languages Infernal, Auran, and one mortal language

AC 20 (+2 size, +3 Dex, +5 natural), touch 15, flat-footed 17

hp 13 (3 HD), fast healing 2; **DR** 5/good or silver

Immune electricity, poison

Resist fire 5

Fort +3, **Ref** +6, **Will** +4

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 50 ft. (perfect)

Melee sting +8 (1d4 plus skycurse) or touch +8 (skycurse)

Space 2-1/2 ft. **Reach** 0 ft.

Base Atk +3; **Grp** -5

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th; DCs are Charisma based)

At-will — *detect good*, *detect magic*, *invisibility* (self only)

1/day — *suggestion* (DC 15)

1/week — *commune* (CL 12th, six questions)

Abilities Str 10, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 14

SA Skycurse

SQ Alternate form

Feats Flyby Attack, Weapon Finesse

Skills Diplomacy +8, Hide +17, Knowledge (any one) +6, Listen +7, Move Silently +9, Search +6, Spellcraft +6, Spot +7, Survival +1 (+3 following tracks).

A skycurse imp has a +8 racial bonus on Hide checks when viewed against a clear blue sky.

Alternate Form (Su): A skycurse imp can assume another form at-will as a standard action. Common forms include bat, eagle, hawk, and raven.

Skycurse (Su): An airborne creature touched by a skycurse imp gets one level of skycurse. A creature can have up to five levels of skycurse, and when it comes within 10 times its level of skycurse in feet from an object in contact with the ground, a line of lightning extends from the object to the creature. The lightning bolt deals 1d6 lightning damage per level of skycurse to the creature and everything in the line. All creatures in the line can attempt a Reflex save for half damage. After the bolt strikes, the creature loses all levels of skycurse.

A skycurse imp can inflict its skycurse up to 10 times before it must take time to recharge its ability. For every ten minutes it spends without giving a level of skycurse, it regains a use of its skycurse.

A skycurse imp is a sadistic joker that finds satisfaction in creating a deadly surprise. Their touch makes the ground reject a creature, smiting it with a stroke of lightning. These imps have been known to dive bomb birds just to see them fried when they attempt to land. The skin of a skycurse imp is the same blue as a cloudless sky.

Strategies and Tactics

Skycurse imps like to approach flying creatures invisibly or in the form of a bird or bat and cling to them in flight. If the flying creature does not dislodge the imp (as an adventurer amazed by the friendly wildlife might not), it can continuously confer its skycurse without any resistance, setting up its victim to take a massive stroke of damage at a later time with no apparent reason.

Ecology

More powerful devils with lairs accessible only to flight sometimes employ flocks of skycurse imps to harry interlopers, ensuring that uninvited guests are struck by lightning if they try to land. Evil spellcasters

with similar motivations often do the same thing. Left to their own devices in the mortal world, skycurse imps prey on any flying creature they can find for their own amusement.

Typical Physical Characteristics: Skycurse imps in their natural forms are typically 2 feet tall and weigh 8 pounds.

Typical Treasure

Skycurse imps have no interest in treasure.

Skycurse Imp Lore

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (the planes) can learn more about skycurse imps. When a character makes a skill check, the following lore is revealed, including information from lower DCs.

Text (base category at HD+10, further categories at +5)

DC 18: Skycurse imps are infernal tricksters, always in the mood for a lethal prank. They are known to curse flying creatures so the earth strikes them with lightning when they next attempt to land.

DC 23: The sky blue coloration of a skycurse imp is great camouflage on a cloudless day in the Material Plane, but it sticks out like a sore thumb in the burning skies of most layers of Hell. Sages speculate that these creatures may have been engineered in preparation for invading the mortal realm.

IMP, SLOTH

CR 2

LE Tiny outsider (Evil, Extraplanar, Lawful)

Init +3 **Senses** Darkvision 60 ft; Listen +7, Spot +7

Languages Infernal and one mortal language

AC 20 (+2 size, +3 Dex, +5 natural), touch 15, flat-footed 17

hp 13 (3 HD), fast healing 2; **DR** 5/good or silver

Immune poison

Resist fire 5

Fort +3, **Ref** +6, **Will** +4

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 50 ft. (perfect)

Melee sting +8 (1d4 plus poison)

Space 2-1/2 ft. **Reach** 0 ft.

Base Atk +3; **Grp** -5

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th; DCs are Charisma based)

At-will — *detect good, detect magic, invisibility* (self only)

1/day — *suggestion* (DC 15)

1/week — *commune* (CL 12th, six questions)

Abilities Str 10, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 14

SA Poison, suppressive sleep

SQ Alternate form

Feats Dodge, Weapon Finesse

Skills Diplomacy +8, Hide +17, Knowledge (any one) +6, Listen +7, Move Silently +9, Search +6, Spellcraft +6, Spot +7, Survival +1 (+3 following tracks).

Alternate Form (Su): As the common imp.

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 13, initial damage unconsciousness for 1d4 minutes, secondary unconsciousness for 1d4 hours. The save DC is Constitution-based and includes a +2 racial bonus.

Suppressive Sleep (Su): A sloth imp that sits or lays on an unconscious creature's torso can keep it from awakening. If no lingering effect is keeping such a victim asleep, it can awaken 1d4 rounds after the sloth imp is removed. Such victims will starve to death if not attended by some third party.

While the base effect of suppressive sleep is eventually deadly, a sloth imp can choose to make its attentions more immediately lethal. After resting on a victim for at least one full minute, it can choose to paralyze its lungs. If the victim fails a DC 13 Will save, it stops breathing, and it must make a Fortitude save at the end of each round in which it is not breathing. The DC begins at 13, and it increases by 1 every round after the first. Both DCs are Charisma-based. If the subject fails a Fortitude save, it is disabled (0 hp).

In the following round, it drops to –1 hit points and is dying. Curing powers can revive a dying subject normally, but if the imp is still upon it, the subject must continue to make Fortitude saves.

If the subject succeeds on two Fortitude saves, its brain realizes what is happening and regains control of the lungs. This event is very jarring to the sloth imp, which becomes panicked for the next minute and must flee.

Distinguished only by its incredible apathy, a sloth imp can normally be found sleeping. They take little interest in anything else, only stirring to find a quieter spot.

Strategies and Tactics

Sloth imps have little interest in attacking other creatures. If disturbed, a sloth imp will sting the creatures responsible until they are unconscious or otherwise not inclined to pursue, then it will find a new place to nap.

Ecology

Left to their own devices, sloth imps will find the quietest, most out-of-the way places to rest. Explorers in Hell can generally trust that a particular nook is generally undisturbed if one or more sloth imps have taken to sleeping there. As long as the imps aren't awakened, they can be lived with. In fact, they are unlikely to report such interlopers unless they are known fugitives of higher infernal powers, lest they bring too much attention to a perfectly good resting place. However, someone had better be left on watch, lest the imps rouse themselves enough to begin asphyxiating sleepers.

For their sleep-related abilities, they are valued by evil beings who want to keep victims alive but incapacitated.

Typical Physical Characteristics: A sloth imp looks no different from a normal imp, standing about 2 feet tall and weighing 8 pounds.

Typical Treasure

Sloth imps do not value treasure, unless it is comfortable to lay on.

Sloth Imp Lore

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (the planes) can learn more about sloth imps. When a character makes a skill check, the following lore is revealed, including information from lower DCs.

DC 15: Sloth imps are an incredibly passive variety of imp, interested in nothing but sleep.

DC 20: Sloth imps can recline on a creature's chest to keep it from waking up. Worse, they can make a sleeping creature stop breathing in the same manner.

IMP, TITAN (NORMAL FORM)

CR4

LE Tiny outsider (Evil, Extraplanar, Lawful)

Init +3 **Senses** Darkvision 60 ft; Listen +10, Spot +10

Languages Infernal and one mortal language

AC 20 (+2 size, +3 Dex, +5 natural), touch 15, flat-footed 17

hp 27 (6 HD), fast healing 2; **DR** 5/good or silver

Immune poison

Resist fire 5

Fort +5, **Ref** +8, **Will** +6

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 50 ft. (perfect)

Melee 2 claws +11 (1d4) and sting +9 (1d4 plus poison) and bite +9 (1d6)

Space 2-1/2 ft. **Reach** 0 ft.

Base Atk +6; **Grp** -2

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th; DCs are Charisma based)

At-will — *detect good, detect magic, invisibility* (self only)

1/day — *suggestion* (DC 15)

1/week — *commune* (CL 12th, six questions)

Abilities Str 10, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 14

SA Poison, rend 1d4

SQ Titan form

Feats Multiattack, Weapon Finesse, Combat Reflexes

Skills Hide +20, Intimidate +11, Knowledge (any one) +9, Listen +10, Move Silently +12, Search +9, Spellcraft +9, Spot +10, Survival +1 (+3 following tracks).

The imp takes a –4 penalty on its Intimidate check for every size category that it is smaller than its target.

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 13 (18 in titan form), initial damage 1d4 Dex, secondary damage 2d4 Dex. The save DC is Constitution-based and includes a +2 racial bonus.

Rend (Ex): If the titan imp hits a single target with both of its claw attacks, it latches onto the target's body and tears the flesh. The rend attack deals 1d4 extra damage in the imp's normal form or 2d6+6 damage in titan form.

Titan Form (Su): As a full round action that provokes attacks of opportunity, a titan imp can swell up to Large size. In so doing, the imp's Strength score increases to 18, its Constitution score increases to 20 (thus it gains 30 hit points), its sting and claw damage dice increase to 2d6, and its bite damage die increases to 2d8. Additionally, its land speed increases to 30 ft, but its flight maneuverability drops to average. Titan form lasts for 10 rounds (not including the initial round of transformation), and may be used once per day. If insufficient room is available for the desired growth, the imp attains the maximum possible size and may make a Strength check (using its increased Strength) to burst any enclosures in the process. If it fails, it is constrained without harm by the materials enclosing it—a titan

imp cannot crush itself by increasing its size. Given below is its statistics block in titan form, incorporating only the entries which change.

Imp, Titan (Titan Form)

LE Large outsider (Evil, Extraplanar, Lawful)

AC 17 (-1 size, +3 Dex, +5 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 14

hp 57

Fort +10

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares), fly 50 ft. (average)

Melee 2 claws +9 (2d6+4) and sting +7 (2d6+2 plus poison) and bite +7 (2d8+2)

Space 10 ft. **Reach** 10 ft.

Grp +10

Abilities Str 18, Dex 17, Con 20, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 14

SA Poison, rend 2d6+6

Skills Hide +8, Intimidate +11, Knowledge (any one) +9, Listen +10, Move Silently +12, Search +9, Spellcraft +9, Spot +10, Survival +1 (+3 following tracks).

The imp gains a +4 bonus on its Intimidate check for every size category that it is larger than its target.

Most imps are acutely aware that they are minuscule and weak in comparison to their masters, and no imp is more enraged about it than a titan imp. This breed has developed the ability to puff themselves up on their anger, swelling up to many times their size for short periods of time. Since they spend so much of their lives bullied for being small, this change turns them into nasty bullies in their own right. Titan imps enjoy rising up above their foes and brutally demonstrating their might to soothe their feelings of inadequacy.

Strategies and Tactics

If there is value in a surprise attack, a titan imp will approach invisibly, activate its titan form, then attack. Some prefer to approach openly and make threats. Often, these threats are not taken seriously, and the imp relishes the terror on its victims' faces when it transforms in front of them. It flees if its titan form ends or it gets below 30 hit points. (It will lose most of these hit points when titan form ends, so it needs to stay above 20 to avoid dying.)

Ecology

Titan imps are valued for being powerful guards that appear unassuming at first. When a lone titan imp or perhaps a pair guards a gate, woe to any who belittle the creature. They can also make good assassins, as they are small and slippery when they need to be, and strong and deadly when the moment is right.

In addition to being physically identical to their common cousins, titan imps seem to bear some resemblance on a metaphysical level. Attempts to call regular imps rarely end up calling titan imps instead, despite the intentions of the summoner. When an imp rolls a natural 20 to resist a *planar binding* spell, a titan imp appears in its place, and it gets a +5 circumstance bonus to its first Charisma check to break free of the *magic circle*.

Typical Physical Characteristics: A titan imp in normal form is no different from a regular imp, being about 2 feet tall and weighing 8 pounds. In its titan form, the imp is 9 feet tall and weighs 700 pounds.

Typical Treasure

Titan imps rarely acquire large weaponry, which they keep in their lairs for personal defense when they are large enough to use it.

Titan Imp Lore

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (the planes) can learn more about titan imps. When a character makes a skill check, the following lore is revealed, including information from lower DCs.

DC 18: Titan imps are normally indistinguishable from their normal brethren, but they hide a deadly surprise. They can grow to more than four times their natural height, becoming dangerous brutes for a short time.

DC 23: Occasionally, a titan imp is accidentally called instead of a regular imp. They cannot be bound as familiars, and the conjurer is often not prepared for the creature to be more powerful. As such, many titan imps that reach the material plane escape bondage almost immediately.

IMP, WATER CR2

LE Tiny outsider (Aquatic, Evil, Extraplanar, Lawful)
Init +3 **Senses** Darkvision 60 ft; Listen +7, Spot +7
Languages Infernal and one mortal language

AC 20 (+2 size, +3 Dex, +5 natural), touch 15, flat-footed 17
hp 13 (3 HD), fast healing 2; **DR** 5/good or silver
Immune poison
Resist fire 5
Fort +3, **Ref** +6, **Will** +4

Speed 15 ft. (4 squares), fly 50 ft. (perfect), swim 40 ft.
Melee sting +8 (1d4 plus poison)
Space 2-1/2 ft. **Reach** 0 ft.
Base Atk +3; **Grp** -5
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th; DCs are Charisma based)
At-will — *detect good*, *detect magic*, *invisibility* (self only)
1/day — *suggestion* (DC 15)
1/week — *commune* (CL 12th, six questions)

Abilities Str 10, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 14
SA Poison
SQ Alternate form, amphibious
Feats Dodge, Weapon Finesse

Skills Diplomacy +8, Hide +17, Knowledge (any one) +6, Listen +7, Move Silently +9, Search +6, Spellcraft +6, Spot +7, Survival +1 (+3 following tracks), Swim +8.

A water imp has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

Alternate Form (Su): A water imp can assume another form at-will as a standard action. Common forms include albatross, otter, turtle, and toad.

Amphibious (Ex): Although water imps are aquatic, they can survive indefinitely on land.

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 13, initial damage 1d4 Dex, secondary damage 2d4 Dex. The save DC is Constitution-based and includes a +2 racial bonus.

Water imps are quite reminiscent of their non-aquatic cousins, appearing as wicked little winged humanoids equipped with poisonous stingers. Their foreclaws are webbed, and their feet are distended into flippers, making them slightly slower on land. Rather than the common red coloration, the skin of a water imp tends to be somewhere on the blue-green spectrum.

Strategies and Tactics

Like normal imps, water imps enjoy making surprise attacks using their alternative form or invisibility powers, and will flee if soundly struck. When fighting air-breathing opponents, they like to draw them into the water, hoping that their paralytic venom will make their victims fall below the surface and drown.

Ecology

Water imps are amphibious, and prefer to lurk around the shores of lakes and rivers or in swamps. They may serve aquatic spellcasters as familiars, or

they may be found serving terrestrial beings who frequent the water, such as sinister fishermen.

Typical Physical Characteristics: A water imp in its natural form stands nearly 2 feet tall and weighs about 8 pounds.

Typical Treasure

Water imps do not tend to accumulate their own treasure. Sinister terrestrial mages sometimes use them to hide valuables underwater, so they can potentially be traced to a stash of spoils.

Water Imp Lore

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (the planes) can learn more about water imps. When a character makes a skill check, the following lore is revealed.

DC 15: Water imps are an aquatic variant of the standard imp, at home in lakes, rivers, and bogs.

IMP, WRATH

CR3

LE Tiny outsider (Evil, Extraplanar, Lawful)

Init +3 **Senses** Darkvision 60 ft; Listen +7, Spot +7

Languages Infernal and one mortal language

AC 20 (+2 size, +3 Dex, +5 natural), touch 15, flat-footed 17

hp 13 (3 HD), fast healing 2; **DR** 5/good or silver

Immune fire, poison

Fort +3, **Ref** +6, **Will** +4

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 50 ft. (perfect)

Melee sting +8 (1d4 plus poison) or incorporeal touch (1d6+6 fire damage; immolating form only)

Space 2-1/2 ft. **Reach** 0 ft.

Base Atk +3; **Grp** -5

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th; DCs are Charisma based)

At-will — *detect good*, *detect magic*, *rage* (self only)

1/week — *commune* (CL 12th, six questions)

Abilities Str 10, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 14

SA Poison

SQ Immolating form

Feats Dodge, Weapon Finesse

Skills Hide +17, Intimidate +8, Knowledge (any one) +6, Listen +7, Move Silently +9, Search +6, Spellcraft +6, Spot +7, Survival +1 (+3 following tracks).

An imp in its immolating form has a +10 bonus on Disguise checks to pass itself off as a normal flame, as well as a +10 circumstance bonus to Hide checks while enveloped in larger flames, though it is unlikely to be so subtle.

Immolating Form (Su): Once per day as a standard action, a wrath imp can turn its body into living fire. It gains the incorporeal subtype, and it gains an effect identical to the *fire shield* spell (in its warm shield variation) as cast by a 6th level caster. It loses its sting attack, but gains an incorporeal touch attack that deals 1d6+6 fire damage on a hit. This form lasts for 6 rounds.

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 13, initial damage 1d4 Wis, secondary damage 2d4 Wis and the subject is affected by a *rage* spell for an equal number of rounds. During this time, it must attack the nearest creature. The save DC is Constitution-based and includes a +2 racial bonus.

Constantly angry, wrath imps embody unbridled rage, worsened by being packaged in a form of unimposing size. Those who underestimate these creatures—or worse, belittle them—are sure to find themselves on the receiving end of a furious assault. They are not particularly distinct from regular imps, though some might note the subtle curls of smoke that escape the nostrils of their apoplectic faces, or the fiery glow of the blood vessels under their skin.

Strategies and Tactics

Wrath imps rush in without warning and attempt to sting as many targets as possible. Once they have done so or are dealt a solid blow, they assume their

immolating form and focus their attacks on their most infuriating quarry. As their fiery shape nears the end of its duration, they will flee the battle to fight another day. In the aftermath, the lingering effects of their poisonous stings can turn their victims against each other.

Ecology

Wrath imps tend to inhabit the first layer of Hell, where they are most likely to encounter interlopers to vent their fury on. They make horrible assistants to spellcasters, but some have been summoned into the world by novice diabolists as instruments of vengeance and mayhem.

Typical Physical Characteristics: A typical wrath imp in its natural form is nearly 2 feet tall and weighs 8 pounds.

Typical Treasure

Wrath imps have no interest in treasure, and can become offended by its diplomatic use as a peace offering or bribe.

Wrath Imp Lore

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (the planes) can learn more about wrath imps. When a character makes a skill check, the following lore is revealed, including information from lower DCs.

DC 15: Wrath imps embody their namesake sin, attacking the objects of their ire without mercy. Their poison inflames feelings of anger.

DC 20: When particularly enraged, a wrath imp can turn its body into pure flame, making it nearly impossible to strike and allowing it to savagely burn its foes.

WHO'S DOOMED

VINAAASH SCHLOSSER

NE Devoratrix Bard 4 / Erudite 3 (*Complete Psionic*, p. 153) / **Cerebremancer 9** (*Expanded Psionic Handbook*, p.141)

Medium Outsider (Chaotic, Extraplanar, Evil, Tanar'ri)

Hit Dice: 108 (22 HD)

CR: 23

Initiative: +2

Speed: 30 ft., fly 50 ft. (average)

Armor Class: 23 (+2 Dex, +4 armor, +7 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 21

Base Attack/Grapple: +14/+18

Attack: +15 Claw +7 (1d6+1); +16 Dagger 'Envy' (1d4+2+1d6 cold (+1d10 cold on crit.)); +19 Grapple (1d3+1); +17 Shortsword (1d6+3 (+2d6 vs. humans)/19-20x2; +15 Unarmed strike (1d3+1 (+2d6 *Psionic Fist*))

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Beget Hollow Man; body of temptation DC 20; *laughing mad* DC 22; mind drain; spell-like abilities

Special Qualities: Change shape; corruption points 11; damage reduction 10 / cold iron or good; darkvision 120 ft.; *diminishing returns*; immunity to electricity and poison; *infect the weave*; *Obscuring mist*; parthenogenesis; phylactery; *reality wrinkle 13,000 ft*; resistance to acid 10, cold 10, fire 10; *spare the child*; telepathy 100 ft.; *too familiar*

Spell-like abilities: (CL 22. DC 17 + spell level)

At will: *Bull's strength*, *darkness*, *detect thoughts* (DC 19), *shadow walk* (self plus 50 lbs. of objects or self plus one Medium- or smaller-sized individual)

1/day - *Deeper darkness*, *restoration*

Class abilities: Bardic music (*countersong*, *fascinate*, *inspire competence*, *inspire courage* +1), bardic knowledge

Saves: Fort. +12, Ref. +15, Will +21

Abilities: Str. 13, Dex. 14, Con. 14, Int. 19, Wis. 16, Cha. 24

Skills: Bluff +20, Concentration +27, Diplomacy +20, Disguise +16, Hide +8, Knowledge (arcana) +22, Knowledge (local: Sri Raji) +8, Knowledge (planes) +13, Knowledge (psionics) + 20, Knowledge (Ravenloft) +8, Listen +11, Move silently +8, Perform (act) +16, Perform (dance) +13, Perform (sing) +12, Psicraft +21, Search +9, Speak language +4, Spellcraft +18, Spot +10

Feats: Alertness (B), Conjunctive Mind, (*Subpsionics; 3.5 D&D Archive*), Improved grapple, Improved unarmed strike, Insidious magic (*Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*, p.36), Insidious Mind (*Subpsionics; 3.5 D&D Archive*), Practiced Manifester (Erudite) (*CP*, p.57), Psionic Fist (*EPH*, p.50), Practiced spellcaster (Bard) (*Complete Arcane*, p.82), Psicrystal Affinity (B) (*EPH*, p.49), Shadow weave magic (*Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*, p.37)

Languages: Abyssal*, Celestial, Chondathan (*Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*, p.84), Draconic, Ija+, Infernal, Rajian, Zherisian

(+Ija is a prevalent language in the north of the Wartorn Cluster)

Psionics: Manifester level: 16; +1 to all saving throws of powers manifested from the *Metacreativity*, *Clairsentience*, and *Telepathy* disciplines; +1 bonus on manifest level checks to overcome power resistance for powers from these disciplines. The subconscious mind proves less than optimal for powers from the *Psychometabolism*, *Psychopotation*, and *Psychokinesis* disciplines. Effective manifest level for powers from these disciplines is 15. The reduced manifest level affects the power's range, duration, damage, and any other

level-dependant variables, including nullify checks against Vinaash Schlosser.

Power points / day: 150

Unique powers/day: 7

Powers known:

6 - *Mass cloud mind**, *Psychometry**, *Remote view trap**, *Stygian bolt+*, *Temporal acceleration+*

5 - *Baleful teleport+*, *Catapsi**, *Energy current+*, *Energy nullification field+*, *Hail of crystals**, *Metaconcert**, *Mind probe**, *Psionic plane shift+*, *Psionic teleport+*, *Psychic crush**, *Psychotic break**, *Second chance**, *Shatter mind blank**, *Stygian dominion+*, *Telekinetic buffer+*

4 - *Burrowing bonds**, *Correspond**, *Detect remote viewing**, *Energy ball+*, *Inertial barrier+*, *Psionic dimension door+*, *Psychic vampire+*, *Remote viewing**, *Thieving mindlink**

3 - *Astral caravan+*, *Crisis of breath**, *Danger sense**, *Dispel psionics+*, *Energy cone+*, *Escape detection**, *Psionic blast**, *Realized potential**, *Time hop+*, *Ubiquitous vision**

2 - *Bestow power**, *Body purification+*, *Brain lock**, *Clairvoyant sense**, *Control air+*, *Detect hostile intent**, *Featleech**, *Id insinuation**, *Mass missive**, *Mental disruption**, *Object reading**, *Recall agony**, *Sensitivity to psychic impressions**, *Thought shield**

1 - *Astral traveler+*, *Bolt**, *Call to mind**, *Conceal thoughts**, *Control flames+*, *Defensive precognition**, *Detect psionics**, *Force screen+*, *Inertial armor+*, *Mind thrust**, *Mindlink**, *Missive**, *Offensive precognition**, *Precognition**, *Thicken skin+*

Magic: Caster level: 17; +1 to all saving throws of spells cast from *Enchantment*, *Illusion*, and *Necromancy*; +1 bonus on caster level checks to overcome spell resistance for spells from these schools. The Shadow Weave proves less than optimal for spells from the schools of *Evocation* and *Transmutation* (except for spells with the *darkness* descriptor). Effective caster level for spells from

these schools is 12. The reduced caster level affects the spell's range, duration, damage, and any other level-dependent variables, including dispel checks against Vinaash Schlosser.

Spells/day: 3/5/5/5/3/1

5 - *Dread of the dead** (*Quoth the Raven* 26, p.34), *Shadow evocation**

4 - *Cure critical wounds*, *Freedom of movement+*, *Greater resistance* (SC, p.174)+, *Shadow conjuration**

3 - *Allegro* (*Complete Adventurer*, p.142), *Cure serious wounds*, *Dispel magic*, *Malicious acceleration* (*Quoth the Raven* 27, p.69)+

2 - *Cure moderate wounds*, *Heroism*, *Silence*, *Tongues*

1 - *Cure light wounds*, *Disguise self*, *Expeditious retreat*, *Unseen servant*

0 - *Daze*, *detect magic*, *ghostharp** (SC, p.104), *mending*, *prestidigitation*, *read magic*

Equipment: +2 anarchic swordcane; blessed book; +4 bracers of armor; +1 freezing burst dagger, "*Envy*"; +1 human bane dagger of wounding, "*Fang*", flesh-stitched cat familiar "*Gregory*"; hand of glory; ring of evasion; ring of mind shielding; ring of protection from negative energy; +2 intelligent, flaming burst saber of wounding "*Maxwell*" (AL CE; Int. 13, Wis. 13, Cha. 10; empathy; 60 ft. vision and hearing; *faerie fire* 3/day, Spot +11); +2 human bane shortsword "*Hawksbane*"; (un)holy symbol of Brightwell

COMBAT

Vinaash tends to avoid combat. In this, she is not unique among her 'sisters', but unlike Imogen she does not feel she is above such things, and unlike Katia she does not disdain getting her hands dirty. Rather, she is far too busy plumbing the depths of the Shadow Weave.

Of course, there are exceptions to almost every rule; Vinaash violently detests the Dark Sisters of Kali, and

has been known to assault them when she can be certain she can do so undetected. In battle, Vinaash prefers to stay mobile. Using her spell-like and psionic abilities, she keeps darting in and out, hitting her opponents in their weak spots; telepathic assault for those who excel in body; energy blasts for those who excel in mind; *Silence* for dedicated spellcasters. Once a victim is reduced to exhaustion or immobility, Vinaash swoops in and feeds on their mind before ripping their body apart.

BACKGROUND

Vinaash was born after Lillian Schlosser first returned from the Wartorn Cluster, mind still in an uproar from her experiences there. The Red Haunt as a whole needed time to find her centre, chaotic as that centre was, and the fiend retreated to Sri Raji. Engaging in meditation and 'relaxing' study (acquiring degrees in philosophy and the sciences psychic and arcane at the Great University of Tvashti almost as an afterthought), the fiend attained an odd sense of tranquility. The Eye of the Storm, as it were.

Waiting in the eye was a dark enlightenment. An enlightenment that would be explored by the emergent persona that would come to be known as Vinaash Schlosser.

Vinaash is different from her sisters in that she lacks the Chaotic nature that unites the rest of the Red Haunt, but this difference in alignment has not caused any noticeable friction. Rather, most of the Red Haunt's evil personas admire and respect Vinaash, for she has been steadily uncovering ever greater depths of the Shadow Weave since her creation. With a mind as tranquil as a millpond and as dark as the Abyss' depths, Vinaash studies the permutations of the Shadow Weave and conducts experiments not in lifeless matter, not in the flesh and blood of the living and the undead, but in the mind.

Vinaash appears as a Rajian woman, and her skills at deceit have allowed her to fool the people at the

Great University of Tvashti into believing that she is of the *brahmin* caste of Pakat. She is looked at with some confusion as a woman who has achieved scholarly titles, frequently travels beyond the Domain, and has been known to teach classes. Most doubts vanished when she 'returned from a trip to Pakat' with her 'dearest husband' in tow: Putala Schlosser.

Putala is supposedly a fine *Brahmin*, his foreign surname explained by the fact that his family had been involved in trade before falling to relative poverty. He is becoming quite the figure about town in Muladi, spending money freely and engaging in various business ventures while his 'beloved wife' spends most of her time at their estate in meditation and teaching private classes. His many 'friends' (most attracted by his apparently boundless funds and jovial personality) often joke that he should be worried about his wife's activities and frequent absences, but Putala always kindly denies any impropriety is taking place.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: 'DEAREST HUSBAND'

Putala Schlosser's real name is Petri Volkoth, and he is most definitely *not* a *Brahmin* gentleman, fine nor otherwise. Petri Volkoth (middle-aged Neutral Evil male Werewolf Bard 4) is an agent of the Centurions of the Night, assigned to help Vinaash maintain her cover.

Although Petri is not a *Satelles* (a Centurion in training) and has no ambitions to become one, he is considered to be a trustworthy Legionnaire. Regrettably, old age is starting to creep up on him, and he suffers from notions of encroaching mortality.

Petri's current assignment as Vinaash's 'husband' in Sri Raji came as a great relief to him. Assuming the form of a Rajian instead of a Corelander was easy enough. Tricking entitled and oafish nobles is the same everywhere, and he has had plenty of practice.

The warm weather is doing wonders for his aching joints. He enjoys the local food. The Red Haunt gives him a generous monthly stipend, and she doesn't care what he gets up to so long as he does not inconvenience her or embarrass the Centurions of the Night.

The aging werewolf is happy enough to do as his commander has instructed, and initially considered his mission in Sri Raji to be not unlike a peaceful retirement. Then he started to realise that he actually has a knack for business, and that he could spot opportunities in Sri Raji.

Even though the *Brahmin* of Muladi consider 'Putala' to be a small player, spending money on numerous ventures instead of focusing on a monopoly, Petri knows the best way to make money is to spread it wide and gather up the profit from his investments on a regular basis. He is collecting a tidy sum every month on top of his stipend—a fact of which he timorously informed the Red Haunt, and which she has permitted with every show of equanimity.

Petri's various business ventures are doing so well, in fact, that he has started up a small company under his true name. *Volkoth Trading* may never be as big as the *Boritsi* or *Carlisle Trading Companies*, but he is making good money by selling luxury items between the Verduous Lands Cluster and the Core, and there has been one very unexpected benefit: Petri currently has a mate of his own, and a litter of pups on the way.

Olivia Volkoth-Grenmore (NE female werewolf Rogue 2) first came to Petri's attention when she murdered one of his workers in the Core and assumed her guise so as to sneak onto a *Volkoth Trading*-ship headed back to Sri Raji. The two shapeshifters initially postured and squabbled for dominance in Muladi's harbor district, but the Red Haunt put a sharp stop to that nonsense.

Olivia was duly intimidated by the demon's presence, and soon impressed by the fact that Petri

was the fiend's trusted servant—not to mention how much wealth he was accumulating. If she could not kill the older werewolf and take his territory, Olivia knew of one sure way she could get a share in the profits; she and Petri were married before the altar of Brightwell in Vinaash's secret shrine within the year, with Lillian Schlosser leading the ceremony. The Red Haunt was, at most, dryly amused by the irony of the situation, and Petri was happy enough with his pretty, young mate.

Olivia masquerades as a servant in the Schlosser estate when visitors come calling, and even hides her true nature as Petri's mate from Vinaash's students. The mask soon drops when the estate is free of outsiders, and Olivia demands all the subservience and luxury due to the mate of 'the master's first lieutenant'. Petri often worries that Olivia's theatrics will offend the Red Haunt, but the demon has not bothered herself with the little upstart beyond ensuring that she does not compromise its own secrecy.

LAIR

The home Vinaash keeps on the outskirts of Muladi is a place of stark elegance and dark reflection. Rather than indulge in decorations, the estate is itself very aesthetic, being laid out in concentric circles around a lush garden with a deep lake at its center. Only the finest marble and granite were used to build the place. The estate is airy, kept scrupulously clean by the staff, and there is usually soft music being played in one room or another.

In spite of the estate's genteel atmosphere and indisputable good taste, the place is still subtly disquieting to outsiders and the uninitiated. Unseen by mortal eye, the estate bubbles and boils with Ethereal Resonance, appearing in the Ethereal Border as a great fissure in the landscape, from which erupts a geyser of dark energy that stains the surrounding Mists black.

While many meditation sessions are held in the estate's sunlit rooms, the greatest research into the

interaction of the mind and the Shadow Weave occurs underground. There were always caves beneath the area where the estate stands, but the Red Haunt has expanded and connected them, Lillian Schlosser has ritually *deseccated* them, and Vinaash has made them into her temple to the Mind and the Shadow.

AMOURETTE SCHLOSSER

CE Devoratrix Bard 7 / Sublime Chord 8 (*Complete Arcane*, p.60)

Medium Outsider (Chaotic, Extraplanar, Evil, Tanar'ri)

Hit Dice: 114 hp (21 HD)

CR: 22

Initiative: +2

Speed: 30 ft., fly 50 ft. (average)

Armor Class: 23 (+2 Dex, +4 armor, +7 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 21

Base Attack/Grapple: +15/+19

Attack: +16 Claw (1d6+1), +20 Grapple (1d3+1), +16 Unarmed strike (1d3+1)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Beget Hollow Man; body of temptation DC 20; *laughing mad* DC 22; mind drain; spell-like abilities

Special Qualities: Change shape; corruption points 11; damage reduction 10 / cold iron or good; darkvision 120 ft.; *diminishing returns*; immunity to electricity and poison; *infect the weave*; *Obscuring mist*; parthenogenesis; phylactery; *reality wrinkle 13,000 ft*; resistance to acid 10, cold 10, fire 10; *spare the child*; telepathy 100 ft.; *too familiar*

Spell-like abilities: (CL 21. DC 18 + spell level)

At will: *Bull's strength*, *darkness*, *detect thoughts* (DC 20), *shadow walk* (self plus 50 lbs. of objects or self plus one Medium- or smaller-sized individual)

1/day - *Deeper darkness*, *restoration*

Class abilities: Bardic knowledge (as 15th-level Bard), Bardic music (countersong, *fascinate*, inspire competence, inspire courage +1, song of arcane power, song of timelessness, *suggestion*)

Saves: Fort. +11, Ref. +14, Will +19

Abilities: Str. 12, Dex. 14, Con. 14, Int. 18, Wis. 16, Cha. 26

Skills: Bluff +17, Concentration +20, Craft (alchemy) +15, Craft (clockwork) +15, Diplomacy +17, Disguise +17, Hide +8, Knowledge (arcana) +23, Knowledge (planes) +17, Knowledge (Ravenloft) +11, Listen +20, Move silently +8, Perform (act) +19, Perform (dance) +14, Profession (astrologer) +9, Profession (cook) +15, Profession (tailor) +14, Search +9, Speak language +6, Spellcraft +15, Spot +10

Feats: Alertness (B), Craft wondrous item, Empower spell, Improved grapple, Improved unarmed strike, Mobile spellcasting (*Complete Arcane*, p.111), Quick change (*Savage Species*, p.38), Shadow weave magic (*Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*, p.37), Widen spell

Languages: Abyssal*, Balok, Casian+, Celestial, Chondathan (*Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*, p.84), Darkonese, Infernal, Lamordian, Mordentish, Vaasi (+ Casian is a language in common use in the Wartorn Cluster, particularly the southern Domains.)

Magic: Caster level: 15; +1 to all saving throws of spells cast from *Enchantment*, *Illusion*, and *Necromancy*; +1 bonus on caster level checks to overcome spell resistance for spells from these schools. The Shadow Weave proves less than optimal for spells from the schools of *Evocation* and *Transmutation* (except for spells with the *darkness* descriptor). Effective caster level for spells from these schools is 14. The reduced caster level affects the spell's range, duration, damage, and any other level-dependant variables, including dispel checks against Amourette Schlosser.

Spells/day: 3/5/4/2/6/5/4/3

Spells known:

8 - *Greater shadow evocation, Horrid wilting*

7 - *Limited wish, Mass hold person, Prismatic spray*

6 - *Create undead, Foreshadowing (Quoth the Raven 26, p.33), Mass cure moderate wounds, Superior resistance*

5 - *Create Darkenbeast (Monsters of Faerûn, p.31), Create Goblin (Ravenloft Gazetteer I, p.115), Dread of the dead* (Quoth the Raven 26, p.34), Greater object glamor (Van Richten's Guide to the Shadow Fey, p.105)*

4 - *Bite of the werewolf (SC, p.29), Cure critical wounds, Enervation, Greater invisibility*

3 - *Malicious acceleration (Quoth the Raven 27, p.69), Wolfsong (Ravenloft Gazetteer I, p.117)*

2 - *Cat's grace, Cure moderate wounds, Silence, Tongues*

1 - *Cure light wounds, Expeditious retreat, Nystul's magic aura, Tasha's hideous laughter, Unseen servant*

0 - *Daze, detect magic, ghostharp* (SC, p.104), mending, prestidigitation, read magic*

Equipment: +2 anarchic swordcane; blessed book; +4 bracers of armor; +1 freezing burst dagger, "Envy"; +1 human bane dagger of wounding, "Fang", flesh-stitched cat familiar "Gregory"; hand of glory; ring of evasion; ring of mind shielding; ring of protection from negative energy; +2 intelligent, flaming burst saber of wounding "Maxwell" (AL CE; Int. 13, Wis. 13, Cha. 10; empathy; 60 ft. vision and hearing; *faerie fire* 3/day, Spot +11); +2 human bane shortsword "Hawksbane"; (un)holy symbol of Brightwell

COMBAT

Amourette is almost as happy to enter combat as her 'big sister' Charissa, albeit in a different way. She loosely plans battles out beforehand if possible, choosing what she considers to be the optimal

terrain and making sure to have numerous assets in place before the first shot is fired; goblins and darkenbeasts loyal to her or mercenaries if she must. She can use undead, but finds them to be rather blunt tools. Sometimes she augments her troopers with a couple of members of the *cabal rouge* as arcane backup.

Amourette typically opens combat by covering the battlefield in magical darkness (widened applications of *Blacklight*, conjured through *Greater shadow evocation*, are an option if her *Darkness*-ability does not suffice) for the sake of her darkenbeasts retaining their form and to give her goblins an advantage over diurnal beings. When blades are clashing, the fiend enters battle by lashing out with her arcane power, raking enemies in the back and flanks while she moves from cover to cover, dipping into the Shadow Plane if she must.

It would not be wrong to say that Amourette enjoys combat, but only when it is on her terms. She fights just as brutally if she is surprised, as she was by Adam back in 753 BC, but her attitude is not as gleeful; she will attempt to slaughter foes who catch her off-guard as quickly as possible, rather than tormenting them from the back and flanks.

BACKGROUND

It is easy to dismiss Amourette, given that her stated goal is to enjoy whatever pleases her. She likes cooking and eating food; she likes making clothes for her 'Mother' and 'sisters' and sometimes for guests; she has been known to join acting troupes and frequently 'entertains' handsome men and beautiful women in her tower near Ramulai. Yes, it is easy to dismiss her as an empty-headed sensualist.

Many deadly mistakes are easy.

As much as Amourette enjoys indulging her fiendish senses, she equally enjoys expanding her mind and testing her skills against clever and powerful beings. It pleased her to found the *cabal rouge* in Hazlan, right under Hazlik's nose. It pleased her to construct the World Engine, acting together with Mu and

Victor Mordenheim. It pleased her to expand her arcane power to the point that only her 'older sister' Imogen can surpass the scope of her magic.

In many ways, Amourette may give the impression that she might be best employed as backup to or a temporary stand-in for her more focused sisters, but she is a terrible threat in her own right. She is unpredictable, capable of showing up anywhere and doing just about anything. Her varied interests have only expanded her arsenal of options. It is Amourette who smuggles dangerous items and messages all across the Core, hiding them with a combination of *Greater object glamor* and *Nystul's magic aura*. It was Amourette who designed the Red Garment, which is now the fiend's signature outfit. And it was Amourette who created the Kidney, a key component of the World Engine. Not to mention, it is Amourette who currently has the largest number of troops in the Core out of her whole "family"...

LAIR

Amourette inhabits a relatively small estate, centered around a large tower erected from slate and granite, from whose ramparts it is possible to observe the Red Academy of Hazlan. Although there are Rashemi servants toiling on the fields around the tower and its outbuildings, growing various crops including opium, the estate's main money-earner is ... entertainment. Students on furlough frequently travel to the tower for 'relaxation purposes'. The ones who are considered to be less promising are provided with the kind of entertainment the term implies, with slave women providing fine food and drink, opium and companionship on the tower's lower levels.

More interesting students, however, may find themselves invited to the higher floors. Here the 'diversions' are not at all what might be expected. Those in favor with the tower's mistress have been introduced to her laboratories and the high-level research conducted by Amourette. The few who balked and tried to run were introduced to the

servants' larder and replaced by *enlightened children*, created by Harmony Schlosser.

Although the tower is considered to be a mere fleshpot of the area, it is warded to the hilt and constantly patrolled by hulking Rashemi servants. Little do the local Mulan *satraps* suspect that the estate's servants are in fact disguised *goblyns*, nor that the cellars teem with *darkenbeasts*, and that various undead guardians lie waiting in shallow graves for the command to rise and attack.

It seems that even Hazlik has not realized that Amourette's estate is, in addition to its other functions, a recruiting station and barracks for troops in service to the Centurions of the Night.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE CABAL ROUGE

It is no secret that Hazlik, wizard-lord of Hazlan, plays favourites and discriminates against certain types of spellcaster. Necromancers receive his contempt, and he disdains spontaneous spellcasters. Many of these still come to the Red Academy at Ramulai, seeking to improve their skills. And when they grow frustrated, many of them drift to Amourette's tower.

The *Cabal Rouge* is a blend of spontaneous arcane spellcasters, divine spellcasters and disaffected Wizards, united by Amourette's 'gentle' manipulations in disgruntlement against Hazlik. Several of them are her apprentices now, or else Imogen's, Lillian's or Solange's. The Red Haunt is raising a fine brood of Mystic Theurges, Ultimate Magi and Shadow Adepts for herself, offering outrageous rewards for equally outrageous service.

None of the members of the *Cabal* yet know that they are ultimately working for the Centurions of the Night, but Amourette might pass any candidates who are especially promising up the chain any day now.

Until such time, the *Cabal* is providing very useful services to the cause, and stands ready to start an uprising against Hazlik whenever the plans - or whims - of its grand mistress call for them to do so.

HARMONY SCHLOSSER

CE Devoratrix Bard 5 / Alchemical Philosopher 9

(*Van Richten's Arsenal*, p.81)

Medium Outsider (Chaotic, Extraplanar, Evil, Tanar'ri)

Hit Dice: 90 hp (20 HD)

CR: 24

Initiative: +2

Speed: 30 ft., fly 50 ft. (average)

Armor Class: 25 (+4 Dex., +4 armor, +7 natural), touch 14, flat-footed 21

Base Attack/Grapple: +13/+17

Attack: Claw +14 (1d6+1), Grapple +14 (1d3+1), Unarmed strike +14 (1d3+1)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Beget Hollow Man; body of temptation DC 19; *laughing mad* DC 21; mind drain; spell-like abilities

Special Qualities: Change shape; corruption points 11; damage reduction 10 / cold iron or good; darkvision 120 ft.; *diminishing returns*; immunity to electricity and poison; *infect the weave*; *Obscuring mist*; parthenogenesis; phylactery; *reality wrinkle 10,500 ft*; resistance to acid 10, cold 10, fire 10; *spare the child*; telepathy 100 ft.; *too familiar*; *Via Stannum*

Spell-like abilities: (CL 6 + class level if any. DC 17 + spell level)

At will: *Bull's strength*, *darkness*, *detect thoughts* (DC 19), *shadow walk* (self plus 50 lbs. of objects or self plus one Medium- or smaller-sized individual)

1/day - *Deeper darkness*, *restoration*

Class abilities: Bardic knowledge, Bardic music (countersong, *fascinate*, inspire competence, inspire courage +1)

Saves: Fort. +11, Ref. +14, Will +19

Abilities: Str. 12, Dex. 18, Con. 14, Int. 20, Wis. 16, Cha. 22

Skills: Bluff +23, Concentration +11, Craft (alchemy) +22, Diplomacy +23, Decipher script + 17, Disguise +15, Heal +12, Hide +8, Knowledge (arcana) +22, Knowledge (nature) +22, Knowledge (history) +14, Knowledge (local: Paridon) +14, Knowledge (planes) +14, Knowledge (Ravenloft) +9, Listen +11, Move silently +8, Perform (act) +15, Perform (dance) +12, Search +11, Sense motive +19, Speak language +3, Spot +10, Use magic device +14

Feats: Alterness (B), Brew potion, Improved grapple, Improved unarmed strike, Shadow weave magic, Skill focus (Craft: Alchemy), Spell focus (Transmutation), Superior alchemy (*Legacy of the Blood*, p.91)

Languages: Abyssal*, Celestial, Chondathan (*Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*, p.84), Darkonese, Infernal, Mordentish, Zherisian

Magic: Caster level: 5; +1 to all saving throws of spells cast from *Enchantment*, *Illusion*, and *Necromancy*; +1 bonus on caster level checks to overcome spell resistance for spells from these schools. The Shadow Weave proves less than optimal for spells from the schools of *Evocation* and *Transmutation* (except for spells with the *darkness* descriptor). Effective caster level for spells from these schools is 4. The reduced caster level affects the spell's range, duration, damage, and any other level-dependent variables, including dispel checks against Harmony Schlosser.

Spells/day: 3/5/3

Spells known:

2 – *Calm emotions*, *delay poison*

1 – *Charm person*, *cure light wounds*, *Tasha's hideous laughter*, *unseen servant*

0 - *Daze*, *detect magic*, *ghostharp** (SC, p.104), *mending*, *prestidigitation*, *read magic*

High Alchemy:

Formulas known:

1st permutation – *Alchemical Homunculus*, *Corporeal Purifier*, *Emotional Purgative*, *Memory Coagulant*

2nd permutation – *Innocence Coagulant, Philosophical Child, Regenerative Salve*
 3rd permutation – *Enlightened Child, Essential Coagulant*

Via Stannum

During her stay and studies in Paridon and the Retreat, Harmony has more than once come face-to-face with dread doppelgangers. She has rendered more than one into component materials for her *philosophical children* – and she has discovered the Alchemical Paths followed by these malleable creatures. With some assistance from her sisters, Harmony has gradually pieced together a viable copy of the *Via Aurum*, and she has experimented on herself.

Having discovered that a shapeshifting demon is just as capable of absorbing the powers of an Alchemical Path as are dread doppelgangers, Harmony has delved deeply into the Path of Tin. As a result, she has access to the following abilities: *Labile; Animal form; Inhuman form; Hybrid; Soulless; Chimera*.

Acquiring the necessary *Emotional purgatives* for this line of study did prove to be tiresome, but Harmony persevered. The usefulness of her studies is somewhat dubious, given that she rarely goes out and thus has little need of her enhanced powers of disguise, but they have some merit as a proof of concept: if Harmony can incorporate these enhanced abilities into herself, then she can also instruct other members of the Centurions of the Night with innate shape-changing abilities...

COMBAT

Harmony is ill-suited to combat, and she knows it. If she is ever faced with hostility that she cannot defuse, she prefers to flee immediately into the Plane of Shadow. Should that prove impossible, she always has at least a handful of *philosophical* or better still *enlightened children* designed specifically for combat in her vicinity. While she may linger long enough to see how her latest bodyguards perform in

the field, Harmony is no fool and seeks the quickest exit from a dangerous situation. If secrecy is not an issue, she immediately shifts into a different persona of the Red Haunt, preferably Charissa or Imogen, who are capable of dealing the most harm.

BACKGROUND

It was probably inevitable that the Red Haunt would one day arrive in Paridon, which is a center of learning and industry. And once she was there, it was equally inevitable that she would develop an interest in the field of High Alchemy.

Paridon 'spoke' to the Red Haunt somehow. It spoke to her in such a way that she considers it her hometown in the Demi-plane of Dread, and that she may well model a part of the new Demi-plane on it, once the Cosmic Necromancy has been completed. The personality that is Harmony Schlosser distilled naturally from the fiend's dark essence due to her exposure to Paridon; Harmony is a scholar, highly focused on her work, and dedicated to chasing the Truth through study and alchemy.

Of course, the Truth an aspect of the Red Haunt pursues is unlikely to be the same as that sought by Paridon's scientific elite.

By the standards of the Red Haunt, Harmony is a recluse. She is more suited to research than field work, prefers correspondence over discussion, and is perfectly content to spend hours upon days tracking and compiling scholarly clues through ancient volumes, when she is not busy in her laboratory with subverting the laws of nature and brewing pseudo-life to add to the ranks of the Red Haunt's servants and spies.

Harmony's true strength lies in creating the right tools for other people's jobs. Just the normal alchemical supplies she produces are invaluable. She can effortlessly replace people the Centurions of the Night need to put a check on, but whose disappearance would cause waves. She tirelessly expands the network of homunculus spies keeping watch over the Retreat and the Centurions' holdings

on Castra. She traps memories and souls, bottles innocence, perverts the natural order a thousand ways in a given week... and she does it all quite happily.

While she is never likely to lead from the front, Harmony provides the tools others need to get the job done. Her love of corresponding has snared more than one intellectual as an unwitting agent or an unsuspecting guest of the Retreat. Many letters are sent from the Retreat and signed by various identities of the Red Haunt; most are penned by Harmony, flawlessly emulating the style and vocabulary of her sisters.

Infrequently, Harmony will go out into Paridon to personally inspect shipments of alchemical supplies or to meet with people she considers to be too fascinating to avoid. When she does leave the safety of the Retreat, she is always escorted by a select troop of *philosophical* and *enlightened children*, disguised *goblyns* provided by Amourette, and *lebendtod* hand-crafted by Imogen. Her tendency to travel with such escorts has given her a reputation of being a frail and sheltered flower in Paridon society, and more than one fool has thought to access the evident wealth of the Schlosser family by forcefully wooing the 'lady alchemist'.

Most such fools are replaced by *philosophical children*, while their bodies go to the Schlosser sisters' various researches, or else to sate the hunger of the monsters 'stabled' at the Retreat.

Lair

Unlike most of the other identities of the Red Haunt, Harmony holds no personal lair. She has her office and her laboratory in the Retreat, and is content to remain there – so long as at least one door continues to open up into Paridon, where she finds the bulk of the materials she needs for her study of alchemy.

SOLANGE D'HONNAIRE-SCHLOSSER

**CE Devoratrix Bard 4 / Dread Witch (*Heroes of Horror* page 98) 4 / Shadow Adept 5
Medium Outsider (Chaotic, Extraplanar, Evil, Tanar'ri)**

Hit Dice: 99 hp (19 HD)

CR: 20

Initiative: +2

Speed: 30 ft., fly 50 ft. (average)

Armor Class: 23 (+2 Dex., +4 armor, +7 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 21

Base Attack/Grapple: +13/+17

Attack: +14 Claw (1d6+1), +18 Grapple (1d3+1), +14 Unarmed strike (1d3+1)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Beget Hollow Man; body of temptation DC 20; *laughing mad* DC 22; mind drain; spell-like abilities

Special Qualities: Change shape; corruption points 11; damage reduction 10 / cold iron or good; darkvision 120 ft.; *diminishing returns*; immunity to electricity and poison; *infect the weave*; low-light vision; *Obscuring mist*; parthenogenesis; phylactery; *reality wrinkle 10,000 ft*; resistance to acid 10, cold 10, fire 10; *spare the child*; telepathy 100 ft.; *too familiar*

Spell-like abilities: (CL 6 + class level if any. DC 17 + spell level)

At will: *Bull's strength*, *darkness*, *detect thoughts* (DC 19), *shadow walk* (self plus 50 lbs. of objects or self plus one Medium- or smaller-sized individual)

1/day - *Deeper darkness*, *restoration*

Class abilities: Absorb fear, Bardic knowledge, bardic music (countersong, *fascinate*, inspire competence, inspire courage +1), delay fear, fearful empowerment 1/day, great master of terror, master of terror, shadow defense +1, shadow feats, shield of shadows 5 rounds / day

Saves: Fort. +10, Ref. +13, Will +20

Abilities: Str. 12, Dex. 14, Con. 14, Int. 16, Wis. 16, Cha. 26

Skills: Bluff +23, Concentration +11, Diplomacy +23, Disguise +16, Hide +8, Hypnosis +23, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Knowledge (planes) +12, Knowledge (Ravenloft) +5, Listen +11, Move silently +8, Perform (act) +17, Perform (dance) +14, Profession (psychologist) + 20, Search +9, Sense motive +20, Speak language +5, Spellcraft + 11, Spot +10

Feats: Alertness (B), Gaslighter (*Van Richten Society Research Files: Doppelgangers*, page 221), Heighten Spell, Improved grapple, Improved unarmed strike, Insidious magic (*Player's Guide to Faerûn*, page 40) (B), Pernicious magic (*Player's Guide to Faerûn*, page 42) (B), Shadow weave magic (*Player's Guide to Faerûn*, page 43), Spell focus (Enchantment), Tenacious magic (*Player's Guide to Faerûn*, page 45) (B), Unnatural will (B)

Languages: Abyssal*, Balok, Celestial, Darkonese, Infernal, Chondathan (*Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*, p.84), Lamordian, Mordentish, Vaasi

Magic: Caster level: 12; +1 to all saving throws of spells cast from *Enchantment*, *Illusion*, and *Necromancy*; +1 bonus on caster level checks to overcome spell resistance for spells from these schools. The Shadow Weave proves less than optimal for spells from the schools of *Evocation* and *Transmutation* (except for spells with the *darkness* descriptor). Effective caster level for spells from these schools is 11. The reduced caster level affects the spell's range, duration, damage, and any other level-dependent variables, including dispel checks against Solange Schlosser.

DC 17 + spell level; DC 18 + spell level for all spells from the school of Enchantment.

Spells/day: 3/5/5/5/4

Spells known:

4 – Greater resistance (SC, page 174), Modify memory*, Resonating bolt (SC, page 174)

3 – Crushing despair*, Glibness, Haunting tune* (SC, page 110), Malicious acceleration (Quoth the Raven 27, page 69)

2 – Doublespeak (Complete Mage, page 102), Mesmerizing glare * (SC, page 140), Scare*, Silence

1 – Bonefiddle (SC, page 37), Cause fear*, Dead end (SC, page 59), Remove scent (SC, page 173)

0 – Daze*, detect magic, ghostharp* (SC, p.104), mending, prestidigitation, read magic

Equipment: +2 anarchic swordcane; blessed book; +4 bracers of armor; +1 freezing burst dagger, "Envy"; +1 human bane dagger of wounding, "Fang", flesh-stitched cat familiar "Gregory"; hand of glory; ring of evasion; ring of mind shielding; ring of protection from negative energy; +2 intelligent, flaming burst saber of wounding "Maxwell" (AL CE; Int. 13, Wis. 13, Cha. 10; empathy; 60 ft. vision and hearing; *faerie fire* 3/day, Spot +11); +2 human bane shortsword "Hawksbane"; (un)holy symbol of Brightwell

COMBAT

Solange does not typically enter combat herself, although she makes sure to always be under the effect of both *greater resistance* and *glibness*; her marriage allows her to hire bodyguards if she wants them, and she can always rely on her sisters to loan her some additional muscle; *goblyns*, *lebendtod* and *enlightened children*. People who work for her for a longer time tend to be utterly fearless, thanks to free therapy sessions eradicating any psychological weaknesses they might have. She is not shy about lending a hand from a safe distance, casting Heightened fear-inducing spells, combined with her powers as a Dread Witch, to reduce her opponents to gibbering terror before she torments them with *bonefiddle*, *malicious acceleration* or *resonating bolt*.

If the fight turns against Solange, she flees as quickly as she can. True to her Devoratrix nature, the fiendish therapist later returns to insinuate herself into her enemies' lives in one disguise or another,

and starts working on them with clever lies, half-truths, and hidden suggestions. Her ability to analyze and expose the weaknesses of her enemies through psychological analysis, then undermine them with completely scientific hypnosis, is one of her greatest assets.

Other fiends capable of sending their victims into the depths of terror or unraveling their minds might capitalize on the moment by inciting violence. Not so Solange, who will patiently subvert her enemies to the point that they either self-destruct or attack each other. Only if she is exposed during this process will she resolve to fighting, and even then, she is quick to shift to a different identity, like the battle-loving Charissa. A true follower of Brightwell, Solange finds the notion of twisting enemies into slaves repulsive; she may guide people to unleashing their own worst selves, she may drive them into ruin, but she does not steal their free will and choices from them.

BACKGROUND

The mind is its own mystery. Over the course of her more introspective phase, which started with the birth of Lillian and continued with the birth of Vinaash, the Red Haunt came to realize she still had a lot to learn about herself – and that the void in her memory was still there.

Seeking to understand herself better, the fiend toured the Core's centers of psychotherapy and took some classes on the subject at the University of Dementlieu. She rooted around in the ruins of the Clinic for the Mentally Distressed, corresponded with the staff of the Asylum for the Mentally Disturbed, even spent some time at the Mousel Sanitarium for Mental Health as a voluntary patient (although she did not reveal the full extent of her madness). Gradually, Solange Schlosser took form out of the Red Haunt's seething, demonic matrix as her understanding of psychotherapy grew.

It was probably inevitable that the fiend would decide to start practicing her new skills at some point, using hypnosis and a twisted reflection of the

analytical method to gain insight into people's weaknesses and traumas, then 'helping them move on' in her own way.

Say a man came to her, suffering from lifelong anxiety because he had been assaulted as a child. Once that secret had been teased forth, what easier way was there to help him move on than to help him track down his old tormentor, torture the bastard to death and dispose of the corpse? The patient was happier in his life – and owed Solange a favor. Say a woman came to Solange, bitter and twisted because her gender had been held against her in her professional life. How much easier would this woman have it if the fiend taught her subtle ways of influencing the minds of those who would put her down, setting them against each other and allowing her to step into the gap whenever they failed. The patient would rise in her field – and owe Solange a favor.

Dementlieu was a grand place for the fiend to provide her unique therapy, helping people to overcome their fears and suffering by throwing wide the inner floodgates and releasing their dark potential. Of course, it was dangerous to play these games under the nose of the great manipulators, Dominic D'Honaire and Rudolph Von Aubrecker, but that made it fun! All the little favors Solange was collecting allowed her access to swanky parties, where she could find even more people in need of 'help' ... and then she met Étienne D'Honaire.

Étienne was seen by Dementlieuse society as just another minor aristocrat, his fame limited to being 'one of Dominic's nephews'. While he was unaware his uncle was deliberately manipulating events to make him the clown of the family, Étienne was fiercely unhappy in his life and determined to break free somehow. When he met Solange and their eyes met, they both felt something rare. Not love – it was rare indeed for the Red Haunt to feel such, and Étienne would not have recognized true love if he had found it eating his dinner – but they sensed a kindred spirit. They were very different people, very different creatures, but they sensed in each other a

similar drive to excel and devour, to rise through blood and fire, if need be, to the place where they wanted to be, and acquire what they wanted to have.

Dementlieuse society gossiped to its heart's content about the age difference (Solange appearing to be about five years older than Étienne), the unseemly haste with which the two lovers rushed through their engagement into marriage, and how Étienne was pursuing degrees in business all the while he was courting his fiancée – with said fiancée sponsoring his studies out of her own pocket.

Dominic D'Honaire certainly seethed behind closed doors about how he had lost control over yet another blood relative, and how he had been unable to prevent the happy day from coming about. He was even more angry when his nephew and his nephew's bride merrily departed to live in Borca, where Étienne opened the small trading company he had been dreaming of for years and gained a reputation as a skilled merchant. Several agents were dispatched to cut short the young couple's married bliss, but these all failed and never reported back to their employer. Some found the end of their life in the dungeons of the Retreat, whereas Étienne sold others abroad as slaves.

Solange is still not 'in love' with her husband, and they have taken steps to prevent them from conceiving together, but they have a strong appreciation for one another. They spend a lot of time apart, but are content to live – and 'play' – together when the opportunity arises for them to do so. Absence definitely makes their heart grow fonder. When not with her husband in Borca, Solange is hard at work for the Centurions of the Night; she provides her special kind of therapy to those who are on the fence as to whether they should join or serve the cabal or not, throwing wide the doors that hold back their worst selves or subtly reinforcing the urges that have already driven them halfway into the Centurions' arms.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: VENTURER OF THE NIGHT

Étienne D'Honaire (LE male human Aristocrat 6 / Merchant Venturer⁴ 3) always had ambitions and desires, but Dominic prevented him from making them a reality and kept ruining his reputation so no one would support him. What Étienne wants is simply to be the richest man in the Core, or even the entire Demiplane, and he wants to attain this level of affluence and power by means of business and economics. He always had the drive and the intelligence to become a man capable of buying and selling kings, and now he has the means to build his golden empire.

Operating from Borca, right under the Boritis Trading Company's nose, is a deliberate move on Étienne's part; his wheeling and dealing and the profits of his own trading business seem insignificant compared to the Boritis' high-profile operation. In truth, Étienne has quite a large trade network already, which is growing larger all the time because his wicked bride has given him access to markets the Boritis do not even know exist.

Étienne sells his wares to creatures and beasts that normally don't have access to shops and merchants, but tend to amass quite a bit of capital by looting their victims.

He also sells to those suffering due to the depredations of the Legions of the Night, well-informed as he is about just where various monsters have been active and what the people in the area might need.

With the backing of the Red Haunt and the Centurions of the Night on his side, Étienne can demand his price of the dark and perilous creatures that are starting to rely on him. He is smart enough not to demand too much – a destitute customer can't buy more from you – and is working hard to build a reputation among the Legions of the Night

⁴A prestige class currently in the development stage.

even while upholding a public front of being an honorable, albeit small-scale merchant.

As to why the Centurions would support Étienne's bid for economic supremacy; he is one of their biggest suppliers, and several Centurions are shareholders in his company. As Étienne's business interests and economic power grow with the Centurions' backing and protection, the Centurions grow rich on their investments. And as the Centurions act to destabilize local markets and foment chaos for the sake of their own plans, Étienne can sweep in and make a killing by selling people things they are suddenly short on.

Étienne is aware of at least some of the Centurions' plans, but has no objection to funding and supplying the apocalypse. Solange has promised him that she will preserve him and transfer him to the new world, and he anticipates being in charge of the economy that will need to be built in that realm. As time marches on and Étienne starts packing on the years, it is likely that Solange will start supplying him with means of extending his youth and life. If push comes to shove, Harmony or Imogen Schlosser may start transferring his soul into freshly grown clones in order to preserve his potential.

Lair

D'Honaire Manor started its existence as a luxury estate in Levkarest, but Solange and Étienne rebuilt it to suit their individual needs. Étienne has turned his half into warehouse and office space for his merchant business; Solange uses her half to receive patients, hold therapy sessions – and to squirrel away those unlucky souls she feels are suitable targets for more intensive therapy and will not be missed. The effects of Solange's therapy and her patients' breakthroughs, combined with Étienne's ruthless greed, have caused the whole Manor to become a Rank 3 Sinkhole of Evil with a mixed taint of Cruelty and Greed.

The few visitors allowed to visit both halves of the Manor often wonder where “Mr. and Mrs.

D'Honaire” go to rest and relax. The answer is that the couple have luxury suites and 'play rooms' hidden underneath the Manor, buried in the earth. Here the fiend and the businessman can dine, bathe, sleep, and engage in any entertainments that might strike their fancy. A small staff of *enlightened children*, a 'wedding gift' of sorts from Harmony Schlosser, is on call to pamper Étienne in any way he desires whenever Solange is absent.

MARGRAVE CIPHRA MIR

CR 24

Rakshasa wizard 8, ultimate magus 10 (prestige class from *Complete Mage*)

LE medium (6 ft. tall) outsider (native)

Init +7 **Senses** Darkvision 120 ft (60 ft. base), see invisible and ethereal in 120 ft; Listen +17, Spot +27

Languages Othroi*, Infernal*, Draconic, Darkonese, Mordentish, Vaasi

AC 39 (+7 Dex, +8 armor, +9 natural, +5 deflection), touch 22, flat-footed 39

hp 230 (25 HD); **DR** 15/good and piercing
SR 45

Fort +21, **Ref** +22, **Will** +29

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee 2 claws +21 (1d4+5) and bite +16 (1d6+2)

Space 5 ft. **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +16; **Grp** +21

Typical Wizard Spells Prepared (CL 20th; spell save DC 20 + spell level)

8th (3 slots) — *blackfire* (*Spell Compendium* page 29), *flensing* (*SC* page 95), *temporal stasis*

7th (4 slots) — *banishment*, *Bigby's grasping hand*, *reverse gravity*, *ghost trap* (*SC* page 103)

6th (5 slots) — *acid storm* (*SC* page 7), *analyze dweomer*, *chain lightning*, *flesh to stone*, *greater anticipate teleportation* (*SC* page 13)

5th (6 slots) — *cacophonous burst* (*SC* page 41), *night's caress* (*SC* page 147), *polymorph*, *greater blink* (*SC*

page 32), *greater dimension door* (SC page 64), *xorn movement* (SC page 244)

4th (6 slots) — *corporeal instability* (SC page 53), *fear*, *fire shield*, *ice storm*, *ray deflection* (SC page 166), *translocation trick* (SC page 222)

3rd (6 slots) — *chain missile* (SC page 44), *cone of dimness* (SC page 50), *demon dirge* (SC page 63), *fly*, *greater disrupt undead* (SC page 68), *shatterfloor* (SC page 187)

2nd (7 slots) — *arcane lock*, *chain of eyes* (SC page 45), *dark way* (SC page 58), *ghoul touch*, *greater alarm* (SC page 8), *locate object*, *Melf's acid arrow*

1st (7 slots) — *buzzing bee* (SC page 41), *detect secret doors*, *hail of stones* (SC page 108), *hold portal*, *Nystul's magic aura*, *spirit worm* (SC page 202), *wall of smoke* (SC page 235)

0 (4 slots) — *amanuensis* (SC page 9), *message*, *open/close*, *prestidigitation*

Sorcerer Spells Known (CL 20th; spell save DC 18 + spell level)

8th (4 slots) — *mass charm monster*

7th (6 slots) — *finger of death*, *waves of exhaustion*

6th (7 slots) — *geas*, *howling chain* (SC page 116), *probe thoughts* (SC page 162)

5th (7 slots) — *dream*, *duelward* (SC page 74), *hold monster*, *reciprocal gyre* (SC page 170), *wall of stone*

4th (8 slots) — *bloodstar* (SC page 34), *Evard's black tentacles*, *force missiles* (SC page 98), *greater invisibility*, *stoneskin*

3rd (8 slots) — *dispel magic*, *fireball*, *lightning bolt*, *icelance* (SC page 119), *major image*

2nd (8 slots) — *belker claws* (SC page 26), *gust of wind*, *knock*, *mirror image*, *spider climb*, *web*

1st (8 slots) — *deep breath* (SC page 61), *magic missile*, *feather fall*, *grease*, *shield*, *spontaneous search* (SC page 204)

0 (6 slots) — *arcane mark*, *detect poison*, *dancing lights*, *light*, *ghost sound*, *mage hand*, *mending*, *caltrops* (SC page 42), *silent portal* (SC page 190)

Permanent Spells *arcane sight*, *read magic*, *tongues*

Abilities Str 20, Dex 24, Con 22, Int 30, Wis 24, Cha 27

SA Augmented casting, *detect thoughts*

SQ Arcane spell power +4, change shape

Feats Alertness, Combat Casting, Still Spell, Scribe Scroll, Silent Spell, Extend Spell, Craft Wondrous Item, Persistent Spell (*Complete Arcane* page 81), Transdimensional Spell (CA page 84), Fortify Spell (CA page 80), Delay Spell (CA page 77), Chain Spell (CA page 76), Improved Combat Casting

Skills Bluff +24, Concentration +33, Decipher Script +18, Diplomacy +17, Disguise +24 (+26 when acting in character), Intimidate +15, Knowledge (Arcana) +28, Knowledge (Architecture and Engineering) +14, Knowledge (Dungeoneering) +14, Knowledge (Geography) +14, Knowledge (History) +26, Knowledge (Local) +14, Knowledge (Nobility and Royalty) +26, Knowledge (the Planes) +28, Knowledge (Religion) +14, Listen +17, Move Silently +17, Search +20, Sense Motive +17, Spellcraft +39 (+41 to decipher scrolls), Spot +27, Use Magic Device +18 (+22 with scrolls).

Ciphramir has a +4 racial bonus on Bluff and Disguise checks. When using change shape, Ciphramir gains an additional +10 circumstance bonus on Disguise checks. If reading an opponent's mind, his circumstance bonus on Bluff and Disguise checks increases by a further +4.

Possessions *vest of the archmagi* (*Magic Item Compendium* page 145; +8 armor bonus, +5 resistance bonus to saves, +2 on caster level checks vs. spell resistance, recall 3 spells per day as swift action, expend spell or slot as swift action to heal 5 times spell level points of damage), *spectacles of intellect* +6, *amulet of office* (+6 enhancement bonus to Wisdom and Constitution), *belt of giant strength* +6, *signet ring of the Southern Mark* (+6 enhancement bonus to Charisma; grants immunity to *detect thoughts*, *discern lies*, and attempts to discern alignment), *ring of defense* (+5 deflection bonus to AC; +6 enhancement bonus to Dexterity), gold wedding band, *robe of eyes* (120 ft. darkvision; see invisible and ethereal in 120 ft; +10 competence bonus on Search and Spot; retains Dexterity bonus to AC while flat-footed; cannot be flanked; unable to

avert eyes from gaze attacks; robe blinded for 1d3 minutes by *light* or *continual flame*, blinded 2d4 minutes by *daylight*), *boots of teleportation* (teleport 3 times per day at caster level 9), *greater metamagic rod* (*quicken*), *greater metamagic rod* (*maximize*), *greater metamagic rod* (*reach*) (MIC page 165), *greater metamagic rod* (*sculpting*) (MIC page 165), *greater metamagic rod* (*acid substitution*) (MIC page 165), *greater metamagic rod* (*electricity substitution*) (MIC page 165), *greater metamagic rod* (*fire substitution*) (MIC page 165), *greater metamagic rod* (*cold substitution*) (MIC page 165), *orb of mental renewal* (MIC page 167), multiple *mementos magica* (MIC page 164; three of 1st level, three of 2nd level, two of 3rd level, two of 4th level, two of 5th level, one of 6th level, one of 7th level, one of 8th level; each allows the recovery of a sorcerer spell slot of the indicated level once per day as a standard action), *Heward's handy haversack*, *orb of storms*, *Flame of Othrir*, *wheelchair*, *replication bowls*

BACKGROUND

Known as Governor Ciphramir to the majority of his subjects and all beyond the southern border, Ciphramir once ruled the lands abutting an imposing chain of mountains called the North Wall. While residents and foreigners alike called this land Othrir, this was a misconception he intentionally perpetuated. In actuality, the region of Ciphramir's rule was merely the Southern Mark, a borderland of the true Othrir. To the subjects and lords of this hidden land, Ciphramir properly bears the title of margrave.

Beyond the North Wall—merely a string of foothills under perhaps the most wondrous glamer in all of the world—lies a realm openly ruled by the cruel rakshasas. Five burgraves rule the region, and much of the land is sectioned into special preserves for humanoids. Hemmed in by living walls (of either *Denizens of Dread* or *Dragon* issue 343), these captives are taught from an early age that they were born in Purgatory for unremembered crimes they committed in life, and will eventually be remanded to the service of the Lords of Hell to earn a place in

the afterlife. From these poor souls the rakshasas take slaves and meals.

Past the lands of the burgraves lies the High Palace. While it is administered by the arrogant Palsgrave Hovennius, it is the home of the Grand Duke, the enigmatic and undisputed master of all Othrir.

In contrast to this, Margrave Ciphramir's realm was by all appearances a human sovereignty. Its residents went about ordinary lives, blissfully unaware that they were being policed by half-rakshasas (*Dragon* issue 313) and tiger masks. This façade allowed Othrir to trade and interact with its neighbors without inviting interference from the forces of good.

The true nature of the Southern Mark could not be kept completely hidden forever. A group of foreign adventurers, having unraveled a smuggling ring with ties to deeper Othrir, found out that Governor Ciphramir was not human. Unfortunately for them, they didn't understand what sort of fiend they were confronting. Armed with a powerful artifact, a tome entitled *The Outer Doors*, they confronted him in his castle and read an incantation meant to permanently send Ciphramir back to his plane of origin. However, since he was native to the Material Plane, the magic of the spell coalesced and hung about Ciphramir, having no effect. As the group fell, the priest with *The Outer Doors* fled in terror.

Hoping to catch and slay the coward before he could spread the secrets of Othrir further, Ciphramir activated his *Flame of Othrir*, which sparked the latent energy from the banishment. In a catastrophic blast, he was hurled into the Deep Ethereal. He cannot be sure how long he spent adrift, on the edge of consciousness. Eventually, he washed ashore in another world's Border Ethereal. By sheer misfortune, he had run aground in the Land of Mists.

When he finally managed to cross out of the Border Ethereal, he arrived in Arak, and was taken in by a family of Darkonian settlers. His body had sustained severe damage in the explosion, and he was paralyzed from the waist down. He recuperated

there for four years as he figured out the magic to repair his spinal cord. During his stay, he kept his adoptive family safe from the depredations of the gossamer folk, and helped around the household in whatever ways he could. When he finally recovered and began to explore the world at large, he kept the guise of a cripple (in order to ensure new enemies would underestimate him), and he took the youngest daughter of the family with him as his apprentice, inadvertently saving her from the Scourge of Arak that came the following year.

CURRENT SKETCH

One may find it rather surprising that a creature as evil and as powerful as Ciphramir was not sealed into a domain immediately upon arriving in the Dread Realms. During his time in Othrir, however, he ruled with a light hand and spent his time pursuing stories. His behaviors and interests were generally not as dark as those of his fellow rakshasas, though his moral compass is still no less inhuman.

Perhaps it is his great passivity—his willingness to hold out for the story he is meant to be a part of—that spares him for now. Perhaps he has been appointed to oppose the Red Haunt, and will be bound once her threat has dissipated—though his unwillingness to destroy her and lose her story makes this a poor hypothesis. Perhaps the awful Grand Duke of Othrir has a stronger claim on Ciphramir's soul, and the Dark Powers fear to stake a claim of their own.

Whatever the case may be, both he and the Dark Powers play a waiting game; he waits to find the perfect tale, and they wait to see how his involvement writes his damnation.

In addition to his pastime of collecting tales, Ciphramir now must give serious consideration to concluding his long feud with the Red Haunt. Her might, and the might of her collected subordinates, pose a threat to Ciphramir's life and autonomy. He wouldn't care about her plans for Cosmic Necromancy if only he were left alone in the process,

but such a courtesy is not to be expected. In light of this, Ciphramir is plotting a terrible blow to the Red Haunt and her apparatus. First and foremost, he wants her phylactery (see *QtR* 27 page 78), which would be the crown jewel of his story collection. In addition, he wants the World Engine (see *QtR* 27 page 65), which he believes could allow him to cripple the Red Haunt's hostilities toward him.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: TO DIE WILL BE AN AWFULLY BIG ADVENTURE

The rakshasas of Othrir are eternal beings. When their bodies are destroyed, their souls drift to Hell and begin to accrete matter. Slowly, often over the course of months or years, a new body is formed, and the rakshasa fades back into the mortal world. Only necromantic techniques that manipulate the passage of the soul can disrupt this cycle.

Lost in the Mists, the fate of Ciphramir's soul after physical death is less certain. It has no true Hell to go to, but Ciphramir conjectures that his soul would gravitate toward a significant concentration of infernal energies. In particular, if enough devils congregate in a single place, his soul ought to linger there, and gradually gather the dust of the world into a new body. The preponderance of imps around his residence makes his lair a likely site.

In the event his home once again fails to outlive him, he has made arrangements for imps to assemble in a remote location after his death. However, a smaller collection of greater devils could snare his soul instead, which is potentially problematic, considering their general animosity toward him.

On the other hand, his soul could most easily form a body from the Mists themselves, so he suspects that, lacking a proper infernal anchor, his soul would probably travel into the Misty Border. While forming a body in the Mists may well be faster, it also opens him up to corruption by the Demiplane. If he fails to resist, he could be reborn with the Mists subtype, and be reduced to a tool of the Dark Powers.

Needless to say, Ciphramir is in no hurry to test his hypotheses. He does not fear death, however, for he and his kind have faith—that the Grand Duke’s all-consuming hunger will be their true end.

COMBAT

Ciphramir tends to begin each day by casting *greater anticipate teleportation*, *greater blink*, *greater dimension door*, and *xorn movement*. He also expends three 6th level sorcerer spell slots to make the latter three Persistent (last for 24 hours), thus leaving 5 further uses of *augmented casting* for the rest of the day. Due to his higher volume of sorcerer spell slots, he is more liable to spend them to augment wizard spells, rather than the other way around. To recoup his losses after heavy spellcasting, he can refresh a small number of his sorcerer spell slots using his collection of *mementos magica*. Since each requires a standard action to activate, this activity is not very practically done during combat.

The extent of Ciphramir’s spellbook is up to the Dungeon Master’s discretion, but his predisposition toward collection implies that he can access at least the vast majority of spells in the *Player’s Handbook*, and he clearly has a fair selection from the *Spell Compendium*. Since coming to the Dread Realms, he has certainly accumulated many spells from the *Ravenloft* books, though they are not represented in his current selection.

Ciphramir prefers to do what he must to avoid direct confrontation. For example, if he detects someone teleporting into his vicinity, he may well drop a *delayed cacophonous burst* (further altered by his *metamagic rod of maximize*) upon the arrival site, then *teleport* away by using his enchanted boots. When he is finally roused to more definitive action against particularly hardy and persistent foes, he tries to kill or incapacitate them quickly, reducing their number until his advantage is certain. At that point, his catlike nature emerges, and he cruelly toys with the last ones remaining.

SPECIAL ATTACKS

Augmented Casting (Su): Eight times per day, Ciphramir can choose to sacrifice a spell or spell slot from one of his classes to apply the effect of a metamagic feat that he knows to a spell cast using another arcane class. He may sacrifice a sorcerer spell slot to augment a wizard spell, or vice versa. The sacrificed spell or slot is lost (just as if he had cast the spell) in addition to the spell he is actually casting.

The level of the spell to be augmented may not be higher than 5th level. The level of the spell or slot sacrificed must be equal to or greater than the spell level adjustment of the metamagic feat. This ability cannot be used to augment a spell already modified by metamagic feats.

Detect Thoughts (Su): Ciphramir can continuously use *detect thoughts* as the spell (caster level 18th, Will DC 20). He can suppress or resume this ability as a free action. The save DC is Charisma-based.

SPECIAL QUALITIES

Arcane Spell Power (Ex): Ciphramir’s caster level for all arcane spells is increased by 4.

Change Shape (Su): Ciphramir can assume any humanoid form, or revert to his own form, as a standard action. In humanoid form, he loses his claw and bite attacks. He remains in one form until he chooses to assume a new one. A change in form cannot be dispelled, but Ciphramir reverts to his natural form when killed. A *true seeing* spell reveals his natural form.

LAIR

Ciphramir resides in a home adrift in the Mists. Using Somnirot’s reality wrinkle as a foundation, Ciphramir has constructed Twice-Risen Manor and the Chthon. At Ciphramir’s call, the Mists can deposit Twice-Risen Manor at any sufficiently large location, or connect the Chthon to any underground cavity.

The entire residence is cloaked in deadly anti-divination magic. Anyone attempting to use a spell of the scrying subschool to perceive Ciphramir's lair is struck by a *greater dispel magic* and a *weird* spell, both as if cast by a 20th level spellcaster. Other divination effects that attempt to ascertain information about a subject (such as *status* or *prying eyes*) are struck by *greater dispel magic* once they cross the edge of Somnirot's reality wrinkle. Spells that locate a target (such as *locate object*) are blocked by the edge of Somnirot's reality wrinkle.

Twice-Risen Manor is a recreation of the home he had before the Red Haunt chased him out of it. It is a modestly large building, with only two floors. Aside from the dining room, kitchen, and privies, most rooms appear to be for relaxation. There are several different lounges, with alcohol, pipes, and books ranging from fiction to academic works. There are also many bedrooms of all sizes, with all sorts of beds (single, double, box, bunk, trundle, fold-down, etc.). Most of these guest rooms stand empty, waiting to serve the needs of associates who spend most of their time infiltrating cultures of the Dread Realms.

Ciphramir's office and the library of *inkchild memoirs* are contained in an extradimensional space that can be removed from Twice-Risen Manor. Only the *memory keys* can open the door, or detach it from the wall and compact it into a readily transportable chest. The many reading desks stand ready for the possibility that he may wish to have *suggestions* spread to vast numbers of inkchildren in a short period of time. For that reason, he calls the chamber between his office and the shelves 'the War Room.'

The Chthon is a network of subterranean corridors connecting a proliferation of vaults, cells, crypts, and laboratories. It is both a physical place, and the manifest ethereal resonance of Twice-Risen Manor; anyone who crosses into the Ethereal Plane in the manor is shunted to the Chthon, and anyone attempting to reach the Ethereal Plane in the Chthon finds that they have nowhere to go. Conjunction spells of the calling, summoning, and teleportation

subschoools fail in the Chthon, which is an artificial rank 5 Sinkhole of Evil, created by twisting the Near Ethereal and placing it under the command of Somnirot's unconscious mind. It is tainted with despair, and it is effectively under the influence of a phantasmagorum (without the *phantom shift* power, as the Ethereal and Material Planes have merged). Anyone in the Chthon has their sense of reality twisted, as the maze of tunnels changes and actively attempts to gaslight its prisoners. Separate groups wandering the Chthon experience erratic time (*Dungeon Master's Guide* page 168) at different rates, making splitting up exceedingly dangerous. Only Ciphramir and Federlin can navigate the Chthon without issue and in proper time. This makes it a particularly secure way to access the manor, as anything that does manage to follow either Ciphramir or Federlin into the Chthon is likely to be trapped in there, or at least delayed and vexed long enough for a suitable offense to be prepared.

Somnirot can lounge around Twice-Risen Manor or wander the Chthon, but if he is ever taken beyond the bounds of Ciphramir's lair, the Manor will collapse. The Chthon may linger on as a dangerous oubliette, waiting for Thrice-Risen Manor to be built.

FEDERLIN COSSUTARI

CR23

Hyosctera (formerly Darkonian human) wizard

13/tiger mask 4/archmage 3

LE medium (5 ft. 4 in. tall) plant

Init +5 **Senses** Listen +2, Spot +2

Languages Darkonese*, Mordentish, Vaasi, Draconic, Othroi, Infernal

AC 28 (+5 Dex, +8 armor, +5 deflection), touch 20, flat-footed 23

hp 79 (20 HD); **DR** 10/+2 against arrows or bolts

Fort +14, **Ref** +11, **Will** +17

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee 2 claws +15 (1d4+4 plus 1d8+1 acid)

Ranged touch +16

Space 5 ft. **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +11; **Grp** +11

Typical Wizard Spells Prepared (CL 18th; spell save DC 16 + spell level, DC 17 + spell level for Evocation and Enchantment)

9th (3 slots) — uttercold *obedient avalanche* (SC page 148), *dominate monster*, *plague of undead* (SC page 158)

8th (4 slots) — uttercold *field of icy razors* (SC page 90), *Otiluke's telekinetic sphere*, *greater plane shift* (SC page 159), *polymorph any object*

7th (2 slots) — uttercold fell draining *cone of cold*, *statue*

6th (4 slots) — uttercold *freezing sphere*, fell animated *fireball*, *repulsion*, *mass suggestion*

5th (4 slots) — enervated uttercold *hailstones* (SC page 109), fell animated uttercold *ray of ice* (SC page 167), fell draining *lightning bolt*, *reciprocal gyre* (SC page 170)

4th (4 slots) — uttercold *fire shield* (chill shield version only), enervated *scorching ray*, *voice of the dragon* (SC page 232), *clairaudience/clairvoyance*

3rd (4 slots) — fell draining *magic missile*, *protection from energy*, *displacement*, *slow*

2nd (4 slots) — misdirection, rope trick, shadow radiance (SC page 185), entice gift (SC page 83)

1st (4 slots) — greater mage hand (SC page 136), uttercold ice dagger (SC page 118), alarm, feather fall

0 (4 slots) — amanuensis, ghost sound, arcane mark, prestidigitation

Permanent Spells *arcane sight*, *read magic*, *tongues*

SA Arcane fire, arcane reach, breath weapon, unlife bubble

SQ Arrow magnet, half-life, lignoderm, mastery of counterspelling, pernicious pollen, plant traits, swarm incarnation, turning vulnerability

Feats Eschew Materials, Skill Focus (Spellcraft), Scribe Scroll, Spell Focus (Evocation), Fell Animate (*Libris Mortis* page 26), Spell Focus (Enchantment), Improved Counterspell, Fell Drain (*LM* page 26), Enervate Spell (*LM* page 26), Lord of the Uttercold (*Complete Arcane* page 80), Arcane Mastery (*CA* page 73)

Skills Bluff +19, Concentration +20, Diplomacy +16, Disguise +19 (+21 when acting in character), Gather Information +17, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (Arcana) +28, Knowledge (Geography) +18, Knowledge (Local) +18, Knowledge (the Planes) +21, Knowledge (Religion) +25, Move Silently +15, Sense Motive +12, Spellcraft +30.

As a tiger mask, Federlin gains a +2 bonus to Bluff and Disguise checks.

Possessions dragon ear cuff (+6 Intelligence and +6 Charisma), collar chain of mighty fists +4, ring of protection +5, ring of invisibility, gold wedding band, cufflinks of armor +8, glamered fingerless gloves of Dexterity +6 (can change the appearance and feel of hands; for example, it can remove claws and make backward hands appear forward), boots of teleportation, vest of resistance +5, teeth of charming (as eyes of charming, but replaces four upper premolars), portable hole, truelight lantern (*MIC* page 190), magic siphon (*MIC* page 164) six 5th level pearls of power (attached as buttons down front of vest), 50 feet of silk rope

Abilities Str 10, Dex 20, Con 12, Int 28, Wis 15, Cha 24

FEDERLIN COSSUTARI (SWARM INCARNATION)

Hysoctera (formerly Darkonian human) wizard
 13/tiger mask 4/archmage 3
 LE fine (5 ft. 4 in. tall) undead (swarm)
Init +6 **Senses** Darkvision 60 ft; Listen +2, Spot +2
Languages Darkonese*, Mordentish, Vaasi, Draconic, Othroï, Infernal

AC 25 (+6 Dex, +8 size, +1 natural), touch 24, flat-footed 19

hp 135 (20 HD); **DR** 10/+2 against arrows or bolts
Immune weapon damage
Fort +9, **Ref** +12, **Will** +14

Speed 10 ft. (2 squares), fly 60 ft. (perfect)

Melee swarm (4d6 plus poison)

Space 10 ft. **Reach** 0 ft.

Base Atk +11; **Grp** –

Permanent Spells *arcane sight, read magic, tongues*

Abilities Str 1, Dex 22, Con –, Int 22, Wis 15, Cha 18
SA Distraction, poison

SQ Arrow magnet, hive mind, immune to weapon damage, pernicious pollen, undead traits

Feats Skill Focus (Spellcraft)

Skills Bluff +19, Concentration +20, Disguise +31 (to act like a normal swarm of bees), Intimidate +9, Knowledge (Arcana) +28, Knowledge (Geography) +18, Knowledge (Local) +18, Knowledge (the Planes) +21, Knowledge (Religion) +25, Move Silently +15 (not while flying), Sense Motive +12, Spellcraft +30.

As a tiger mask, Federlin gains a +2 bonus to Bluff and Disguise checks. In swarm form, she gains a +10 bonus on Disguise checks to act like a normal swarm of bees.

BACKGROUND

Federlin Cossutari was born in Darkon in 568 BC, placing her birth eleven years into the domain's false

history. She had an older brother and an older sister, and by the time her parents decided to emigrate to Arak, becoming farmers a short distance outside of Marbh-Cathair, she had two younger brothers as well. In 583 BC, she and her father found Ciphramir lying among the crops, having just passed into the mortal plane from the Border Ethereal. As Ciphramir recovered, he was formative in her adolescent upbringing, entertaining her with strange tales of kingdoms bordering his far-away homeland. With odd names like Othrir, Befennim, and Varcyrion, it was clear to her parents that Ciphramir had a most fanciful imagination. He was helpful around the house, doing what he could in spite of his crippled state, but he was subtly a bad influence. Federlin discovered him laying wards and enchantments to keep the shadow fey at bay, and became fascinated by magic. She lost interest in many of the more mundane aspects of her agrarian life, much to her parents' consternation. Once Ciphramir fully recovered, he convinced her parents to let him take her out into the wider world, and the two departed Arak in 587 BC.

In less than a year, the Scourge of Arak wiped her family from the world of the living. She and Ciphramir were in Barovia at the time, and the news of this disaster caught up to them just after they crossed into Mordent. For the sake of closure, they returned to Arak. There, in the spot where her family's farm had stood, among the tireless corpses of her parents and siblings—still going about their business as though the Scourge had yet to come—she mourned for several days. The widderrìbhinn, kept at bay by the power of her tiger-headed teacher, did not disturb her.

By the age of 29, she was quite powerful in her own right, almost a peer to Ciphramir in the field of spellcraft. More than master and apprentice, they were dear companions. Federlin's devotion to Ciphramir was great, beyond even the devotion that had been necessary to twist her hands into backward claws, but she kept her limerence to herself. She knew that Ciphramir was unknowably

ancient, while she was mortal—an inherently doomed combination—so she spent a great deal of time researching improvements on the human form. It would not be until five years later, after she had become a hyosctera, that she would present a pair of simple gold rings to Ciphramir, along with her feelings. Ciphramir, having been aware of her thoughts, but eternally patient, accepted her proposal, and the two have considered themselves spouses ever since, in spite of no official ceremony ever taking place.

CURRENT SKETCH

In addition to having the immortal and inhuman Ciphramir as her principal role model, Federlin's worldview is further warped by their research into the nature of false history. Given that the first eleven years of her life emerged whole cloth from the Mists, she no longer holds the principles of her early upbringing to be particularly valid. She ascribes no intrinsic value to life, and unlike Ciphramir, she enjoys unleashing her power. Aside from assisting Ciphramir with his endeavors, she has ambitions of her own. Her interests are multifarious, but she focuses on manipulations of the soul, to make it return to life of its own accord. A hyosctera is hard to destroy, but it still doesn't quite compare to a rakshasa.

Once during their early travels through Darkon, Ciphramir and Federlin were waylaid by Charissa Schlosser. In the course of the confrontation, the Red Haunt slashed Federlin from belly to collarbone, and though the cut was not mortal, it never saw fit to fade. Federlin holds a particular loathing for the Red Haunt, and—much as her husband is wont to do—plans to return the favor some day.

COMBAT

Federlin casts *statue* at the start of every day as a source of camouflage. She saves her fell animated spells for when enough foes appear to be on the edge of death. If she feels one of her 5th level spells is particularly useful (for example, a foe has many

active spells on it, rendering it very vulnerable to *reciprocal gyre*), she will take the time to activate a pearl of power in combat and cast the spell again in the following round. She generally leads with quite powerful spells, as she prefers to end battles quickly and destroy her foes outright.

Since her physical form is fairly fragile, she is generally accompanied by her handmaidens—a pair of bhuts (*Fiend Folio* page 20) advanced to 16 HD and given perfectly preserved bodies to occupy.

SPECIAL ATTACKS

Arcane Fire (Su): Federlin can change arcane spell energy into arcane fire, manifesting it as a bolt of raw magical energy. The bolt is a ranged touch attack with long range (1,120 feet) that deals 1d6 points of damage per level of the spell used to create the effect.

Arcane Reach (Su): Federlin can use spells with a range of touch on a target up to 30 feet away. She must make a ranged touch attack.

Breath Weapon (Ex): Federlin's breath weapon is a 30-foot cone of psychotropic spores. Those within the cone who fail a Fortitude save take 1d4 points of Wisdom damage, and perceive all other creatures as being surrounded by duplicates for the next minute. Each creature appears to have 8 duplicates; the effect is similar to a *mirror image* spell, except that these duplicates do not disappear when struck. This effect is non-magical and mind-affecting. *True seeing* and similar magic will not pierce the hallucination, but *neutralize poison* would remove the spores from the victim's system. The DC for the Fortitude save is 21. Federlin may use her breath weapon once per day; this ability cannot be used in swarm incarnation.

Distraction (Ex): Any living creature that begins its turn with Federlin's swarm incarnation in its space must succeed on a DC 24 Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1 round. The save DC is Charisma based. Even with a successful save, spellcasting or concentrating on spells within the area of a swarm

requires a Concentration check (DC 20 + spell level). Using skills requiring patience and concentration requires a DC 20 Concentration check.

Poison (Ex): Swarm attack, Fortitude DC 24, initial and secondary damage 1d6 Dex.

Unlife Bubble (Su): The area around Federlin is treated as *desecrated*. This effect extends 100 feet.

In an emergency, Federlin can “pop” this bubble as a swift action. In this event, the *desecrate* effect goes away, and every living creature formerly in its area gains two negative levels. For every negative level bestowed in this fashion, Federlin gains 5 temporary hit points, which last for up to an hour. It takes 24 hours for the bubble to reform and the *desecrate* effect to return, which leaves her somewhat vulnerable (see turning vulnerability under *hyosctera* Special Qualities).

SPECIAL QUALITIES

Arrow Magnet (Su): Federlin is more susceptible to certain ranged attacks. Any arrow or bolt (but no other form of ranged attack) that is aimed at a target within 20 feet of her has a 50% chance of being redirected toward her. The attack is resolved as normal but as if the shot were originally aimed at her, with missed shots having no effect. If Federlin has more than 50% cover, the arrow magnet ability fails to function. While in tripartite form, this causes arrows to veer toward her shadow.

Mastery of Counterspelling: When Federlin counterspells a spell, it is turned back upon the caster as if it were fully affected by a *spell turning* spell. If the spell cannot be affected by *spell turning*, then it is merely counterspelled.

LAIR

Aside from her connected office and bedchamber in Twice-Risen Manor, Federlin has established a residence of her own in Arak. In the Plane of Shadow, approximately parallel to the site of her family’s farm, stands her single-storey home, warded by anti-divination spells as strong as those on the

Sea Cat and Twice-Risen Manor. A squadron of swordwraiths (*Fiend Folio* page 173) and a college of deathlocks (*Libris Mortis* page 94) guard the area, and any creature wandering the grounds without Federlin’s approval finds that all surfaces and objects are adhesive. Every space is difficult terrain, and remaining in contact with something for a full round leads to it being stuck to the interloper with the strength of *sovereign glue*.

DREAD POSSIBILITY: SECRET ADMIRER

For the past twenty years, an unknown person has been leaving a bouquet of red roses on the very edge of Federlin’s territory on the sunset of the spring equinox. Ciphramir has denied all knowledge. Attempts to scry the person or persons responsible have consistently failed, and the guards never seem to spot the intruder.

Is this the work of the Red Haunt, commemorating the day she permanently scarred Federlin? Or has some other force of evil singled out Federlin for some unspeakable reason? The Gentleman Caller might be taking an interest. Perhaps Styrix has decided to use Federlin’s unique soul to power the *Rift Spanner*. Or maybe it is a Shadow Fey lord, come to taunt and eventually claim one of the very few survivors of lost Arak.

THE OTHRITE ACCOUNT OF CREATION

The Serpent coiled about itself, and from its Mouth came the Flame of Creation. In the Light of the Flame, the Serpent cast its great Shadow, and from its Fumes the Serpent spun the Astral and the Ethereal.

Using its Tail as a hammer, the Serpent forged the Element of Air, and thus was able to speak its Name. Next came the forging of Water in the Flame, for when the time came to forge Earth, there had to be something in which to quench it.

Last of the Elements forged was nearly lost, for it was too volatile. Moments after it was finished, before it could be named, the Flame set it alight, and the Serpent could only save scraps of the Lost Element from the conflagration. To salvage the catastrophe, the Serpent took the base Fire that fed upon the Lost Element and named it the fourth and final Element.

After the Elements, the Serpent forged the Energies, one of Life and the other of Death. In the pursuit of perfect Balance, the Serpent sought to create the Energies simultaneously, but it was not to be. For the fleetest of instants, Life coursed through the Flame, filling it. Awakening it. Death followed in a flash, and stole the sensation away.

From the Elements and Energies, the Serpent made the Material Plane, yet at first it stood empty. Taking a lungful of Air, the Serpent coaxed the Flame of Creation to flare with its own Breath. With the Flame at its brightest, the Serpent proceeded to forge its true Masterpiece: the Soul. Uncountably many new-made Souls were born of the Flame with each strike of the Serpent's mighty Tail, and each Soul was a true Child of the Flame, for within the Soul is a sliver of the Power of Creation. So spent was the Flame in this final act, that it was reduced to little more than an Ember, and the Serpent cast this remnant away.

To the Souls, the Serpent offered its new World. They could be born into it, live upon it, and experience the joy of the incarnate, but at a simple cost, for all that are born shall one day die. Merely a myriad balked at this price, refusing to be born to die, and they fled their Maker's presence. For the others, the Serpent made mortal forms from the Elements and Energies, and they became the living beings of the World.

Coiling its Bulk around the World, its Elements, and its Energies, the Serpent lapsed into Torpor and let its Creation proceed unguided. New Souls, born of the First Generation, came to be, but the Power of Creation did not cease there.

As the living came to know the World and sought to understand it, their ideals and beliefs gathered on the sleeping form of the Serpent, forming the Ring of the Outer Planes.

Beyond the Ring, the Ember drifted alone. It faded as it tumbled, threatening to go out forever. It was saved from this fate, however, for the Unborn had followed the trail of their true Father. They gathered about it and gave it their breath until it grew to a Spark, but in rebirth, it only grew to know Hunger. All of its Children, all Life, all of Creation that had been wrung from the Flame left it empty, and it burned to be full. With the Unborn, it made its way back to the Ring.

The Unborn could not partake of Creation, but they did whisper to it, and they fed their lies to the living. From the fear and inner darkness of the living, the first demons came to be in the Outer Planes. The devils also owe their existence to the Unborn, for their whispers inspired the creation of the Pact Primeval. For this service, the denizens of Hell offered Souls to the Last Spark of Creation, and from this rush of power the Spark was once again a Flame.

The Flame took shape in the World, and with the aid of Hell it gave living forms to the Unborn. It was no birth, however, and so the living Unborn remain eternal. Mortal frames they have, but their Souls have safe harbor in Hell, where they can gather their flesh once more and prepare to walk again. The Unborn founded a nation of their own, with the Flame as their master, and we named our land Othrir.

One day, all Creation will return to its Father, all beings Born and Unborn shall join with the Flame, and the Serpent shall burn with them forevermore.

VICTOR GAGNÉ

CR 14

Human (Mordentish) Dhampir wizard 9/alchemical philosopher 3

N medium (5 ft. 5 in. tall) monstrous humanoid

Init +6 **Senses** Listen +12, Spot +12

Languages Mordentish*, Balok, Darkonese, Draconic, Zherisian, Lamordian

AC 21 (+2 Dex, +3 armor, +4 natural, +2 deflection), touch 14, flat-footed 19

hp 105 (12 HD); **DR** 10/magic; **Regeneration** 1 (bypassed by fire, blessed/holy weapons)

Resist cold 10, electricity 10

Fort +6, **Ref** +8, **Will** +13

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares); spider climb 20 ft.

Melee Slam +7 melee (1d6+2 or 1d6 acid with fluidic limbs)

Space 5 ft. **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +5; **Grp** +7

Typical Wizard Spells Prepared (CL 9th; spell save DC 15 + spell level, DC 16 + spell level for transmutation [*] spells)

Before receiving the refurbished road book

5th (2 slots) — *sending, stone shape**

4th (3 slots) — *heart of earth**, *Leomund's secure shelter*, *Victor Gagné's optimized wolfsong*

3rd (4 slots) — *blink, gaseous form**, *giant's wrath**, *greater mage armor*

2nd (5 slots) — *earthen grasp**, *insight, quick potion** x3

1st (6 slots) — *appraising touch, expeditious retreat, greater mage hand, identify, magic missile*

0 (4 slots) — *detect magic, light, mending**, *read magic*

After receiving the refurbished road book

5th (2 slots) — *cacophonous burst, sending*

4th (3 slots) — *Dalamar's lightning lance, heart of earth**, *Victor Gagné's optimized wolfsong*

3rd (4 slots) — *blink, giant's wrath**, *greater mage armor, sonorous hum*

2nd (5 slots) — *earthen grasp**, *elemental dart* x2, *insight, quick potion**

1st (6 slots) — *ectoplasmic armor, expeditious retreat**, *greater mage hand, magic missile* x2, *shield*

0 (4 slots) — *detect magic, light, mending**, *read magic*

Road Book 30 pages, each overwritten with *secret page* to create a total capacity of 60 pages

5th — *sending, stone shape**

4th — *heart of earth** (*Complete Mage* page 106), *Leomund's secure shelter*, *Victor Gagné's optimized wolfsong*

3rd — *arcane sight, blink, gaseous form**, *giant's wrath** (*SC* page 105), *greater mage armor, gust of wind*

2nd — *earthen grasp** (*SC* page 76), *insight* (*Van Richten's Arsenal, Vol. I* page 24), *knock**, *quick potion** (*SC* page 164)

1st — *appraising touch* (*SC* page 15), *enlarge person**, *expeditious retreat**, *greater mage hand* (*SC* page 136), *identify, mage armor, magic missile, shield*

0 — *detect magic, light, mending**, *read magic*

Refurbished Road Book A gift from Imogen Schlosser, this spellbook contains everything in Victor's original road book, plus the following spells:

9th — *maw of chaos* (*Spell Compendium* page 140), *unbinding* (*Spell Compendium* page 225)

8th — *wall of greater dispel magic* (*Spell Compendium* page 234), *stalking spell* (*Savage species* page 71)

7th — *deep freeze* (*Dragonlance Campaign Setting* page 106), *electrical storm* (*Dragonlance Campaign Setting* page 107)

6th — *cloak of hate* (*Heroes of Horror* page 128), *incorporeal nova* (*Libris Mortis* page 67)

5th — *cacophonous burst* (*Spell Compendium* page 41), *lesser ironguard* (*Spell Compendium* page 125)

4th — *Dalamar's lightning lance* (*Dragonlance Campaign Setting* page 105), *earth reaver* (*Spell Compendium* page 75)

3rd — *earthen shield* (*Dragonlance Campaign Setting* page 107), *sonorous hum* (*Spell Compendium* page 196)

2nd — *elemental dart* (*Dragonlance Campaign Setting* page 108), *vision of entropy* (*Hordes of the Abyss* page 96)

1st — *bestow wound* (*Heroes of Horror* page 127), *ectoplasmic armor* (*Libris Mortis* page 64)

Abilities Str 14, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 20, Wis 18, Cha 15

SA Blood drain, domination, fluidic limbs

SQ Blood requirement, restless, spider climb, vulnerability to sunlight

Feats Scribe Scroll, Sudden Silent (*Complete Arcane* page 83), Spell Focus (Transmutation), Brew Potion, Brew Exudate, Quintessence, Regenerative Salve, Emotional Purgative, Memory Coagulant, Tissue Regenerator, Corporeal Purgative, Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes.

Skills Appraise +5 (+7 with regard to alchemy), Bluff +8, Concentration +17, Craft (Alchemy) + 20, Decipher Script +20, Disable Device – (+10 with fluidic limbs), Escape Artist +2 (+7 with fluidic limbs), Heal +6, Hide +8, Intimidate +2 (+7 with fluidic limbs), Knowledge (Arcana) + 20, Knowledge (Geography) +11, Knowledge (History) +11, Knowledge (Local) +8, Knowledge (Religion) +7, Listen +12, Move Silently +8, Open Lock – (+7 with fluidic limbs), Search +11 (+16 when feeling around for seams or cracks with fluidic limbs), Sense Motive +10, Spellcraft +22, Spot +12, Survival +4 (+6 to avoid

getting lost and to avoid hazards), Use Magic Device +5 (+9 with regard to scrolls).

Possessions road book, refurbished road book, *fourfold sign of Brightwell*, *bag of holding type II*, *ring of protection +2*, *ring of proof against detection and location* (as *amulet of proof against detection and location*), *bracers of armor +3*, *spatterdashes of tracklessness* (as *boots of tracklessness*, *MIC* page 79), *hat of disguise*, *spool of endless rope* (*MIC* page 186), *stone of alarm*, *deck of illusions*, *tindertwigs* (20), *smokesticks* (5), *alchemist's fire* (1 flask), *night drops* (1 vial; *Van Richten's Arsenal* page 59), *emotional purgative* (patience; 4 vials; *Van Richten's Arsenal* page 64), *elixir for the Path of Iron* (3 vials), *quintessence* (5 vials; *Van Richten's Arsenal* page 64)

BACKGROUND

“Unless this, my analysis of your features is entirely off,” she said in lightly accented High Mordentish, a smile tugging at perfect Cupid’s bow lips, ‘you are a son of Mordent. Am I in the right?’”

– *The Shadow*

“My father, a former diplomat, spoke every language of the Core, and then some. I was not patient enough in my youth to learn from him how to speak them all, but I could place their origin countries after hearing only a few sentences.”

– *The Dark Alchemist*

“‘Why is she called the Enemy of Ezra?’ Though I am no anchorite, and my religious tendencies stem more from my upbringing than an appreciable spirituality, the epithet was a source of no small disturbance.”

– *Out of One, Many*

“What did take me back was being in his presence; to see the great Georg Talbann in concert again. When he finally took his hands off of the bench and applied

them to the manuals, the memories became nearly tangible—my father to my left, my mother at his other side, in the midst of more than a score of attendees seated in the ballroom of Heather House. A positive organ much like this one had been acquired, loaned for the occasion by a Dementlieuse patron of the arts. Lord Jules Weathermay himself was seated in the front row, alongside his son-in-law Daniel. Absent were the latter's two daughters, but children barely three years of age were an understandable omission from the cohort of invited guests."

– Our Final Confrontation

"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 professors."

– The Wormbringer

"The press of people in Riverside Square was no less overwhelming than I remembered; I had participated in a brief exchange program during my days at the University of Dementlieu. In fact, the crush of humanity about me this time was most certainly more oppressive than before—I had come to the city in the days before the Zherisian countryside vanished, and was present when they did. Seeking security at the Mordentish Embassy was something with which I had firsthand experience."

– Our Final Confrontation

"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."

– The Wormbringer

"'Professor Victor Gagné, of the University of Mordent?' she asked, her voice suddenly sharp and eager, her eyes widening behind those crimson lenses.

'At your service,' I said. 'I—'

Miss Schlosser turned away from me, her chair swiveling smoothly. When she turned back, she was holding a familiar-looking volume, and grinning like a fox. 'Professor Victor Gagné,' she said, 'author of Three Lesser-Known Aspects of Formulae of the Second Permutation?'

– The Shadow

"My master would rather like to receive you at his residence at your earliest convenience. As a practitioner of Philosophical Alchemy, you may perhaps be a kindred spirit to him. It was by chance that he heard of your use of memory coagulant in finding that nest of powries near where Mordent, Richemulot, and Dementlieu meet, and he is most excited to know of another alchemist so nearby."

– The Dark Alchemist

DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE UNIVERSITY OF MORDENT

Careful readers may note that there is only one mention of the University of Mordent, on page 146 of *Van Richten's Arsenal* (in Lord Balfour de Casteelle's Background entry). This is unfortunately sparse, but more disturbing is this excerpt from *Gazetteer Volume III*:

"Mordent offers no institutions of higher education as such in Mordent [*sic*]; those who wish to pursue their studies to such a degree must either head for nearby Dementlieu or hire a private tutor."

These two sources are in direct conflict. Which version of reality do we choose? Rather than rule one source erroneous, perhaps they could both be true. For your consideration, here is the University of Mordent.

Even without educational institutions to gather in, academics form communities. In Mordent, many societies and gentlemen's clubs of a scholarly bent have formed, where scientists, doctors, alchemists, and other men of letters can trade conversation and publications with those who share their interests. Despite these thriving coteries, it was the universities of other domains that captured attention as centers of academia. In 729 BC, the scholars of Mordent decided that this would not do, and eight major academic societies banded together to mutually elevate their status, forming the University of Mordent.

The University has changed in recognition and grandeur over the past decades, but not in basic function. Great research and scholarship have occurred there, none can deny, but to this day, it has never enrolled a single student, nor scheduled a single class. Its members have been known to tutor bright individuals, but this is on their own time, and not among their University duties. The University remains as it always was: eight academic social clubs, joined in name and purpose.

Mordent Agricultural College: This is perhaps the oldest member organization of the University. It is primarily concerned with studying farming practices as they currently stand and experimenting with improvements to the process. Excepting the Crossing Commerce Consortium, this is the wealthiest division of the University, as its innovations directly benefit agriculture in the realm, improving crop yields and reducing the costs of farming.

They have recently created a prototype system for raising fish and plants together, using the animals' waste as fertilizer, and they enthusiastically show it off to potential donors and visiting academics. However, scaling up the design is not yet feasible.

Crossing Commerce Consortium: This is the only department of the University which is not headquartered in Mordentshire. Rather, the Consortium developed in Blackburn's Crossing as a businessmen's association. As their interest in the workings of trade and economics grew, they started to exchange papers and apply mathematical methods to the flow of goods and services. This academic shift in their organization progressed slowly at first, but with their inclusion in the University, emphasis on economic science has grown considerably.

College of Science: Biologists, mundane chymists, physicists, geologists, astronomers, statisticians, mathematicians, and other purveyors of natural and formal science have gathered under this banner. Other than the Association of Letters and Arts, the College of Science has the most diverse interests of the entire University. In terms of communicating with outside institutions, however, they exceed the Association. With rare exceptions, most partnerships between the University and foreign schools started with overtures made by the College of Science.

Mordent Society of Magicians: The smallest faculty in the University, the Society has only three core members.

Many arcanists across Mordent have some affiliation with the Society, but its administration consists of a trio of wizards who must borrow office space from the College of Science. This leads many to the erroneous conclusion that arcane studies is one of the disciplines of the College of Science, which is not the case.

Iatric League: This is an association of medical professionals. They gather to discuss their most interesting cases, and thereby advance their understanding of physiology and psychology. Through the League, people suffering conditions which require a specialist's hand can be more easily referred to a particular physician.

Collegium Alchimiae: This member society of the University has twice as many constituents as the Society of Magicians (Victor Gagné among them), but they also do not have their own center of operations. As a science primarily concerned with the living body, they throw their lot in with the Iatric League. The Collegium likes to remain unobtrusive, given Mordent's infamous history with alchemy gone too far.

Association of Letters and Arts: Originally, this group was called the Association of Letters, and consisted of essayists, authors, poets, and other sorts of writers. Eventually, the efforts of musicians brought song into the Association, and it gradually became acceptable to perform music without words. As the emphasis on literature declined, other forms of non-written art began to find purchase in the Association. Today, there is still a fair contingent of writers and musicians in the Association, but a smattering of painters, sculptors, weavers, and other visual artists have found a home there as well.

Theistic Assembly: This small club consists of aging members of the Church of Ezra and a handful of the most faithful nobles in the surrounding community. They meet irregularly in the Church of Pure Hearts to discuss theology. They make passing attempts to view faiths comparatively, even inviting erudite followers of Hala, the Morninglord, and the Eternal

Order to speak at gatherings, but the Assembly keeps a decidedly Ezrite outlook on all matters. Their writings never put other faiths on equal footing with their own, and tend to treat other doctrines as curiosities. A better theological group would result if a more equal representation of faiths participated, but attempts to shift the balance would surely meet with resistance.

Montesor House: Not an academic group, Montesor House is the administrative heart of the University of Mordent. One of the major figures in the formation of the University of Mordent was Edgar Montesor, a member of the Association of Letters. He was among the most active in bringing the individual societies together, and was the principal drafter of the University Charter. He was not particularly inclined to actually head the University, but he was eventually pressured into succeeding the first Chancellor. He held the post for five years before passing away in 742 BC. He had no heir, so his wife Fortune donated their residence to the University as a central office and moved to be with family in Blackburn's Crossing.

CURRENT SKETCH

Since his great series of ordeals, Victor has gone on a sabbatical from his prior life. In the interest of closure, he has elected to pursue the tsochar Zaxxott Ssentroi, whom he calls the Worm. He believes he must take this opportunity to destroy the creature, not only to avenge his friend Nikolai, but to prevent the Worm from bringing about its vision of apocalypse—and to prevent the Red Haunt from using the Worm's magic for her own vision.

Should he succeed in this endeavor, he may still not rest. Not only is he afraid of reintegrating into society since becoming a dhampir, but the abomination that actually transposed with Nikolai is still lurking in the Dread Realms, the vampire Delthirus still plots from the Shadow Rift, and the Red Haunt's world war impends. He has the burden of knowing these things, and they are likely to drive him on.

He does not toil alone, however. For now, he has Georg Talbann to assist him, and to provide blood that can be consumed with lessened guilt. He also hopes to one day see Paloma again, or at least to know that she escaped Paridon safely.

COMBAT

Victor had not been involved in significant physical confrontation before his disastrous odyssey began. He prefers to rely on prepared alchemical substances and magic to see him through situations where discourse will not. However, with his dhampir transformation, he does have some innate physical advantages over the average man. He can attempt to dominate people with his gaze to stall a fight—though it would make him uncomfortable to do so. He can also climb walls to put distance between himself and his enemies. Still averse to taking blood by force, however, he is unlikely to put his blood drain ability to use in combat.

Victor never expected to be on a hunt. The collection of spells in his road book was selected with the idea that going off the beaten path may be transiently necessary, but not the expectation of forging into the unknown with a purpose. As such, he was somewhat ill equipped for the fate that has presented itself to him. That is where the spellbook given to him by the Red Haunt comes in. The spells within better ready him to pursue and confront the Worm, as well as other enemies, and he is grudgingly willing to take a measure of this aid.

Some of these spells are dares to Victor to be scary, and to tempt him to be a little bad; none have the Evil descriptor, but using them should make him doubt himself. The Red Haunt also gave Victor spells of all levels to challenge him to keep applying himself as a wizard and grow more powerful; he's no good to her dead. For some reason, it appears she is attempting to steer Victor toward a focus on earth, ice, and electricity.

SPECIAL ATTACKS

Blood Drain (Ex): Victor can suck blood from a living victim with his fangs by making a successful grapple check. If he pins the foe, he drains blood, inflicting 1d4 points of Constitution damage every round that the grapple is maintained.

Domination (Su): By meeting an opponent's gaze, Victor can affect the opponent as the spell *dominate person* (caster level 12). This is similar to a gaze attack, except Victor must take a standard action, and those merely looking at him are not affected. This ability has a range of 30 feet. The Will save DC to avoid domination is 18.

Fluidic Limbs (Su): As a standard action, Victor can cause one or both of his forearms and hands to turn into pseudopods of salty, black water. Another standard action solidifies them once again. Victor may pass his fluidic limbs through the smallest of cracks, allowing him to slip out of manacles, reach into keyholes, and perform other such strange feats. With his fluidic limbs, he has a +5 circumstance bonus to Disable Device (which he may use untrained), Escape Artist, Intimidate, Open Lock (which he may use untrained), and Search (when feeling around for seams or cracks) checks. Additionally, the water of his hands is toxic, and the damage his slam attack deals becomes 1d6 acid.

SPECIAL QUALITIES

Blood Requirement (Ex): Victor must feed on humanoid blood at least once a week or he cannot use his supernatural special attacks or special qualities.

Restless (Su): Victor is doomed to rise as a vampire after death, regardless of the cause of his demise. 1d4 days after burial, the "dhampir" template is removed, and the "Veidrava vampire" (*QTR* 26 page 37) template is applied. Destroying Victor's body as one would destroy the body of a vampire can prevent this.

Spider Climb (Ex): Victor can climb sheer surfaces as though with a *spider climb* spell (caster level 12).

Vulnerability to Sunlight (Su): Victor cannot use his supernatural special attacks or special qualities in natural sunlight.

CONFERENCES MASTER TIMELINE

568: (False History) Federlin Cossutari is born in Darkon.

579: Darkon forms.

575: Arak forms.

581: The devoratrix later known as the Red Haunt enters the Demiplane in Darkon. She begins losing her memory to Darkon's memory drain, and curses herself as a defensive measure. The personality of the Haunt known as Mother is born, without any memory of her prior life. The personality known as Charissa Schlosser is born later that year.

583: Ciphramir enters the Demiplane in the domain of Arak.

587: Ciphramir and Federlin depart Arak. Charissa accosts them on the road, scarring Federlin before being repelled by Ciphramir.

588: The Scourge of Arak. The personality known as Imogen Schlosser is born in Darkon.

602: Ciphramir and Federlin become husband and wife.

684: The personality known as Katia Schlosser is born in Lamordia.

693: Clementine Schlosser is born in Dementlieu.

694: The personality known as Lillian Schlosser is born in Sri Raji.

703: The personality known as Vinaash Schlosser is born in Sri Raji.

708: Georg Talbann is born in Lamordia.

711: Lord Delthirius Valtyn slips out of Darkon during Drakov's third invasion. He marries the doppelganger Harriet Cadswell (Harcad) after erasing her from her clan's memory.

712: Delthirius Valtyn II (Delva) is born in Paridon.

713: Cadzius Valtyn (Cadzva) is born in Paridon. The personality known as Amourette Schlosser is born in Hazlan.

719: Victor Gagné is born in Mordent.

720: The personality known as Harmony Schlosser is born in Paridon.

723: Nikolai Kazić is born in Borca.

728: Delthirius II goes through Wakening.

731: Cadzva goes through Wakening.

733: Cadzva murders Lord Delthirius during the Dark Kiss, turning Harcad into a Vorlog. Delthirius II leaves Paridon and enrolls in the University of Tvashti. The personality known as Solange Schlosser is born in Dementlieu.

734: Victor sees Georg Talbann perform in Mordentshire.

735: The elan who would come to be known as Qualensturm enters the Demiplane in Barovia.

737: Victor enters the University of Dementlieu.

738: Georg suffers a stroke. Several months later, Ciphramir finds him and reverses his brain damage.

739: Nikolai enters the University of Dementlieu. Delthirius II graduates from the Great University of Tvashti. Near the end of the year, Victor enters an ill-fated exchange program with the University of Paridon.

740: The Great Upheaval. The personality of the Red Haunt known as the Centurion is born in Masogan. Victor returns to Dementlieu as soon as the Mistways reopen. The devoratrix known as Roe enters the Demiplane of Dread in Ghastria.

741: Nikolai forges a warlock's bargain with the tsochar great noble Thlagderr Thraal, who sends Zaxxott Ssentroi to assist him in piercing the Mists. Qualensturm is drawn into Bluetspur, but causes enough trouble that he is able to escape back to the Core. He settles in Falkovnia, takes his current name, and begins the construction of Untenturm.

742: Azrael Dak discovers the Lake of Sounds. Delthirius II dies in the Veidrava Salt Mine and returns to life as the first Veidrava vampire. Pauthrael transposes into Ravenloft, and both he and Delthirius II enter the Shadow Rift. Nikolai leaves the University of Dementlieu for Ludendorf.

743: Untenturm is completed, and Qualensturm becomes a psionic lich.

744: Zaxxot betrays Nikolai, who transposes with a Far Realm abomination in Ludendorf.

745: Victor graduates from the University of Dementlieu and moves back to Mordent.

746: Delthirius II becomes a mature vampire.

749: Ivar Skytte meets Rallux, Xavan, and Honored Mother as he attempts to flee Valachan.

750: The Requiem. Delthirius II becomes an old vampire. Ivar embarks on his three doomed expeditions to the Wildlands, Markovia, and Demise. After rejecting Xavan, he becomes a tyro of the Order of Exclusion.

750: Ivar becomes a cenobite of the Order, and Saecal Natormo is raised in Verbrek.

751: Founding of the Centurions of the Night in Kartakass.

752: The personality known as Genevieve Schlosser is born in Lund.

753: The World Engine is first activated at Schloss Mordenheim.

754: Delthirius II becomes an ancient vampire.

755: Ivar becomes a severant of the Order.



Heroes of Chibiloft

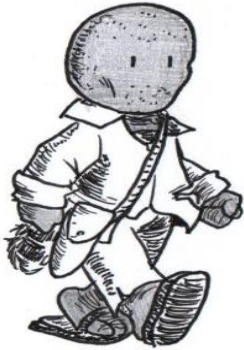
BY MARK "ROCK" BARTELS



A brief introduction to the ridiculous cast of this year's 'Chibiloft'-adventures. Who knows, unless you're all very good in this and the coming year, they might come back to plague Quoth the Raven in 2022! OooOooEeeOoo...

In all seriousness, I had a blast drawing these guys' little adventures and thumbing my nose at the more dark and gloomy parts of Ravenloft. I really wouldn't mind bringing them back for more.

Without further ado, let me introduce you to the cast!



Name: *Aubert*

Alignment: **LN**

Species: **Human**

Gender: **Male**

Home: **Souragne**

Class: **Cleric / Voodan**

Patron: **Ezra; Lethede**

The Chibiloft Crew's resident healer, Aubert hails from the steamy Island domain of Souragne. He has been a Voodan of the *Loa* Lethede, Lady of the Roads, since early childhood, due to a combination of a spiritual inclination and a nasty case of itchfoot.

“Père Aubert” as his friends jokingly called him, was liked well enough as a traveling healer among the commoners of Souragne. They didn't even mind that much when he started attending *Low Eglise* and was ordained as a priest of Ezra. Unfortunately, the *seigneurs* of Souragne did mind when Aubert tried to attend – and preside over – services in *High Eglise*. Needless to say, Aubert left his homeland under something of a cloud. And with a knife in his back.

In some ways, Aubert lucked out when he met the Chibiloft Crew; as adventurers, they're always on the go, they appreciate a good healer, and none of them give a fig about which type of religious services he wants to attend so long as he isn't sacrificing people to fiends or raising undead monstrosities. He has even found a new love interest in Wick.

Combat: Aubert prefers to let his ranged spells do the talking for him when it comes to a fight. If danger comes close, he quickly combines the *Shield of Ezra* with *Mount of the Loa* and adds on any protective spells he might have available at the time. He is far more likely to use a simple weapon than he is the longsword of an Ezran priest.

Special notes: Aubert habitually shaves his head and body whenever he has the chance. If asked why, he will give a detailed account of all the nasty vermin that inhabits the swamps of Souragne, and which kinds are happy to nest in a man's hair. He will keep telling people even if they beg him to stop.



Name: *Comoară*

Alignment: **CG**

Species: **Giomorgo**

Gender: **Female**

Home: **Barovia**

Class: **Spellthief**

Patron: **Mytteri**

Comoară is the youngest member of the Chibiloft Crew, and she prides herself on being a born adventurer. Her Vistana mother (who claimed she was kicked out her tribe as part of a power struggle over who would become the next *Raunie*), usually just called her an idiot. Her Barovian father, who

struggled to keep food on his family's table by peddling (because running a store in one place would have doomed his wife to the effects of Static Burn), often worried that the girl would bring doom upon all their heads – especially when she started manifesting weird magical abilities.

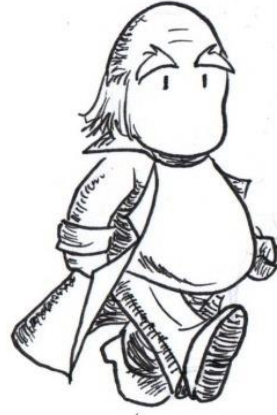
In the end, they were all right. Comoară proved she had an adventurous spirit by playing a foolhardy prank on some cruel tax gatherers in service to Count Strahd Von Zarovich, and her family was scattered to the four winds as agents of the Devil Strahd came for them. Comoară might well have died in the Barovian night if she hadn't run into two strangers in a sudden fog-bank: Slice and Wick.

Should anyone ask – and even if no one does – Comoară is happy to say that she is one of the founding members of the Chibiloft Crew. Slice and Wick, tend to grumble that the reason why they formed a party was to survive Comoară's tendency to do 'heroic' things on a whim. Most times, she's the one who brings plot hooks – I mean – *tales of woe*, to her teammates and encourages them to be heroes. Just as many times, she does something stupid and brave that gets her teammates embroiled in disasters way above their pay-grade, but that's Ravenloft for you.

Combat: Be it in melee or in ranged combat, Comoară is a nasty surprise waiting to happen to any enemy. She is a skillful dual-wielder, both with daggers and pistols. She's a crack shot, well-trained in the application of sneak attacks, and combat pragmatism is second nature to her.

Special notes: Intelligence and Wisdom may be Comoară's dump stats, but she is a surprisingly effective Spellthief. So long as she gets simple, clear instructions and someone bothers to make sure she has them memorized, she's a huge asset to the team as a scout, a trapspringer, a pickpocket and a neutralizer of enemy spellcasters. She's also no slouch at 'tag-teaming' with the 'Crew's other spellcasters, lifting specific spells from their memories and hurling them at the enemy.

Known feats: *Exotic Weapon Proficiency (firearms), Two-Gun Shooting, Two-Weapon Fighting*



Name: *Julio Huevo*

Alignment: **N**

Species: **Human**

Gender: **Male**

Home: **Invidia**

Class: **Alchemist**

Patron: **Ezra**

Dr. Huevo is an educated man, a scientist taught at the universities of Dementlieu and Leidenheim. After his graduation, he opened a medical practice in Karina, fully intending to bring the benefits of science to his countrymen. He might have eventually retired to the countryside on the money he made from fact-checking the theories of more famous scientists if the Chibiloft Crew had not arrived in Karina and asked for his help in locating a murderous doppelganger.

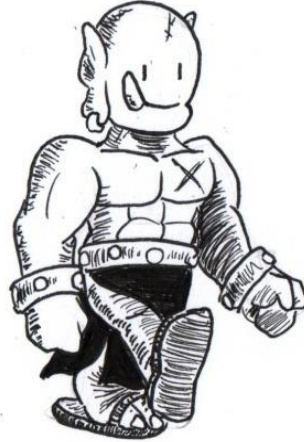
Against his expectations, Dr. Huevo found the challenge the 'Crew brought to him interesting. He also found the adventurers' unusual way of thinking and innovative way of problem-solving to be enticing. He was not too bothered by the fact that his practice caught fire and partially exploded during

the investigation, or that he was chased out of Karina by the town guard along with the 'Crew. He kind of bullied the adventurers into taking him on as their science expert right away, and has not regretted his decision.

Having a man of science in an adventuring band might seem an awkward fit, but Dr. Huevo would disagree. Adventurers are always doing things that require special tools and solutions. They are also always discovering things that need to be recorded and analyzed for posterity. What better job could there be for a man of education, backed by hard science, than the adventuring life?

Combat: Dr. Huevo prefers to open hostilities by throwing bombs at his enemies, using his Alchemist's *Discoveries* to exclude his allies from the blast zone. If things go his way, throwing bombs from a – to him – safe distance is all he does in a fight. Should things go south, he would rather test some brilliant new invention or extract on the foe than quaff a mutagen, but quaff he will if that should be necessary to support his allies!

Special notes: Dr. Huevo is middle-aged and rather overweight, but still as spry as a man half his age. He needs to be, to keep ahead of the unintended results of some of his 'innovations'. Despite the fact that he tends to analyze everything through the lens of science, Dr. Huevo is surprisingly openminded and respectful of others' beliefs. Now if only he could cultivate some common sense.



Name: *Ooglie*

Alignment: **LG**

Species: **Caliban**

Gender: **Male**

Home: **Darkon**

Class: **Rogue / Monster Hunter**

Patron: **Ezra**

Most people who see Ooglie for the first time tend to call him ugly or even a monster to his face. They also tend to assume that he's an unlettered thug, and treat him accordingly. After years of being treated this way, the Caliban suffered something akin to culture shock when he hired on with Slice and Wick for some mercenary work in Barovia. The two Outlanders were clearly surprised by his looks, but actually judged him on his merits. He became especially fond of Slice, who got angry on his behalf when an employer tried to stiff them on Ooglie's share of the reward. When he was offered a spot on the Chibiloft Crew, Ooglie jumped at the chance and he has never looked back.

In his heart of hearts, Ooglie is a kindly innocent. The years of abuse left him saddened, but he never retaliated; he just fled confrontation. Since he joined the 'Crew, his sense of self-worth has been vastly improved and he has received a thorough and varied education at the hands of his teammates. He has discovered he likes to read and learn, but more

importantly, that he likes to help people and make the world a better place. One day, Ooglie hopes he might become a hero. Some day, he might realize he already is one.

Combat: In melee, Ooglie favors the rapier over the kind of blunt instruments and two-handed chopping implements most people associate with Calibans. Of course, *his* rapier is so large that it tends to terrify his opponents well before it gets into stabbing range. The power and reach of Ooglie's oversized arms combine with the rapier's own length, giving him a larger effective reach than he is technically entitled to.

Suspected feats: *Monkey Grip* (unconfirmed)

Special notes: Ooglie is easily the most noble member of the Chibiloft Crew. Recently, he unlocked the Monster Hunter prestige class by combining hands-on experience with his reading of the *Van Richten Guides*. With the prestige class came access to magic, which Ooglie treats with a mixture of enthusiasm and hesitation. He has been asking the other spell-casting members of the 'Crew a lot of questions, and still prefers to rely on his wits, his skills and his oversized rapier.



Name: *Slap*

Alignment: CE / CN

Species: *Tanar'ri (Succubus)*

Gender: Female

Home: The Abyss

Class: Ranger (Natural Weapon combat style; Sword-Devil archetype)

Patron: Mytteri

Slap has not been forthcoming about the reasons why she's in the Demiplane of Dread. She has let it slip that she is not there due to Transposition. The fact that she has shown no desire to return to the cesspits of the Abyss suggests something, but she adamantly refuses to say anything outright.

Comoară and Wick met Slap in the wretched domain of Lack-Light, where they saved a girl from a vampiric Darklord, who decided to take their interference personally. They managed to persuade the succubus to let them use her reality wrinkle so they could cross the closed domain border, and that would have been that – if Slap hadn't forcibly claimed a spot on the Chibiloft Crew and refused to leave. Under different circumstances, the 'Crew might have fought Slap, but she correctly pointed out that she hadn't actually done anything to them – yet – and that people in their line of work could need her services as a 'getaway vehicle' of sorts any time.

Much of the time, Slap is a nuisance. She openly – not to mention crudely – flirts with strangers, takes a childish glee in the terror her true form elicits in ordinary people, commits minor crimes if she believes she can get away with them, mocks the beliefs and morals of her teammates, and is happy to play Devil's (or rather, Demon's) Advocate in any situation. It is therefore deeply aggravating that when the 'Crew is in serious trouble, Slap can be absolutely relied upon. She will take direction and give her best effort, only to poke fun at her teammates as soon as the danger has passed and remind them that they owe her another debt. It

seems the Chibiloft Crew will never be able to get rid of Slap, no matter how much her teammates may want to.

Combat: Slap shines in melee. She uses her natural weapons – especially her tail – and Land-based powers to great effect, is difficult to hit, and provides useful bonuses to her allies. She works especially well together with Oogle and Comoară, setting up flanks and keeping the enemy occupied with a frontal assault while they pile on the *sneak attacks*. In spite of this, the person she most enjoys fighting beside is Slice, who she judges to be closest to herself in combat strength.

If Slap is required to work alone, her efficiency drops sharply, as she becomes far more conscious of her own safety.

Special notes: Slap may well be edging closer to a more Neutral attitude, but this is not due to the influence of her teammates. Rather, it is the result of a very pressing sense that she is in over her head, being stuck in the Demiplane of Dread as she is; there are far greater Evils in this realm that might swallow her up if she overindulges in the habits of the past. In spite of this, she very much does not want to return to the Abyss, nor be anywhere that its overlords might lay their hands on her, so she needs to make changes. If she can.

Land-based powers: 1/day *Dominate animals (Richemulot)*, 1/day *Forget (Darkon)*, 1/day *Poison Touch (Borca)*, *Spell-like abilities (Tepest):* 3/day *barkskin*, 3/day *greater magic fang*



Name: *Slice*

Alignment: LG

Species: Human

Gender: Female

Home: Gothic Earth

Class: Magus (Staff Magus archetype)

Patron: Universal Life Church

Slice hails from Gothic Earth. The reason why she was transported to the Demiplane of Dread... is something she has not revealed. Once, when someone asked whether she didn't want to go home, she let slip that "At least here if you kill a horrible monster that wants to ruin people's lives, you don't get sued and thrown in jail". This suggests something, but Slice is not willing to open up about her background or any crimes she may possibly have committed on Gothic Earth.

As a Magus, Slice is skilled in both melee combat and arcane magic; a natural "gish" character. How she managed to become such in a world tormented by the Red Death while maintaining her ethics and morals... is another thing she has not revealed. Really, she's annoyingly closed-mouthed about herself.

The only thing that Slice is not shy about sharing with the world, is the fact that she stands directly opposed to Evil and Stupidity. It's anyone's guess

which one irritates her more, but she is more likely to beat someone to a pulp over the former than she is the latter. Irritable, grouchy and undiplomatic as she is, Slice is nevertheless the Chibiloft Crew's leader on the basis that she is the one who combines intelligence with common sense, and the only one to possess appreciable strategic and tactical ability.

Combat: As a Magus, Slice does not have the wide spellcasting scope or brute power that Aubert or Wick does. She is also not as purely melee-oriented as Slap. What she is, is balanced. She excels at supporting any and all of her teammates, adding her abilities to theirs, but she can also be brutally effective by herself as she uses her diverse abilities to enhance each other.

For all that she carries a chip on her shoulder bigger than she is, Slice keeps a cool head in battle, analyzing the situation and the party's assets and coming up with effective battlefield tactics in record time. Of course, sometimes the only viable tactic she can offer is to run away, but that is only so the Chibiloft Crew can survive to fight another day.

Special notes: Don't tick her off. You won't like her when she's angry at you.

Known feats: *Quarterstaff Master* (B)



Name: *Wick*

Alignment: **N**

Species: **Human**

Gender: **Male**

Home: **Krynn**

Class: **Illusionist / Wizard of High Sorcery (Red Robes)**

Patron: **Lunitari; Mystra**

Wick's parents were sellswords, who operated on the continent of Ansalon. Growing up, Wick fully expected that he would one day join their profession, and he trained under their tutelage. Then the little family unit met an old Wizard on the road, who decided to test Wick on a whim. When it turned out that their son had the potential to join the Orders of High Sorcery one day, Wick's parents turned over every copper they could earn to further his education.

In time, Wick did journey to the Tower of Wayreth, where he passed the Test and joined the Order of the Red Robes. As a graduation gift, he received the magical dagger Silverwolf – “a replacement for the sword that he must now give up forever”. With the test completed, he hoped to finally be able to visit his parents again – except Wick had a true knack for the school of Conjuration, and “the Order needed him to serve”.

Wick was well underway to mastering the spell *precipitate breach* when he met a Black Robe at the Tower -- a Black Robe who wore a necklace that had belonged to Wick's father. When challenged on this, the Black Robe gleefully related how he had killed two broken-down old mercenaries who had been hired to stop him from doing the will of Takhisis, Queen of Darkness. Wick's seething fury only served to amuse the Black Robe, and the rules of the Order forbade conflict on Tower grounds.

Wick defied those rules. He had to use his first true casting of *precipitate breach* to escape justice, as meted out by the Orders of High Sorcery. By and by,

he arrived on the world of Abeir-Toril, the blood of the Black Robe long since wiped off of *Silverwolf's* blade. At first, he was delighted by the many opportunities for magical and martial study offered by the Forgotten Realms. He reacquainted himself with the use of the sword and traveled freely.

Eventually, Wick wandered into Aglarond. Here he was invited to an audience with the Simbul, who communicated an offer from Mystra, goddess of magic, for Wick to become one of her Chosen. It must be said that Wick had started worshipping the Lady of Mysteries in addition to Krynn's Lunitari, but he did not feel honored by the offer. Insofar as Wick understood it, he was being asked to become a tool of magic supremacy, as well as a living phylactery for a goddess who had turned out not to understand him at all.

Wick wildly cast *precipitate breach*, cursing Mystra and all other gods for trying to deny him the freedom to choose his own path. And out of the breach rolled Mists...

Combat: Wick knows his greatest strength lies in magic. He tends to open combat by unleashing his strongest Evocations on the enemy, then follows up with Illusion to confuse and herd targets, or else to shield his allies. If he has a flaw, it is that he is over-eager to switch to swordplay if the enemy gets within melee range.

While Wick is surprisingly good at defending himself, skillfully executing parries, his strength and stamina are fading as old age catches up, and his attacks are no longer up to snuff. No matter how much he may deny this is so.

Special notes: While he still sometimes prays to the two goddesses, Wick does not want to leave the Demiplane of Dread; he prefers to keep some distance between himself and his magical patrons for the rest of his mortal days. Not to mention, he has finally found love with his teammate Aubert.

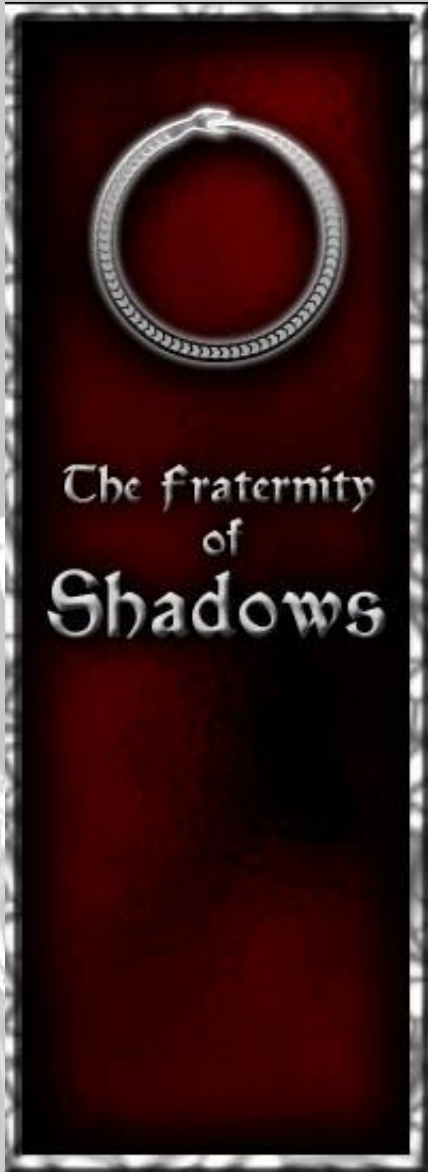
The magical dagger *Silverwolf* shattered when Wick entered the Demiplane of Dread, but he has reforged it, blending its original metal with black mithral (don't ask where or how he got his hands on it) to create a unique alloy and forge a sword he calls *Leadenwolf*.

This act of blasphemy against the rules of Lunitari, goddess of Neutral magic, has constituted a failed Powers Check and put Wick's feet on the Path of the Pharaoh. Wick's face has become dark, the skin shriveled and leathery, increasing his Outcast Rating; once a day, he can use the spell-like ability *Scare* as a gaze attack.

Known feats: *Scribe Scroll, Spell Focus (Illusion)*

Suspected feats: *Combat Expertise, Craft Magic Arms and Armor, Martial Weapon Proficiency (longsword)*





THANK YOU, DEAR SCHOLAR OF DREAD !

DO NOT FORGET TO LEAVE FEEDBACK
TO THE AUTHORS. DO NOT FEED THEM AFTER
MIDNIGHT, HOWEVER...

WILL WE SEE YOU NEXT YEAR ?

