

# Barovia Interviews

## Attached Notes Addendum

Considering that my esteemed patron may find himself too *bound* by his responsibilities in Darkon to travel abroad and experience the varied cultures of the southeastern Core, I have included a few excerpts of my interviews with the inhabitants. Perhaps my patron will enjoy this sampling of “local color.”

Regards,

**S**

## Legend of Regina d’Ghiaccio

*“You’ve never heard of the Ice Queen? Of all the unliving shades that haunt Mount Baratak, she’s by far the most lethal, and the most beguiling. The Vistani call her Regina d’Ghiaccio, and say that she was a princess who loved the mountains too deeply. I’ve seen her myself, I swear by the Goddess’ Cauldron! She’s a deadly beauty, she is, with eyes like the winter dawn on glaciers, and silver tresses that float like the hair of a drowned woman.*

*“Aye, I spied her only briefly, but that glimpse was more than enough for me. I was out one morning to check my lynx traps in the mountains north of the Village of Barovia. The sun was shining strong that week, and I was leery of avalanches, so I was out before dawn. Suddenly, I caught sight of her, drifting about the slopes like an ephemeral leaf in the wind, but obviously in a desperate haste. I knew what I was seeing without a moment’s thought: the Ice Queen, the most fearsome ghost of Mount Baratak, the witch that saps away a man’s warmth to stave off her own eternal chill.*

*“She didn’t seem to notice me, thank Hala, and in fact she seemed spooked by something herself. Only when she vanished around the western face of the mountain did I realize what she was fleeing: the first pink streaks of dawn.”*

— Recounted by Razvan, Barovian ranger of Vallaki

## Ghita and the Vampire

*“What do you want?” Ghita asked the demon.*

*“Your blood, of course, you silly boy,” the demon replied.*

*“Surely there must be something else in which you take pleasure, besides blood?” Ghita offered.*

*The demon thought for a moment. “I do enjoy stories of the old days, for they warm my cold, dead heart.”*

*Ghita proposed, “Then before you drain my life’s blood, allow me to regale you with a tale. I know many wonderful old stories. Why should you partake of one pleasure when you could partake of two?”*

*The demon concurred that Ghita spoke the truth, and sat down beside the young shepherd to listen to his*

*story. So marvelous was Ghita’s tale that the demon urged him to tell another, and then another. Ghita told many, many stories, one after the other, of kings and fair maidens, thieves and knights, saints and dragons.*

*Finally the demon grew hungry, exciting though Ghita’s stories were, and reached out to sup on the young man’s blood. But at that moment, the demon began to rot away, like the dusty corpse it was!*

*“What is happening?” the demon shrieked. Then it saw that the sun was rising in the east, and the hateful rays were falling upon its flesh.*

*“Foolish creature!” Ghita laughed, “You sat listening to my stories all night long! Don’t you know a good tale is measured by how fast the time seems to pass in its telling?”*

— Excerpt from *Ghita the Shepherd and the Vampire*, as told by an anonymous Barovian grandmother

## On Leaving Barovia

*“It was a chilling sight, it was. The sun had already set, and I was hurrying to make it back onto Barovian soil before I ran into Aderre’s goons. All of the sudden, I almost run right through this bank of fog... no, it was like a wall of fog, curling and roiling, but not drifting at all. It ran as far as I could see through the gloom in either direction, and rose all the way up into the night sky. For a moment I thought I had hiked a hundred miles off course to the edge of the Mists themselves!*

*“Now I knew there was something truly unnatural going on, but I also knew that Barovia was on the other side of those mists, and I could hear Invidian war hounds approaching from the west. What else could I have done? The mists were as cold as a tomb and just as silent, but I walked right through them unscathed. When I looked back at those vapors, all I could think of was that accursed fog that rings the Village of Barovia. Somehow, I knew if I stepped back into that wall, I’d be drawing my last breath.*

*“I’d never seen anything like it, but I remembered that my uncle used to talk about such a thing. He said that every Strahd von Zarovich is cursed to dream of the Tergs sweeping over his homeland and laying waste to all life. On nights when the nightmare is particularly vivid, the fog of the Village of Barovia spreads like ripples in a pond to the very frontiers of Barovia. You see, the fog obeys the slumbering will of the Count; it shifts to protect his entire realm, to surround and fortify it against his enemies within and without.”*

— From an interview with Dracul Vioruca, trapper from the Tepurich Forest

# Hazlan Interviews

## The Legend of Jei Aryubaani

*"Many men claim that somewhere in the Hazlani Balinoks lies a lost city, though I believe it a legend. No man knows the exact nature and location of the city, but all who speak of it know its name — Jei Aryubaani. Most men claim that Jei Aryubaani is the citadel of the servants of the Lawgiver, who receive the faithful and usher them into a paradisiacal existence as the enlightened and ennobled vassals of the Black Lord. Other men claim that Jei Aryubaani was built by one of the wizard lords of Hazlan's ancient past, a mighty summoner whose demonic servants overthrew him. According to these stories, Jei Aryubaani is a pleasure dome, filled with the ancient satrap's hoard. Many a greedy treasure-seeker has disappeared into the Balinoks while seeking Jei Aryubaani, never to return. Other tales surrounding the lost city speak variously of it as a realm of spider-like creatures, a stronghold populated by the living dead, a vast library kept by strange cloaked beings, and a vast lifeless citadel, empty of even the smallest living things. There are other tales besides, but all agree on one thing — no man in living memory has found Jei Aryubaani and returned."*

— As told by Elkiars Xamen, Mulan governor of the Barren Lands

## The Legend of the Reaping Angel

*"Grain farmers in the lands of the Iron Faith say that once a year, the Black Lord grants a boon to one of the extremely faithful. For growers of wheat, rye, and other grains, the Lawgiver's boon comes in the form of a ghostly, black-cloaked figure who comes in the night the reap the pious farmer's fields. By morning, a week's work is done, stacked neatly in sheaves, and in the center of the field, the reaper leaves a small stone marker bearing the mark of the Iron Tyrant. The ghostly scythe-bearer is called the Reaping Angel, and in the harvest season, farmers know not to go into their fields at night lest they disturb him and bring the Lawgiver's wrath on their house for interfering with his grim emissary."*

*It is said that the great hero Vosshik began his adventures when he accidentally interrupted the Reaping Angel's labors. The Angel blighted Vosshik's field and flew back towards his house. Vosshik pursued the Angel, but returned too late to save his wife, children, and parents. From that day forth, Vosshik wandered the lands where the Lawgiver was worshipped in search of the Reaping Angel, and though he fought many night creatures, he never again found the Angel. When Vosshik was ancient, but still hale, he walked into the Mists, still seeking the Reaping Angel, and there he seeks the Angel still."*

— Common Rashemani folktale, as told by Nizami Alon, puppeteer

## On Leaving Hazlan

*"I'd been hired on to a merchant caravan out of Toyalis, headed for Immol with a load of tea and opium. There'd been some problems with bandits along the Warlock's Road that year, so the traders figured they'd best bring a few extra sword-arms along with them this time through. I've never been much for travel, but for the pay they offered I could stand a few saddle sores, eh?"*

*"We reached the Barovian border without sighting a soul, and I was just thinking to myself that the merchants had wasted their money, when all of a sudden an arrow sticks me in the leg, right here, and this horde of bandits starts popping up from behind the rocks and trees. I figure I already got an arrow in me, so I earned my pay, and I turn my horse around and start it galloping mightily back in the other direction."*

*"It's a good thing I turned tail, as just a few seconds after I start running I feel this ungodly hot gust of wind on my back. My horse panics and throws me down, and now my other leg's twisted. I figure I'm done for, so I turn around to see what did me in, and I see a sight the likes of which I hope to never see again."*

*"The bandits and the merchants, all of them, are screaming and burning, surrounded by flames that reach up as high as I can see. I look left and right, and it's like the whole world's beyond Hazlan is on fire. The horses, the wagons, the men, they're all cooked, and I'm starting to feel my face blister from the heat, when suddenly the flames snuff out, and there's no sign they were there at all save for the ash and bones where the battling was going on."*

*"It don't happen often, but the flames can jump up like that at any time, with no warning at all. I wasn't much for traveling before, and I sure as hellfire ain't much for traveling now. When you head back for home, stranger, you best have some prayers in mind."*

— Necmi Osmail, Rashemani warrior from Toyalis

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# Forlorn Interviews

## Legend of the Lake of Red Tears

*"Before the Year of Woe came, before the fall of the MacFarns and the ApBlancs and the ApFittles, there were many little ponds which lay where the Lake of Red Tears is today. One of these ponds was indeed called the Lake of Red Tears. A vampire haunted the pond, coming each night to mourn his lost mortality. One night, a girl from Birnam-town watched him weep bloody tears, red drops falling into the lake. So moved was she that when the wasting sickness took her, her ghost went down, down to the lake to comfort the vampire throughout his eternity.*

*But now, the old things are ruined. Forfar has been torn asunder, the old gods forgotten, the Good Folk have left, the forests blighted, the land's balance is broken, and evil walks the land. Now, on the turning points of year, the land itself weeps for what it has become and the forgotten gods cry for the druids. Solstice and equinox, tears of blood fall from the cliffs and sky above the Lake of Red Tears, staining it red once more."*

— Excerpt from an interview with Seamus MacDane, tanist of the Forlorn druids

## A Word on Goblins

*As an aside, I would like point out that when I speak of "goblyns," I am not speaking of the pitiful and primitive creatures that dwell in caves and forest throughout the Core. No, goblyns are an entirely different breed, unrelated to common goblins. Though they are squalid, little monsters, goblins are natural. They live, reproduce, age, and die, like so many things of this world. Goblyns do not. Unlike the dual-gendered goblins, goblyns are sexless, and while goblins age and die, an unmolested goblyn is practically immortal. Aside from these fundamental differences, goblyns are taller than goblins, have green-brown skin instead of the yellow to red range of goblin skin tones, and have only a fringe of hair at the base of their scalps, while many goblins are quite hirsute.*

*The confusion between these two groups supposedly dates back to over 900 years ago, according to The Tyrahgaunt Text, a Vaasi history of sorcery. The Tyrahgaunt Text states that an archmagi known as Yrym-Sybarr created the first goblyns from "the dust of a stone from the stars and the green clay that lyveth and the stolen essences of slaves and crymynals and ways secret and the formula of Zetter-Roath." The book records Yrym-Sybarr's words at the success of his experiment as, "Y have succeeded at the making of a new race. Though the race ys only goblyns, they obey my whyms and delyght yn and desyre only wyckedness." Yrym-Sybarr's unusual Draconic passed into usage with later mages, and soon "goblyn" was the accepted name of the slave race Yrym-Sybarr had created.*

*Given the unintelligent nature of goblins, many of which still consider sharp rocks the height of invention and fire as terrifying magic, I would normally classify them as sub-human fauna and discuss their activities in the section reserved for commentary on such creature.*

*The goblyns of Forlorn, however, were once human, and thus continue to follow social patterns almost as complex as those of actual humans.*

## On Leaving Forlorn

*"Every caravan tells the story a little differently. It is a secret story, told only after escaping the dark passage through the woods.*

*The tribe gathers around the fire as their raunie tells of the Zarovan and how once, Duke Gundar and the worst of his vampiric slaves pursued Madame Eva's tribe to the borders of Forlorn. There at the border, Madame Eva called out to the king of the trees, Azenwrath, asking safe passage through the heart of Forlorn. In response, the king of the trees strode forth, twenty of his children at his back, planning to feast on Vistani flesh. But Madame Eva was not afraid.*

*At that moment, with Duke Gundar behind her and the tree king before her, Madame Eva spoke a single sentence. No one knows what that sentence was, though every raunie has a guess, but it stopped the tree king in his tracks. With a wave of his branching hand, the trees retreated and opened a road before the Vistani, a road just wide enough for a vardo to pass through, that cut clear and straight across Forlorn.*

*And so, Madame Eva escaped the clutches of Duke Gundar of Gundarak, the raunie says. And she smiles.*

*And the tribe nods, for her smile really says, "Did Gundar truly threaten the Zarovan, or did Madame Eva lead him to Forlorn, so that she might speak with the King of Trees?"*

*And the tribe nods. And the raunie smiles. And there is silence for a time.*

*For the Vistani know that desperation's road is not walked without a price. Each time the tribe walks the tree king's road, they must stay the night in his kingdom and pay his price. The tribe must make camp in the clearing in the center of the road and during the night, the king of the trees will send a terror for the Vistani to face. If they are truehearted, the terror will pass with little harm. But should they fail to face the terror, the trees will have at least one Vistani to feed their roots by morning's light.*

*And the tribe is silent, for they have walked desperation's road."*

— Esmeralda Vicushev, of the Vicushev caravan, a Vatraska tribe of the Kaldresh tasque

# Kartakass Interviews

## Grandfather Wolf and the Men

*“Grandfather Wolf was hunting in the woods, but Grandfather Boar was nowhere to be found that day. His belly growling, Wolf sang to the forests, begging them to show him where his prey was hiding. The forests loved Wolf, so the trees parted to reveal a wide, sunny meadow. Wolf looked out and saw that the meadow was filled with white, defenseless creatures. Grandfather Wolf is avaricious and fickle, so the moment he saw the lambs, all thoughts of boars were forgotten. So delighted was Wolf that he resolved to devour the entire flock in one sitting.*

*“Grandfather Wolf bounded out into the open and dragged down a bleating sheep with his mighty jaws, but before he could enjoy his meal, arrows suddenly stung his flanks. Yelping in pain, Wolf looked up and for the first time saw his true foe: Mankind, who could shoot their iron teeth through the air. Wounded, Wolf snatched up his sheep and fled to the safety of the woods. There he licked his wounds and made a new plan.*

*“Grandfather Wolf peeled off the dead sheep’s fleece and dressed himself in it, creating a perfect disguise. In the form of a sheep, he returned to the sunny meadow. The Men were none the wiser and did nothing as he mingled with their lambs. Convinced that he had tricked the Men, Wolf leapt upon another sheep and tore out its throat — but then the arrows stung him again, and he was forced to flee once more. Grandfather Wolf had fouled his disguise, for Men do not expect cruelty from a sheep.*

*“One Man followed Wolf into the dark woods to destroy him, and this was the Man’s doom. Grandfather Wolf killed the lone Man, then licked his wounds and made a new plan.*

*“Grandfather Wolf peeled off the skin of the Man and dressed himself in it, creating a perfect disguise. Once again he returned to the meadow. Wolf slaughtered the sheep, and the Men did nothing. Wolf then turned on the Men and devoured them as well. Never did the Men think to stop him, for Men know to expect cruelty from a Man.”*

— Kartakan tale of the First Days, as told by Orion Corren, baker

## Skald’s Meistersinger Contest of 743 BC

*“So Meistersinger Berdarik and the bard Lukas took the stage together. As reigning meistersinger, Berdarik went first, launching into ‘The Wolf’s Lament,’ the climactic aria from his own opus, ‘The Soulless Crown.’ In the aria, all of Grandfather Wolf’s cruel ambition has come back to destroy him. As Grandfather Wolf, Berdarik stormed across the stage, a grand tyrant flailing against his final collapse, railing against the treacherous monsters he himself had created. By the end, Grandfather Wolf is broken and alone. Still refusing to express regret for his crimes, he retreats into the Dark Forest, forever shamed.*

*“After Berdarik finished, Lukas stepped up and — to the utter shock of all — began to sing the exact same aria! A piece written by his opponent! It simply isn’t done! Was he throwing away the contest? Had the ballad cowed him? Was there truth to it after all?*

*“Ah, but we underestimated the sly old bard. Lukas changed not one note of Berdarik’s melody, not one word of Berdarik’s lyrics, but through the sheer artistry and intensity of his performance, he completely subverted the aria’s intended meaning. Lukas stood alone and still at the center of the stage, his open palms outstretched, presenting the aria the despair of a father whose greatest crime was to have loved those under his care too blindly and too much, and to have given too freely of his spirit. Now, his love and guidance were repaid with bitter betrayal by ungrateful usurpers. I assure you, no one missed Lukas’ subtle glance to Berdarik as he sang the lines ‘Here I stand, stripped down to defeat / By one whose heart I set to beat.’ As the aria concluded, Lukas’ Grandfather Wolf retreated into the Dark Forest, accepting exile rather than recant a single heartbeat of the love he had freely given to his children.*

*“I tell you, I was on the verge of tears. I could perform the aria for you now, if you’d like. Which rendition would you prefer?”*

— As told by Jarob Erking, minstrel

## On Leaving Kartakass

*“It’s not a tale I care to repeat, but I’ll relent for the sake of posterity. I’d just completed a commission — a set of three violins — for a wealthy buyer in Borca. Such instruments are quite fragile, as I’m sure you know, so I opted to deliver them personally. I purchased a seat on a carriage traveling up the Crimson Road. There were four of us — myself, the driver, and two other passengers. We picked up a fourth passenger at an inn, and a dreadfully nervous fellow he was, too. Every time we heard a wolf off in the woods, he’d go pale as a ghost.*

*“You could just watch his terror build the farther north we went. To this day, I’m not sure what he was afraid of, but he must have known. Eventually, we started to hear singing up ahead, drifting down to us from the trees — like when you approach a village. In fact, that’s what I thought we were doing, at first. I couldn’t quite make out the words, but the melody was soft and sad... and soothing, like a lullaby. I can’t imagine that more than a few moments passed before I nodded off. Everyone did, in fact. The other passengers, the driver, even the horses, for all I know.*

*“We woke up soon enough. We’d gotten turned around somehow, and had gone a few hundred yards back south. Everyone was fine — except that nervous fellow. The door on his side of the carriage was hanging open and he was simply gone. We soon came upon him lying in the road.*

*“What was left of him, anyway.”*

— Recounted by Karolin Bandistock of Harmonia, artisan