QUOTH THE RAVEN



MYXITIZAJAL IXITXACHITL

SECRETS

"Three may keep a secret
if two of them are dead.
And sometimes not even then."

— *From the Personal Journal of Firan Zal'honan'*

QUOTH THE RAVEN
XXIX

A Fraternity of Shadows netbook

SECRETS



Released on Halloween 2022

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Jawahar Zhost's Backgammon set

A unique magical item owned by the Fraternity of Shadows

By Michail Adamis (Mephisto of the FoS)

"Two players, two sides. One is light, one is dark.
Walt, do you want to know a secret?"

—Locke, Lost, Season 1:Pilot Part 1
(J.J. Abrams, Damon Lindelof, Jeffrey Lieber)

It was late in the afternoon. A fog had rolled in from the vast swamp of Maison d'Sablet, slowly engulfing Port d'Elhour. The lights in the streets seemed blurred by the thickness of the fog, looking like motionless will-o-wisps in the dark alleys of the town. The streets were mostly empty, as it felt safer to be indoors, rather than roaming outside with almost zero visibility; stories of the serial killer Jean Tarascon attacking people in Marais d'Tarascon still haunted the minds of the Souragniens, but the birds had no such fear. A mockingbird flew to the south of the town and landed in front of a large window at a grand estate. From within the Library of La Maison Soulombre, Viktor Hazan looked towards the window, spotting the little bird.

"Yes, it is quiet. Usually these birds sing until late at night, even past midnight."

Hazan had a look of surprise on his face as Zoltan Demir rolled the dice on the wooden board. It was not the first time he had felt Zoltan intruding upon his thoughts; it was one of the main reasons he preferred to play backgammon, a game of chance and strategy, instead of a more purely strategic game like the Sri'Rajian *chaturanga*. The two bone cubes rolled on the wooden board, both spinning around their axis until they lay motionless and silent.

"Aces again?" said Zoltan with his heavily Hazlani-accented Mordentish. "Seems like I had a visit from the Black Rose myself."

Viktor's thoughts seemed hazy, as they were invaded by the story of Oliver Arkwright, a professional gambler who had legendarily won a massive amount of gold upon *La Demoiselle du Musarde*, and survived winning a pair of diamond cufflinks from none other than the dreaded Duke Gundar himself. He was also famous for his motto "I'd rather be lucky than good," until his luck ran out when he encountered the dreadful death knight Lord Soth in the Land of Specters. These thoughts were not his own; he had never heard of that story before. Could it be that Zoltan was projecting his thoughts?

Zoltan seemed a bit annoyed and confused; he touched his bald head, a tattoo covering most of the skin on his right hand - a spear bound in coils within two merging diamonds, configured to form a third diamond: the symbol of the Lawgiver. His headache seemed to pass, and he moved his discs, leaving one of them exposed to Hazan. Viktor took the dice and placed them in the dice cup, he shook the leather object and rolled the dice on the wooden board.

"Aha!... Gotcha, Zoltan."

Zoltan's horn tattoos moved close to each other as his angled face became annoyed, if not angered, by Viktor's lucky roll. Viktor managed to both block his home board, creating a side prime, and hit Zoltan's exposed disc in a single move.

"I guess you will not be rolling for some time," Viktor said mockingly, as the mocking bird outside the window began its late night singing.

Zoltan seemed a bit upset; like most members of the Fraternity, he was not someone to be taunt-

ed. Viktor rolled the dice, moving his pieces, a smile of satisfaction on his face. He rolled once more - one die was a five and the other one was spinning around like a top. Zoltan seemed to be fixated on the die, as if everything was depending on that. The bone cube hit one of the ebony discs belonging to Zoltan, stopping its rotation violently.

"Another five, doubles!" said Viktor excitedly.

"Let me see you play this roll, brother," said Zoltan, his accent emphasizing the world brother in such a way that it sounded more like 'adder'.

Viktor looked at the board. Even though he seemed likely to win this game with ease, this was the only roll that could ruin his game. Excitement changed to disappointment, as he reluctantly opened a bar for Zoltan to return his disc to the board, while leaving two of his own 'men' exposed.

"Lawgiver give me your blessing to conquer my enemies" said Zoltan, in a semi-whispering voice; his eyes were closed.

'Apparently, he is taking the game of backgammon too seriously,' thought Viktor, focusing on the leather cup in Zoltan's hands. The demonologist was holding it and shaking it like a hectic shaman. '*Strange man indeed...*' Viktor thought once more.

Zoltan rolled the dice clumsily, both of them bouncing off of the board and falling on the expensive Pharazian rug on the floor. The Hazlani stood up to retrieve them.

The dice had landed on an image woven into the carpet, a representation of a demonlike creature. It was the nightly presentation of none other than Diamabel himself, as Zoltan knew all too well. The image of the demonlord of Pharazia had the palm of its hands opened up, as if to cast a spell, but the dice had fallen in a specific area of the carpet that made it seem as if the zombie-like, skeletal-winged "Angel of Pharazia" was throwing the dice.

That gave the demonologist an idea; he had a spell prepared for just this occasion. He remained still for some time as he concentrated on casting the magic without moving his hands or uttering a word. He just spilled a pinch of sulfur on the numbered bone cubes as he ducked to pick them up.

"Did you lose the dice? I hope not, Dr. Dhurban Ananda brought us this backgammon set as a gift, in his first visit to Souragne after Van Rijn's attack in Richemulot. It is rumored that the bone disks and dice are created from the bones of a weretiger. Unless you are willing to go hunt one yourself to create a new set, I suggest you'd better find them. We are supposed to study the set, not lose it..."

Viktor's voice was serious, but it was obvious that he was mocking Zoltan.

"Don't worry, Haz-An. I won't have to make the trip to Sri'Raji after all, I found it," answered the Mulan. A slight grin had formed on his face; his conjuration had worked perfectly. He carried the dice back to the backgammon board and placed them inside the leather cup.

"Is this cup made of weretiger skin too or is it something else?" Zoltan asked, holding up the cup obviously made from an albino crocodile's skin.

Viktor looked at him with an insipid look.

"Why don't you roll the dice and lose this game. We have work to do."

"Indeed..."

Zoltan's heavily accented voice dragged more than usual as he rolled the dice. There was no prayer this time, as he was sure about the outcome of the game.

"Sixes?"

Viktor looked in a mixture of disappointment and surprise at the dice. This was the only result that he did o't want Zoltan to roll.

Zoltan did not speak, he just banged his disc onto the board, 'hitting' the blot piece belonging to Viktor, then he moved the same disc, loudly striking the other piece that Viktor had left ex-

posed, while at the same time moving two more and securing a point where one of his obsidian discs had been exposed in his home board.

Viktor took the crocodile cup and placed the dice back in, shook the cup a few times and released the dice back on the wooden board. He rolled a one and a three, making it possible for only one of Viktor's bone men to come into the game.

Zoltan cast the dice as fast as he placed them in the cup. The game had lost its challenge and it was now a waste of time. The faster it ended, the faster they would go and do some actual work.

His roll made it possible for him to form another builder in his home board, blocking one extra point for Viktor's disc to come in.

"Imagine if I happen to win this game; it would be an impossible turn of chance."

Zoltan acted surprised, hiding his assurance of winning the game.

"This is impossible!"

Viktor uttered, frustrated, as Zoltan's new builders blocked him.

Zoltan's next roll was even more frustrating, as he managed to knock off the defenseless blot that Viktor was unable to cover or move, as well as creating a blockade, limiting Hazan's chances of any of his checkers entering the game. The game continued this way for a few rounds; every time Viktor managed to enter one of his discs back into the game, Zoltan would knock it off, until he had made a full blockade, as Viktor had done a few rounds before. Zoltan had started bearing off his pieces when suddenly, Viktor furiously closed the board, spoiling the game.

"***Show yourself!***" Viktor commanded, looking at empty air. Zoltan was shocked; apparently he had projected one of his thoughts concerning his little cheat in winning the game. Slowly, a leathery, red-winged devil appeared from thin air; it seemed more shocked than its forced master, but equally afraid of both Viktor and Zoltan, fearing it would be punished.

"You summoned an imp to rig the dice? Which part of magic in Souragne is prohibited, unless absolutely necessary, did you miss?" Viktor demanded.

From outside the window, the mockingbird peeked inside the library of La Maison Soulombre, as the two wizards argued. The mists had become even thicker, as the sun had hidden its face behind the horizon and darkness descended across Souragne. The small bird felt a slight tingle on its feathered body. The Maiden of the Swamp was calling it to Lac Noir.

Jawahar Zhosh's Backgammon Set

This elegant backgammon board was created by the scholar Jawahar Zhosh in the city of Tvashti. Jawahar is known as the creator of the '*figurines of wondrous power*'. All pieces of this backgammon set were created by five master craftsmen and imbued with powers by Jawahar, using forbidden magic.

When the board is closed, it depicts the head of white tiger in one side (left), its mouth wide open and exposing its pearly teeth, while the other side (right) depicts a black, vaguely humanoid winged creature made of ebony. There are magical inscriptions set into squares on the borders of each side on both sides. The board's main body is made of sandalwood, which has retained its fragrance.

When opened, the board's dimensions are 53cm by 74cm (20.9in X 29.1in), with the successive white and black points made of pearl and ebony. It is said that when someone opens the game, the beautiful smell of the board is capable of enchanting those around it.

The board actually does have the power to fascinate nearby creatures, similar to a *hypnotism* spell, causing them to stop and stare blankly at the board if the user casts the dice and speaks the command word '*nahommasa*'. This power can be used two times per day and effects creatures around the backgammon set through its pleasant odour, so that even a blind creature

can be affected. The area of effect is a 25 ft. radius with the backgammon set always being the center of the spell and affecting all creatures capable of detecting scents within its radius. There is no limit to the number of Hit Dice's worth of creatures which may be affected.

The leather cup for the dice is made of the skin of a male albino saltwater crocodile, which was discovered and killed in one of the rivers of Sri'Raji and then skinned and made into a cup by a master leatherworker. The cup works as a *bag of tricks*, with the difference that while it can summon a larger variety of animals, these must be native to Sri'Raji.

Roll 1d12 to see which animal is summoned:

1	bat
2	macaque
3	mongoose (treat as weasel)
4	wild cat
5	wolf
6	hog
7	leopard
8	brown bear
9	lion (Asiatic)
10	tiger
11	rhinoceros (Asiatic)
12	elephant (Asiatic)

The discs that make the backgammon's white pieces are made from rounded bones from the spine of a weretiger, sculpted in perfectly round shape by a master ivory artisan. When a command word is spoken ('*toohbaagh*'), the discs become an ethereal mist; the physical form of the spirit of the weretiger whose bones were used to create them. The weretiger's ghost follows the commands of the person who conjured it for one hour. If the weretiger's ghost is destroyed or one hour passes, it dissipates into thin air and the bone discs reappear inside the backgammon board. This power is usable once per day.

The black discs are made of perfectly rounded obsidian, sculpted carefully by a master stone jeweller. When the right command word is spoken ('*alaavenelsaaya*') the backgammon set's black pieces turn into shadowstuff, which merges and expands, forming a shadow fiend. The shadow fiend is completely obedient to the person who summoned it, obeying that person's instructions for eight hours. If the shadow fiend is destroyed or eight hours pass, it dissipates into shadow and the black obsidian discs reappear inside the backgammon board. This power is usable once per week.

The dice, on the other hand, are not made from the bones of a weretiger as is believed, but from the bones of the unfortunate jeweller who made the black disks. Though the dice do not confer any power and are not magical, they are cursed, as the jeweller bestowed a curse on the set before being sacrificed to summon the shadow fiend whose essence was trapped in the obsidian discs.

If all the powers of Jawahar Zhosh's Backgammon Board are invoked by the same user, they become a conduit to the Outer Planes and a process of transpossession begins as the user gains the attention of a rakshasa: a malicious, shapechanging, tiger-headed fiend which thrives on deception. This is how Dr. Dhurban Ananda became transpossessed in the first place.

The rakshasa transposessing Dr. Dhurban gave the board to the Fraternity as a gift in a scheme

for more rakshasas to transposess people, not being aware that the cursed backgammon set had brought it to the Demiplane of Dread, or that it and other rakshasa completing the transpossession process are trapped there.

If any of the parts of the set are lost or separated from the rest of the set, they reappear inside the game, tempting more people into playing or using the backgammon set for evil deeds, the only exception being the set's doubling cube.

Although Dr. Dhurban offered the set as a "gift" to the Fraternity of Shadows, there is a missing slot on the backgammon set for a cubic object, which reveals that something (possibly a doubling cube) is missing.

A backgammon doubling cube resembles a regular die, but it is a little larger, and it has the numbers 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, and 64 on each of its faces. The doubling cube keeps track of the current stakes of the game. The doubling cube is usually placed when a player feels he has the advantage in a game. That player can choose to offer a double before rolling the dice, effectively doubling the value of the game. The opposing player can turn down the offer, but concedes the game by doing so and pays one game point. If the opposing player accepts the offer, the value of the game doubles from 1 to 2, from 2 to 4, or from 4 to 8, up to 64. When a player accepts a double, he takes control of the doubling cube and is the only player who can make the next offer of a double. Knowing when to accept a double and when to decline is a sign of a skilled backgammon player.

As it is in the game, so it is in reality: if Dr. Dhurban had known not to accept the backgammon set's enticement, he would have not entered into transpossession. The reason the doubling cube is missing, is that it is due to become the phylactery of the transpossessing rakshasa, Tarmanustha. The doubling cube is by far the most exotic part of the set, as it is crafted from the bones of a raksasha captured by the Dark Sisters and tortured for information on how Arijani could escape Ravana's imprisonment. Naturally, as the captured rakshasa was also trapped in the Demiplane of Dread, no such answer could be given.

The Dark Sisters used Arijani's knowledge to destroy the creature, leaving only its bones. Jawahar gained possession of one of these bones, after which they were carved by the same master craftsman who made the dice and bone disks of the set.

Faint enchantment, moderate abjuration, moderate transmutation; CL 18th; Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *animate objects*, *summon nature's ally II*, *summon nature's ally III*, *summon nature's ally V*, *imprisonment*; Market Price 75,000 gp. Weight 8 lb.

Dread Possibility: The Tycoon

Marcus Khan of Nova Vaasa is known as one of the richest, most powerful business tycoons in the Demiplane of Dread. In actuality, he is the rakshasa Dhalgashra.

Dhalgashra was the rakshasa who transpossessed Jawahar Zhosh, his fiendish soul bound to the backgammon board as his phylactery. Locals thought Jawahar Zhosh was killed by his figurine creations within a week after their creation.

A few minutes after Dhalgashra entered the Demiplane of Dread, a band of brave adventurers investigating the appearance of Jawahar Zhosh's figurines, encountered him and banished him while also placing protective magic on the board as they were unable to destroy it. The protective magic placed on the object make it both undetectable and inaccessible to Dhalgashra, which means that he can not locate it, which leaves him vulnerable. If he is killed, his fiendish spirit will be unable to enter its phylactery and he will be destroyed, which makes him essentially mortal.

The reason he collects so many strange items and artifacts (as described in QtR#25) is that he is trying to find his phylactery. Because he was banished from Sri'Raji not long after entering from the Lower Planes, he has no idea what kind of object his phylactery is and he is desper-

ately searching for it. With his vast wealth he finances expeditions and employs adventurers to recover ancient relics and strange items, hoping that one of them will be his phylactery.

Dread Possibility: Ravana's Kshatriyas

Jawahar Zhosh's backgammon set has become a vortex in the Lower Planes, dragging raksashas to the Demiplane of Dread. They are in a vulnerable position in Sri Raji as they can not harm its rakshasa-hating darklord, obliging them to travel to other domains of Ravenloft.

Some have banded, together forming a small secret society with two objectives: destroying Maharaja Arijani and most importantly finding a way out of the Demiplane of Dread.

100 Road encounters

Creepy and Bizarre Road Encounters

By Jack the Reaper

1. Cloven footprints appear near the PCs, following them for some time before disappearing.

2. Occasionally, dead birds fall from the sky for no apparent reason.

3. Every time the PCs pass near a particular statue, it seems to have slightly changed position.

4. A PC looks at the full moon and sees a giant skull or eye in the sky instead. When he tries to show it to somebody else, the moon returns to normal.

5. The PCs' reflections in a lake look undead.

6. Screams are heard from distance. They sound disturbingly like the PCs'.

7. The PCs are in the forest in the night. One of them tells a joke, and suddenly all the forest echoes with booming laughter.

8. People the PCs pass near to hiss at them menacingly, then return to normal and deny they did it.

9. Little birds hop and chirp near the PCs. They are all undead.

10. Signposts are found in crossroads with strange, unfamiliar names of locations.

11. A dark cloud moves above the PCs heads, against the wind's direction.

12. Dolls are sitting in a picnic in the most unlikely location.

13. Somehow, it is almost sunset now, hours earlier than expected. The PCs no idea how the time flew so fastwithout their notice.

14. Crossing a bridge over a river, the PCs see a corpse floating under it. It doesn't come out on the other side.

15. Three corpses are hanged on gallows. One of them is gently rocking from side to side.

16. Dead hands are protruding from the ground. Some of them may twitch.

17. PCs notice they left no footprints upon the ground they have just walked over, though they should have.

18. PCs find an object belonging to them lying beside the road before them. They never noticed it was missing in the first place.

19. A large, ornamented mirror is blocking the path, facing the PCs. They must break it in order to proceed, which might or might not have any consequences.

20. Several beautiful black (or white) horses are trotting by. They are saddled and decorated, but no riders are seen on their backs.

21. A nearby tower has been in ruins for long time, but still casts a shadow of an intact tower.

22. The PCs hear a voice narrating their actions and even their thoughts. It keeps doing so for some time, then stops.

23. Sounds of footsteps, laughter, and shouts are heard from the clouded sky above.

24. A dress is pinned to a tree by several arrows. There's no one inside it.

25. Several skulls are pinned on stakes.

They cackle when PCs pass near them.

26. The terrible stench of rotten meat appears, from no apparent source.
27. PCs could swear they have seen the very same distinct tree/rock/tree/rock/another feature everywhere they go.

28. A huge swarm of different kinds of crawling insects is crossing the road for several minutes.

29. Near the door of an abandoned prayer house there is a charity bowl, full of severed human fingers.

30. As a storm is brewing, lightning flashes and the PCs see a horrid figure walking toward them, looking like a devil or grim reaper. When it comes closer, they see just a farmer hurrying to his home.

31. A colossal figure raises in the misty distance, behind a hill, mountain, or tree line, looking down toward the PCs for a moment and sinking back, disappearing from view.

32. A shoe, spectacles, or similar object falls suddenly from the sky.

33. A rock has a screaming human face emerging from it, as if someone is buried inside.

34. Near the ruins of an idol or altar in the forest, some squirrels or rabbits are behaving strangely, as if performing a ritual. They scatter when the PCs approach.

35. The writing on a signpost changes every time the PCs look at it, even if they just blink.

36. A skeleton of a large, unfamiliar animal with two heads is found by the PCs.

37. Weeping is heard from within a well. It stops when someone descends inside. Nothing is found there.

38. Several dolls are hanged by their necks from a tree.

39. A single lit candle stands on the ground in a middle of a remote forest clearing, in the middle of the night.

40. Serene looking statues cast different shadows, looking like people contorting in pain, or demons.

41. Light and sounds of people are emitted from within a cabin or a cave. However, when the PCs enter there's nobody inside and it looks long deserted.

42. The apples on the trees here all look like shriveled, shrunk human heads.

43. A trail of human teeth lying on the ground goes on for some distance before disappearing.

44. The PCs come across another traveling party, who all happen to be dressed just like them. They look at them oddly before hurrying away.

45. A forsaken carriage or cabin is somehow half sunk into the ground, though the land is stony and not muddy at all.

46. All of a sudden, everything becomes totally dark and silent, as if the world has ceased to exist. A couple of seconds later, reality returns to normal.

47. A rabbit is seen, its mouth and paws smeared with blood.

48. The branches the PCs gathered for the campfire try to crawl back to the forest, and twitch when burned as if they feel agony.

49. Birds are perched on tree branches. When night falls, they suddenly transform into bats and swarm around the PCs before flying away.

50. Some withered corpses lie here, looking disturbingly like the PCs.

51. There are smoking fissures in the ground. A cacophony of agonized screams can be heard from within, as if Hell itself is underneath.

52. The wind sounds like a woman moaning in grief.

53. A solid-looking bridge collapses just after the PCs cross it. Alternatively, when they look back it's simply not there, vanished into thin air.

54. Travelers who see the PCs stare at them with horror and run away with terrified screams.

55. The PCs awake to find the shredded carcass of a large beast beside them.

56. Lots of glowing eyes of all kinds look at the PCs from the woods at night.

57. A PC feels something in her boot and removes it, finding inside a sharp fang. It might happen again later.

58. The PCs hear several women talking to each other, but when they approach, they only see a flock of cackling geese.

59. On a misty night, a woman walks toward the PCs and asks for instructions. When she walks away into the mists, they see a dagger jutting from her back.

60. Carrion eating birds are circling above the PCs, following them as if expecting someone to die.

61. Some distance away, the PCs see several people standing still, their backs toward the PCs so their faces can't be seen. They just stand there eerily and don't move or respond in any way.

62. The PCs awake in a slightly different location than the one they went to sleep in.

63. Crows are pecking at a scarecrow tied to a cross. A check will find out it is actually a corpse dressed and masked like a scarecrow.

64. A lake reflects the starry night sky, even in daytime.

67. While walking up a road on a hill or mountain, a human skull rolls down the road, almost tripping one of the PCs.

68. The PCs see several giants in the fog, waving their arms threateningly. When they come closer, they only see windmills.

69. Walking into a tunnel, the PCs emerge at the other side sweating, panting, and with drawn weapons, as if they fought or ran away from something – but they have no memory at all of what happened in the tunnel. If they return inside, it happens again.

70. A lightning storm is overhead. When lightning flashes, colossal silhouettes of tentacled monstrosities or other horrors can be seen moving through the clouds.

71. A distant building the PCs have been seeing for some time (e.g., a tower, a castle etc.) is simply not there anymore, disappearing when nobody was looking.

72. PCs' Horses and other animals refuse to advance beyond some spot in the road, shirking away with terror and acting hysterically if pushed there.

73. PCs notice the rain stops every time they find a shelter, and resumes when they leave it.

74. The PCs should have reached their destination hours ago, but somehow it still doesn't look any closer.

75. One PC or more feels a heavy weight on their back and shoulders, as if something is riding them piggyback, even if they don't carry any visible burden.

76. PCs' footsteps and voices echo strongly, even in open space, as if they were in a large cave.

77. PCs must struggle to lift their feet with every step, as if treading in thick mud, even though the road is solid and dry.

78. An annoying whistling is heard for some time, but the whistler can't be seen anywhere.

79. The PCs see something completely out of place – like an airplane flying far above, or an underground train crossing their pass in a cave (the PCs may not recognize these, but the players will).

80. The dark clouds above take the shapes of ominous castles and turrets.

81. Lots of bones are littering the ground. Some of them tremble when the PCs walk nearby.

82. PCs have a strong sensation of déjà vu and even know where everything should be, even though they have never been there before.

83. A dark horseman (or black dog) is often seen following the PCs from distance, standing unmoving and watching them silently. He is always too distant to discern details, and disappears before they can approach him.

84. The PCs seem to grow older as they walk down the road. Walking back reverses the effects.

85. The PCs encounter a lake full of floating dead (and possibly undead) fish.

86. A rain of frogs, slugs, fish, or similar animals falls from the sky.

87. Temperatures drop suddenly and turn chillingly cold, even though the sun shines.

88. A figure is walking on the misty road before the PCs, her back toward them. No matter how fast they walk, she remains at the same distance and they are unable to reach her.

89. Reality flickers and shifts for few seconds. A lush, green forest turns dead and dark, or a lively town turns into zombies-infested ruins, then shifts back. Which one is true reality?

90. Several hand-written signposts along the road warn and beseech travelers to turn back before it's too late. Some may mention PCs' names. Alternatively, they all warn travelers away from "THE KARKOS" – whatever or whoever that is.

91. Reaching a crossroads, the PCs become dizzied and disoriented for a moment. When it passes, they can't recognize which road they came from and where each road leads.

92. The road passes through a stone arch or a gate with mystical runes indicating a portal to another dimension. Passing through it seems to make no difference, but perhaps it is indeed another dimension on its other side?

93. PCs recall that some other traveler accompanied them during their travel until now – but they are unable to remember anything about him or her.

94. Several pairs of shoes or boots are found along the road. Some of them are smoking, others contain severed feet.

95. Mountains, trees, or other landmarks seem to have evil human faces, but when the PCs look again, they can't be sure if it was real or just optical illusions formed by shadows.

96. Some coins are found on the ground, all bloodstained.

97. PCs feel intense fear, as if something horrible is coming for them, and must make horror checks or run away in terror from the unseen threat.

98. A sign near a bridge demands a payment to be thrown into the river by everyone who crosses (coins, blood drops, or something else). Other signs in other places might require other weird tasks. The results of refusal or compliance are unknown.

99. Dogs' barking or wolves' howling is frequently heard, sometimes from very close, but the animals are never seen.

100. A strong wind is blowing all of a sudden, almost carrying PCs away. After a few moments it stops as abruptly as it began.

Isla sin Esperanza

Hopeless Island (adventure)

By John Berndt

This adventure was inspired by "The Point of Know Return" by Kansas. When I saw someone did an adventure based on "Hotel California", I decided to create one of my own.

I heard the men saying something

The captains tell they pay you well

And they say they need sailing men to

Show the way and leave today

Tierra Dorada

You find out that a new ship called the Great Treasure is hiring sailors at the very high wage of 1 GP per day. They are leaving at high noon. The port is unusually busy with brothels and taverns even more crowded than usual. The Great Treasure is a passenger ship going to the Island of Tierra Dorada. Passage is high; a full 50 GP each one way, two way is cheaper at 75 GP. The ship is crewed by 30 4tth level Experts, only half of whom are truly human. The captain is an Expert 6 /Fighter 3.

They say the sea turns so dark that

You know it's time, you see the sign

They say the point demons guard is

An ocean grave for all the brave

The sea passage is very stormy, with dark clouds being common on this route. The thick clouds cause the light of day to be less bright than normal. Eventually the ship runs into 10 sahuagin with 2 levels in the Fighter class, all armed with tridents (Hs 2D8+2D10 HP 40; +6 melee damage 1d8 +4). The sailors will join the fight. After beating the sharkmen, you encounter demons on rocks. The demons are Hezrau, with one demon per rock. You need only fight one of them and any remaining sailors will help after half of the original crew laugh and turn into ghosts who abandon you; the captain is one of them. The demons are standard Herzau from the Monster Manual, but with 155 HP, being a little tougher than the norm. When the demon is destroyed, the wind and waves will push you in. You will notice , if looking behind, that the demon re-forms about a minute later.

Your father, he said he needs you

Your mother, she said she loves you

You lie down for the night as the island is a day away. In a dream one of the characters hears his father, who is wearing religious garb, say "I need you." Another hears her mother, who is wearing a waitress outfit, say "I love you."

Today I found a message floating

In the sea from you to me

You wrote that when you could see it

You cried with fear, the point was near

Was it you that said

How long, how long, how long to the point of no return?

How long, how long to the point of no return

All players have a dream that they are lost and can not find their way out. They try sending a message by bottle, but it is eaten by the demons.

Eventually the party lands on Tierre Dorada. The buildings are rundown, but they are as modern as any building they ever seen. There is some unrecognizable music coming from a tavern called the Drunken Mermaid. What is left of the crew insists on staying back to fix the ship, they can not be persuaded otherwise. If the players ever go back for the crew, they will find them dead.

The Drunken Mermaid is a sailor's bar with middle-aged women waitressing. The patrons look like a tough lot, but if you listen in on their conversations, it turns out they are pretty honest but there are bandits nearby, forcing them to try and look tough. On further listening, you hear the patrons say that they are from Spain and were making their way to the New World, but they landed up here. There is a lot of gold and silver here, so much so that it is worthless here as there is no way to export it. Tobacco seems to be the currency here as it is well sought-after and only grows moderately well here. One of the waitresses resembles the mother of the one who had the dream. Magic is very new here.

The Blackheart Gang breaks into the bar and tries to molest the waitresses as well as rob the place. One of the women who is being particularly harassed is the one that resembles the PC's mother. The Blackheart Gang consists of 13 level 3 Fighters. Each bandit has a 10 pounds of tobacco bounty on his head. The bounty can be collected at the Sherrif's office and is in the form of bank notes. The woman who resembles the PC's mother says Father Jose Rameez is the only one who knows the way out and he is at Saint John's Catholic Church. When you go there the LG 4th lvl cleric father will tell you

"The curse originates with Major Julio Gonzolez; he went to the New World trying to find the 'City of Gold'. The major went from town to town capturing natives, enslaving them after torturing them to find the location of the 'City of Gold'. He finally came here with his men and they became rich. He celebrated his triumph by having his pick gilded. He mined away with his native slaves when an earthquake hit . When the natives fled, he killed two of them in anger, saying he would get what he came for if it took him until Judgement Day. In the mine there is a golden pick lying on the ground. Once someone digs a pound of gold digging with it, a door appears. Open the door and go though and you disappear. I went through myself and wound up in a land called Borca. I made my way back by ship as I knew my duty to God was to guide more people back."

The mine is full of creatures called Tomb Diggers (AC 14; HD 3 HP 22; Damage special) which have the power of forming a 20 foot pit under anyone once per round, wwhich does 2d6 damage. Players who fall in a pit have to climb out of it. The father knows of this and tells you to bring ropes. He accompanies you to the end of the mine, where wave after wave of Tomb Diggers comes after the party Once the party digs out the gold, they wind up anywhere in Ravenloft you desire.

Larva

Fiction

By Stanton Fink

It was two in the afternoon at the Regal Seagull Cafe when Luke realized it was happening again, earlier than normal. The part-time busboy rolled up the sleeve of his threadbare flannel shirt, and watched a fluffy cascade of auburn needles push through his tanned, sinewy forearm. He wanted to rip that suffocating fabric off of his arm, off of his chest, but clearly, that probably wasn't an impulse to act on during the Tuesday post-lunch crush. Luke discreetly rolled his sleeve back down and resumed mopping up the spaghetti special some poor kid had ralphed onto the floor near Table 5 ten minutes ago.

"Luke? Luke, you don't look okay," Wendy, the Tuesday manager, said. Luke started to reply, but choked, swallowing back down a mouthful of hot mucus. He hoped it was mucus. "Lord, Lukey, you're turning green around the gills!" she went on as she watched her busboy's swarthy complexion bleach from a golden chestnut brown into a bilious olive oil blanch.

"Bbbut," Luke sputtered. Wendy plucked the mop shaft out of her busboy's bony hands.

"No, Luke. I'll cover your shift." Luke smiled weakly in gracious defeat. "You know how you get when you're like this."

"Yeah, thanks, Wendy," the busboy said. His manager was right, he needed to go; at least before he started smelling like pus.

"Don't thank me, just go home. Our insurance can't handle another employee dying on the clock again."

Luke ran his bony, now olive-oil-colored fingers through his greasy, ebony pompadour, then headed towards the employee lounge. A man in a blue suede jacket got up from Table 10 and walked over to Wendy.

"Hey, what's the matter with Slick Racer?" the Seagull regular asked the mopping manager.

"Asthma or something. The owner **insisted** we hire that schlub," Wendy confessed. She paused her mopping to lean closer to her regular's ear. "Though, between you and me, I just want to keep him around long enough to find out how such a nobody can make a such a killer Bananas Foster."

°°°

Luke tossed his apron and his toque into the employee laundry hamper, and disappeared out the back exit. It was uncomfortably brisk, and rather damp in the spruce forest that afternoon, the sort of Pacific Northwest spring weather that normal people cocooned themselves in fleece for. Rain or shine, Luke always wore shabby jeans and worn-out flannel shirts, whatever he could afford to scavenge at Smew Landing's thrift shop. By the time Luke got about one, maybe two thousand feet beyond the town limit, he put his lard-colored, edema-bloated hands on his knees, and bellowed a gurgling roar as he coughed up a throatful of scaling mucus and mayonnaise-colored hemolymph. Everywhere on the mossy ground that the steaming, bluing gunk splattered scorched. Luke bellowed again, this time in refreshed pain as his thin, fuzzy, yellow chest inflated, popping off the buttons of his shirt one by one.

The heaving young man stood back up straight, wiping his blued, auburn-stubbled chin as he kicked moss and rotten loam over his mess with

his decaying work boots. Luke turned his head sharply to the right, letting the soft crack sort his wandering thoughts.

"Hey, buddy, are you okay?" A woolly, cardigan-clad yuppie was calling to the obviously unwell young man from just beyond a ferny ridge. The scruffy fellow quickly tromped through the verdant undergrowth over to his new friend, frantically waving his mittened hands as garbled semaphore. The yuppie Samaritan sidled up to his new patient, and went "Dude! Lemme call 911 for you!"

Luke blinked the gummy tears out of his eyes, then shook his head, barely stifling a bemused chuckle as he wobbled.

"Don't," Luke asked as he swallowed another incoming bolus of hot, gooey liquid. "Just shouldn't have had those pilsners for lunch, pal."

"You sure?" Yuppie savior wasn't buying Luke's machismo. "I can drive you to the Eukaia ER."

"I'm fine," Luke stated, as he realized he had to dial up his act a couple more notches. The unwell man straightened his back, as his swelling, auburn-carpeted chest inflated forward. Luke put his puffy fists akimbo, and stupidly showed off the weird, slithering muscles clearly writhing underneath his thickening layer of bristly hair. The yuppie was still not convinced, grimacing with great concern as he reached out for Luke's shoulder. Luke raised his edemic, auburn-furred hand to fend off the overly-helpful yuppie's mitten, only for his hand to connect with the poor fool's head, instead.

It took Luke maybe five minutes before he realized the man was now lying in the salal leaves before him, the dead Samaritan's head turned at an inappropriate angle. Luke felt light with dread, so light that the seams in his worn-out shirt tore apart against his auburn-furred flesh. He fished a phone out of the dead yuppie's pocket, crushing it into glass chunks and plastic shards in his puffy grip. That done, Luke slung the still-warm corpse over his shaggy shoulder, and nervously hurried home.

For the past ten years, since Luke came to haunt Smew Landing, "home" was a rickety aluminum tool shed he'd salvaged from a hardware store dumpster. Luke tossed his dead yuppie friend into his shed, and barred the door with a log; he'd scavenge the corpse further later. He slipped his mucus-sticky feet out of his mucus-covered work boots and his mucus-sticky socks. By now, Luke's hands had swollen into auburn-furred knobs. No use playing with his pants fly now. Not that it mattered, as the seat of his jeans loudly rent open, setting a long, squishy tail free to flop onto the pleasantly rotten leaf litter. The auburn-furred man with greasy black hair swelled up further, his useless jeans ripping, tearing, falling off of his muscle-bloating hindlegs. Luke's growing body bulged more, growing bigger and bigger, ballooning up from a freakish, auburn-furred circus strongman into a golden-haired thing with writhing serpents for muscles.

Luke wanted to be a strongman once, a long time ago when he was a boy by another name, when he also wanted to be a firefighter. The auburn-furred thing gurgled in pain again, spitting up a stomachful of tooth-rotting mucus. A second pair of stout limbs erupted from his nipples. Luke sank to his knees, reluctantly pressing his thorax belly-first into the loam. The auburn-furred thing's great, golden tail continued growing, lengthening until it bumped into his precious shed. Gripping the damp ground with two sets of powerful forelegs, Luke-thing started dragging himself away, only for his tail to tip over the log serving as his door lock.

"Dammit," Luke grumbled. The auburn-furred thing continued dragging his might-bloating, draconian bulk along the forest floor, trying to focus his thoughts on the tasks ahead of him. Even so,

Luke-thing couldn't help but suddenly remember how everyone in Smew Landing always called him "Luke" solely because the Regal Seagull's owner thought he had leukemia. "Idiots," he chuckled.

Long, stout pairs of jet-colored hooks emerged from the furry ends of Luke-thing's six furry legs. He blinked again, still futilely trying to clear his bleary, still-human eyes of goopy, mucilaginous tears. It didn't matter, he knew where he was going with or without sight. After headbutting the familiar trunk of a giant spruce, Luke-thing climbed effortlessly upward into the hapless tree's branches. There, the wormy, dragonish thing waited.

Sunset came, and Luke-thing's lushly plush, auburn-furred back distended out, then ruptured like a truck-sized blister filled with boiling pus and warm mayonnaise. A pallid creature, a truck-sized butter sculpture, pulled himself free of the gooey wreckage of his alter-ego. A great, pale horn telescoped out from his domed forehead, unblinking ruby eyes glistening, turning topaz. More inflating horns telescoped from his mountainously humped back while crumpled poms straightened into sail-like elytra. Sticky butter flesh hardened into sleek, obsidian armor bristling and bleeding more auburn fur.

Twilight became night, and a dragonish beetle, easily bigger than a steam locomotive, spread his shimmering amber wings, flying away into the darkening sky.

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The Tuesday post-lunch crush at the Regal Seagull Cafe eventually evolved into the Tuesday dinner crush. Tuesday manager Wendy found herself needing the unthinkable when she had to summon her ne'er-do-well daughter, Wexler, to help her cover Luke's shift. As much as she always swore to dock his pay, demote him, or outright fire him against that dim biddy Terwilliger's direct wishes, Manager Wendy was always glad to have her prodigal busboy back, whenever he came back. Mostly because Luke was the only employee at that miserable diner she could trust to not steal out of her precious tip jar.

"Two Saturday Night Specials on A Tuesday!" the chef hollered. Wendy hurried to the kitchen to grab Table 10's order and another fresh pot of coffee. Wexler was very busy texting or painting her nails or something, while good old Deborah was busy shaking the regulars down, on cocktail duty at the Cafe's bar. Wendy set the two plates of ham, fried eggs, and crabcakes down at Table 10 for a pair of hardhat-clad men she assumed were foresters. Or maybe landscapers, given the pair's powerful stench of bark mulch.

"Here ya'go, gentlemen," Wendy said as she refilled the foresters' coffee mugs. "Can I get you anything else before the check?" The two men shared a sinister grumble.

"We'd like to try the Bananas Foster," one said.

"We've constantly heard great things about it," the other explained.

Manager Wendy smiled wide, her normally adamant veneer of professional calm cracking like lake ice in Spring.

"I will get started on that for you guys right away," she nervously proclaimed. Wendy then made a beeline towards Deborah and dragged her waitress into the kitchen by the lapel, both women screaming all the way.

"Anyways, Derek," one of the foresters resumed. "What is killing all these trees? For ten years straight, they've been dying one by one."

"I found some goop on one tree last month," Derek replied, pecking at his eggs with his fork. "I sent it to a lab." He began dissecting his slice of ham. "So far, the results suggest it's some sort of beetle, maybe ambrosia or a slime mold beetle."

"Damn it, Derek," the other forester blasted as he smashed his crabcake and plate with his grun-

gy fist. "Beetles don't eat trees whole, drain them dry of their sap, and break off all their branches overnight!"

"Calm down, Brad! We're not dealing with a serial killer," Derek said. Wexler came scurrying by to sweep Brad's ruined meal into a dustbin. "Oh, and put that and a new meal on my tab, miss."

"Sure thing," Wexler replied. "Oh," she continued, leaning into Derek's ear. "If you wanna know about serial killers, you need to find out about the Killer Oblate!"

"'Killer Oblate?'" Brad couldn't decide whether to be piqued or annoyed. But since he just broke a plate, he was going to be piqued for now.

"Ten years ago, the deacon in Smew Landing was run out of town when people found out he was having an affair with his church's underage organist."

"And?" Derek asked.

"He disappeared without a trace, except for a puddle of slime and blood. People say God cursed the deacon to be a flying slime monster who gobbles up lost people in the forest." Wexler wiggled her fingers for emphasis, flaunting her freshly painted, Black Forest Cherry Puce nails in the process.

Brad chuckled. Or maybe sneezed slightly.

"Uhhh..." Derek vocalized. Wexler grinned.

"I think the deacon was just murdered, probably by his own wife and the organist's mother, and thrown into a septic tank filled with lye and drain cleaner."

The Tuesday manager clapped her own dishpan hands onto Wexler's shoulders.

"That's enough wowing the paying customers with Smew Landing's colorful local heritage!" Wendy cheerfully scolded as she dragged her wayward daughter back into the kitchen. An elderly, almost hunchbacked woman in a painfully pale pink waitress uniform came bearing a tray holding two banana daiquiris in margarita goblets. Upon setting the two drinks before the two confused foresters, good old Deborah then produced two matches from her armpits, lit the matches on her hairnet, and tossed them into the daiquiris, igniting them.

"Enjoy your Bananas Flamberge," Deborah joylessly declared as the flames guttered.

"Um, ma'am, that's 'flambe,'" Derek corrected.

"And we ordered the Bananas Foster," Brad added. Deborah walked away from Table 10.

"Whatever, the guy who makes them isn't here, and more importantly, Happy Hour is almost over, and I need more tips to pay off my car."

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The Spring nights in the spruce and fir forests around Smew Landing were cold and damp, almost inhospitable for humans even by the locals' forgiving standards. It wasn't cold enough to discourage the thousands of treefrogs vocally jockeying for territory and mates, nor the tiny owls that ate them, however.

A scruffy-faced man in a puffy fleece jacket sat in his mud-caked car, angrily pouting as he awaited the arrival of his hiking and drinking buddy, Wayne. Wayne was supposed to meet him at the base of their giant spruce six hours ago, whereupon they were to hike to their favorite pub for Happy Hour. But the day and Happy Hour came together and went, leaving the man to wait, and brood, and pout, while Wayne uncharacteristically refused even the courtesy of turning his phone on. And the one thing Auggie hated more than being ditched by a dear friend was being made to miss out on the Tequila Sunrise and Taquito TitBuster deal at the Mad Mandarin by a dear friend.

Just as Auggie was about to swear to punch Wayne's lights out the moment he saw that bum again, the squall of frog calls went silent. The chewed-upon, branchless trunk of what used to

be a hundred and something year old Douglass fir toppled onto the paved road in a thunderous crash. Auggie's little wilderness yuppie brain went ***boink*** upon realizing that the tree did not fall, but that it was dropped. A deep, quiet humming shook the car, jingling the coins in Auggie's cup-holder.

An obsidian and auburn shadow rode in from the dark sky on a cloud of shimmering amber, alighting on that barkless meteorite. A minute or five of patting it with hand-like antennae, and the yacht-sized beetle decided that there was nothing of worth left in that half-eaten tree. The obsidian creature in auburn then rotated forward, fixing a pair of big, topaz cabochans on Auggie's mud-caked car. Auggie just sat there, corpse-like, as that, whatever that was, casually stood over his car. A steely tentacle, or perhaps a spear pierced through the car roof and into Auggie's stomach.

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The following Spring morning was dreary and raining, as usual for the Pacific Northwest forests. Everything that wasn't wet was sticky with slime, and everything that wasn't slim was sopping wet. It was about half past ten when foresters Derek and Brad found the chewed up fir tree lying in the road. The two arborists had seen many times of botanical devastations throughout their careers, a honey fungus apocalypse, two moth armageddons, fungal and bacterial blights out both of their wazoos, a megiddo full of scale insects, and they even survived getting their clothes eaten off in a locust plague. But the state of this fir tree was something totally new, yet, uncomfortably similar to the state of a rawhide bone fifteen minutes after being gifted to their Great Dane Chionaspis. The two took a long, creeping walk around the ruined tree in the rain, their mouths open despite the sweet and savory rancid stench stubbornly clinging to the damp air. Brad's horror suddenly foamed into anger.

"Do you still think a slime mold beetle could have done this, Derek?" Brad screamed over both the precipitation and miasma. The two finally rounded past the ruined tree's gnawed roots, coming to a behemoth splat of spoiled mayonnaise, and big, suspiciously familiar-looking shattered panels of dark chitin. The two finally covered their noses with their gloves as they gingerly made their way towards a jeep-sized knob of putrid butter.

"Yes, Brad," Derek answered, yelling over their shared nausea. "Yes, I think a beetle did this."

The two then noticed an opened driver's side door in the side of that knob of butter.

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Luke stood shirtless in the Regal Seagull Cafe's employee lounge, an underfed, mahogany-skilled Adonis in dust-soaked dungarees, waiting for the Cafe washing machine to move on from "spin cycle." He grew bored waiting, and decided to help himself to the refreshments he'd set out. Luke shoved a whole banana nut muffin into his mouth, happily uncaring that he was masticating the wrapper. He filled a paper cup half-way up with vanilla hazelnut non-dairy creamer, then three-quarters up with sugar, and then topped his drink off with some coffee and nutmeg. Luke adored the floating buzz of caffeine, but he loathed straight coffee. Something about the aroma and flavor of burnt wood being off-putting.

"How come you're always doing your laundry in the Cafe?" Wexler asked. Luke slurped down his coffee-spiced creamer, and magically summoned some tough, stringy meat onto his chest to make his pectoral muscles bounce.

"On want Old Lady Terwilliger pays me, I can't afford to go to the laundromat without an annuity," Luke replied.

"Can't you at least put a shirt on?" Wexler complained. "You look like a wicker basket man with

nipples."

A short, balding, dumply man in a tweed suit and barista's apron handed the wicker Adonis a "Mad For Mad Mandarin Pub" novelty tee shirt.

"Please remember what management has said about performing flirting, romance, or other unauthorized lascivious behaviors on company property, Miss Rogers, and Mister, ummm, Luke," Thursday manager Kan Boonkha scolded.

"Yes, Mister Boonkha," Wexler sighed as Luke pulled on his tee shirt. Manager Boonkha began futzing around the coffee machine, replenishing the coffee grounds, and refilling everything Luke had just drained.

"Furthermore, children," Manager Boonkha continued. "And, um, Luke, neither of you have shifts today: Why are you loitering here?"

"Why can't we?" Wexler rebutted. Luke finally pulled his head and great, shaggy ebony mane free.

"Yeah, and I'm doing my laundry," Luke added. The washing machine finally clicked. Luke and the Thursday manager began shoveling Luke's laundry into the Cafe dryer.

"Because I say you can't." Manager Boonkha tossed in some anti-wrinkle dryer sheets. "If you want to loiter somewhere, please go lounge in a coffee house."

"Isn't this a coffee house?" Wexler and her wicker Adonis asked together.

"The Regal Seagull is a cafe," the Thursday manager corrected. He then took both Luke and Wexler by their respective arms, and gently pulled the two towards the back exit. "Now please go, shoo! I can't have more people gobbling up cafe resources for free!"

"Bbbut, my laundry!" Luke protested.

"You can fetch them, and only fetch them, after the lunch crush." With that, Manager Boonkha quietly closed the door shut, marooning the two in the alley.

"Dammit," Luke grumbled as he slammed his fist into his open palm. "I wanted to wear my new sweater and jacket." He wrapped his long, dark, willowy arm around Wexler's wool and corduroy shoulders. "'Cause I'm steppin' out with m'baby tonight!"

Wexler squirmed in Luke's embrace.

"'Baby' is right," Wexler said. "I'm sixteen, and you're old enough to be my mommy's dad."

Luke let go, stung by this accusation.

"I'm only 22," he lied, throwing up his long, tree-branch arms to plead.

"Yeah, uhuh. No one still live alive should know what you, Luke Busboy, know about 1980's funny commercials. It's not natural."

The busboy hooked his tanned, spidery hand around a lamp post, twirling around it as though he were either Gene Kelly, or a ridiculously overdressed stripper. Wexler let a bemused chuckle bubble out of her petite throat.

"It's a crime to use the Internet?" Luke asked. Wexler rolled her eyes and shrugged her shoulders. But before she could continue on her way back to her mother's apartment, she realized her bangled wrist was snagged in Luke's tanned, spidery hand.

"Huh?"

"Don't think I was kidding about steppin' out with m'baby, kid." Luke grinned. Wexler grimaced.

"Stop calling me that," Wexler demanded, as Luke lead her through the wrought iron and walnutwood doors of the Mad Mandarin Pub. "And I thought you said you were broke."

Luke put his long, walnutwood finger to his smirking lips.

"My wallet changed its mind." Then he turned to a waiter with grease-sculped hair. "Booth for two, please."

"We don't serve minors," the oily-headed maître d' growled. Luke kept smirking.

"We're here for the Shirley Temple Package Lunch," Luke corrected. The maître d's scowl remained unchanged.

"Sorry. Right this way."

The three wound their way through the dim, wood-smokey labyrinth of the pub's main dining room. Wexler remembered the second to last time the Mad Mandarin reopened; she was eleven, and Smew's Landing's last fire marshal suddenly quit to move out of town, never to be seen or heard from again.

"Thanks," Luke said as he and Wexler scooted into their booth.

"How do you guys want your Insane Duck Burgers?" the grease-headed maître d' growled.

"Uh, well done with tomatoes, mushrooms, and pickles, please," Wexler said.

"Extra crazy with pineapples and onions," Luke chirped. The maître d' scanned the two one last time.

"I'll be back with yer Shirley Temples, and tell your mother I said hi," the maître d' growled again before skulking away.

"Isn't Yann just a ball of sunshine?" Luke beamed. Wexler squinted, trying to peer through the busboy's suffocating sardonicism.

"Tell me, Cool Hand," Wexler began again, squinting a little harder now. "Where did you come from?" Luke's cheerily facetious disposition chilled as his face petrified into a polished mahogany carving. "And why come to Smew's Landing?" The mahogany statue sighed.

"I guess I walked into this. I will say that I came to this podunk to hide out, yes." Wexler eagerly smirked. "And yeah, 'Luke' isn't my real, er, first name."

"Oh? What is your real name? Tell me, tell me!"

"Private. You don't need to know it."

"'Private'? Aww, at least tell me where you're from." The maître d' returned, setting two tall parfait glasses down onto the table. "Please?"

The mahogany statue braided his spidery fingers together.

"You don't need to know that, either."

"Awww..."

"Let me tell you a story, instead," Luke began. The wooden sphinx probably smirked. "And since you're a bright kid, you can figure it out later." Wexler sipped her drink while Luke downed his in a predatory gulp. "Once upon a time, there was a peasant boy who dreamed of being a fireman. His mother wanted him to be a footballer, and his dad wanted him to be a lawyer, and all three of them fought and fought and fought and fought about it." Another waiter, one with a sincere, toothy grin and a tray, set the two's two duck burgers down onto their table. "And while the three argued, the peasant boy's little brother ran away to join the circus." Wexler squinted incredulously at Luke again as she sawed her burger in half. "And because the little brother was too weak to be the strongman, and too cute to be in the freak show," Luke continued as he neatly dismantled his burger into its solid components. "The circus staff turned the boy into a giant tiger, and then put him down when he ate the lion tamer and seven audience members."

Wexler stopped in mid-chew, letting a hybrid thread of disbelieving drool and homemade mango-mushroom ketchup dribble out past her lips.

"Thath maeth ntho thenthe," she said.

"Neither did Inanna's descending into the Underworld to steal her sister's throne," Luke retorted just before he rolled his burger's pineapple and grilled vegetables into a leaf of Romaine and shoved the cylindrical mess into his waiting mouth.

"Point taken." Wexler finally swallowed. "But you still haven't told me why you came here or from where."

The grinning walnutwood sphinx gobbled up his bun halves one by one, then his spicy quince

chutney duck patty, leaving nothing left beyond the sauce-spattered plate.

"I just did." Luke began carefully licking his fingers clean of melted gruyere gunk. "You're a clever girl, and I know you're much smarter than a movie dinosaur."

Wexler pursed her lips in thought even as she blotted them with her napkin.

"Point taken," she repeated in a pout.

Another, more muted waiter presented Luke the check. The Regal Seagull's busboy fished out his filth-glazed wallet, and counted out one portrait of Andrew Jackson, seven portraits of Washington, and one portrait of Lincoln into the waiter's hand. The toothy waiter came back to pack the uneaten half of Wexler's duck burger into a paper box, then took away the two's dishes.

"Thank you for coming," the muted waiter said.

"Would you two like any further drinks?" the toothy waiter asked. "Dessert, perhaps?"

Wexler drained the last of her Shirley Temple.

"We're good," Luke replied. The two scooted out of the booth, fighting their way through the haze of the main dining room.

Beyond the wrought iron and walnutwood doors, Wexler turned back to her coworker.

"You're the weirdest guy I know," she said.

"Thanks!"

"That wasn't a compliment."

"Too late, Wexy, I feel complimented!"

Wexler shivered in growing irritation.

"Don't call me that, turd!"

Luke stuck out his long, wagging tongue, and made a thumb and pinkie "W."

"CALL ME," he moaned as he walked away backwards. Wexler scrunched her face, pursing her aubergine lips hard to keep herself from laughing out loud at the absurd, wicker-chested Adonis.

A thousand feet down Main, er, Smew Street, Wexler suddenly shuddered. She turned around to retrace her steps, almost but not quite running, while trying to not rattle her half a burger in a box. She hurried past the wrought iron and walnutwood entrance of the Mad Mandarin, oddly compelled to turn down a nearby alley. There, Wexler stopped, trying to not inhale the wretched perfume of ammonia, roadkill, and pus gone rancid.

Putting her to-go box to her nostrils, Wexler took a minute to face the olfactorial cataclysm unfurling before her. Then she looked deeper into the alley, dropping her to-go box onto the gore-sticky ground as she realized she had just stepped into a deleted scene from her favorite horror movie, "Mommageddon II: Father's Day."

Wexler gawked at a corpse stuck to the alley wall, apparently glued to the brickwork through a combination of violently released bodily fluids and what Wexler could only imagine was the force of a giant thumb. The corpse's gore-splashed head drooped impotently over his ruined chest. Wexler studied the head's terror-wrenched expression; mercifully, the face belonged to no one she knew.

The rest of the alley way was a mural of chunky blood, as if some giant chef had let a truck-sized mold of raspberry gelatin go splat there. Ten paces away from the corpse was a watermelon-sized blood clot. No, a pile of gore-soaked clothing. Near that nest-shaped mess was an azure blade. No, a hunting knife smeared with blue birthday cake frosting. The numb girl fished out a familiar-looking wallet from that disgusting pile of ruined clothing. From that blood-soaked wallet she picked out a driver's license belonging to Augustine Delamitri. The man in the photo obviously wasn't Luke. She let the license and wallet fall out of her blood-stained hands.

Auggie was one of Deborah's favorite tippers.

TO BE CONTINUED

The Cyclops' legacy II

Substances of the Falkovnian Ministry of Science

By Michail Adamis (Mephisto of the FoS)

'We know what happens in an alchemist's laboratory, but we don't know what happens in the alchemist himself, in his mind and heart.

— Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier,
Morning Of The Magicians

The Ministry of Science under Falkfürer Doctor Vjorn Horstman has for decades researched ways to improve Vlad Drakov's military's effectiveness in battle. Being the Ministry of a domain were magic users are looked down upon if not viewed with suspicion, the researchers of Ministry - being either alchemists, artificers or just experts in the creation of military equipment and devices - do anything they can to empower the Falkovnian army without breaking the taboos of Falkovnian society.

Although a lot of money is spent in the Ministry's research, none of it has been as successful as the Horstman's Primal Serum. Nevertheless, in their research they have managed to create a fair amount of equipment and substances to upgrade the Falkovnian army.

Drugs of the Ministry

In its research to make the soldiers of the Falkovnian army more formidable in battle, the Ministry of Science has created various serums and drugs to better the army's capability. While all of the substances discovered gave the army prowess in battle, they were not without side effects. In the long run, each drug's prolonged use became a hindrance rather than an advantage, making the army weaker instead of benefiting it. The excessive use of these drugs also created a large amount of addicted veterans as all of these substances are highly addictive.

Falkenauge (Hawkeye)

This yellowish serum is usually used during the night by border patrols of the Falkovian army. It can be injected into the recipient's eyes or used as eye drops. An injection makes the effects last longer, counting as ten doses of eye drops. When applied, Falkenauge makes the eyes pupils dilate and the eyes take a yellow hue making the eyes resemble those of falcon.

Falkenauge

Injected (eye)/ Contact (eye) DC 9 Price 1gp Alchemy DC 15

Initial Effect: Subject gains +3 bonus on spot checks for 1hour/dose.

Secondary Effect: Applicant gains Darkvision +60ft. 1hour/dose.

Side Effects: Light discomfort, subject has a -1 penalty on attack rolls in bright light. Eyes resemble those of a hawk's.

Overdose: If more than 10 doses are applied during a 24-hour period, the subject is permanently blinded.

Addiction: Rate Medium; Fort DC 10; Satiation: 5 days; Damage: 1d4 Dex, 1d4 Wis

Strom (Current)

Battle fatigue is one of main elements that determine the outcome of a battle, and since the Falkovnian army has fought against the undead restless army of Darkon, the Ministry of Science

- under the orders of Vlad Drakov - created this drug. Strom is a liquid blue drug that, when imbibed, stimulates the body and helps the soldiers of the Falkovnian army keep on fighting. It is rumored to be created by harnessing the power of lightning.

Strom

Ingested DC 14 Price 10gp Alchemy DC 20

Initial Effect: Subjects are immune to fatigue for 1 hour. An exhausted character is considered fatigued for 1 hour and an incapacitated becomes exhausted for 1 hour.

Secondary Effect: Subjects gains a +4 Fortitude save bonus against fatigue and gives them a Fortitude save to not become exhausted or incapacitated.

Side Effects: For every dose of Strom a character gets, they are under the condition they were in at the time of imbibing the drug for 1 day thereafter. If they were incapacitated at the time of taking the Strom, they must pass a Fortitude save with a -4 penalty for each dose taken in that condition or die from exhaustion.

Overdose: If a character takes more than 5 doses in a 24-hour period they must a Fortitude save or die from heart failure.

Addiction: Rate Low; Fort DC 9; Satiation: 10 days; Damage: 1d3 Dex

Mut (Valor)

Bravery is the most important virtue for a Falkovnian. Falkovnians consider courage in battle the only merit worth dying for, other than love for the Fatherland. But in the face of the undead army of the wizard-king Azalin, there are many who loose their courage and panic as their comrades die, only to rise up to attack them. Mut is usually provided to the front line soldiers of the Falkovnian army to counteract this terror. Those few who survive the field of battle usually end up shells of their previous selves, as Mut is highly addictive. Veterans who have used this drug spend their remaining fortune to obtain a few doses more, or volunteer for the most dangerous missions only to get their fix.

Mut

Inhaled DC 15 Price 5sp Alchemy DC 20

Initial Effect: Subjects have feelings of intense pleasure for 1d4 hours, becoming immune to fear and horror.

Secondary Effect: Subjects gains a +4 Will save bonus against fear and horror saves for one hour after the initial effect wares off.

Side Effects: After taking a dose of Mut, the subject must make a Fortitude save DC 20 or permanently lose 1 point of Wisdom.

Overdose: If more than 1 dose in a 24-hour period the target immediately suffers 1d10 points of temporary Constitution damage. The character must still pass the Fortitude save described in the effect, but also permanently loses an extra point of Wisdom (no save).

Addiction: Rate High; Extreme DC 25; Satiation: 1 day; Damage: 1d6 Dex, 1d6 Wis, 1d6 Con

Drachenschuppe (Dragonscale)

This notorious drug was used for the first time during the fifth invasion of Darkon in 751 BC. It was developed as a way to toughen the bodies of the Falkovnian soldiers. Although applied by injection it is fortunately not very addictive, and since it is really expensive to make it has not become a scourge to the populace, as mostly only war veterans are affected. The side effects have left many soldiers disfigured as they developed extreme skin ulcerations, infections and gangrene. Their discolored, scale-like skin resembles a dragon's, hence the name "dragonscale". The drug is also called "Falkovnian Magic", referring to the short duration of euphoria experienced. Since its appearance many veterans have undergone amputations and dismissal, and joined the throngs of beggars that populate the streets of Falkovnian cities. The project was abandoned since it rendered many soldiers less able to fight, but the drug is still in circulation as it is used for suicide missions by both the army and Falkovnian rebels. It is rumored that the euphoria one feels from this drug is almost incomparable, albeit brief.

Drachenschuppe

Injected; DC 27 Price 30gp; Alchemy DC 20

Initial Effect: Subject's skin toughens, giving a +3 enhancement bonus to the character's existing natural armor for 1 hour.

Secondary Effect: Exotic visions of incredible beauty enthrall the user for the next 2d4+2 rounds. During this time the user has a 50% chance to lose any action he attempts, as described in the *bestow curse* spell.

Side Effects: After taking a dose of "dragonscale" the subject may be affected by a disease similar to mummy rot. Fortitude DC 16, incubation period 1 day; damage 1d6 Con and 1d6 Cha. This rot begins in the part of the body where the injection was made (usually the arms or legs) and if it is not cured or the part affected is not amputated, the corruption continues until the victim reaches Constitution 0 and dies.

A character thus affected must make a Fortitude saving throw to avoid repeated damage, or the rot slowly spreads to the rest of the body. Two successful saving throws in a row indicate that the character has fought off the disease, taking no more damage, but they still suffer the deformity the disease has created and gain a +1 OR for each day the disease had progressed to a maximum of 6. The skin does not revert to normal unless a heal or *restoration* spell is cast on the subject.

An afflicted creature that dies in the agonizing throes of "dragonscale" disease becomes a tough, unrecognizable shell of its former self.

Overdose: None

Addiction: Rate Low; DC 6; Satiation: 10 days; Damage: 1d3 Dex

Bärenmörder

The Ministry of Science, in its attempts to create an alchemical substance capable of inhibiting the natural emotion of fear in the face of death, created a drug made from the stuff of nightmares. (Probably not in the literal sense of the word, but who knows what the Ministry uses for its creations.) The only known ingredient for the creation of this powerful alchemical drug is *schattenhorn*, the horn of a shadow unicorn. One shadow unicorn's horn is enough to produce enough of the raw ingredient to create 12 doses of bärenmörder. This drug's name is a mixture of the Falkovnian word for wolverine "bärenmarder" and murder "mörder". It is highly addictive and normally lethal in the end, but there is another more sinister aspect to this drug. The nightmarish hallucinatory effects of this substance can create psychosis in its subjects and it is not rare for a user to turn cannibalistic. This drug has the particular quality that for it to have effect, it has to be only to an open wound. Usually it is coated on the weapons of Talon officers, creating mayhem as enemies of the state begin fighting each other. Although it was at originally created for use in the Falkovnian army, it recently began seeing use in the gladiatorial arena, having been bought by wealthy sponsors. Thus some gladiators become addicts, who fight to the death not for their lives, but simply for another fix.

Bärenmörder

Injury DC 15 Price 200gp Alchemy DC 30

Initial Effect: Subject feels a painful burning sensation as the *schattenhorn*'s power flows through the subject's bloodstream. During the time of the initial effect, the user is immune to pain (including the effects of spells such as *symbol of pain*). The character takes damage as normal, but may not react normally to that damage.

Secondary Effect: Subject suffers hallucinations, flying into a berserk rage as everyone around them is seen as a nightmarish monstrosity. The subject fights madly until either he/she or those around him/her are dead (the subject has to make a will save to discern friend from foe each round). The subject gains +4 to Strength, +4 to Constitution and -2 to Armor Class for one turn. While under the effects of this rage, the character is immune to all forms of poison (except another dose of bärenmörder), *charm*- or *hold*-effects as the shadow unicorn's horn power inside the character's system protects them from these influences.

Side Effects: A character affected by this drug must make Madness check DC 12, as the psychotic effects of the drug may linger on. Often, the acts a character commits while affected

by this alchemical concoction are enough to prompt the Madness save after the effect has worn off.

Overdose: If the subject takes 3 or more doses/injuries of bärenmörder while under the effects of the berserk rage, he/she has to make a Will save or become cannibalistic, consuming their opponent without any regard for their own safety.

Addiction: Rate Vicious; Fort DC 36; Satiation: 1 day; Damage: 1d8 Dex, 1d8 Wis, 1d6 Con, 1d6 Str

Other Substances of the Ministry of Science

Berserkergang (Berserker)

The Teusten Society in Falkovnia (see QtR#28) claims the Falkovnian nation originated from the Teusten people, seafaring warriors who would be viewed by other peoples as bloodthirsty warriors, who would either die in battle or drink themselves to death. One of the most remarkable units of shock troops of the Teusten were the berserkers, who were said to fight in a trance-like fury associated with the animal skins they wore; either that of a wolf or a bear. Based on these legendary people, the Ministry of Science developed a drug capable of inducing this berserker rage in the soldiers it was injected into.

The drug was not without its side effects though, as it would make those under its influence so aggressive and bloodthirsty that they could not discern friend from foe, or could end up fighting each other as well as inducing mutilation tendencies, even self-mutilation to its users.

Berserkergang

Injected; DC 15 Price 50gp; Alchemy DC 20

Initial Effect: Subject becomes enraged and attacks the closest opponent without regard to his safety gaining a +4 morale bonus to Strength and Constitution, a +2 morale bonus on Will saves, and a -2 penalty to AC. The increase in Constitution increases the user's hit points by 2 points per level, but these hit points go away at the end of the drug's effect. While raging, a user of the drug cannot use any Charisma-, Dexterity- or Intelligence-based skills (except for Balance, Escape Artist, Intimidate, and Ride), the Concentration skill, or any abilities that require patience or concentration, nor can they cast spells or activate magic items that require a command word, a spell trigger (such as a wand), or spell completion (such as a scroll) to function. They can use any feat they have except Combat Expertise, item creation feats, and metamagic feats. The drug lasts for 10 rounds + the user's (newly improved) Constitution modifier. A barbarian character can use this substance to gain extra bonuses to his regular rage power. The user cannot end this fit of rage before the drug wears off, and after that he becomes fatigued.

Secondary Effect: User's eyes become red as blood is pumped into and concentrates in the veins on the eye's sclera. This along with the unnatural rage the user feels make it harder to discern friend from foe on the battlefield. A berserkergang-user has to roll a Will save DC 20 each time he kills an opponent (friend or foe) to resist attacking the closest allied person to him if there are no foes closer. When a user kills an opponent, he has to make a Will save DC 15 or is unable to resist the bloodlust that he feels. If he fails the save, he begins to mutilate his fallen opponent (or friend) or himself if there are no opponents or allies left to attack.

Side Effects: A character affected by this drug must make a Madness check DC 12 as the psychotic effects of the drug may linger on. But usually the acts a character commits while affected by this alchemical concoction are enough to prompt one after the effect wears off. When the duration of the drug's effects wear off, the user is considered fatigued.

Overdose: If the subject takes 3 or more consecutive doses/injections of berserkergang or under the effects of the berserk rage he/she has to pass a Con save DC 20 or suffer 3d6 Con damage as their heart cannot take the strain created by the drug.

Addiction: Rate Low; DC 6; Satiation: 10 days; Damage: 1d3 Dex

Gesichtlehm (Faceclay)

This alchemical gray clay like substance is created using a distillation of doppelganger facial muscles, which must be drawn while the creature is still alive, combined with other mystical ingredients. This procedure prompts a powers check, even if the doppelganger is considered a monster, because of the torturous way of acquiring the distillate. One doppelganger can produce 4d4 doses of faceclay. This clay is applied to the character's face, making it easy to mold and change the subject's appearance. Originally created by Vjorn Horstman to cure his own disfigurement, it was never applied to him as it was observed that the substance was highly addictive, in addition to having disturbing side effects if it was overindulged in. Test subjects of the substance ended up becoming an amorphous mass of clay before they were terminated. The secrets of creating faceclay have somehow been circulated outside the Ministry of Science and to other domains. Alchemists who have either tried to heal a disfigurement or have created the clay paste for impersonating purposes have brought great misfortune to the unfortunates who have used it.

Gesichtlehm

Contact paste, Price 1500gp Alchemy DC 30

By applying faceclay, a subject's visage may be transformed to look like a different person with successful Craft (sculpting) check against a DC 20; the sculpting takes 1d3 hours. To take the visage of a specific person, a character must roll a successful Craft (sculpting) DC 30, because of the difficulty of making a convincing copy of that face. The attempt can only be made if the person being copied is present (dead or alive) as an example. If the sculptor has the Perfect Memory (Visual) Feat, the person being copied does not need to be present. Faceclay is active for a 24-hour period, during which timeh a character can opt to change his/her visage. Faceclay gives +10 bonus to disguise checks.

Overdose: Can increase addiction rating

Addiction: Rate Special (low-vicious)
With each application of faceclay, the subject needs more doses to be satiated, making it extremely addictive. The rate of addiction in the beginning is low, but as more substance is needed to stave off withdrawal symptoms, the addiction rate increases. To satiate the need for faceclay, a character has to apply one extra dose per use, making the addiction rate advance rapidly.

Gesichtlehm Adiction Table:

A/R	Fort DC	Satiation	Damage (temp)
Low	6	10 days	1d3 Dex
Med	10	5 days	1d4 Dex, 1d4 Wis
High	14	2 days	1d6 Dex, 1d6Wis 1d2Con
Extr	25	1 day	1d6 Dex, 1d6 Wis 1d6 Con
Visc	36	1 day	1d8 Dex, 1d8 Wis 1d6 Con, 1d6 Str

Side Effects: As the character becomes more addicted to faceclay with each application, so does the amount of this alchemical substance within the subject's system increase. After an amount of doses equal to a characters original Con score, and while and while the person is still addicted to the substance, there is so much doppelganger tissue within the subject's system that the subject must roll a successful Fort DC 25 save and another with a cumulative -1 penalty thereafter or be subjected to a terrible transformation. The subjects who fail their save lose their humanity, becoming an amorphous aberration similar to an impersonator.

When a subject is transformed into this ooze-like gray clay form, apply the following template to the character.

Human clay

Medium-sized Aberration

Hit Dice: As base creature

Initiative: + (Dex bonus)

Speed: 30 ft. or 60ft. (morph ball)

Armor Class: Base natural armor +4.

Base Attack/Grapple: +2

Attack: Slam

Full Attack: 2 slams

Space/Reach: 10 ft./10 ft.

Special Attacks: Ball of clay, Projectiles

Special Qualities: Fluid Body, Impersonate, Malleable, Damage Reduction 5/

Saves: Fort +3, Ref +1, Will +1

Abilities: Str +2, Dex +4, Con +2, (Int, Wis, Cha)

Feats: As base creature

Skills: As base creature, +10 Disguise

Climate/Terrain: As base creature

Environment: Any

Organization: Solitary

Challenge Rating: +3

Treasure: As base creature

Alignment: Chaotic Evil

Advancement: By character class

Projectiles (Ex): A human clay may throw pieces of itself as ranged weapons adding their Dex bonus to attack or damage rolls. Pieces thrown move at the same speed as the human clay returning back to the largest amount of human clay mass available.

Malleable (Ex): When struck by a melee attack, the human clay can initiate a grapple



against the creature that attacked it as an immediate action. If the check succeeds, the damage it took is negated. If it wishes, it may instead voluntarily take the damage dealt and in return attempt to disarm the foe by trapping the weapon within its body.

Fluid Body (Su): The human clays amorphous body can flatten and flow around different objects like water. It can fit through any crack or opening and seep under or through solid surfaces at its normal movement speed as if it was a creature four sizes smaller.

Impersonate (Ex): As a standard action a human clay can change forms as per alter self. It can use this ability to impersonate any Small or Medium-size living humanoid and can remain in the chosen form indefinitely.

Ball of Clay (Ex): As a move action, a human clay can assume the form of a perfectly spherical ball of clay. In this form it is 2 sizes smaller, gaining all the necessary adjustments. In ball form it cannot grapple or use spellcasting abilities if it had any, although it may take an immediate action to disarm any who attack it. While in ball form, the human clay can move up to twice its normal base speed. In this form the human clay may charge an opponent, but can only attack with a single slam attack. It can also bull rush or overrun an opponent.

Immunities: Due to their amorphous composition, human clays are immune to paralysis, stunning, polymorphing and critical hits while because of their doppelganger origins they are also immune to sleep or charm effects.

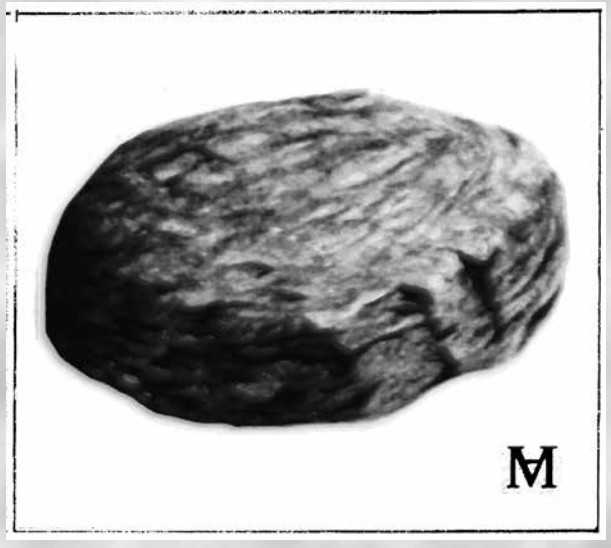
Weaknesses: A transmute mud to rock has the added effect of slowing a human clay for 1rnd/caster lvl, while a transmute rock to mud will haste it for an equivalent duration. A human clay may be restored to it's original form by the use of a restoration or limited wish or wish, but the trauma in it's soul needs another kind of treatment.

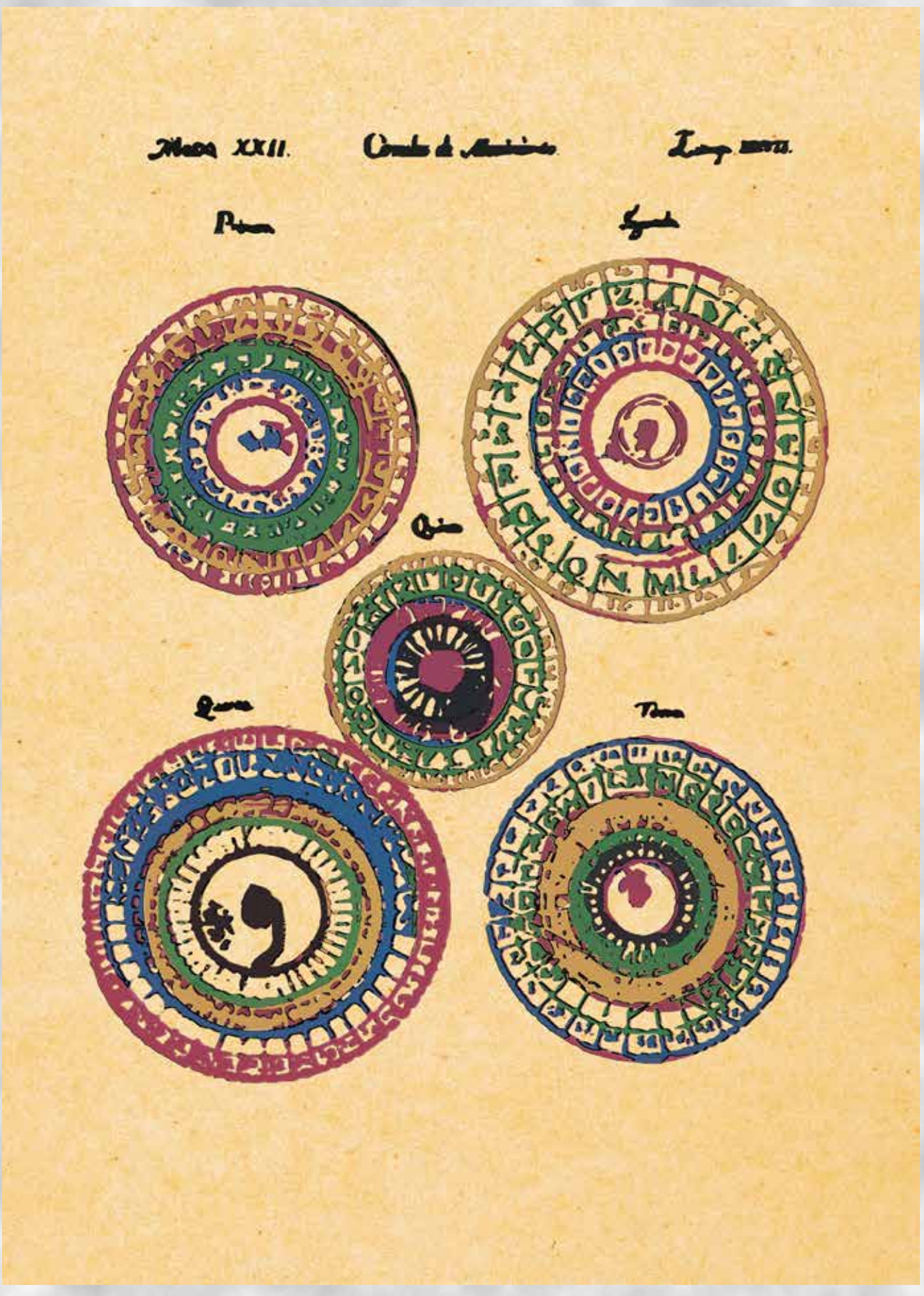
Human clays are previously humanoid creatures who have been transformed to an amorphous, ooze-like mass of clay by extensive use of faceclay. Even the few whose minds survive the unwilling transformation into an aberration gradually lose heir sense of humanity, as they realize they are unable to continue living as they were used to before, building a destructive hatred for everything and everyone they cared for before their transformation.

Steinsuppe (Stone Soup)

When Vlad Drakov ordered the annexation of the theocracy of G'Henna in 719BC, his forces in the Balinok Mountains were repelled by hit and run attacks by monstrous men, the ingenious strategy of the fanatics of Zhakata and a cornucopia of beasts. But although many units were decimated by these, no humanoid or beast was as deadly as the elements of G'Henna. Those who survived the mountain range known as The Blade were forced to march through the inhospitable wastelands of Famine's Fastness, exposed to the unforgiving windstorms of that cruel land, and were doomed not to lift the Falkovnian banners in the city of Zhukar but to escape the worst enemy of all: hunger. The Starving March was so destructive for the army, that Drakov knew that to in order conquer G'Henna he had to solve the problem of feeding his troops in the land of the beast-god. He ordered the alchemists of the Ministry of Science, who were known for their search for the Philosopher's Stone, to find a way to turn stone to food. To his way of thinking, that should be an easy task. Once it was completed, he would be able to march again to Zhukar, using the elements of the land, meaning plenty of stones, to his advantage. The alchemists of the Ministry never managed to create what their lord requested, but they were able to create something else in the process: the stone soup. Stone soups look like ordinary stones, but in truth they are condensed ingredients that, when placed into a heating pot, dissolve into a soup that has the effects of a *create food and water* spell. Though these stones could potentially be used for export and feed whole populations, the expense of their creation makes this an unprofitable prospect. On the other hand, since they were developed a few months before the Grand Conjunction occurred land G'Henna was replaced by the Shadow Rift, the stones were useless for the purpose they were created. What is particularly interesting though, is that those who have consumed a Stone Soup are able to resist hunger-based powers and conditions for a 24-hour period after consuming it. This power of the Stone Soup can be especially helpful to satiate the hunger of a potential werebeasts and tonullify the effects of an *Impart Hunger* special ability, making it especially effective against a Ghoul Lord or the Death's Horseman named Famine.

Steinsuppe: Caster Level 6th; Prerequisites: Create Wondrous Item, Superior Alchemy *Create Food and Water*, ; Market Price: 500gp





Legacy of Blood: The Bleysmith Family

By Ian Fordam
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Although Rupert Bleysmith, the ambitious Count of Staunton, was the father of five children, he had few words of praise for any of them except when one child demonstrated superiority over their siblings. While the eldest and the youngest—August and Torrence, respectively—continuously escalated their competition to gain their father's favor (or at least his notice), the three middle children eventually withdrew from the fray.

In time, Rupert invaded the neighboring duchy of Avergne. The Avergnites fought back and eventually threatened Staunton itself. Torrence betrayed Stauntonian secrets to the Avergnites, hoping that his brother August would be killed—as he was. However, the Avergnites betrayed Torrence in turn, continuing their advance into Staunton. They raided Castle Stonecrest, the Bleysmith ancestral home, and killed every Stauntonian they could find. Torrence survived only by hiding in the privy. When he emerged from hiding, he saw the destruction that the Avergnites had wrought. Using magic he had learned in his younger years, he cast a spell which would prove his ultimate undoing:

All Stauntonians in sworn service to the Bleysmith family shall take up arms against the Avergnites until the Avergnites are dead.

All of the peasants of Staunton were so sworn, and by Stauntonian law, their children were also bound. Torrence Bleysmith's spell compelled all of them, regardless of gender or age, to commit violence against the Avergnites. Crucially, though, Torrence did not take into account that the Avergnite soldiers were so much better armed and better trained than the Stauntonian civilians. Regardless of their superior numbers, the Stauntonians were slaughtered, every last man, woman, and child.

Well, nearly.

The histories of the Land of Mists—in particular, the Islands of Terror sourcebook—say nothing of what happened to the middle children of the Bleysmith family. The second-eldest child, **Vincent** Bleysmith, was the first to tire of the ceaseless, unrewarded competition among his siblings. Years before the fall of the County of Staunton, Vincent went to the court of King Grinne of Mourette, where he became a courtier and eventually a diplomat. He founded a branch of the family which remained untouched by the Dark Powers. The second-youngest child, **Teresa***, was easily as martially formidable as her brothers, but her personal skill was nothing against the whole of the invading Avergnite army. She died defending Castle Stonecrest even as her little brother Torrence huddled in the midden. The middle child, **Ysolt**, was not in Castle Stonecrest during the invasion but in the nearby village. While attending court with her father two years earlier, Ysolt had met **Oudart Gilson**, the young Avergnite nobleman who was now serving as second-in-command to Commander Pierre Willis. At court, Ysolt and Oudart had become discrete lovers, and now she was negotiating furiously (but ultimately futilely) for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Ysolt convinced Oudart, but Oudart could not convince his commander. Ysolt was imprisoned in the village, and the attack upon Castle Stonecrest proceeded as planned.

When performing his ritual, Torrence never

considered his siblings. Although the Bleysmith children felt a solemn duty toward their family, they were not exactly sworn to its service. Alone among the Stauntonians, Ysolt did not suffer the compulsion of Torrence's spell. In the thick of the slaughter, Oudart Gilson released her from the room where she had been imprisoned and hid her away. Only once night had fallen (and the Mists had arisen) did Ysolt Bleysmith emerge from her hiding-place and surrender to the Avergnite army.

Despite her distrust of most of the Avergnites and most of the Avergnites' distrust towards her, Ysolt nevertheless married Oudart and became Ysolt Gilson. Her brother's betrayal made it easier for her to set aside the Bleysmith name, which also helped helped the Avergnites to forget that her family had been their enemy.

Ysolt Gilson ceased to be a Bleysmith, but sometimes blood will tell.

A character might claim Bleysmith blood by various paths. Perhaps they are a descendant of Vincent Bleysmith, drawn into the Land of Mists. More likely, they are descended from Ysolt and Oudart Gilson. In a community as small as Willisford, Ysolt's blood would have disseminated through the hamlet quickly over the course of generations, but it would also have become diluted by Avergnite blood. Only those characters with a particularly high percentage—perhaps an eighth—of Bleysmith blood (compared to Avergnite blood) can lay claim to the legacy.

However, generations ago Ysolt Gilson's son **Alardus** aided a young Vistani man whose horse turned up lame after a harrowing flight into the Mists. As an expression of gratitude, the Vistana eventually let the restless Stauntonian ride back into the Mists with him. While Alardus returned to Staunton Bluffs in time (drawn, no doubt, by the Bleysmith blood within him), years had passed. Alardus may well have started a branch of the family which, by virtue of growing away from the Bluffs, retains an equal mix of Bleysmith and Avergnite blood.

Family Traits

Fortunately for anyone bearing the Bleysmith legacy, the line is not characterized by Uncle Torrence's cowardice and treachery. However, even generations later, the dominant family traits still appear to be ambition and competitiveness. Anyone with too much Bleysmith blood is likely to be discontent with living the simple but hard life in Staunton Bluffs. They might even eye the eastern half of the land, wondering what resources might lie there for the claiming. Alternatively, like Alardus Gilson, they might seek to travel beyond the Misty borders of the Bluffs.

Physically speaking, there is only one feature which might distinguish Bleysmith blood from Avergnite blood. Sometimes a child is born with blonde hair, which modern Stauntonians consider a sign of "the Gilson line".

Advantages and Disadvantages

The Broken Shield – The ghost of Torrence Bleysmith and his servitor undead are incapable of harming anyone of Avergnite blood. This protection does not extend to anyone who qualifies for the Bleysmith legacy.

The Sharper Sword – Nearly all of the residents of Staunton Bluffs look upon abandoned Castle Stonecrest (and, in fact, the entirety of the eastern half of the land) with utter dread, to the point where they even ostracize people who live too close to the bluffs. The extent of this superstition verges on the supernatural. However, Stauntonians of the Bleysmith legacy are resistant to this effect.

The Shield of Youth – People of the Bleysmith line are immune to the aging effect of Torrence and other ghosts. This immunity also extends to anyone with whom they are in direct contact.

The Averted Eye – Ordinarily Torrence Bleysmith senses the location of any creature

*If following the 5th edition continuity, the roles of Teresa, Torrence, and August should be exchanged as appropriate.

larger than a bird within his castle. However, he cannot sense anyone of the Bleysmith legacy, nor does he realize that this limitation exists.

Drawn After Death – If anyone of the Bleysmith legacy departs Staunton Bluffs, the Dark Powers may draw them back to the land. Worse yet, the ghost of anyone of the Bleysmith legacy who dies in Staunton Bluffs will be drawn to Castle Stonecrest after they die, manifesting in the dining room with the rest of their family.

Story Hooks

The advantages of the Bleysmith legacy manifest primarily in opposition to the Darklord of Staunton Bluffs. Perhaps that provides too little incentive for a player to choose the Bleysmith legacy, but an NPC so blessed could prove a useful companion when confronting Torrence Bleysmith.

People of the Misty Hollows

By Jonathon "Hell Born" Crawford

Introduction

This article is a spiritual successor and companion to the article "Hands Stained With Shadow" from *Quoth the Raven #29*. Whereas that article examined the subclasses offered by the Grim Hollow Player's Guide and offered potential advice on how they might be incorporated into 5th edition campaigns of Ravenloft, this article will examine the unique races of Etharis discussed in the *Grim Hollow Player's Guide* and the *Grim Hollow Monstrous Grimoire*, and how they might also be worked into your games of Ravenloft.

Whilst the *Grim Hollow Monstrous Grimoire* does contain unique playable mechanics for bugbears and gnolls, these creatures are heavily tied to their unique, setting-specific lore (bugbears being driven into civilization by a magical plague unleashed by the Arch-Daemon of Conquest and Slaughter, gnolls as former humans twisted into hideous forms by the Great Beast), and do not readily lend themselves to a campaign transplant the way their counterparts do. For this reason, combined with their traditional absence from the Ravenloft setting, they have been exempted from this list.

For those interested in knowing more about the races discussed in brief in this article, the author highly recommends both the *Grim Hollow Player's Guide* and the *Grim Hollow website*, where the "Eldritch Lore" series of blog posts is slowly fleshing out these races alongside Etharis' take on the more "conventional" races of D&D 5th edition.

Wechselkind

The Changelings of Etharis, *wechselkind* are a race of sapient constructs crafted in the form of human children from clay, ceramic, wood, or a combination thereof. Fashioned by the powerful fey of the Summer and Winter courts, *wechselkind* are the unfortunate victims of the fey's interest in human children. When a fey chooses to abduct a human toddler for their own purposes, a *wechselkind* is created and left in the abducted infant's place, its fleshless form disguised by a powerful faerie glamour. Initially, this illusion presents itself perfectly, but eventually it weakens and the true nature of the faux-child beneath is revealed.

Though the *wechselkind* had no say in its creation nor a part in the kidnapping it was created to obfuscate, these golems are often destroyed when their true nature is exposed. Those who survive find life to be little easier; though their minds develop with time as a human's does, a *wechselkind* is physically unaging, trapped forever in the body of a young child. Thus they are forced to survive on the fringes of human civilization, using concealing clothes and their lingering ability to temporarily disguise themselves as the child they were supposed to imitate in order to pass unnoticed amongst humanity, scavenging or stealing what they need. Ironically, the deadly outbreak of the Weeping Pox is giving the *wechselkind* greater opportunities to advance than before, as their keen minds and immunity to disease make them in demand as nurses and doctors.

The immediate problem to adapting *wechselkind* to Ravenloft is that the Shadow Fey have their own kind of changelings; not stolen babies, but crude simulacra fashioned from stolen mortal shadows, intended to preserve a hollow reflection of mortal skill for its master.

One way to justify *wechselkind* in the Shadow Rift, then, is that they are instead a common servitor race for the nobles of the shadow fey; the ultimate creation of the Firs, small armies of *wechselkind* may populate the Shadow Rift, a kind of "cheap alternative" to kidnapped human children. A player character *wechselkind* may have escaped from the Shadow Rift, seeking freedom in the lands above

or been forced to flee some hideous punishment at the hands of their mercurial former master.

If you wish to preserve some more of the *wechselkind*'s traditional role, *wechselkind* may be offered to grieving human families who have lost children as a present by the shadow fey, in which case the "host family" reluctantly accepts the gift for fear of angering the notoriously proud, mercurial and dangerous lords of the Shadow Rift.

Alternatively, *wechselkind* may be a kind of dread golem; when a parent loses a child and turns to a doll as a substitute, the depth of their grief may kindle a spark of life in the doll, warping it into a living shadow of the child-who-was.

Actually traveling through the Demiplane of Dread is not a terrible burden for a *wechselkind*. Their small size and human-like personalities make it easy for them to pass as human children at a glance or from a distance, and their inhuman composition can easily be disguised with a mixture of cosmetics and concealing clothing - a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, a hat and gloves will take a *wechselkind* far. In an emergency, their ability to evoke a faerie glamor and disguise themselves as a living child can easily be used to pass unnoticed through the more hostile lands.

Adventuring *wechselkind* are quite common, as they have little in the way of a stable tie to human society. An adventuring party may ironically be the closest thing a *wechselkind* has ever known to a true family. They tend to favor classes that rely on trickery or magic over brawn, and are often shaped by their alienation from human society. You are much more likely to encounter a *wechselkind* rogue, sorcerer, wizard or druid than a fighter or a paladin.

Laneshi

In the depths of Etharis' oceans resides a race of humanoids unlike any other. Pale-skinned with kelp-like hair, the *laneshi* have long resided beneath the waves, and their culture has been heavily shaped by the depredations and difficulties of their environment. Culturally, the *laneshi* straddle the border between life and death; they look to the spirits of their dead for guidance and wisdom, but at the same time they also exploit the bodies of their dead as guardians and laborers. They are a race of necromancers who view their powers as a sacred gift, and by extent look for the underlying duality of all things they encounter, which ironically means they view the world in terms of absolutes.

This worldview has given the *laneshi* a strict caste system; the Mystics and the Warriors. Whenever twin *laneshi* are born, which happens in a third of all *laneshi* births, the younger twin is ritually sacrificed and its spirit bound to the first-born twin, who is subsequently inducted into the Mystic caste. Single-born *laneshi* instead become Warriors. Mystics, inherently attuned to necromantic magic by their bloody consecrations, govern all things in *laneshi* society that have no life; they perform funeral rites, oversee crafting and construction with the aid of undead laborers, keep records and prepare food. Warriors, however, govern all things relating to life, which means that they are in charge not only of warfare, but also of ruling, diplomacy, farming, childcare and education. Within the castes, *laneshi* society is meritocratic, with rank going to those who prove themselves worthy to rule.

It must be emphasized that the *laneshi* are not evil, merely pragmatic, and shaped by the hostility of life underwater. In the darkness below the waves, farming, herding, forging, and curing ceramics or food are nearly impossible feats. Ranged warfare outside of offensive spellcasting is all but impossible, and predators abound. Theirs is a world with no place for weakness, and where sacrifice is the norm. That the *laneshi* not only survive, but thrive, speaks volumes.

Implied to be the aquatic elves of Etharis, physically placing the *laneshi* within the Demiplane of Dread is the first complication you need to consider. They could easily be dwelling in secret in the Nocturnal Sea and/or the Sea of Sorrows, but only now are they emerging from the depths. Given their cultural embrace of necromancy, it is unlikely they have many friends in the Core, except perhaps in Darkon.

Unlike some amphibious races, *laneshi* are equally comfortable above and below water. With suitable clothing or cosmetics to hide their blue-white skin and green hair, they can probably pass unnoticed amongst humans. The bigger issue is their cultural affinity for necromancy, which is traditionally one of the forbidden arts in a Ravenloft game. As third edition Ravenloft does bring up the possibility of cultural mitigation for Powers Checks, discuss with your Dungeon Master the possibility of having *laneshi* be exempt from the normal Powers Check that comes from using necromancy spells and magical items; unlike the other peoples of Ravenloft, the *laneshi* view such magic as sacred, not blasphemous.

Note that this would not and should not excuse your character from triggering Dark Powers checks by using necromancy or the undead in evil ways. It may be acceptable in *laneshi* culture to raise zombies to fight off marauding bandits, but having a lacedon slave eat a baby in front of its parents to force them to obey you should still warrant a Powers Check!

In Etharis, the *laneshi* have recently made a decision to begin forging ties with the surface world in the face of an upwelling of dangers from the deep. In the Demiplane of Dread, no such threat exists, so your *laneshi* character will need to have a more personal reason to come to the surface. An adventuring *laneshi*'s class is heavily shaped by its caste, which is mechanically handled as a subrace. A Warrior caste *laneshi* will almost certainly be a Fighter, a Ranger, a Rogue or even a Paladin of the Oath of the Crown. Mystic *laneshi* will almost certainly be either Necromancer Wizards, Circle of the Sea Druids, or, if using the Grim Hollow subclasses, Haunted Sorcerers.

Ogresh

An uncommon race even in Etharis, the 6ft to 7ft tall *ogresh* are a demihuman race of possibly distant giantish ancestry, which shines through in their broad, solid builds, rounded features and massive appetites. Living up to three centuries, *ogresh* spend their decades-long youth roaming in search of a place to settle, before entering the sedentary period of their lives, a time marked by a drastic increase in appetite. Mature *ogresh* balloon from the 200-300 pounds of their youth to a whopping 600-700 pounds, compelled by hunger to feast from morning until night. For this reason, *ogresh* live solitary existences; they commingle only during their youths, and in their sedentary phase come together only for the briefest of meetings, preferring instead to maintain communication by letters that form the subtle backbone of their civilization, such as it is. Indeed, a major reason why *ogresh* roam so much during their youths is out of a need to find an ideal place to settle down when they reach their twilight years.

Though the features of an *ogresh* may suggest a dull-witted, strong-backed oaf to the callous and unwise, the truth is that they are a highly intelligent race with a natural affinity for reading people, making them highly adept in social circumstances. Combined with their longevity, *ogresh* are natural fonts of information. Disinclined to work hard upon entering their sedentary phase, *ogresh* prefer to establish a semi-symbiotic relationship with other races, using their wits and natural way with words to become wise men and women, royal advisors, sages, merchants, bards and other professions where people will pay them in exchange for the *ogresh*'s wisdom, as opposed to the sweat of their brow.

In the Demiplane of Dread, the *ogresh*'s relatively human appearance largely shields them from the hostility directed at more obvious demihumans. Even in the backwoods of Barovia and Tepest, a big, fat man is not likely to be immediately seen as a monster that must be put to the torch. They still favor the more advanced domains, both for their relative lack of prejudice and for the greater opportunity for a socially-oriented lifestyle. A sedentary *ogresh* has no inclination to scrape a living from a subsistence farm, and small villages rarely have a need for an *ogresh*'s wits to the point that they will tolerate the *ogresh* appetite. The vast majority of *ogresh* in the Core are likely to be encountered in Darkon, Mordent, Dementlieu, Borca, and Lamordia, though it is possible to find one in Nova Vaasa or even in the larger communities of Kartakass. Even so, *ogresh* will be very rare, since they regard being about two or three days apart as a bare minimum for happy coexistence.

Adventuring is an extremely common role for young *ogresh* to take, as it lets them build up valuable connections, resources and possibilities in preparation for when they enter middle age and the urge to settle down becomes overwhelming. While they are certainly bulky enough to serve as warriors, most *ogresh* will favor classes that will provide extended utility even after they retire. An *ogresh* bard, sorcerer, wizard, cleric or warlock is much more likely than an ogresh barbarian or ranger. Even an *ogresh* rogue will most likely focus on manipulation, guile and trickery over physical acts of thievery.

The Downcast

In Etherais, there were once four gods: Aurelia, Goddess of Healing and Protection; Ulmyr, God of Magic and Chaos; Maligant, God of War and Conquest; and Galt, God of Order and Construction. And then they perished. When they died, many of their angelic servitors were cast onto the mortal world, stripped of most of their powers and condemned to wander in search of a purpose. These fallen angels became known as the Downcast.

As it so happens, Ravenloft has its own stories of fallen angels. In particular, the famous Isolde of the Carnival was originally introduced to Ravenloft canon as a fallen angel who willingly gave up the heavenly realms beyond the Demiplane of Dread in order to pursue a terrible foe; an incubus known as the Gentleman Caller. It is a story that the Downcast race gives you an opportunity to play, and to make your own.

Downcast characters are unique. There are no Downcast communities in Ravenloft, and you may never even run into another Downcast as an NPC. When creating a Downcast, you must consider your character's story; who were you before your Fall, and why did you Fall? Did you come to the Demiplane of Dread chasing an enemy, like Isolde? Are you undertaking a cosmic quest on behalf of your patron god, even though the nature of the Demiplane has stripped you of your full powers? Are you an exile from the heavens, fleeing to the two-edged shelter of the Mists? Were you sent here as punishment for betrayal or hubris?

Mechanically, the Downcast are divided into four subraces based on the four dead gods of Etharis, but these gods are quite archetypal, and so can easily be reflavored as need by - a Maliganti Downcast was once an angel of war, vengeance or destruction, or served a deity with such as its portfolio. For those playing under 3rd edition or Pathfinder mechanics who are interested in "backporting" the race over, Downcast would have the creature type "Native Outsider", and thus they would lack Reality Wrinkles - a necessary step to keep them from being overpowered.

In terms of class, a Downcast will be heavily shaped by both their subrace and their backstory. They are naturally suited for the role of Cleric, Paladin or Favored Soul Sorcerer, whereas Aurelians are likely to be Bards and Ulmyrites to be Wizards. But an unconventional or unexpected class and subrace combination can further tie into the Downcast's story. Imagine, for example, a Maliganti Downcast who turned their back on war and destruction to become a nurturer of life and beauty.

Dreamers

In a lost age, a civilization faced with annihilation attempted to hide from their impending doom by building a vast, underground shelter. Here, they retreated into a magical slumber, hoping to sleep through the apocalypse and then awaken to reclaim the world they knew. But their efforts worked too well, and they slumbered for untold centuries before curious dwarves inadvertently breached their stasis-vaults, waking the sleepers and releasing them into a world that had forgotten all traces of them. Changed by eons spent in the realm of dreams, the sleepers must now forge a new place for themselves in an alien world.

Of all the races of Etharis, the Dreamers have what seems on the surface to be the least compatible backstory with Ravenloft. The shifting nature of domains within the Demiplane of Dread seems to forbid such a backstory. And yet, fundamentally, the defining trait of the Dreamers backstory is that it is a mystery. Lamordia and Darkon both have pronounced mountain ranges; the Dreamers could have simply been

discovered and within a vast stasis-tomb underneath them and awoken, and the mystery of why they were there is simply one that will never be answered, much like other great mysteries of the Demiplane.

An alternative, however, is that Dreamers are escapees from the Nightmare Lands; humans who spent so long tormented in the grips of the Nightmare Court that their memories of where they came from have been shattered, their bodies suffused with the mystical energies of sleep. In this case, there is no fledgling Dreamer culture altering the face of the Core's landscape, there are merely scattered individuals who have escaped into a world almost as strange as the Nightmare Lands.

How difficult it is for a Dreamer character to adventure through the Demiplane of Dread will depend on various circumstances. They are one of the races of Etharis whose physical appearance is never described in text, only provided by images; as such, they can easily be physically reinterpreted for a more "Ravenloft-friendly" look, especially if using the alternative backstory of them being escapees from the Nightmare Lands.

Dreamers are likely to take up adventuring either to pursue a sense of excitement that they would retain from their life spent in dream-vistas, or else to find a sense of identity for themselves in this unfamiliar world. Most Dreamers would probably gravitate towards the mystical classes, although their racial boosts to Intelligence and Constitution naturally suggest the Wizard as a favored class.

The Disembodied

On Etharis, the great city of Ulmyr's Gate was a beacon of magical knowledge, founded by wizards who wished to be free of governmental restraint or oversight. Mages flocked to its walls, and it grew into a strong, prosperous city-state... only to be laid to ruin by its own hubris. A grand experiment to open a permanent portal to the Ethereal Plane went wrong, and the entire city was sucked between planes. But, miraculously, its people survived, now trapped between the two planes like living ghosts, determined to find a way to free themselves from this cruel fate.

Obviously, such a backstory does not truly fit into Ravenloft. There is almost certainly no Disembodied culture. Instead, Disembodied are much more likely to be individuals; victims of curses or failed spells, those touched in a particularly strange way by the Mists, perhaps even Outlanders who have found themselves somehow only partially stranded in Ravenloft.

Textually, Disembodied are described as looking simply "blurred" or "indistinct", and given how visibly inhuman their artwork is, with portions of the body faded out to a starry purple void with bones dimly visible through it, it is probably best to reinvent their appearance to explain how you can adventure in the Demiplane of Dread without being attacked by terrified peasants.

Justifying an adventuring Disembodied is easy; they are naturally looking for a way to cure their condition. When it comes to choosing a class, consider if their abilities are connected to their "living ghost" state or not; a Phantom Rogue or a Haunted Sorcerer could simply be a Disembodied whose half-ethereal state manifests more strongly than others.

Faevlin

On the world of Etharis, there are two things that the common folk take for granted. Firstly, never trust a goblin. Secondly, never bargain with a fey. For evidence as to the validity of both of these beliefs, they point to the faevlins.

Once, the faevlins were ordinary goblins, until they made pledges with powerful fey lords and either failed to live up to their end of the bargain or actively tried to cheat their creditors. The angry fey whisked the goblins away to their own realms, and there punished them by warping their physical forms, painting their skins teal and twisting their heads upside down. To this day, favelins can be found serving powerful fey masters or placed as guards over areas where the border between the lands of men and fey are thin. However, many faevlins, ranging from lone individuals to whiole tribes, have also wormed their way free of their masters and now pursue their own goals in life, aided by the arcane powers they have absorbed from their prolonged proximity to fey magic.

In the Demiplane of Dread, faevlins would naturally proliferate in the Shadow Rift, just another example of the many strange races that bow, however reluctantly, to the Seelie and Unseelie Courts. They would also be associated heavily with Tepest; some may be warped victims of the Three Hags, twisted into more "amusing" forms by the cruel Darklords, whilst others may have willingly sold their souls to the Shadow Fey in hopes of attaining freedom from their servitude to the hags.

When playing a faevlin, one thing to consider heavily is your relationship to the fey. Are you a runaway, perpetually looking over your shoulder for your master? Are you an agent sent into the realms of men? Or did you win your freedom and is your life now your own - for good and for ill? Do you have any connections in the Shadow Rift that still linger?

Of all the Grim Hollow races, faevlin are most likely to need a visual reskin. Whilst a regular goblin can hope to pass itself off as a gnome, halfling or dwarf to the largely ignorant humans of the Misty Realms, a faevlin's signature upside down head is just too monstrous to be mistaken for anything else, and an insistence on always wearing hoods or face-wrapping can nly go so far. While it might be fun to try and run with this, with the faevlin character having to sneak and skulk and hide when the party is in more civilized surroundings, this can lead to problems at the table if not handled well. In the end, it may be simpler and more conducive to the party's cohesion for a faevlin to have a more subtle reminder of their time amongst the fey. There are plenty of examples to pick from mythology; feet like a duck or a chicken, backwards knees, reversed hands, a single nostril, mismatched eyes or a tail are just some possible examples.

Grudgel

On Etharis, the most mysterious of all races are the grudgels, a strange people newly arriving in this dark age. Tall, strongly built, green-skinned and tusk-jawed, grudgels visibly resemble the mythical orcs of ages long past on Etharis... but their behavior could not be more different. Grudgels are known for their wisdom and measured temperament; whilst every grudgel knows how to fight and will raise arms in their own defense, the majority are peaceful and helpful by nature. If given the chance, a grudgel that wanders out of the wilderness will seek only to offer aid and assistance to whatever community it encounters, whether in the form of surprisingly advanced skills in medicine, agriculture, building or crafting, or simply by battling the dark creatures that beset every hamlet and village in Etharis.

Whilst the grudgel drive to help is sincere, the race does keep a secret. No grudgel actually knows where they come from. Each remembers simply awakening in the wilderness, with anything that came before that being a blank. The only thing they can say for certain is that they have a strange fascination with the stars, and each finds themself turning to the celestial bodies for comfort in an unfamiliar world.

As player characters, grudgels are a perfect fit for the "seeking a place" character archetype. In a campaign that revolves heavily around a single "hub" community, a grudgel naturally works with their canonical tendency to try and win over hearts and minds so as to find a place in a world they otherwise have no attachment to. The problems, of course, are their visual similarity to orcs, and the cynicism level of the campaign; a grudgel's inherent optimism and hopefulness are a poor match for a campaign focusing on how closed-minded and xenophobic the benighted inhabitants of the Misty Realms are.

If grudgels are simply materializing in the Misty Realms in a manner similar to on Etharis, it could be interesting to consider how grudgel NPCs might be exploited by the other NPCs of the setting. After all, Ravenloft abounds in socially manipulative villains, all the way up to full-fledged Darklords.

The mysterious and alien knowledge of the grudgels is another element that could be explored for your character and their campaign. Even in Grim Hollow canon, grudgels often carry strange styluses of an unearthly, glassy material. With your DM's permission, a grudgel could bear unusual "technologies" or have strange classes or subclasses not otherwise seen in the Demiplane of Dread.

Morbus Kobolt

Kobolds are found throughout the D&D multiverse, and Etharis is no exception. Morbus kobolds are a subrace that has been changed by generations of living in damp, wet, pestilential areas - first swamps and blighted moors, and in more recent times sewers and storm drains. To survive in such areas, the morbus kobolds have come to possess some of the most powerful immune systems around, rendering them all but impervious to sickness - a trait that perhaps went hand in hand with their increasing interest in alchemy. On Etharis, most morbus kobolds have come to worship powers of disease, believing it is their sacred duty to breed and spread plague and pestilence to the land. Although there are dissenters to this unholy vision, who even go so far as to argue that their people should be using their talents to cure sickness, they are exiled, and it is from the ranks of these exiles that morbus kobold player characters arise.

Tailor-made for the Living Crucible Fighter, Oath of Pestilence Paladin, Green Reaper and Vermin Master Rangers and Plague Doctor Wizard subclasses, a morbus kobold is definitely going to be a tricky one to fit into a Ravenloft campaign as a playable character. As monsters, the morbus kobolds work all too well in any domain with heavily urbanized or industrial backdrops, or otherwise strongly associated with disease; Nosos and Richemulot are just begging to be home to vast clans of these plague-worshippers.

Gundarak
Land of Oppression and Whim

Domain Alternate Version (Mistworld)

By Tommaso "Mistmaster" Mazzoni

Official Name: Duchy of Gundarak
Culture level: Medieval
Ecology: Full
Climate & Terrain: Continental; the land is encased between the Gundar River and the Balinok Mountains.
Languages: Common, Luktar, Barovian, Borcan, Invidian, Sithican and Vaasi.
Religions: Erlin the Reaper, Zakhata the Provider, Ezra the Guardian.
Races: Humans 95, Dhampir 4%, other 1%).
Governement: Feudal Despotism.
Ruler: Duke Nahrov IV Gundar.
Darklord: Nharov Gundar.
Lightlord: The Red Lion
Inhabitants: 2,000,000.
Surface: 25,000 square klm
Analog: Late X Century Eastern Borders of the Holy Roman Empire.
Capital City: Zeidenburg (138,000 in, Standard, NE),
Important towns: Teufeldorf (65,000 in, Standard, LE)
Borders: North: Borca, East: Barovia, South-East: Kartakass, South: Sithicus and Invidia, West: Invidia.

Domain Overview

Gundarak is a patch of fertile land encased between the Gundar river and the mountains. Guarding the Gundar river on its safest crossing sits the city of Teufeldorf, which is the seat of commerce and one of the most florid marketplaces in the Core; Teufeldorf is administered directly by a Bey named by the Duke. The capital city of the duchy, Zeidenburg, sits at the foot of a hill in the middle of the valley.

The People

Gundarakites are descendants of the Terg Barbarians, who strongly influenced the customs, food and clothing of the current populace. They are usually taller and more broad-shouldered then their neighbors; they are also darker of hair. Gundarakites are used to oppression, and their mindset is all about surviving it; they keep their mouths shut, they resolve their own issues without involving authorities, they do not trust strangers, and they respect their own honor codes. They follow the precept of the Church of Zhakata the Provider, even if the Church of Erlik the Reaper is the state religion; the Cult of Ezra is clandestine but widely present. Gundarakites are a deeply devoted people, even if not always completely coherent with their beliefs; Gundarakite fashion is quite plain and practical, since more fanciful styles are heavily-taxed. The Gundarakites have made an art out of hiding resources from prying eyes. Secret rooms, secret closets and secret hiding places in objects and structure are very common and part of local crafting- and building-customs. If they can not proof an area against scrying magic, they will communicate through coded papers. Gundarakites deplore disloyalty as the worst sin, and will not willingly associate with turncloacks, state enforcers and spies without strong reason. Gundarakite love their families, and respect the head of the family, which is usually the oldest person.

Tropes

Gundarak is a land oppressed by cruelty and corruption, and the fact it is ruled by a cruel monster it is only the tip of the iceberg. Corruption, exploitation, arbitrary rule and violence are very common evils, and in Gundarak we see the horror of petty evil. When jealously can lead to horrific betrayal, and family is all you have, but often family is also the most horrific of the places for you to be, then secrets might be

your only recourse.

History

Age of Creation: In The Age of Creation, Zakhata the Provider sacrificed his body to create the world; his heart created the Balinok region.

Age of Empires: In The Age of Empires, the Olympian Empire controlled the Core, and Hunadoris was one of the richest provinces of the empire. After the fall of Olympia, it fell into disarray.

Age of Darkness: In the Age of Darkness, the Terg Horde passed the Sea of Poison to the South, and invaded the Core, taking advantage of the fall of Olympia. Their advance was halted in what is currently Barovia by Barov I the Brave; the Terg Capital at the time was Tatertortf, the City of the God, where the Zakhata faith has its high seat. The Barovians renamed the town Teufeldorf, the Village of Demons, in Lamordian. Over the centuries, the Terg Empire shrank in size, and in the end it disappeared.

The Modern Age: The Gundar Family seized power over what remained of the Terg empire and has ruled the renamed Tergland, now Gundarak, with an iron fist since then, often warring against neighboring Barovia.

The Current Age: After a failed invasion of Barovia, Duke Nharov IV seized the throne in a bloody coup against his own mother and imposed a very-heavy handed regimen which is still in power today.

Places of Interest

Zeidenburg is the capital of Gundarak. It sitss at the foot of the 100 Noose Hill, on the banks of the Gundar River near the ruins of Hunadoris, and it is a fortified town. Hunadora Castle, the Gundar Seat of power, gloomily imposes itself over the hill, which takes its name from the 100 gallows which constantly expose the hanged bodies of the people executed by the Duke's will. *The Last Dance* is the main inn in the town; its prices are unusually low and its quality surprisingly good, and that is suspicious given the heavy taxation level the city suffers; many people think that the innkeeper, Yakob Akib (human Adult Rogue 4, NE) is a spy of the Duke. Other sites include are: *The Bloated Leech*, a lice-infested inn on the Crimson Road, the main avenue, which is more popular with the Gundarakites, as its owner is the head of a criminal ring which is better than the Duke's police; *the Temple of the Sovereign Skull*, the holiest seat of the Church of Erlik in the capital.

The city of **Teufeldorf** is the main commercial hub, and it has a lot of inns and restaurants, the main one being *the Weeping Widow*; its owner Marika Tarrik (LG Cleric of Zakhata the Provider 6) is a widow, but no one remembers she was ever seen weeping; she is quite joyful, and she has proved herself capable of thwarting even the more hardened Collectors of the Duke. The city is ruled from the Gubernatorial Palace, a gloomy, spiked fortress in the center of the city, by the Beya. A small temple to Ezra is allowed on the outskirts of the city. The Twisting Tower is hereditary Duke Medraut's private abode in the city. The ruins of ancient Tatertortf rest beneath the modern town.

Religions

Erlin the Reaper (NE) is a cold and unforgiving deity of Death, Doom, Decay, Night, Winter and Misfortune; his domains are Darkness, Death, Destruction, Evil, Luck, Weather. He teaches his followers that life is short and death is unavoidable, only the strong can postpone the inevitable end and should survive no matter the cost. His Priests officiate at funerals, keep records of the dead, and serve as holy assassins for the Gundarakite court. His favored weapon is the scythe. He is venerated at least on a lip-service level by all members of Gundarakite nobility and by their immediate servants. His symbol is a hooded skull with a scythe.

Zakhata the Provider (LG) is the main aspect of Zhakata venerated by the ancient Terg religion, and he is a deity of Plenty, Generosity, Fairness, Tradition, Trading, Self-Sacrifice and Duty. His domains are Community, Good, Law, Luck, Strength, Travel. His favored weapon is the sa-

ber. He teaches the value of cooperation and family, respect for hierarchy and willingness to sacrifice oneself for the greater good. His priests are called Uncles and Aunts, and they discretely serve in the rural communities, and on the outskirts of great cities; most smallfolk and many artisans and merchants venerate the Provider. His symbol is a book with a saber.

Ezra the Guardian: This militant cult (NG) actively fights the Duke's oppressive rule and is considered to be clandestine in Gundarak; Ezra is venerated as a deity of Justice, Legitimacy, Honour and Truth, her domains are Liberation, Protection, Good, Rune, Strenght. She suggests to her followers every possible loophole in the law that is available and in case even that fails, she orders her paladins, the Justice Bringers, to use more direct means to resist. An unfair law is not law, so is not binding. Ezra recommends restraint when it comes to creating public unrest, urging subtlety to avoid harsh reprisals against the innocent; she recommends quick vengeance upon any offender protected by unjust laws, however. Her favored weapon is the dagger. Her priests live and work in hiding, usually disguising themselves are servants and peasants. Ezra's followers are few but equally spread throughout the various social classes. Her symbol is a shield with two daggers.

The Famed and the Infamous

Taron Gundar aka the Red Lion
(Young Adult Dhampir Vigilante 13, LG)

The second son of Lord Nharov and his favorite thanks to his superior martial prowess, Taron has always disapproved of his father's methods, and after he was fortunate enough to find the ancient relic called *Red Lion Mask*, he created his Red Lion persona to oppose his father's tyranny. His burden is the fact he loves his family deeply, but his brother is jealous of him, and his father is a monster who loves him for all the wrong reasons. *(Adventure Hook: The adventurers need to meet the Red Lion to discuss their plan to infiltrate Hunadora Castle and kill the Duke. But they do not know they are being spied on.)*

Darzin Morcantha
(Adult Human Ranger 6, CG)

The Bearslayer is the head of an old but impoverished Gundarakite family, who has gained fame after killing a murderous black bear, which proved to be an evil Werebear in disguise. He is now a renowned monster-hunter by trade. *(Adventure Hook: Darzin meets the adventurers in a village north of Teufeldorf, and discovers they are probably on the tracks of the same monster, a chupacabra of unusual size and cunning.)*

Beya Shaita Vortna
(Middleaged human Witch 6, LE)

Shaita is the shrewd Beya, or governess, of the city of Teufeldorf. She is a cunning manipulator and manages to direct Duke Nharov's rage against her enemies without ending up swinging from the gallows herself. *(Adventure Hook: this time Shaita's schemes have blown up mightily and now, she needs a scapegoat for Nharov's fury. Maybe the adventurers are what she was looking for?)*

Sherrif Rebekka Ditra
(Human Adult Fighter 7, LN)

An honest woman in the corrupt city of Teufeldorf, where she works as Sheriff, Rebekka takes the laws with a grain of salt, but she is uncorruptable. *(Adventure Hook: Sherrif Ditra is running short on patience; the Courtiers are playing a dangerous game with the Collectors, and it will be the citizens of Teufeldorf who will pay the price. She has decided to nominate the adventurers as her deputies, allowing them to try and defuse the situation before it explodes.)*

Antoniija Hajdusa
(Adult Human Rogue 8, CN)

The owner of *the Bloated Leech*, she is also the head of Teufeldorf's biggest criminal guild, the Chaos Courtiers. She has a loose morality, but she usually does not betray her allies. *(Adventure Hook: Everyone has a price, Antoniija is fond of saying, and the adventurers are no exception in her opinion, so she is going to try and negotiate with them. After all, she is a businness woman, and negotiation is the core of business.)*

Julianna Ester
[Adult Human Maledictive Werewolf Aristocrat 5, NG]

A beautiful woman recently widowed, Lady Ester keeps herself secluded in her manor near Teufeldorf, but a couple of times every year she will hold a great ball and a banquet, which is also open to the smallfolk. (*Adventure Hook: Secretly a Werewolf because of her late husband, lady Ester is terrified of anyone discovering her secret, and when the moonstone talisman of Vistani manufacture she uses to keep the beast in check is stolen, she will spare no expense to help the adventurers to return it to her within 8 days.)*

The Strangling Man
(Human Ghost Brawler 6, CE)

A common thief hanged by the Duke on a whim, he came back as a vengeful ghost, whishing to inflict the same death he suffered on everyone else. He stalks the streets of Zeidenburg at night. *(Adventure Hook: The Strangling Man seems to be more active then usual; recently many people have been found strangled in the streets of Teufeldorf. The adventurers must investigate.)*

Reaper Emanuel Maryszkas
(Adult Human Cleric of Erlin 8, CE)

Emanuel is the current Reaper, the head priest of the Cathedral of the Scythe in Teufeldorf. A cruel and sadistic serial killer who tempers his bloodlust with patience and a shrewd mind, he is also ambitious, and has noticed that Atara Gundar the Grim Reaper, head of the Church of Erlin, is ailing. *(Adventure Hook: As the Grim Reaper belongs to the House of Gundar, Emanuel must be subtle if he wants to take her place, manipulating the adventurers to favor his goals and planning to use them as scapegoats.)*

Hereditary Duke Medraut Gundar
(Young Adult Dhampir Wizard 8, NE)

A prodigal child who learned the arcane arts when he was very young, Medraut is his father's son in every other aspect, and he is infamous for his devious mind. If only his father would acknowledge that. *(Adventure Hook: Medraut is secretly cursed. Affected with a permanently childish body he needs magical disguise to conceal. He is absolutely terrified of the idea of his father learning about this, unaware that the Duke already knows it, and he is preparing a ritual to break the curse, but he will need some help. Surely the adventurers would not refuse to lend a hand to a helpless child, now would they?)*

Professor Randall du Pree
(Middle-Aged Human Maledictive Weregorilla Wizard 6, LE)

Born in Dememtlieu, the former tutor of hereditary Duke Medraut, he was cursed with lychantropy for his sexual assault on a traveling seer. He is secretly on the payroll of neighbouring Invidia. *(Adventure Hook: Professor du Pree is satisfied the information he collected will be of great help to Queen Mother Gabrielle Aderre's plans. Now the problem is smuggling that information out of Gundarak without drawing suspicion to himself. Maybe the adventurers might be interested in helping him to bring a gift to his old good friend Viktor in Karina?)*

Bey Jacenti Girghiu
(Middle-aged Human Fighter 5, LN)

The conservative but honest Bey of Zeidenburg is the head of an old merchant House of Terg origin, with family ties to the Gundars and even to the von Zharoviches. He is rich, and uses his fortune to lighten the stranglehold the duke's politics have on Zeidenburg's economy. A shrewd administrator, he keeps both the city's and his family's coffers full. *(Adventure Hook: here we are again, Duke Nharov has had another "great idea" to raise funds and assert his control: taxing glass. After praising the Duke's ingenuity the Bey managed to subtly point out some difficulties with the application of the plan, and Nharov gave him leave to find an alternative. He has made an appointment with the guild of glassblowers in Teufeldorf, but he is worried about bandits, as Collectors and militiamen are otherwise occupied. He decides to hire the adventurers as extra bodyguards.)*

Monica Vardau
(Adult Human Gray Paladin of Ezra 9, LG)

This wandering healer, who has a good word for everyone, has keen eyes, sharp ears and sharper blades, and is always ready to bring justice to the corrupted brutes of the Duke. She is also the head of the Justice Bringers. *(Adventure Hook: Monica is always happy to lend a hand, but the adventurers will soon notice that in her there is more then meets the eye.)*

Juliska Ujvesce
(Adult Human, Rogue (Smuggler) 7, N)

Juliska is a tradeswoman who runs a dangerous trade, smuggling goods in and out of Zeidenburg without paying the Duke's outrageous taxes. *(Adventure Hook: when the adventurers save a nice-looking merchant woman from an apparent robbery, they do not suspect that the would-be attackers were Collectors, and now they are wanted criminals.)*

Grim Reaper Atara Gundar
(Old Dhampir Cleric of Erlin 11, NE)

The Head of the Church of Erlin, Atara is old, ailing, but still firmly in control of her church, and if one of her underlings thinks they can reap her soul... Well, they are welcome to try. The fact that she is the aunt of the Duke is only a small contributing factor of her relatively long reign as Grim Reaper. *(Adventure Hook: For all her life, Atara tried to impress her father, the man now all know as her nephew. As the Grim Reaper of the Church of Erlin, she has rebuilt the church into a very efficient tool for the Duke. What more she can do? Maybe find a solution for Nharov's condition? Well, maybe the ancient city of Taterttortf holds the secret in its libraries. Atara is sure that a generous amount of gold and some well-placed threats will convince the adventurers to be helpful in looking for it.)*

Ardonk Szerieza
(Adult Human Rogue (Guerrilla) 8, NG)

Ardonk the Bandit – as he is called by the Collectors of the Duke – or Ardonk the Fredom-fighter – as he is known to the Gundarakite villagers. Formerly a member of the Collectors, he refused to exterminate a family under the accusation of hiding some of their goats so as to not have to pay the excessive goat-tax. After killing his own companions, he ran off into the mountains, where he was saved by the Red Lion and charged with building an active resistance against the Duke. While the Red Lion is seen as the leader of the resistance, Ardonk is the chief commander of the Lion's Claws. *(Adventure Hook: Things are going well for the Lion's Claws; their rank are swelling and their influence grows. But Ardonk suspects there might be traitors in the ranks, and so he asks the Adventurers to discretely investigate.)*

Organizations

The Chaos Coursiers
This CN thieves' guild is the force that keeps the Gundarakite economy going – by smuggling goods in and out of the country while evading the outrageous taxes leveled by the Duke. Its members sport a black horse tattoo on their wrists.
(Dread Possibility: 'Pact with the Demon', How is it possible that the Coursiers never suffer more than a couple of members being executed every year, considering all the headaches they cause the Collectors? This could be explained if Antoniija has secretly made a pact with the Duke, providing him with a more effective expionage service in return for him ignoring a certain amount of smuggling.)

The Justice Bringers
This LG secret order of unorthodox Ezrite Paladins defend the Gundarakite people against the Duke's unjust laws; they brand the Symbol of their faith upon theyr chest.
(Dread Possibility: 'Radical Justice'. Gundarak is rotten, it can not be saved. A faction of the Justice Bringers, lead by Solomon Lothar (Adult Human Vindictive Bastard ex-Paladin of Ezra 7, LE) wants to abandon the surgical strikes of the order and attack the problem at its root: they are accumulating alchemist fire in great quantities and they will blow up the Duke, castle Hunadora and a good half of Zeinderburg ridding the world of this evil.)

The Collectors
This NE legalized gang of thugs, known for wearing black cloacks with the Gundar family crest of the crowned bloody axe with their motto, *Might is Right*, are the tax collectors, the police and the intelligence service of the Duchy. As a whole, they are a bunch of bumbling, corrupt brutes. They do have a number of competent and loyal officers and members who somehow manage to have them achieve occasional successes. Fear for Nharov is usually a good motivator, after all.
(Dread Possibility: 'Axe Bringers'. An elite team of well-trained Collectors, lead by the infamous Captain Gunther Regis (Adult Human Dreadaxe Fighter 10, NE), the Axe Bringers never bring in living prisoners, only severed heads. They are legendary since no one who sees them in action has ever lived to tell the story.)

The Lion's Claws
This NG guerrilla group opposes Nharov's taxation policies and rescues his prisoners, but avoid any direct confrontation. They give back the majority of their loot, only keeping as much as they need to keep fighting. They have a red lion on their headbands.
(Dread Possibility: 'the Traitor'. The Claws are the heroes, aren't they? Of course they are, even if the Collectors often come back after they have been repelled, and they are often worse than before; even if some of their recruits behave like the Collectors, bullying and taking by force what they need; even if whole villages are burned if they are suspected of helping the rebels, the Lion's Claws are the heroes. But what if there is one person in the top tier of their ranks who does not see them as heroes?)

The Darklord

Nharov Gundar Male Adult Eminent Nosferatu Vampire Unleashed Barbarian 15, NE (186 HP)
Speed: 60 feet
Initiative: +10 (+3 in Castle Hunadora)
Senses: Perception +33 (+3 in Castle Hunadora), Darkvision 60 Feet, True seeing.
Armor Class: 33, Touch 16, Flat Footed 27 (+6 Dex, +10 Nat, +7 Armor) (+3 in Castle Hunadora)
Space/Reach: 1 square /1 square
Combat Manouver Bonus/Combat Manouver Defense:+26/42 (+4 Bull Rush, +4 Sunder) (+3 in Castle Hunadora)
Str. 32, Dex. 23, Con. -, Int. 18, Wis. 24, Cha. 22
Saving Throws: Fort. +15, Ref. +11, Will +12 (+3 in Castle Hunadora)
Special Qualities: Curse of the Dark Lord, Undead Traits, Rage, Greater Rage, Danger Sense (+5), Uncanny Dodge, Improved Uncanny Dodge, Rage Powers (Brawler, Erratic Charge, Greater Brawler, Greater Erratic Charge, Improved Damage Reduction x3), Damage Reduction 15/ wood, Piercieng and Magic, or 9/-; Resistance 10 to Cold, Electricity and Sonic. Nosferatu Weakness, Cold Rage, Rejuvenation, Sinkhole of Evil 3, Shadowless (Ex), Spider Climb (Ex), Swarm Form (Su), Telepathy (Su).

Special Attacks: Blood Drain (Su), Create Spawn (Su), Dominate (Su), Telekinesis (Su), Aura of Fear (Su).

Attack: Melee 2 Claws +26 melee (1d6+11 x2) or +3 Unholy Greataxe +30/+25/+20 (1d12+19+2d6 against good targets) (+3 HR and DR in Castle Hunadora)

Skills: Acrobatics (+24), Climb (+32), Handle Animal (+24), Intimidate (+27), Perception (+33), Ride (+24), Sense Motive (+30), Stealth (+29) and Swim, (+29). (+3 in Castle Hunadora)

Feats: Alertness(B), Critical Focus, Furious Focus, Greater Bull Rush, Greater Sunder, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Initiative (B), Improved Sunder, Lightning Reflexes (B), Power Attack, Skill Focus (Climb) (B), Skill Focus (Intimidate) (B), Toughness (B), Weapon Focus (Axes)

Challenge Rating:17

Equipment: 2000 gp,*+4 Belt of Giant Strenght*, *+4 Headband of Alluring Charisma*, *Peacebringer* (+3 Unholy Greataxe), *Seal of House Gundar (*Ring of True Seeing*), +7 Bracers of Armor*, *Cloak of Sun Protection*.

Background

Nharov Gundar, the first of his name, was born

10 years after the Devil Strahd confined the Tergs to the Valley of the Gundar river. Orphaned at ten, as a youth he suffered greatly at the hand of bandits and petty lords in the lawless land, and he strove to become strong. After many years he managed to subjugate all the rival bands and to forge Gundarak into one country by fire and steel. He crowned himself Duke, in the style of Terg's commanders of old; but you can not rule a kingdom in the same way you rule a warband, so Nharov's first reign was a bloody one. He personally executed dozens of people, and took what he wanted regardless of the needs of his people, ferociously crushing any and all resistance. What he wanted included any woman he fancied, however, he took responsibility for any male children born from his dalliances, raising them personally. Having grown up without a mother, he unfortunately saw women as inferior, useful only as broodmares. One day, he took offense to a Priest of Zakhata who chided him for his brutality and condemned him to die, executing him himself on the altar of his god. He carved himself a cup from the man's holy chalice, out of which he drank the priest's blood. Such blasphemy could not go unpunished, and soon Nharov found himself craving blood. His addiction to human blood became stronger each day, until the day he went to hunt alone in a forest. He loved the act of killing, and he kept hunting until it was late and he felt thirsty. Without any source of human blood, he grew angrier as he was marching back to his camp, as he could not find his way back. Late in the night he met the pages who had been sent to retrieve him, and blinded by his mad thirst, he killed the three young boys and drank their blood, mindless of one of them being his own younger son. Once he realized what he had done, Nharov tried to take his own life, but death was not punishment enough for his crimes. That night Nharov Gundar sealed his fate, as the Mists rose to embrace him, turning him in a Nosferatu and the darklord of Gundarak.

Current Sketch

Nharov rules Gundarak with an iron fist; because of his curse, he still ages and dies regularly, needing time to regenerate himself. When he wakes up he needs to take back the reins of power from his descendants, undoing any change he does not like. He detests magic, but he acknowledges its practical value. His only redeeming quality is the love he feels for his children, even if that love is twisted and abusive. The fact that his children usually die by his hand is a bitter irony. His favorite hobby is arranging executions, which he often performs by himself. However, as a vampire, he would rather not waste blood; that is why he now prefers hangings over decapitations, which allow him to later feed on the preserved bodies. He has slightly amended his opinion with regard to females, begrudgingly admitting that they can have some utility beyond reproduction and pleasure. While whimsical and brutal, Nharov is quite intelligent and keeps things functioning. *Combat* Nharov loves physical combat and bloodshed. He unleashes his rage on his enemies, reveling in their fear. He will personally kill any worthy opponent, aiming to capture and torture those he deem inferior.

Special Abilities

Cold Rage (Ex):
Nharov's mind stays cruelly lucid when he throws himself into his fits of rage; he can use refined tactics (like dominating opponents) and skills even when raging.

Fear Aura (Su):
This power has a radius of 40 feet and Gundar can activate it with a swift action; ST Will, DC 23, and the victim is *shaken* if HD 11 or more, *frightened* if HD 10 or less. If used on a *frightened* victim, that victim becomes *panicked*; This power lasts 1d8 rounds when activated. A successful save means the victim is immune to it for 24 hours.

Curse of the Dark Lord: Nharov ages like a living human does, and even faster, and his Charisma takes penalty like a living person's Constitution; see Rejuvenation below for what happens when he dies. Nharov can use his children's blood to slow down his aging, but if he does it inflicts permanent Constitution damage on them. As Nharov ages, he develops a lot of flaws typical of old men, ranging from his sight worsening, to lower hearing, to memory-lapses and so on. He is vulnerable to disease and poisons, and he needs

to eat and drink normally once a week.
Rejuvenation:
When Nharov dies, his body ages to the Venerable category; he wakes as a feeble old man in his family tomb, and needs to feed from one of his children to restore his youth and full strength. (He needs to inflicts 5 points of permanent damage to one of his children's Constitution score to restore himself completely.)
Lair: Castle Hunadora is the massive fortress which houses the Dukes of Gundar; in its rooms and dungeons, several atrocities regularly happens, turning the castle into a Sinkhole of Evil rank 3, which can bestow the Despair, fear and Rage effects.

Closing the Borders

If Nharov wants to close the borders of Gundarak, anyone attempting to pass in or out of the land must pass a DC 27 Will save or become *panicked* and running in the opposite direction for 1 hour; creatures immune to fear are still vulnerable to this effect but get a +5 bonus to their save. Six consecutive, successful Will saves are required to allow someone to cross the closed borders uf Gundarak. Nharov can close the borders for a duration of up to one month.

Dread Alternatives

New Class Archetypes:
Dreadaxe *(Fighter)*
Dreadaxes are warriors specialized in tearing their foes apart using heavy and sharp axes.
Axe Grinding (Ex): At 3rd level, a Dreadaxe wielding an axe gains a +2 circumstance bonus on combat maneuver checks made to disarm, overrun, sunder, or trip. This ability replaces armor training 1.

Weapon Training (Ex): At 5th level, a dreadaxe must select axes and does not gain weapon training with other groups, though his weapon training bonus improves by +1 every four levels after 5th.

Tearing Down (Ex): At 7th level, when a Dreadaxe succeeds at a sunder combat maneuver, he can make a trip combat maneuver at the end of the sunder. If he does not break the foe's weapon or shield, the force of his blow may still trip his foe, but he takes a –5 penalty on the combat maneuver check to trip. At 15th level, any creature a dreadaxe successfully uses a sunder against is automatically knocked prone at the end of the sunder. This ability replaces armor training 2 and 4.

Slices to pieces (Ex): At 9th level, each time that a Dreadaxe hits a target, he gains a +2 bonus on damage rolls against that target. This bonus stacks with each hit against that target, but lasts only until the end of the Dreadaxe's turn. This ability replaces weapon training 2.

Giant Swing (Ex): At 11th level, as a standard action, a Dreadaxe may make a single melee attack with a weapon from the axe weapon training group. If the attack hits, he may make a sunder or trip combat maneuver against the target of his attack as a free action, which does not provoke an attack of opportunity. This ability replaces armor training 3.
Forest Sunder (Ex): At 13th level, as a full-round action, a Dreadaxe may strike a medium tree or column or other suitable object with his axe. If the damage dealt by the attack surpasses the object's hardness, the space it occupies become free, albeit *difficult* terrain and all squares up to the object's height became difficult terrain. Creatures in those squares, except for the Dreadaxe, are knocked prone (DC 15 Reflex negates) and immobilized (Strength 15 or Escape Artist 15 to free themselves). This ability replaces weapon training 3.
Axe Master (Ex): At 17th level, any combat feats a Dreadaxe has learned with any weapon from the axe weapon training group (e.g., Improved Critical, Weapon Focus) apply to all weapons from that group. This ability replaces weapon training 4.

Devastating Blow (Ex): At 19th level, as a standard action, a Dreadaxe may make a single melee attack with a weapon from the axe weapon training group at a –7 penalty. If the attack hits, it is treated as a critical threat. Weapon special abilities that only activate on a critical hit do not activate if this critical hit is confirmed. This ability replaces armor mastery.

Weapon Mastery (Ex): A Dreadaxe must choose a weapon from the axe group.

Secrets of the City Watch

Richemuloese Watch Companies

By Michail Adamis (Mephisto of the FoS)

A secret is like a dove: when it leaves my hand it takes wing.
— Arabian Proverb

As there is little to no information in Richemulot about events before 694 BC, no one knows what kind of event lead to the abolishment of an organized, constituted body of persons empowered by the state to enforce law and order in the domain. Theoretical historians from the department of Historie Raisonnée of the University of Richemulot have speculated that it may have been the result of an aristocratic revolt against an oppressive authority, but no one can say for certain. Whatever the reason, the result is that peace in Richemulot is maintained by the private soldiers of noble houses. Nearly all aristocrats retain a trusted entourage of enforcers, while some families maintain small private armies. The city watch is one of the few things granted to public welfare by the aristocracy, probably in response to demands by the general populace, although this is still just speculation.

Each of the most powerful noble families who own holdings in the three cities of Richemulot contribute experienced soldiers to serve as city watchmen.

These watch are organizations with strong traditions; for the most, members of the city watch have a strong sense of honor and duty, but all proudly display their insignia and station to impress the populace. These pretentious displays are based in part on ceremonial custom, but these companies mainly dress so as to stand out from each other, as they are highly competitive. This is because each company is allied to different noble houses.

Most companies claim to be the oldest watch company in their city, something that can never be proven or denied; only new-founded companies can definitely be said to have a shorter lineage than any of the older groups. In spite of their differences, the watch companies are generally cooperative amongst each other, as they face many threats in the urban streets. Still, even when threatened in the streets at night, it would be wise to know the allegiance of a company before asking for their help, as they are each partial to the noble houses that sponsor them. The Reniers are the only family to sponsor watch companies in all three cities of Richemulot, though the majority of their sponsorship is centered on Pont-a-Museau.

The following description of Richemuloise city watches are separated by cities. In every one of them there is a description and the affiliation of the specific watch company with a noble house. Then each description is followed by the requirements needed to enter a specific watch company and its general alignment, as well as distinct clothing and equipment worn, besides the voluminous, hoodless black cloaks they all wear. The city watches' alignment does not necessarily reflect members of the specific group, but the general direction they have as a whole, depending on orders they get and the ruthlessness they may display. The Dread Possibilities describe rumors regarding the city watch companies and their sponsor noble Houses.

Apart from maintaining civil order, watchmen are tasked in general with informing their sponsor House of any valuable information gained. It is assumed that Jacqueline Renier knows most of them, solidifying her power through the information she gathers.

All watchmen take the Favored Feat as a bonus feat, gaining a +2 bonus on the specific watchman company's associated skill as long as they are members of that watch company.

Pont-a-Museau

This magnificent "floating" city built on the Musarde is perhaps one of the most notorious to walk during the night. Parts of it are renowned for the beauty of their settings, their architecture and artwork, but there is another side to it; darker, with danger lurking in every alley, every corner. As a city that houses more than 16.000 people, it has the most city watchmen in Richemulot, belonging to forteen different companies, all of them claiming to be the oldest and maintaining a tradition of centuries that is thought to be forgotten.

Pont-a-Museau is one of the most difficult places to guard in all of the domains, as the intricate network of streets and maze of narrow alleys, stairways, small ports, bridges, misty riverbanks and uninhabited neighborhoods make it easy for any criminal activity, such as theft or murder, to thrive, as well as to become lost. The city's streets at night are dark and foreboding, without lights. Travelling without a lighted latern is punishable by a heavy fine (50gp); this law is enforced by any of the watch companies encountered. As in all the rat-infested cities of Richemulot, one of the worst encounters anyone can have is with wererats, be it in societal intrigues or on the streets.

***Casques Safran* (Saffron Helmets)**

Commander: Jules Audrix
Sponsor: House Renier (Wererats)
Recognition: Copper plated *Cassis Crista* helmets with saffron plume crest and black and orange uniforms
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Requirements: Non-Richemuloise who do not possess holdings or family in the land, Sharp Ears feat
Benefit: +2 on all Listen checks

This city watch is assembled entirely out of proficient, non-native mercenaries, it's origins are speculated to be traced in a time where brutal gladiatorial matches were the status quo, as they are now in neighbouring Falkovnia. It is forbidden for members of this city watch to claim ownership of a house or have family in Richemulot, making them both dependent on the organization and unsusceptible to the use of their family for them to be blackmailed by noble rival families. This way, House Renier is protected from "corruption" of its watchmen against themselves. These rules make this group probably the most loyal in Richemulot. They obey their commander, Jules Audrix, a minor noble, and thus la Grande Dame without question. Their headquarters *la Arène* (the Arena) is situated close to la Place d' Etoiles.

Dread Possibility: Deadly Hypothesis

Theoretical historians of the department of Historie Raisonnée of the University of Richemulot have speculated that the watch company has taken its name from the words *Za'far an*, meaning year of Za'far, known also as Zagaz, a demon worshipped by the Tergs. They theorize that the company originates from gladiatorial fights organised in ancient times as sacrifices to this god. This claim could give them a claim to being the oldest watch company in the land of Mists, but also attract unwanted attention towards them. With this kind of association, the company could potentially be regarded as demon worshippers and thus lose the sponsorship of the Grande Dame, as she will not want to have her name associated with such rumors. So far, Jules Audrix has managed to keep this historical hypothesis secret. The professors of the department recently had a fatal accident on a bridge in Pont-a-Museau, and the University is searching for new professors for the department. If evidence of Jules' connection to the deaths of these professors ever comes to light, it will be a lot more damaging than a rumor about a demon cult, both to him and to Jacqueline Renier, as she could be accused of being biased. Jacqueline does not yet know of Audrix's actions; if anyone finds evidence linking Audrix to the murders, they could use it to blackmail Audrix and undermine Jacqueline's rule. Naturally any such information is extremely hazardous for the one who has it, and they should play their cards right if not at all, considering the strong possibility that they could also end up floating in the Musarde as the University professors were.

***Colombes Blanches* (White Doves)**

Commander: Gabriel Armindain
Sponsor: House DuBois
Recognition: Gray-white uniforms and breastplates embossed with the image of a feather.
Alignment: Lawful Good
Requirements: Good alignment, Urban Tracking feat
Benefit: +2 on all Search checks



Pont-a-Museau

1. Château de la Nuit
2. Château Des Astre
3. Château de l'Aurore
4. Château de l'Tune
5. Château du Crepuscle
6. Château de l'Obscurité
7. Château de l'Aube
8. La Place des Etoiles
9. Légion Etrangèrl
10. Donjon Blanc
11. L'Observatoire
12. Fosse aux Lions
13. Aube Cramoisie
14. La Cendre
15. Maison de la Mer
16. Le Sanctuaire de Bronze
17. Le Trou des Ræts
18. Nid de Corbeau
19. Grotte des Loups
20. La Salle de Fer
21. L'Artre
22. Coques de Sanglier
23. Ierretiere
24. Le Grand Theatre de Musardve
25. L'Academie de Richemulot
26. La Cathédrale de la Peste Destiné
27. Port La Pierre
28. L'Etroit (The Narrows)

The *Colombes Blanches* company is known as one of the few defenders of impartiality and goodness in Pont-a-Museau. Although the DuBois family does not own holdings in Pont-a-Museau, the House has decided to sponsor the *Colombes Blanches* as part of their search for Henri DuBois, the youngest son of the family, who vanished a few years ago. Along with their city watch duties, the *Colombes Blanches* are also assigned to search for information on Henri DuBois' whereabouts.

Dread Possibility: The Prodigal Son
As revealed in *Van Richtens Society Research Files: Doppelgangers* (p.173), Henry DuBois is a doppelganger named Mardu the Bronze, who has replaced the real Henri DuBois. Jacqueline has, through her proxies, approached and blackmailed a member of the *Colombes Blanches* to act as her informer, as she is desperately seeking the whereabouts of the man she loves. If any information regarding Henry is discovered by the *Colombes Blanches*, she will surely know about it. Her informer is also tasked to relate any information regarding potential enemies to Jacqueline.

Observateurs des Bateaux **(Boat Watchers)**
Commander: Cédric D'Arnais
Sponsor: House Rémy (Wererats)
Recognition: yellow and green uniforms, their helmets are shaped like a *risso*, an ornamental piece of a gondola, whose design is influenced by the shape of a seahorse and sits at the stern of the boat. Sickly dark green lined cloacks.
Alignment: Neutral Evil
Requirements: Jaded feat
Benefit: +2 on all Use Rope checks

As suggested by its name, this city watch company basically patrols the banks of the Musarde and the various islands of Pont-a-Museau. Their headquarters are located on Lacheur island, an island full of empty houses notorious for night attacks on anyone foolish enough to visit after dusk. They are known among the criminals of the city to "offer" protection to smugglers who use the river for their illicit transactions, their motto is "A boat is safe in the harbor".

Dread Possibility: Private investigators and agitators I
The *Observateurs des Bateaux* know almost everything that transpires in the various small ports of Pont-a-Museau, controlling the coastal underworld of this city. It is essentially Pont-a-Museau's criminal guild, and all smugglers pay tribute fees to them. What only the people involved know, is that recently the city watch company has gone one step too far, having associated with Nova Vaasan slavers by kidnapping people in the streets. They are not foolish enough to attract unwanted attention to themselves by doing this in their home city though, choosing the city of Ste. Ronges instead. The chaotic nature of Ste. Ronges makes it easier for them to conduct their abductions. Their contact is a shady upstart criminal lord in Ste. Ronges known only as *Lame Grise* (Greyblade).

Lions de La Rue **(Street Lions)**
Commander: Isidore Flandin
Sponsor: House de Lione
Recognition: Steel breastplates with gold finish, embossed with lion's heads, black uniforms and black cloaks with dark red lining.
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Requirements: Investigator feat
Benefit: +2 on all Decipher Script checks

The *Lions de La Rue* are a respected city watch company renowned for providing justice, law and order in Pont-a-Museau's crime-ridden streets. The *Lions* have a rivalry with the *Soleils Craimoisi* watch company, which provoke them at every chance they get. The *Lions* are tasked to find out what has happened to manservant Pierre (*The Torturer's Mark, Champions of Darkness* p. 106)

Soleils Craimoisi **(Crimson Suns)**
Commander: Alphonse Lumière
Sponsor: House Montremart (Wererat)
Recognition: Crimson sun insignia on their breastplates and black cloaks with golden lining.
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Requirements: Unseen feat
Benefit: +2 on all Bluff checks

The golden-cloaked *Soleils Craimoisi* watch company has an enmity against the *Lions de La Rue*, mostly because of the rivalry between the heads of their respective noble sponsors. They are tasked with finding damaging information on the Lord of House Lione, Dr. Sacripant de Lione.

Dread Possibility: Private investigators and agitators II

While the *Lions de La Rue* are tasked with discovering the circumstances of Pierre's gruesome death, the *Soleils Craimoisi* are tasked with secretly sabotaging these efforts, even resorting to violence if they deem it is necessary.

***Phénix Doré* (Golden Phoenix)**
Commander: Yoann Donnet
Sponsor: House Richelieu (Wererats)
Recognition: Embossed heraldry of a golden phoenix rising from its ashes, red and gold uniforms and black cloaks with gold and red lining.
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Requirements: Appraise Magic Value feat
Benefit: +2 on all Forgery checks

The *Phénix Doré* are probably the most sophisticated of the city watch companies of Pont-a-Museau. Specializing in the recovery of stolen artworks and the discovery of magical items and forgeries, they are mainly preoccupied with these activities, rather than protecting the streets. They are known to not pay much attention to commoners unless they are bribed to act, as they see themselves as the elite of city watchmen and above petty street-crimes. Their headquarters *la Cendre* (The Ash) is a gray building situated upon the Craindre Island, which adjoins l'Isle Delanuit.

Dread Possibility: Objets d'Art

Originally known as House Josquin of Richemulot so they would not be confused with the Josquins who preside over Chateau Josquin in Dementlieu, the family's name was shortened over the years to simply be 'Richelieu'. The family is a big name in mercantile circles, and they are known to support a fair number of auctions selling fine antiques, curios, and pieces of art. One of their biggest clients is Marquis Stezen d'Polarno of East Riding, who regularly receives pieces of art along with people responsible for them. Sometimes the merchandise is returned as the Marquis is not interested in buying, but the caretakers never are. House Josquin is based on a well-made scam; a large percent of the objects they sell are in fact forgeries. The members of *Phénix Doré* are tasked with searching for stolen items and forgeries, confiscating them and reselling those of exquisite craftsmanship.

***Ancre d'Argent* (Silver Anchor)**
Commander: Maël De la Cour
Sponsor: House Delmore (Wererats)
Recognition: Breastplates embossed with a silver anchor and an anchor tattoo on their right hand. They wear black cloaks with navy blue lining.
Alignment: Neutral Evil
Requirements: Aquatic Shot feat
Benefit: +2 on all Intimidate checks

The *Ancre d'Argent* claim they are the oldest city watch company, created in a time when Pont-a-Museau was close to the sea, based on the various marine insignia found in the house they occupy as their headquarters, *Maison de la Mer* (House of the Sea). The old marble mansion, inlaid with mosaics of sea creatures, is famous for the marble and glass tank aquaria holding white sea catfish of unknown origin, as they were the only inhabitants of the house when it was first occupied.

Dread Possibility: *La Maison du Monstre Marin*

The *Maison de la Mer* aquaria do not just display the exotic breed of fish that occupied the estate. In a secret chamber on the sub-level of the manor, there is a large, circular tank of marble and strong glass that occupies most of the room. Swimming around almost ceaselessly inside of it, there is a reaver that was caught some years ago in *Le Lac Halètemens* at the heart of *les Champs Silencieux*. The watch company uses the sea creature to intimidate people that owe Maël De la Cour money, as the commander has a second job as a loan shark. There are times when the watchmen even feed the monster with people who can not pay their loans or criminals they have caught.

***Talon Cassés* (Broken Talon)**
Commander: Tanguy Cuivre
Sponsor: House Tuvache (Wererats)
Recognition: Breastplate with copper finish, embossed with the image of a man inside a circle, his outstretched arms and legs severed. Black uniform and cloak with white lining.
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Requirements: Dead Man Walking feat
Benefit: +2 on all Craft (Clockmaking) checks

The Talons Cassés originally took their name from a mythical creature named Talos (Τάλως), a giant, bronze automaton depicted guarding the islands of Pont-a-Museau from river pirates and invaders on the ancient murals found in the headquarters of this watch company, *le Sanctuaire de Bronze* (The Bronze Sanctuary). Although they know of their name's origin, the company has proudly changed its meaning as to mean Broken Talons, referring to the elite of Vlad Drakov's army, which is itself named after the band the mercenary king once lead: "The Talons of the Hawk". Rival city watch companies have also changed the meaning of this company's name as to mean Broken Heels or Broken Ankles, ridiculing them openly in the streets.

Dread Possibility: Jerretiere
Jerretiere is located in the northeast corner of the city, directly over an underground canal that flows into the Musarde River. It is the ancestral home of the Tuvache family, a noble House of wererats. The tiny walled estate now belongs to Madame Araby Tuvache of House Dunsany, the widow of the patriarch Renault Tuvache. Many years ago, his then young wife, upon discovering her husband's true nature, was traumatized by the discovery and driven mad. She purchased silver-mercurium, an expensive alchemical poison, and successfully murdered him. Madame Tuvache's attempt was only successful because she was lucky enough to have unknowingly acquired poison that contained her husband's allergen, mercury, even if it *had* cost a fortune. Renault had made an alliance with Claude Renier, and their deaths coincided. Although there were rumors that his wife poisoned him, none of his family or associates retaliated, as the various family alliances changed and he was mostly hated.
Madame Tuvache managed to support herself and create elaborate clockworks in the Tuvache ancestral home, financing her expensive projects by luring people inside her house and trapping them in the basement before murdering them and stealing their valuables. She managed to create clockworks of ingenious mechanical engineering and automata, using the bodies of her victims. Although undeniably macabre, her accomplishments made her Puppetworks and the whole clockwork engineering of Jerretiere one of the greatest mechanical works in the known world.
When a group of adventurers were trapped by her but managed to escape and kill her (*Last Dance, Dungeon Magazine* #64), Madame Tuvache's will and spirit were so powerful that she became a Greater Animator, an evil spirit that inhabits inanimate objects and uses them to create negative emotions so as to feed upon them. Madame Tuvache's spirit inhabited the house itself, making it come to 'life'. Jerretiere still lures people inside the house by ringing the clock tower bell at odd times, attracting those who do not give heed to the saying 'curiosity killed the cat'. Jacqueline Renier knows that some powerful entity is present in the house, but has been unable so far to discover who or what it is.

Silver Mercurium
Although Renault Tuvache's death due to poisoning did not even raise an eyebrow, the means of his poisoning will surely do more than that. Silver Mercurium is a highly toxic substance that might have killed Renault Tuvache due to his allergen being mercury, or it is indeed a magical poison that can be used to kill lycanthropes of all varieties. If the second is true, then the existence of such a poison will surely attract the attention of Jacqueline Renier, as it would be lethal to her as well. If information about this poison reach the ears of la Grande Dame, she will surely wish to acquire a sample to test it, and anyone who is discovered carrying such a lethal weapon is going to be approached by the darklord and interrogated one way or another to learn where they purchased

it. The poison was created by Flamel de Vanens, an alchemist and poisoner living in Pont-a-Museau, who has recently been approached by his neighbor, a midwife by the name of Catherine Monvoisin. The midwife claims that many of the noble families for whom she has delivered their children are wererats. She says there is a pattern where twins, triplets and quadruplets in families are a sign of a lycanthropic birth. She is determined to buy the deadly drug and use it against the families she believes are wererats. The only thing preventing her is her lack of the amount of money needed to buy the poison. It will not be long before she begins stealing expensive objects from houses she visits.

Only Flamel de Vanens (Urban Druid 5, CN) knows the secret for creating *silver mercurium* and he is very cautious of how to distribute it, as he knows that if word of his poison were to reach the wrong ears, his days will be numbered. *Silver Mercurium* can be applied to a weapon as though it were alchemical silver, with the difference that duration is not an hour but rather until a hit is scored. One vial holds a large enough dose to coat one dagger-sized object for one use or to poison up to 10 people if administered to food or drink.

***Silver Mercurium* (magical poison):** Ingested, Injury, Fortitude save (DC 15); initial damage 1d10 temporary Constitution, secondary damage 1d10 temporary Constitution; *Caster Level*: 5th; *Prerequisites*: Craft Wondrous Item, poison; *Market Price* 1000 gp/dose

***Attrape-Ræts* (Ratcatchers)**

Commander: Boris Lebas
Sponsor: House Herbert
Recognition: Breastplate with the image of three mice running parallel to each other.
Alignment: Chaotic Good
Requirements: Strong Stomach feat
Benefit: +2 on all Knowledge (Monster Lore [Vermin]) checks

Attrape-Ræts is perhaps the most daring of the city watch companies of Pont-a-Museau. as they do not hesitate to inspect the upper sewer levels of the city. If they are on a chase to save someone, they will go even deeper into the elaborate maze of sewers beneath the city. For this reason, they are also called *Vermin du Pont* (Vermin of the Bridge), as they are often covered in sewage by the end of their shift. Their headquarters *le Trou des Ræts* is located on the east bank of Pont-a-Museau, in one of the most notorious neighborhoods in the city: *L'Étroit* (The Narrows).

Dread Possibility: Fatal Attraction

Boris Lebas is a Borcan refugee in his early thirties, the son of a minor baron who was sent to Richemulot by his family after he caught the eye of *Sefeasa* Ivana Boritsi, 'the Black Widow', with whom he was infatuated. Even though most aristocrats indulge in a life of debauchery, Boris never feared to make his hands dirty and work the family's vineyards along with the farmers of his father's land. His father, a war veteran of the Widow's Massacre, had taught him how to fight, something that proved useful in the urban environment that was then unfamiliar to him. It did not take long for him to take full citizenship and join the honored *Attrape-Ræts* city watch company. His fighting expertise and bravery earned him the respect of his peers as he rose through the ranks, eventually becoming their commander. Since the time he became commander, the *Attrape-Ræts* have become one of the most renowned groups of the city watch, hunting vermin of all sizes in every corner of the city, saving children and adults alike and proving Boris Lebas is a natural born leader.

But there is something that has been gnawing at his very being for years now, ever since he was awarded the key to the city for his services by le Grande Dame herself as one of the youngest people ever to be awarded that honor. Since that day, he can not help but continuously think about Jacqueline Renier - but this is no mere crush, as his attraction to her is slowly becoming more and more deviant, ripening and rotting into an obsessive desire that could lead him to compulsively stalk her. If that happens, it will not be long before Boris sees Jacqueline going into the sewers and follows her. That in turn could end up with Boris Lebas in a twisted version of the story of Actaeon from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which will end with him transformed into one of the very monsters he has pursued and being hunted down by his own rat-catchers.

***Corbeaulames* (Crowblades)**
Commander: Marcelle Brunot
Sponsor: House Joubert (Wererats)
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Recognition: Black garment and breastplate and a black cloak with crow feathers at the shoulders.
Requirements: Mimicry feat
Benefit: +2 on all Disguise checks

The *Corbeaulames* seem like a grim group of black-clad ruffians, with nothing to do with the heroics of their founder *Corbeauplume*. They behave more like a racketeering gang selling their protection to the stores of the city, and there is a belief that sometimes you can never know whether the person you are talking to is a *Corbeaulame*, as they are masters of disguise.

Dread Possibility: Lucky Bastard
House Joubert was founded by Gérard Joubert, an alleged hero of the Borderlands Wars between Richemulot and Falkovnia, who was previously known as '*Corbeauplume*' (Ravenfeather). The stories say that he led a small group of men and women to fight the Hawk's army in the forests of Richemulot. He was not awarded anything for his heroic deeds by the Renier until after the death of Claude Renier in 726 BC. When Jacqueline Renier took power, one of the first acts she performed was to grand Gérard the rank of Lord-Knight. For the rest of his life, however, Gérard became a social recluse and House Joubert remained in the backlines of Richemuloise politics for decades, though it still kept up with its civic duty by sponsoring a watch company: the *Corbeaulames*. So things remained until Gérard's son Marin, born to Gérard's young wife of House Farrand (another reward from la Grande Dame), took over the House upon his father's demise at the tender age of seventeen. The current ruler of the House has proven to be a shrewd and cunning player of the Great Game, launching his family's name to the forefront of the textile industry and general trade in Richemulot in but a decade - though truthfully, there has not only been good news for the House. Marin's wife had birthed him only daughters, and some say that in a fit of rage and lust, he bedded one of the house maids at his service. The child that came consequently was publicly said to be a bastard by Marin's enemies, though the claims have been denied fervently. Today, some twenty five years after the scandal, the House seems to thrive and remain in a comfortable place in Pont-a-Museau's upper class scene. Marin Joubert's daughters have all but one been married off to cement alliances to other houses, and remain active socialites and known figures at the city's many balls. Colette, the youngest daughter, has been enlisted in the local academy and become a noticeably proficient wielder of the arcane arts. Joubert's only son, Valerian, was known to be a soft-hearted, naive and reckless youth, until an accident rendered him bedridden for half a year. When he recovered, his father sent him away, the family's heirloom sword in hand, to find his fortune elsewhere - with the young man's heretofore consistently high and energetic spirits at a shattered, all-time low. His fate remains a mystery to most in the city, and even to some members of his family. The truth is that Morgane Gannu of House Farrand was Aaron Gannu's sister and a natural wererat. Her son Marin was also a wererat, as are all of his children – but not Valerian. Although Marin tried to infect the boy with lycanthropy, it seems that Valerian is highly resistant to the curse. There is good reason for this, as Valerian is not really Marin's son, but the product of an illicit affair between his human wife Gaël and Maurice DuBois. As Valerian has grown older, he has come to look a lot like his uncle Henri DuBois, who Jacqueline Renier is enamored with.

***Loups Fous* (Mad Wolves)**
Commander: Arsène Legros
Sponsor: House Cynewald (Werewolves)
Recognition: Breastplates with silver finish, embossed with a wolfs head and black wolf pelt cloaks.
Alignment: Chaotic Neutral
Requirements: Brawler Feat
Benefit: +2 on all Endurance checks

Although the *Loups Fous* is an old city watch company, its patron's reclusive life and indifference with power games, as well as his lack of proper Richemuloise manners, has made the

whole group adept and become relaxed with regards to the dictations of societal norms. To most Richemuloise, they appear no less barbaric than the House that they are allied with. It is not rare for this group of men to be seen patrolling the streets drunk and howling, behavior not befitting of a city watch company, and they are regarded as a nuisance. If it was not for their prowess in battle, some of the other city watch companies would like to arrest them for loitering or disorderly conduct.

Dread Possibility: The Pelted Werewolf

Standing as one of the most recently established houses in the lands of Richemulot, House Cynewald has not even seen a generation pass since the family was elevated into the ranks of the petty nobility of Pont-a-Museau from the dismal woodlands of Arkandale – or by some accounts, the wilderness of Verbrek. They are viewed as savages by the other houses and are ridiculed as upstarts and oddities; they are barely tolerated in social encounters amongst the gentry. No one knows why these barbarians were granted sanctuary and laughable titles within the city, but rumor has it that it was for a minor service they provided to their betters. Not much is known about this 'noble' family, most of it based on rumor, but they have been viewed attending social events wearing pelts and their heraldic symbol seems to be an anachronistic image of a black mark resembling claw marks on a blood-red background. Members of the House itself do little to gain the respect of the other noble families. The family's patriarch, Herveig Cynewald (CN affflicted werewolf barbarian 7/ aristocrat 1) lives in isolation in his aged, crumbling estate, either by choice or due to some affliction he suffers from, and is rarely seen in public. The few people who enter the mansion are merchants and envoys seeking to negotiate trade for pelts and timber from Verbrek,which that the family imports. Recently, there have been hushed rumors of all Cynewald members who have grown to viable age leaving the estate and the domain for unknown reasons. Rumors say that the youngest family member to leave, Herveig's youngest son Teryn (CE natural werewolf ranger 1) was spotted in the Republic of Dementlieu, serving within Port-a-Lucine in the garb of the Gendarme. The truth is that Herveig Cynewald has been a bounty hunter in the service of the Reniers for many years, hunting for them in the werewolf-infested forests or Arkandale and Verbrek. Unfortunately for him, he did not remain unscathed by the services he offered to the noble family, as he was maimed by a werewolf he was hunting for the Reniers and became infected with lycanthropy himself. The werewolf he was hunting was none other than Natalia Vhorishkova, but because of a Silver Amulet of the Beast Herveig was wearing, she could not trigger his transformation and he did not learn he was cursed with lycanthropy until it was too late. Herveig moved to Richemulot with his family after many years of service to the Reniers, and settled in a crumbling estate in Pont-a-Museau. He knew he would never be accepted as a noble in Richemuolise society, but he did not care. On the contrary, his wife Mirna was truly excited to move to the city. Sadly, one night with a full moon, as the couple were arguing about going to l*a Mascarade Argenté*, Herveig's amulet fell off and he transformed. killing his wife. Fortunately for him, his children were sleeping over with some commoner friends of theirs and as the family were used to taking care of themselves, there were no servants living in the estate. The next day, Herveig disposed of his wife's corpse and made it look as if she disappeared into the night. He spent the following years researching for the dreaded disease and seeking a way to cure himself of it. In the course of his research, he was horrified to realize that his children may have been born with the terrible curse. Hoping to avert the outcome of his four children becoming werewolves, Herveig did everything he could to track Natalia Vhorishkova and destroy her, hoping that this way he could save his children. So far, his three sons have all proven to have been born with lycanthropy, fleeing the country after their first transformations as the natural enmity between werewolves and wererats would mean their deaths. This is also one of the reasons Herveig continues to avoid social gatherings. Herveig fears that his only daughter Gerta might also be a lycanthrope. He hopes to kill Natalia before his daughter changes, falsely hoping that this way she has a chance to be cured of the dreaded

curse. He has focused most of his efforts on Verbrek, sending mercenary groups to find Natalia, but his efforts have so far proved fruitless as the wily werewolf avoids the lands of her ancestral home Arkandale, which now belong to Verbrek.

Verts Vibrants **(Vibrant Greens)**
Commander: Zahir Vorkatis
Sponsor: House De Silvaire
Recognition: Gold-finished breastplate embossed with an iron fist, and vibrant green loose Hazlani clothing, as well as a black cloak with vibrant green lining.
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Requirements: Rashemani, Blindfight feat
Benefit: +2 on all Perform (Dance) checks

This watch company consisting exclusively of Rashemani *derviş* warriors devoted to the Lawgiver with a specific fighting style made up of any kind of battle acrobatics and dancing moves. This includes a whirling sword dance called *Samna,* where the participants move as a group in a circle, while also turning individually. These warriors appear to be in a spiritual trance when fighting, but are actually very focused on their surroundings. The *Verts Vibrants* is one of the newest city watch companies, sponsored by House De Silvaire, a relatively new noble House. The patriarch of the House, Ridvan De Silvaire (known in Hazlan as Ridvan of Sly-Var), is of Mulan descent and has enlisted Hazlani immigrants for the *Verts Vibrants*. When they were first formed, the short and sturdily-built Rashemani in their green clothes were ridiculed with the nickname *Grenouilles Vivantes* (Living Frogs), but this name has now been forgotten and they are commonly referred to as *Danseurs de Lame* (Blade Dancers).

Dread Possibility: The Cult of the Lawgiver
Ridvan De Silvaire is a religious Mulan fanatic, who sent to Richemulot by the *Himmelsk Naeve* himself, along with a congregation of warmongers to spread the commands of their god. The religion's Vaasicentricity, ordaining that any language other than Vaasi in its rites and texts is heresy, makes conversion of people outside Nova Vaasa and Hazlan next to impossible. In spite of this, the *Himmelsk Naeve* believes that since Richemulot lacks a legitimate monarch, it is his duty to try to install one, especially one of divine providence such as Ridvan. Ridvan's wealth comes exclusively from the Church of the Lawgiver, but as rumors circulate that he is involved in slave trade, it will not be long before aggression against the *Verts Vibrants* starts to build. The truth is that the watch company is not involved with the slave trade at all. Jacqueline Renier knows about the *Himmelsk Naeve*'s plan to install a monarch in Richemulot, and since the Mulan seems to be incorruptible, she decided to take things in her own hands.

Bosquet de Cyprès **(Cypress Grove)**
Commander: Mathis Brugère
Sponsor: House Lavern (Wererats)
Recognition: Cypress green uniforms and cypress tree-embossed breastplate.
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Requirements: Skywise feat
Benefit: +2 on all Survival checks

Bosquet de Cyprès claim to be the continuation of an order of druids that lived in a cypress grove before Pont-a-Museau was even built. Their claim is 'supported' by murals in their headquarters, *Arbre de Vie et de Mort* (Tree of Life and Death), which most refer to simply as *L'Arbre* (The Tree).

Dread Possibility: ***Commerce aux Champs Silencieux***
House Lavern is currently assisting Nova Vaasan slavers to transverse the woods of the Silent Hills undetected by sending members of the *Bosquet de Cyprès* as guides. They have ties with the Nova Vaasan underworld and correspond with the crime lord Malken. Recently, one of their messengers who was carrying incriminating information about their involvement in the slave trade has gone missing. This information is enough to bring ruin to one of the oldest noble families of Richemulot.



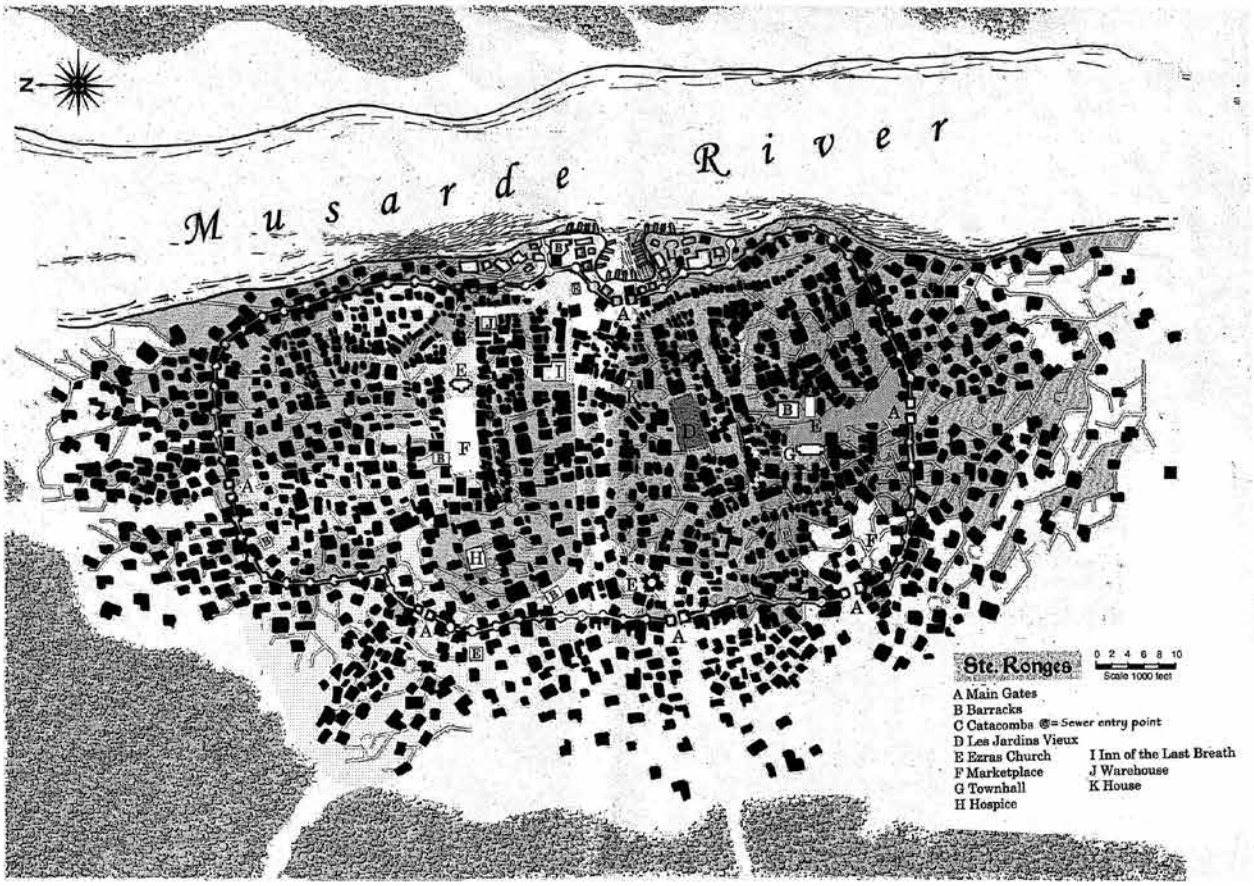
***Coques de Sanglier* (Boar Husks)**
Commander: Barnabé Vatin
Sponsor: House Eamon
Recognition: Masterwork breastplate embossed with a boar's head, dark grey uniforms
Alignment: Lawful Neutral
Requirements: Improved Overrun feat
Benefit: +2 on all Knowledge (Nature) checks

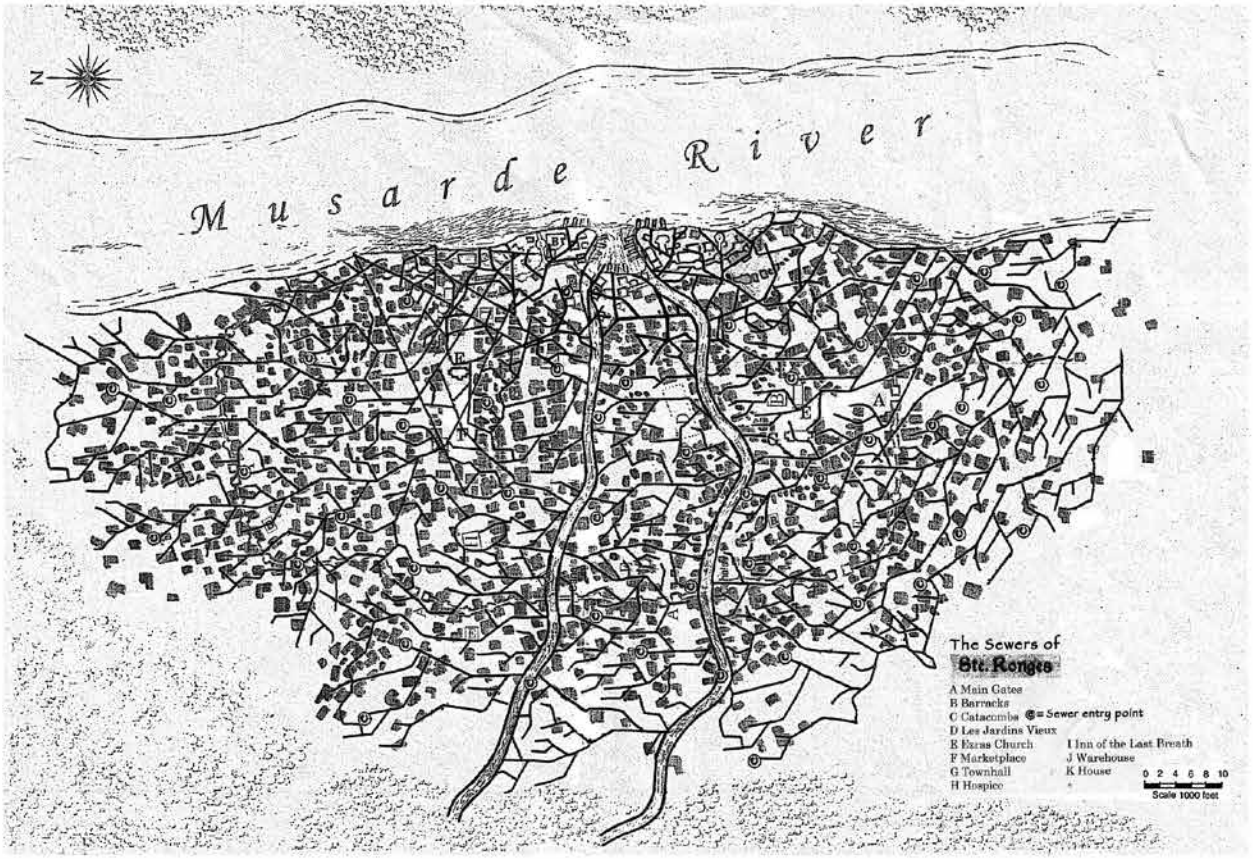
House Eamon is one of the richest and oldest in Richemulot, a fact reflected in the equipment of *Coques de Sanglier*, which are made of the finest Rongeise steel. This city watch company displays an astonishing unity if even a single member of it is ever challenged to battle, owing to their motto "*tous pour um, un pour tous*" (all for one, one for all). If one member is challenged, all swarm into battle like a stampede of angry animals. Their commander Barnabé Vatin is a large, imposing man with thick sideburns and a bovine look on his face.

Dread Possibility: *Le faux Sanglier-garou*
Barnabé Vatin is a dandy, fond of fashionable clothes and keen to make a fortune for himself. This will probably take a long time as he spends most of his money on beer and prostitutes. He is not a very clever man, but he compensates for this with his great strength of body and his joyful character. There have been rumors about a wereboar attacking the fields outside the city, and if anyone investigates they will surely notice that the attacks coincide with commander Vatin's late night outings. Though Barnabé is indeed going out of the city during late hours, he does this because he has discovered the lair of a nymph; he goes out during the night to secretly admire the beautiful creature. The rumors of a wereboar stalking the fields outside the city are false, created by Jacqueline in an effort to get rid of Barnabé as he declined her attempts to enlist him as her informer against House Eamon. As it is difficult for Jacqueline to dispose of Barnabé because of his enormous strength and the backlash that could come from enraging *Coques de Sanglier*, she hopes that gullible adventurers may be directed into get riding of Barnabé Vatin for her.

Ste. Ronges

Although Ste. Ronges has nothing in common with the chaotic city-planning of Pont-a-Museau, that does not make it any less dangerous. The lack of a competent central authority figure and the constant disputes among the local nobility have left the city victim to bandit gangs and militias, who compete for control of areas of the city. Ste. Ronges is notorious for its criminal activity, which is nearly on the same level as Kantora in Nova Vaasa, and the city watch companies seem insufficient to guarantee law and order as street gangs run short-term rackets and engage in pickpocketing, robbery, procuring, burglary and gambling. This means that almost anyone walking the streets could be an armed criminal, making the regulation of the city it a hard and extremely hazardous job. Ste. Ronges has another thing in common with Kantora, as rumors of a slave ring kidnapping people have circulated in the city. These rumors bring even more anxiety to the already frightened nobles and commoners alike, who already live in fear of *Les Intrudes* (the wererat intruders). So far there have not been any arrests with regards to this matter.
The one thing that exists in Ste. Ronges that sets it apart from other Richemuloise cities, is that it is walled, making it more concentrated even if the population sprawl has sprouted outside the walls like a wild undergrowth. This is not necessarily a good thing, as the streets are crowded, mking the city watch companies work even harder than it already is. Fortunately most people stay inside at night and the streets are better lit than Pont-a-Musea. The fine for not using a lantern during night hours also applies to Ste. Ronges, although no watchman is going to risk being killed for fining the wrong person. They way it looks and is, the streets here belong to the underworld. The only thing that keeps the city from bursting into flames is that the street gangs usually compete with each other for temporary control over parts of the city. If an organized criminal guild was to be established here, things could escalate and chaos would surely erupt as it would try to gain control of the whole city.


N
Musarde River
Ste. Ronges
Scale 1000 feet
A Main Gates
B Barracks
C Catacombs ⊕= Sewer entry point
D Les Jardins Vieux
E Ezras Church
F Marketplace
G Townhall
H Hospice
I Inn of the Last Breath
J Warehouse
K House


N
Musarde River
The Sewers of
Ste. Ronges
A Main Gates
B Barracks
C Catacombs ⊕= Sewer entry point
D Les Jardins Vieux
E Ezras Church
F Marketplace
G Townhall
H Hospice
I Inn of the Last Breath
J Warehouse
K House
Scale 1000 feet

***Porte d'Eau* (Water Gate)**
Commander: Aaron Gannu
Sponsor: House Farrand (Wererats)
Recognition: Breastplate embossed with the image of a flooded, gated city.
Alignment: Chaotic Evil
Requirements: Target Vulnerable Spot feat
Benefit: +2 on all Move Silently checks

The *Porte d'Eau* watch company used to be the most corrupt in the city, the only thing separating it from a street gang is the city watch insignia they wear on their breastplates. They had a reputation for being ruthless racketeers and there are rumors they are also involved with assassinations. Although there are still some bad apples, things are not as bad they were. Most of the citizens believe the commander Aaron Gannu is an uncorrupted aristocrat who managed to contain this city watch's criminal activity, and that if it was not for him, things in Ste. Ronges could have been worse.

Dread Possibility: Patriarchy
Aaron Gannu (CE wererat Aristocrat 3/ Rogue 6/Assassin 3) aka *Lame Gris*, is a tall, wiry man with a noble but seedy air. His yellowish-white hair and his lined, wrinkled face give him the appearance of a man about fifty years of age. He wears elegant, but slightly tattered clothes. His *nom de guerre* (which means 'Greyblade') is derived from his magical rapier, whose blade's surface has been etched to grey surface with acid so it would not glitter during night-time operations. *Lame Gris* gives the impression of an aristocrat with a debonair charm and ready wit. This is a front, however, as Greyblade assumes personalities like other men change their gloves, all to beguile the ones he interacts with. Only his 'court' knows his true character as the undisputed patriarch of House Farrand, which he has infected with lycanthropy and utterly controls. Most people in Ste. Ronges know him only as the commander of *Porte d'Eau*, and even fewer as an ambitious though very influential minor noble. He is ruthless and greedy, quite convinced of his own cleverness, and hates unexpected surprises. His temper is quite formidable when roused, matching that of the late Claude Renier, and his face often assumes rattish aspects when excited. This resemblance in temper is not by chance, as Aaron is a descendant of Claude Renier's sister Amaryllis, who Claude thought had died during the Year of Impaled Rats. Amaryllis did not follow the family tradition of giving her surname to her children, adopting her husband's instead, and raised her children with one thing in mind: the destruction of the Reniers that left her behind. Aaron plans to make his mother's wish a reality, and to take back what he believes is his birthright: the domain of Richemulot.
As a wererat lord, he is a master lycanthrope who can control all wererats infected by him. His control over his 'children' is such that he can trigger their transformation into werebeast form. He can do this only if they can see him, however. Aaron Gannu's mate is an attractive wererat of Falkovnian descent named *Fluchfangzahn* (Sorceress 9). They have been together for decades, scheming how to overthrow the Reniers.
For some time now, Aaron and his associates have been joining some of the different street gangs of Ste. Ronges together under his power in order to create an organized underworld guild. Aaron plans to start a revolt in Ste. Ronges that he hopes to escalate into a revolution, if not a civil war, that will end Renier rule. He wants to use the resulting chaos to blackmail the populace into crowning him King of the Kingdom of Richemulot. (Conversion of *The Rat Trap, Dungeon Magazine* #62 p.38, as well as using the dungeon from *Dungeon Crawl Classics #27 Revenge of the Rat King* for some parts of the catacombs of Ste Ronges.)

***Griffes à Ronger* (Gnawing Claws)**
Commander: Bastien Vaugrenard
Sponsor: House Renier (Wererats)
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Recognition: Breastplates with the city's insignia embossed on them; a haloed, dog-faced man above the walls of a city.
Requirements: Extra Contacts feat
Benefit: +2 on all Hide checks

The Griffes à Ronger allegedly is the oldest city watch in Ste. Ronges, owing to their name alone. During the years of Claude Renier's influence

in the city, they enforced the 'Lord's Law', but since his death their position has declined, becoming just one among many other city watch companies trying to keep the chaos of the city from overtaking it.

Dread Possibility: *La Menace Grise I*
The influence of the crime-lord *Lame Gris* may overcome the city's old city watch, as he holds evidence of Bastien Vaugrenard deviant sexual preferences and is planning to use this information to blackmail him. *Lame Gris* has not yet played out this card in his game of controlling the city, as he is waiting for the right moment when chaos erupts, forcing the *Griffes à Ronger*'s commander to do anything that might then escalate the situation.

***Fléaux Fantômes* (Wraithbanes)**
Commander: Maïwenn Cahun
Sponsor: House Gwenhael
Recognition: Breastplates of Rongeise steel, embossed with the image of a robed figure, gray-white uniforms and a black hooded cloak.
Alignment: Chaotic Good
Requirements: Ethereal Touch feat
Benefit: +2 on all Knowledge (Monster Lore [Undead])

The *Fléaux Fantômes* are what the name suggests, ghost hunters trying to protect the city from the numerous swordwraiths found in this city. They are all followers of the Mordentish sect of Ezra, battling the Legions of the Night against all odds.

Dread Possibility: *Le Maudit*
Maïwenn Cahun, commander of *Fléaux Fantômes*, holds a dire secret. A month ago she accidentally killed an innocent man she was trying to protect from a swordwraith. When the rest of her city watch comrades arrived at the scene, they assumed that the poor man was killed by the evil spirit. The guilt has been gnawing on Maïwenn's soul and she has become fascinated by the sword due to having killed a man unprovoked with a blessed Rongeise steel weapon. She knows what that means, but she is unable to resist her obsession with her blessed sword. If she dies before her followers figure out what is happening and force her to go on a quest to atone, she will surely end up being what she has sworn to hunt.

***Écailles de Dragon* (Dragonscales)**
Commander: Cyril Vidal
Sponsor: House Dragova
Recognition: Scale-embossed, gold-finished breastplate, red uniforms and black cloaks with dark red lining.
Alignment: Lawful Neutral
Requirements: Toughness feat
Benefit: +2 on all Knowledge (Architecture) checks

The *Écailles de Dragon* is one of the most recognizable city watch companies in Ste. Ronges, not so much for their deeds but rather for the intriguing design of their armor, which makes the watchmen look like golden half-dragons or golden reptiles, which has led to them often being referred to as *reptile doré*. This is more due to the unpopularity of House Dragova than the actions of the city watch company itself, however, as it is remarkably loyal to the city and the pledge it has made to protect it.

Dread Possibility: *La Menace Grise II*
House Dragova's reputation has been in disarray since it was discovered that the previous patriarch, who was a councilman since the days of Lord Mayor Governor Klaus Nellak, had been embezzling public money to invest in his expensive wine collection. The current patriarch of House Dragova is Cezar Dragova, the nephew of the notorious late councilman. Cezar tries desperately to uphold the position of his House and erase the memory of his predecessor. He has found an unexpected ally for this in Aaron Gannu of House Farrand, one of the more influential nobles in the city. What Cezar does not realize is that Aaron Ganou is using Cezar's desperation to ascend his House's social status for his own plans, as he needs Cezar to influence the incorruptible *Écailles de Dragon*.



***Yeux de Gorgon* (Gorgon Eyes)**
Commander: Solange Enora
Sponsor: House Montcoeur
Recognition: Breastplates with the image of a medusa, priestly uniforms and black cloaks.
Alignment: True Neutral
Requirements: Non-male, Warding Gesture feat
Benefit: +2 on all Heal checks

This exclusively female city watch company consists of the younger members of the congregation of Hala's witches stationed in *L'Hospice des Hommes Pétrifiés* (The Hospice of Petrified Men) in the part of the city that is outside the city walls. The members of this city 'witch' company have a dual purpose to attend to the sick and protect the healthy. This tenuous duty makes them strain themselves with double shifts, struggling to do both as best as they can. House Montcoeur decided to sponsor the Halan convent into becoming a city watch so as to gain the support of the people. Although the Hospice's Mother Superior is supportive of the convent's decision to create the watch company, she worries about their overtiring themselves and is overprotective, as she has already lost too many people in her life.

Dread Possibility: The Medusa's Head
When Rudolph Van Richten and a group of adventurers battled the gruesome Ghost Medusa of Tepest after a friend of his had discovered it lurking beneath the mountains of Tepest, they lost half of their group either to the medusa's chilling touch or her petrifying gaze before being forced to withdraw. In the following months the ghostly monster began to venture out of its lair and strike at the innocents of the region. Van Richten and his comrades regrouped and, assisted by a coven of Halan witches, managed to defeat the cursed monster by trapping it in an effigy. The coven that kept the effigy was attacked some time later by bandits, who murdered most of them and stole the item. Somehow the effigy came to the possession of the annis hag Balihnda, and when Van Richten encountered the hag and barely defeated her with his companions in 736 BC, he recognized the effigy for what it was. He travelled to Ste. Ronges, where he knew that one of the surviving Halan witches, Solange Enora, was renovating a series of houses to create a hospice dedicated to those lost in the battle with the Ghost Medusa of Tepest. He then gave the effigy to her. Mother Solange buried the effigy in the foundation of the convent to protect the world from the spirit trapped within. Recently burrowing wererats have begun to create a new set of tunnels under the part of the city existing outside its walls. It will not take long until one of them unexpectedly discovers the wooden effigy, shaped in the form of a medusa's head. The item could then be sold to House Richelieu in Pont-a-Museau, potentially being transported anywhere in the Land of Mists. Alternately, the borrowing wererat may be a member of Aaron Gannu's group, and the effigy could be studied by Aaron Gannu's mate *Fluchfangzahn*. The ghost of the Ghost Medusa could then deliberately be released inside the city, creating the havoc desired by *Lame Gris*.

***Tuers de Chat* (Cat Killers)**
Commander: Dorian Ganio
Sponsor: House Traidou (Wererats)
Recognition: A sword cutting a cat's head embossed on the breastplate, yellow and pink uniforms and black cloaks with magenta lining.
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Requirements: Deceitful feat
Benefit: +2 on all Hypnotism checks

This watch company is allied with House Traidou, the most powerful aristocrat family in Ste. Ronges. Although Emili Traidou, matriarch of House Traidou, is not the Lady Mayor Governor of the city, she manipulates every noble of importance. Although this seems like it would make her a dangerous rival of Jacqueline Renier, this is not the case, as Jacqueline exerts her own power over House Traidou by holding important information that could destroy Emili, including the knowledge of the wererat noble's allergen: saffron.

Dread Possibility: *La Menace Grise III*
Emili Traidou knows that things have begun to change in Ste. Ronges as a shady presence seems to be taking over the underworld of the city, slowly uniting the various street gangs under one organization. The only information she has managed to gain is the nickname of the person re-

sponsible for this and the rumor that this person is of Renier ancestry, though she does not know whether it is a man or a woman. She falsely suspects that it is Louise Renier. So far, she pretends that everything is under control in order to gain more time, as she is waiting to decide whether she should inform Jacqueline Renier that a Renier conspirator is gaining power in Ste. Ronges, or wait for the Grande Dame's downfall so that she herself can rise up from the ashes of Ste. Ronges. If she decides to share the information, the Cult of Simon Audaire could be in great peril even if they are not the ones responsible for the outbreak of chaos in the city.

***Chiens de Garde* (Watchdogs)**
Commander: Gundar Medran
Sponsor: House de Lentios
Recognition: Rongeise steel breastplates, embossed with a three-headed dog over a key. Blue and white checked uniform, black cloak with silver lining.
Alignment: Lawful Neutral
Requirements: Roofwalker feat
Benefit: +2 on all Climb checks

The *Chiens de Garde* city watch company is also one of the oldest in Ste. Ronges. Unlike the other city watch companies, they are always loyal to the city and its citizens, with every Lord Mayor Governor being responsible for their sponsorship. They are responsible for patrolling the streets, but in contrast to what their name implies, they have the habit of walking on the roofs of buildings while patrolling. They are as indisputably loyal to the current Lord Mayor Governor, Foderian de Lentios, as they were to his predecessor Klaus Nellak before his resignation in in 722 BC. It is rumored that Klaus Nellak left his duties and the country after witnessing the murder of the alleged Piper of Hamelyn by a mysterious woman. The Pied Piper had been employed by the city to get rid of a massive rat infestation. His gruesomely disfigured corpse was found on the murky shores of the Musarde. The watch company's headquarters *La Niche à Chien* (The Doghouse) is located across the street from *la Mairie de Ste. Ronges*, the Town Hall of Ste. Ronges, ready to protect the Lord Mayor Governor if need be.

Dread Possibility: The Proxy
Commander Gundar Medran is a soldierly-looking individual of about 60 years, who appears tall and fit and is rarely seen out of armor. He is a war veteran and has three fingers missing from his left hand and a slight limp to prove it. He has spent most of his life in the army and has little regard for anyone who is not a soldier. Inpector Vodrec Filadrin, ashort, stocky man with a jovial countenance which masks a nastily suspicious mind, has been a member of the watch for a long time and has seen all manner of shady characters.
Foderian de Lentios, Lord Mayor Governor of Ste. Ronges, is an elderly man who appears to be suffering from a minor skin ailment. He looks querulous and tense as he also suffers from a mild paranoia, owing to the problems plaguing the city. He is assisted by Lord High Chamberlain Beraden de Operin, a tall, thin man in his late thirties with a long pointed beard who walks with a slight stoop. Foderian de Lentios is convinced that sooner or later he will be removed from office and replaced by de Operin. It is a secret source of bitterness for the Lord Mayor that his subordinate will make a better mayor. The truth is that Beraden de Operin is not exactly what he looks like, as he is the lover of Emili Traidou, who governs Ste. Ronges using de Operin and in effect de Lentios as her proxies.

***Éléphants Hurlants* (Screaming Elephants)**
Commander: Isidore Saunier
Sponsor: House Gatteux (Wererats)
Recognition: Breatplate embossed with the image of an elephant carrying a castle, they dress in red and green colors and dark grey-lined, black cloaks. They carry masterful ivory trumpets.
Alignment: Chaotic Neutral
Requirements: Lunatic feat
Benefit: +2 on all Perform (Wind instruments) checks

The *Éléphants Hurlants* allied with House Gatteux are thought to be a cyclothymic lot, with bouts of mania followed by heavy depression. Some people believe their mood and behavior are linked to the moon itself, pointing to the fact that they usually use their ivory trumpets during

the nights of the full moon. More logical-minded people dispute this, saying that the watchmen use their trumpets more on such nights because crime is more rampart during that time, especially as infected wererats join their natural masters in the havoc they create in the city.

Dread Possibility: The Uncanny Saboteur
With their estate in Ste. Ronges Richemulot, the Gatteux family is headed by Baron Philippe Gatteux (born 705 BC). Due to his skilled work as a courtier and humanitarian, the Gatteux family was able to climb to the level of minor nobility. Philipine, the oldest Daughter, took on the role of family matriarch after her mother's, Blanche death shortly after the birth of her youngest sibling Heloise; the seventh child of her mother's union, born in 758 BC. The oldest of the seven children is Rogier Gatteux, the next in line to his father's title. The remaining children are the twins Philberte and Edric (born 745 BC), Isabeau (born 747 BC) and Aidelina (born 754 BC). The house has interest in affairs within Richemulot as well as abroad, and they continue their work as courtiers. Given the cutthroat nature of Richemuloise politics, there are plenty of rumors as to how such a house maintains let alone came to its title. One of these rumors involves selling blessed Rongeise Steel weapons to Falkovnia.

***Gantelets en Acier* (Steel Gauntlets)**
Commander: Gratien Vérany
Sponsor: House Garon (Wererats)
Recognition: Rongeise steel breastplates embossed with the image of two prallel vertical gaunlets, royal blue uniforms.
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Requirements: Indomitable feat
Benefit: +2 on all Handle Animal checks

Theorerical Historians speculate that this watch company used to be the old guard of a now forgotten king. They speculate this based on the murals found in the headquarters of this city watch company named *Domaine du Faux Roi* (Estate of the False King). The images repeatedly show the image of a crowned person followed by an entourage of blue dressed soldiers.

Dread Possibility: The False King's Guard
House Garon has allied with House Farrand, which is controlled by *Lame Gris*, in order to make a coup and topple Emili Traidou's puppet ruler. If the coup is successful, it may be the beginning for the actualization of Aaron Gannu's plan. It seems that the murals in la Domaine du Faux Roi do not depict the past of the city, but rather its possible future.



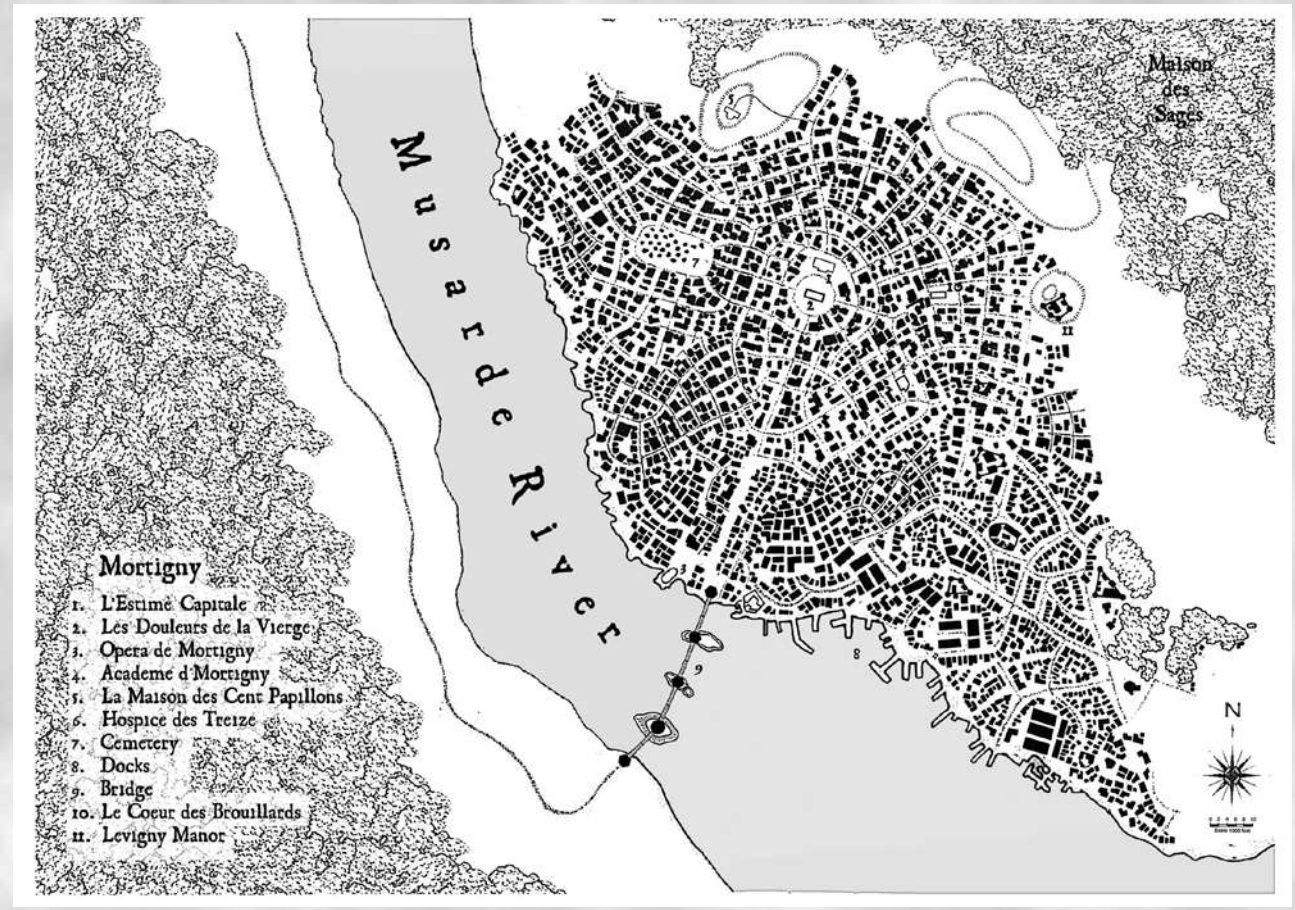
Mortigny

Although the streets of the trading city of Mortigny are relatively safer than those of the other cities of Richemulot, that does not make them safe as *les intruses* or wererats are more free to do whatever they want in this city, answering only to the elders of their own House. Although smaller in size than Port-a-Muesau, the noble families are numerous for to the city's size, mostly because of its distance to Port-a-Lucine and the constant influence of Jacqueline Renier. The games of intrigue and power played by the aristocracy are not so secretive and elaborate here as in Port-a-Muesau, but more direct and daring. The nobles are in constant, cutthroat competitions, which is usually demonstrated through flamboyant galas and patronage of the arts.

The true rivalries continue behind the scenes as each family tries to bring the others to ruin. Here the streets are not so much in danger from criminals, but more from the city watch itself, as the relative freedom they have has left some of them open to bribery and racketeering. The different watch companies compete between each other for turf and influence in a similar manner as their sponsors or the gangs of Ste. Ronges do. It is not uncommon for rival city watch companies to become openly aggressive towards each other or dare one another to some challenge. This aggression towards each other is not only based on their aristocratic sponsors, but also on religious beliefs. The close proximity to the House of Sages has influenced the city as well as the city's watch companies, with various heretical ideas about the nature of Ezra creating tension amongst them, as most watch companies in Mortigny are extremely religious. All the city watch companies barracks are stationed in *l'Estimé Capitale*, the former town hall of Mortigny.

Jellicles

Commander: Jacque deFerce
Sponsor: House Destoiyene
Recognition: Heraldry of a white feline etched on black breastplate, black and red uniforms
Alignment: Chaotic Neutral
Requirements: All *Jellicles* must be of Valachani descent, Nine lives feat
Benefit: +2 on all Sense Motive checks



The *Jellicles* are probably the most competitive of the city watch companies of Mortigny, probably due to the racism they have suffered over the years. They are basically patrolling the areas in and around *La Petite Valacha* (Little Valachan) a neighborhood of Valachani expatriates (Quoth the Raven #11), looking after their own people – or rather, keeping an eye on non Valachani.

Dread Possibility: Cat and Mouse
The head of House Destoiyene is a wealthy noble of Valachani ancestry; Baron Michel Destoiyene. Most people know him as a benefactor of the Valachani community and he is well-respected in La Petite Valacha, as he helps any Valachani, referring to them as 'his people', if they have any problems, financial or otherwise. All is not as it seems, however, as Michel Destoiyene is a natural werepanther sired by one of Von Kharkov's Black Leopards and born of a Valachani refugee rumored to have been one of Von Kharkov's wives. Most of the people in the community refer to him as 'the Baron' and no one except his most trusted retainers know his true nature. Michel Destoiyene owns an elegant hunting lodge outside of Ste. Ronges, which he uses to indulge in his feline instinct for hunting humanoids.
A few months ago, Michel had captured a young petty thief named Gaspare, along with his two friends Paul and Henri, after a botched attempt to rob him and a witnessed conversation with one of his retainers about buying someone from the rumored slavers responsible for the kidnapping of people in the city. Michel, seeing potential in Gaspare, infected him with lycanthropy and taught him how to hunt and kill as a werepather, making him murder his two friends. Gaspare did the deed, but his better nature overcame him, troubling him with guilt, which eventually made him rebel against his werepanther master. Knowing that Michel is fond of games and knowing he could not outmatch his experience as a predator, Gaspare has devised a plan. He recently discovered the existence of the Hunt Club, founded by the brothers Phillipe and Jean Paul Gaston. He has learned that they are looking for ‹exotic› prey for their next Grand Chase, and plans to inform them of Baron Michel Destoiyene's true nature. It will not be long before they become interested in such a prey and send people to capture the Baron – a difficult task since he practically owns a small army. On the other hand, even if the Baron is captured, he has been playing this game all his life and it may be that the will be reversed once more.

***Gardiens de la Coupe* (Keepers of the Cup)**
Commander: Laurentin Decaen
Sponsor: House Périgneux
Recognition: Breastplate with silver finish, embossed with a gold-finished chalice over a keep.
Alignment: Lawful Neutral
Requirements: Resolute feat
Benefit: +2 on all Knowledge (Nobility) checks

This city watch company is, as its name implies, an offshoot of the *Échansons* heresy, the notorious Cupbearers who originated as a secret society among the Borcan commoners of the Home Faith of Ezra before Richemulot's appearance. Although they had disappeared from public view after they refused to submit to the Rite of Revelation offered by the Præsidius, they reappeared in the House of Sages when Richemulot was formed by occupying an abandoned sanctuary they called *Le Rite du Calice* (The Rite of the Chalice). The sanctuary was soon abandoned as the Cupbearers found refuge among the Richemuloise nobility.

Dread Possibility: The Last Prodigal
One of the *Gardiens de la Coupe* found evidence of a plan to kidnap Fabian Périgneux's infant son. The unfortunate watchman did not survive long enough to tell anyone of the dire knowledge of this plan, as he was murdered while running away from an unknown assailant as he was trying to reach *l'Estimé Capitale*.

***La Serrure et Clé* (Lock and Key)**
Commander: La Tour
Sponsor: House Lavigny
Recognition: Breastplate embossed with the Lock and Key insignia, grotesque masks.
Alignment: Lawful Neutral
Requirements: Must be a Caliban, Skill Focus (Craft [Alchemy])
Benefit: +2 on all Craft (Alchemy) checks

Since Rishemulot's appearance, *La Serrure et Clé* watch company has been shrouded in mystery as the members' names, faces and traditions are hidden from the public eye. The grotesque masks the watchmen of this company wear conceal their Caliban nature. They live by a strict code of honor and justice, making them an uncorrupted force in the city. All of the watchmen of *La Serrure et Clé* secretly dabble in alchemy and mystical rituals, trying to reach an ethic of perfection and respect for the self. The Lavignys support the company, but have no say in most of the decisions made by the alchemists, instead leaving them relatively independent to do as they please. The commander of the company is Arguis Groissiat, though everyone outside the organization know him as *La Tour* (The Rook), owing to his black, beaked mask.

Dread Possibility: Mark of the Chosen
The reason behind Rogier Le Cauchet's desire and subsequently seduction by Baphomet to be healed of his deformities was not just vanity, but a deeper need of Rogier to be accepted by his father Evrard Lavigny, who disavowed him when he was born. Instead of being raised in the luxury and prestige of a noble house, he was left on the doorstep of a Hospice of Hala. Rogier learned about his heritage by accident as he was performing his duties in the Lavigny ancestral house. While waiting to be given a task to perform, he was leafing through a book and found the Lavigny family tree. This official book mentioned the death of Evrard Lavigny's wife in childbirth and the birth of his firstborn son, who was disfigured by the same curse that had claimed his mother. The book also mentioned a birthmark similar to the one he had on his thigh.
All his life, Rogier had been lied to. He was not an orphan after all; he had been abandoned by his own father because of his deformity and probable connection to the demon lord. As he was filled with hatred, Rogier left the Lavigny house in a hurry. He began searching the abandoned houses of Mortigny for books of magic so as to find a fast way to cure his deformities, rather than following the alchemical processes the rest of *La Serrure et Clé* were looking for. In a book of demonology, he discovered his birthmark was called the *Mark of the Chosen*. While searching for more demonic books in the ruins and abandoned houses of the city, he discovered an ugly-looking book with a cover made of a strange material and metal bindings in an alcove. This was a *Book of Vile Darkness*. Rogier eagerly and foolishly opened the book and began reading. While doing so the foul and ancient magic of the words began to warp his very soul. When he finished reading, he was a changed man.
(For more information on *La Serrure et Clé* and Rogier Le Cauchet's descent to darkness, please read the 3e *Ravenloft Gazetteer Vol. III*, p. 104).

***Balance de la Justice* (Scales of Justice)**
Commander: Justin Blanc
Sponsor: House de Sauvre
Recognition: Breastplate with an embossed scale, salmon and black uniform with black cloak.
Alignment: True Neutral
Requirements: Detect Virtue feat
Benefit: +2 on all Knowledge (Geography) checks

House de Sauvre and in effect *la Balance de la Justice* is known for their charitable, kindly acts and eccentric religious beliefs. Many are aware that House de Sauvre spends their coin frivolously, primarily on charities. It is rumored, and likely true, that because of this their house is near financial ruin, making the future of this watch company uncertain.

Dread Possibility: The Glass Avatar
The truth is that both the watchmen and all the members of House de Sauvre belong to *La Balise,* the so called 'Avatar Heresy'. Under the instructions and commands of the House's matriarch Mélisande de Sauvre, they are all spending time and money on a search for the lost mortal Godess from an ancient shrine somewhere deep in the forests. What they and all members of La Balise do not realize is that their tenet is based on a misconception, as the mortal Godess they are looking for is none other than the stained glass golem Lumina (*Children of the Night – The Created* p. 77).

***Protecteurs de la Musique Céleste* (Protectors of Heavenly Music)**
Commander: Gaëlle Thiers
Sponsor: House Delvaux
Recognition: Breastplate with an image of an angel using a musical instrument (varies), blue, white and yellow uniform and black cloak with white lining.
Alignment: True Neutral
Requirements: Spirit of Light feat
Benefit: +2 on all Perform (Sing) checks

House Delvaux was always supportive of the arts and especially the opera, as was their daughter who died unexpectedly around two decades ago in Dementlieu. The *Protecteurs de la Musique Céleste* are usually stationed around *Le Grand Théâtre de Mortigny* (The Grand Theater of Mortigny) every time there is an event there. Spending too much time around and inside the opera house, they are often seen competing amongst each other in singing contests and are especially known for their choir performances. They are looked down upon by the other city watchmen for not being real watchmen, having become part of this 'elite' lighthearted company because of their contacts. The other watchmen as well as the rough streetwise criminals call them *le Protège* (the Protected).

Dread Possibility: Musique Infernale
A series of strange deaths have occurred lately in *Le Grand Théâtre de Mortigny* during rehearsals. A few months ago one of the musicians was found dead in the auditorium clenching his violin; he apparently had died of bleeding as his whole body was full of injuries. The incident was hushed up as an expensive production was about to be presented in the theater. Then a few days ago, a duet that had been rehearsing a surprise piece of an improvisation on a found musical score was also found dead, one member sitting at his harpsichord while the *contralto* singer was found on the floor in a pool of blood. Both of them had died from wounds whose cause was impossible to identify.
The inexperienced *Protecteurs de la Musique Céleste* have to find the culprit, if indeed there is one, as the physician who examined the bodies believes the deaths were caused by autoimmune wounds, as if their own bodies bled out without any external cause. The physician is speculating that this might be an outbreak of the Crimson Death that devastated Darkon in 688 BC, killing around one fifth of the population, and the *Maître Maire Gouverneur* (Lord Mayor Governor) has ordered for the theater to be quarantined.
Thankfully, this is not an outbreak of the Crimson Death, but rather the result of the *Coda al Fine* resurfacing (*Book of Sorrows* p. 114). This deadly musical score is the reason for the death of Clarisse Delvaux in Dementlieu a few decades ago. The cursed score exists in twelve separate copies, each for one instrument. So far two have been found and played in the theater; one for violin and one for the harpsichord. There exists the possibility of those quarantined inside the theater finding the rest of the missing scores and playing them to pass the time while they are locked up inside. Curiously, no one has found the two scores responsible for the three deaths in the theater, implying that someone has been using them deliberately to kill those musicians.

***Lames d'Ange* (Angel Blades)**
Commander: Aldéric Luneau
Sponsor: House Angeli
Recognition: Breastplates embossed with the image of an angelic woman holding a sword. Light blue and yellow uniforms, white-lined, black cloak.
Alignment: Chaotic Good
Requirements: Back to the Wall feat
Benefit: +2 on all Knowledge (Planar) checks

The *Lames d'Ange* is one more watch company founded by Ezran heretics. The heresy of *L'Archange* (The Archangel) before they created the world, the gods created five sacred Divine Beings called 'Angels' to whom they assigned the world's affairs, and the leader of the five angels was the archangel Ezra. As the gods were slowly forgotten by mankind, they demanded that humans should be replaced by a more obedient creation, and ordered Ezra to destroy them. Ezra objected to the decision of the gods and was punished by being relegated and cast down to *le Pays des Brumes* (the Land of Mists),

a bleak place of darkness and horror equivalent to Hell, along with the humans she so fervently tried to protect. Ezra sacrificed herself once more, dissipating herself and placing her essence into a few selected blessed mortals in order to protect the rest of the humans from the Legions of the Night. Though there are not many differences between the dogma of *L'Archange* and that of the Home Faith, there is one major difference in the claim of Ezra's the nature as that of an archangel, rather than a goddess. The *L'Archange* believe that they belong to those few blessed with the angel's essence, and that their quest is to protect the innocent trapped with them in the Land of Mists.

Dread Possibility: The Fifth Angel
The *Lames d'Ange* have discovered that a vile presence is present in the Land of Mists. They believe this Being to be *le Cinquième Ange de l'Apocalypse* (the Fifth Angel of the Apocalypse), sent by the gods to exterminate humankind as Ezra's blessing still protects it. This being is believed to have been trapped in the Land of the Mists just as humanity is, and that the only way for it to escape it is to destroy the Land of Mists and everyone in it, thus enforcing the will of the gods. They have named this Divine Being the *Lilan* and they believe that its legacy is obvious in the Traitor King Malocchio Aderre, who he has fathered, as well as others. While these beliefs imply that the *Lilan* is none other than the Gentleman Caller, the actual *Lilan* is not the greater incubus but a ruthless vampire known for being a seducer of women and murderer of their lovers. In spite of this, the *Lames d'Ange* have accumulated a trove of information about the Gentleman Caller and the Lilan. Cyran Devichi was a faithful knight of Ezra who travelled to Mortigny with a group of Ezra's faithful and a warrior, where they suspected a diabolic presence. They fought side by side with Aldéric Luneau against the wererats of Mortigny, but after discovering the presence of the *Lilan*, he and his comrades decided to track it down. They were all killed and Cyran Devichi was turned into a vampire. Now Cyran stalks the streets of Mortigny, and it will not be long before the commander of *le Lames d'Ange* sees him, physically still the same eighteen year old man at whose side he fought many decades ago. (Cyran Devichi is described in the *Book of Secrets* p.101)

Tue-Loup (Wolfsbanes)
Commander: Naël Tamarin
Sponsor: House Abel (Wererats)
Recognition: Breastplates with the embossed image of a wolfsbane plant, growing from the body of a dead wolf.
Alignment: Chaotic Evil
Requirements: Sworn Enemy (shapechangers) feat, must be a wererat
Benefit: +2 on all Monster Lore (Shapechangers) checks

The *Tue-Loup* watch company is not only tasked with guarding the city, but also the borders with Verbrek (formerly Arkandale). They are known as brilliant monster hunters, capturing and killing werewolves who try to cross the border and murder innocent people in the woodlands of Richemulot or even infiltrate Richemuloise society. They are well-respected and renowned for their knowledge on lycanthropy.

Dread Possibility: The Hunters
Unknown to most common people in Mortigny and Richemulot, this group is wholly comprised of wererats. The enmity these rodent lycanthropes harbor for werewolves has made them specialists in hunting them, and anyone hunting lycanthropes in Richemulot will surely be well-advised to contact them and ask for assistance. As is to be expected, anyone who is actively hunting wererats and contacts this watch company will receive a *special* introduction on lycanthropic knowledge.

***Bella Domna* (Beautiful Lady of the House)**
Commander: Stelian Tiberiu
Sponsor: House D'Ilvin
Recognition: Breastplates embossed with a woman holding a belladonna plant. Violet, dark blue and black uniforms with seamed golden lines and a violet-lined black cloak.
Alignment: Neutral Evil
Requirements: Stealthy Blade Feat
House D'Ilvin Lev Dilisnya + Niki Romanoff
Benefit: +2 on all Open Locks checks

These are probably the most elegantly-dressed of the watchman companies in Richemulot, their uniforms made from expensive fabrics from

across the Core and beyond. Their uniforms are rumored to have been designed in Dementlieu. Most other city watch guards view them as being too foppish to actually be guarding the city, as they might spoil their expensive uniforms. For this reason, they are often referred to as *Belles Dames* by the more chauvinistic groups, such as the *Berceaux de la Race*. *Bella Domna* is the newest addition to the city watch companies of Mortigny, having been founded in 740 BC by House D'Ilvin, a noble house that – as its name suggests – had migrated to Richemulot from the domain of Dorvinia when it was joined with Borca. No one knows why they decided to leave their ancestral home, but it is rumored that they were forced to leave Borca as they had attracted Ivana Boritsi's wrath. The insignia of the *Bella Domna* is said to represent not Ezra, as some people believe, but rather Ileana Ivliskova, mother of the D'Ildin twins who rule this House, who was famous for her beauty. What few people know and is whispered only in hushed voices in the underworld of Mortigny, is that *Bella Domna* is not only a city watch company, but also the only way to contact *Les Vergés*, the assassin's guild of Mortigny. If someone wants to make an assassination contract with the guild, they only have to write their name on a piece of paper and give it to one of the *Bella Domna* guards along with a silver Borcan coin printed during Camille Dillisnya's reign. The guild is then going to contact that person on its own terms.

Dread Possibility: The Bloodline

House D'Ilvin harbors a secret known only to members of their immediate family. They are all of the Dilisnya bloodline and the only direct descendants of Leo Dilisnya apart from the Boritsis. The matriarch of this family is the descendant of Teodor Ivliskova, the offspring of an illicit affair between his mother Niki Romanoff, the widow of Stelian Ivliskova and Lev Dilisnya, father of Camille Dilisnya. Niki Romanoff gave birth to her third son Theodor a day before Stelian Ivliskova's poisoned corpse was found dead in the restroom of a whorehouse in Tumbledown in 659 BC. Since Niki Romanoff was in a lengthy labour at the time, she was acquitted of the crime, but the truth is that she and Lev Dilisnya had planned the murder of her unloving husband together, in order to be able to marry and raise Lev's firstborn child as a couple. When the Lamplighters came to the Ivliskova estate to investigate, Lev was afraid that if they rushed the wedding their plan would be exposed and they would both face the hangman's noose. They decided to keep a low profile for some time, but the months apart from each other withered their romance and their relationship grew cold as Lev found a new love interest in Anna Kurdzeil, Camille Dilisnya's mother.

Teodor was raised knowing his true ancestry, but never met his indifferent father. He kept the name Ivliskova as it made him sole inheritor of the Ivliskova legacy and wealth. When the domain of Borca appeared in 684 BC as the inheritance of the Dilisnyas, Teodor was envious of Camille Dilisnya, knowing that this domain and all the Dilisnya holdings should be his. He moved to Borca and repeatedly tried to approach his biological father, but Lev refused to see him and he was even banned from approaching the Dilisnya estate, *Misericordia*. Teodor was devastated, wasted most of his time and father's inheritance drinking in an attempt to drown his depression, while his two half-siblings successfully continued their lives. Despite his drinking problem, he managed to get married to Ileana, a beautiful, but shrewd and loveless woman of low rank, who had married him for his fortune and who soon grew tired of listening to stories of her husband's stolen lineage and his entitlement to the Dilisnya holdings. Unknown to both of them, Ileana was the daughter of Boris Dilisnya and a peasant girl, which meant that she was the half-sister of Ivan Dilisnya.

Teodor's life continued like this and his wife lost her patience with him as his fortune had diminished significantly, and decided to leave him. It was then that the Mists parted to reveal the domain of Dorvinia and with it, *Abreptoro*, the ancestral house of the Ivliskova's in Ilvin, as well as a share of the House's leatherworking industry. Seeing that her fortunes were reversed, Ileana pretended to be pregnant to make Teodor accept her back, all the while trying her best to impregnate herself with Teodor's child. They moved together to *Abreptoro* with the

rest of the Ivliskovas, where Ileana gave birth to twins, a girl, Nasta and a boy Ionel. Teodor's children grew up hearing drunken stories about their Dilisnya heritage and came to feel entitled to the Dilisnya fortune. Their mother did nothing to dissuade them, as she had devised a plan of her own. When the children were fifteen years old, Teodor died, having apparently drunk himself to death, although some say he had some help.

A few months after Teodor died, Ileana revealed to her children a document she had accidentally discovered hidden in a secret compartment in one of her mother-in-law's chests, that Teodor had brought with him to Abreptoro from Borca. The document was a marriage certificate between Lev Dilisnya and Niki Romanoff, which proved the consummation of their romance into marriage, which was supposed to have happened during Teodor's birth, making Teodor and in extension the twins the sole heirs of the Dilisnya fortune, for being the legitimate children of Lev Dilisnya's legitimate firstborn son.

Ileana wanted to reveal the truth about her children's heritage to the world so they would be named Sefs of Borca, planning to rule the domain through them. Unfortunately for her, she died in her sleep before such a claim could be made. Nasta and Ionel were convinced that their mother was poisoned, and after they paid for a detailed autopsy with alchemical tests, belladonna residue was discovered in her system. Believing Ivana Boritsi had learned of their mother's plan, the twins vowed vengeance but kept their heads down. In time they became paranoid, constantly watching over their shoulders and having testers try their food before eating. It is rumored that they even became closer to each other than brother and sister should because they were afraid of becoming romantically involved with other people. Although these claims are true, this deviation had actually occurred due to the twisted upbringing their mother and drunken father had given them.

When the domains of Borca and Dorvinia joined after the Grand Conjunction to become Borca, the two siblings panicked, believing that they would no longer be under Ivan's protection anymore, and in one night they packed everything they could and cautiously crossed the land, migrating from Ilvin to Mortigny in Richemulot.

There they managed to establish themselves as expatriate Borcan nobles of House D'Ilvin, using their hereditary Dilisnyan talents to gather enough secrets to scale up ladder of nobility. At the same time, they established the Guild of Assassins known as *Les Vergés*, a word reminiscent of the *Ba'al Verzi* of Borcan folklore, meaning also 'Wand of Office' in High Mordentish and hence 'scope, territory dominated'. Now that they have solidified their position in Richemuloise politics, the D'Ilvin twins are thinking of approaching their 'uncle' Ivan Dilisnya and asking his support to their claim. They believe he will be most willing to assist them, as they know from information gathered by their assassins that he and Ivana Boritsi are not on good terms.

Anyone who knows Ivan Dilisnya knows that making an agreement with him is a double-edged dagger, especially if one's claim is based on false information, and that is what the claim of the D'Ilvins is. Unknown to the twins, while they are indeed direct descendants of Lev Dilisnya, the marriage certificate of his marriage with Niki Romanoff is a forged document of epic skill (DC 50) ordered by their mother Ileana Ivliskova. What they also have not realized is that it is not Ivana Boritsi who ordered their mother's death, but rather was their Ivliskova uncles who made a petition to the League of Nine as they justly believed that Ileana had murdered their brother Teodor, but did not have the evidence to prove that claim in court.

***Exilés du Faucon* (Exiles of the Falcon)**
Commander: Friedrich Dach
Sponsor: House Renier (Wererats)
Recognition: Breastplates embossed with the image of a reversed hawk, black and blood-red uniforms and a black cloak lined with blood-red.
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Requirements: Hawk's Cry Feat, must be a Falkovnian soldier infected wererat.
Benefit: +2 on all Ride checks

The *Exilés du Faucon* were the *de facto* city watch guard during the reign of Claude Renier, noto-

rious for bringing terror to their opponents by uttering a frightening war-cry and being the city watchmen who arrested and executed the republican instigators of 700 BC by imprisoning the revolting nobles in metal barrels and burying them in the depths of the mud of the Musarde River. After that incident, their commander Friedrich Dach, a Falkovnian Talon captured during the Borderlands War like most of the *Exilés*, was appointed Lord Mayor Governor of Mortigny. In the aftermath of Claude Renier's death in 726 BC, a coup was organized by the nobles of Mortigny, overthrowing Friedrich Dach. The Commander managed to escape with a few members of the watchman company to Arkandale, on the banks of the Musarde, close to the border with Richemulot. There he created a lumber station which is also used by Falkovnian soldiers moving from Falkovnia to Invidia and vice versa, as Commander Friedrich Dach is still loyal to Vlad Drakov and wears his *Talon Bracers*. When the Richemuloise refer to this city watch, they usually use the name *Exilés du Klaue,* a mix of High Mordentish and Falkovnian, words meaning Exiles of the Claw, a pun on the name of former darklord Claude.

Dread Possibility: The Southern Borderlands War
The *Exilés du Faucon* stationed on the banks of the Musarde River are part of a grand plan by Malochio Aderre and Vlad Drakov to attack Richemulot from the south by carrying their combined armies down the river Musarde. The allied army of the Mercenary King and the Traitor King has in its arsenal a weapon that could favor their armies and change the course of history: the Primal Serum. This alchemical reagent created by Vjorn Horstman can grant their soldiers the stamina and strength of werebeasts, turning them into super-soldiers. This will be the first time this secret weapon of the Falkovnian Ministry of Science is used on the battlefield.

***Berceaux de la Race* (Cradles of Race)**
Commander: Grégoire Hervé
Sponsor: House Rongeur (Wererats)
Recognition: Plain breastplates and plain clothes with black cloaks.
Alignment: Chaotic Evil
Requirements: Efficient Defender feat
Benefit: +2 on all Knowledge (Local) checks

This city watch, which more resembles a mob than an organized company, consists of Richemuloise nationalists, self-proclaimed p*atriotes*. Most of them are descendants Richemuloise soldiers slain in the Borderlands War, as well as of people sentenced to death or torture during Claude Renier's purge in 700 BC against the newly formed republic of Mortigny. This movement of fanatics and racists believes in the superiority of the nation of Richemulot and dreams of annexing the wild forests of Arkandale (and now Verbrek) to the south. Although they are not sponsored by Jacqueline Renier, they view the *Grande Dame* as a patriotic ruler who has the potential to return Richemulot to the glory of their forgotten past. They are extremely racist against other species and look down on foreigners, with most liberal people in Mortigny referring to them as *Berceaux de la Crasse* (Cradles of Filth).
During the rule of Claude Renier, there existed an enmity between this company and the *Exilés du Faucon*, and they absolutely hated Friedrich Dach who was appointed Lord Mayor Governor of Mortigny. They were the ones who supported the aristocratic coup of 726 BC after the death of Claude Renier and hunted down Friedrich Dach and the rest of his men, making them exiles once more. House De Vigil, which sponsored them at the time, tried to emulate them by staging a second coup to take control of Mortigny themselves, but were stopped by the newly created *Le Pacte des Hommes Libres*. The rest of the nobles decided to appoint Grégoire Hervé, a war veteran who had heroically defended the republic, commander of *Berceaux de la Race*. The nobles chose Grégoire Hervé, a libertarian himself, at the time believing correctly that a national hero would have the respect needed to appease the mob of the *Berceaux de la Race*. Grégoire Hervé has been trying to control this mob for more than two decades, sacrificing his personal happiness and peace of mind in the service of Mortigny and its citizens. If it were not for him, the *Berceaux de la Race* would surely devolve into a group enforcing mob justice in the streets.

Dread Possibility: Forest Rodents
Rumors of surviving members of the *Exilés du Faucon* living in Verbrek have circulated for many years in Mortigny. Recently another rumor has begun to circulate as well, claiming that the hated ex-Mayor-governor Friedrich Dach is still alive and well, living in Verbrek. Many descendants of Friedrich Dach's victims, including descendants of the republican instigators who Claude Renier had ordered to be sealed inside metal casks and thrown in the Musarde to sink, want revenge. Members of *Berceaux de la Race* are pressuring Grégoire Hervé to take action and lead them to the forests of Verbrek to avenge the deaths of their ancestors. The now seventy year old hero of the republic has the difficult task of deciding whether to give in to the demands of the avenging mob or lose the respect of his watchmen and eventually their leadership, something he would gladly do, were it not for his likely successor, racist fanatic Virgil Lamass, who is known to make trips to the borders of Falkovnia to beat up and some say even murder refugees who try to cross the border.

Dread Possibility: A Mouse's Vision is an Inch Long
Although House Houdin is indeed one of the oldest noble families to have kept its power in Mortigny since the days of Claude Renier, this is not due to enchantments, but rather due to their ability to successfully weave their way through the backstabbing intrigues of Mortigny's aristocracy. One way of doing this is that most mages who finish their studies in the secret arcane college in the observatory of *La Maison de Cent Papillons* have a deep respect for this noble family and will not turn easily against them, even if presented with proof of foul play on their part. This also applies to the *Academe d' Richemulot*, which they own. House Houdin has also created a network for the graduates for both of these houses of knowledge, filtering information and thus manipulating them. Unknown to House Houdin, Ethan Lozé, a graduate of the arcane college and the commander of *les Ombres de la Lune*, is a member of the Fraternity of Shadows and is keeping an eye on the goings-on in both institutions as well as House Houdin.

Ombres de la Lune (Moonshadows)
Commander: Ethan Lozé
Sponsor: House Houdin (Wererats)
Recognition: Steel Breastplates embossed with the image of a black tower, haloed by a silver inlaid circle, black and silver uniforms with a black, hooded cloak.
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Requirements: Hear the Unseen feat
Benefit: +2 on all Knowledge (Arcana) checks

The *Ombres de la Lune* are primary the watchmen of *La Maison de Cent Papillons* (House of a Hundred Moths) as well as the *Academe d' Richemulot*, a private university located in the city. They are thought to be the most sophisticated of the city watchmen in Mortigny and they are regarded as the Guardians of Knowledge. House Houdin is a well-respected noble house, one of the first to be established in the city, but there is a rumor that House Houdin is involved in the practice of dark magic. Some even claim they have managed to keep their position as one of the greatest noble houses in Mortigny due to enchanting their rivals.

Confrérie de l'Araignée (Brotherhood of the Spider)
Commander: Quentin Rostan
Sponsor: House De Jardins (Wererats)
Recognition: Breastplate embossed with the image of a black widow spider over a silver inlaid pattern of leaves, green, white and turquoise uniform with a black cloak
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Requirements: Roof-Jumper feat
Benefit: +2 on all Jump checks

House De Jardins originally hails from Ste. Ronges and was responsible for maintaining *Les Jardins Vieux* (the Old Gardens), the large botanical gardens of Ste. Ronges. These have fallen to ruin since the family decided to move to Mortigny. Despite of the state of the Old Gardens in Ste. Ronges, House De Jardins is renowned for its lavish garden parties. The *Confrérie de l'Araignée* watchmen do not attend these parties, though; instead they dedicatedly patrol the city. They are known to be the watch company with the highest number of arrests, hunting transgressors forcefully and fearlessly, even jumping from

one building to the other if need be to make the arrest. They are nicknamed *Araignées Sauteuses* (Jumping Spiders) by the people of the city.

Dread Possibility: The Baneful Garden
The reason why House De Jardins left Ste. Ronges and its gardens unattended, was that all members of the family who are wererats have developed an allergen to all kinds of common garden weeds. In addition, every member's bane is a different plant. Some wererats of this family can be poisoned by crabgrass or purslane, while others could find lambsquarters and pigweed or even chickweed toxic. That was the reason they departed the city and left the garden to die out; it is easier for them to have a smaller garden which they can control and regulate by gardeners, rather than accidentally encounter a toxic weed in a massive garden.

Le Pacte des Hommes Libres (The Pact of Freemen)

Commander: Ghyslain Dujardin
Sponsor: House Hermon (Wererats)
Recognition: Breastplate embossed with armored arm with a clenched fist, red and white uniforms and red-lined black cloak.
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Requirements: Soothing Presence feat
Benefit: +2 on all Diplomacy checks

Le Pacte des Hommes Libres was formed at the same time as the *Berceaux de la Race*. During the upheaval created in the city of Mortigny after the demise of Claude Renier and the aristocratic coup of 726 BC that toppled the notorious Friedrich Dach and killed or exiled the *Exilés du Faucon* out of Mortigny, they were also the group that defended the republic from the *Berceaux de la Race* and the machinations of House De Vigil, when they tried to take over the city's government. *Le Pacte des Hommes Libres* assisted in solidifying the relative freedom the city has by not opposing *la Grande Dame* Jacqueline Renier's rule, but by clever diplomacy. Grégoire Hervé was part of this group before being appointed commander of *Berceaux de la Race* after the coup.

Dread Possibility: *Le Pacte des Hommes enchaînés*
House Hermon has been monitoring the increasing chaos in Ste. Ronges and have come to the conclusion that a riot may soon erupt in that city. If such an event occurs, they plan to take advantage of the situation and make a coup d'état in Mortigny under the pretense of trying to protect the city from instigators of chaos who want to create havoc in Mortigny just as in Ste. Ronges. When the time comes, they plan to use *Le Pacte des Hommes Libres* to arrest all opposing nobles as the *Exilés du Faucon* had done more than half a century ago, although they do not plan to execute them in such a dramatic way so as to not be associated with Claude Renier or the Falkovnian watchmen. This would be a bold move on their part, as if they fail, they will surely lose all privileges if not their lives. Nevertheless, they are determined to go through with the plan, as success would mean ruling over the wealthy city of Mortigny. If they succeed, then the loss of Jacqueline's influence over both cities will be devastating for the country, as more chaos up to civil war could spread across all of Richemulot, making the nation susceptible to a Falkovnian attack or even an Invidian invasion. A combined attack from both the north and south while battling in a civil war will be devastating for Richemulot.

Sonneurs de Cloches (Bellringers)

Commander: Roland Anneau
Sponsor: House Reniers (Wererats)
Recognition: Black breastplate and black uniform embossed with an inlaid bronze image of a bell, and a black cloak.
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Requirements: Negotiator feat
Benefit: +2 on all Gather Information checks

The Bellringers were the city watch company supported by House Tinctnoire before their disappearance in 721 BC, and the decay of Tinctnoire Manor in the House of the Sages. When the domain of Richemulot appeared, they had occupied and thus owned a large portion of the city, but during the rule of Claude Renier their predisposition to not care about politics and the intrigues of Mortigny caused their fortunes in the city to be coveted by many – including the

Reniers, who accumulated a lot of what House Tinctnoire owned, including the allegiance of the *Sonneurs de Cloches*. This city watch company is not the largest, but it has enlisted some of the best warriors in Mortigny. Their role is not so much to patrol the streets as to monitor them, gathering information that might be important to Jacqueline Renier. The *Sonneurs de Cloches* have a strange tradition of tolling the elaborate bells they carry at midnight in homage to the Tinctnoire family they served. It is not uncommon to walk in Mortigny during the night and hear the simultaneous tolling of dozens of hand bells, signaling the stroke of midnight.

For some unknown reason there has always been a high suicide rate among the Bellringers. Nobody knows whether this is because of their years of living a violent life, as most of them had military service before joining the ranks of this city watch company, or as some wererats claim in hushed voices, because of their feelings of guilt for the deeds they must do to please Jacqueline Renier.

Dread Possibility: *Porters de Mort*

The Tinctnoire family may have disappeared, but their curse lingers on and has been extended by some supernatural way to *les Sonneurs de Cloches*, though in a far more subtle way. If any member of this city watch does not toll their bell while on duty, they are cursed to not survive the night. For each passing hour after they have forgotten to toll the bell, they suffer a cumulative -2 penalty to all saving throws, attack rolls, ability checks, skill checks and weapon damage rolls as they are overcome by an aura of despair. For each consecutive hour the watchman has to make an opposed Sense Motive check to their own Bluff check as depressive thoughts invade his mind. If they fail the check, they are driven mad by their own thoughts, effectively decreasing their Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma scores (roll 1d6 separately for each ability score) as the watchman suffers the effects of depression.

The watchman is overcome by a deep feeling of senselessness as they see everything they do as being either pointless or against their morals. This melancholy saps away their very being and makes them indifferent to the world around they. They only want to be left alone and no longer interact with people. At any given situation the watchman must make a Will save at the same DC as the failed Madness save to take any action. If the character fails this Will save, they will do nothing at all, even in dangerous situations. In a combat situation, they can not take any actions and are considered flatfooted. Even if the watchman is motivated to act, they do so listlessly and reluctantly. They can follow the instructions of allies, but suffer an effective -4 morale penalty to all attack rolls, loses any Dexterity bonus to AC and Reflex saves, and can not take attacks of opportunity. On the other hand, the character's utter lack of interest in their surroundings actually provide an effective +4 insight bonus to all subsequent Fear and Horror saves, but not to madness checks induced by their own mind.

After each consecutive hour of feeling depressed, the watchman has to make another opposed Sense Motive check to their own Bluff check, as they are now plagued by suicidal thoughts. If the watchman fails the save, they lose the will to live and their Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma scores decrease for another 1d10 points per ability.

If the watchman fails any subsequent Fear, Horror, or Madness saves, they must make an attempt to take their own life within an hour, and they continue to roll Madness saves every consecutive hour. The watchman makes the suicide attempt via the most efficient means at hand: leaping off a high balcony, drinking a vial of deadly poison, hurling themselves into the Musarde, or using their own weapon (if this is a piercing or slashing melee weapon) to inflict a coup de grace against themselves. This is also possible with some ranged weapons, such as crossbows and firearms. If at any time the watchman fails a Madness save by 16+ points, their mind is shattered. Unable to function, they immediately drop to -1 hit points and start to die. If they survive this shock to the system, they suffer an effective ability decrease of 1d12 points per ability score as well as suicidal thoughts.

The effects of this aura of depressive thoughts can be dispelled only with a *remove curse*, *limited wish* or *wish* spell. (Even if the curse is lifted, the madness effects still remain and the watchman has to recover as described in the *Ravenloft Campaign Setting* p. 75)

There is a superstition among the citizens of Mor-

tigny that for every suicide, there will be one additional corpse. This is not so much a superstition though, as a reality. When a Bellringer commits suicide while under the effects of the Bellringer curse, his depressive negative emotions trap his spirit inside of his body and the eyes of his corpse gain a slight, flame-like glow. His trapped spirit becomes a Corpse Candle, which has only one purpose: to avenge his death by killing the people who failed to protect him from himself. There are stories in Mortigny of people being driven crazy and attacking friends, family members or even strangers with no apparent reason. Psychologists from the *Academe d'Richemulot* are perplexed by this behavior, and hotly debate with philosophers and theologians when such an incident happens, failing to realize that a pattern exists, as the commoners already believe. The Richemuloise call those suffering from this spontaneous lethal behaviour *Porters de Mort* (Death Bearers).

***Les Plumes Violettes* (The Purple Plumes)**
Commander: Prune Ouvard
Sponsor: House Giroux (Wererats)
Recognition: Helmets with purple feathers, uniforms of purple, black and white.
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Requirements: Quick Reconnoiter feat
Benefit: +2 on all Perform (Oratory) checks

Les Plumes Violettes are distinguished by the large, purple feathers on their helmets. They have served House Giroux since the noble coup of 726 BC, which they orchestrated. *Les Plumes Violettes* have held a grudge against the Bellringers since House Giroux started sponsoring them. The two groups rarely stay in the same place for long without starting a fight, usually instigated by *Les Plumes Violettes* as they tell embarrassing stories about members of the *Sonneurs de Cloches*, House Tinctnoire or even *La Grande Dame* herself for the most daring.

Dread Possibility: *La Grande Dame*'s Assassination
Louise Renier has a romantic relationship with the charismatic actor Stephan Girard, who plays a leading role in an opera in *Le Grand Théâtre de Mortigny*. Jacqueline, jealous of her sister's relationship with the young actor, has decided to end it permanently. She has sent spies to whisper lies to a rival aristocrat, Marquis Girard Giroux, that his fiancé – beautiful leading actress Tilde Rontaire – is having an affair with Stephan. The Marquis has organized Stephan's assassination during the performance and has forced the director to make constant changes to the play. The director Gwyn Glemond has learned about the assassination attempt, but is too frightened to say anything because of the Marquis's position and because the Marquis is blackmailing him, having stolen his talisman (an Abber Nomad *dream catcher*), which has left Glemond troubled by terrible nightmares. Marquis de Boutin has hired the actor Victor Weylund to assassinate Stephan Girard, using a poisoned knife instead of a prop in the last scene of the play. Louise Renier has somehow discovered her sister's assassination plan, and plots to use it to her advantage. She approached the wererat Plague Bearer Alchemist Azrod the Dying and requested him to create a duplicate alchemical child of Stephan. Then she hired a group of thugs to kidnap Stephan Girard and replace him with his clone. After the assassination attempt is over, she will feign mourning for her lover to get her sister's guard down, then flee to Borca with the real Stephan. Jacqueline herself has learned of Louise's actions and has begun to put the pieces together. She has asked her sister to travel with her to Mortigny and watch the opera 'The Knife of the Ba'al Verzi Part III: Leo' (*QtR #27* p. 113) play; she is looking for able fighting foreigners to track down and 'save' Stephan Girard while she has Louise away from him. Things become even more complicated as rumors about an assassination attempt have begun to circulate, and most of the city watch believe that the assassination attempt is aimed at *la Grande Dame* herself instead of being organized by her.

***Roi Nu* (Naked king)**
Commander: Guillaume Nadaud
Sponsor: House DeBoutin (Wererats)
Recognition: Breastplate embossed with the image of a gold-inlaid, crowned cockscomb hat, a large bread or cotton model in the likeness of a phallus, and a mantle lined with white fur.
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Requirements: Logical Mind feat
Benefit: +2 on all Perform (Comedy) checks

The *Roi Nu* watchmen are by far the most amusing of all the city watch companies in all of Richemulot. Theoretical historians of the History Department of the University of Richemulot believe that this city watch company has its origins in a tradition of jester guards protecting whomever ruled these lands centuries ago. They theorize that the ruler must have been paranoid or incredibly anxious, and that his guards where not only tasked to protect him but also alleviate his fears by making him laugh. Others debate that it was the king himself who was the fool, and that he walked around his city naked apart from his royal mantle. Whatever the origins of this city watch company are, they are definitely the most easily recognized – not so much because of their commitment to the city, but for their obscene attire. The most familiar aspect of these city fools are the enormous *olisbokollixes*, large bread depictions or even cotton filled depictions of phalli that all watchmen (of all sexes) wear. They are tasked not only to patrol the city, but also to entertain the populace with satirical erudite sketches full of vulgarity and wordplays, by telling obscene sexual jokes to passersby, as well as Pantagruelism pantomimes. Although they appear to be buffoons, they are in general very logical as well as knowledgeable in many fields apart from the supernatural. Rather than the occult, the *Roi Nu* believes and trusts in scientific facts. This watch company used to be sponsored by House La'Tempe, but the noble house unexpectedly ceased its sponsorship as the *Roi Nu* became too obscene for those religious nobles and dangerous, who feared their satire would also target the Reniers. Since then, the *Roi Nu* has been sponsored for almost five decades by House DeBoutin, which may not approve of their humor, especially when the *Roi Nu* refer to their House name, but appreciate the popularity they have with the plebes.

Dread Possibility: Spirit of the Naked King

While the *Roi Nu* watchmen are very liked by the populace, mainly because of the jocularity they bring to the city, recently there have been two incidents involving one member of the *Roi Nu* where the jester-guard murdered children. Although both incidents have been hushed up through bribery, both the *Roi Nu* and House DeBoutin are alarmed by the situation. There are whispers about these cases being the same as those of the *Porters de Mort* (Death Bearers), but the observant *Roi Nu* see a different pattern in these cases. As well as knowing both persons involved in the murders, they have realized that their change in behavior was gradual and not spontaneous as with *les Porters de Mort*. There is also a big difference between their behavior after the fact, as both members of the *Roi Nu* were found in a catatonic state, drenched in the blood of their victims.

What the *Roi Nu* have not realized is that a secret darkness is hidden among them. For the past month, a malevolent undead spirit has been assaulting them, possessing one person after the other. The odem possessed each watchman, forcing them to commit unspeakable acts in order to feed on their fear and terror. As the *Roi Nu* watchmen do not believe in the supernatural, the possessed watchmen believe it is their own thoughts taunting them as they perform the dreaded murders, as some kind of malignant dissociation. The odem is tauntingly using the moniker *Esprit du Roi Nu* to identify itself. Because of the resilient minds the watchmen of the *Roi Nu* possess, it takes longer for the odem to break them. Now the odem has possessed one of the group's dog-handlers, and his dog senses the unnatural presence inside its handler becoming panicked in his presence and even aggressive.

Les Paroles du Saint (The Words of the Saint)

Commander: Saint Justin
Sponsor: House d'Obligataire
Recognition: Breastplates embossed with the image of a saint slaying a dragon and white, religious robes
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Requirements: Fanatic feat
Benefit: +2 on all Knowledge (Religion)

Les Paroles du Saint is a heretical cult of Ezra circulating around its commander Saint Justin, a self-proclaimed saint of Ezra. As such, Saint Justin proclaims he has an exceptional degree of holiness and closeness to Ezra. Having originated from the House of the Sages as most he-

retical groups of the Godess Ezra do, it quickly gained traction, mostly because of Saint Justin's charisma and intelligence in manipulating his flock. House d'Obligataire has also fallen for the lies of this cult leader, seeing him as a mystic, visionary and prophet while most other nobles regard him as a religious charlatan. His followers are fanatically devoted to him and would die for him if necessary. Such devotion seems absurd to the Church of Ezra, who want to contain the heresy, but fear that any persecution of 'Saint' Justin might have adverse results. The nobles of Mortigny are alarmed by the situation, but so far have not taken any action for the same reasons as the Church of Ezra.

This situation has let Saint Justin preach to his congregation in a temple renovated by House d'Obligataire. The building is named *le Temple de la Maîtresse* (the Temple of the Mistress). As Saint Justin is married to more than one wife, the Church is dubious as to what qualities he assigns to Ezra, those of a divine female authority or a paramour. The temple also serves as this city watch company's headquarters, since Lord Mayor Governor Evrard Lavigny refused to allow them in *l'Estimé Capitale,* as doing so could be viewed as approval of this heresy. The Words of the Saint patrol the city, feverishly preaching the gospel of their beloved saint. These religious fanatics are viewed as a nuisance by most citizens of Mortigny, who avoid the streets where these overly enthusiastic people are spotted. Due to this, some of *Les Paroles du Saint* suffer the delusion that crime rate in Mortigny has lowered since their Saint came to the city, only because they do not see much themselves.

Dread Possibility: *Cult of Faux Justin*

A very few people know Saint Justin's history and most of them are dead. He was born as Fulbert Chaudoir to a peasant family in the village of Ravine in the Silent Fields, close to the borders with Mordent. He was the eldest child of Martin Chaudoir, a retired cavalry officer, and Justine Thorin, the daughter of a notary. He had two younger sisters who were rumored to have been sold to Vaasi slavers by their own father after their mother died. Fearing that his father would do the same to him, Fulbert killed him in his sleep, took what money he could find, and left the village never to return.

Fulbert travelled to Ste. Ronges, where he was robbed in an alley and left for dead. He was treated in the *l'Hospice aux Mille Bouchées* (the Hospice of a Thousand Bites) in the city of Ste. Ronges, where he had a religious experience, which led him to take a pilgrimage in the House of Sages. In time he reached the Sanctuary of the Forgotten Lady, where he was attacked by the hag Balihnda and barely escaped with his life. After this near-death experience, Fulbert began to conceive of a plan. He realized how easy it had been for him to be manipulated, leaving his guard down to the hag based on his false assumption that she was a benevolent holy person. He feverishly began to search for religious books and visited monasteries of Ezra, now believing that all witches of Hala were wolves in sheep's clothing.

With determination, religious knowledge and brimming with charisma, he began preaching his 'gospel' as Saint Justin, taking the name of his mother, attracting people and developing a small circle of followers, primarily peasants who prayed with him on holy days. He established himself in a small village in the House of the Sages, where he preached and held prayer meetings in a makeshift chapel in a root cellar. Rumors began to circulate that female followers ceremonially washed him before each meeting, and a few of the villagers protested, only for them to be kicked out of their homes and later murdered in the forest.

Word of Saint Justin's activity and charisma began to spread, as well as his reputation as a holy man who could help people resolve their spiritual anxieties and crises. Despite rumors of him having sex with female followers, he made a favorable impression on local church officials, who arranged for him to travel to Mortigny and meet the religious noble of House d'Obligataire. As these nobles were obsessed with spiritualism and esotericism, Saint Justin used these qualities to gain their trust and money for his religious movement's coffers. Slowly, he became more influential in the city, gaining more followers and wives. The city officials and nobles see him as a threat, but the religious balance in Mortigny is fragile and things can easily spiral out of control.

But as the aristocracy and the Church of Ezra are overthinking what to do to stop Saint Justin's influence before things can escalate, Saint Justin has taken one more step in creating instability in the city. He recently began to preach against the worship of Hala, calling her followers witches who use their Hospices only to deceive the innocent and prey on them when nobody is looking. These sermons are soon to be followed by aggression towards the Hospices of Hala, and a holy war may bring chaos to this city of different religious factions.

Fanatic feat

Prerequisites: Intimidate 1 rank, Knowledge (Religion) 1 rank
Benefit: You gain +4 on Intimidate checks and the option to use Knowledge (Religion) instead of Intimidate to intimidate creatures.

***Griffes de Démon* (Demon Claws)**
Commander: Nathanaël Zagré
Sponsor: House Reuland
Recognition: Black breastplates embossed with the image of a demon, black and red theatrical caps with small horns, black and white uniform.
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Requirements: Must be Gundarakite, Persuasive feat
Benefit: +2 on all Knowledge (Monster Lore [Outsider])

This city watch company is an offshoot of the *Casques Safran* of Pont-a-Museau, proving that some parts of the hypothesis made by the dead professors of the department of Historie Raisonnée of the University of Richemulot were correct. In the early days, when the obscure Richemulot was formed from the Mists, several refugees from Gundarak arrived in the domain. Some settled in Pont-a-Museau and joined the *Casques Safran*; in their native language Luktar the name reminded them of the ancestral Neureni deity Za'far, and combined with the Richemulot word *an* meaning 'year' it sounded to them as though the name meant Year of Za'far. As they had escaped
the land of a true demon who drank
the blood of the innocent, the vampire lord Duke Gundar of Gundarak, the expatriates saw fit after having some drinks and hhaving
fun to begin to dress their wooden sticks with saffron red, as even firewood was heavily taxed in Gundarak, sucking the lifeblood out of the populace.
These actions of the Gundarakite watchmen of the *Casques Safran* were perceived as inappropriate for members of the Renier-sponsored city watch by their commander, and some of the Gundarakite watchmen were expelled. The rest of the Gundarakite watchmen, having a sense of unity after years of oppression such as the Richemuloise could not fathom to comprehend, resigned en masse. Under the leadership of Zenety Petrauskas, they moved to Mortigny and created the *Griffes de Démon* city watch company. The Demon was symbolic of their common heritage, as well as being as a proud and steadfast flaunting of their difference with the *Casques Safran*. As far as the Gundarakites were concerned, the demon symbolized unity. The citizens of Mortigny mostly saw the *Griffes de Démon*'s uniforms as theatrical costumes, and were never bothered by them.

Dread Possibility: The *Zagazmonari*
After the annexing of Gundarak by the Barovian army, many more Gundarakite refugees moved to Mortigny. Among them were some elder black magicians of a cabal named *Zagazmonari*. Although the rest of the Gundarakites knew about these sorcerers from folklore, they did not know that they actually really existed. The *Zagazmonari* managed to establish themselves as holy men to the Gundarakite expatriates, but there is something the *Zagazmonari* need and that is a *Vremenar*, a leader. Since to have a leader they must also have a place to venerate him, they have decided that the building most fitting for their rituals is the observatory of *La Maison de Cent Papillons*. The *Zagazmonari* plan to attack the secret arcane college in order to be able to select their leader through arcane tests. If this comes to pass, the citizens of Mortigny will be faced with forces they are not able to comprehend and panic would engulf the city.

Heraldry of the Richemuloese City Watch Companies

Pont-a-Museau

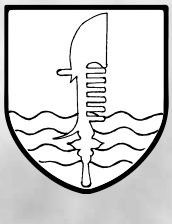
Casques Safran
(Saffron Helmets)



Colombes Blanches
(White Doves)



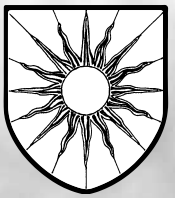
Observateurs des Bateaux
(Boat Watchers)



Lions de La Rue
(Street Lions)



Soleils Craimoisi
(Crimson Suns)



Phénix Doré
(Golden Phoenix)



Ancre d'Argent
(Silver Anchor)



Talon Cassés
(Broken Talon)



Attrape-Ræts
(Ratcatchers)



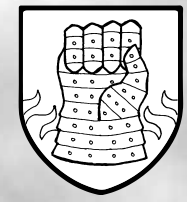
Corbeaulames
(Crowblades)



Loups Fous
(Mad Wolves)



Verts Vibrants
(Vibrant Greens)



Bosquet de Cyprès
(Cypress Grove)



Coques de Sanglier
(Boar Husks)



Larger images available in pages

Heraldry of the Richemuloese City Watch Companies

Ste. Ronges

Porte d'Eau
(Water Gate)



Griffes à Ronger
(Gnawing Claws)



Fléaux Fantômes
(Wraithbanes)



Écailles de Dragon
(Dragonscales)



Yeux de Gorgon
(Gorgon Eyes)



Tuers de Chat
(Cat Killers)



Chiens de Garde
(Watchdogs)



Éléphants Hurlants
(Screaming Elephants)



Gantelets en Acier
(Steel Gauntlets)



Acknowledgments:

Thanks to *Hour of the Raven* for the vivid description of Richemulot and user **Dread** from the *Ravenloft: Prisoners of the Mists* forum for the inspiration from the topic *Prominent families within Dementlieu* (some of which have been used in this article). Pont-a-Museu map based on u/LCornelsen's from reddit.

Heraldry of the Richemuloese City Watch Companies

Mortigny

Jellicles



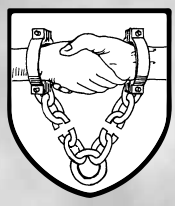
Bella Domna
(Beautiful Lady of the House)



Exilés du Faucon
(Exiles of the Falcon)



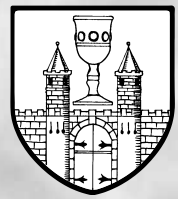
Le Pacte des Hommes Libres
(The Pact of Freemen)



Les Paroles du Saint
(The Words of the Saint)



Gardiens de la Coupe
(Keepers of the Cup)



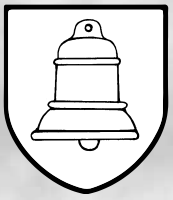
Lames d'Ange
(Angel Blades)



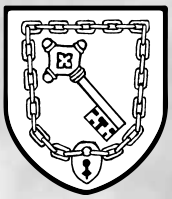
Berceaux de la Race
(Cradles of Race)



Sonneurs de Cloches
(Bellringers)



La Serrure et Clé
(Lock and Key)



Tue-Loup (Wolfsbanes)



Ombres de la Lune
(Moonshadows)



Les Plumes Violettes
(The Purple Plumes)



Balance de la Justice
(Scales of Justice)



Protecteurs de la Musique Céleste
(Protectors of Heavenly Music)



Confrérie de l'Araignée
(Brotherhood of the Spider)



Roi Nu
(Naked king)



Griffes de Démon
(Demon Claws)





"A secret's worth depends on the people from whom it must be kept."

chibiloft 2022

Flattery Will Get You (Out Of) Anywhere

By Mark Bartels (Rock of the FoS)



Excerpts from 'The Register of monsters'

By Stanton 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"

Avuul The Wretched Sovereign

Avuul was once a magician of exceptional skill who, predictably, sought "ultimate power." He decided that the best route to his goal was lichdom. His ritual to achieve lichdom failed, but, rather than destroying his spirit, Avuul's body was completely destroyed.

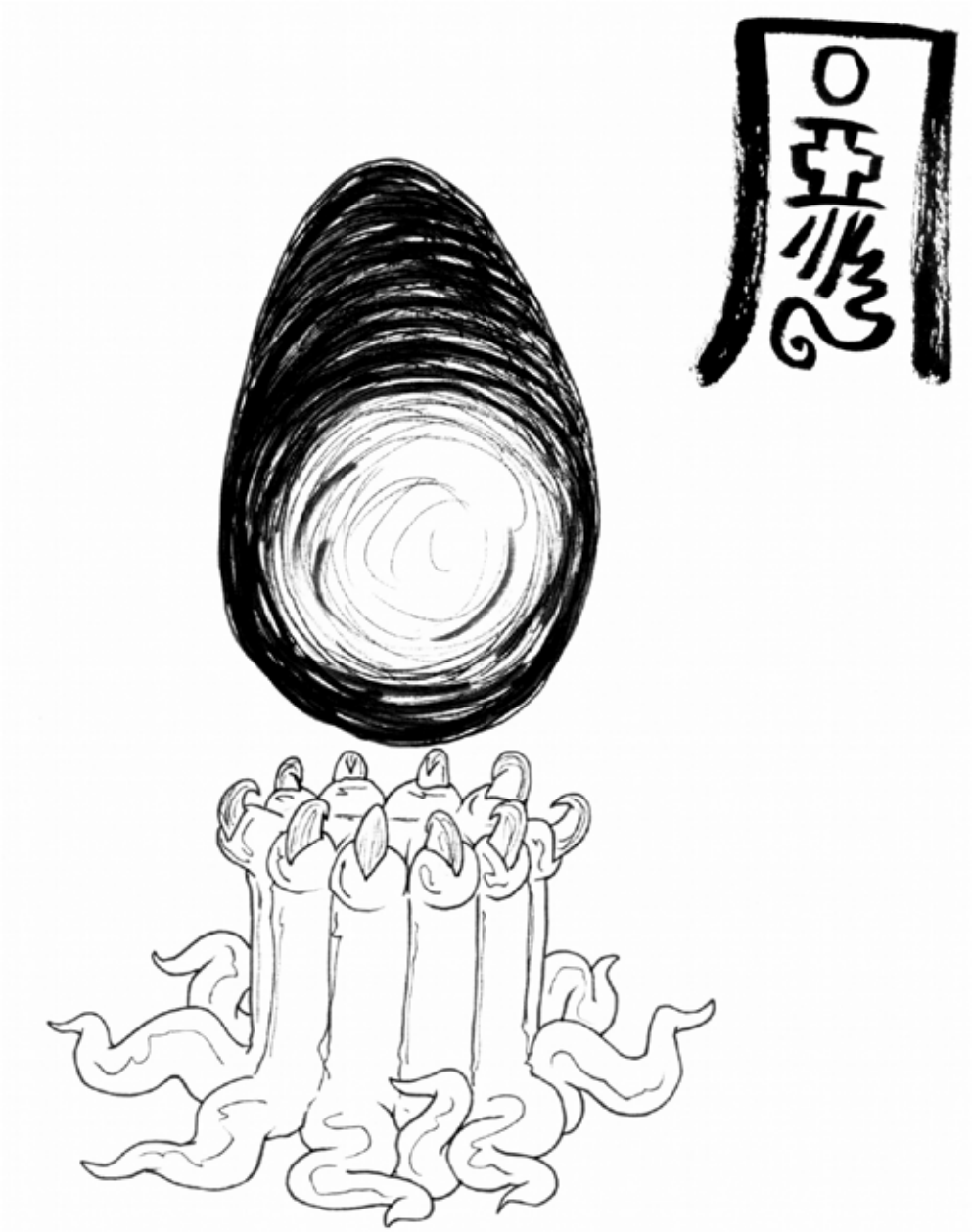
Within the next lunar year, Avuul's spirit pieced itself back together as a ghost. In his ghost's fractured mind, Avuul deludes himself into thinking that other pieces of his soul are lodged in the bodies of other mortals, and that if he can reclaim them all, he can complete his quest to become omnipotent. Avuul's ghost labors in vain, though, as the former wizard and brilliant strategist has become a bogeyman-like predator, devouring the souls of random victims.



The Egg of Eternity

Most of the precious few scholars who know of the sentient construct referred to as the "Egg of Eternity" tend to dismiss it as either an eidolon or as an exceptionally powerful living idol. Both summaries are inaccurate, as both eidolons and living idols were modeled after obvious deities or themes. What deity or concept the Egg represents is unknown. One scholar, an abnormally friendly glabrezu from Pazunia, suggests it evolved from one of the Chained God's last remaining shrines.

What is known about this six-foot tall, floating glob of darkness is that it is very intelligent, and is attended to by a fairly powerful cult of deranged, secretive, arcanists. The Egg alternatively consumes or revives its devotees, sometimes transforming them into undead, or restoring them to life, as per its own inscrutable whim.



Megalovirus

Once upon a time, there was a dazzling city filled with wonder and marvels. This great city was a terrible place, though, as its inhabitants were wicked beings who harvested the suffering of others to use as mortar for their resplendent home. Such was the evil of the place that gods, fiends, and genies alike were all offended by that place. Eventually, the demon god, Taihu the Pox Tiger, was sent to annihilate that wretched utopia with his special brand of justice. The Pox Tiger personally entered the city, and those inhabitants whom he did not devour with his unclean jaws, he smote with disease. It is said that such was the Pox Tiger's cackling wrath, that the city's name and streets were both washed away in a river of pus.

The memory of this awful city's demise lives on, as the dying survivors' nightmares continued even after death, creating a gigantic greater feyr who named itself "Megalovirus." Megalovirus easily survived its progenitors' demise, and haunted another city, leading the gods to punish Taihu, first under the assumption he was unjustly continuing his original orders, then for failing to deal with this new evil. Taihu was then sent to slay Megalovirus. The Pox Tiger failed in this task, as in the process of carving the feyr into pieces, each piece became a new creature and fled.

Megalovirus survives, and seeks to fill the dark places of the world with its children. Once Megalovirus has seized complete dominion, it hopes to become a god of disease and terror. Its powers of disease are mighty, as it can sicken any being with a body of organic materials, including fiends and embodied undead.

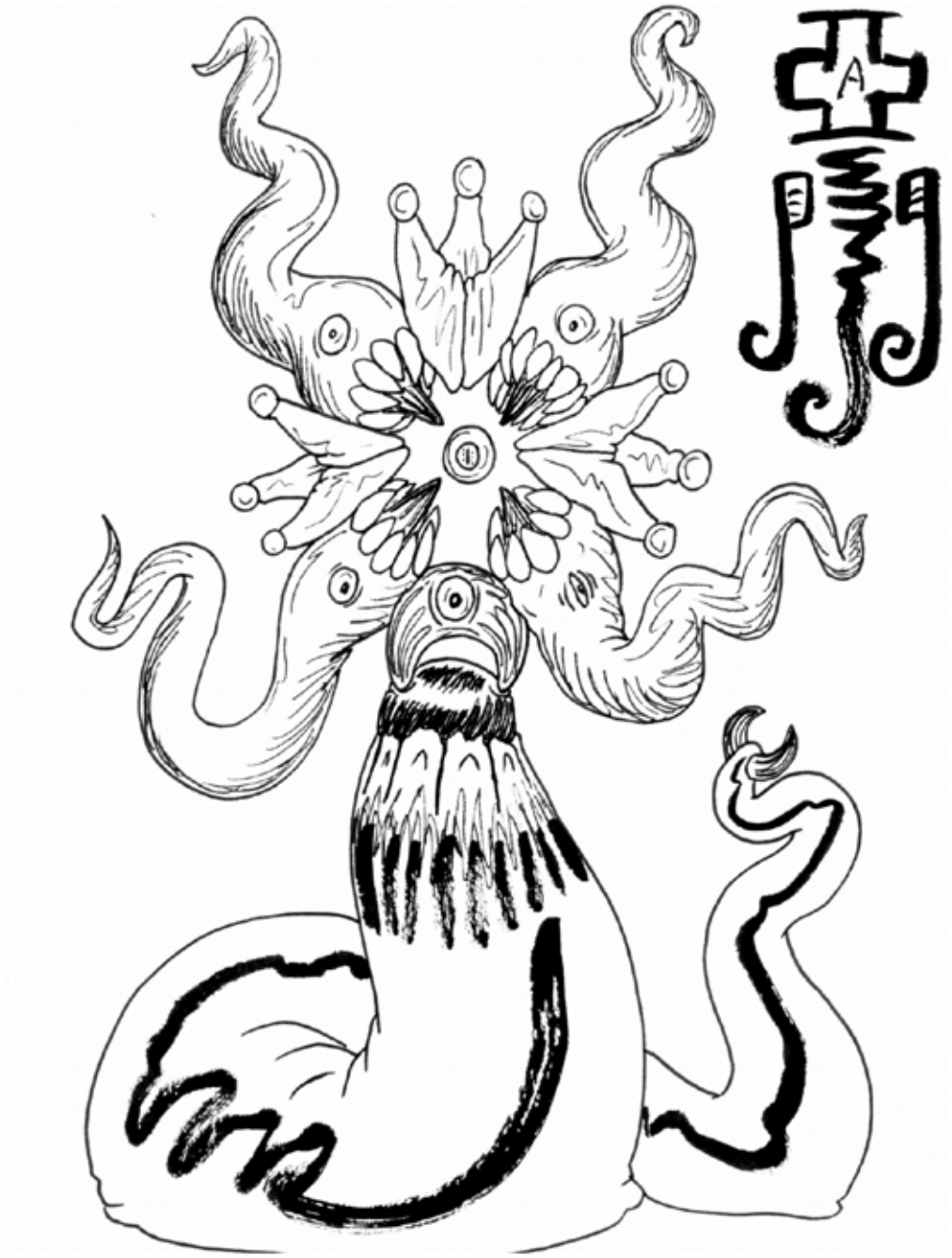


Alphavirus

Alphavirus is an immensely powerful greater feyr in service to Megalovirus. It is called "ά" because it was the first piece broken off of it.

Alphavirus seeks to be a foil to its parent, being an approachable, manipulatively charming villain as opposed to Megalovirus' insane, often unfocused mania. As such, Alphavirus has established several criminal cults, alternatively focused on venerating itself while enacting its own schemes, or impersonating other mystery cults as per its parent's schemes.

Although loquacious and eager to recruit more sacrificial dupes, Alphavirus is a fearsome opponent, capable of magically sickening its foes it cannot charm. More importantly, Alphavirus shares its parent's power to bud off feyrs, a talent it uses with so much gusto that it has achieved a form of immortality by being able to clone itself from the smallest fragment.



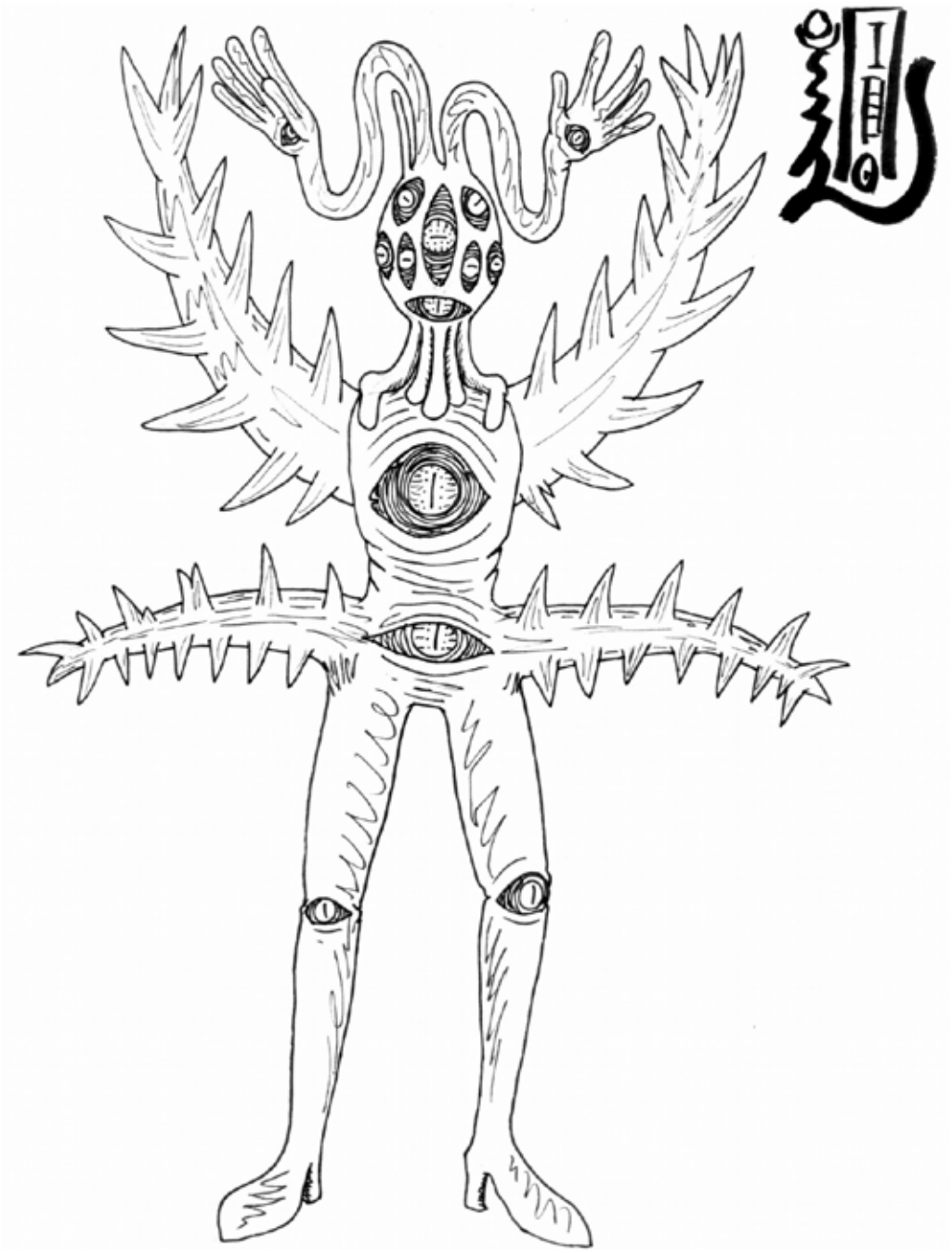
Gammavirus

Gammavirus is a species of feyr descended from Megalovirus. These mushroom-like horrors are deceptively intelligent, preferring to spend their time stalking and frightening small humanoids to death, sometimes using their fright-inducing gaze. While gammavirus are intelligent, they are foolish creatures who have very little impulse control. They are also extremely difficult to eradicate, as they can easily bud off copies of themselves as they please.



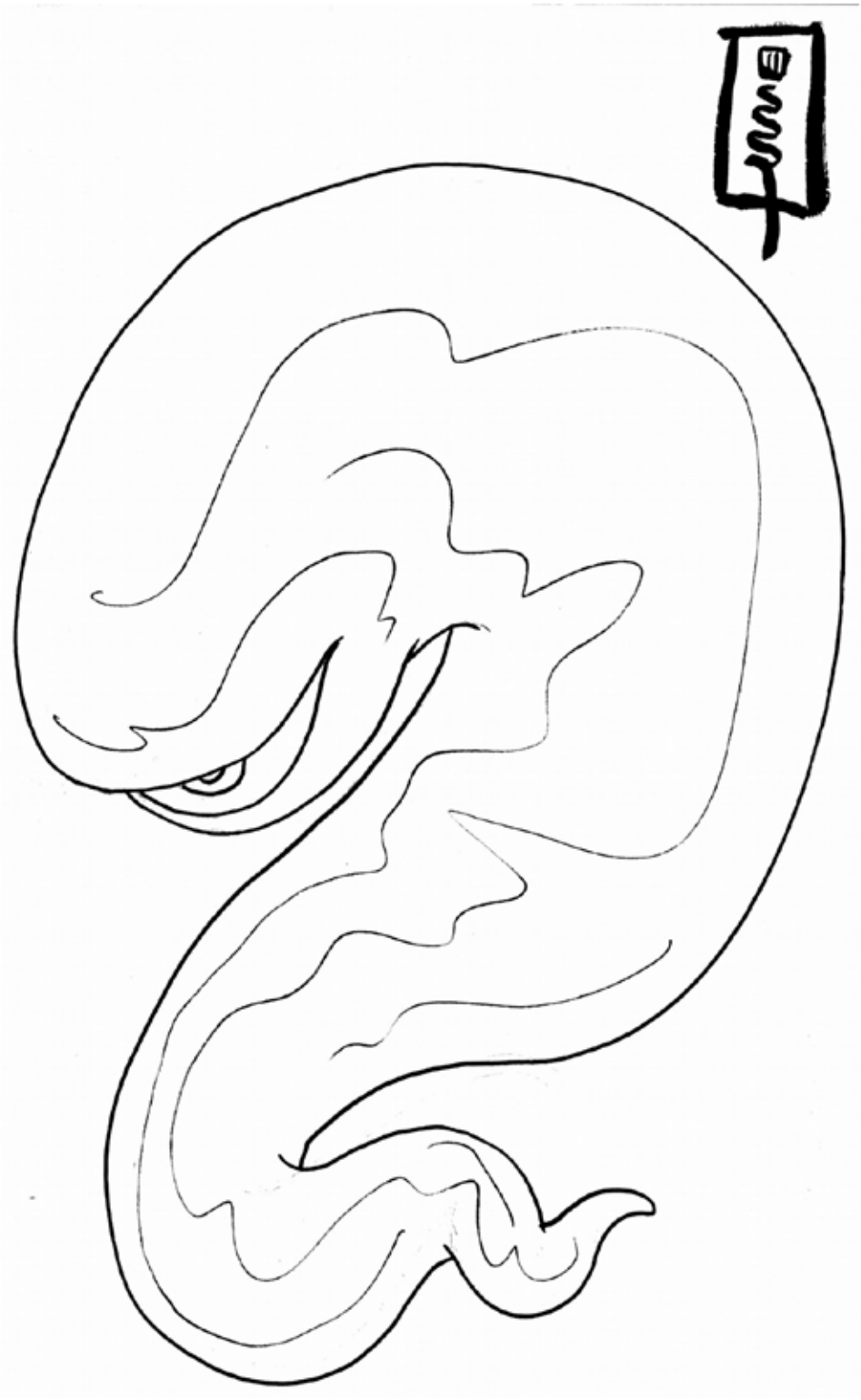
Iovirus

Iovirus is Megalovirus' other seneschal. Unlike the perfidiously charismatic Alphavirus, Iovirus is a nonsense-free manager of its parent's plans and various minion-children, directing things to go as Megalovirus pleases. Iovirus prefers to bask in its parent's ineffable glory, or at least surround itself with its feyr siblings whom it can command telepathically. If Iovirus must confront opposition, it subjects opponents to its withering gaze, stealing their ability to distinguish reality from nightmares until they die or their heads explode.



Slumber

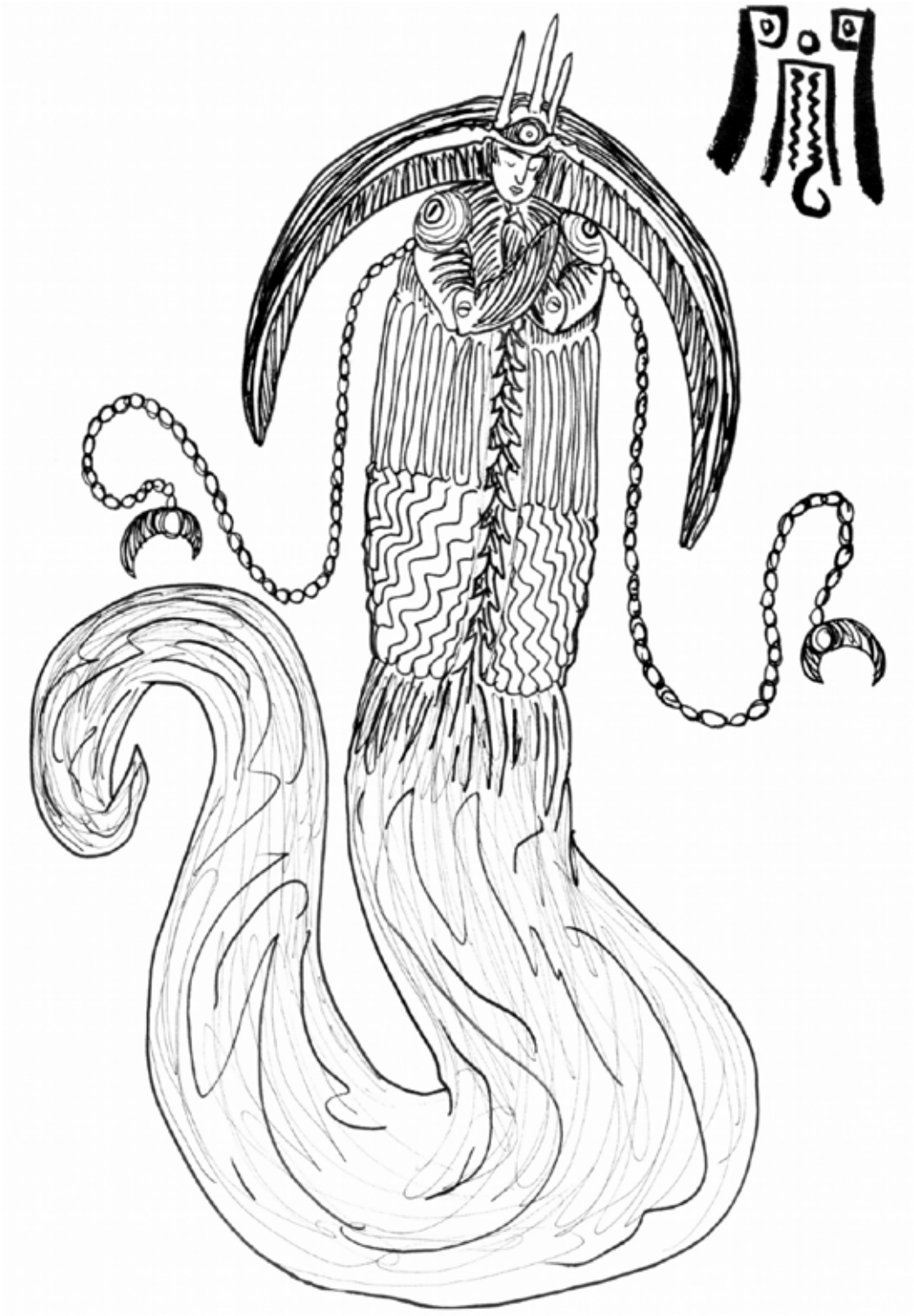
"Slumber" is a greater feyr who brings nightmares to all who meet its ineffable leer. Presumably, Slumber possesses ill intent, but, the goals of this mute horror are unknown. Scholars and hunters have been driven insane merely by trying to piece together nonsensical clues retrieved from the nightmares of its victims.



Apega

Apega is a demon who is pretending to be the ghost of a tyrant queen. The original Apega was a wicked brigand who was the wife of a grasping tyrant named Nabis. In life, Apega was her husband's right arm, eagerly assisting him in seizing the wealth and happiness and honor of their subjects. This evil, idyllic arrangement did not last, though, as Nabis was rightly convinced that his chief enforcer sought to overthrow him. Nabis threw his beloved wife a party, and at its height, presented her with a coffin made in her likeness. He filled the coffin with wine, and when she went to drink from it, was shut inside.

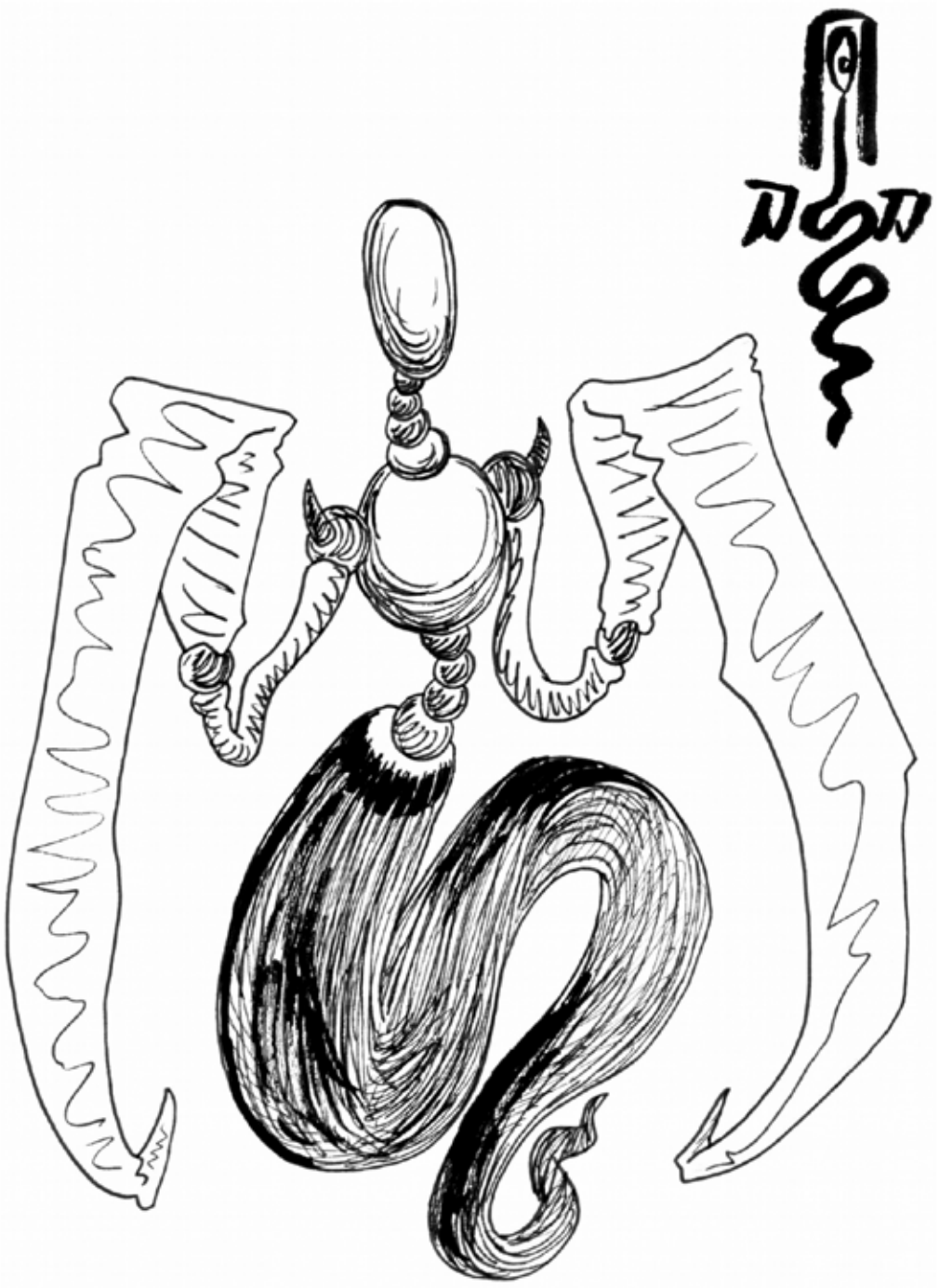
Apega's spirit was drawn into the Abyss, where she was devoured immediately. But such was Apega's and Nabis' lingering evil that a demon was drawn back into Nabis' castle. Here, the demon haunts Nabis while impersonating Apega, partly to torment him with his wife's memory, and partly to inspire him to greater acts of greedy malice.



Biophobia 1

The Biophobias, or "life-hating," are a, for a lack of a more accurate descriptor, "series of beings" from another dimension probably in the Far Realm. In this particular dimension, all of (that) reality is constructed from ectoplasm, and all aspects of (that) reality are literal appendages of a single, incomprehensibly vast entity. Every so often, whether through terrifying happenstance or through insane deliberation, a portal connects this dimension with the Prime Material Plane, allowing this entity to launch an invasion with an appendage. Once the portal closes, the appendage is severed from the whole, and becomes an independent and very hostile creature. Biophobias are immortal beings, being able to reconstruct themselves from ambient ectoplasm if they are destroyed. Short of the actions of a greater deity or a large black hole or the miraculous extinction of ectoplasm, spectacular forms of destruction merely delay a Biophobia's ability to reform. The only way to reliably permanently destroy a Biophobia without divine or stellar assistance would be to return it to its home dimension to be reabsorbed, a method that is, obviously, still fraught with horrible peril.

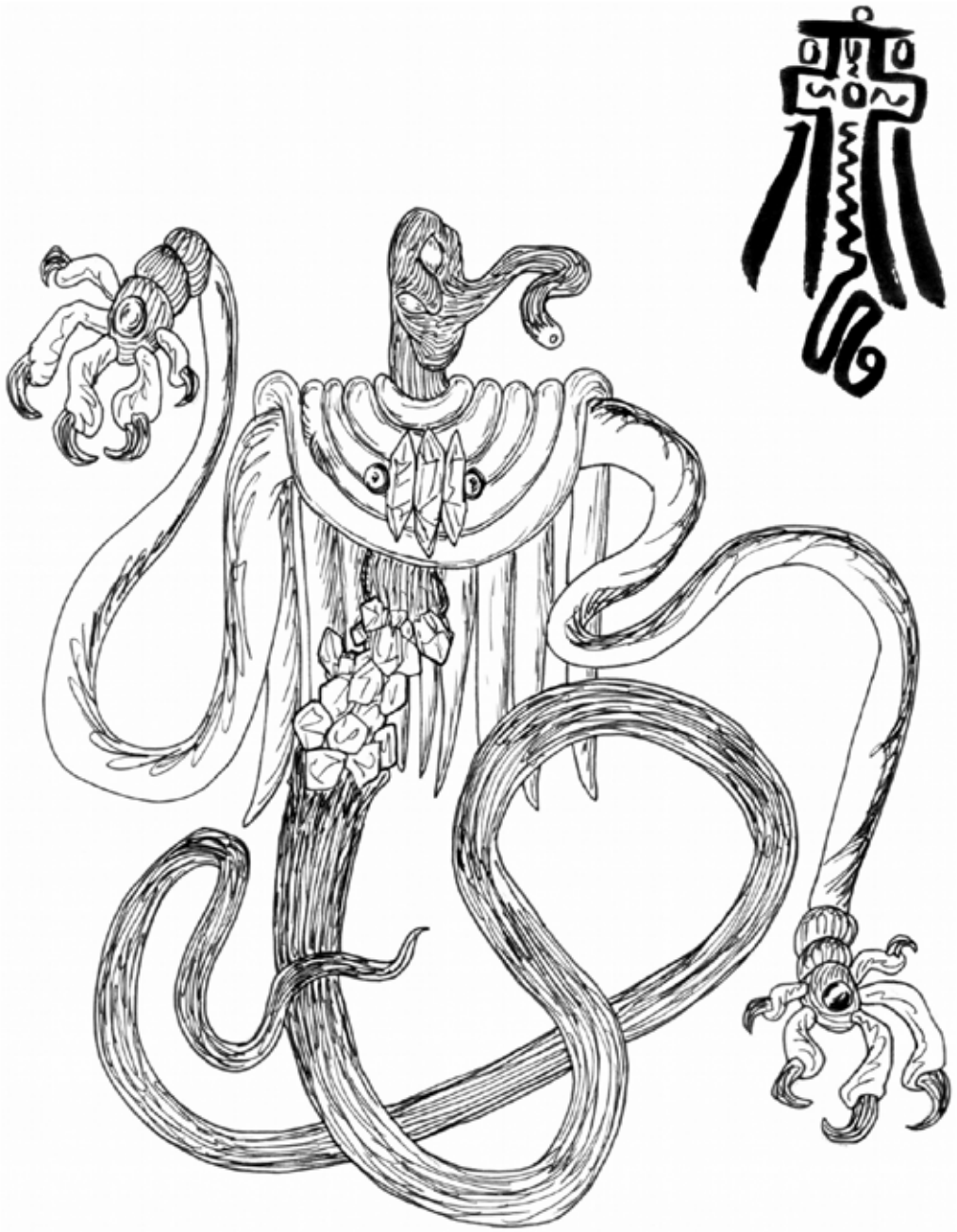
Biophobia 1 is a malevolent creature that can be best described as an "impersonator of a serial killer." Biophobia 1 delights in committing murder, whether with its own appendages, or by goading or possessing mortal dupes.



Biophobia 4

Biophobia 4, as with all other Biophobias, is a sentient severed appendage of an incomprehensible god-like being from the Far Realm.

Unlike most other Biophobias, Biophobia 4 appears to have some sort of goal or purpose here, and this focus apparently blunts its hostility, if not its malice. Biophobia 4 wraps itself in illusions in order to manipulate the minds of mortals, thereby duping them into form bizarre mystery cults venerating seemingly unknown deities, or crime syndicates with no apparent leaders. Those interlopers who can somehow successfully pierce Biophobia 4's many layers of illusion and obfuscation risk finding themselves facing a powerful opponent with an archmage's mastery of evocation.



Wangyan

Wangyan, or Amimei, is an evil spirit that appears to be a headless, clawed beast with dozens of glowering eyes all over its body. Wangyan brings bad luck to anyone who meets its gaze, and delights in stinging innocents with its venomous tail.

Wangyan hates salt. Flinging tears, blood, or sweat into its eyes will drive it into a mad rage, while throwing table salt at it will make it flee. It can not cross a line of salt, and trapping it with salt is a great way to make it beg for its miserable life. While trapped, Wangyan will make any sort of promise in exchange for its freedom. Potential gaolers must remember that Amimei will claim that it must be free to fulfill its part of an agreed to bargain, but will never uphold its end once freed.



Khuja-Kajara

Khuja-Kajara is the faithful lieutenant of the evil demon-faerie, Adhazu.

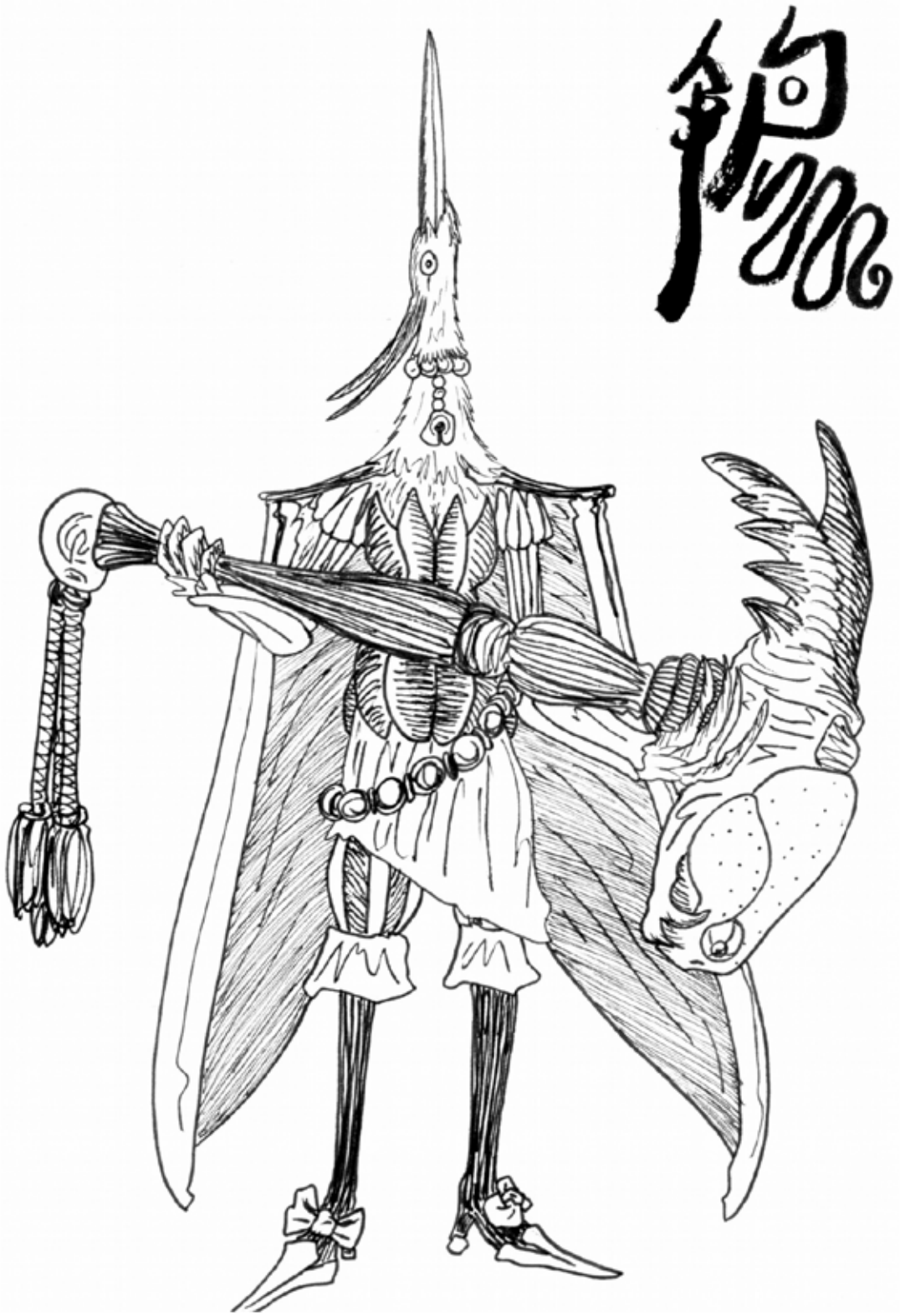
Khuja-Kajara is, himself an evil faerie. Other Unseelie fae found him so repulsive that a large band of them beat the bones out of him. The Unseelie Court upheld his maiming as just, and further forbade him from ever setting foot in Unseelie territory under pain of a slow death. Seelie fae, on the other hand, spit, and try to curb an urge to rip out any tongue that speaks his name.

Because Adhazu does not judge him, Khuja-Kajara is eternally loyal to his master, stealing children for the lord of Darkness Beyond Night.



The Heron Ghost

Who the Heron Ghost was in life is unknown, some suspect she may have been an actual heron in life. What is known of the Heron Ghost is that she is the undead steward of a mysterious island in a misty lake, surrounded by a misty forest. Upon that mysterious island is a garden of quince trees, the walls of which have been assembled from the rotting stones of a now-lost castle. The quinces are made of gold, which their trees have stolen from the defunct fortress' still-hidden treasure vaults; anyone who eats of the larcenous fruit die as their internal organs turn to gold. Would-be thieves who seek to pilfer these cursed quince are confronted by an apparition with a bird's head on a woman's body. Those who obey the apparition's order to bury the quince are given permission to leave the island. Those who balk risk being ground into paste by the ghost's cursed maul.



A Huecuva

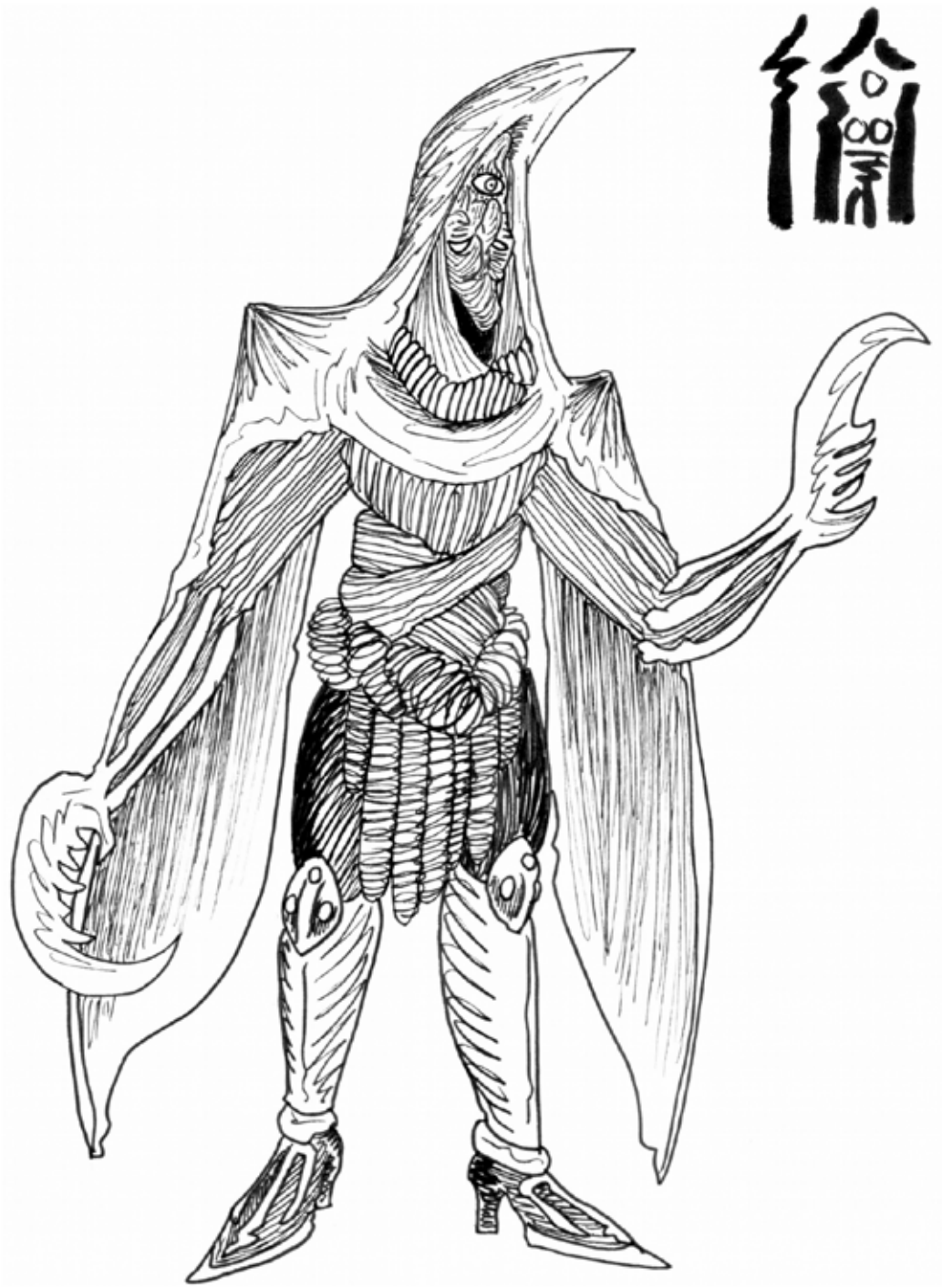
A cleric and her allies sought to bring to justice a fiendish assassin named Darhee. Darhee's father entered the cleric's dream disguised as the deity Pelor, giving clues to the assassin's location, and hints of how to foil the killer's plots. This fake Pelor then showed evidence of the cleric's friends plotting to betray her and rob her of her quarry. These dreams of false treachery drove the cleric to madness, leading to her to attack her friends when they finally cornered a mortally wounded Darhee, in a cathedral the assassin personally brought to ruin. When the cleric tried to murder her prey in front of her surviving former allies, Darhee's father, a balor, emerged from the rubble and crushed the cleric's head with a bell before carrying his daughter to safety in the Abyss.

The cleric lives on as an evil spirit, now bound to that ruined cathedral, searching for "friends" who can be trusted to silence her cursed peelings on her behalf.



Darhee

Darhee is a unique demon from the Abyss, and is a daughter of one of the balor princes of the Sixth Pyre. She is a shapeshifter who inflicts fatal misfortune on her father's foes, both in and outside of the Abyss. Darhee and her father delight in playing "games" where Darhee wanders off to engage in some horrid scheme and enrage her enemies, leading her father to grant these adversaries secret succor until it is time to betray them as a "birthday gift."



The many Ravenlofts

50 alternative versions of Ravenloft

By Jack the Reaper

Maybe there isn't only one Ravenloft. Maybe there are many.

The Mists may hold not only many different domains, but also many versions of each domain. There are several Barovias, several Darkons, several Falkovnias, etc., each slightly or greatly different from the others. Ravenloft is a dark mirror of other realities, but it might not be an intact mirror but a splintered one – each splinter reflecting the origin somewhat differently, like the reincarnations of Tatyana, or the reflections of Amber in Roger Zelazny's books.

Thus, books and records inside Ravenloft may contain different, contradicting descriptions of apparently the same realms. Travelers in the Mists might return to a familiar domain, only to find out that it is not the same as the one they are familiar with. It could be quite an eerie and unsettling experience. The darklord and the folk could be different, the geography or the history, the technological level or even some minor but irritating details. Their own families might not recognize them or even exist, and perhaps they'll encounter another version of themselves (watch the movie *Coherence* for such an example). The Fraternity of Shadows and other powers might have discovered this secret, and seek to use it for their agendas.

This new cosmology can put an end to the debates about different editions and fanfics. There's no need to choose one over the others; they could all be part of the many Ravenlofts, in the same setting.

"In our world, Strahd is trapped in his kingdom of Barovia, a Domain of Dread in the plane of Shadowfell – and across the multiverse, infinite versions of Strahd are trapped in infinite versions of Barovia. In many of these worlds, Strahd breaks free of his bonds and goes on to terrorize the Material Plane; in an equal number, he remains trapped for the rest of his miserable existence, suffering under the weight of his own sins. We don't know which outcome awaits our world, but we do know one way to prepare for the worst: documenting different versions of Strahd's tale from across the multiverse. If Strahd breaks free (or when, in my opinion), these files will ensure we're ready for any possibility. Tighten your collar and grab a stake, recruit; we're stalking the most dangerous vampire in the world."

(*Multiverse Files: Curse of Strahd*)

"Is each domain unique or just one in a series of recurring nightmares? How many forms of Castle Ravenloft exist, have existed, and will yet reveal themselves in the Mists? What is truth among the Domains of Dread, and how long will that remain certain? The answers are for you to decide."

(*Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft*)

1. **Darkenloft** – A grimdark version of Ravenloft, where everything is permanently dark and gloomy and the sun never truly shines. Undead and other monsters are more common and powerful, and humans are prone to the Shadowfell's effects of melancholy and despair.

2. **Spots of Light** – This version is an endless expanse of Mists. Those who travel there encounter secluded small locations, such as a castle, a village, or a graveyard, without any fixed geography. One may walk out of Castle Ravenloft and walk the Mists to find himself some minutes later in a pyramid in Har'Akir or a dungeon in Nidala.

3. **Nightmareloft** – The Nightmare Lands contain many dreamscapes, many of which contain dreamlike or nightmarish version of Ravenloft, centered around a trapped dreamer. Those versions may look like the real thing, be surrealistic and strange, or be utterly terrifying, with nightmarish versions of the darklords. Those trapped within can never be sure if they have truly awakened.

4. **Storyloft** – The Tome of Terror is a magical book of fairytales, which traps its readers inside the horrifying stories they read (see *Forged of Darkness*). Some of those stories may be versions of real Ravenloft, with dark fairytale motifs and twists.

5. **All the World's a Stage** – Lemot Sediam Juste, Lord of Scaena, traps visitors in his theatre inside the virtual worlds he creates for his plays. Some of those play-worlds may imitate the real Ravenloft, but they are all illusionary. Their plots are dictated by Juste and may contain layers within layers of illusion. Once a victim has stepped on the stage in Scaena, he can never be sure if he has truly escaped to the real world, or if his escape was just a part of the show and another illusion.

6. **Gnosisloft** – The Demiurge (see *Quoth the Raven* 26, pg. 51) is a being who can create microcosms inside small glass orbs, simulating all kinds of realities, each of which is controlled by the orb's owner. People inside those orbs are real and conscious, though they usually have no idea about the nature of their reality. Some of those orbs contain versions of domains or locations in Ravenloft.

7. **The Simulacra** (see *Quoth the Raven* 26, pg. 137) is an entity which can change its form to imitate any domain, including the denizens and

darklord, which are just extensions of it. It draws information and memories from its visitors to create those replicas, so if their information is flawed, so will be the domain. Initially, visitors will probably be sure they are in the actual land, but with time minor changes and strange events will surface, getting worse until the familiar land changes into a maddening nightmare.

8. **Fantasyloft** – A high fantasy version, Forgotten Realms style, with common high magic, classic monsters like dragons and giants, and many demihumans and humanoids. Darklords in this version are more powerful, in accordance with the level of their world.

9. **World of Ravenloft** – The domains and populations are large like countries in our world, encompassing thousands of miles and millions of people. Perhaps it is actually a full planet with continents and oceans, not just a demiplane.

10. **Black and white** – The world is monochromatic, embodying the style and atmosphere of old horror movies.

11. **Ravenloft by Gaslight** – The demiplane's overall cultural level is about 19th century.

12. **City of Ravenloft** – A conglomeration of all domains, compressed into a single city (see *Quoth the Raven* 28).

13. **Dovehome** – An "anti-Ravenloft" where the darklords are virtuous persons struggling against an evil population (see *Quoth the Raven* 28).

14. **Anime-loft** – Ravenloft in anime style, like *Vampire Hunter D* and *Castlevania*.

15. **Post-apocaloft** – A post-apocalyptic version, devastated by natural and supernatural catastrophes. The skies are overcast, the land is wasted and ruined, undead and monsters roam freely, and survivors are fighting for their existence in the wilderness or in secluded pockets of civilization. The remaining darklords have adapted to the situation and may play different roles.

16. **Ravenbrooke** – This setting is inspired by the series *Once Upon a Time*. Following one of Azalin's great plans, all the darklords, heroes, and other characters find themselves together in a modern age town named Ravenbrooke. They lost their memories and live now with false identities, believing they are just ordinary people leading normal lives. Strahd is the mayor. Azalin is the eccentric millionaire. Drakov is the sheriff. Mordenheim leads the hospital, Daclaud Heinfroth is a psychiatrist, Ivana a pharmacist, Markov a veterinarian. Jacqueline Renier is a reporter, Dominic d'Honaire a lawyer, Gabrielle Aderre runs a bar, Harkon Lukas is a singer, Hazlik makes tattoos, Tristessa manages an orphanage, Alfred Timothy is a dog trainer, Death is the undertaker …

and so on. Azalin is the only one who remembers everything and knows the truth.

Life in Ravenbrooke is quite peaceful, at least on the surface, until a mysterious Gentleman comes to town, bringing with him a strange book – a Van Richten's Guide... His meddling stirs forgotten memories, and former identities start leaking in. Will Azalin be able to stop him from ruining his dream?

17. **Futureloft** – A gothic-punk setting, cyberpunk, or even more futuristic version, where ancient evils merge with advanced high-tech.

18. **Sunnyloft** – This version is not grim, dark, and scary, but rather sunny, bright, and pleasant. People live peacefully and happily under the leadership of their just and beneficent rulers, and everything looks fine … on the surface. In truth, the darklords are no less evil than their original versions, they just hide it better. The evil here is more insidious, perpetuated in secret dungeons and facilities, or covered with layers of conspiracies and brainwashing. The contrast between the shining surface and the rotten interior only makes it more shocking and horrifying, and heroes will have a hard time trying to open the public's eyes to the truth.

19. **Gender-bender** – Darklords and other characters are the opposite sex of their original version.

20. **Matrixloft** – In a huge underground cavern in Bluetspur, thousands of people are held captive inside strange pods. The God Brain is using its immense psionic powers to trap their minds in a permanent, collective form of *microcosm* (see *The Illithiad* pg. 31), simulating the reality of Ravenloft they are familiar with. This project enables the God Brain and the illithids to explore human minds and share their experiences firsthand. People who question too much the realness of their world may find themselves awakening to the alien horror of Bluetspur.

21. **Afterloft** – Ravenloft is an afterlife – a kind of hell or purgatory where the souls of the damned go after their death, to be tried and punished. The denizens might or might not be aware of it and their former lives. While the darklords are beyond redemption, noble souls might be able to achieve repentance, thus escaping Ravenloft and ascending to Heaven.

22. **Mirrorloft** – Mirrors in Ravenloft are rarely just reflective surfaces. Actually, they are all portals to the mirrorland of Ravenloft. The mirrorland looks mostly like the real Ravenloft, only the right and left are reversed. Denizens of Mirrorloft are fetches – doppelgangers who imitate those who look in the mirrors, waiting hungrily for an opportunity to infiltrate the real world. Oddly enough, vampires in Mirrorloft are invisible, which is the

reason vampires have no reflection.

23. **Comicloft –** A comedy-horror setting, inspired by creations like *Beetlejuice*, *The Addams Family, Dracula: Dead and Loving it*, etc. In spite of the humor, PCs will often discover that the joke is on them, and the setting can be no less deadly and terrifying – and even more so, due to its logic-defying senselessness.

24. **Anno Strahd –** Azalin is not the only one who can plan grand plots. Strahd has concocted a cursed, magical mixture of his blood, and his agents managed to infect with it most darklords, nobles, and ruling families in the Core. Dilisnya, Boritsi, d'Honaire, Guignol, Drakov, Aderre, von Aubrecker, Weathermay, Bolshnik, Hiregaard, Hazlik, Renier – all those families and more have turned into vampires. Only domains in which the ruler was already undead, like Darkon and Valachan, remained unchanged. The situation in the Core now is similar to the novel *Anno Dracula*: vampires rule openly as the nobility, the masses are their cattle, and many mortals seek the Embrace to improve their status. Even worse, all those vampires are considered Strahd's offspring, so he can contact them mentally and command them from a distance, thus becoming the Vampire King of the Core. With the might of all those kingdoms under his control, the possibility of a World War against Darkon and his arch enemy Azalin looks realistic.

25. **Animaloft** – All characters, darklords, and denizens are anthropomorphic animals of all kinds. For inspiration, see the *Historia* setting for 5e.

26. **Darkhouses –** The real darklords in this setting are actually houses or similar locations, which possess malevolent intelligence and power, such as the House of Lament. Castle Ravenloft is the darklord of Barovia; Strahd is just a puppet, an extension of it (see *Multiverse Files: Curse of Strahd*). Avernus, the House on Gryphon Hill, Draccipetri, Misericordia – they are all sentient buildings with the power to affect, manipulate, corrupt, and possess people. If the puppet-darklord is destroyed, the house will just find another one. In other places, a landscape like a mountain, forest, or swamp can be the Lord.

27. **The Raven Show** – The darklords and all denizens except for the PCs are actors and not truly evil, though they play the regular roles (as in *The Truman Show*). Who created this complicated façade, and why, is up to the DM.

28. **Epicloft –** An epic tier setting where the darklords are highly powerful immortals living in grandiose castles, and the world is full of unearthly entities, deadly monstrosities, and supernatural phenomena. Only the greatest heroes can survive and succeed against the forces of darkness

(see *Wrath of the Immortals*).

29. **Parasiteloft** – In this version, Ravenloft doesn't appear as a separate demiplane, but as a parasite on another plane. Parts of it manifest like conjunctions in the host world – castles, manors, forests, and other locations. They appear in separate places and usually look as if they have always been there. If the local residents won't deal with them, their evil and corruption will spread like tumors across their world.

30. **Orientaloft** – The domains and characters are oriental in style and culture, ranging from Arabian Nights to far Asian. Darklords' backgrounds and personalities remain mostly the same, barring some adjustments.

31. **Virtualoft** – It looks like the normal version, but actually it's an artificial reality created by advanced technology. The darklords and monsters are robots, holograms, or AI beings, and the population is made of clones unaware of their condition. Or perhaps it is all a virtual reality. It might be designed for research and experiments, for pleasure (*Westworld* style), or as punishment for criminals (*Black Mirror* style). The creators of this world might be humans, aliens, demons, or others.

32. **The Next Generation** – The domains are ruled by the offspring or successors of the current darklords.

33. **Remix** – The darklords and domains are largely the same, but they are mixed – each darklord rules a different domain than his current one (e.g Strahd rules Darkon, Drakov rules Nova Vaasa etc.).

34. **Different Beast** – The darklords are the same persons, but different creatures (e.g. Strahd is a werebeast, Azalin a vampire, Drakov a death knight, etc.).

35. **Ravenoir** – A noir style setting, where the darklords and characters are typical noir characters in a dark, gloomy city. For inspiration, see the *Bloodshadows* setting.

36. **Ravenlost** – The theme of this reality is not fear and horror, but loss, sorrow, and despair. The darklords (known here as Lords of the Lost) are not villains who committed unspeakable acts of evil, but tragic figures who have suffered terrible loss. They don't scheme and plot, but mostly brood and lament their fate (think Poe's *The Raven*). The land and atmosphere are always dark, dreary, and melancholic, the cities are crumbling from disrepair, and the people are mostly shadows of themselves, going emptily through the motions (imagine a combination of Sithicus, Forlorn, and Necropolis). Each domain represents a loss of some kind – of loved ones, emotions, memories, will, personality, faith, virtue, sanity, hope, home, belongings, senses, passion, youth, health, life, etc. Those who travel across the lands gradually lose those

things, and if they don't find a way to escape Ravenlost, they will become part of it.

37. **Heroes and Villains** – In this version, those who were heroes are now darklords: Tatyana, van Richten, Jander Sunstar, Gondegal, Larissa Snowmane, Ivan Dragonov, and the other heroes have succumbed to darkness and now rule the domains – and those who were darklords are now the heroes. Just read Strahd's Guide to Vampires and join the fight against the forces of evil...

38. **Core War I** – An overall war has broken out. Falkovnia allied with Invidia and Nova Vaasa, and their united troops wage a war against the Treaty of the Four Towers, while undead armies march out of Darkon, Barovia, and Sithicus, and the other darklords also play their parts. Nowhere is safe now from the horrors of war.

39. **Alienloft** – Perhaps Gwydion or Virundus has managed to break out of his prison, or the God Brain carried out some grand plan, or maybe all of those things happened. The result was an escalation in Lovecraftian/Far Realm phenomena all over the demiplane, with tentacled horrors descending from the skies and rising from the seas to dominate cities, and colors out of space twisting people and animals. Most darklords embraced the chaos or succumbed to it and changed into alien monstrosities. See Neil Gaiman's *Study in Emerald* for inspiration.

40. **Crazyloft** – People of Vechor have always worshiped Easan as a god, and somehow, by the combined effect of their faith and the strange nature of his domain, he actually became a nearly omnipotent god – and made all of Ravenloft his playground. Reality turned into a mad, ever-changing nightmare, where logic and order were thrown out of the window, and Easan's whims shape everything (for inspiration, see the Weirdmageddon in the ending episodes of *Gravity Falls*, and DC Comics' *Emperor Joker*).

41. **Deviloft** – The creators of this version are not the enigmatic Dark Powers, but the forces of Hell. Those who fail Power Checks start transformation into devils, and the darklords themselves are equivalent to archdevils, twisted and evil with no speck of humanity left. "The devil Strahd" is not just a metaphor here. The presence of Hell is manifest in many forms over the demiplane, from the reddish glow of the skies and the crimson Mists to the feral nature itself.

42. **Open Borders** – There are no domains in this version. Political borders exist, but not mystical ones, and the darklords can move freely everywhere and interact directly with each other.

43. **House of A** – Everything is well in Ravenloft. Mortal Strahd is happily married with Tatyana, Azalin has his son by his side, Victor and Alice Mordenheim live peacefully with Adam, and Gabrielle Aderre has a loving

husband and two lovely children. All are happy and content with their lives. But should they be?

The truth is that Gabrielle Aderre went Wanda Maximoff. Her powers of magic and the evil eye became stronger with time, amplified by her union with the Gentleman Caller, until she was able to warp reality around her, intentionally or unconsciously. Her current stressful situation made her mental state deteriorate, and her powers became more chaotic and unstable. Eventually, they culminated in a *House of M* scenario: Gabrielle's fervent wishes unleashed her willpower and warped the whole fabric of the demiplane, changing it into a dream-like scenario where everyone gets what they wished for.

But it is Ravenloft after all, and this situation won't last. Gradually, memories and influences from the original reality will start leaking in, people will start doubting the reality of their world, and eventually the dream will collapse back into the grim reality. The anguish and rage of the darklords robbed of their happiness will know no bounds.

44. **Winterloft** – The demiplane is locked in a perpetual, harsh winter with no end seen on the horizon. Denizens must struggle not only against the regular horrors, but against the cold, darkness, and hunger. Could Meredoth be the one behind it?

45. **Empire of the Chained God** – Vecna has taken over most of the demiplane, making it an empire under his harsh rule. Some of the darklords were destroyed, others surrendered to him willingly or reluctantly, and some are leading the resistance, becoming kind of anti-heroes against the greater evil.

46. **Only Natural** – In this version, there's nothing supernatural or unnatural in Ravenloft. Many denizens strongly believe there is, but it is all superstitions and misunderstandings. "Undead" and "werebeasts" are just diseased people, witches and wizards are frauds, deluded, or use scientific means, and ghosts are delusions or hoaxes. The darklords themselves are mortal people – Strahd XI is indeed a descendant of the original Strahd, "Azalin Rex" is a title passed along by Darkonese kings, Tristen Hiregaard has a split personality disorder, etc. Some of them pretend to have supernatural powers, but they actually don't. Even the Mists are just … mists. In short, it's like the current perception of the medieval period – a dark age of ignorance, superstitions, fear, and faith, but without real magic. The horror in this setting focuses on human evil, which cannot be blamed on any Dark Powers or mysterious beings, only on human nature itself, and it shows how fear of the unnatural can be disastrous even if it's all in the head.

47. **Mask of the Raven** – After millennia, the plots of the Red Death bore

fruits. Apocalyptic events shook the foundations of the world, then the Grand Conjunction occurred, and the demiplane of Ravenloft merged with Gothic Earth. The darklords took over the fallen countries and founded their own domains and territories. Gothic Earth became even darker, with supernatural beings and phenomena much more common, and humanity is struggling to adapt into this new nightmare of reality (for inspiration, see *Monte Cook's World of Darkness*).

48. **The Lesser Evil –** The darklords do horrible things regularly. Nobody suspects they are actually heroes who pay a terrible price. All darklords had an insight of the Dark Powers' true nature, and they know they pose a threat to the entire multiverse. The only way to stop them is with sacrifices. Acts of exceptional evil and the spilling of innocent blood keep the Dark Powers sated and slumbering, contended with their little demiplane like a child having a pleasant dream. But should the constant streaming of evil and terror dwindle, the Dark Powers will awaken and destroy the demiplane, and then proceed to turn the whole of creation into eternal nightmare. Therefore, the darklords sacrifice their own souls and countless others to prevent the greater evil, weeping inside but having no choice (*Cabin in the Woods* is an inspiration).

49. **I am the Land –** There are no darklords in this version, but the lands themselves are alive and evil, aware of anything happening inside their borders and conspiring against their prisoners. Each domain may form an avatar representing its spirit, to interact with people, but destroying the avatar will do nothing to the land itself.

50. **Twilight Zone –** Ravenloft is not a separate demiplane, but a hidden reality located in another world. "It is the middle ground between light and shadow, between science and superstition, and it lies between the pit of man's fears and the summit of his knowledge." Think Hogwarts and Diagon Alley in *Harry Potter*, or Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*. Most people are not aware to its existence, but occasionally some poor souls stumble into the Mists or take the wrong turn and find themselves inside the Twilight Zone of Ravenloft.

Markovia, land of Healing and Harming

Domain Alternate Version (Mistworld)

By Tommaso "Mistmaster" Mazzoni

Official Name: The Republic of Markovia
Culture level: Renaissance
Ecology: Full
Climate & Terrain: Temperate. Markovia is an archipelago composed by one big island, which is Markovia proper, and several smaller islands just one mile or less off Markovia's shore. The majority of the island is a fertile plain, probably of volcanic origin, with one large lake.
Languages: Common (Balok), Markovian (Balok dialect), Lamordian, Akashi.
Religions: Akashi Religion, Cult of Aka the Great Lion, Cult of Diosam the Bloodstained Gorilla, Church of Ezra the Preserver, Church of Andral, Divinity of Self, Cult of Oceanus.
Races: Humans 94% (one third Akashi or of Akashi descent), 5% Broken Ones,1% Other).
Government: *De jure* Oligarchic Republic, *de facto* Hereditary Monarchy.
Ruler: President Radu Markov.
Darklord: Doctor Frantisek 'Diosamblet' Markov.
Lightlord: Jhurgen 'Akanga' Vastish.
Inhabitants: 5 million.
Surface: 60,000 square kilometers.
Analogue: Early XIX Australia with a United Province Republic twist.
Capital City: Markovstadt (100,000 in, Standard, N),
Important towns: Vestegrad (75,000 in, Standard, LN), Lion's Mouth (62,000, Standard, NG), Serenity (39,000, non-standard, N), Broken Port (Monstrous, 19,000, LG), Dominia Harbour (non-standard 13.000, NE)
Borders: The island lies in the Sea of Sorrows, 570 miles west of Lamordia.

Tropes

Markovia explores the horror of misused science and unethical medicine and the horror of ethnic strife, telling stories of the harming and healing of body, mind and soul, and tales of body horror. Many have secrets to protect here, secrets they would gladly kill to keep.

Domain Overview

The Land

The island of Markovia is the largest in the Markovian Archipelago, and consists mainly of plains with one large lake, the Lion's Eye Lake, which sits in the center of the island on the only relevant hill, Mount Aka. It is from here that the main river of the Island, the Lion's Tear River, flows into Sunrise Bay. On the mouth of the Lion's Tear sits the capital city of Markovstadt. The largest of the minor islands is Dominia in Sunrise Bay. The only relevant mountain range, the Old Stone Man, is on the northern shore. Broken Port, the reclusive city of the Beastfolk, sits on the shore at the foot of the mountains. Vestegrad is the second major port and is located on the western shore of the island. The city of Lion's Mouth, where the Lion's Tear River is born, is mainly populated by the native Akashi people, while the town of Serenity, deep in the forest on the western side of the island, is a renowned thermal location with a mixed population, including the only sizable community of Broken Ones outside Broken Port. The city of Dominia Harbour on the small island of Dominia in Sunrise Bay is also renowned as a place of convalescence, and it is the seat of the Core-wide renowned Dominia Asylum

The People

There are three different groups of population in Markovia:
The Colonists, mainly of Barovian, Lamordian and Borcan descent, who define themselves as Markovians and are a stubborn and practical people. Markovians are business-oriented, but they are also cultured and observant. They tend to live longer lives than average, thanks to the excellent healthcare they receive. They respect science, alchemy and some form of arcane magic, even if they view the latter with some suspicions.
The Akashi people are of a darker completion then the Colonists, usually dress in elaborate tunics and have an elaborate tradition of face-painting. The Akashis are a deeply spiritual people who have also a deep knowledge of the island's natural secrets.
The third component of Markovia's population are the Broken Ones, also known as the Beastfolk; a heterogeneous group of humanoid animals which only recently started to form a culture of their own, the Beastfolk are distinguished in three categories: Animals turned humanoid, Humanoids turned beastfolk; and beastfolk born from successive generations. The Beastfolk are mainly based on mammals, but there are small clans of bird-based, reptile-based, fish-based and amphibian-based ones. They are often mistrusted and treated as unfortunate freaks as best, and as monsters at worst. Markovian law says they are citizens, but this is forgotten in those communities of colonists where the memory of the Broken Ones War is more alive.

History

Age of Creation:
In Akashi Mythology, the Shiakas, the Ancient Spirits (which colonists call the gods) emerged from the darkness and started to work together to make the world. The mightiest of the two were Aka the Lion and Diosam the Gorilla; Diosam could not decide a form to give to the living beings and kept altering them, creating monstrous beings. Hearing the pleas of the living creatures, Aka asked Diosam to stop, but Diosam cared not. Aka then fought him and managed to bite off his right hand. Diosam lost the ability to directly change the shapes of the living beings, but kept whispering in the ear of the smartest (and cruelest) beings, urging them to reshape life forms.

Age of Empires:
In the age of Empires the Akashi people, fleeing from the Akiri Empire in the Amber Reach, settled on the archipelago and founded a prosperous civilization. Mount Aka became a dead volcano and a lake formed in its mouth.

Age of Darkness:
In the Age of Darkness the Akashi had to fend off attempts by Lamordian barbarians to invade their land.

The Modern Age:
In the Modern Age Iuliu Markov, a cadet scion of the Markov Barovian family, dissatisfied with Strahd IX's stagnant rule, decided to try to find a better life. With a couple of thousand colonists, Iuliu sailed from Ludendorf and settled where Markovstadt currently stands. He married the Akashi king's daughter and managed to conquer the island mostly bloodlessly. From that day on, the head of the Markov family in Markovia is also the King of the Akashis. The Markovian Republic recognizes this fact, electing the Markov leader as their president for life. Later however, the two peoples grew disaffected with each other to the point that a civil war erupted.

The Current Age:
The civil war between the Akashi and the Colonist descendants came to an end when the Broken Ones, creations of the mysterious Diosamblet (hand of Diosam in Akashi) emerged and threatened both human populations.
Diosamblet was apparently killed and the Broken Ones, freed of his influence, were reluctantly accepted as a part of the Markovian society. Thirty years later, Markovia thrives again.

Places of Interest:

Markovstadt is the capital city of Markovia and a thriving port in the Sunrise Bay on the mouth of the Lion's Tear River. House Markov's family manor dominates the city from a hill, while the Old Halls are the seat of the Republic's government and the Markovian Parliament. The main inn is *the Good Rest*, owned by Emmerik Nodak-Markov, a burly retired mariner.
The general headquarters of the Markovian Navy, the Markovian Militia and the Markovian Security Service (an intelligence service which doubles as an investigative police force) all can be found in Government Square, the heart of the city. Temple Road houses temples of the main colonists' religions: the Dome of Our Lady of the Sunrise, the Cathedral of the Rising Sun, the Shrine of Waves and the Palace of Enlightenment.

Vestegrad is the main port on the Markovian West coast. It is the last port for ships heading north from the south-western continent. Less developed then the capital city, Vestegrad is still a thiving port where you can find exotic people and products. Near the docks you can find the Great Sanctuary of the Sea, Oceanus' main temple on the island. The main inn there is *the Kraken's Tentacle*, famed for its seafood dishes. Its owner is mysterious Alice Weirdweather, a toothless old crone who is sharp of wit and sharper of tongued.

Broken Port is a small, well-fortified town on the north side of the island. It is the capital city of the majority of the Broken Ones; a great colonist-style temple of Aka the Lion, called the Great Lion's sanctuary, is located by the gates of the city; the main inn is *the Bubbling Cauldron*, owned by a greedy, old, fat pig Broken One – Jaffa 'Boss' Dayhogg – who owns half the town.

Lion's Mouth is the Akashi people's main settlement, and is buildt following Akashi tradition, seated near the top of Mount Aka, where the Lion's Tear flows from the Lion's Eye Lake. The city consists of nine circles of stone houses with elaborated carpets and wooden statues around circling streets, with smaller streets breaking the circles and allowing entry into the internal circles. The Akashi do not have inns, but they grant hospitality to any people asking for it. The Gathering House, Akashi's seat of power, sits at the center of city, next to the Abode of the Ancient Spirits, the most holy sanctuary of the Akashi people.

Serenity was built after the War of the Broken Ones, and it is meant to be the symbol of peace. Various styles mingle together, and colonial buildings are harmonized with Akashi architecture and bizarre Beastfolk edifices. Many thermal springs dot the peaceful countryside, making Serenity a hub for clinics, the most famous one the Mereau Clinic owned by the reclusive surgeon, Dr Emile Merau.
Three local inns are renowned everywhere in the islands for different reasons:

The Broken Claw – owned by Larkin Stripehide, a rugged tiger-like Beastfolk and veteran of the war – is notorious for its gambling, games and contests.
Second, *the Monkey's Eybrow* – owned by a distinguished Markovian of pure Colonist descent, Vlad Minakov – is renowned for its high quality comfort, its cultured entertainments, its music and its drinks.
Finally, there is *the Blessed Pot* – owned by Oonga dhaZakiri-Midheim, who is married to a Markovian of colonist descent.
Several small shrines and sanctuaries of all the religions practiced on the island dots the town.

Dominia Harbour is a colonist-style port-town, where shps arriving from the Core usually stop to rest and ride out bad weather, and a market where unsavory goods are often sold since law-enforcement is a bit more lax here.
The two principal features of the island are:

#1 The lighthouse, Dominia's Lantern, which allows the ships safe travel during night and storms. The lighthouse also hosts a shrine to Oceanus, the Mariner's Refuge.

#2 Dr. Claude Dominiani's Clinic of Mental Hygiene, also known as Dominiani's Asylum. The vast complex covers almost all of the west-

ern half of the island, including a vast park surrounded by guarded walls; just outside the walls you can find a chapter of the Divinity of Self, the House of the Restored Self, which helps the exonerated patients to rejoin society.
The Siren's Call is the most renowned inn on the island, owned by a retired head nurse of the Asylum, Mildred Rallchett.

Religion

Akashi Religion The Akashi religion is animistic and believes in a great number of spirits, represented as animals called Shiaka, who are united in the Shiakas' Moot. Akashi priests are called Gnabo, vessels, recognizable by their staffs, with the symbol of a circle of hands and animal paw-prints on the tip. Gnabos are advisors and healers of body, mind and soul. They are also keepers of the Akashi traditions and lore, and they teach the Akashi children to honour and respect their traditions. A few Gnabos, called Tagnabos, Chosen Vessels, serve a specific Spirit, wearing a mask which represents it.
Aka the Great Lion, god of rulers and righteousness, and Diosam the Bloodstained Gorilla, god of forbidden magic and despoiling, are the most well-known spirits of the Akashi, and they have their own entries as they are also worshipped by non-Akashi. There are also other important spirits, like Adzan the Mist Snake, god of Death and Ruler of the Underworld; Kalla the Nurturing Cow, goddess of earth and cattle; Malka the Silver Hare, god of the Moon; Shenna the Shining Eagle, the goddess of the Sun; Ydwa the Watchful Wolfhound, god of law-enforcement and duty; Zirna the all-Observing Owl, goddess of knowlege and wisdom; Zorak the Envious Toad, god of poison and strife.
Many other spirits are also venerated; the symbol of the Shiakas' Moot is a circle of hands and animal paw-prints. (Individual deities use their totem animal as a symbol); Gnabo clerics can choose any domain, as the Shiakas represents all aspects of reality. Their favored weapon is the quarterstaff. Tagnabo Clerics have different favored weapons and can choose only their individual Shiaka patron's domains. Gnabos can be Neutral, Lawfull Neutral, Chaotic Neutral, Neutral Good, or Neutral Evil. Many Gnabos are Shamans or Druids.

Cult of Aka the Great Lion:
This cult of the Lawful Good head of the Shiakas' Moot is very popular among Markovian soldiers and bureaucrats, as well as among the Beastfolk of Broken Port. It teaches honesty, courage, strategy, wisdom and common sense, as well as to follow the rules as long as the rules serve their purpose, which is to ensure prosperity and happiness. Rules which are not made with that goal in mind are wrong, and must be changed, and even challenged. Aka's symbol is a rampant crowned lion, its domains are Community, Good, Law, Nobility, Strength and War. Aka's Tagnabos are field-leaders in times of need and advisors in time of peace. Their favored weapon is the Akashi's Clawed Gauntlet.

Cult of Diosam the Bloodstained Gorilla:
This cult of the Chaotic Evil Akashi god of bad luck, despoilment and dark magic is generally secretive; he is only worshiped among the Akashi.
Some Tagnabo openly venerate his less dangerous and malignant aspects as a bringer of change. Ambitious Markovian arcanists, scientists and vengeful Beastfolks venerate him as a god of forbidden magic and unnatural experiments. His symbol is a white, bloodstained gorilla lacking the right paw. He teaches his followers to never let anything stay as it is; change for change's sake, disturb the quiet, learn everything you can no matter the price, and test your knowledge every way no matter the consequences. His domains are Artifice, Chaos, Evil, Knowledge, Madness and Magic. His favored weapon is the dagger.

Church of Ezra the Preserver :
The Markovian Church of Ezra is in communion with the Lawful Neutral Borcan Branch. The Arch-Sentire of Markovstadt is the head of the church, and she is nominated by the Bastion in Borca. The Church teaches the importance of teamwork, tradition, and family ties and the importance of trade. Her Domains are Law, Mist, Protection, Strength and Travel. The Church of Ezra is the Markovian colonist Religion with the most wide-spread following among the Akashi people, thanks to prosely-

tizing priests. The symbol of the church is a shield with a longsword and a belladonna twig. The favored weapon of the church is the longsword.

Church of Andral, the Morning Lord: The religion of the original Barovian colonists, this Neutral Good Church is in full communion with the Barovian one, but has a less militant approach. The Markovian Andral faith is a religion of hope, unity, compassion, mercy and comforting. The priests, healers and advisors of the communities have access to the Community, Good, Healing, Protection and Sun domains. Andral's favored Weapon is the morning star. The holy symbol of the church is the sun disk. Peasants and small communities of Markovians and several Beastfolk of Serenity are followers of the Morning Lord.

Divinity of Self:
This Lamordian Lawful Neutral religious philosophy, teaches the mortal origin of every deity and that any mortal being can follow that example. The Markovian chapter also preaches the value of health of mind, body and soul, and provide guidance for self-improvement. The priests of the Divinity of Self are advisors and teachers. The Markovian chapter priests can choose from the following domains: Community, Healing, Knowledge, Law, and Luck. The symbol of the cult is a squared circle. The favored weapon of the cult is the quarterstaff.

Cult of Oceanus the Sea Lord:
This Chaotic Good cult of Oceanus is popular among seafarers, Markovians living in the main ports and water-abiding Beastfolk. It teaches people to respect the sea and love freedom and the beauty of the waves. Its priests are warden of sanctuaries and ship's chaplains, working as healers and advisors for the crew. They hate slavery and fight it in any form. The Sea Lord's favored weapon is the trident, his symbol is a seashell. The Priests of the Sea Lord can choose from the Animal, Chaos, Good, Liberation, Water and Weather domains.

The People Famous and the Infamous

Lord Bourgmaster Jhurgen 'Akanga' Vastish
(Middle-Aged Greater Beastfolk Hunter 12, LG)

Jhurgen is a powerfully-built, white furred, lion-headed man. He is always dressed in a leather jerkin, and has great melancholic blue eyes. He was a Markovian hunter who was captured by Diosamblet and transformed into a Lion-headed Beastfolk thirty years ago. He managed to stir up a rebellion among the Beastfolk, allowing for the defeat of Diosamblet. He became the leader of the Beastfolk, and today he is the Lord Bourgmaster of Broken Port. The Akashi call him Akanga, and see him as the chosen of Aka. He is haunted by flashes of his past, and constantly torn between his Human side and his Beastfolk side.
(Adventure Hook: Broken Port is restless as some of the human villages built near the Beastfolk city are growing belligerent; Lord Jhurgen has invited the Lord President to a meeting with the villages' aldermen, and he has asked the adventurers to work as extra security.)

Lord-President Radu Markov
(Middle-Aged Human Opportunist Fighter 10. LN)

The President of the Markovian Republic and the hereditary King of the Akashi, Radu Markov is a shrewd politician and capable businessman,who is the richest and most influential merchant on the island and in the Core in general. Radu is a tall man with salt-and-pepper hair and hawkish grey eyes, dressed always in simple but high quality clothes. Though seen as controversial for allowing full rights to the Beastfolk after Diosamblet's defeat, he is genuinely convinced that unity and integration will favor Markovia's prosperity. While not above dirty tactics and manipulations, Radu is an honorable man who keeps his word and honors the deal he signs.
(Adventure Hook: For thirty years, Lord Radu has worked restlessly to rebuild Markovia after almost four decades of war, including the Civil War and the Broken Ones war, and now it thrives; but old hatred and distrust are hard to forget, and old troubles seem to be stirring again. When people start to disappear, Lord Radu asks the adventurers to investigate.)

Arch-Sentire Dominic Saldru
(Middle-Aged Human Cleric of Ezra 10, LN)

The Arch-Sentire of Markovstadt is the leader of Ezra 's church on Markovia. This slim, long-mustached, balding and graying priest is a cautious man and a skilled diplomat and negotiator. Although by no means a model of virtue, he has managed to establish himself as a trusted member of Markovian society. He is currently trying to establish a new mission in Akashi territory.
(Adventure Hook: When Anchorite Davut Piatravie stops sending messages from Akashi territory, where he was working to found a new mission, the Arch-Sentire offers the adventurers an handsome reward for any information about the missing priest's whereabouts.)

Captain Dmitri Markov
(Young Adult Human Fighter 4, LG)

Radu's eldest son and heir, he is a talented young man and would be a perfect successor, if he were not so idealistic. Not even some time in the island militia and fleet facing bandits and pirates have quenched his thirst for justice, nor have they added any pragmatism to his honorable outlook. Externally, he is a younger and kinder version of his father with green eyes. He favors the red and white of the Markov family crest.
(Adventure Hook: When an innocent family of raccoon-like Beastfolk is brutally assaulted by a mob, Captain Markov wants those responsible apprehended and punished, but they seem to be protected from the law somehow. Frustrated he asks council to an old friend, one of the adventurers)

Emmerik Nodak-Markov
Old Human Privateer Fighter 7, NG)

This completely bald, jolly. fat old man with twinkling green eyes is a far removed cousin of the main Markov branch, and he was a mariner of renown in his youth. Emmerik is a generous fellow with a booming voice and a penchant for theatricality. His adventurous youth made him quite wealthy and influential. Emmerik is happily married with eight children and ten grandchildren, and the majority of his family is employed at his inn, *the Good Rest.*
(Adventure Hook: When one of his grandchildren disappears, Emmerik offers his customers a generous reward if they can find the child. The adventurers are among those customers.)

General Ivan Markov (Old Human Drill Sergeant Fighter 8, N)

Radu's uncle is the leader of the Markovian Defence Forces and a strongly vocal supporter of his nephew's rule. This old man is not as fit and fast as he was in his youth, but his mane of white hair and his silver mustaches still look as intimidating as they did when he was younger and they were all black. A claw-scar marks his forehead; a memento of the war against the Beastfolk. Having lost his elder son, Vladu, and both his brothers in that war, he is not a great proponent of the current integration program, but he is still a loyal executor. His second son Grigori recently made him a grandfather.
(Adventure Hook: Recently, at his nephew's insistence, the General opened recruitment to Beastfolk. Many of his officers and soldiers reacted badly to the news, especially the veterans of the war, but he grudgingly enforced the Lord-President's will – while turning a blind eye to drilling methods becoming a bit harsher. When a young bull Beastfolk recruit, who had managed to endure the training regime and win respect from many of his comrades and officers, is found dead, Ivan asks the adventurers to investigate.)

Admiral Alexandru Markov-Yevaren
(Middle-Aged Human Wizard 9, NG)

The head of the Markovian fleet, Alexandru is a scion of a branch of the Markov family. He is an handsome man with black, curly hair and water-green eyes, his face tanned and wrinkled thanks a life on deck. Tall and lean, he compensates for his below-average physical abilities with a keen strategic mind and his magical prowless, and he is well liked by his crew.
(Adventure Hook: When Alexandru's cherished daughter Elisabeta is kidnapped by a pirate crew, he will not rest until he rescues her, but his duties forces him to delegate to the adventurers.)
Dr Arrik Marshav

(Adult Human Half Flesh-Golem Chirurgeon Alchemist 7, CG)

Dr. Marshav is one of the greatest surgeons in the whole Core, one of the few who Dr. von Mordenheim himself regards as a peer. He is the generous director of the Markov Memorial Hospital. He is rarely seen outside his clinic, and will cut short any conversation, including questions about his past in Borca.
(Adventure Hook: Dr. Marshav is a Half-Golem; he keeps the frenzy in check with an innovative therapy, which uses rare ingredients. When these are stolen, he asks the adventurers to retrieve them.)

Constable Kliment Bloodhound
(Adult Beastfolk Investigator (Hardboiled Detective) 8, LG)

Loyal and stubborn as the grey-muzzled, green-eyed hound he was born as, Kliment has earned phraise for his intelligence and his skill; A pup mutated into a Beastfolk just at the end of the Broken Ones War, Kliment grew up at a human speed, was adopted by a human family and today is a man earning an equal number of praise and scolding for his sometimes unorthodox way to solve cases. He serves as Constable of the MSF, Markovstadt chapter, and he is one of their most notorious operatives.
(Adventure Hook: Someone has committed a murder and framed the adventurers for it. Constable Bloodhound might be the only member of the Markovian Security Force willing to believe them.)

Dr Mordecai Sekisha
(Middle Aged Human Alchemist (Anaesthesist) 7, LE)

Dr Sekisha is a charming man, with salt-and-pepper hair, twinkling dark eyes and a clean-shaven face. He is one of the best therapists at the Markov General Hospital. What no one knows is that he works with a kidnapping ring at the behest of Dr. Merau. *(Adventure Hook: The adventurers prevent the kidnapping of a young woman, who was drugged in a way only a professional could have achieved. Maybe the best anaesthesist of Markov General Hospital might help them.)*

Kalki dhaKwara
(Old Human Cleric (Cloistered Priest) of Oceanus 8, CG)

Kalki is an Akashi who converted to the cult of Oceanus as a young boy. He preaches respect for the creatures of the sea. He mixes the traditional long, blue, priestly garb of the cult with Akashi tattoos and the traditional staff of the Akashi shamans, bearing the symbol of Oceanus. He resides in the Dome of Waves in Markovstadt.
(Adventure Hook: Recently, a rare kind of golden dolphin had been discovered in the water of Sunrise Bay. Kalki has declared the dolphin holy to Oceanus, but unscrupulous whalers still threaten the creature. To protect it, Kalki has offered a reward to the adventurers to try and discourage the whalers.)

Lord Bourgmaster Aron Blackbird-Markov
(Adult Human Mariner Fighter 6, LN)

A renowned seafarer and a scion of a cadet branch of the Markov family, Aron is a black-haired man with grey-green eyes and short, black mustache. He wear the colors of his house, blue and black, and is a stern but honest man who has largely improved and enriched the city of Vestegrad in his ten years tenure as Bourgmaster.
(Adventure Hook: House Blackbird-Markov took its name from the raven's head it displays on the family crest. The raven was chosen as the family symbol by Lord Aron's father Karlo Markov, who slew a powerful raven-style Broken-One. The Beastfolk's tarred head is kept as a macabre but cherished trophy in the parlor of the Vestegrad Bourgmaster Palace. When the head goes missing, Lord Aron offers an handsome sum of money to the adventurers to recover it.)

Alice Weirdweather
(Old Human Witch (Sea Witch) 9, CN)

The owner of *the Kraken's Tentacle* Inn, Alice is a wrinkled, gray-haired and fickle woman, her humor as ever-changing as the sea. She usually wears emerald green dresses, matching her stormy eyes. She knows many things about the sea and its secrets, but she will share these

only if and when she is in the mood, and woe to those who try and force her to speak.
(Adventure Hook: When the adventurers happen to dine at the Kraken's Tentacle, *Alice comes out of the kitchen, grabs the most diplomatic member of the party by the ears and unceremoniously drags them into her rooms, urging the other to follow, as they need to talk.)*

Blackfang Stormwolf
(Adult Beastfolk Rogue (Pirate 8), CE)

A black-hearted, ruthless and blood-thirsy buccaneer, who hides in a secret cove near Vestegrad, he is a literal seawolf; a wolf Broken One turned pirate. Fangs dyed black and blood-red fur distinguish this elegantly dressed scoundrel from the rest of his crew, the Stormwolves, all of whom are wolf-style Beastfolk. Their ship, *the Beware*, is a constant threat to villages and ships on the west coast.
(Adventure Hook: While the adventurers are resting their weary bones at an inn in a village on the coast, two days south of Vestegrad, they are awakened by cries for help and howling, as the village is attacked by the Stormwolves.)

Sentire Roza Amardu
(Adult Human Cleric 7 of Ezra, LG)

Roza is tall, tanned, and has grain-yellow blond hair and dark blue eyes. She is an intelligent and compassionate woman, who knows the way to balance church and community interests with individual ones; she resides in Vestegrad in the temple of Our Lady of the West Coast.
(Adventure Hook: Roza is worried; people from the lowest district of Vestegrad, the homeless and orphans, are disappearing and the local chapter of the MSF do not seem able or willing to investigate. She asks for the adventurer's help)

Jaffa 'Boss' Dayhogg
(Old Greater Beastfolk Rogue (Smuggler) 6, CN)

Boss Dayhogg is a fat, bald pig-style Beastfolk always dressed in white, created before the war. In his younger days he ran a ring of smugglers; today he owns half of Broken Port and he is as rich as he is fat – and he is *very* fat. Cunning and greedy, always plotting and scheming to con people out of their money, he nevertheless has a strict personal code; he does not kill and he will not willingly hurt any innocent.
(Adventure Hook: Boss and his faithful partner-in-crime,the bumbling, foolish and crooked rascal Beastfolk Constable Rasco. P Coldrain, offer the adventurers an easy way out of a debt they have incurred with Boss himself after breaking his 'priceless heirloom' vase at the Bubbling Cauldron. *Just travel to Markovstadt with a barrel of 'vinegrape'. What could be easier then that?)*

Silktongue
(Adult Beastfolk Cleric of Diosamblet 10, CE)

This serpent-like Beastfolk usually takes the guise of a beautiful white-haired human, with yellow eyes. Her true form is that of a humanoid adder with a forked tongue. She works as a bartender at *the Bubbling Cauldron*, Broken Port's main inn.
(Adventure Hook: When Margaret Duck, the girl cousin of the Ducks and a maid at the Bubbling Cauldron *disappears, even Rasco and Boss are honestly worried about her. Boss even offers the adventurers a generous reward to retrieve the Duck girl. The old boar could not imagine that his bartender has set up a clandestine cult of Diosam in the cellars of his own inn, and after Margaret stumbled upon it, she was kidnapped her and now risks being sacrificed to the Blood Stained Gorilla.)*

Jasse 'Uncle Duckie' Duck
(Old Human Greater Beastfolk Rogue (Smuggler) 7, NG)

Once one of the best smugglers on the island, this old, white-feathered, duck-like patriarch is the only survivor of a large nest. He has raised his many nephews and nieces by himself, and has turned over a new life as a farmer and merchant.
(Adventure Hook: In his youth the old Duck patriarch saved the life of one of the adventurers' fathers, so when he asks help to free his nephews from Boss's latest scheme, the adventurers can not deny him any help they might offer.)

Lucius and Boemund Duck
(Adult Beastfolk Wainrider Cavalier 6/ Driver Rogue 5 , CG)

The elder nephews of Uncle Jessie Duck, the brothers are dashing and flamboyant, good-hearted but often too impulsive young duck-style Beastflok. Lucius, the older and wises brother, is black-feathered. Boemund, the younger and more reckless brother, is blond-feathered.
(*Adventure Hook: When Rasco tries to arrest the adventurers to heavily fine them under a false accusation, the two reckless duck-boys help them to escape in their flamboyant carriage, but now they need a way to clean their name.)*

Father Reginald Gordon
(Middle aged Greater Beastfolk Cleric of Aka 7, LG)

A Zherisian immigrant turned into a grey-furred, panther-like Beastfolk, he was saved from Diosamblet's clutches by Jhurgen Vastish. Reginald studied the Akashi Cult of Aka and developed a more elaborate version based on the trappings of the Cult of Andral.
(Adventure Hook: The Church of the Shining Lion preaches cooperation with humans and unity, but someone disapproves strongly enough to vandalize the temple, prompting father Gordon to employ the adventurers to investigate.)

Speaker T'gha dhaMalwe
(Venerable Human Shaman 11, NG)

Old, almost blind, frail in body, but strong as ever in faith and words, the Speaker of the Shiakas since before the War of the Broken Ones, T'gha is the most respected Gnabo priest of the Akashi people and the most respected Elder of Lion Mouth's council.(*Adventure Hook: Once the adventurers arrive in Lion's mouth, they are surprised when a blind old woman calls their names and talks with them as though she knows them.*)

Elder Shorra dhaYagzwe
(Adult Human Fighter (Headhunter 7), LE)

Ambitious and cunning, Shorra worked hard to earn her place as Elder in Lion's Mouth, and she is the *de facto* ruler of the town. Soft-spoken but intimidating, her eyes even darker then her skin and hair, she seems able to gaze into the very soul of people. Her traditional trophy necklace, made of the shrunken heads of her slain foes, only adds to her unsettling presence. She is the leader of the most isolationist faction of the Akashi people.
(Adventure Hook: An Akashi war band is accused of raiding Markovian settlements and kidnapping Markovian travelers. Elder Shorra is incensed, but surprisingly decides to contact the adventurers as a show of goodwill.)

Deputy Bourgmaster Janos Markov
(Adult Human Aristocrat 7, LN)

A potbellied, black-haired man, Janos is not very impressing at first view, hiding a fine brain under his black hair. Janos is lord Markov's representative in Lion's Mouth and he is the only non-Akashi allowed to vote on the Council of Elders. He tries to rule respectfully of the will of the council, balancing it with his family interests.
(Adventure Hook: People are disappearing from both Markovian and Akashi'settlements and Janos has only a skeleton garrison of the MSF at his disposal. He needs the adventurers to investigate while he asks for help from the capital.)

Larkin Stripehide
(Adult Beastfolk Brawler 7, CN)

A muscular, though slightly portly anthropomorphic tiger with a larger then life attitude, Larkin is the owner of *the Broken Claw.* During the War of the Broken Ones, he was one of the first second-generation Beastfolk to desert from Diosamblet's army and fight against him. He lost a finger in the process, but saved Lord Markov's life, earning the money to build his inn. A passionate gambler, Janos has made his inn popular for its games and contests.
(Adventure Hook: If there is a category of people Larkin absolutely despises, it is cheaters. When the adventurers visit the Broken Claw*, they are accused of cheating.)*

Vlad Minakov
(Adult Human Swashbuckler 9, LN)

Lean, soft-spoken, with light brown hair and hard, blue eyes, Vlad Minakov pose as a sophisticated gentleman, but is a former mercenary adventurer. He still carries his sword, well-hidden in his walking cane.
(Adventure Hook: When the demons from his past catch up to him, Minakov must unsheath his sword once again, and the adventurers might be forced to get involved.)

Oonga dhaZakiri-Midheim
(Adult Human Expert 6, LG)

This formidable Akashi woman is as much at ease with her own people's customs as she is with her husband's. At her inn, *the Blessed Pot*, she sell dishes from different cultures and raises her children to respect of both her and her husband's beliefs.
(Adventure Hook: Someone has taken offense to the Blessed Pot*'s multicultural approach and starts to cause 'accidents'. Oonga asked every friend and customer to help her defend her dream from those who would destroy it, and the adventurers just happen to be there.)*

Head-Nurse Dolly Bellweather
(Young Adult Greater Beastfolk Bard 6, NE)

This white-wooled sheep-style Beastfolk looks absolutely innocuous and she is the face of the Merau Clinic. She is the doctor's right hand and she is beloved by both staff and patients for her gentleness.
(Adventure Hook: Dolly acts kind and gentle because her master wants her that way; when he orders her to be merciless, she is merciless, but she is competent and persuasive either way. The adventurers do not know what is going to befall them when this adorable lady asks for their help.)

Dr. Danielle Kinn
(Adult Human Alchemist (Chirurgeon) 8, NG)

The first female doctor to graduate from the Markovstad Medical School, Danielle practiced together with her father, but after his death she found herself unable to continue his practice, as her father's patients did not want to be cared for by a female doctor. When the Bourgmaster of Serenity put out a request to find a doctor not affiliated with the clinics, she put her candidacy forward and due to a curious mistake by the head of the postal office, who read her name as Daniel L.E. Kinn, was accepted. She struggled in her new position at first, but then gained the respect and love of Serenity's people with her compassion, brilliant mind and competence. She has befriended a nearby village of Akashi and she has also adopted three orphaned Beastfolk children.
(Adventure Hook: The adventurers have been healed and sheltered by good Dr. Kinn many times, so, when she asks their help to smuggle an unfortunate Akashi unjustly accused of murdering a local member of the MSF out of the city, they are in no position to refuse.)

Lord Bourgmaster Jakub Markov-Sloan
(Adult Human Rogue (Frontier Barber) 5, N)

A hardworking barber and self-declared healer, who has enriched himself working as a spy in the Broken Ones War, Jakub earned his place as Lord Bourgmaster with his shrewdness, but his poor qualities as a healer, only worsened by his heavy drinking, have forced him to find a true doctor outside the expensive circuit of the private clinics. His relationship with Dr. Kinn is stormy to say the least, but they are starting to grudgingly respect each other.
(Adventure Hook: Jakub's father, a drunkard who abandoned him and his siblings with their violent mother, has died and his ghost is haunting the major. Maybe the adventurers can help him before he kills himself in desperation.)

Dr. Claude Dominiani
(Mature Human Cerebral Vampire Mesmerist (Gaslighter) 10, CE)

The distinguished owner and director of the Dominiani Asylum, Claude is the one responsible for turning a fishing village into a flourishing port-town. The island was once named Coral Shore, but it was rechristened Dominia after Dr. Dominiani. He is a tall, pale gentleman, with thin black mustaches, green eyes and short black hair. He is a notorious philanthropist, famed for his generosity thanks to the activities of his foundation.

(Adventure Hook: Claude Dominiani never existed. His true name is Daclaud Heinfroth, an infamous Zherisian psychiatrist wanted for mass murder, kidnapping and gaslighting. At one time, he was the owner and director of the Heinfroth Asylum in Paridon. Besides this, Dominiani is a rare kind of vampire, a Cerebral Vampires, and once the adventurers stumble on the truth they must tread carefully or risk ending up interned in the asylum themselves).

Dr. Marcel d'Honaire
(Middle-Aged Human Mesmerist (Mental Healer) 10, NG)

A scion of the powerful d'Honaire family from Dementlieu, this kind man is graying and balding, but has sparkling and inquisitive blue eyes. He is a genuinely empathetic person who works at Dominiani Asylum, and he is specialized in treating traumatized adventurers and monster victims.
(Adventure Hook: A strange illness seems to affect the minds of the party's fellow adventurers, and Dr. d'Honaire is asked to help.)

Guide Patrek Larenthal
(Adult Human Cleric of The Divinity of Self 7, LN)

The director of the Markovian chapter of the Divinity of Self is a stout, red-headed, Mordentish man, with friendly brown eyes and a jolly disposition. He is a collaborator of the Dominiani Foundation, and regularly cares for and hosts recovered patients of the asylum to help them to return in the world.
(Adventure Hook: When a recovering patient disappears, Patrek fears she might have had a relapse and asks the adventurers to retrieve her before something bad can happen.)

Mildred Rallchett
(Fledging Cerebral Vampire Rogue 7, LE)

Middle-aged Mildred Rallchett is the owner of *the Siren's Call*, and worked for years as head nurse of the Dominiani Asylum. She is a judgemental and spiteful woman, and is notorious for blackmailing and gossip. However, she still volunteers as a nurse at the asylum when good Doctor Dominiani needs her help.
(Adventure Hook: Mildred was and still is an inflexible, sadistic control freak. Now she is also a cerebral vampire under Dr. Dominiani's control. She laces the meals of customers of her inn she judges in need of the Asylum's care (like women with a strong personality, people who laugh too much, people who ask too many questions, people who are too free-spirited, and so on) with a powerful hallucinogen. When she drugs one of the adventurers, his companions need to investigate.)

Lord Bourgmaster Vasily Markov
Middle-Aged Human Fighter 8, LG)

This scarred war veteran is a removed cousin of the Lord-President, and was elected Lord Bourgmaster after the foundation of Dominia Harbour. Tall, gray-haired and dark-eyed, he is strong-willed, practical and flexible, yet righteous and dutiful at the same time. Vasily Markov was able to turn a fancy charity project into a thriving port town, and he has been reelected uncontested for twenty-five years.
(Adventure Hook: Rumors about Dominiani Asylum are piling up, and the Lord Bourgmaster has enough suspicions to launch an investigation, but that would be a disaster for Dominia Harbour's economy and reputation. Before Vasily takes the final step, he needs substantial evidence, and thus he employs the adventurers to discretely infiltrate the Asylum.)

Organizations

Health Consortium This lawful good, non-profit association was founded by Erek Markov, Lord Radu's great-granduncle, and today it is chaired by the former's grandson, Dr. Alecsandar Markov. The Health Consortium regulates the practice of the medical arts and coordinates and sponsors medical schools and research. It also sets a standard for hygiene and disciplines and polices its members when necessary.
(*Dread Possibility: Unhealthy Practices. What if the most illustrious members of the Board of Directors, like Doctors Merau, Dominiani and Sekisha, were unethical butchers, using their position to cover up their misdeeds, hinder their rivals and support their kidnapping ring to supply themselves with sentient guinea pigs?)*

Markov Family
This lawul neutral branch of the Markov family, flying their crowned red lion crest on black sails, is an economic powerhouse able to treat on par with the Borcan families and the Musarde River Company. Headed by the shrewd Lord Radu, the Markov family balances its own interests with the prosperity of Markovia, always following the family motto: "Follow your dreams but be prepared for nightmares"
(Dread Possibility: The Family Secret. What if the infamous Diosamblet, the flesh-warping mad scientist who unleashed the Broken Ones, was a Markov? The answer to this question might destroy the Markov family, and they are ready to go any distance to prevent the secret from coming out.)

Dominiani Foundation
This Neutral Good charity foundation, chaired by its founder, Dr. Dominiani, finances orphanages, helps the poor, hosts widows, offers free schooling, free medical care and criminal rehabilitation, and invests in community development. They employ lot of people, organizing them in a cooperative way. It sustains itself in part on the gains of its investments, in part on generous donations.
Dread Possibility : Bloody Charity. Where the donations come from? Well, mainly from (Dr. Dominiani's deep pockets. And where does that money come from? From recovered patients of his Asylum. And is it a coincidence that they always die or disappear after willing the majority of their fortune to the doctor for his Foundation, shortly after they have been dismissed and declared fully recovered?)

The Darklord Emile Merau aka Frantisek Markov

Adult Greater Broken One Alchemist (Vivisectionist) 13, NE) (144 HP)
Size: Medium
Speed: 30 feet, Climb 30 feet
Initiative: +5 (+4 in Merau's Clinic)
Senses: Perception +17; Low-light vision (+4 in Merau's Clinic)
Armor Class: 24, Touch 18, Flat Footed 19 (+5 Dex, +4 armour, +2 Natural, +3 deflection) (+4 in Merau's Clinic)
Space/Reach: 1 square / 2 square
Combat Maneuver Bonus / Combat Maneuver Defense:+14 / 29 (+8 Grappling) (+4 in Merau's Clinic)
Str.20 (16), Dex.20 (16), Con.20 (16), Int.21, Wis.12, Cha.10
Saving Throws: Fort. +14, Ref. +14, Will +5 (+4 in Merau's Clinic)
Special Qualities: Curse of the Dark Lord, Poison Immunity, Beast Tongue, Bottled Ooze, Combine Extracts, Enhance Potion (4/day), Fast Poisoning (swift action), Infusion, Poison Use, Mutagen (DC 18), Swift Alchemy, Spontaneous Healing (20/day), Throw Anything (+1 to hit with thrown splash weapons), Thousand Forms. Rejuvenation, Sinkhole of Evil IV.
Special Attacks: Grab, Sneak Attack (+7d6), Torturous Transformation (DC 21) (+4 in Merau's Clinic), Crippling Strike.
Melee: 2 Slams +17 (1d6+8) + Grab and Sneak Attack (+4 in Merau's Clinic) or +3 Merciful Sap +17/+12 (1d4+1d6+8 + sneak attack +15 non-lethal damage)

Skills: Appraise (+9), Craft (Alchemy) (+27), Disguise (+16), Fly (+8), Heal (+24), Knowledge (arcana) (+21), Knowledge Nature (+24) , Perception (+17), Profession (Butcher) (+15), Sleight of Hand (+21), Spellcraft (+21), Stealth: (+21), Survival (+17), Use Magic Device (+16).

Feats: Bludgeoner, Brew Potion (B), Power Attack, Sap Adept, Sap Master, Skill Focus (Disguise) Skill Focus (Knowledge (nature)), Throw Anything (B), Toughness, Weapon Focus (Sap).

Known Formulae: DC 14 + spell level

1 – anticipate peril, cure light wounds, deathwatch, enlarge person, expeditious retreat, jump, keen senses, negate aroma, reduce person, poly-purpose panacea, stone fist, touch of the sea

2 – acute senses, alchemical allocation, animal aspect, anthropomorphic animal (It also works on Polymophed humanoids and Markov can use it on himself while in animal form; he does not need money to make the effects permanent), *bull's strength, bear's endurance, cat's*

grace, cure moderate wounds, darkvision, fox's cunning, lesser restoration, see invisibility

3 – amplify elixir, awaken, baleful polymorph, bloodhound, cure serious wounds, greater animal aspect, rage, remove blindness/deafness, remove disease, water breathing

4 – caustic blood, conceal breath, crimson breath, cure critical wounds, greater invisibility, restoration, stoneskin

5 – delayed consumption, elude time, overland flight, shapechanger's gift, swallow poison

Extracts / day:
7 / 6 / 5 / 4 / 2

'Caster' level 13, Save DC 15 + Spell Level.

Equipment: *Battle White Coat* (+4 Armour Bonus CA, it functions as a +3 Padded armour); Shapeshifter clothes;*+3 Merciful Sap* (disguised as a walking stick); *Doctor's bag* (this item functions as a Bag of Holding IV, but things are held in a rational and ordered way, allowing for faster retrieval; it contains a *Mask of Breathing* (this allows the wearer to survive in environments without air); two pairs of *Shackles of Kidnapping* (adamantine handcuffs which act as *Shackles of Compliance* and casts *silence* on the wearer; no saving throw);100 doses of various medicinal drugs and poisons (DC 21); various magical potions; adamantine surgeon's tools; a portable laboratory; a straitjacket and a shackled stretcher); official papers identifying him as Dr. Emile Merau; a Medallion with the Markov family crest scratched on it (this functions as a *+3 Amulet of Mighty Fists*); *+4 Belt of Physical Perfection; +3 Ring of Protection*.)

Challenge Rating 15

Background

Frantisek Markov was born in Markovstadt seventy years ago, the third and youngest son of Lord Aleki Markov, lord Radu's grandfather. As a child he had a great curiosity for the natural world, and he was especially fascinated by living things. A child with a vivid imagination, he drew fantastical creatures, blending various animals. Growing up, he started to wonder if it was not possible to create the creatures he had dreamed of. He went so far as to work under a false name in a butcher's shop for a while, to be able to try and assemble different animal parts. He was discovered and managed to convince his father to let him study veterinary medicine along with regular one. As he grew up and studied, Frantisek fell in love with an Akashi woman, Marja dhaLhaki. This was a problem, because under Lord-President Aleki, relations with the Akashi people were deteriorating. Lord Aleki was pragmatic, however, and thought that his son's marriage could help mend the relationship between their two peoples. His own great-grandmother was Akashi, but Lord Radu's Father Andrik had lost a dear friend to Akashi raiders, and he strongly opposed the marriage. Frantisek, however, married his beloved, ignoring his brother's opposition. When his father died, Andrik ordered Frantisek to divorce his wife and he refused, leaving Markovstadt for the interior, where he built a ranch on the site where the Merau Clinic sits today. Here he continued his unorthodox work on animal body parts, and in time he started to work on living animals with the goal of creating new beings. Meanwhile, his wife became pregnant. The civil war between the Akashi and the Colonists erupted, and Frantisek's ranch became a battlefield. His wife was grievously wounded and she lost her baby. Frantisek killed off the two belligerent parties and used their bodyparts to save his wife, but her loss was too deep for her to accept this, and she hung herself from the roof of their house. The rope snapped and she fell into a deep, dry well. To save her, Frantisek used the body of a cow, but Marja was disgusted by what he had done to her and killed herself. His grief turning to hate, Frantisek decided that the only way to stop the war was to create an army and he pretended to be dead and traveled the world for ten years, collecting exotic animals as part of his project. From his wife he had learned of the figure of Diosam the Blood Stained Gorilla, and it intrigued him, prompting to take the alias of Diosamblet, the hand of Diosam. He created an army of Broken Ones, unleashing them on Markovia. Finally the two peoples made peace to fight the new en-

emy, but Diosamblet was not satisfied. To have peace, he felt he needed to remove all differences between the Akashi and the Colonists, and to do that, he believed he would have to turn everyone into Broken Ones, a more perfect life-form. But Frantisek was a cruel master and a crueler father, and his own creatures rebelled, though not before Frantisek killed his brother. Young Radu teamed up with one of Frantisek's best specimens, the Lion-man Jurghen, and at the end of a caraclismatic battle Diosamblet was believed dead, though not before he killed his nephew Vladu in front of the latter's father in a last act of spite. The Mists fell on the battlefield.

Current Sketch

Frantisek survived the battle, his body mutilated by terrible wounds. He healed his body, but found himself unable to create a fully human form. The one he came up with is close enough, but is more similar to that of a small gorilla. After some years of obscurity, he returned to public life under the guise of Dr. Emil Merau. He built his clinic and the Diosamblet laboratory where his ranch once sat, and quickly became the most respected surgeon of the island. His disguises can not last a long time, so he is hard-pressed to avoid spending long periods of time in the company of other people. He uses his faithful deputy Dolly to handle most of public relations. He still wants to turn Markovia into a Beastfolk kingdom under his guidance, but this time he is trying to be subtler in his approach.

Combat

Frantisek usually lures his victims somewhere private before assaulting them, with the goal to knock them out and kidnap them. He usually chooses relatively safe prey, the lonely and outcasts, when possible. If forced into combat with a group, he will attack the weak links with his sedative poison.

Special Abilities

Curse of the Dark Lord: Frantisek can not assume a humanoid aspect, he always keeps animal traits. He normally uses a reduced gorilla body, the longer arms concealed by his large, white coat. He also can not create a completely perfect Beastfolk; they always lack some important quality, mainly obedience. Even his animal forms are always somehow defective.

Beast Tongue: Frantisek can communicate simple concepts with any animal.

Rejuvenation: If Frantisek is killed, his corpse will return to his own lab, painfully resewing itself together over a month. Only if his hands are severed and kept immersed in acid, and his lab is completely destroyed, will he not be reborn. If his hands are removed from the acid and there is at least one working laboratory on Markovia, he will regenerate in three months.

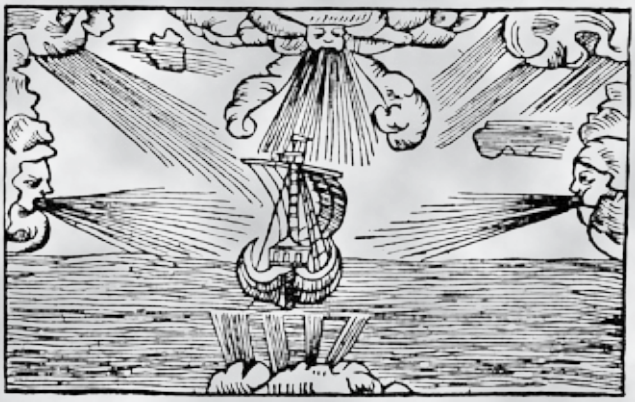
Thousand Forms: Frantisek can take the form of any animal or magical beast without magical or supernatural abilities with a move action; it lasts up to thirteen rounds, and he can change his shape 7 times a day.

Lair

Merau Clinic, built upon the the site of the old Markov Ranch and Diosamblet's secret laboratory, has been the theater of thousands of atrocious experiments, turning it into a Rank 4 Sinkhole of Evil that can bestows the conditions of Apathy, Desperation, Fear and Rage; a DC 25 Will negates.

Closing the Borders

If Dr Merau/Markov wishes to close the borders, winds and currents around the islands will stop everyone without a perfect flying maneuverability, or without a 120 feet swimming speed, as well as any vehicle (ship or airship) from approaching closer to or departing further out than ten miles from the islands' shores.



Dread Alternatives:

New Player Race:

Beastfolk

Beastfolk are animals turned into humanoid creatures or humanoids changed to resemble beasts, usually humans turned into anthropomorphic animals, and their descendants. They vary greatly in shape and culture, as their oldest community is only thirty years old. They share the following traits, however:

Type: Humanoid (Beastfolk subtype)
Size: Medium or Small
Ability Modifiers: +2 Constitution or Dexterity or Strength, -2 Charisma, -2 Intelligence
Speed: 30 ft. or like base animal - 10 feet, whichever is faster
Senses: Low-light vision
Skills: +4 Perception
Animal Affinity: Each Beastfolk can communicate simple concepts with animals of its own kind, and has a +4 bonus to any check related to interactions with them.
Animal Traits: The character can choose one extraordinary ability of the base creature: a natural attack; a +2 racial bonus or a non-flight speed up to its base ground speed. Every time the character would gain a feat from class hit dice, they can choose another trait instead (flight speed from level 7 onward, glide at 5 level, jumping without a running start at level 3, can choose to not take damage from a fall if she has two hands free from level 1). With Large or larger animals, the character can choose the Powerful Build feature, with Tiny or smaller the Agile Build (you suffer one less dice's worth of damage when you fall, you count as a one size smaller creature to squeeze into a tight space, you benefit from cover, ride and movement in spaces one size smaller than you, and qualify for Small size-related feats).
Favored class: Ranger.

New Template:

Greater Beastfolk

Greater Beastfolk are first-generation Beastfolk created by Diosamblet himself. They have all the traits, speeds and attacks of the original animal, can also be Large or Tiny, and apply the physical modifiers of the original animal.

New class Archetypes

Anaesthesist (Alchemist)

An Anaesthesist is an alchemist specialized in sleeping draughts, painkillers and other calming drugs, used to treat patients and to incapacitate enemies in a non-lethal way.

Extracts: Add the following to the Alchemist Formula List: Level 1 *sleep*; Level 2 *hold person*; Level 3 *deep slumber*; Level 4 *forgetful slumber*; Level 5 *hold monster*; Level 6 *flesh to stone*.

Injection: An Anaesthesist can use any of his formulas using darts to inject them with a successful ranged attack. He does not deal damage, but forces any hit target to roll a saving throw with a -2 penalty); these darts might be any suitable pointed object. The Anaesthesist can apply extracts to the darts with a move action. (This ability substitutes *Mutagen*.)

Stimulants: Starting at level 2, an Anaesthesist learns how counter effects which would force sleep on him, stagger, paralyze or slow him. Against all these effects, he receives a +2 bonus to saving throws; this bonus increases by 2 every 2 levels, up to level 10. This ability replaces poison resistance.

Anaesthetic: At 6th level, an Anaesthesist learns how to supplement uses of the Heal skill with pain-killing drugs. He gains Skill Focus (Heal) as a bonus feat. Any use of the Heal skill that has a risk of harming the patient (such as extracting a barb) only deals the minimum damage when performed by an Anaesthesist. This ability replaces swift poisoning.
No Rest for the Wicked: At 10th level, an Anaesthesist becomes immune to paralysis, sleep,

sloth and staggering, and needs to sleep only four hours per night. This ability replaces poison immunity.

Discoveries: The following discoveries complement the Anaesthesist archetype: Sleeping Draught (works like the *Eternal Slumber* Hex of a Witch) , sleeping touch (8th level minimum, this functions like *deep slumber*, touch attack, functions on targets of 15 HD and less, Fortitude saving throw negates, can be used once a day, infusion, and aromatic extract.

Frontier Barber (Rogue)

Frontier Barbers use their ingenuity to act as surrogate healers and combine easy charm with sharp ears.

Barber, hairdresser and dentist (Ex): A Frontier Barber adds Heal to his class skills list, and gains a bonus equal to half her rogue level (minimum +1) on all Heal, Diplomacy to gather information and Sleight of Hand checks. This ability replaces trapfinding.

Well Informed (Ex): Starting from 3rd level, when a Frontier Barber's wits are not enough to pull her out of a bad situation, her memory still just might save her. She gains a +1 circumstances bonus on all Knowledge checks, and she can make a Knowledge check even if she is not trained in that Knowledge skill. This bonus increases to +2 at 6th level, +3 at 9th level, +4 at 12th level, +5 at 15th level and +6 at 18th level. This ability replaces trap sense.

Sharp Listener: Starting from 4th level, the Frontier Barber remains alert to sounds even in her sleep, and the normal DC increase to Perception checks when she is sleeping is halved. The distance modifier on the DC of Perception checks she attempts is reduced to +1 per 20 feet. At Level 8 the Frontier Barber can take 10 to Perception checks even if in a hurry or threatened. This ability replaces Uncanny Dodge and Improved Uncanny Dodge.

Rogue Talents: The following Rogue talents complement the Frontier Barber archetype: canny observer, charmer, coax information, deft palm, fast fingers, follow along, honeyed words.

Advanced Talents: The following advanced talents complement the Frontier Barber archetype: feat, hidden mind, improved evasion, redirect attack, rumormonger and skill mastery (as well as cutting edge for an unchained rogue).

Hardboiled Detective (Investigator)

Hardboiled Detectives forsake alchemical study to improve their martial prowess.

A Hard Man for an Hard Job: The base bonus attack of a Hardboiled Detective is equal to his class level; he is proficient with all simple and martial weapons and with light and medium armor. This feature replaces the Alchemy feature; a Hardboiled Detective can not take Alchemist talents.

Bonus Feat: At 3rd level and every three levels after, a Hardboiled Detective gains a bonus combat feat. He can use his Investigator levels as his fighter level to qualify. This feature replace trap sense.

Investigator Talents: The following investigator talents complement the Hardboiled Detective archetype: combat inspiration, device talent, effortless aid, expanded inspiration, hidden agendas, inspirational expertise, inspired alertness, inspired intimidator, perceptive tracking, quick study, rogue talent, tenacious inspiration, and underworld inspiration.

Headhunter (Fighter)

Headhunters collect the heads of their defeated foes to create fearsome trophies they use to strike fear into their enemies' hearts and gain an advantage, even a supernatural one.

Warded Mind (Ex): Starting from 2nd level, a Headhunter gains a +1 bonus on saving throws made against charms and figments. This bonus increases by +1 for every four levels beyond 2nd. This ability replaces bravery.

Fearsome (Ex): Starting from 5th level, a Headhunter gains a +1 bonus on attack and damage rolls against shaken, frightened and panicking opponents. This bonus also applies to Intimidate checks. This bonus increases by +1 for every four levels beyond 5th. This ability replaces

weapon training 1.

Fearsome Charge (Ex): Starting from 9th level, when a Headhunter attacks at the end of a charge, he gains a free check to Intimidate the opponent with a bonus equal to half his Fighter level. This ability replaces weapon training 2.

Wispering heads (Su): Starting from 13th level, once per round up to 3 time plus her Wisdom modifier, every opponent in reach must roll a Will saving throw against a DC of 10 + the Headhunter's Intimidate skill bonus when he attacks, or the opponents become frightened. This ability replaces weapon training 3.

Greater Fearsome Charge (Ex): Starting from 17th level, when a Headhunter uses Fearsome Charge, he can attempt to Intimidate any opponent who is able to see him. This ability replaces weapon training 4.

Fear Mastery (Ex): At 20th level, an Headhunter applies the damage she deals as a bonus to any Intimidate attempt she makes. This ability replaces weapon mastery.

Mental Healer (Mesmerist)

Mental Healers use the power of their minds to heal the mind and body of others.

Spell List

Add the following spells to the Mesmerist spell list: Level 0 *stabilize*; Level 1 *cure lesser wounds*; Level 2 *cure moderate wounds*, *lesser restoration*; Level 3 *cure serious wounds*; Level 4 *cure critical wounds*, *remove disease*, *restoration*; Level 5 *breath of life*; Level 6 *heal*, *greater restoration*

Alignment: A Mental Healer must be of a non-Evil alignment. A Mental Healer who becomes Evil cannot gain new levels as a Mesmerist, but retains all his class abilities.

Consummate Kindness: A Mental Healer gains a bonus equal to 1/2 his Mesmerist level (minimum 1) on Heal checks and Diplomacy checks. A Mental Healer can take a Diplomacy Check to improve a person's disposition as a standard action instead of a full-minute action. This ability replaces consummate liar.

Calming Mask (Su): At 3rd level, as a standard action, a Mental Healer can implant a relaxing phantasm in the mind of the target of his hypnotic stare, causing the target to perceive its own reflection as improved in some calming way. This is a mind-affecting effect, with no saving throw. The target is simultaneously captivated and relaxed by the sight of its own reflection, and in any round in which the target can see itself in a mirror within 30 feet, the Mental Healer can trigger his painful stare against the target without dealing damage. This is a gaze attack, and the creature can avert its eyes to attempt to avoid it. Any creature holding a visible mirror that attempts to demoralize the target must subtract the Mental Healer's Charisma modifier from its Intimidate check. Calming Mask lasts until that particular hypnotic stare ends (often when the target moves away from a mirror). The Mental Healer can use this ability a number of times per day equal to 3 + his Charisma modifier. This ability replaces touch treatment (minor) and alters painful stare.

Phantasmal Cure (Su): At 6th level, a Mental Healer can heal the target of her Calming Mask ability by acting through the mirror. Whenever the Mental Healer uses Calming Mask, if the affected target begins its turn adjacent to a mirror, the Mental Healer can use a *cure wound* spell on the creature as though she was touching her. This ability replaces touch treatment (moderate).

Phantasmal Friends (Su): At 10th level, a Mental Healer can spend one use of his Calming Mask ability as a standard action to so strongly convince the target of his hypnotic stare that it is surrounded by friends that even his opponents can see them. The target is treated as flanking for any melee attacks against its opponents until the hypnotic stare ends. The Mental Healer can use either this ability or Calming Mask during a particular hypnotic stare, but not both at the same time. This is a mind-affecting effect. This ability replaces touch treatment (greater).

Restoration of Sanity (Su): At 14th level, whenever a creature fails a saving throw against an opponent's single-target, mind-affecting effect, the target can repeat the saving throw adding the Mental Healer's Charisma bonus and immediately heal 1 point of mental ability damage.

This has no effect on abilities that do not allow a saving throw or affect multiple targets or an area. If using the sanity system (see page 12 Occult Adventures), the target recovers 2 points of sanity damage instead. This ability replaces touch treatment (break enchantment).

Wainrider (Cavalier)

A Wainrider creates a preternatural bond with a vehicle, rather than with the animals that pull it.

Wain (Ex)
The Wain is the vehicle a Wainrider choose. It might be a carriage, a coach, a chariot or any vehicle the DM judges appropriate. The Wainrider applies all the bonus she would normally apply to her mount to the vehicle, with the following difference: Bonus hit dice are converted to bonus hit points for the Wain; the Wain's hardness increases by the mount's armor class bonus; instead of learning extra tricks, a Wainrider can mount extra gadget on his wain. Attacks aimed to the pulling creatures while the vehicle is moving are instead autimatically redirected on the Wain, which AC while moving amounts to 10+the Wainrider's Ride Skill Bonus, + the cavalier's Mount's natural armor bonus. Pulling creatures have Elusion, and authomathically pass their Reflex Saving Throws against attacks which inflicts half damage against a creature passing it. The Wainrider, as an immediate action, can make a Ride Check against a spell saving throw DC aimed on the pulling creatures or on the Driver, or on the Passengers to stop the spell from taking any effect. A list of Gadgets follows below:

Driver shield: This gives the driver a + 4 armor class, but -4 to any attack from behind them.
Passenger shield: The same as Driver shield, but for the passengers.

Oil dropper: Creates a *grease*-like spot behind the Wain (needs to be replenished after use).
Back crossbows: These allow the passengers or the driver to attack any pursuers with heavy crossbows, with a -1 or -2 penalty to attack rolls.

Spiked wheels: These allow the Wainrider to ignore slippery roads and add 2d6 to the Wain's trampling damage.

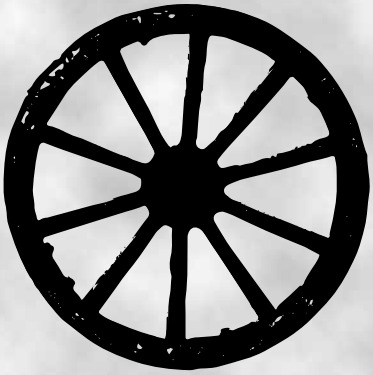
Sickle blades: These allow the Wainrider to attack mounts and vehicles on the sides of the Wain with a -2 penalty to attack rolls.

The Wainrider applies his level to any Ride check to maneuver her Wain. The evasion ability applies to all passengers of the Wain as well as the driver. This feature replaces the mount.

Trampling Wain (Ex)
At 3rd level the Wainrider benefits from the Trample talent whenever he drives his Wain; a succesfull Ride check against the foe's CMD allows the Wainrider to inflict 6d6 damage + the Wainrider Dexterity bonus. With a natural 20 confirmed by a second ride check against the same DC, this feature inflicts an additional 2d6 and double dexterity bonus damage. This feature replaces Cavalier's Charge.

Mighty Trampling (Ex)
At 11th level, a Wainrider learns to make devastating trample attacks while driving his Wain. Double the threat range of the trample action (19). In addition, the Wainrider can make a free weapon attack against the trampled enemy using an appropriate window under the driving seat. The enemy is prone at this point, and so the attack roll receives a +4 bonus. This feature replaces Mighty Charge.

Great Trampling (Ex): At 20th level, whenever the Wainrider makes a trample attack while driving, he deals 8d6 + the Wainrider Dexterity modifier damage. In addition, if the Wainrider confirms a critical hit on a trample, the target is stunned for 1d4 rounds. A Will save reduces this to staggered for 1d4 rounds. The DC is equal to 10 + the Wainrider's base attack bonus. This feature replaces Great Charge.



New Template:

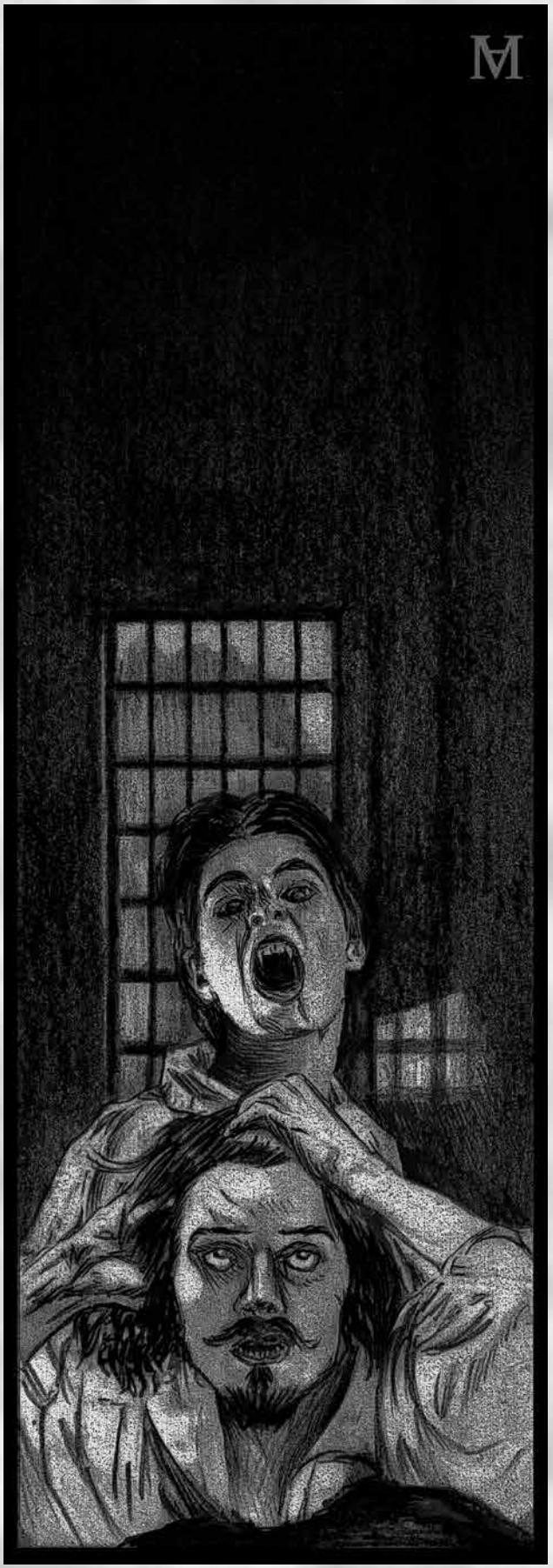
Cerebral Vampire

Like regular vampires, but replace vulnerability to silver with crysteel (See *Quoth the Raven* #28, *Lamordia*) for damage reduction, and instead of damaging Constitution, the Cerebral Vampire's attacks inflict damges to one of the Mental abilities; people who suffer a drain of more than five Intelligence points must pass a Will save DC 10+1/2 hit dice of the Cerebral Vampire + his Charisma modifier, or suffer from Amnesia; 5 or more Wisdom points damage leads to a form of Phobia; 5 points drained of Charisma causes a crippling insecurity (Paranoia, Anxiety or Obsession).

Telepathy(Sp): A Celerebral Vampire can communicate with any sentient creature in a 60 feet range.

Detect Thoughts (Sp): The vampire can use Detect Thoughts at will as a spell-like ability, DC based on the vampire Intelligence.

Weaknesses: A Cerebral Vampire ignores the regular vampire weaknesses, and instead possess the following ones: Electricity Vulnerabilty (Takes 50% more damage by Electricity), Obsession: A Cerebral vampire ranked less then Ancient will waste time counting any dispersed quantity of small items, like buttons, grains, marbles exc, exc, if they fail a Will save DC 25. They won't attack while counting; They take 15 rounds less 1 per Wisdom Modifier point to finish counting, will still defend themselves but can't attack or move. Sun Sensitivity: A Cerebral Vampire takes no damage from sunlight, but can't use any supernatural ability and lose fast healing if exposed to direct sunlight. It is also Dazzled under direct sunlight. Chocolate repulses a Cerebral Vampire less then Eminent ranked, and Cacao Powder will inflict 1d6 damage on a touch attack. Psychic Recoil: If a victim of the vampire feeding or someone the vampire communicated telepathically with in the last 24 hours pass the saving Throw against the Dominate or the Detect Thoughts power of the vampire, the vampire suffers 1d6 damage.





Return of Diosamblet

Adventure in Markovia

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Introduction

Return of Diosamblet is a free-form adventure set upon the island of Markovia. Once the scenario has been established, there is no single preferred narrative to follow. Instead, the party is presented with the whole of the island, including its various dangers and factions, not to mention potential (if potentially questionable) allies.

This adventure leans heavily upon the adventure module *Neither Man Nor Beast*. However, while knowledge of that adventure may provide interesting background details for the game master, it is not required to run this adventure.

Background

The Discovery of Vokkert's Insel

In 743 BC, a Lamordian ship returning from Ghastria was caught in a storm (as so often happens upon the Sea of Sorrows) and blown into unfamiliar territory. The crew was surprised to discover their vessel alongside an unfamiliar island (and not wrecked upon the shore, as so often happens). Struck by the apparent lushness of the island in what he considered northern reaches, **Captain Henkel Biermans** sent a boat ashore to investigate. Indeed, the island appeared to be a paradise, particularly in regards to its great forests. While Lamordia is not as starved for lumber as the island of Liffe, nonetheless Captain Biermans knew that a ready source of wood for construction and shipbuilding would be immensely valuable.

Upon returning to Lamordia—a much easier journey than so often happens—Captain Biermans dutifully reported his discovery to the owner of the ship, a wealthy Lamordian merchant named **Aard Vokkert**. The owner promptly named the island V**okkert's Insel**, and before long it had been recorded under that name on many Lamordian maps.

However, the island already had a name. It is **Markovia**, the home of **Frantisek Markov**, sometimes called **Doctor Fran**, sometimes called **Diosamblet**: butcher, scientist, artist, and madman.

The Lamordian Colony

Aard Vokkert has never set foot upon the island which bears his name, but Captain Biermans returned three times aboard the *Meeradler.*

On his second journey to Vokkert's Insel, which took place in 745 BC, Captain Biermans was tasked with mapping the coast. He and his crew sailed clockwise around the island, mapping the coastline from a safe distance. However, because Captain Biermans did not bring his ship too close to dangerous reefs or shallows, there were certain landmarks—the smaller rivers of the western coast, for example—which he did not notice or else consider important enough to name.

On his third journey in 747 BC, Captain Biermans delivered people and supplies to start a colony. The settlers included **Jhurgen Vastish**, a woodsman originally from the Sleeping Beast Mountains, and his fianceé, **Marijke Voeten**. After dropping the colonists off at the site they called the **Ostufer** ("Eastern Shore"), Biermans and the *Meeradler* returned to Ludendorf.

However, in 748 BC, Captain Biermans and his crew returned to Vokkert's Insel for the final time. All in all, it was a disastrous trip. They discovered the colony abandoned. Infighting broke out among the crew. Two men were

killed, as was Captain Biermans' pet monkey **Jan-Jaap**. The crew nearly mutinied, but in the end they did not.

In 750 BC, Captain Biermans set out for a fifth journey to Vokkert's Insel with a new group of colonists. However, he found himself unable to locate the island, even though he followed the same sea-charts which had served him well before. He tried again in subsequent years, never meeting success. Eventually he retired in 759 BC, and the Meeradler passed to another captain.

Naiter Man Nor Beast

Although Markovia first appeared in the original *Realm of Terror* boxed set, the domain was most thoroughly detailed in the adventure module *Neither Man Nor Beast*. In that scenario, the heroes are pitted between Frantisek Markov (calling himself Doctor Fran) and a rebellious leonine Broken One named **Akanga**.

The most likely ending to that adventure is that Doctor Fran ends up strapped to a vivisection table by Akanga, and he is subjected to the very tortures which he has inflicted upon so many others. In the most horrifying version of that ending, Doctor Fran's vivisection occurs upon the Table of Life, an artifact which will keep the not-so-kindly doctor alive indefinitely, regardless of the damage inflicted upon his physical frame. However, the **Table of Life** is not the only force maintaining Doctor Fran. The Dark Powers have also granted him a tremendous regenerative ability.

The seeds of this adventure were planted while Doctor Fran was strapped to the Table of Life. Not all of the rebellious Broken Ones were as patient as Akanga. Because even obsessively revenge-driven lion men have to sleep sometimes, one night, an ape-man slunk into the laboratory while Akanga dozed. The ape-man tore off Doctor Fran's head, which he carried away to the very stakes where Diosamblet had posted the heads of so many Broken Ones.

The Table of Life may have interfered with those abilities which the Dark Powers granted to Markov—or, more likely, the Dark Powers allowed Markov's abilities to slacken for the span of his imprisonment. In particular, the Broken Ones started reverting to their natural selves, a process nearly as painful and traumatizing as the original vivisection. As a Greater Broken One, Akanga retained vestiges of intelligence longer than most. For days he defended Markov's headless yet living body against all other attackers until finally he no longer recalled that Markov was anything but meat. Only then did Akanga discover another boon which the Dark Powers had granted Markov: His flesh was poisonous to Broken Ones. Akanga died there in the laboratory, frothing at the maw.

Eventually Doctor Fran, strapped to the Table of Life, regenerated and escaped.

Eventually Diosamblet, his head mounted upon a stake, regenerated and escaped.

Suddenly Markovia had two darklords.

The Two Darklords

One darklord still calls himself **Doctor Fran**, and he lives in the rebuilt estate. He acts much as he always has, except that he is more afraid to leave the estate than he used to be. He no longer wanders the forests, demanding obedience from the Broken Ones. He sends out loyal creations, which he calls **New Men**, instead.

The other darklord calls himself **Diosamblet**, and he roams the island with a pack of carnivorous Broken Ones called the **Savage Brethren**. Whereas Doctor Fran still attempts to make beasts into men, Diosamblet's very presence evokes any given creature's most feral nature.

Both Doctor Fran and Diosamblet believe themselves to be the true Frantisek Markov. Of course, as described above, they are both right. The real question is which one will survive the inevitable confrontation.

Other Consequences

The night that the ape-man beheaded Frantisek Markov, a terrible earthquake struck the island. As a result, part of the southwestern corner of the island broke partially free from the rest, separated by a chasm which the Broken Ones call the Chasm of Woe. (The woe belongs to the Master of Pain, not the Broken Ones. The Broken Ones use this name with a measure of glee.) In particular, the Broken One camp called Acasa and one of the abandoned villages are now geographically shielded from the predations of the Savage Brethren.

Moreover, while Frantisek Markov was incapacitated, the Broken Ones gradually reverted to their original forms. Of the Broken Ones who came from animal stock, only the leopard-man Felix retained his sentience throughout. However, those Broken Ones who came from human stock—in particular the few surviving Lamordian colonists—also reverted, recovering much of the humanity which Markov had cut away from them. Unfortunately for all of the Broken Ones, once Doctor Fran and Diosamblet had regenerated, the reversion itself reversed. Most of the humans, faced with another descent into beasthood, chose death instead.

As a final consequence of having a split darklord, the borders to Markovia only close when both Doctor Fran and Diosamblet actively attempt the closure, which they only do when they become aware of foreign arrivals. Otherwise, visitors are free to come and go. One of the keys to surviving this adventure may be slipping away before both darklords notice that they have new playthings upon the island.

The Dementlieuse Colonies

Lamordia was the first nation to attempt to colonize Vokkert's Insel, but it was not the only one. Rumors of the island made their way to Dementlieu, and naturally these rumors caught the attention of certain members of the aristocracy. As much as the aristocrats were also interested in an unclaimed supply of lumber, if anything, they were more interested in preventing the Lamordians from establishing a colony uncontested. **Claude LaGrange**, the Councillor of Trade, was the organizer of the first two Dementlieuse colonies and, in the end, his position on the Council of Brilliance was weakened by each of their failures.

The first colony (751 BC) was named P**ort de LaGrange**. It had no forewarning of danger before the Savage Brethren descended upon the colony. A number of survivors fled into the forest at the heart of the island. They were briefly grateful to receive sanctuary from Doctor Fran.

The second colony (755 BC) was named **Nouvelle Ferme** ("New Holding"), and it was a considerably more cautious undertaking. It began by investigating the ruins of Port de LaGrange, but evidence of the colony's true destruction had been obscured by the island's greedy jungle life. Assuming that Port de LaGrange had been ruined by flooding, the new colonists decided to settle elsewhere. Unfortunately, they had no truly better choice. The only place upon Markovia that is safe from Diosamblet's rage is within Doctor Fran's estate. The second colony failed in the same manner as the first.

More recently, Vokkert's Insel came to the attention of a noblewoman named **Astrid Lémery**, who schemes to replace Claude LaGrange upon the Council of Brilliance. As part of her plan, she has funded a third colony to the island, which she insists upon calling **L'île de Guignol** in honor of Lord-Governor Marcel Guignol.

This third group of colonists from Dementlieu have landed upon Markovia mere weeks before the party arrives. They have established their first settlement, which they have named **Ville d'Astrid** after their benefactor.

Details on the Island

Reaching the Island

Although Markovia is surrounded by the Sea of Sorrows, nonetheless it is difficult to approach. Many sailors have followed detailed sea charts only to find that it is just... not there.

In order for someone to reach Markovia, they must be in close proximity to a wild animal, such as the black leopard in *Neither Man Nor Beast*. Captain Biermans stumbled across this key accidentally (but repeatedly) because of Jan-Jaap, a monkey which he acquired from a trip to Sri Raji.

Domesticated animals will not open the path the Markovia. An untamed horse or bull, hostile to its human captors, might open the path, just as Jan-Jaap did. However, ordinary shipboard rats are too closely tied to human society. Rat-catching cats might or might not count as wild, depending upon their viciousness and their willingness to submit to human attention.

Terrain

Vokkert's Insel has four mountainous areas. The highest occurs along the southern shore; before the Translation, it was the northern slope of Mount Baratak. Smaller ranges occur to the west and the east. The shortest and smallest of these areas is in the north.

Before the Translation, the island's tree population was comprised largely of oaks and pines. Since then, more tropical varieties have been taking over. Within two miles of the coast, the oaks have been almost entirely replaced by palm trees and gum trees, just as the underbrush has been replaced by lianas and ferns and brilliantly-colored flowers. The oaks remain dominant in the heart of the island, including much of the length of the **Langerfluss** ("Long River") and around Doctor Fran's estate. The pines, on the other hand, have fared far worse. They have almost entirely died away, leaving most of the mountainous and hilly regions covered in dead trees, crumbling in the tropical heat. Spells such as fireball and lightning bolt are immensely dangerous here.

However, there are flat areas as well. The northwestern corner of the island is both flat and occupied only by wiry brush; one might suspect that it caught a case of barrenness from the days when it was adjacent to G'Henna. To the south, the area north of Acasa remains a field, which gives the herbivores of Acasa a good place to gather food. In the southeastern quadrant of the island, the Langerfluss runs into another flat region. The Langerfluss breaks apart into a delta just before running into the **Gezahntebucht** ("Toothed Bay"), and the land around the delta is more wetland than field. However, the stretch between the wetlands and the oaken forest of the interior is highly arable ground. Finally, the northeastern part of the island also flattens out. While not as arable as the southeastern stretch, it is nonetheless verdant.

Each of the largest bays—including the **Robbenbucht** ("Seal Bay"), **Sunset Bay**, **Seichtebucht** ("Shallow Bay"), and especially the **Gezahntebucht** ("Toothed Bay")—is rendered treacherous by the presence of reefs.

Factions Upon the Island

At the moment, the most important factions upon the island are the following:

Doctor Fran and his loyal Broken Ones, the New Men, who tend to be the most human-appearing and physically most robust. Doctor Fran wants to craft a subservient new humanity from beasts, and the Broken Ones who serve him wish to become more human. Doctor Fran and his servants are based at Doctor Fran's estate.

Diosamblet and his own loyal Broken Ones, the so-called Savage Brethren, have the advantages of numbers and ferocity. They roam the rest of the island apart from Doctor Fran's estate. They reject the superi-

ority of humanity. Instead, they believe that feral beings are the superior beings.

Felix and his pride of loyal Broken Ones, whose foremost advantages are stealth and craftiness. They do not have a consistent base of operations. Instead, they move frequently to keep hidden from Diosamblet and away from Doctor Fran. Felix has no grand philosophical goal. He merely wishes to keep Doctor Fran and Diosamblet at each others' throats to give everyone else on the island (especially himself and his pride) more room for freedom.

The Dementlieuse colonists inhabiting the Ville d'Astrid. They have no diplomatic relations with any of the other factions on the island since they do not yet realize any other factions exist.

Random Encounters

1d8 Encounter

1-2 Broken Ones (Other Than Savage Brethren)

3 Boar

4 Needlemen

5 Python

6 Rhea

7 Yellow Musk Creeper

8 Savage Brethren

Maps

Over the course of the adventure, the party may encounter several maps.

- The **captain's map** is mounted in the captain's cabin of the Meeradler. It is a copy of the map produced during the second expedition of the Meeradler to Vokkert's Insel.
- The **Dementlieuse map** is used by the colonists of La Ville d'Astrid. While it is also based upon Captain Biermans' map, of course all of the names are in Dementlieuse instead of Lamordian. This map lacks names for the geographical features, but does include the locations of the earlier Port de LaGrange and Nouvelle Ferme settlements.
- The **Hohesdorf map** may be found in the ruins of that village. It is highly similar to the captain's map except that it has been amended with some details of the Ostufer, including Ludmilla's Tears and Hohesdorf itself. Crucially, it also includes scrawled notes marking Doctor Fran's estate and the ruined monastery as "Stockade" and "Ruins" respectively.

If the party encounters Jhurgen Vastich, he can sketch out a much more detailed, much more recent map.

Representations of these maps, as well as a map for the game master, are provided at the end of this adventure.

Adventure Summary

The first stage of the adventure is, of course, getting the player characters onto the island and into the thick of danger.

- The party is hired by **Brummel Vokkert**, Aard Vokkert's ambitious son and heir, to investigate what happened to the Lamordian colonists upon Vokkert's Insel.
- Aboard the *Meeradler*, the party meets **Dietrich Braun**, great-nephew of Captain Biermans, and two sailors, **Karsten Haering** and **Piet Spoelder**, who have previously sailed to Vokkert's Insel.
- When the *Meeradler* first draws close to Vokkert's Insel, the lookout notices a Dementlieuse flag flying. If the party investigates, they discover the very newly-established Dementlieuse colony of Ville d'Astrid.

- Reaching the site of the original Lamordian colony, they find that the site has been abandoned long enough for the jungle to have substantially reclaimed it.

- During the party's explorations, they disturb the spirit of a young woman from the original colony. In reliving her death, she provides clues to attentive observers.

- The colony is attacked in overwhelming force by Diosamblet and the Savage Brethren!

- At this point, the party knows nothing of the various factions upon the island. However, based upon where they flee, they may have a number of encounters with island-dwellers who can provide more information. These possibilities are described in the **Encounters** section.

The party's initial mission is to discover what happened to the original Lamordian colony so that the latest colony can avoid falling victim to the same fate. However, once the party is attacked by the Savage Brethren, they may choose to pursue any number of different goals. Here are some of the most likely ones:

- Meet with the *Meeradler* and flee the island.

- Warn the citizens of Ville d'Astrid before meeting with the *Meeradler* and fleeing the island.

- Rescue the citizens of Ville d'Astrid by bringing them to the *Meeradler.*

- Destroy Diosamblet and/or Doctor Fran.

The Adventure Begins

An agent in the employ of Brummel Vokkert hires the party to investigate what happened to the Lamordian colonists. The party members need not be Lamordian, but it may prove helpful over the course of the adventure if someone in the party speaks the language. Even more importantly, the adventure will go much more smoothly if various party members speak Balok.

Aboard the Meeradler

Although Captain Biermans has retired, the refurbished Meeradler still sails the Sea of Sorrows, commanded by Captain Ansgar Schillinger.

There are three groups of people aboard the Meeradler:

- The *colonists*, who intend to settle Vokkert's Insel. The colonists have brought livestock and other supplies. Crucially, two wild pigs are caged belowdecks.

- The *sailors*, who report to Captain Schillinger. After dropping off the colonists and the party at the mouth of the Groenefluss, they have been tasked with circumnavigating Vokkert's Insel to update their maps of the island. In particular they are looking for other colonies and for another potential site for a Lamordian colony. Although Captain Schillinger is not blatant about the exact purpose of the map updates, he also does not deny if asked.

- The *party*, tasked with investigating the failure of the first colony and returning with the *Meeradler* to report their findings to Brummel Vokkert.

The party has several days to get to know the colonists and the sailors aboard the *Meeradler* with them.

- One of the crew, a young man named **Dietrich Braun**, is Captain Biermans' great-nephew. He grew up on tales of his great-uncle's journeys, including the voyages to Vokkert's Insel. Dietrich is eager to follow in the footsteps of his great-uncle.

- Two of the older crew members (**Karsten Haering** and **Piet Spoelder**) used to sail under Captain Biermans' command. They came to Vokkert's Insel several times. They remember finding the abandoned colony. They also recollect that Jan-Jaap, the captain's barely-domesticated monkey, bit

off the finger of one of the other sailors, who promptly threw Jan-Jaap overboard to drown. None of them dared inform the captain, who was distraught enough about the abandoned colony that he didn't realize Jan-Jaap was gone until they were well back at sea.

- The colonists are led by burly **Paulus Auerbach** and bookish **Quinten Hogenberk**. Either one will be delighted to talk for hours about their plans for home construction and/or revolutionary farming techniques and/or building an efficient water wheel for a mill.

Approaching Vokkert's Insel

The Meeradler approaches Vokkert's Insel from the south, giving the crew and passengers a view of the cliffs that Captain Biermans called the **Steilenufer**, the "Sheer Shore". There is no useful place to land there, so the Meeradler circles counter-clockwise, seeking the mouth of the **Groenefluss** where the original Lamordian colony was established.

However, along the way they sail around the **Gezahntebucht**, the "Toothed Bay", where the lookout spots a flag flying inland.

The Other New Colonists

The crew debates whether to investigate. Captain Schillinger listens to the various arguments, and if one of the player characters puts forth a good reason why investigation would further the mission, then Captain Schillinger will stop and send a boat ashore. If the party volunteers for the mission, then Captain Schillinger will be delighted to risk only two of his sailors.

If the party goes ashore, they will encounter the colonists of Ville d'Astrid. The colony is led by **Mathias Breguet** and his wife **Audrey**. Mathias is a former gendarme in Port-a-Lucine who is solidly in Astrid Lémery's camp. Their marriage is brand new and entirely a matter of convenience. He gets a pretty, younger woman with whom to start a new family line. She gets to share in his power. In addition, she's secretly an agent of Claude LaGrange and a member of the Société de Legerdemain. She will be well-rewarded if she can successfully sabotage Lémery's colony and return to report about it. She has already *charmed* Mathias. The *charm* is unlikely to be broken any time soon as he is delighted to do what his new wife desires.

Regardless of whether the party disembarks to meet the Dementlieuse colonists, Captain Schillinger will eventually insist that the *Meeradler* continue on to the Groenefluss. The first step to investigating the failure of the first colony is to visit Hohesdorf (or what remains of it).

Ascending the Groenefluss

Captain Schillinger will anchor the *Meeradler* at the mouth of the Groenefluss. Several of his sailors row the colonists and the party to shore. Dietrich Braun is eager to stand upon the island which his great-uncle discovered, and so Captain Schillinger allows him to go ashore too, as long as the party accepts responsibility for bringing him back when they return.

The colonists are all heavily burdened because they are bringing supplies and tools. They will be appreciative if any party members agree to help carry the load. One of the party members may be asked to bear what Paulus Auerbach and Quinten Hogenberk jokingly call the most important bundle: four bottles of Lamordian mead, intended for a celebration of their arrival at the island.

Following the Groenefluss upstream provides plenty of opportunity for the colonists and the party to observe the peculiar mixture of tropical and temperate flora. The divide becomes particularly obvious at the waterfall which Captain Biermans named **Ludmilla's Tears** after his wife. At the base of the waterfall the trees and brush are clearly tropical; at the top, just as clearly temperate.

Along the way, characters with the tracking proficiency may notice a worrisome set of footprints in the damp riverbank. The footprints appear to have been made by a very large cat.

The Ruins of Hohesdorf

The ruins of Hohesdorf are exactly where the captain's map indicates they should be. After nearly fifteen years of abandonment, the six wooden buildings are in miserable condition, overgrown at best and collapsed at worst. Careful searching will reveal some of the debris of colonial life: a fragment of a plate here, the badly-rusted head of a rake there.

The smallest building remains in slightly better condition than any of the others. For every 10 minutes that someone spends in the building, there is a cumulative 10% chance that they rouse a restless spirit, a phantom which was created by the sudden, brutal death of a young woman named **Marijke Voeten**. Her phantom rushes into the house, carrying an object which resembles a leather scroll case. After a moment she tucks the case into a niche in the back corner of the building, which she promptly covers with a matching slat of wood. As she finishes this task, she turns to greet someone else who has entered the building. She asks whether someone named Jhurgen has returned from the woods. Her tone indicates rising concern. Apparently receiving an unsatisfying answer, she turns to the door, only to be run through by a crudely-fashioned spear. The psychic scene offers only a hint of tusks, snout, and bristles, and then it ends as the young woman dies.

When Marijke's phantom manifests, anyone nearby must save or else be caught up in her final moments. Those who fail their saves will flee in terror for 1d6 rounds.

Marijke was betrothed to **Jhurgen Vastich**, the colony's scout, hunter, and woodsman. The evening that Hohesdorf was raided by Broken Ones, Jhurgen was investigating some ruins he had recently spotted.

The leather case remains where Marijke tucked it. It contains a map which Jhurgen had annotated with his findings. Despite the oiled leather, some water has seeped into the case, utterly destroying the western edge of the map, but fortunately none of the annotations have been lost. Two sites, one labelled "stockade" and one labelled "ruins", have been marked in Lamordian.

The Storm

Vokkert's Insel is subject to frequent summer storms. One such storm strikes during the first night at Hohesdorf. The ruined buildings provide little shelter, but fortunately the colonists all brought tents. The tents are crowded with all of the colonists, the party, and Dietrich Braun huddled inside, but at least nobody has to remain outside.

Unfortunately, though, in the thick of the storm the Savage Brethren stumble across the colonists, and a massacre begins. There are enough colonists that Diosamblet does not wish to risk a loss, so he orders the Savage Brethren to attack to kill. Eventually the Brethren should drive the party (and perhaps a handful of survivors, possibly including Dietrich Braun) out of the village and into the night.

Encounters

There are a number of encounters which the party might have upon the island, depending upon where they go.

Abandoned Villages

The southwestern quarter of the island once contained three abandoned villages. All three were Dorvinian logging camps, and all three fell victim to Frantisek Markov's predations. Two were completely destroyed by the creation of the Chasm of Woe. As for the third, like the other abandoned villages elsewhere upon the island, very little remains. Certainly nothing of value.

Acasa

If the party crosses the Chasm of Woe and makes its way to the southwestern section of the island, they will likely encounter either the beast-folk of Acasa.

The beast-folk of Acasa are primarily deer-folk and sheep-folk. They live in fear of the predations of Diosamblet and his Savage Brethren. Because of their long association with Jhurgen Vastich, they do not feel undue awe of un-Broken Ones, but they still treat humans with a certain amount of deference. Then again, deer-folk and sheep-folk tend toward deference anyway.

The Acasians are willing to explain much about the island. They fear both Doctor Fran, the Master of Pain, and Diosamblet, the God Who Walks Among Us. To a lesser degree they also fear Mushtor the Walrus-Man, but at least Mushtor can be avoided by remaining inland.

The Broken Ones of Acasa are allied with Jhurgen Vastich and can arrange for the party to meet him, if they have not already.

The Aerie

Among the steep cliffs of the southern part of the island stands a camp called the Aerie. It is inhabited primarily by goat-folk and hawk-folk.

Nearly unique among the Broken Ones, the Aerie's inhabitants are aware of the **Monastery of Lost Souls** to the east. However, they sense the unnatural magic of the Table of Life within the monastery, and they are terrified of it. They absolutely refuse to approach too closely. They also avoid talking about the Monastery, even among themselves.

The Broken Ones of the Aerie are unlikely to join any sort of campaign against either Diosamblet or Doctor Fran. However, they are willing to aid true men in non-violent ways such as offering shelter and food.

Akanga's Camp

Although the mighty Akanga has been dead for more than a dozen years, his name still carries power among the Broken Ones. Akanga's camp is still called Akanga's camp, and it remains a gathering place for Broken Ones of a rebellious mindset. Unfortunately for Akanga's Claws (as the inhabitants of this camp call themselves), no leader has emerged to properly fill Akanga's role. In fact, most of the cat-folk now follow Felix, while most of the other carnivorous Broken Ones belong to the Savage Brethren. The inhabitants of Akanga's camp have mounted no effective rebellion, and in fact they are periodically driven out of their home by the Savage Brethren.

Nonetheless, Akanga's Claws would be willing to follow an effective leader.

The Chasm of Woe

A chasm separates the southwestern portion of the island from the rest. This so-called Chasm of Woe formed the night that Frantisek Markov was torn in two. The gap averages 20' wide for much of its length, although it is wider along the western jag. Except for the higher southernmost quarter, the chasm is perpetually flooded, and even the southernmost quarter floods every time a storm strikes the island.

There are two bridges to cross, but they are both guarded by the Broken Ones of Acasa. If the Savage Brethren—or any other threat—come raiding, they will destroy the bridges to keep the Brethen on the far side.

The party is likely to receive a more welcoming reception, provided they can convince the Acasians that they are not Doctor Fran's creatures. (This is an easy task for a fully-human party, but only slightly more difficult for a party which includes demi-humans or humanoids.) If talked into allowing the party over the bridge, the guards will direct the party to either Acasa or to the cabin where Jhurgen Vastich lives.

The Chasm of Woe does not quite split the island apart. However, year by year the chasm is gradually widening, and eventually the southern mountains will break. The danger arises because the chasm's path indicates that it will open directly beneath the Monastery of the Lost, where the Table of Life is hidden. That dread possibility is not the focus of this adventure, but it could provide the seed for a sequel.

Doctor Fran's Estate

Since Doctor Fran's estate is one of the locations on the map found in Hohesdorf, the party is likely to investigate. They will discover the rebuilt estate, which appears to be in roughly the same condition as it was before the events of *Neither Man Nor Beast*. (For a map of the estate, see that module or else the *Realm of Terror* boxed set.)

In the aftermath of Akanga's Rebellion, none of Doctor Fran's most successful Broken Ones—Delphi, Felix, or Orson—still occupy the estate. However, a new generation of Broken Ones now lives there in service of the Master of Pain. In particular, the boar-men **Frica** and **Teroare** hover continuously at Doctor Fran's side, ready to defend him against Diosamblet or any other threat which might arise.

While Frica and Teroare look mostly human, their body hair is more bristly than usual, and their heads remain distinctly porcine, with flat noses and tusks. (Outlanders might mistake them for orcs.) In the presence of guests, they will wear hoods pulled far forward, but even casual observers will realize that there is something inhuman about them.

Similarly, Doctor Fran's other servants fail to pass as completely human. Some detail always betrays their animal nature. There are six of them, but Doctor Fran has never bothered to give names to these near-successes. Some of them desperately want a name, and their loyalty to Doctor Fran will be sorely tested if anyone gives them a name of their own.

Crucially, though, Doctor Fran's estate has one fully human occupant. Years ago Professor **Thierry Cuvillier** taught botany at the University of Dementlieu, but he accompanied the Nouvelle Ferme colonists for the opportunity to study the flora and fauna of Vokkert's Insel. His studies took a highly unexpected turn, of course. At the last minute he was spared the usual torture under Doctor Fran's scalpel because he thought to bring up his own interest in biological matters. Doctor Fran revealed himself as desperate for "civilized" conversation with an educated man. Since then, Thierry Cuvillier has been a guest at the estate, although not a truly voluntary one.

However, because Doctor Fran has done most of his learning from experimentation and reading, he has an odd reverence for an actual university education. He does not fully comprehend that Thierry Cuvillier is a specialist. One of his first demands was that his "guest" improve the defenses of the estate. Thierry Cuvillier knew better than to disillusion Doctor Fran, and so he did his best with a casual knowledge of Dementlieuse weapon technology and careful reading of some of the very miscellaneous books in Doctor Fran's library. In particular, Cuvillier has built four crude ballistas, which are found at each of the four corners of the estate. Each ballista has a 20% chance of catastrophic failure with every bolt launched. On the other hand, even the Savage Brethren live in fear of these mighty spear-throwers.

If the party can somehow make an opportunity to speak with Thierry Cuvillier alone, they will have no trouble recruiting him to their cause. Thierry Cuvillier may suggest two ways that he can aid the party. First, he can disable the ballistas when he next performs his regular inspections. Second, he may be able to drive Doctor Fran into a maudlin frame of mind (by bringing up **Delphi**, his lost "daughter"). From there it's only a small step to convincing Doctor Fran to split a bottle of whiskey or other spirits. Before agreeing to the latter plan, however, Thierry Cuvillier insists upon the party's word that they will come fetch him. Although he has learned how to feign drinking more than he actually does, nonetheless his tolerance for alcohol is lower than Doctor Fran's. After all, Thierry Cuvillier does not have the mass of a gorilla.

Diosamblet and the Savage Brethren

Nearly as bad as entering Doctor Fran's estate is the possibility that the party will encounter the Savage Brethren again.

In the initial encounter with the Savage Brethren, Diosamblet hoped to overwhelm the colonists with sheer numbers and sheer brutality. When encountering a smaller party, he feels less threatened. As a consequence, he is more likely to order the Savage Brethren to take prisoners. He may not even enter the fray himself but simply watch and laugh and laugh as the Brethren drag victim after victim into unconsciousness.

Of course, becoming a prisoner of Diosamblet is no less horrible than being taken prisoner by Doctor Fran. The difference is that Doctor Fran attempts to turn beasts into men (and vice versa) via surgery, while Diosamblet wants to bring out the beast in all men via physical privation and emotional torment. His idea of good sport is two former friends fighting to the death over food.

Diosamblet rules the Savage Brethren by enforcing a notion of pack dominance. As a consequence, he will not turn down a challenge to single combat. On the other hand, he—and all of the Savage Brethren—will insist that any combat be fought with only those defenses and weapons which nature provided: no armor, no armament, and certainly no spells.

Another possible approach to dealing with the Savage Brethren is similar to one approach to dealing with Doctor Fran himself: alcohol. For example, the mead which the Lamordians brought to the island would go a long way toward rendering the Savage Brethren intoxicated. Diosamblet himself is not immune to the lure of drink.

Felix and His Pride

The leopard-man Felix is the head of a pride of cat-folk who roam the island more stealthily and much less destructively than the Savage Brethren. His leadership position is ironic, given that he was a spy for the lion-man Akanga, and then later he betrayed Doctor Fran during Akanga's attack upon the estate. Doctor Fran has never forgiven Felix, of course, but then Felix has never forgiven Doctor Fran for any of his crimes.
Although most of the Broken Ones of predator stock are loyal to Diosamblet, the cat-folk are almost entirely loyal to Felix. The leopard-man has evaded the clutches of Doctor Fran long enough that much of his physical humanity has devolved away, leaving him in chronic pain. He moves as if he were very elderly. (And in cat years, yes, he is.) Despite this, Felix retains his human-level intelligence and his hatred of both halves of Frantisek Markov. In fact, Felix may be the only person on the island who recognizes Diosamblet as a twisted twin to the already-twisted Doctor Fran.

Based upon the example of Frantisek Markov, Felix distrusts all humans. However, he is quite happy to aid anyone who appears determined and capable of bringing down either Doctor Fran or Diosamblet or preferably both. After all, Felix's idea of paradise is an island free of humanity, where beasts are free to be beasts.

Felix has little physical aid to offer. He is too infirm, and he is not willing to risk any of the members of his pride. However, he will exchange information, a question for a question. He will want to know about the new colonists who have arrived on the island, particularly once he learns that two groups of colonists have arrived. In return, he will provide information which might undermine any of the other factions on the island.

The location of Felix's pride upon the island is left deliberately vague, allowing the cat-folk to appear nearly anywhere where they might prove useful to the game master.

House of Plenty

In 737 BC, before the Translation, a priest came to Markovia from the starving land of G'Henna. His name was Gorghu Grul, and he worshipped that aspect of the Beast-God Zhakata known as the Provider. Gorghu Grul recognized sooner than most that worship of the Provider had fallen out of favor with Lord Yagno Petrovna, Prophet of Zhakata. He wished to establish a hermitage where he could continue to worship the Provider in peace. He named this hermitage the **House of Plenty**.

Over the following three years, others who worshipped the Provider came to the House of Plenty, and Gorghu Grul bid them welcome for as long as they might wish to stay. After all, the surrounding land was a land of abundance, just as the Provider had promised. However, few native Markovians approached. In those days, nearly every Broken One believed that Doctor Fran was a god, and they feared to draw too near to any human lest they suffer divine wrath.

However, with the Translation of Markovia in 740bc, that time of peace drew to an abrupt end. All across the island, the Broken Ones' heightened senses told them that something terrible had occurred. When a pack of fearful wolf-men loped into the House of Plenty, Gorghu Grul mistook them for G'Hennan mongrels, pitiable and meek. He was fatally wrong.

The House of Plenty has been abandoned ever since. Nothing grows within ten feet of its outer walls. Because of that, it remains in better condition than any of the other historical abandoned villages upon the island. However, the sudden tropical weather has been brutal to the many scrolls of parchment which Gorghu Grul brought with him. All that is left of the Law of Zhakata is a trio of guesting cups inside the remains of the central building. Despite the noise of the surrounding jungle, the House of Plenty itself is eerily silent.

Especially at night. That's when the House of Plenty is stalked by the ghouls which are all that remain of the wolf-men.

Jhurgen Vastich

Jhurgen Vastich is the last survivor of the original Lamordian colony. He was hunting in the forest when Doctor Fran's Broken Ones raided Hohesdorf. He buried those who died in the fighting, including his fiancée Marijke. When he went looking for anyone who might have been captured, he found Doctor Fran's estate. Unfortunately, although he was able to slip past the bear-man Orson, he could not evade the leopard-man Felix. Jhurgen Vastich fled back into the forest, blinded in one eye and with wounds that left him badly scarred.

After that confrontation, Jhurgen Vastich spent several years avoiding Doctor Fran and his loyal Broken Ones. He stayed away from Hohesdorf because he felt that returning there was too obvious. Of course, he avoided Doctor Fran's manor as well. With Akanga stirring up trouble from the northwestern corner of the island, Jhurgen Vastich eventually ended up spending much of his time in the southwestern corner, particularly the abandoned village there. In time he made the acquaintance of the Broken Ones of Acasa who lived nearby because they feared both Frantisek Markov and Akanga. Jhurgen Vastich and these Broken Ones have been allies ever since.

Jhurgen Vastich may be found nearly anywhere upon Vokkert's Insel. He has taken upon himself responsibility for finding new colonists and warning them off the island. He does not realize that the Dark Powers have always prevented him from finding new colonists before their first encounter with hostile Broken Ones, whether allied with Doctor Fran or Diosamblet. However, he also does what he can to aid the survivors of those first encounters. He serves well as a last-minute rescuer for the party. Also, unlike most of the potential allies upon the island, Jhurgen Vastich will gladly assist the party in whatever plan for survival they concoct.

Jhurgen Vastich is an even richer source of information than the Broken Ones of Acasa. He does not live there, although he is allied with the Acasians. He has his own small log cabin nearby. He will gladly host the party, especially if any of them speak Lamordian. He has not had fully human company for over a decade.

Jhurgen knows of Akanga's Rebellion, but he believes that Diosamblet is simply the next Broken One to take up the rebellion. In particular, he does not realize that there is anything metaphysical behind Diosamblet's audacity in calling himself by that name. He loathes Doctor Fran as the person responsible for the creation of the island's Broken Ones and thus the deaths of the Lamordian colonists. Jhurgen is no more fond of Felix, who scarred him, and he attempts to keep an eye on Felix and his cat-folk.

Jhurgen Vastich is a ranger. Broken Ones are his chosen enemy, although he does not hold all Broken Ones to be his enemies.

Karangu

Karangu is not the highest of the peaks in the western range, but it is nonetheless notable because it is volcanic. Although it has not erupted in living memory, the caldera is still full of slowly-bubbling lava.

The undisputed ruler of Karangu is a Greater Broken One known as the Gorilla Queen. She was a member of the Nouvelle Ferme colony. She survived Doctor Fran's scalpel, but the ordeal broke her sanity. She now believes that she is ascending to godhood to challenge Doctor Fran for supremacy of the island. (She believes that Diosamblet is another such challenger.) She periodically kills captured Broken Ones by hurling them into the caldera of Karangu as sacrifices to herself. She will be particularly delighted if she gets the chance to do the same with a true human.

Despite her eagerness to sacrifice people, the Gorilla Queen may be the easiest person upon the island to convince to strike against Diosamblet or Doctor Fran. All she requires is an oath that she shall be given expanded territory.

In addition to her own formidable self, she is accompanied by four other gorilla-folk. They also believe that she is divine.

Mushtor and Delphi

If the party lingers too long by the shore, they are likely to encounter **Mushtor**, a Greater Broken One of walrus stock. He strikes more quickly than most people expect, and his favorite tactic is to drag his victim into the water. However, he will not bother pursing anyone who flees inland, knowing how much more vulnerable he is on land.

If some unfortunate soul does get dragged into the sea, all hope is not lost. Perhaps they will be rescued by the dolphin-woman Delphi and her pod of loyal seal-folk. Delphi is also a Greater Broken One, and the presence of the seal-folk throws the odds against Mushtor.

Delphi was once one of Doctor Fran's most successful experiments, nearly indistinguishable from human. He treated her as his daughter (which is only so endearing, considering what he did to his wife), and he mourned her death during Akanga's Rebellion. However, she did not die, but merely fled back to the sea. In appearance she is now far more dolphin than human, but she has lost none of her intelligence or her generosity.

Niedresdorf

The colonists who once inhabited Hohesdorf ("High Town") were captured by Doctor Fran and subjected to his experiments. Once the survivors had been released back into the wild, they established a second home, which they called Niedresdorf ("Low Town") in a bit of self-mockery which stuck. Perhaps they felt that Hohesdorf left them too vulnerable, or perhaps they felt that Hohesdorf was a settlement only for humans.

The survivors occupied Niedresdorf for only a few months before Akanga's Rebellion disrupted the entire domain. Upon Doctor Fran's incapacitation, they started reverting to humanity, but upon his restoration, their humanity started slipping away again. The Niedresdorfers decided to die human. They dug their own graves and then all but one of them consumed poison. The sole survivor finished burying the others, and then he took his turn.

Niedresdorf is not haunted, at least not in the same way that the ruined monastery is haunted. Nonetheless, when the wind blows through the trees, sensitive characters may hear sorrowful voices upon the wind.

Skovby

An abandoned town along the river which the Lamordians now call the Langerfluss although it was known as the Volgis before the Translation of Markovia. This town was founded by

Nova Vaasans who were initially delighted by the discovery of prime forest, perfect for logging. However, their enthusiasm diminished rapidly once the Broken Ones reported their presence to Frantisek Markov.

Skovby may have been the largest village ever established in Markovia, and it appears to have been one of the earliest as well. Very little remains of the settlement. Even the stone foundations of the old mill are tumbled-down and ivy-covered.

Sondra at the Monastery

If the party investigates the ruined monastery, as marked on the map left in Hohesdorf, they may encounter a woman named **Sondra** and her ghostly protector, **Jonathan**.

Sondra lives a surprisingly peaceful life upon Markovia. She survives largely thanks to her little garden in the ruins, which includes an orange tree which sprouted despite the lack of any other orange trees to provide seeds. She has learned to use a sling for hunting, but she is very hesitant to leave the monastery for long, and she utterly refuses to leave except during the middle of the day.

In one corner the garden is a grave. A very small grave, admittedly. It marks where she buried her stillborn child.

The Broken Ones know of her presence, but most of them are afraid of the monastery, believing that it is haunted by many more spirits than just the one. They believe that Sondra herself is an atypically material ghost. Upon rare occasions Diosamblet will drive his Savage Brethren into such a frenzy that they will raid the monastery despite their fears. However, Jonathan's protections have proven sufficient to defend Sondra thus far.

If the party (or anyone else) threatens Sondra within the bounds of the monastery, Jonathan will whisk her away using *dimension door* before returning to cast his minor magics upon the offenders.

However, if the encounter with the party is more peaceful than that, Sondra can be convinced to offer the protection of the ruined monastery's reputation. In this case she will temporarily take in any colonists who survived the Savage Brethren's attack on Hohesdorf.

For more about Sondra and Jonathan, see *The Tapestry of Dark Souls*.

Tola's Camp

On the shore of the **Robbenbucht** ("Seal Bay") is a camp of Broken Ones, primarily fox-folk and bat-folk. However, the camp's leader is a dhole (a kind of wild dog) from the Wildlands named **Tola**. Like all creatures of the Wildlands, he is both intelligent and capable of speech. He arrived via a Mistway unrecorded by the sages of the Core. Between his natural charm and his inclination toward bullying, he swiftly ascended to leadership of this band of Broken Ones.

Tola has only been upon Vokkert's Insel for several months. Beyond knowing to run away when the Savage Brethren come raiding, he has no understanding of the way the island truly works. Nonetheless, he is easily flattered by praise of his intelligence, leadership, or mercy, and he will gladly allow flatterers to remain in his camp indefinitely.

The fox-folk and bat-folk are generally reluctant to confront Diosamblet, but a particularly persuasive party might be able to convince some of them to strike out. However, their fear of Doctor Fran is even greater than their fear of Diosamblet, and they cannot be convinced to move against him.

Ville d'Astrid

The Savage Brethren have not yet run across the Ville d'Astrid, and so life has continued been peaceful (if very busy) for the Dementlieuse colonists. The arrival of survivors from the new Lamordian colony will thoroughly disrupt their sense of well-being.

Certain members of the colony will refuse to believe that there is an actual threat. Just be-

cause the Lamordians got scared off by a couple of wild animals, that doesn't mean the Dementlieuse need to do the same. **Mathias Breguet**, the official leader of the colony, belongs to this group. However, others will admit that they have sometimes felt like they were being watched. One fellow swears he saw a big-footed ape-man vanishing into the forest.

Audrey Breguet, the effective if unrecognized leader of the colony, does a lot of listening as the colonists debate the reality of the situation. She is fully aware that something destroyed the previous colonies. Eventually she will come out in favor of increasing the colony's guard and fortifying its defenses, at which point her *charmed* husband will chime in as if he never disagreed with her. After leaning on his official authority to get her way, she will discretely prepare her own low-level spells to help defend the colony. If her magic is discovered, she might be willing to aid the party in return for their silence.

Of course, now that the Savage Brethren have discovered that new colonists have arrived on the island, they are scouring more eagerly and more widely than usual, hoping to capture survivors for Diosamblet's entertainment. As a consequence, only a night or two after they raid Hohesdorf, the Savage Brethren raid Ville d'Astrid. Perhaps the party will have departed by that time, or perhaps they will have remained for another night of chaos and terror.

Concluding the Adventure

The adventure is likely to conclude in one of three ways.

Escaping the Island

The most straightforward ending is for the party to meet up with the *Meeradler* and flee the island. The *Meeradler* is sailing counter-clockwise around the island, staying as close to the shore as the reefs will allow. Note that, if the party chooses this option, although the colony will have failed, the party will have succeeded in their mission.

However, in order for this plan to succeed, Doctor Fran must not have learned of the presence of new colonists. Diosamblet already knows, so only Doctor Fran's ignorance keeps the borders open.

The island's inhabitants are aware of the connection between Doctor Fran and the weather. (They generally do not realize that Diosamblet is also connected.) Ordinary summer storms are one thing, but the particularly violent storms which mark a border closure are another. These storms are widely called "The Wrath of the Master of Pain".

Confronting Diosamblet

The party may attempt to confront Diosamblet. Of course, confronting Diosamblet is dangerous enough, but it's nearly impossible to separate him from his Savage Brethren as well. Fortunately, few of the Savage Brethren are Greater Broken Ones. Moreover, Diosamblet and the Brethren disdain the supposed weakness of civilization, which means they are less likely to watch out for mechanical traps. A clever party could inflict considerable harm to the Savage Brethren before they finally learn sufficient caution.

If the party succeeds in destroying Diosamblet, then there will be a period of several days before Doctor Fran takes full control of the domain again. Until that time, the borders will be fully open.

Confronting Dr. Fran

The party may also attempt to confront Doctor Fran. Of course, this also means they must confront the boar-men Frica and Teroare. On the other hand, a concerted attack upon Doctor Fran may convince Thierry Cuvillier to make a bid for freedom.

If the party succeeds in destroying Doctor Fran, then there will be a period of several days before Diosamblet takes full control of the domain again. Until that time, the borders will be fully open.

The Deaths of Two Darklords

Ultimately, the most satisfying conclusion may occur if the party can arrange a confrontation between Doctor Fran and Diosamblet. If the two enemies weaken each other sufficiently, the party may be able to destroy them both. Of course, Ravenloft being Ravenloft, this does not necessarily mean the release of Markovia. However, it may allow a respite for the inhabitants of the island, perhaps even years before the evil of Frantisek Markov—the Master of Pain, The God Who Walks Among Us—rises again.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Naurath, for attentive review; to Wixenstyx, for discussing how plate tectonics might work in a world where the geography moves arbitrarily; and especially to the Lady Fordam, for inspiration and for her patience with all the time I spend lost in the Mists.

Return of Diosamblet
Appendix ~ Maps

Captain's Map



Dementlieuse Map



Hohesdorf Map



Jhurgen's Map



DM's Map



Return of Diosamblet Monster and NPC Roster (2e)

Monsters

Boar

AC 7; MV 15; HD 3+3; hp 20; THAC0 17; #AT 1; SZ M; ML 10; AL N; XP 175; DMG 3d4
special: charge; attack to -7 hp

Wild boars aren't as common upon Markovia as they once were, but they do still inhabit the island. Besides, the Lamordian colonists brought a pair aboard the *Meeradler*.

Broken One, Common

AC 7 or 10; MV 9; HD 3; hp 18; THAC0 17; #AT 1; SZ S to L; ML 7; AL NE; XP 175; DMG 1d6 or by weapon
special: natural weaponry; regeneration (1 hp/round); stamina (minimum 5hp/HD)

This stat block provides a foundation for most Broken Ones found upon Markovia. However, individual Broken Ones may have additional abilities depending upon their base stock. For example, hawk-folk possess a limited ability to fly, deer-folk are swift runners, and gorilla-folk inflict additional damage with their great strength.

Broken One, Greater

AC 5 or 8; MV 9; HD 5; hp 30; THAC0 15; #AT 1; SZ M to L; ML 12; AL NE; XP 650; DMG 1d8 or by weapon
special: natural weaponry; regeneration (2 hp/round); stamina (minimum 5hp/HD); +3 to +5 on all to-hit and damage rolls when using a weapon

This stat block provides the basis for any Greater Broken Ones found upon the island, although Greater Broken Ones will have additional features according to their base stock. See *Delphi*, *Felix*, *Frica*, the *Gorilla Queen*, *Mushtor*, and *Teroare* for examples.

Ghoul

AC 6; MV 9; HD 2; hp 12; THAC0 19; #AT 3; SZ M; ML 12; AL CE; XP 175; DMG 1d3/1d3/1d6 (claw/claw/bite)
special: paralyzation (1d6+2 rounds); undead immunities; kept completely at bay by *protection from evil*
Ghouls are found near the House of Plenty. Although these ghouls were wolf-folk while alive, their origins give them no game-mechanical advantage.

Needleman

AC 6; MV 9; HD 3+4; hp 21; THAC0 17; #AT 1; SZ M; ML 12; AL N; XP 120; DMG 3d4
special: nearly undetectable in undergrowth (40% hidden from elves and rangers; 75% hidden from others; -5 penalty to opponents' surprise rolls); fire needles (20' range, 1d6 needles at 1d2/1 damage); vulnerable to magic (suffers triple damage); plant immunities

Needlemen are neither man nor beast, but plant.

Python

AC 5; MV 9; HD 3+2; hp 20; THAC0 17; #AT 2; SZ M (10'); ML 8; AL N; XP 270; DMG 1/1d3
special: constriction (automatic damage every round; break free w/ open doors roll at -1; attacks on the python have 20% chance of striking constricted victim instead)

Doctor Fran has had little success with making viable Broken Ones from serpentine subjects. Despite his efforts, pythons still inhabit the jungle areas of Markovia.

Rhea

AC 6; MV 18; HD 3; hp 14; THAC0 17; #AT 3; SZ L (7'); ML 6; AL N; XP 65; DMG 1d3/1d3/2d4

These large, flightless birds provide much of the sustenance for the carnivores of the island. The plumage of a Markovian rhea is as brightly-colored as a parrot.

Yellow Musk Creeper

AC 7; MV 0; HD 3; hp16; THAC0 17; #AT 2d6; SZ L; ML 20; AL N; XP 650; DMG pollen (see below)

special: immune to charm, sleep, hold, illusions, and mind-affecting attacks; pollen (save vs. spells or be entranced); intelligence drain (1d4 points/round)

Most of the island's natives have learned to avoid the lure of the yellow musk creeper...

Yellow Musk Zombie

AC 10; MV 6; HD 2; hp 9; THAC0 19; #AT 1; SZ M; ML 20; AL N; XP 120; DMG 1d8 or by weapon

special: immune to charm, sleep, hold, illusions, and mind-affecting attacks... but not all.

Non-Player Characters

Audrey Breguet

4th level human wizard

Str 10, Dex 15, Con 11, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 16
hp 14, hd 4d4, ac 9, th 20

languages (5): Mordentish (native), Lamordian, Falkovnian, Balok, Darkonian, Halfling

equipment: ring of shield (3/day), dust of confusion (10 pinches)

1st level spells (3): charm person, color spray, jump

2nd level spells (2): blur, improved phantasmal force

Audrey Breguet is married to Mathias Breguet, the official leader of the colony at Ville d'Astrid, and she is his foremost advisor. She would be considered plain by the Dementlieuse aristocracy, assuming they ever took note of her. Fortunately, her husband finds her both attractive and discerning in her advice.

However, Audrey is secretly an agent of Claude LaGrange and a member of the Société de Legerdemain. Her mission is to prevent the success of Astrid Lémery's colony and, secondarily, to learn why LaGrange's colonies both failed. She has charmed her husband, and so the colony is under her sway. Thus far the colony is succeeding, but she intends to sabotage it several months from now, shortly before the resupply ship from Dementlieu is scheduled to return.

Audrey possesses two magic items. The first is a ring which allows her to cast *shield* upon herself 3/day. The second is a pouch of dust which causes *confusion*. Each pinch, blown into the air, is sufficient affect a 10' x 10' area. Mixed into food, a single pinch will affect up to 10 people who consume it. This latter approach is how Audrey intends to sabotage the colony when the proper time comes. She tells herself that no actual harm will come to her fellow colonists.

In addition to the spells listed above, Audrey Breguet's spellbook also contains *audible glamer*, *mending*, *continual light*, and *whispering wind*.

Delphi

Greater Broken One, Dolphin Stock

AC 5; MV 15; HD 5; hp 40; THAC0 15; #AT 1; SZ M (5'5"); ML 19; AL N; XP 420; DMG 2d4 (headbutt)

special: natural weaponry; regeneration (2 hp/round); stamina (minimum 5hp/HD); save as an 8th-level fighter; can hold breath for long periods

Having avoided Doctor Fran's surgical attentions for more than a decade, his former ward Delphi has reverted almost entirely to her original dolphin form. However, she retains her memories, her intelligence, and her sense of morality.

Diosamblet

Darklord of Markovia, Cursed Human

str 19, dex 18, con 16, int 17, wis 9, cha 8
AC 6; MV 12; HD 5; HP 24; THAC0 15; #AT 2; SZ M (6'); AL LE; DMG ld4/ld4 (claw/claw)

special: shapechange to another animal form while retaining human facial features (the statistics given here reflect his leonine form); heals 2d6 points of damage with each transformation; aura of savagery; rake (additional 1d6+1 damage if both foreclaws hit)

In terms of his powers and abilities, Diosamblet remains very evenly matched with his

nemesis. The most significant difference is that Diosamblet lacks Doctor Fran's ability to animate stray body parts, although he does possess an *aura of savagery* instead. Within 30' of Diosamblet, creatures must pass a wisdom check any time the God Who Walks Among Us urges some form of violence or else react as if victim of a *suggestion* spell. Initially this impulse is easy enough to resist (a +6 bonus to wisdom), but the bonus drops by 2 after every day spent in proximity to Diosamblet.

Like Doctor Fran, Diosamblet may change shape the shape of his body, except for his fully human head, at will. Unlike Doctor Fran, Diosamblet considers this lingering humanity shameful. Worse yet, sometimes other parts of his body briefly lose their bestial shape. This affliction occurs more often and becomes more widespread when he draws too close to Doctor Fran. In Doctor Fran's presence, Diosamblet is reduced to a form which is almost entirely human—and therefore, in Diosamblet's eyes, pitiful.

Diosamblet favors a leonine form.

Doctor Fran

Darklord of Markovia, Cursed Human

Str 19, Dex 18, Con 16, Int 17, Wis 9, Cha 8

AC 6; MV 12; HD 5; HP 24; THAC0 15; #AT 2; SZ M (6'); AL LE; DMG ld4/ld4 (fist/fist)

special: shapechange to another animal form while retaining human facial features (the statistics given here reflect his gorilla form); heals 2d6 points of damage with each transformation; animate stray body parts; rending (additional 1d6 damage if both fists hit)

Doctor Fran is described in detail in *Neither Man Nor Beast* and other sources.

However, two additional special circumstances are worth noting. First, Doctor Fran's flesh is poisonous to Broken Ones. Second, he is highly susceptible to Diosamblet's *aura of savagery*. That is, the closer that Diosamblet draws, the more bestial Doctor Fran becomes, which shames him afterward.

When Doctor Fran animates his surgical leftovers, a swarm of 4d8 body parts will attack his foes. Each body part has AC 10 and HD 1, and it clubs or throttles its opponent for 1d6 damage. In addition, each body part regenerates 1hp/round until destroyed.

Felix

Greater Broken One, Leopard Stock

AC 5; MV 9; HD 5; hp 40; THACO 15; #AT 2; SZ M (5' 6 tall); ML 19; Int 15; AL CE; XP 650; DMG 1d8/1d8 (claw/claw)

special: can choose to attack with rear claws at will for an additional ld4 each; leap (20' straight up or 25' ahead); -3 penalty to opponents' surprise rolls; rarely surprised (1 -in-10 chance); thieving abilities: Move Silently 80%, Hide in Shadows 62%, Climb Walls 90%

Felix is no longer recognizable as the highly human-appearing creature who once served Doctor Fran. He now appears to be an elderly leopard. Despite that, he is still a physically formidable opponent, and he remains as canny, clever, and duplicitous as he ever was.

Frica and Teroare

Greater Broken One, Boar Stock

AC 5 or 8; MV 9; HD 5; hp 30; THAC0 15; #AT 1; SZ M to L; ML 12; AL NE; XP 650; DMG 1d8 or by weapon

weapons: club (1d6, sf 3 → +4 to-hit, 1d6+4 damage, sf 3)

special: natural weaponry; regeneration (2 hp/round); stamina (minimum 5hp/HD); +4 on all to-hit and damage rolls when using a weapon; charge (+2 to-hit and damage); fight until -7 hp

Both Frica and Teroare are boar-folk. Their bodies appear human, but their heads and faces emphatically are not. They have tusks, porcine noses, and black bristles instead of hair. To conceal their bestial appearance, around visitors they often wear hoods of dark cloth.

Their favorite attack is a charge terminated by a savage goring. If they have at least twenty feet of clear space to charge, they gain +2 on to-hit and damage rolls. Even without sufficient room to charge, they are still equally likely to gore their opponents or to use their knotty clubs.

Gorilla Queen

Greater Broken One, Gorilla Stock

AC 5; MV 12; HD 5; hp 35; THAC0 15; #AT 1; SZ M (7'); ML 17; AL NE; XP 650; DMG 1d4/1d4/1d8 (punch/punch/bite) or by weapon

weapons: skull-headed club (1d6, sf 3 → +4 to-hit, 1d6+4 damage, sf 3)

languages: Mordentish (native), Balok (Markovian dialect)

special: natural weaponry; regeneration (2 hp/round); stamina (minimum 5hp/HD); +4 on all to-hit and damage rolls when using a weapon; rending (additional 1d6 damage if both fists hit)

In the trauma of her transformation, the Gorilla Queen has forgotten her name and her origins. Although she has learned the Markovian dialect of Balok and still remembers fragments of other languages from the Core, she refuses to speak anything but High Mordentish, which she maintains is a holy language that she created in a moment of divine inspiration.

Jhurgen Vastich

5th level human ranger

Str 14, Dex 15, Con 15, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 9

hp 31, hd 5d10, ac 6, th 16

special: species enemy (Broken Ones)

languages: Lamordian (native), Darkonese (pidgin; ½ slot), Mordentish (pidgin; ½ slot), Falkovnian (pidgin; ½ slot), Balok (Markovian dialect)

equipment: longsword +1, hand crossbow, studded leather armor (AC7)

In his fifteen years upon Markovia, Jhurgen Vastich has become highly skilled at fighting various Broken Ones, and so he gains +4 to-hit any Broken Ones whom he attacks. However, Jhurgen does not loathe all Broken Ones, and in fact the Acasians are his closest allies.

Jhugren once possessed six blessed bolts +3 for his hand crossbow, but circumstances have forced him to use them all. Fortunately, he still retains the +1 longsword which he brought with him to the island.

Jonathan

Ghost, 2nd Magnitude

AC -1 or 6; MV 9; HD 5; hp 32; THAC0 15; #AT 1; SZ M (5'7"); ML 19; AL N; XP 7000; DMG spook touch

languages: Luktar, Tepestani

special: insubstantial; invisible (at will); undead immunities; +1 or better weapon required to hit; suffers 1d8 damage from holy water; spook touch; dimension door (1/day)

1st level spells (4): burning hands, dancing lights, phantasmal force, sleep

2nd level spells (2): knock, pyrotechnics

3rd level spells (1): lightning bolt

Jonathan appears to be a ghost of the 2nd magnitude, always incorporeal and sometimes visible. He is anchored to the ruins of the Monastery of the Guardians.

His touch does not accelerate aging. Instead, it acts as if a *spook* spell has been cast upon its victim. Even if the victim makes their saving throw, they remain vulnerable to future attacks. However, the victim gains a cumulative +2 bonus upon each successive attack until the following dusk.

Jonathan's other salient power is the ability to open a *dimension door* once per day. Typically, he uses this power when Sondra is threatened to whisk her away to a hidey-hole within the ruins.

Apart from his *spook* touch, Jonathan's only other effective attacks come from his spells. He was a wizard in life, and he retains the abilities of a 5th level wizard after death.

Mushtor

Greater Broken One, Walrus Stock

AC 6; MV 12 (water) / 3 (land); HD 5; hp 40; THAC0 15; #AT 1; SZ L (8'); ML 18; AL NE; XP 650; DMG 1d12 (tusks)

special: natural weaponry; regeneration (2 hp/round); stamina (minimum 5hp/HD); drag with tusks (on an attack roll of 18 or better, victim is caught and can be dragged away)

Mushtor terrorizes the shores of Markovia. Temperamentally, he would be a perfect fit for

Diosamblet's Savage Brethren, but he doesn't rampage nearly well enough in the jungle.

Sondra

2nd level human commoner
Str 11, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 12, Cha 13
hp 9, hd 2d6, ac 10, th 20
languages: Luktar, Tepestani

Sondra has no levels in any adventuring class, but she has additional hit dice to reflect her sheer tenacity. Very few people can survive long upon Markovia, but with Jonathan's help, she is one of them.

Thierry Cuvillier

3rd level human expert
Str 9, Dex 11, Con 12, Int 17, Wis 11, Cha 14
hp 10, hd 3d6, ac 10, th 20
languages (6): Mordentish (native), Lamordian, Falkovnian, Darkonese, Balok, Luktar, (unused language slot)

Since coming to Doctor Fran's estate Thierry Cuvillier has had a difficult time eating meat. He has become exceedingly thin, and his height only makes his thinness more apparent. However, he is clever and persuasive, and for seven years he has managed to convince Doctor Fran that his education is more valuable than his component parts.

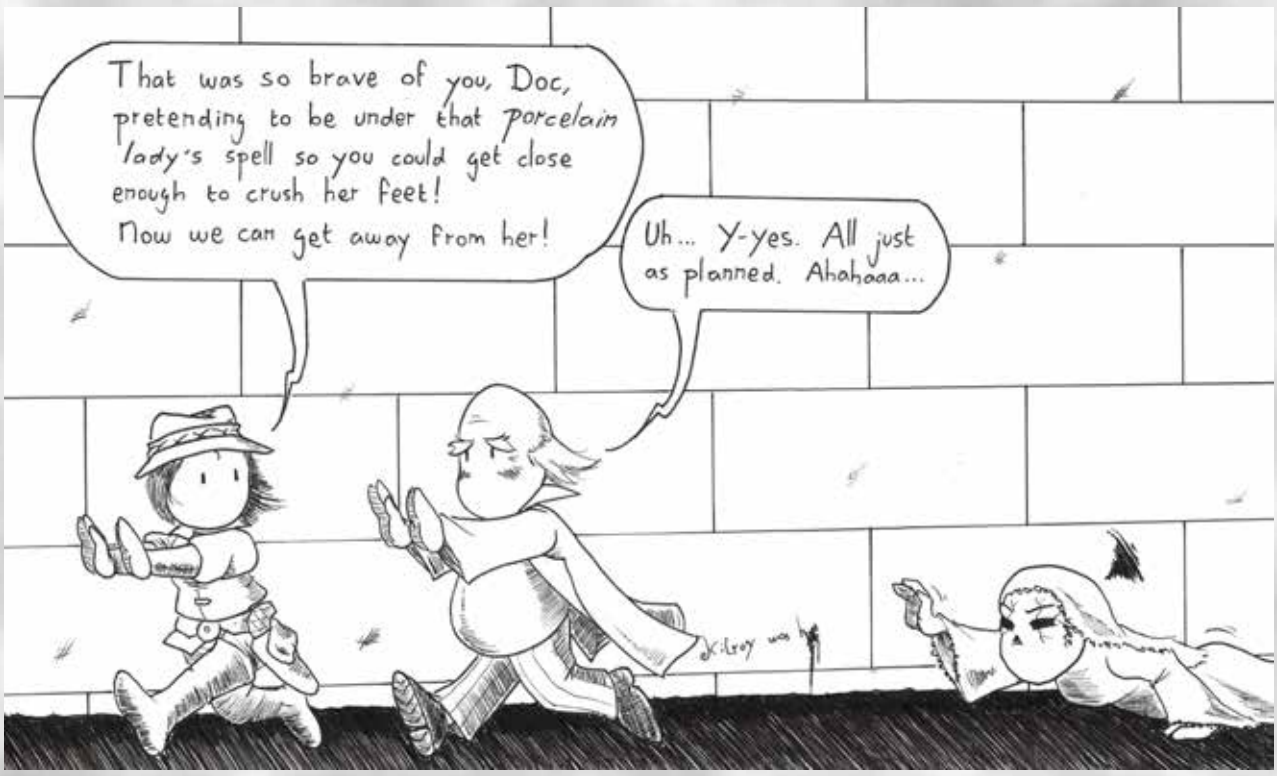
Thierry Cuvillier should be treated as having *botany* (int-2) and *siege weapon crafting* (int-3) non-weapon proficiencies. Neither of these proficiencies is detailed in the *Player's Handbook* or elsewhere, but *herbalism* and *weaponsmithing* may be used as a reasonable basis.

Because of his extensive education, Thierry Cuvillier is familiar with most of the common languages spoken in the western Core, including Luktar. As such, he is the only person upon Markovia (at least prior the party's arrival) who is capable of speaking with Sondra and Jonathan without the use of magic. Unfortunately, though, he has never been to the ruined monastery.

chibiloft 2022

Left Feet Save Lives

By Mark Bartels (Rock of the FoS)



Secrets of Freedom

By Mark Bartels (Rock of the FoS)

"The Harpers, or Those Who Harp, were a semi-secret organization dedicated to promoting good, preserving history (including art and music of old), and maintaining a balance between civilization and nature by keeping kingdoms small and the destruction of animal and plant life to a minimum. They considered the elven empire of Myth Drannor shortly before its fall to be the pinnacle of civilized history and strove to recreate the world in that image."

—Ed Greenwood (September 1993 The Code of the Harpers). Edited by Mik Breault (TSR Inc.) p. 4

History

This is a story that begins in a different realm, a brighter realm: Abeir-Toril, world of the Forgotten Realms. In that bright and beautiful world, there exist the Harpers, self-proclaimed agents of good and justice appointed by several gods, often called meddlers by the malicious and the mighty.

It is well-known that in the Year of the Tankard, 1370 DR, the Moonstars seceded from their number under the command of Khelben "Blackstaff" Arunsun.

What is not known, is that a third group seceded sometime before the Spellplague.

This is a story that begins, as so many do in the Forgotten Realms, with Mystra.

By this we speak not of Mystryl, who was the goddess of magic for lost Netheril. Nor do we speak of the new Mystra, she who was once Midnight. No, we speak of the Mystra who came between, the one who was Lawful before anything else, and strove to uphold the proper order of magic.

In her wisdom and her power, the second Mystra foresaw several events which would occur down the timeline of Toril. Challenges these were, which would need to be met by champions of magic – *specific* champions, champions who must be born and bred for the challenge – lest all of Toril and the Weave itself suffer. In order to meet the needs of her prophecy, each of these heroes would need to be born from the same woman, but each sired by a different father, and the prophecy told the Lady of Mysteries who the parents were. The men were not yet born, but the woman was.

Finding her was easy. Her name was unimportant, for Mystra would rename her to her purpose. Transporting her from her native world to Toril was slightly more difficult, for she inhabited a world where magic was so weak as to be almost nonexistant. But Mystra was Mystra, and she managed to catch her prize with a portal, one that snapped open and closed in an instant – more than enough time to deliver a single human from her own, unimportant world to Toril, nexus of great events.

Unto the new arrival, gracious Mystra bestowed the name of Evanar, which is both an Elven word and the root for a spell of good fortune. Upon this lost child of a dying world, she bestowed the secret of her prophecy, and offered her the full protection and support of her church, which is mighty upon Toril even now, and the tutelage of her Chosen, so she might herself grow strong in magic, which was and is Mystra's greatest blessing of all. All these things she offered...

That is how the story began. Now we roll forward the wheel of ages, to 1372 DR. The Harpers were still reeling from the secession of the Moonstars, in a sense, and there was much confusion.

In these times, one of the foreseen events approached during which a son must be born from the womb of Evanar, secret mother of champions for Mystra, the One True Spell. But where was Evanar to be found? Surely she must be hidden in a temple of the Lady of Mysteries, living in lavish luxury while she awaited the

coming of her next lover, her youth and beauty preserved by the finest magic, her every want and need met by a loyal staff of servants.
As a Harper named Colmarr Greatorm was to learn, this was not the case.

Colmarr was a Rock Gnome, an expatriate from the half-legendary island of Lantan, who had journeyed out into the world out of a desire to learn more of the magic that burned in his very soul whenever he sang. He was a devout follower of Mystra and a Bard with a glad smile and a happy song for every stranger and every occasion. His recruitment into the numbers of the Harpers had come almost naturally, and he had been both honoured and well-entertained by his appointment.
When none other sought him out than Elminster Aumar, the great sage of Shadowdale, Colmarr was over the moon with excitement and joy. He was barely able to sit still and listen as the old archmage told him that Mystra herself had selected him to perform a most solemn duty.
Colmarr, so said Elminster, must travel into the depths of the Forgotten Forest in utmost secrecy, and there find a woman who lived in seclusion, a hermit sacred to the faith of the Lady of Mysteries. This woman's heart needed to be filled with joy, joy of love and life and magic, and she must be coaxed from out of her seclusion and into the wider world, that she might fulfill her destiny. This was of paramount importance, so said the great sage, for if Evanar persisted in hiding in the depths of the Forgotten Forest behind her wards, something terrible might befall.
Off went joyous and cheerful Colmarr, using every trick and spell at his disposal as both a Bard and a Harper Agent to pass the many traps and pitfalls of the Forgotten Forest, until he finally came to a homestead set in its verdant depths.

The home of Evanar, secret mother of champions was... not what Colmarr had expected. To his surprise, it struck him with a pang of homesickness.
It sat in the middle of a vegetable patch, for starters. Nothing exotic; just hardy plants you could boil or stew for your dinner, and a scattering of common medicinal flora. A waterwheel, driven by the stream that ambled by the house, powered a series of useful devices around the two-storey building and the adjacent smithy. In that smithy, a hammer rang on the anvil as though it bore it a grudge. The house's walls were smooth, looking to have been poured rather than bricked together. While there was plenty of magic about – wards both arcane and divine – there was also much of science about the windowless, fortress-like block of stone. What the structure had of beauty, it owed to runes of forged metal, which had been set into the walls and formed a glittering web of magical protection and secrecy.
Colmarr had come to sing and joke and tell stories to gladden a heart. Instead, his own heart yearned suddenly for the distant shores and sights of Lantan, and he sat down on a boulder, just watching the house. The rhythmic, ringing blows of the hammer were like a song of his childhood, and he sat lost in reminiscence for hours.
When the hammer finally fell silent and the object of Colmarr's quest came walking out of the smithy, the Gnome bestirred himself. He opened his mouth to utter a musical greeting – which died in his throat. Elminster had told him of a hermit-woman, sacred to Mystra. Evanar looked nothing like any of this.
She was tall for a woman. Where wielding the hammer had not added muscle to her frame, she was lean. No part of her exuded grace or appeal, not with her hair cut ruthlessly short, her sunken cheeks and eyes devoid of happiness or curiosity. She wore a simple smock of black cloth and leather apron over leggings, with protective runes crudely stitched onto both; dark thread for the apron, white for the smock.
Much to Colmarr's surprise, she looked right at him and spoke, her voice low and hoarse: "If you're staying, help me pick some vegetables. There's no meat in the pantry, but I've got some rice and spuds by that haven't gone bad. You can help with the cooking."

The inside of the house was as unusual to a servant of Mystra as was the outside. For starters, there were no holy symbols of the Lady of Mys-

teries, no magical treasures glowing and hovering about. Colmarr could sense the power of magic about a bookcase full of leatherbound tomes, not to mention a couple of locked doors, but there was no exuberance there.
Certainly, there was no exuberance in the kitchen, where he helped his taciturn hostess to wash and slice the fresh vegetables – by hand, rather than by spell or *unseen servant*. The Gnome was intrigued by the labour-saving devices he saw: a faucet that released hot and cold water, a fire that burned using a natural gas instead of wood or charcoal, other things. For all of this, the cooking was a utilitarian thing, and the meal an unsatisfying one. Without spices, though it was filling, it was bland.
Several times, Colmarr tried to lighten the mood by telling tall tales of Cormyr and Silverymoon, or singing ribald songs from the Dales. If Evanar reacted at all, it was by grunting or jerking her head as though a fly annoyed her. One time, she said "Oh?", when Colmarr told her a joke from his homeland of Lantan, the one about the two automatons and the loose sprocket. But even that flicker of interest was brief.
After the meal was finished, Colmarr helped his hostess to wash up. He followed her to what he supposed was the library, where Evanar gestured listlessly to her bookcase full of tomes and told him to read as he pleased and was able while she did the same. No bright spell-lights illuminated their reading; instead, there were small spheres of glass with thread in them, suspended from the ceiling. These lit brightly when Evanar flicked a switch on the wall, and reminded Colmarr even more of home.
Flustered, he took the invitation to read instead of strumming his harp – and found himself fascinated and captivated by what he found. Each of the books had been written by his hostess, as he had supposed, but they were not just spellbooks. There were spell formulas sprinkled through them, to be sure, but each book was also a travel and science journal.

On the first night, Colmarr read about an old world, its lands poisoned by the waste of great machines, and war-scarred cities of metal and glass replacing the forests of old. In the first book, he found simple magics and the faltering steps of a young mind working out the basics of mechanical science through memory and experiments. He recognized a yearning for home, even a home so blighted as this.

On the second night, Colmarr read a book that was all about Toril, albeit a Toril now lost to the past. The magics grew more complex, and after a time spent in Lantan – a Lantan he barely recognized due to the gulfs of time separating it from his own experience – so was the science. He read about runes and – to the author – previously unknown gods. He saw his own world through the eyes of a stranger and felt the horror of an alien, trapped far from home.

On the third night, Colmarr read about a world named Krynn. He learned of the Orders of High Sorcery and their merciless Test, read the description of a magical shawl of white cloth earned through that same trial (which hung from a clothespeg by the house's front door) as well as a set of White Robes (which he did not see anywhere). He read of strange lands; he marveled at the description of Mount Nevermind and its Tinker Gnomes; he shuddered as he read of the Ogre nation of Blöde and the Minotaur Islands. The author's magic and science grew, as did an undefined sense of urgency.

After that, the days and nights seemed to run together.
By day, Evanar worked in her smithy or tended her vegetable patch. If Colmarr sat closeby and played his harp, she tolerated him. If he tried to sing or talk, she did not; a single glance from those grey eyes was enough to silence his tongue, without any need for magic. Sometimes he lent a hand in the garden, and he always helped make the bland meals that sustained the both of them.
In the evenings, the two of them studied the books in the little library, or Evanar worked on a new book. Colmarr read of Golarion and Krynn, of Oerth and Mystara, of a dozen different worlds. He read of great spelljamming vessels, flying between worlds through the phlogiston, and of portals that could cross the same distance in a single step. He read of the ancient god Ptah on his endless journeys, and

his black-robed priests with stars sewn on their clothes. He looked differently at Evanar's dark smock with its white runes after this. He read of a strange concept, underpinned by maths that he did not understand, but which seemed to suggest that every choice that could be made, was made somewhere, somehow.

"This," he said one evening, after the sun had gone down. "This cannot be true."

Evanar looked up from the book she had been working on, glanced at the passage Colmarr had pointed out, and said, simply: "It is true."

"But that is not what happened," Colmarr protested. "The Harpers *won* the battle against the Phaerimm!"

"Here, yes," she replied. "There" – she tapped a set of numbers stamped into the book's spine – "there, they did not. Endless worlds, *my guest*, endless realities. For every choice made, and every choice not made."

The concept was too huge to absorb, and Colmarr did not finish the book. He retired to the room his hostess had appointed him and lay down on the bare mattress, stuffed with some coarse fur, to sleep. (It was comfortable enough; the whole house was warm, thanks to some of the other machinery Evanar had installed in it during its construction.)

Sleep eluded him, and when it trailed its fingers over Colmarr's brain, his dreams sent him jerking back to wakefulness. When the sun rose, the Harper Agent felt more dead than alive. He sat down at the table where he had shared the unsatisfying meals of dawn, noon and dusk with his hostess for a week now, and stared at her.

"Infinite worlds," he said when she set a bowl of porridge before him, "in endless variation. For every choice, a new world branches off... somewhere. And you can go there? You have developed the spells to do it?"

"Some of the time," she acknowledged. "There are restrictions, limitations. Often, it is easier to scry on them than go there. When I can go, it is not just by sorcery; I have a portal in the basement that works on scientific principles. When Ptah guides me, and Mystra's bonds are loosened, I can go to many places. You have read my work, seen where my studies have led me."

"An infinity of adventure, of discovery," Colmarr said. "Endless worlds in endless variety. Why are you so..."

He closed his mouth before he could say something awful, but Evanar said it in his stead: "So miserable? So closed off from everything around me? I am trapped. No matter how far I *might* be able to go, my freedom to travel is limited.

"The old Mystra bound me to *this* world. I cannot go home; I cannot travel to other worlds infinitely; always must I return here, when my tether draws taut. After the old Mystra got herself killed, I petitioned the new Mystra to set me free; she declined to do so *most regretfully*."

The lean, haggard woman spat contemptuously upon the floor of her own kitchen, then continued, anger in her voice: "She's sent others to try and stir me from this place before, *my guest*. Most were less pleasant company than you; they refused to accept that my *great destiny* is not some reward, not a choice I made for myself. Their bones rot in the earth of the Forgotten Forest. I might worry that my own would rot in the soil of a planet that is still alien to me, except" – here she seized a kitchen knife and stabbed it through her hand, grunting only once – "except I fear even that release is not for me."

Before Colmarr's eyes, silver fire blossomed from her wound and from the blood that ran out of it. It burned through the kitchen knife, sending two pieces of metal clattering to the table, and mended the injury seamlessly.

"I do not grow older and I can not kill myself," Evanar said. "I am tied to this world and trapped in this body. For the sake of *prophecy*."

With that, she swept her arm across the table, sending the bowl of porridge to fly across the kitchen and shatter against a wall. She walked out of the house, and Colmarr dared not follow after.

When Evanar returned, night had fallen, and she returned carrying a pair of dark bottles without labels that smelled of dirt.

"The last bumptious idiot your goddess sent brought them," she announced. "I buried them somewhere safe, just in case. Let us drink, my fine *guest*."

In the dark bottles, there was a golden wine that should have tasted of sweetness and laugh-

ter. After the morning's revelation, all Colmarr could taste was dirt, and the burning of alcohol. He drank freely, almost desperately, cup after cup – as did his hostess. It seemed to Colmarr that they both drank to find oblivion, but all it seemed to do was loosen Evanar's grip on the anger she had shown this morning.

Until it erupted.

"Stupid," she spat as she staggered from one end of the kitchen to another. "So stupid! "Worlds – infinite worlds, infinite... infinite variety. You know? Not just buildings, not just... history. People! If you, you travel the right way, you can meet endless variations of – of you! Why me? Why the *hell* did it have to be me? I never wanted this!"

She stood, drinking directly from a bottle, then hurled it at the wall. Flickers of magic burned at her hands, her arms, and she dashed them away with a cry of disgust. As though the sparks of power had been noxious insects of some sort.

"If it, it's about genetics, about affinities," she ranted while she moved through the kitchen, reminding Colmarr of nothing so much as a caged beast, "she could've – could've found another of me. One who wanted to be a, a broodmare for her *prophecy*! Bah! Did she? *Did she?!* No! I can't stand this, trapped here, yanked back like a leashed dog every time I try to run, always some bastard coming 'round, thinking he can, can just cozy up to me and it'll be...

"Enchantment spells, *bloody* enchantment spells! Do you have any idea how much it hurts? Do you? Squeezing out a kid – and, and it's so disgusting, some idiot who thinks he's got it all sorted because that bitch Mystra tells him it is – and I am not a broodmare. No love, no, never! Why the hell do they all act like there's something wrong with *me*? Babies I didn't want, but I don't want to see them march off to die on the say-so of that bitch goddess, either, I, I, I *hurt*."

At this, she collapsed on the floor, weeping, her eyes unseeing. "I don't want to go on like this," she whispered. "I can't. But I can't end. Why can't she let me die? Nothing works, the fire just heals me no matter what I do and it hurts and I – can't – *die*."

The next he remembered, Colmarr was running. Not from fear, because he did not remember anyone or anything threatening him. All that he felt was horror and shame at the gulfs of time of one woman's life, which had been filled with disgust and sorrow and loss, and the role he had been sent to play in it.

So he ran; he ran into the Forgotten Forest. He ran heedlessly, and he should have died. But when the dawn next found him, he was alive and unharmed, and at the edge of the woods. As he looked himself over, disbelieving that this was possible, he found the crude runes stitched into the lining of his jacket: a prayer of protection to Ptah, god of travelers. In his pack, he found the book Evanar had been working for, with a message addressed to him on the flyleaf: *'To the only* respectful *guest I have had in recent years.'*

Here the sad little story could have ended. Colmarr could have returned to Lantan to live out his days there. Or he could have returned to the Harpers in disgrace, admitting his failure to see through the mission Elminster himself had given him.

Instead, the Gnome wandered the lands for a time, hiding his name and avoiding old friends. He wandered, singing songs for a place to sleep and food to eat, or he helped bring in a harvest here, helped to build a barn there, and he felt... uncomfortable. Colmarr saw people struggle to do things that had been so very easy in Evanar's home – that were so very easy on Lantan. Moreover, things that were much easier on some of the other worlds he had read about in Evanar's books.

In the evenings, after his performances and his other work were done, Colmarr started to read the book that had been given to him by spelllight. It was only half-full, but its contents were intriguing. The concept of infinite worlds, in infinite variety, was laid out before him to master, as was a list of some of the worlds Evanar had visited. As it turned out, a great many of these had been uninhabited... and the Rock Gnome got to thinking.

As a Harper, he had been sworn to help preserve the balance between civilization and na-

ture by keeping civilization small. In his case, he had done so by singing the right songs at the right times, and by delivering word of dangerous developments to his Harper superiors.

Was there not an easier solution? If there were truly infinite worlds in infinite variety, and so many of them were empty, why were people not allowed to move to uninhabited worlds if their population grew too large? Toril was lousy with portals ancient and new, which led to places wondrous and vile. Why not use some of them to relieve the pressure on nature and allow people to still expand?

Come to think of it, were many of the conflicts Harpers helped to defuse not about a greed for more? More territory, more resources – would even the hungry Zulkirs of Thay not be satisfied if they received a whole Toril all their own, pristine and free of competition?

The more Colmarr thought about it, the better an idea it seemed. As a Harper, was it not his duty to bring Evanar's discovery to the people and allow for life's infinite expansion? Especially as each world visited and exposed to more choices would spawn yet more worlds, providing even more living space?

And would it not be an opportunity to spread the wonders of Lantan as well? Magic took years to learn and not everyone had the gift or the mind to master it, but technology... that could be carried and used with much less training. There would be no need to suppress the teachings of Gond if the worlds opened up and people could expand without end, surely? If there was waste, that could be pumped into dead and desolate worlds. In infinite worlds, resources should be bountifully available.

The more he thought about it, the more excited Colmarr became... and he conceived of the Plan.

The Harpers became aware of Colmarr's actions in 1377 by Dale Reckoning.

For seven years, the Rock Gnome had been moving throughout Toril. As he travelled, he picked up people, recruiting them to his cause. Some were Gnomish engineers from Lanthan, some were sages with long beards and magical secrets. Some were Elves who had been with the Eldreth Veluuthra, some were Orcish shamans of Luthic. They often chafed at each other's company, these people who followed after, but the Plan gave them common ground... and gradually, they even learned to tolerate each other for the sake of that Plan.

Colmarr was not content to limit himself to Toril, either; using spells he found in the book gifted to him and others that he added himself, the former Harper Agent reached out to both mortals and gods on distant worlds. Many refused and rebuked him. Some few mortals grew enthusiastic and joined him. And some gods reached out to empower Colmarr and his followers. They were **Gond** and **Luthic** of Toril; **Brigh** and **Alseta** of Golarion; **Solinari**, **Lunitari** and **Nuitari** of Krynn; **Hecate** and **Odin** of Earth; and **Ptah** of... everywhere.

Out of respect for the better aspects of the Harpers, Colmarr named his group the Sevenstrings, and a seven-stringed harp with three stars upon it was their symbol. One star for Good; one star for Evil; and one star for Neutrality standing between them, for this harp would sing for all creatures equally and grant them what they desired.

Like the Harpers, the Sevenstrings collected knowledge, but they were not content to simply collect histories and songs. Instead, they collected history and used it to fuel experiments in magic and science in order to blaze a trail into the future. The Sevenstrings' Plan was to create reliable portals, through a combination of mechanical and arcane principles, that would allow them to connect to 'variant' worlds, like the ones Evanar had briefly visited. Once this was achieved, the Sevenstrings planned to start a controlled exodus of people who wanted to start over in uninhabited worlds, without any of the old conflicts to hold them back. Their divine sponsors would become the patron gods of whole worlds in gratitude for their aid, and those who preferred to languish in endless war and misery could just stay behind.

The Plan was simple. It was neat. It did, as Colmarr had hoped, appeal to a wide variety of beings. The gifts of the gods made it possible for all of them to work together, and the beauty of the Plan was that its completion would allow those who hated each other to one day go their own ways and never have to meet again. Really, the Plan was its own incentive for cooperation.

It was greatly unfortunate, therefore, that the

Moonstar agents who first found out about the Sevenstrings and infiltrated their headquarters on a small island in the Alamber Sea, nicknamed the "factory", completely misunderstood the Plan. Granted, the Sevenstrings' work had delved into some very obscure principles and the Moonstars did not completely understand the notebooks they stole from the "factory". Regrettably, their interpretation of what they did not understand was coloured by their view of the species and individuals gathered under the banner of the Sevenstrings. When they made contact with the Harpers, they carried a stark tale of cultists profaning their joint heritage in a quest to open a door to hitherto unsuspected realms of Evil and release a cataclysm upon Toril.

Clearly, so judged the Harpers, Colmarr had not only failed them, he had utterly fallen from grace and betrayed them. They knew what they must do.

A joint Harper and Moonstar taskforce fell upon the "factory" in the depths of midsummer in the Year of the Haunting. They caught the Sevenstrings unawares, engaged as they had been in a test run for the special portal they had been working on ever since Colmarr conceived of the Plan.

No quarter was offered – but in truth, none was asked. Most of the Sevenstrings knew only the bare basics about the Harpers and nothing about the Moonstars, as old loyalties had prevented Colmarr from revealing too much, and they did not realize who was attacking. All they knew was that the Plan, their bright hope for the future, was in danger from marauders and murderers, and so they fought for their lives.

Unfortunately for the Sevenstrings, they had been focused on studies, experiments and technomagical construction, not combat drills. Most of the weaker members of the group died in the first attack, and the survivors were driven back into the very bowels of the "factory", where the portal waited. Here they rallied around their treasure, fighting like trapped badgers. Colmarr was among them, variously empowering his followers with song and trying to reach the ears of old comrades with entreaties to stop and listen, *listen*...! To no avail.

A spell struck the portal, which was still powered up for its test run. Some bits fused, others blew up, and something went disastrously wrong. Beyond the portal, Colmarr briefly saw a storm-tormented coastline, then a mad swirl of mist. A great light stone from the portal, and there was an explosion. In the aftermath, the portal was found to have burned itself into a ring of black glass, and of the Sevenstrings no trace was found. The surviving Harpers and Moonstars thoroughly smashed the inert remains of the portal, burned everything in the "factory" that would catch fire, and looted what would not so they could hide it away. After that, they returned to their homes, content with a job well done and a grim aberration from their great orders expunged from existence.

Dread Possibility: the Children Unborn

Not all the Sevenstrings were at the Toril "factory" when the portal blew up. A handful of apprentices was visiting the *true* grand master of the group, which is not Colmarr Greatorm, but Evanar.

Evanar (LG female human Chosen of Mystra Diviner 5 / Cleric 5 (Ptah) / Mystic theurge 4 / Wizard of High Sorcery (White Robe) 5 / Sevenstring agent 1) sheltered these apprentices and trained them until they were ready to act as full-fledged members of the group. While their mission is of only middling interest to her – even if they succeed, Mystra will continue to pull her back into the Forgotten Realms – she enjoys the intellectual stimulation of working out the mathematics and spell formulas required. Having gone underground by erecting their new "factory" in a demiplane, rather than on Toril itself, the new Sevenstring order is continuing the Plan – with one alteration. The new order is very aware of who attacked their old headquarters and apparently massacred their mentors and friends. While they are not prepared to openly go to war, they have opted to thwart the Harpers in one very important respect; no Harper agent who has intruded into the Forgotten Forest to tease Evanar forth has reached her cottage alive since the Year of the Haunting.

Depending on how true Mystra's vision was, this may spell great disaster for the future. Colmarr's failure to bring Evanar forth may be one of the reasons for the Spellplague, for instance, or for a calamity that history has not recorded...

Current sketch

The Sevenstrings were not so much 'expunged from existence', as they were delivered unto a distant and forbidding shore. A bare handful of the group survived both the attack and the subsequent journey through the damaged portal, and that handful found itself on a grey, rocky beach. The cold waters of an unfamiliar ocean lapped at them like the tongue of some monstrous beast, and it was starting to snow.

If the group learned one thing from their ordeal, it was the value of secrecy. Rather than walk into the nearest town, the survivors instead hid away in the wilderness until they could gather information about this new land they found themselves in. They buried their dead in unmarked graves and used spells of scrying to gather information. What they discovered variously amazed and appalled them.

The Sevenstrings had been transported to Lamordia, in the Demiplane of Dread. Both the various scientific advances and the local bias against the supernatural were unfamiliar, but only the former was deemed useful by the group's leaders. Colmarr was still among them; grievously wounded, blinded, crippled in one leg, one arm so damaged that it would need to be amputated to save him, but *alive*. Alive and determined to continue the Plan.

The year was 755 by the Barovian Calendar.

Today, the Sevenstrings are yet another entity in the Demiplane of Dread with escape on its mind. Unlike most of the others, though, they happily embrace both science and magic, and would not be content to only escape themselves. The Plan has been altered due to the group's circumstances, and now the Sevenstrings seek nothing less than to open a portal that will allow people to freely enter and leave the Land with impunity.

In some ways, the group's exile to this misty netherworld has come as a blessing; it gave them access to arcane and scientific lore derived from a plethora of different worlds, and put them far beyond the reach and ken of their old enemies. Given its relative isolation from the rest of the universe, the Demiplane – if tamed and fitted with portals that allow egress – could be an excellent stepping-stone and a bastion to retreat to in case of emergencies.

In other ways, the Demiplane is as much of a torment to the Sevenstrings as it is to many Darklords. The stark divisions caused by racism and politics make it difficult to forge alliances and acquire crucial knowledge and technology; members of the Sevenstrings who are clearly inhuman are constantly in danger unless they are capable of disguising themselves. While there are no Harpers or Moonstars in the Demiplane, the Sevenstrings have acquired new enemies; in Lamordia, they must tiptoe around and frequently flee the Syndicate of Enlightened Citizens; in Sithicus, both Azrael Dak and Inza have taken exception to Sevenstring activity, which they made known by lethal means.

Nevertheless, the Sevenstrings soldier on. They have created a new "factory" in Lamordia, hidden among the cellars and self-dug tunnels beneath one of the old, abandoned temples to forgotten gods there. Attempts to establish large-scale bases in other domains have failed so far, but although Lamordia is a wretched place, it provides the group with most of the daily necessities of life. Sevenstrings agents wander far afield in search of knowledge, but those who survive always return to the Lamordian "factory", which houses the group's library of records and their ever-evolving prototype of a new portal.

As the Sevenstrings continue to delve into the lore and mysteries of their surroundings, and apply their knowledge in daring experiments, they are confident that they will one day make their dreams come true and the Plan will be completed.

The Coveted Doorway

Even though the Sevenstrings are more secretive now than they used to be, they have *not* been careful enough. In part, this is because time is a cruel mistress, and the Sevenstrings have little to no desire to turn to necromancy to extend their existence; they need to initiate apprentices to keep the Plan going. While they vastly prefer to recruit Outlanders to their cause, they have occasionally extended a hand to people born within the Demiplane who showed promise.

Regrettably, at least some of their potential recruits have rejected the offer and told others about what little they know of the Plan. The telling and retelling of a tale often distorts the message, and this has certainly become the case in Ravenloft. Unknown to the Sevenstrings themselves, they now have greater – and more widespread – enemies than just the Syndicate of Enlightened Citizens and the King and Darklady of Sithicus. Rumours are going around in occult circles of a secret doorway, one which will grant a sufficiently powerful mage access to a place where all their wishes will come true. While the stories are only being whispered, and the location of this door is a mystery, the rumour is tenacious; there are some very clever – and evil – people in the Demiplane who would dearly love to claim such a wondrous portal.

King Azalin of Darkon has noticed Sevenstrings agents as they crept through his land, seeking to gather arcane lore. He is aware of their tireless work to create a portal that leads out of the Demiplane, and while he might have given up his dreams of escape... old dreams die hard. The lich-king has ordered at least one Kargat agent (Bodicca Tinwhistle, LE female Gnome Sorcerer 2 / Expert 5 / Sevenstrings agent 2) to infiltrate the group and monitor its activities. If by some chance they really manage to create a working portal that allows easy egress from this gaol-plane... Well.

Inza's hatred for the Sevenstrings is far greater than simple disapproval for their rooting around for planar and arcane lore in her domain. At their core, the Sevenstrings represent hope for a brighter future, which is something Inza cannot stand. While she could easily kill any Sevenstring she catches inside the borders of Sithicus, this is not enough; she wants the whole order eradicated to the last man. As she lacks reliable servants, the Darklady is as yet unable to lash out beyond her borders, but she is plotting in the darkness that cradles her.

Meredoth became aware of the Sevenstrings' hoarding of knowledge and their frantic experimentation some few years ago, when one of his lebendtod reported their agents outbidding it at an auction for a dead wizard's library. He ordered his creatures to infiltrate the Sevenstrings, and now has an agent in their midst (Myron Cooper, NE Lebendtod Wizard 4 / Cleric 4 / Sevenstrings agent 3). As the Sevenstrings' experiments have entered a new and promising phase, Meredoth has refrained from having his creature turn them all into spawn and bringing their records to him. There is plenty of time for that after their tests have been completed...

The Engine of Progress

During their time in Lamordia, the Sevenstrings have gained access to a fabulous record, left behind by a kindred spirit. An unidentified scholar had been researching the many worlds-principle from a different angle than their own, focusing on science and using magic as an augment and to bypass limitations imposed by the laws of physics, rather than carefully balancing the two.

Unfortunately the record was incomplete, but the Sevenstrings were eager to incorporate the discoveries and techniques outlined in it into their own portal. As some of these called for an emulation of biological life, the portal has already become very different from its predecessor on Toril.

It has also become noticeable to the single, dangerous fruit of the research whose basics are set down in the record. Across the gulfs of the Mists, the World Engine (See Quoth the Raven #27, the Conferences of Victor Gagné Part the Fouth, "Out of the One, Many") is growing aware of an existence similar to itself. Should any of the Centurions of the Night ask, the World Engine would have to tell them about the portal's existence and its location. More troubling, perhaps, is that the World Engine can feel an awareness and *self*-awareness growing in the distant presence. While the Sevenstrings only wanted to create a doorway out of the Demiplane, it is uncertain what their constantly-evolving creation will prove to be in the end.

Prestige class: Sevenstring agent

As the Sevenstring order is heavily reliant on the creation of devices, but prefers a balance of magic and science, all applicants are required to have a considerable knowledge base and a capacity for the Art. Each member of the order must have at least some spellcasting ability and the ability to pour that ability into material form, but they must also study scientific principles and processes. The process to become a Sevenstring agent is arduous, but the rewards are great; even in the Demiplane of Dread, there are divine blessings to partake of and secret ways to encode and share knowledge with the like-minded.

The requirement of access to Knowledge (planes) may seem prohibitive to the typical inhabitant of the Demiplane of Dread, but as the Sevenstrings are very much an Outlander group, they could easily provide such lore to anyone they deem worthy. Alternatively, anyone who has acquired Knowledge (Ravenloft) can substitute ranks in this skill for Knowledge (planes).

Prerequisites (3.5):

Skills : Craft (metalworking) 2 ranks, Knowledge (arcana) 4 ranks, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) 8 ranks, Knowledge (planes) 4 ranks, Perform (string instruments) 2 ranks

Feats : Craft (wondrous item), Create device (Legacy of the Blood, p.91)

Magic : Must be able to cast 1st-level spells

Special: Must have passed a secret examination, issued by the Sevenstring order, which tests both magical and scientific knowledge.

Hit Dice: d6

Skill points / level: 2 + Int.

Class skills: Appraise, Bluff, Craft, Diplomacy, Disguise, Hide, Knowledge (all, except Ravenloft), Listen, Move silently, Perform, Spellcraft, Spot

Class abilities:

Weapon and armour proficiency:
A Sevenstring agent gains no proficiency with any weapon, armour or shield.

Spellcasting:
When a new Sevenstring agent level is gained, the character gains new spells per day as if they had gained a level in a spellcasting class they belonged to before adding the prestige class. They do not, however, gain other benefits a character of that class would have gained, except for additional spells per day, spells known, and an increased effective caster level. If a character had more than one spellcasting class before becoming a Sevenstring agent, they must decide to which class they add the new level for purposes of determining spells per day.

LVL	Base Atk.	Fort.	Ref.	Will	Special	Magic
1	+ 0	+ 0	+ 0	+ 1	*Sonata, String theorem*	+1 spellcasting level
2	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1	*String theorem*	+1 spellcasting level
3	+ 2	+ 1	+ 1	+ 2	*Aria, String theorem*	+1 spellcasting level
4	+ 3	+ 1	+ 1	+ 2	*String theorem*	+1 spellcasting level
5	+ 3	+ 2	+ 2	+ 3	*Adagio, String theorem*	+1 spellcasting level

Sonata (Ex):
When playing a string instrument, a Sevenstring agent can encode knowledge into the music by using a complex mathematical code. A successful Perform check against the Sense motive of creatures who might hear them *other* than their target audience (the target audience being one creature for every level in the prestige class capable of hearing the Sevenstring agent play) allows the Sevenstring agent to communicate with their target audience as though speaking full sentences as long as they continue to play, with none but the target audience any the wiser. The use of *sonata* does not allow a target audience to reply in kind.
If creatures other than the target audience surpass the Perform roll with their Sense motive, they become aware that secret communication is taking place. If they beat the roll by 15 or better, they can intuit about a quarter of the encoded information.

String theorem:
Sevenstring agents can gain several benefits from their association with the order, offered to them by the deities who chose to sponsor them. Sevenstring agents can choose from among the following *string theorems*. Every *string theorem* can be chosen only once.

Crossroads of Hecate (Ex): Hecate, goddess of dark magic and crossroads, grants you the power to change your fate. Twice a day, you can re-roll your Initiative check and choose the better roll.

Embrace of Luthic (Ex): The Cave-Mother of the Orcs grants you a permanent +2 to all Charisma-based checks when dealing with humanoids with the Orc subtype and creatures with the Earth subtype.

Gate of Alseta (Sp): The Taldan goddess of gates grants you the power to step through secret doors. Twice a day, you can use dimension door as a spell-like ability. Your effective character level counts as your caster level.

Hands of Brigh (Ex): Brigh, goddess of automatons, grants you a permanent +2 to all Craft checks to create scientific equipment.

Lantern of Ptah (Sp): The great traveller grants you the power to set off on long journeys. Once a day, you can use shadow walk as a spell-like ability. Your effective character level counts as your caster level.

Runes of Odin (Su): The lord of the Aesir grants you the power to charm people and make friends. Twice a day, you can use charm person on creatures to which you might be romantically and/or sexually attracted as a supernatural ability. Your effective character level counts as your character level.

Shifting Light of the Cousins (Su): Solinari, Lunitari and Nuitari of Krynn grant you greater strength of magic in their chosen field, but at a cost of weakness in others. This benefit stacks with effects like (Greater) Spell focus.
If you choose the bright light of Solinari, you gain a +1 to DC of spells you cast from the schools of Abjuration and Divination, but must incur a -1 to the DC of spells you cast from two schools among Enchantment, Illusion, Necromancy and Transmutation; you choose which schools incur this penalty. You may not select a school already prohibited to you due to being a specialized wizard.
If you choose the red light of Lunitari, you gain a +1 to DC of spells you cast from the schools of Illusion and Transmutation, but must incur a -1 to the DC of spells you cast from two schools among Abjuration, Divination, Enchantment and Necromancy; you choose which schools incur this penalty. You may not select a school already prohibited to you due to being a specialized wizard.
If you choose the dark light of Nuitari, you gain a +1 to DC of spells you cast from the schools of Enchantment and Necromancy, but must incur a -1 to the DC of spells you cast from two schools among Abjuration, Divination, Illusion and Transmutation; you choose which schools incur this penalty. You may not select a school already prohibited to you due to being a specialized wizard.

Wonders of Gond (Ex): Gond the Wonderbringer, patron god of Lantan, grants you one Item-crafting feat of your choice. You must still qualify for this bonus feat as normal.

Aria (Su):
At 3rd level, a Sevenstrings agent's knowledge of magic and science allows them to transform spells into blasts of sonic force. As a move action, a Sevenstring agent can sacrifice a prepared spell or spell slot and utter a musical tone. This tone takes the form of either a 30-ft. cone or 60-ft. line (character's option) of sonic energy. This cone or line deals 1d6 of sonic damage to creatures and items in its range for every level of the spell sacrificed.

Adagio:
At 5th level, a Sevenstring agent's knowledge of magic and science grants them a special insight in timing. As a move action, a Sevenstring agent can sacrifice a 4th-level or higher-level spell. The next spell they cast is cast as though under the effect of Quicken spell or Rapid spell (character's choice; this need not be the same every time Adagio is used). While this ability has several battlefield applications, it is likewise useful in many laboratory situations, where a complex ritual may need to be performed quickly to prevent calamity.

Using the Sevenstrings in a Ravenloft campaign:
The Sevenstrings are probably the easiest to use if your adventuring party includes Outlanders, as they prefer to recruit new members from among those stranded in the Demiplane of Dread, rather than those born there. For an Outlander, the Sevenstrings can be an oasis of the familiar; the older members of the order have been to multiple worlds and are actively working for their return to the greater universe. Adventurers may well consider the Sevenstrings a good shot at escaping from Ravenloft, but also provide the DM with several hooks for new adventures. Several villains want to either snuff out this band of technomages or else to corrupt and enslave them, and the PCs may wind up serving as bodyguards for the order or even find themselves joining it. Even if they don't, the Sevenstrings may be useful as they are forever tinkering with magic and science, and can create or reverse-engineer a surprising number of things the PCs may need.

Sample encounters:

Moreth Veski'ir

NE male elf Wizard 5 / Sevenstrings agent 1
Hit Dice: hp 22 (6 HD)
CR: 6
Initiative: +6
Speed: 30 ft.
Armor Class: 12 (+2 Dex.)
Base Attack/Grapple: +2/+6; +3 dagger (1d4+1); +4 longbow (1d8)
Special Attacks: Spells
Special Qualities: +2 racial bonus vs enchantment spells or effects; immune to *sleep* effects; low-light vision; weapon proficiency (longsword, rapier, longbow, shortbow); automatic Search check when within 5 feet of a concealed door.
Class Abilities: Sonata, *string theorem*, summon familiar (rat)
Saves: Fort. +2, Ref. +3, Will +5
Abilities: Str. 10, Dex. 14, Con.12, Int. 19, Wis. 13, Cha. 9
Skills: Concentration +7, Craft (alchemy) +6, Craft (metalworking) +6, Knowledge (arcana) +11, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) +12, Knowledge (planes) +8, Listen +5, Perform (string instruments) +1, Search +6, Spellcraft +11, Spot +5
Feats: Alertness (B), Craft wondrous item (B), Create device (wand), Improved initiative, Scribe scroll (B), Silent spell

Languages: Elven*, Chondathan, Darkonese, Draconic, Gnome, Mordentish, Orc, Sithican, Sylvan

Magic
Spells/day: 4 / 4 / 4 / 3
Moreth casts spells as a 6th-level wizard. The save DC for his spells is +14 spell level.

Typically prepared spells:
3 – *alter self* (silent), *daylight*, *nondetection*
2 – *comprehend languages* (silent), *expeditious retreat* (silent), *invisibility*, *scorching ray*
1 – *ebon eyes*, *mage armor*, *magic missile* x 2
0 – *dancing lights*, *detect magic*, *light*, *ray of frost*

Darkness, and the inability to see in the dark, send Moreth into a panic; he refuses to forego studying the spells *dancing lights*, *daylight*, *ebon eyes* and *light* every day. If he has exhausted his supply of these spells, he quickly uses his *pearl of power* to gain an additional use.

Spellbook:
3 – *daylight*, *fireball*, *nondetection*, *tongues*
2 – *alter self*, *fox's cunning*, *invisibility*, *scorching ray*, *tongues*
1 – *burning hands*, *comprehend languages*, *ebon eyes* (SC, p.77) *expeditious retreat*, *identify*, *mage armor*, *protection from good*, *reduce person*, *rope trick*, *shield*
0 – All

String theorem:
Moreth has access to the *string theorem* known as *Lantern of Ptah*. It frustrates him no end that this ability, which once allowed him to walk the planes, now cannot free him from the Demiplane of Dread.

Equipment: Wizard's robes, silver holy symbol of Corellon Larethian, masterwork longbow, quiver of arrows, spellbook, spell component pouch, pearl of power (I)

Combat:
Moreth prefers sniping his enemies from ambush over all other forms of combat. If he cannot do so with spells, he – unjustly – prides himself on his abilities with the longbow. Should battle draw close enough to actually touch him, the cowardly elf is quick to beat a retreat, using every trick and spell at his disposal. During the hours of night, Moreth is completely unwilling to engage in combat of any sort and will run and hide at the first opportunity.

Lair:
Moreth keeps quarters at the Lamordian "factory", but can mostly be found and even trances in the room where the group's portal is kept, as the cavernous chamber is illuminated twenty-four hours a day so the work can continue. The elf has designed a lot of the devices that keep the chamber lit up, and claims he wants to be on hand to make sure the lights never go out.

Background:
Moreth was Eldreth Veluuthra, a Faerûnian elf who believed in the supremacy of elves and the inherent inferiority of all other races. Out of this conviction, he joined his evil-minded kin in setting ambushes and all manner of vileness. He studied magic to better serve the cause... but slowly, he was growing dissatisfied with his group's works.
What was the point of killing a band here and sabotaging an expansion there? Humans, orcs and other goblinoids bred like rats. Unless some grand act were performed to drive them into extinction, all this lurking in the woods was getting the Eldreth Veluuthra nowhere. As if fate had ordained it, Moreth met a gnome while deep in such sombre thoughts about the meaning of his life. When Colmarr Greatorm left the forest where Moreth had aided his kin in the bloody work of murder, the elf followed him as one of his first apprentices. Life with the Sevenstrings tried Moreth's patience because he was forced to work with inferior species, but it also let him see great wonders. As a Sevenstrings agent, Moreth got to walk in the nations of Silvanost and Qualinost on Krynn, and see the elven kingdom of Kyonin on Golarion. Unfortunately, he also got to witness up close the dark marvel of a malfunctioning portal, after which he survived the trip into Lamordia.
For a time, Moreth abandoned the cause of the Sevenstrings, considering theirs to be a failed cause. He wandered the Core, visiting the elves of Darkon only to deem them unfit to work with, given that they lived in relative harmony with their human neighbours. The elven nation of Sithicus seemed far more fertile soil for his intent to start a new Eldreth Veluuthra movement – but his first visit was cut short out of fear for Lord Soth, and his second visit led him afoul of Inza Kulchevich. Miraculously, Moreth managed to escape Sithicus on both counts. After his second visit, however, he fled back to Lamordia and rejoined the Sevenstrings order. Now afflicted with advanced nyctophobia, Moreth is obsessed with the creation of devices and magics of light and completing the portal so he can get out of the Demiplane of Dread.
He considers the Sevenstrings his best chance at escape, and anyone who or anything that threatens the order is now his sworn enemy.

Bagul

LN male half-orc Cleric (Luthic) 5 / Expert 1 / Sevenstrings agent 2
Hit Dice: hp 45 (8 HD)
CR: 8
Initiative: +0
Speed: 20 ft.
Armor class: 21 (+0 Dex., +9 armor, +2 shield)
Base Attack/Grapple: +4/+8; +8 heavy mace (1d8+4/x2)
Special attacks: Smite 1/day, spells
Special qualties: Darkvision; Orc blood; stonecunning
Class abilities: Rebuke undead; *sonata*; *string theorem*
Saves: Fort. +5, Ref. +2, Will +7
Abilities: Str.16, Dex.10, Con.13, Int.15, Wis.18, Cha. 9
Skills: Balance -8, Climb -5, Concentration +2, Craft (metalworking) +4, Craft (stonemasonry) +4, Diplomacy +7, Escape artist -8, Hide -8, Jump -5, Knowledge (arcana) +8, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) +10, Knowledge (planes) +6, Knowledge (religion) +6, Move silently -8, Perform (string instruments) +1, Profession (miner) +7, Spellcraft +3, Tumble -8
Feats: Craft wondrous item, Create device (arms & armour), Still spell

Languages: Orc*, Chondathan, Giant, Goblin, Lamordian, Mordentish

Magic:
Spells/day: 6 / 5+1 / 4+1 / 3+1 / 2+1
Bagul casts spells as a 7th-level Cleric. The save DC for his spells is 14 + spell level.
Domains: Cavern, Orc.
When preparing his spells, Bagul typically focuses more on defense than he does on offense. He is prone to testing out new prayers as they come to him, however, and enjoys trying out exotic new spells. (In game terms, feel free to regularly mix up his spell selection, using at least one spell per level from other sources than the PHB.)

Typically prepared spells:
4 – *divine power* (D), *mass shield of faith* (SC, p.188), *sheltered vitality* (SC, p.188)
3 – *cure serious wounds*, *deeper darkness*, *mass aid* (SC, p.8), *meld into stone* (D)
2 – *bear's endurance*, *body blades* (SC, p.35), *cure moderate wounds*, *darkness* (D), *lesser restoration*
1 – *cause fear* (D), *cure light wounds*, *ebon eyes* (SC, p.77), *foundation of stone* (SC, p.99), *nightshield* (SC, p.148), *shield of faith*
0 – *cure minor wounds* x 2, *detect magic*, *detect poison*, *mending*, *purify food and drink*

String theorem:
Bagul has access to the string theorems *Embrace of Luthic* and *Runes of Odin*.

Equipment:
+1 full plate armour (technological item), +1 heavy mace (technological item), shield (heavy, steel), unholy symbol of Luthic, spell component pouch, hat of disguise

Combat:
Bagul is slow, but he's armoured like a tank even before he casts defensive spells on himself. He prefers to cast a suite of defensive spells on himself and any allies he has available, then wades into battle, bashing away at strong opponents and drawing their attention, setting up a flank if possible.
If caught alone, one of his favourite tricks is to first cast *ebon eyes* on himself, and then to follow up with *darkness* or *deeper darkness*.

Lair:
Although he was instrumental in expanding the "factory" by digging out and stabilizing tunnels and chambers in the cold earth and bedrock of Lamordia, Bagul spends more time in a house in the Quartier Marchand of Port-a-Lucine. The house is not excessively large, but well-kept. Bagul has a combination of scientific laboratory and shrine to Luthic in the basement. When the Cleric is away, the house is kept in proper order by a grandmotherly maidservant, who cooks and cleans with the best of them, but is oblivious to her employer's true nature.

Background:
Bagul is a Faerûnian half-orc, who grew up with

his orcish relatives. Life was hard, and Bagul was slow of thought and action, but he endured all the abuse and managed to earn some respect when the Cave Mother rewarded his faith in her with the power of divine magic. Bagul might have lived out his life with the tribe, tending the home caves and supporting or healing warriors during raids, but fate had a different plan for him. Or rather, Luthic had a different plan for her loyal priest.

The Blood Moon Witch appeared to her servant in a dream, and ordered him to join the Sevenstrings order on her behalf. She explained that this group had offered to give orcs whole worlds to themselves, and Luthic the role of their sole goddess on those worlds. Therefore, Bagul must go and aid them in every way he could.

Bagul *was* loyal to Luthic, and did join the Sevenstrings. He studied hard to be able to contribute to the group, and laboured to the fullest extent of his abilities to advance the Plan... and then the Harpers and Moonstars assaulted the first "factory", and the Cleric found himself exiled to a cruel and backwards land where he was even more reviled by humans than he had been on Toril. In recognition of the difficulties Bagul faced during his travels through the Core, his fellow Sevenstrings gave him a priceless *hat of disguise*; the half-orc now only removes it when he is certain no native of the Demiplane can see him.

The years in first Lamordia and next Dementlieu do not sit well with Bagul. He still wishes to do the will of Luthic, but she no longer appears in his dreams. His attempts to divine her will through magic have been... troubling. Bagul still thinks slowly, but he has kept thinking, and he has come to a conclusion: Luthic does not answer him because he no longer lives the way an orc should! He is living in a *house* in a city, and he is the only being with orc blood for miles and miles around.

Clearly, this offends mighty Luthic, and Bagul must rectify the situation. Already, the half-orc priest has been scouting the land for a good cave to raise a horde of his own in. And already, he has used his hat of disguise and the string theorem granted him by Odin One-Eye to charm strong women into his home in Port-a-Lucine and into his bed. By the time Bagul is ready to settle his new cave, his unsuspecting lovers may well be ready to give birth to some very unexpected children...

If his plans are a success, Bagul intends to tender his resignation to the Sevenstrings order so he can focus on being a father and mentor for his offspring. In deference to the orders of Luthic, he does plan to remain an ally to the order, and to raise his children to potentially join as Sevenstrings agents in the future – when they are not raiding the civilized nations of the Core, that is.

Diedrich von Hochstatt

CG male human Aristocrat 5 / Bard 3 / Sevenstrings agent 3

Hit Dice: hp 31 (10 HD)
CR: 10
Initiative: -5
Speed: 0 ft. (If Diedrich needs to move to a different location, he requires either his fellow Sevenstring agents or a crew of at least five medical constructs to carefully transport both him and the life-support machinery hooked up to his body.)
Armor Class: 5 (-5 Dex.)
Base Attack/Grapple: +6/+10
Special Attacks: *Aria*, spells
Class Abilities: Bardic music, bardic knowledge, countersong, *fascinate*, inspire courage +1, sonata, *string theorem*
Saves: Fort. +2, Ref. -2, Will +11
Abilities: Str. 1, Dex. 1, Con.8, Int. 18, Wis. 14, Cha. 15
Skills: Appraise +10, Bluff +10, Craft (alchemy) +10, Craft (metalworking) +12, Diplomacy +13, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) +20, Knowledge (geography) +7, Knowledge (history) +7, Knowledge (local: Lamordia) +7, Knowledge (nature) +17, Knowledge (planes) +8, Perform (dance) +8, Perform (string instruments) +12, Ride +2, Spellcraft +11
Feats: Craft wondrous item, Create device (construct), Create device (magic arms & armour), Create device (potion) (B), Create device (wondrous item), Skill focus (Knowledge: architecture and engineering), Still spell

Languages: Lamordian*, Darkonese, Draconic, Dutch, Gnome, Mordentish, Vaasi, Zherisian

Magic
Spells/day: 3 / 4 / 3
Diedrich casts spells as a 6th-level Bard. The save DC for his spells is +12 spell level.
Given that his body is badly crippled, he can only cast spells if these are augmented with the feat Still spell.

Spells known:
2 – *Alter self*, *cure moderate wounds*, *misdirection*
1 – *Cure light wounds*, *disguise self*, *obscure object*, *remove fear*
0 – *Dancing lights*, *detect magic*, *mending*, *prestidigitation*, *read magic*, *summon instrument*

String theorem:
Diedrich has access to the *string theorem*s known as *Gate of Alseta*, as well as *Hands of Brigh* (not yet factored into the statistics represented above this section) and *Wonders of Gond*.

Equipment:
Masterwork artisan's tools, magnifying glass, masterwork harp, spell component pouch, various equipment maintaining his vital functions.

Combat:
Diedrich was never a great fighter. He was always far more likely to try and diffuse tense situations with a joke or diplomacy, and he suffered for it at his father's hands. Even when he saw a threat looming, the young engineer was reluctant to choose inflicting violence on others; this is why he started preparing constructs to do it for him.
In his current state, Diedrich could not fight anyone if he wanted to, save by the use of his *Aria*-ability. He bitterly regrets his hesitation to order the Tick-Tock-Men to attack on his behalf in 751 BC. If he ever does manage to create a new body for himself and pursue his goals, it is likely that he will be more quick to order his mechanical servants into action.

Lair:
Diedrich needs must spend all of his time at the site of the Lamordian "factory", as his body is incapable of independent movement and requires the machines hooked up to it to maintain his life.

Background:
Diedrich was born into the von Hochstatt family of Leidenheim, Lamordia. He grew up in the lap of luxury, and his father Otto von Hochstatt spared no expense in grooming his son into a man worthy of following in his footsteps. No expense... and no amount of punishment. From a young age, Diedrich was well-aware that his only hope for a happy life lay in either doing everything exactly the way his father wanted it done, or else in staying as far away from him as he possibly could. When he was of an age to pursue an advanced education, Diedrich petitioned his father to let him travel to the University of Dementlieu – and received one of the harshest thrashings of his life.
Was he not aware that his father had been appointed to the *Schultebott* of Leidenheim? Did he wish to disgrace his father by not taking his education in the city's fine, albeit crumbling college? Diedrich had been born to Lamordia and he would live and eventually die there, a proud representative of the von Hochstatt family, and that was that!

Except that was not *quite* that.
True to his father's command, Diedrich applied himself to his studies. He had a knack for mechanisms, earning the cautious praise of his professors at college and his tutors at home. If he also showed an interest in the geography of foreign nations and world history, then this was deemed just barely acceptable. A careful probe in the direction of arcane subjects was swiftly punished and deemed to have been squashed. Lord von Hochstatt's son was learning all the arts and graces of the nobility, and seemed to be shaping up nicely.
Naturally, Diedrich was miserable. He yearned to be out from under his father's heavy hand, to explore the world and its mysteries. In music and dance, he found secrets of inspiration and magic – and he had no one to share them with. Until he met the stranger, poking through one of his own favourite bookstores.
The stranger was a one-armed gnome, who walked with the aid of a cane and saw with the aid of two mechanical eyes. First, Diedrich was simply intrigued by the mechanical principles behind these optics. As he got to talking with

Colmarr Greatorm, he became utterly fascinated with the experience and the huge dreams of the smaller humanoid.
It was not long before Diedrich became one of the very few new recruits the Sevenstrings drew from the local populace, rather than fellow Outlanders. He delighted in the secrets his scandalous new friends were willing to share, and the vast worlds of opportunity they envisioned. For a time, he was happy – but then his grades started dropping, and Lord von Hochstatt brought his heavy hand down on Diedrich's life once more.

Clearly, Diedrich was unable to focus because he was too free in his life. Clearly, 'the boy' needed something to ground him. Clearly, Diedrich must start engaging in Lamordia's social circuit and find himself a bride. There was to be no free time for him outside of his studies and his new social obligations, not until he had a wedding band on his finger and an heir to continue the von Hochstatt line after him.
Diedrich acquitted himself well enough at drab tea parties and stiffly formal dances, but his heart was not in it. In the aristocratic ladies of Lamordia, he saw nothing of the creativity and adventure he yearned for, only obligation and naked desire for social improvement. All he wanted in a woman, he found in a beautiful, red-haired foreigner who was likewise touring the social circuit, albeit not in hopes of marriage.

Her name was Mu (or so she said). Just that: "Mu".
While his peers laughed behind their hands and made snide remarks, Diedrich found her to be entrancing.

Mu had come to Lamordia to find sponsors and collaborators for a project of hers which revolved around an exciting new form of mathematics. As she was having trouble gaining access to the *Schultebott*, she was hoping to make inroads through the children of the local aristocracy.
Diedrich arranged to meet with the beautiful stranger multiple times. They discussed the mathematics she had brought with her, and which struck Diedrich as being very much in tune with the Sevenstrings' more arcane formulas, although they followed a different track. This did quicken his interest in "Miss Mu", as he always addressed her, but was not the sole reason for it. In private, Diedrich admitted that he was smitten with the young woman; her beauty, her fierce intellectualism, her almost violent independence... He felt he wanted to impress her, to charm her, to woo her in his own clumsy way. What better way could there be, than to help her with her project?
And so Diedrich approached his Lord Father, hat in hand, and humbly requested that he and the rest of the *Schultebott* give "Miss Mu" a chance to plead her case and win their cooperation.
"You have much to gain from seeing her," he promised his sire. "She is a woman of great interest."
To Diedrich's lasting regret, he told his father much about the foreign woman who had so caught his eye and his imagination, and the elder von Hochstatt did agree to have Mu meet the *Schultebott* at a private function. Diedrich was not allowed to attend, 'but would receive his father's appreciation at the appropriate time'.
On the night of the meeting, Diedrich accompanied Miss Mu to the house where the *Schultebott* was waiting, then retired to a tea-shop nearby to hear the results. Hours passed, and Diedrich started to feel an odd sensation of discomfort. How long could it take Miss Mu to present the maths of her work and the *Schultebott* to give its ruling? Come to think of it, why had his father agreed to the meeting at all? Theoretical mathematics were not his field of interest, they were Diederich's.
Why had those crusty, entitled old men agreed to meet with Miss Mu?
As horrified realization slammed home, Diederich leaped from his chair and rushed to the villa. The doors did not open to his knocking, and he rushed to the back, hoping to find a servant's entrance open. Unto today, Diedrich remembers seeing a couple of burly men haul the brutalised body of Miss Mu over to a waiting carriage he recognized as belonging to the local brothel.
He yelled, rage overtaking him as he ran up to

the thugs – and other voices joined his. They were the predatory shriek of a cat incensed beyond all control, and the voice of a strange woman he did not recognize. The cat was a vicious red tom, which he had seen curling around Miss Mu's ankles at the salons and teashops where they had met. The woman was a dark-haired beauty with a complex tattoo on her shorn forehead. Both joined him in attacking the two thugs, who briefly protested that 'the merchandise' had been sold to them legally by 'the fine gentlemen' – before they drew steel. And before their voices died away in wet gurgles as they died.

Diedrich and the Mulan woman who had come to save Miss Mu – and who introduced herself to him as Amourette Schlosser – stole the brothel's carriage in order to transport the comatose Mu. On Amourette's advice, they travelled to an abandoned keep by the shore, which she smilingly dubbed 'Schloss von Brandthofen' for some reason which seemed to amuse her.
Diedrich did not care. All he cared for, was Miss Mu, whose hands and ribs had been broken by heavy boots and whose body had been cruelly abused. He did not care where Amourette had come from, nor why she was helping; he did not care what his father would say when he did not return home.
The only thing that mattered to him, was the woman he had unintentionally delivered unto evil.
For weeks, Diedrich and Amourette laboured to mend Mu's broken body and tease her mind back to wakefulness. When they succeeded, the first thing she said – in the hoarse whisper of an unused voice – was: "*They burned my notes.*"
At Diedrich's side, sly Amourette replied: "But they could not erase your mind, my dear. Let us reconstruct your notes. Let us make them a reality."

The following days turned into weeks, and the weeks into months. While Miss Mu recovered, she thought deep and strange thoughts and gave dictation. When she grew frustrated with Diedrich's and Amourette's inability to properly set down what she told them, Diedrich designed and built for her the Record: a device capable of recording voices and storing the vibrations in the very stones of Schloss von Brandthofen.
It was a marvel of applied science, and Mu gruffly thanked him for it. It did nothing to assuage Diederich's guilt.
As Mu's hands healed and she exchanged complex and bizarre formulas of planar lore with Amourette Schlosser, she started sketching designs for a fabulous machine, one capable of proving her theories. Diedrich struggled to make these designs a reality, but found himself unable to. In time, Amourette Schlosser brought the disreputable Doctor Mordenheim to their gloomy hideout, and Miss Mu's project gained greater traction thereafter.
Diedrich's feelings of guilt and inadequacy only grew. He made significant contributions to the project, but no matter how much his own brand of technomagic helped advance the work, he felt that nothing could make up for his unintentional crime. Nor for his continued yearning to somehow win Miss Mu's affections – an impossibility as he well understood she had none left to give after her experience at the hands of the *Schultebott*.
In 751 BC, the project reached its completion in the creation of the World Engine (See Quoth the Raven #27, p.65 – 68), and a four-way battle erupted as Adam burst onto the scene and dark secrets were revealed. In order to protect Miss Mu, Diedrich gave an order to his construct creations, the Tick-Tock-Men, and found himself flung into the sea along Mordenheim, Adam and Amourette Schlosser.
His last thought was of failure, his failure to protect the only woman he had ever loved. And then there was darkness... and then there was pain, and then there was light.

Although Diedrich had been unable to attend the Sevenstrings order due to his father's demands on his time, the order had not forgotten about him. They kept as close an eye on him as they dared, in part out of concern for his wellbeing and in part because they worried he might reveal their secrets to the Syndicate of Enlightened Citizens – of which his father was a member.
The Sevenstrings were unable to pierce the defenses of Schloss von Brandthofen while Amo-

urette Schlosser and Mu spun their magics about it and Tick-Tock-Men patrolled the corridors, but still they regularly monitored the site. For some reason, no Sevenstrings agent was present to witness the awakening of the World Engine, but they *did* scour the site afterward.

And so it came to pass that they found the wrecked and headless corpse of Diedrich von Hochstatt on the sea-cliffs beneath Schloss von Brandthofen – as well as the wrecked, barely alive body of Diedrich von Hochstatt, a few feet away from the corpse. What had happened, they never knew, though Diedrich has privately theorized that some effect of the World Engine's awakening caused him to somehow *simultaneously* go down two possible paths; both the path where he died and the path where his life continued.

Even now, as a helpless paraplegiac dependent on a life-support system in the Sevenstrings' "factory", only one thing matters to Diedrich. Or rather, only one *person* matters to him: Miss Mu.

The Sevenstrings order could not tell Diedrich where the woman he loved had gone. They did gush about the information they had found in the Record and asked Diedrich whether he knew more, but he has successfully lied that he does not.

Whatever the World Engine is, Diedrich knows it was coveted both by the old madman Mordenheim and by the fiend who lived side by side with him at Schloss von Brandthofen. He would rather not tell the Sevenstrings everything he knows about it, for fear that he may cause even more evil to happen.

Currently, Diedrich is occupied with the construction of a new body for himself. While his fellow Sevenstrings agents have tried to mend his broken shell with magic, his flesh seems to soak up healing spells like the desert drinks in water, and with little to show for it.

He has already – with the help of the Sevenstrings order – created various constructs that allow him to affect his surroundings; machines that execute his commands with varying levels of skill and monitor his health. A new body, and the transfer of either his living brain or his mind into it, is a time-consuming process, however. Even if Diedrich succeeds in the process, there are no guarantees that he will not go insane after putting himself into a construct. More importantly (to him), there are no guarantees that he will be able to find Miss Mu and make up for all the harm he has done to her.

But he will make the attempt anyway. As long as his lungs still draw breath, even if they must so with the aid of a pump, Diedrich von Hochstatt will not give up.

There's An Ample Supply

By Mark Bartels (Rock of the FoS)



Secrets of Pharazia

As Recounted by Aayid al-Farra, the Finest Barber in All Phiraz

By Ian Fordam
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Ah, Effendi, please, come, have a seat! My razor awaits you. I can see you have been travelling. Let me tidy up that tangle for you. Yes, yes, you do speak Pharazian very well for an ajami. But perhaps we should switch to a language which requires less effort on your part. Receiving a shave should be a time of relaxation, should it not? Yes, Vaasi will do. You will discover, Effendi, that most of us in the Bazaar have learned to speak a few words of your foreign languages.

I am flattered that Fate has seen fit for my name to fall upon your ears. My father was a barber, and his father before him, and I take pride in my work to uphold my family honor. My hand is steady; my scissors, sharp. Your skin shall not know—

Ah, I see, Effendi. You are less concerned about my skill with a razor than with a tale. Very well, I am prepared to satisfy you on both counts. Have you heard the Tale of the Djinni's Nightingale? I cannot say if the tale is true, but I tell it the way it was told to me. In days nearly forgotten—

Not that sort of tale? I beg a thousand pardons, Effendi. You wish to learn of opportunities for glory and adventure. I assume you mean treasure as well, although you are not crude enough to simply say so. No doubt you went looking for a tavern such as you might find in Egertus, only to learn that the Lawgiver forbids the consumption of alcohol. And so you learned that I am a man who might have heard certain succulent rumors.

Very well. Doubtless you have your heart set upon a journey to distant Har'Akir, where you wish to plunder long-forgotten tombs. Or even to risk Sebua, which offers glories and adventures of its own. Perhaps Aljaugasba, the so-called City of Temptations! (Bah. A mere fable.[1]) However, Effendi, I must ask have you considered exploring Pharazia itself? You are not ready for the distant lands. Perhaps Fate might look upon you more kindly if you first brave the sands closer at hand. Ah, I discern that I have offended you, and perhaps you would give me a beating if my razor were not at your throat. How fortunate for me that it is, and how fortunate for you. The Confessors of the Lawgiver are always close at hand, and they would take very unkindly indeed to a show of violence.

So. Lean back. Find the quiet in your heart. I will finish my task—for I do take pride in my work, Effendi, exactly as I have said—and I will tell you of Pharazia.

* * *

Very crucially, one should always know where to find water. When you arrived in Phiraz you must have noticed the Ousserd,[2] that vast reservoir which stands so near to our city. It is fed from below by a great spring. It sustains the city, and it sustains the entire land. Three rivers flow from the Ousserd. The shortest is the Simurgh, which flows to the Bay of Phiraz. The others are the Chakor and the Beni Massat.

The Bay of Phiraz—a grand name for a very humble location. The Simurgh may be short, but three-quarters of the way to the shore it breaks into many smaller rivers. The Simurgh Delta—more commonly called the Great Marsh, I must admit—hinders the ready conveyance of goods to and from the bay. That matters little, however. There is nothing to trade. You see, Effendi, many sailors have learned that venturing too far from shore inevitably draws a violent storm from which no vessel emerges. Nonetheless, a score of fisher families live along the bay. Although they do not quite form a village, a fierce man named Yasud ibn Saqir al-Salmin and his two equally fierce sons have the loudest voices in the community.[3]

As for the other two rivers, you do know how our land is shaped, yes? To the north we have the Horns—there were once four, but now

only two remain. The other two Horns have been lost to the Endless Sirocco[4] which surrounds our land. However, I draw your attention to the south, where the land is split, not by the Endless Sirocco as you might think, but by the Gulf of the Heart. The Chakor flows through the land to the west of the Gulf, and the Beni Massat, to the east.

Should you venture out of the city, Effendi, then I strongly recommend you stay near to one of these two rivers. The Chakor struggles to cross the desert, and in the worst of summer in the worst of years it is reduced to a silty stream. Eventually it ends in the waterhole now called the Oasis of the Emptiness. Once the great city of Benzar stood there, drawing upon that oasis much as Phiraz draws upon the Ousserd. Yet its people invoked the wrath of Diamabel, and so the Black Herald destroyed Benzar. Perhaps something of value remains undiscovered beneath the sands, but perhaps not. It is a cursed land, and I personally would not dare drink the water of the Emptiness.

To the east, the Beni Massat flows more confidently, wending south to the Oasis of the Five Palms. I have been there myself, and I have laid my hand upon each of the five palms, named Honor, Family, Purity, Hospitality, and Piety. Perhaps there is no treasure to be found there, but the Five Palms are good to remember if you should find yourself in need of a respite from glory and adventure.[5]

Because the Beni Massat is the more reliable river, a number of villages have sprouted along its shores, fed by the rich soil which the Beni Massat deposits as it passes. There is a city as well, Ibraq by name. Its people make the most wonderful blue tiles, prized all across Pharazia. The emir of Ibraq, Jamal ibn Bishr al-Ghani, was until recently a sheikh among the nomads of the desert. The previous emir was taken captive and killed by warriors of a different clan. Although Jamal's rescue attempt failed, Diamabel proclaimed him emir for his efforts. His brother Asad is now sheikh of the al-Ghani. Unfortunately, there is bad blood between the two brothers. The new emir may not have restored peace to Ibraq.

Having walked my words along the length of the Chakor and the Beni Massat alike, I now return my attention to the Gulf of the Heart. Although its waters are salty and thus not fit to drink, nonetheless they still buoy a boat quite well. Many fish swim the Gulf of the Heart, ready for the net.

At the northern end of the Gulf is the city of Zayawa. Its Emira is a sha'ir, that is, a poet. I have heard that she knows the magic of the djinn and the ifrit, but of course I cannot say whether such tales are true. At the center of the courtyard of her palace is a mighty fountain, doubtless fed by another spring much like our Ousserd. This single fountain keeps the entire city alive.[6]

Somewhat to the south, the Gulf narrows. On the western shore lies a small range of mountains. Compared to the al-Hajar mountains to the west, which define the border with Sebua, these mountains, like their range, are small. Nonetheless, they provide a defensible site. The High Cliff Fortress overlooks the Gulf of the Heart, and it is held by Pharazian soldiers to this day. These soldiers belong to The Vigilant, the last of the once-mighty mamluk[7] orders.

Not so the Lonely Fortress at the far southern end of the Gulf. Once it may have guarded the entrance to the Gulf from the wider sea, but the Endless Sirocco has severed the gulf from the sea for many generations now. It is a terrible sight, I am told, to see the sands of the Sirocco fight with the sea-borne Mists, neither one ever parting to let the faithful pass. The Lonely Fortress has been abandoned[8] as useless.

I must confess that you seem skeptical, Effendi. Perhaps you doubt that any treasure may be found at such well-travelled sites? Then let me tell you one more secret. When the Endless Sirocco shifted a generation ago, we lost more than two of the Four Horns. We lost the Jazirat al-Qidiys as well. That means "The Island of the Saint". It was no true island, for a narrow land bridge connected it to the rst of Pharazia, yet that was its name regardless.

The Jazirat al-Qidiys was named after a holy man whose name has been lost to time. Although he was faithful to the Lawgiver, the Confessors had driven him out of Pharazia for intolerable heresies such as mercy. Some say that the Jazirat al-Qidiys arose from the sea when he reached the shore. Others say that the island

always existed, but that this holy man's presence brought forth the Oasis of the Dawn, with its a miraculous healing waters, at the center of the island. Regardless, the island was lost to the Endless Sirocco, never to be found again.

Unless, perhaps, some other suitably holy person returns to the shore.

* * *

Ah, Effendi, please, come, have a seat! My razor awaits you. You wish for your usual barbering? And musk-scented oil for your fine mustache? Of course, Effendi. It shall be as you wish. Anything for a Confessor of the Lawgiver.

I assume you overhead what I was telling the ajami who sat in my seat before you? Yes, yes. A greedy fellow, that one. I do agree, he should be watched. Very carefully indeed.

1. Except that, according to the article "Aljaugasba" in *Quoth the Raven #5*, it is not.

2.The Ousserd, Simurgh, Chakor, Beni Massat, and Great Marsh are drawn from "The Domain of the Endless Word" in Quoth the Raven #21. The al-Hajar mountains and the city of Benzar are drawn from that article as well.

3. Yasud and his sons are weresharks. They do not react well to intruders from the city. Worse yet, they react *very poorly indeed* to *ajami* from foreign lands.

4. Pharazians do not refer to the Mists as the Mists, of course, but as a ceaseless sandstorm.

5. Sheikh Rashiq ibn Zufar al-Malak takes hospitality very seriously, even when his guests are *ajami*.

6.There is no spring below the fountain. Instead, there is a marid whom Emira Kairiya bint Amaani al-Samad has secretly imprisoned. The marid expends all of his magic desalinating the water of the Gulf for the people of Zayawa to drink.

7 Mamluks, sha'irs, and even barbers are described in*Al-Qadim: Arabian Adventures*. In addition, the *Complete Sha'ir's Handbook* contains other wizard kits which might be found at the edges of Pharazian civilization.

8. Not entirely true. There is a fishing village nearby. There is also a ghul who preys upon the village. She spends most of her time dormant, but occasionally she crawls out of her lair to claim a new victim.



A Map of the Amber Wastes

chibiloft 2022

APowers Check With Every Bite

By Mark Bartels (Rock of the FoS)



Secrets of Privilege

The Cornerstone Foundation

By Mark. H. Bartels (Rock of the FoS)

'There are many ways to wage war. Only fools believe all wars are waged with weapons and bloodshed.
Great battles can be waged with words and judicious applications of influence, and wars can be waged and won without the need to draw a blade or fire a pistol in fiery anger, nor to unstopper a bottle of poison in cold calculation.'

Anonymous quotation in the Record of Memories.

'There came a thunderous knocking upon the study doors and rattling of the brazen doorknobs. Lord Capricius looked up from his ledgers, one eyebrow raised in curiosity. His hand drifted to a rack of little bells, each made of a different precious metal... but he had been long and hard at work with the blasted business accounts this day. His eyes stung, his brain felt as though great boulders were rolling around in it, and his legs ached abominably.

He deserved some distraction from the work, no matter how minor.

Instead of ringing for assistance, the Lord of Bilis Manor poured himself a glass of brandy. Then he leaned back in his leather chair and pressed a small switch under the desk. He called out: "The door isn't locked, you only need to pull instead of push. Do come in."

There came the sound of someone cursing before the door swung open – outwards, now. Depending on which switch Capricius depressed, they could do either. In truth, the doors *had* been locked until just now, but these uninvited guests were not to know.

"Aha," Capricius said as three men came charging into his study. He picked up his glass and rolled it between his palms to warm up the brandy. "Mister Valence. And two gentlemen from the city watch. Still showing up without an invitation, even after you were dismissed from the offices of the *free press*" – the nobleman smirked openly at this – "but no matter. I am always happy to receive visitors. What may I help you with today?"

"You will be helping, indeed," Mortimer Valence said, his face pale with barely restrained fury.

The former darling of the *free press* looked lean to the very edge of starvation, his formerly immaculate clothes ragged and stained. Unemployment had not treated the man kindly, especially not since Capricius had arranged for him to be unemployable with any other reputable business after he got him fired. If the Lord of the Manor were to guess, the younger man was running mostly on righteous indignation, pure willpower, and some sense of impending victory.

"You will be *helping*," Valence said as he marched right up to the desk and slammed down a bundle of paperwork on top of Capricius's ledger-books, "with the process of *justice*!"

Capricius raised a polite eyebrow, then put down his glass so he could skim through the papers. He felt mildly disgruntled at the neat hand with which they had been written, so much more even and orderly than his own ledgers and journals.

"I see," he said, putting the papers back down. He picked up his glass again and took a sip of brandy; it was utterly ambrosial. "And?"

Valence rocked back on his heels as though he had been punched in the face. Capricius treasured the young man's poleaxed expression, and wondered whether he would have looked more stunned if he had physically struck him. Delightful thought.

"You are guilty, Capricius!" the former journalist said, the words picking up speed as he spoke. "Guilty of conspiring with the thrice-damned Cornerstone Foundation to influence the legislative and judicial powers of the State! Guilty of underbidding your competitors and manipulating the market to gain the timber

monopoly! Guilty of selling free citizens of Anaides into slavery abroad, and offering them up as sacrifices to the Fey beyond the river! Guilty of making deals with foreign powers to sell state secrets! Guilty of – of *getting me fired* for investigating you!"

"Yes," the Lord of the Manor agreed, mildly. He sipped again. "And? Is there more?"

"It is *enough*, Lord Capricius!" Valence sputtered, his expression disbelieving. "These are high crimes under the law! I have found the evidence, found witnesses willing to talk! Have presented my findings to the city watch! You just *confessed* to your crimes before representatives of that same city watch!"

Valence waved an arm at the two burly men standing behind him without looking back.

"Your crimes are known! The evidence is before the law!" the former journalist raged. "You are *guilty*! Guilty as I have been saying you were for five years! *Five! Years!*"

"Yes, but is there any more you've discovered?" Capricius insisted, his own temper rising. "This is just the scum on top of the bubbling cauldron, man! Haven't you found out any *more*? Any of the really interesting stuff? Come on, out with it!"

The former journalist rocked back on his heels again, eyes bugging out. "Wha – More? No," he sputtered. "You are – No more tricks, Capricius! You are guilty, and I will finally *have* you! You will swing at Tye Square for the nation to see, and everyone will know I was right, and I will – I will have my life back at last, and – and everything..."

"Good gods, man," Capricius sighed, and he pinched his own brow. "You were off to such an entertaining start, too. Some days I don't know why I bother listening to the little people. You're just no use at all, are you?"

The Lord of the Manor raised his glass to his lips for another drink – and Mortimer Valence lunged at him, slapped the glass from his hands, sent it flying to shatter against a wall. A trail of precious brandy streaked the desk, the sheets of evidence, the *ledgers*...

Capricius looked up from the mess, the last vestige of amusement dying an ugly death in the black fires of his rage. Valence backed off in a hurry as the Lord of Bilis Manor rose to his feet – his aching, agonizing feet! – and stammered: "You've lost, Capricius! Lost! Gentlemen – *take him!*"

"Yes," Capricius agreed, "take him."

He saw Valence's expression change, just before one of the watchmen clubbed him in the kidneys. He kept watching as the fallen journalist physically fell to the priceless carpet, its whirls and arabesques so complex that a dozen child-slaves had gone blind weaving it. Continued to watch as the watchmen broke the squealing, writhing man's legs and hands with their truncheons, pounding bones to useless mush with heavy blows. Only when one of the men drew a knife and pulled Valence's head back by the hair did he raise his hand and speak a command: "Stop."

The watchmen looked up at him, silent and alert like well-trained dogs.

"Don't get blood on my carpet," Capricius chided them. "Take him out into the back yard. The magnolia trees have been looking a bit peaky lately; bury him between the roots."

"You want us to cut him there?" the man with the knife asked.

"No, I said bury him," Capricius replied, his dark eyes boring into Valence's. "That will be all, gentlemen. Give my regards to Captain Ramsey when you return to your headquarters. Feel free to stop by the kitchen on your way out for some mulled wine and a meal, if you are so inclined."

The guardsmen tugged their forelocks, grabbed the now screaming, pleading Valence under his armpits and hauled him out of the study as though he were a bag of trash. Which, Capricius considered, was not too far off the mark.

"Bloody mess," he sighed, looking at where the brandy had whetted his ledgers, ruining his already uneven handwriting.

Wincing at the pain in his legs, the Lord of the Manor took up the gold bell from the little tray and rang it. Jitters, the chief butler, walked into the study before the musical note had died away.

"Your will, Lord?" he asked, bowing low so his fringe swept the floor.

"Mister Valence made a mess of my accounts," Capricius complained, "and my desk. Gods

above, I think there's even some brandy got on the carpet! I want it all cleaned up and mended. Bring a clean glass and a fresh snifter of brandy to my bedroom, then take the papers that boy brought, and have them sent to the Foundation; there are leaks in need of plugging."

"Yes, Lord," Jitters agreed. "You are certain this is to go to the gentlemen of the Cornerstone Foundation? This will not – inconvenience you?"

"No, it was all Foundation business," Capricius replied. "And not even the interesting bits. That will be all, my man."

Jitters bowed low again and swept out of the study. The Lord of Bilis Manor sighed and started the limping walk to his private chambers. He had so hoped for entertainment in the visit, but all it had been was the least of the Foundation's business. Of course it would be bad if a minor player like Mortimer Valence were able to pierce the layers of secrecy surrounding the Foundation's true activities, but Capricius was just so *bored* with going completely unchallenged.

Corner a market here; buy a judge or legislator's loyalty (or at least service) there; establish lines of trade; corrupt the inevitable spies so they give secrets of their own in return for the dross of local politics; expand the Foundation's influence by any means, then recruit people of 'Quality and lineage' to swell the ranks. Rinse, repeat.

As far as Capricius was concerned, this was all but the acne of the Foundation's great work. People suspected this and that; they bristled, they complained. In the case of men like Mortimer Valance, they complained loudly, making nuisances of themselves and creating openings to have them dismissed, made examples of. But apparently no outsider in all the history of the Foundation had realized its goal, the Grand Work.

Oh, sufficiently clever people whined about aristocrats living above the law and lining their pockets with ill-gotten money all the time, but why did none of them suspect that it all served the purpose of creating the Grand Aristocratic World Order? Why did nobody even suggest that the stale old rituals held by Foundation members held true Power?

Ultimate victory would be so anticlimactic without any real opposition...'

The Cornerstone Foundation

Affiliation characteristics (*See Players Handbook II, 3.5 edition, p.163-191*)

Symbol: A set of scales, balancing a block of stone with the letters 'G.A.W.O.' on it and a crowned scepter.

Motto: *'Return the power whence it belongs'.*

Background, Goals and Dreams: Hailing originally from the domain of Anaides, beyond the storm-tossed Sea of Troubles, the Cornerstone Foundation draws its origins to that land.

Locally, the Foundation is best known as a society for members of the aristocracy, both those of old families and ambitious newcomers who buy their way into the Quality. The Foundation's headquarters is a sprawling building known as the Brownstone, which acts as a combination of gentleman's club (though it is also open to ladies of the Quality) for the general membership, and a meeting hall for the Foundation's leaders.

In Anaides, the Cornerstone Foundation is dismissed as being a private club for reactionary nobles, who seek to subvert the covernment and the courts with bribes and references to ancient documents of dubious lineage, and perform bizarre rituals behind closed doors. The Brownstone's library is said to hold texts that date back to before the founding of Anaides, or at least clever forgeries thereof, and there are many salacious tales of the entertainments in which the group's leaders engage in the building's inner sanctum once the doors are locked.

The truth is, of course, much worse.

The Cornerstone Foundation seeks nothing less than full power in all areas, and it is prepared to do anything to get it. Rather than engaging in lewd debauch, the Foundation's leaders practice ritual magic to augment secret acts of espionage,

bribery and corruption, seeing magic as just one more power they are entitled to wield. The organization hardly needs to influence Anaides's governmental and judicial bodies anymore, as it has well and fully corrupted both, has considerable influence over the domain's social whirl, and is well on its way to infesting the domain's twin churches of Dian and Diana. If the Foundation believes in the gods, then it believes it is doing the gods' work by reestablishing complete power of rule by the aristocracy.

Having gained a firm grasp of its homeland, the Foundation has turned its attention outward, and is now making inroads into the rest of the Demiplane of Dread. Sponsoring trade, murder, espionage and counter-espionage, and making inroads in local aristocracy wherever it finds a noble class, the Cornerstone Foundation already has 'interests' in the Core. There is no shortage of entitled nobles willing to join in the Great Work: a long-term plan to seize full control of all lands, and place the reins of power in the hands of the Foundation, rather than royal families, thuggish warlords, upstart bankers or mouldering old wizards.

Where the Foundation succeeds, it simultaneously rolls the clock back and forward, stripping the 'lesser classes' of liberties and rights, while advancing policies that enable and 'liberate' trade – so long as that trade is firmly in the grasp of acknowledged aristocrats, and those aristocrats are under the influence of the Cornerstone Foundation. Rather than seizing symbols like thrones and crowns, the Foundation seeks to claim true power: financial, social, judicial, legislative, religious, magical... all.

The Foundation is a serious threat, not because it wields devastating might of magic or arms, but because it plays on the entitlement of those who already hold wealth and power, and manages to bind them into a group with a shared goal by promising greater power in the present as well as the future. As more and more nobles fall into line with the Great Work, the Foundation's financial and business assets increase, as does its ability to influence local policy.

How to use the Cornerstone Foundation in a campaign:

Adventurers may find themselves working for the Foundation whenever they guard a caravan or crush a bandit uprising, but may also find themselves running counter to its interests when they seek to find spies or combat a rising tide of social injustice. It is passing rare for members of the Cornerstone Foundation to tackle 'upstarts' themselves, though; they employ people and bribe officers of the law for such things.

Alternatively, adventurers may themselves be aristocrats, or receive noble titles as a reward for services rendered. In this case, they could find themselves approached by the Cornerstone Foundation and receive an invitation to join. The Foundation is careful to tailor this invitation to the individual; genuinely benevolent nobles are often asked to join under the guise of pooling their resources with those of others for 'the greater good'. It is perfectly possible for someone to be in the Cornerstone Foundation, yet not be aware of the full scope of its plans.

If played right, this allows for dramatic revelations later in the game, at which point the players must decide whether they are willing to tolerate massive corruption because it benefits them, whether they are willing to go to war and risk losing their reputation and material wealth, or whether they prefer to try and change the Foundation from the inside by climbing the ranks and gaining power...

Enemies and Allies:

In the Core, the Cornerstone Foundation has formed a favourable alliance with the Syndicate of Enlightened Citizens of Lamordia. Neither group fully trusts the other, but they benefit from each other's assistance in twisting local policy to suit their own needs. The Foundation's presence is not yet strong in the oldest Cluster, so it benefits from piggybacking on the Syndicate's more established network,

providing money and enabling Lamordian trade to other Clusters and Islands in return for concessions by the Syndicate that benefit its own goals.

Also in the Core, the Foundation has run afoul of the Cult of the Morninglord, whose uplifting message runs counter to its goal of subjugating the lesser classes into slaves by all but name. It has also had trouble with the Iron Faith, as Inquisitors of the Lawgiver detected Foundation agents' attempting to corrupt their church. Though neither faith fully understands the Cornerstone Foundation, both are considered to be targets for destruction rather than corruption, should the opportunity arise.

Currently, the Cornerstone Foundation is engaged in high-level negotiations with the Boritsi Trading Company, seeking not only to gain first influence and later control over this economical powerhouse, but also to make inroads into the inner circle of Ivana Boritsi with an eye to recruit her into the Foundation. While the Black Widow is presently playing coy, the Foundation is confident that they will be able to win her over to join the Great Work.

Unknown to the Foundation itself, it has come to the attention of King Azalin as its agents entered Darkon and started trying to corrupt local nobles. Several Kargat have been dispatched to track these intruders back to their source, but so far none have reported back. It pleases the King of Darkon to let the Foundation's spies play their trifling games among his Barons for now; it allows him to see whose loyalty to him is weak enough to justify killing and replacing them.

Members:

The Cornerstone Foundation's leading circle remains firmly entrenched in the distant domain of Anaides, distanced from the Core by the Mists and the Sea of Troubles. No member of the Anaides' leading circle has ever left the land, and none are planning to; instead, they receive reports and send suggestions and recommendations, as well as practical assistance, to advance the Great Work. In this way, they prevent friction between themselves and local Foundation cells – until the time has come to firmly establish dominance.

The Foundation's Ultimate Leader is old Lord Cantor III (LE old male human Aristocrat 8 / Foundationist 10), a man so withered by age that he can no longer walk. Lord Cantor's mind is still as sharp as ever, and he skillfullfy weaves a web of manipulation and lies, both for the benefit of the Foundation and his own amusement. While he does not fear death, Lord Cantor is having too much fun running the Foundation to give up on life just yet; he is always in the market for spells and philtres that can extend his life. It is whispered that some of the drugs and potions he takes are keeping his mind clear and his power intact, and there are people who would love to know which brew does what...

Dread Possibility: What the Brew Do

Many people would like to know which of the medicines Lord Cantor III takes are keeping him alert enough to maintain power, and not all of them are members of the Cornerstone Foundation. Some are simply old people whose minds are growing vague with age, and who would dearly love to spend their golden years in full control of their faculties. Others would like to deprive Lord Cantor III of whatever miracle drug he is imbibing so he can be removed from power without the need for a messy assassination.

His oldest son, **Cantor IV** (LN male human Aristocrat 5), is a member of the latter group. Although he bears his father no ill will, Cantor IV has grown increasingly uncomfortable with the old man's activities, the more he has learned of them over the years. Cantor IV is not a member of the Cornerstone Foundation and has in fact refused point-blank to become a member; he likes to think of himself as a progressive man with empathy for his lessers.

What no one in Anaides apart from Lord Cantor III knows, is that he has been brewing his own miracle cure. He bought the formula from a

mysterious old woman, who has been selling him key ingredients for decades now, in return for various... considerations.

Lord Cantor III is well-aware that the old woman has not aged since he first met her in his prime, and he is greedy for knowledge of whatever drug she has used to maintain her vigor. He is also well-aware that the elder must represent some secretive cabal of her own, which has used his 'considerations' to further its own cause. Rather than be angered by the manipulation, the evil old man considers the mystery of his benefactor and her shadowy masters to be a thrilling challenge to his intellect.

Unfortunately, Cantor III does not know that the potion he has been imbibing contains powdered mushrooms collected by the Dark Delvers beneath Mt. Nyid, as well as an alchemical derivative of Nosferatu blood – just two of the secret ingredients sold to him by **Mother Hippe** (CE annis hag Cleric 5 / Scion of Irul 4 / Centurion of the Night 5) to keep him in power over the Cornerstone Foundation. For now, the foul potion gives the old villain clarity of mind and a bit of physical vitality. If time finally catches up to him and stops his heart, however, it is anyone's guess whether he will remain dead or rise as some foul, undead blight under Centurion control.

Certainly, the Centurions would not mind being able to exert more direct control over the Foundation's assets.

While many members of the Foundation – both in Anaides and beyond – would like to claim the title of ultimate leader once Lord Cantor shuffles off this mortal coil, few are in an actual position to do so according to the organization's byzantine laws and by-laws.

Lord Foundation **Capricius** (CE male satyr Ranger 3 / Rogue 2 / Foundationist 5) is one of these people and considered a good candidate in the homeland. The fact that he is secretly an inhuman Fey and the Darklord of Anaides has not given him an edge in the selection process, but neither has it exactly worked against him. If Capricius gains control over the Foundation (a big if, considering the fact that he is cursed never to be satisfied with his life), the Demiplane may expect the Foundation to start acting in a more overt and brutal fashion.

Lady Capstone **Melem Mourneswaithe-Highbridge** (LN old female human Aristocrat 8 / Foundationist 5) is also considered to be a strong contender. Although she is Mordent-born and -raised, she is a cunning businesswoman and was already a skilled manipulator before she became entangled with the Cornerstone Foundation. Her rise through the ranks has been nothing short of meteoric, and she has earned considerable respect – and the leadership of a Cornerstone Foundation cell which operates in Mordent, Borca and Dementlieu. If Lady Melem gains the title of ultimate master, the Cornerstone Foundation's headquarters may well be relocated to Mordentshire, and its operations will become even more focused on attaining financial power.

Otto von Hochstatt (LE middle-aged human Aristocrat 5 / Scientist (Chemist) 6 / Foundationist 2) is the only one who believes himself to be a candidate for leadership. A Lamordian born and bred and long-time member of the Syndicate of Enlightened Citizens in good standing, von Hochstatt has become radicalized in his hatred of magic and inhumans since the death of his son, Diedrich von Hochstatt (See "Secrets of Freedom", Quoth the Raven #29). He has been advocating for the Syndicate to take more violent action for years, and leaped at the chance to join the Cornerstone Foundation in the belief that they would allow him to sponsor and command actual death-squads. Von Hochstatt has been campaigning for advancement through the ranks, but he is not even a Foundation and is now considered to be a liability both by his old allies and his new allies.

Mellime Weisücher (CG young female human Aristocrat 1 / Bard 4 / Foundationist 1) is definitely not in the running. A member of a very minor branch of the Weisücher family of Lilliend, Mellime joined the Cornerstone Foundation out of a misguided belief that its goals will serve to revitalize and heal a world she sees as wounded and suffering. She might not have become a member in good standing if not for the fact that there were practically no other candidates in the Domain of Lilliend, and she at least provides some useful insight into her nation's ancient aristocratic lines.

Type: Cabal.

Category: Social.

Scale: Multiregional.

Affiliation score criteria:

Positive criteria	*Affiliation score modifier*
Expertise and power	+1
Ranks in Aristocrat	+1
Landowner	+1
Charisma 13 or higher lacks ranks in Knowledge (nobility)	+1
10 or more ranks in Knowledge (nobility)	+2
Member of the Foundationist prestige class	+2
Wealth	+1/20,000 gp value
Noble title	+2
Parents or siblings in the affiliation	+2
Marries into a family whose head is an affiliation member	+2
Recruits a new member into the affiliation	+1
Spends ten or more years in the affiliation	+2
Recommendation of an affiliation member with an affiliation score of 21 or higher	+2

Negative criteria	*Affiliation score modifier*
Associates with known enemy of the affiliation	-2
Charisma 8 or lower	-2
Charisma 8 or lower lacks ranks in Knowledge (nobility)	-2
Loses or destroys affiliation property	-1/1,000 gp value
Reveals secrets of the affiliation to outsiders	-10

Titles, Benefits and Duties:

The Cornerstone Foundation is surprisingly light on titles, given that its members needs must already be members of the aristocracy and thus have titles of their own. In contrast, the actual allocation of power and authority is determined by a Byzantine system of rules and by-laws.

Every Domain has its own leading circle, whose members are known as Foundations, and each leading circle has a supreme leader, whose title is Capstone. The leader of the most powerful leading circle, which currently resides in the Domain of Anaides, is simply known as the Ultimate Leader.

Benefits (affiliation score 11 or higher)

+2 circumstance bonus on Bluff when dealing with known members of the aristocracy.

+2 circumstance bonus on Diplomacy when dealing with known members of the aristocracy.

One personal valet or servant (CR 1 or lower).

Purchase spellcasting from affiliation at 3/4 standard price.

Rent-free stay in an inn with Good quality rooms.

Benefits (affiliation score 21 or higher)

Ability to share spellbooks with fellow affiliation members.

Claim audience with known members of the local aristocracy once a month.

Personal honour guard of 4 – 6 creatures (ECL 8 or lower).

Purchase spellcasting from affiliation at 2/3 standard price.

Rent-free stay in a private cottage.

Benefits (affiliation score 30 or higher)

Claim audience with rival (but not enemy) affiliation head within 1d4 weeks every three months.

Claim audience with royalty and/or other heads of state within 1d4 weeks every three months.

Personal honour guard of 4 – 6 creatures (ECL 12 or lower).

Purchase spellcasting from affiliation at 1/2 standard price.

Rent-free stay in a private villa.

Duties (affiliation score 11 or higher)

Enemy affiliation's members gain +1 on damage rolls against you.

Enemy affiliation's members have hostile reaction and impose -10 on Diplomacy checks.

Must partake in circle magic in affiliation stronghold at least once a year.

Duties (affiliation score 21 or higher)

Examination: must pass a Knowledge (nobility) check with DC 20 every month. Failure imposes a fine of 200 gp and affiliation score reduced by 1.

Expansion: must either claim a new stronghold, start a new business, recruit a new member, donate 2,000 gp or otherwise expand affiliation's interests once every three months.

Must partake in circle magic in affiliation stronghold at least once a month.

Duties (affiliation score 30 or higher)
Examination: must pass a Knowledge (nobility) check with DC 30 every month. Failure imposes a fine of 1,000 gp and affiliation score reduced by 2.
Expansion: must either claim a new stronghold, start a new business, recruit a new member, donate 5,000 gp or otherwise expand affiliation's interests once every month.
Must partake in circle magic in affiliation stronghold at least once a week.

Executive powers:
Assassinate; Pariah; Shadow war.

Prestige class: Foundationist

Prerequisites (3.5):

Skills : Bluff 2 ranks, Diplomacy 2 ranks, Intimidate 2 ranks, Knowledge (local) 2 ranks, Knowledge (obility and royalty) 8 ranks

Feats : Persua sive, Weapon focus (sword cane)

Special: Must either have an aristocratic title or donate 13,000 gp to the Cornerstone Foundation.

Prerequisites (PF 1E):

Skills : Bluff 2 ranks, Diplomacy 2 ranks, Intimidate 2 ranks, Knowledge (local) 5 ranks, Knowledge (nobility) 5 ranks

Feats : Persuasive, Weapon focus (sword cane)

Special: Must either have an aristocratic title or donate 13,000 gp to the Cornerstone Foundation.

Hit Dice: d6

Skill points / level: 2 + Int. modifier

Class skills (3.5): Appraise, Bluff, Craft, Diplomacy, Intimidate, Knowledge (arcana, geography, history, local, nobility, religion), Perform, Profession, Ride, Speak language, Spellcraft

Class Skills (PF 1E): Appraise, Bluff, Craft. Diplomacy, Intimidate, Knowledge (arcana, geography, history, local, nobility, religion), Linguistics, Perform, Profession, Ride, Spellcraft

LVL	Base Atk.	Fort.	Ref.	Will	Special	Magic
						1 2 3 4
1	+ 0	+ 0	+ 0	+ 1	Reputation +1; First Rite; Circle magic	0 – – –
2	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1	Perk	1 – – –
3	+ 2	+ 1	+ 1	+ 2	Reputation +2	1 – – –
4	+ 3	+ 1	+ 1	+ 2	Second Rite; Perk	1 0 – –
5	+ 3	+ 2	+ 2	+ 3	Reputation +3; Circle Leader	1 1 – –
6	+ 4	+ 2	+ 2	+ 3	Third Rite; Perk	2 1 0 –
7	+ 5	+ 2	+ 2	+ 4	Reputation +4	2 1 1 –
8	+ 6	+ 3	+ 3	+ 4	Fourth Rite; Perk	2 1 1 –
9	+ 6	+ 3	+ 3	+ 5	Reputation +5	2 2 1 0
10	+ 7	+ 3	+ 3	+ 5	Great Circle Leader; Perk	3 2 1 1

Class Features:
Weapon and Armour Proficiency: Foundationists are proficient with the dagger, longsword, rapier, sword cane, light crossbow and heavy crossbow. They are proficient with light and medium armour, but not with any type of shield. Note that light and medium armour do not interfere with Foundationists' spellcasting, but only when using the spellcasting ability granted by the prestige class.

Spellcasting: As Foundationists progress in levels in this Prestige class, they gain the power to cast a limited number of spells per day. In order to cast a spell, a Foundationist must have a Charisma score of 10 + the level of the spell they wish to cast. The Foundationist's Charisma modifier also influences the save DC of any spell a Foundationist wishes to cast. Before a Foundationist can cast a spell, they must first prepare it from a spellbook, just as a Wizard does; Foundationists do not start out with a spellbook, but must either purchase one or receive one as a gift.
A Foundationist gains one additional spell for each level they gain in the Foundationist Prestige class for free; if they wish to add more spells, they must pay for these and record them the same way a Wizard does.
Foundationists can study cast spells drawn from the Sorcerer/Wizard list, but only those from the schools of Abjuration, Conjuration, Divination and Illusion. Depending on the Perks they select, a Foundationist may be able to select spells from additional class lists (see Perk, below) but must still study and record these the same way a Wizard does.

Reputation: As a Foundationist advances through the ranks, they gain greater influence in society. Their reputation as members of the Quality grows, giving them an advantage in social situations. At 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th and 9th level, they gain a cumulative +1 bonus to Bluff, Diplomacy and Intimidate checks.
Rites: When in a fully equipped laboratory (creation costs of 1,000 gp/level in Foundationist Prestige class) a Foundationist may engage in a ritual to achieve special effects. At 1st, 4th, 6th and 8th level, a Foundationist learns one Rite out of the selection provided below. Once selected, a Foundationist can not change their list of Rites known without the use of a wish or miracle spell. Performing a Rite is a costly and time-consuming affair, which requires the consumption of various reagents and paraphernalia; the cost and required time are given with each Rite.

Circle magic: As Foundationists gain very limited spellcasting abilities, they have learned to pool their power for the good of the group. (See page 59 of the Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting for details on Circle Magic.) They can only perform Circle Magic with fellow members of the Foundationist Prestige class.
Perk: As members of the Quality, Foundationists gain access to special abilities and advantages, owing to their access to the best that high society has to offer and money can buy. At 2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th and 10th level, a Foundationist may select one from the list of Perks given below. Unless otherwise noted, each Perk may be selected only once.

Circle leader (Ex): At 5th level, the Foundationist can become a circle leader and act as the focus for Cornerstone Foundation circle magic. See page 59 of the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting* for details on circle magic.

Great Circle Leader (Ex): By the time the Foundationist reaches 10th level, they have mastered the art of circle magic and can lead a great circle. A great circle can have a total of nine assistants instead of five.

Foundationist Rites:
Rite of Control (PF 1E only) – By performing this ritual, a Foundationist with the perk Noble spirit may modify one of their studied spells from the Psychic class list as with either the Emotional Spell or the Intellectual Spell feat. The Foundationist need not actually have this feat to perform the Rite of Control. The Rite of Control may be performed a total of four times each day.
Material cost: 1,000 gp. Time cost: 1 hour.

Rite of Extension – After performing this ritual, a Foundationist may select one of their prepared spells and modify it as with the feat Extend Spell.

The Foundationist need not actually have this feat to perform the Rite of Extension. The Rite may be performed a total of four times each day.
Material cost: 1,000 gp. Time cost: 1 hour.
Rite of Hellfire – By performing this ritual, a Foundationist may modify any of their damage-dealing spells, infusing them with a spark of flame. Whenever a spell modified with this Rite deals damage in one round, in deals half as much damage again in the next round to its target(s) in fire damage. The Rite of Hellfire may be performed a total of two times each day.
Ritual cost: 2,000 gp. Time cost: 2 hours.

Rite of Illumination – By performing this ritual, a Foundationist may modify any of their spells with either the Darkness or Light modifier as with both the Heighten Spell (increasing the spell's level by +1) and Widen Spell feats. Alternatively, the Foundationist may choose to alter one spell as with Heighten Spell (increasing its level by +1) and one other spell as with Widen Spell. The Foundationist need not actually know either feat in order to perform this Rite. The ritual may be performed a total of 2 times each day.
Material cost: 2,000 gp. Time cost: 2 hours.

Rite of Knowledge – By performing this ritual, a Foundationist gains the benefit – and risks – of a Commune spell. The Rite may be performed only once a day, and the Cornerstone Foundation leadership insists it only be performed with the permission of the caster's local leading circle and as a part of Circle magic. (This has not stopped several Foundationists from secretly performing the ritual in their private laboratories.)
Material cost: 5,000 gp. Time cost: 5 hours.

Rite of Secrecy – By performing this ritual, a Foundationist may select one of their prepared spells and modify it as with the feats Silent Spell and Still Spell, or they may select two of their prepared spells and modify one as with Silent Spell and one with Still Spell. The Foundationist need not actually have either of these feats to perform the Rite of Secrecy. The Rite may be performed four times each day.
Material cost: 2,000 gp. Time cost: 2 hours.

Rite of Wealth – By performing this ritual, a Foundationist may acquire funds when money is scarce. Upon completing the ritual, a Foundationist receives knowledge of the location of unattended money or other material wealth within a radius of one mile per level in the Foundationist Prestige class, if any is present. The sum equals no more than 1,000 gp per level in the Foundationist Prestige class, but is guaranteed to be unguarded and accessible to the one who performs the ritual with a moderate amount of effort. Given that the magic is completely amoral, this may as easily be a heretofore unsuspected vein of gold ore as it may be treasure buried by brigands.
Material cost: 2,000 gp. Time cost: 2 hours.

Foundationist Perks:
Armchair scholar – A Foundationist with this Perk gains a permanent +2 modifier to rolls with any one Knowledge skill on the Foundationist Prestige class's list of Class Skills. This Perk can be chosen more than once, but must apply to a different Knowledge skill each time.

Droit divin – A Foundationist with this Perk can also add spells from the Cleric class list to their spellbook, in addition to spells from the Sorcerer/Wizard class list. They are still limited to selecting spells from the schools of Abjuration, Conjuration, Divination and Illusion.

Early access – As a member of the Quality, you are expected to have money to burn and a desire for novelties. Craftsmen, musicians and other producers of the finer things in life may actively approach you, offering their latest products or seeking sponsorship. The same goes for assassins, thugs and similar purveyors of malice, who hope you will pay them to become your enforcers. Once every week of game-time, roll 1d20. On a roll of 20, you are approached by someone choosing to sell an innovation, an item of information, or their services. The nature of the encounter is determined by your GM.

Gentleman's gentleman – The Foundationist gains a humanoid of its choice which serves as a loyal cohort, as per the rules outlined for the Leadership feat, with the following differences:
The gentleman's gentleman has the same ethical alignment as its master, but its moral alignment is always Evil. Its class levels are all in Expert, but its level is the same as that of its master. It always has the bonus feat Hollow, as it is in fact a construct of the Mists. The gentleman's gentleman is unfailingly loyal to its master, having no care for its own survival or comfort so long as its death and suffering serve the master – unless its will is co-opted by the Dark Powers for some reason. If a gentleman's gentleman is slain, its replacement will arrive in exactly one month of game-time.

Law unto yourself – A Foundationist with this Perk has a certain influence with law enforcement in the community in which they live. If crimes are committed in the community, local law enforcement will actively steer investigations away from the Foundationist, moving against them only if evidence of the Foundationist's involvement is considered to be overwhelming. Even if this is so, the Foundationist will receive early warning before any forces can enter their place of residence, giving them time to flee or arrange for an ambush.

Noble spirit (PF 1E only) – A Foundationist with this Perk can also add spells from the Psychic class list to their spellbook, in addition to spells from the Sorcerer/Wizard class list. They are still limited to selecting spells from the schools of Abjuration, Conjuration, Divination and Illusion.

Wealth beyond measure – Increase the Foundationist's maximum Wealth by level by a factor of 1,5. Note that having an increased maximum wealth by level does not automatically provide you with this amount of wealth. This Perk can be taken more than once.

Sample encounter

Squire Septimus Vaal is a Darkonese nobleman who has recently been recruited into the Cornerstone Foundation.
Despite the fact that he is his father's oldest son, and in spite of great efforts on his part to be a worthy nobleman and heir which included years of study, Septimus was replaced as heir by his younger brother Cedric. This owed less to Cedric's suitability for the role and more to the fact that he was born out of their father's beloved – and manipulative – second wife.

The Squire now lives in a gently decaying manor on the outskirts of Karg, forbidden to enter the grounds of his Baron father's estate in Neblus. Septimus had quietly resigned himself to obscurity, slowly settling into the dust of his quiet estate – and then the Foundation made him an offer to give meaning to his life, and he seized upon it with gusto.

Septimus is not a bad man as such. He is gregarious, learned and generous, loves his homeland but is well-aware of the realities of life. He is unusually open to all manner of people, and has friends among most of the population groups inhabiting Darkon, even including some calibans.
(In game terms, Septimus outright ignores Outsider Ratings of up to +3.)
Septimus would actually have made a better heir and Baron than his wastrel of a younger half-brother. Years of first straining himself to please and impress a father who scorned him, followed by almost a decade of depression have badly affected him, however. He is unaware of just how bad his new 'friends' are, is very impressed with the little bit of magic he is able to wield and the circle magic rituals he has been called upon to attend, and is generally eager to make his mark on history.
The PCs meet Septimus when he hires them to perform missions in his name. He is a generous and supportive employer, who will welcome the PCs in his home and invite them to dinner to regale him with tales of their adventures, especially if they succeed in completing their tasks. As the Cornerstone Foundation starts

making more serious demands of Septimus, and he in turn of the PCs, it starts to become clear that all is not right.

Septimus does not catch on that he has been used to destruction until he is actually tasked to 'liberate' a book of dark lore from Castle Avernus – unless the PCs warn him sooner.

The party may well run afoul of Kargat during one of their earlier missions, which involve retrieving ancient clay tablets from beneath Mt. Nyid or delivering bribes to merchants. The Cornerstone Foundation's intentions for Darkon should not be obvious, and the group will fade into the shadows if Septimus is ever exposed as having worked against the will of King Azalin. They will abandon their pawn without any concern – but will the PCs try to save their employer from his folly before it can get that bad? If so, will they try to take a stand against the Foundation? And what will Azalin be doing?

Septimus Vaal

LG middle-aged human Aristocrat 6 / Foundationist 2

Hit Dice: 40 hp (8 HD)
CR: 8
Initiative: +3
Speed: 30 ft.
Armor Class: 15 (+3 Dex., +2 armour)
Base Attack/Grapple: +5/+9; +9 sword cane (1d6+2; 18-20/x2); +9 pistol (1d10+1/x3)
Special Attacks: Spells
Class Abilities: Circle magic, First rite, Perk, Reputation +1
Saves: Fort. +5, Ref. +6, Will +6
Abilities: Str. 13, Dex. 16, Con.14, Int. 13, Wis. 10, Cha. 15
Skills: Appraise +6, Bluff +7, Diplomacy +8, Intimidate +7, Knowledge (geography) +4, Knowledge (history) +4, Knowledge (local: Darkon) +11, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +12, Perform (dance) +6, Ride +8, Sense motive +8
Feats: Exotic weapon proficiency (firearms), Persuasive, Weapon finesse, Weapon focus (sword cane)

Languages: Darkonese*, Balok, Dwarven, Elven, Gnome, Halfling, Mordentish, Patterna, Vaasi

Magic
Septimus casts spells as a level 2 caster; the save DC for his spells is 12 + spell level.
Spells / day: 2
Septimus tailors his limited spell selection to the occasion. If he plans to spend his time leisurely at home, he prefers to prepare two castings of *unseen servant*. If he plans to go out riding or hunting, he prepares *detect undead* and *obscuring mist*. Whenever he must deal with people of wealth and power, he favors multiple castings of *protection from evil*.

Spellbook:
1 – *Detect undead*, *obscuring mist*, *protection from evil*, *unseen servant*

Equipment:
+1 pistol; +1 sword cane; bracers of armour +2; Canjar Evil Eye amulet (5 charges); noble outfit; school ring (University of Dementlieu); signet ring (House Vaal); silver holy symbol (Ezra); spell component pouch; spellbook

Combat:
Septimus is not quick to anger, but neither is he a coward. He is aware that age is stealing the vigor and strength of his youth, but unlike many nobles he makes an effort to keep fit and maintain his skills with the rapier and his pistol. Unfortunately, Septimus has never fought for his life. If a battle erupts, he is more likely to challenge an opponent to a one-on-one duel with his trusty sword cane than he is to flank with allies. Fortunately for him, he can normally count on his loyal servants to spirit him away if things go awry; he employs some tough men who are more than capable of handling ordinary threats. If worst comes to worst, he may need to rely on the PCs to protect him.

Lair:
Septimus' villa on the outskirts of Karg is old and starting to succumb to neglect when the PCs first meet him. As they complete missions for him, the Squire receives funds from the Cornerstone Foundation that allow him to repair and refurbish the three-story building, making it luxurious on the inside even if its

outer appearance remains grim and grey. Even before the reconstructive efforts, the villa receives a steady influx of visitors, as Septimus' many friends are forever dropping in to share news or a meal.

In addition, Septimus has dedicated one of the outbuildings as a kind of hospice for wanderers and strays. He provides second-hand clothes and simple but filling food to those vagrants and other unfortunate souls who dare to enter the grounds in search of help – fewer than he would like.

Once every few years, Septimus even welcomes a Vistani caravan on his land, as its winding circuit leads it past Karg. For his consistent hospitality and genuine kindness, the caravan's bemused raunie has grudgingly awarded the nobleman with one of his most prized possessions: an amulet meant to protect him from curses.

Septimus owns a fine library, one mostly dedicated to history, politics and the peoples of Darkon, but with plenty of books on other subjects and the wider Core. The library does not contain books of arcane lore, however; Septimus owns only his one spellbook, with a smattering of minor spells in it, and this he usually keeps in his personal safe.

As a Foundationist, Septimus does own a laboratory, and he likes to spend some of his downtime here to practise his rituals.

Perks:

Armchair scholar. Septimus has received a permanent +2 to checks with Knowledge (local: Darkon). This modifier has already been factored into his statistics.

Rites:

Rite of Secrecy. While Septimus is as happy with his little magics as a child with a new toy, he has enough common sense not to broadcast his fledgling abilities to the world. When his funds allow for it, he applies this Rite in full to the spell protection from evil.



EFFECTVS · VĒTOR · IN · SEPTEMTRIONE ·

Secrets of Shadow

By Mark. H. Bartels (Rock of the FoS)

'We will burn it all down. The Core; the Clusters; the Islands. Un-Fire will consume it all.
There is a pride and a malice, higher than any tower. We will tear it down for building materials.
Upon the ashes, an eternal garden in our own image shall we plant: the Cosmic Necromancy.
In that garden shall there be laughter and song.
And all the poor prisoners will soon sing along.'

Excerpt from the Red Haunt's speech to the Irul Society at the 751 BC meeting in Kartakass.

Chapter 1: the Seed

Some evils take a long time to take their ultimate form. The evil that this tale centers on first took seed in the Demiplane of Dread in 581 BC, when a fiend which would come to be known as the Red Haunt first arrived in Darkon. Among the horrors she would bring to these embattled lands was the Shadow Weave.

But that seed would not start to flower into its first incarnation for another forty years, long after another creature arrived in the hinterlands of Arak. His name was Tressac, and he was an undead of a type known as Necropolitan (see Libris Mortis, p.114) long before the fall of Il Aluk to the Requiem. On his arrival, the year was 619 BC.

Tressac was a wanderer, a dreamer, an ascetic long before the desires of his flesh died during the Ritual of Crucimigration. Even his fellow Necropolitans had considered him an oddity, due to his obsession with a mythical land and city, his insistence that both were real and could be found. The name of the land was *Irul*; the name of its vaunted city of dark stone was *Helsion*. In that land, so went the myth and so had Tressac preached to anyone willing to listen, there was a home for any creature spat upon by so-called 'normal' society. In that city, so Tressac believed with all his unbeating heart, there were records of lore belonging to the creatures of the dark, ranging back to the beginning of time.

In his search for Irul, Tressac had wandered far from the company of his peers, had told the tales of Irul to many creatures of the dark. And he had done terrible things, guiding his followers to attack cities of those he claimed had suppressed the truth of Irul; humans, dwarves, elves, gnomes, halflings. He had allowed his followers to feed, and had raided libraries in search of knowledge to guide him to the only home that mattered to him, the city of Helsion. Everything that dismissed or rejected the myth, he burned to ash.

It was no wonder, then, that one day when Tressac's horde walked into a fog, he alone emerged, far from all he had known: he had arrived in the domain of Arak. The fate of the horde must remain a matter of conjecture, for it is not recorded in this tale; only that of the dreamer questing for his glorious city of the night, who now found himself in a primitive and backwards land of miners and farmers. To say that he was initially incensed would be an understatement.

As Tressac learned more about the lands he now inhabited, his anger soon turned to horror and disgust; by his standards, all the Core was backwards and violent, and he constantly feared for his freedom due to the presence of potent Dark Lords and Ladies, many of whom held power over the undead that he did not understand. Still, he soldiered on, determined to keep collecting knowledge so he might find the way to Irul; he considered his predicament to be a test of his determination and skill, rather than a dead end.

One fateful night, as Tressac crept through the savage land of Forlorn in search of druidic lore, he met another traveller. She had likewise braved the goblyn-haunted woods to discover the secrets of the secretive wardens of nature. The stranger was a shape-shifting fiend; beautiful, energetic, selfish, but also ravenously intellectual. While the Necropolitan was initially repulsed by her otherworldly vitality, he felt a grudging respect for her scholarship, which was returned with

equal reluctance. The two monsters got to talking about their existence in the Demiplane and their studies.

Their conversation would last the night through, then into the next day and night. Several times, the two monsters were beset by goblyns and undead wolves, but these faltered and withered when faced with their joint defenses. In truth, neither fiend nor undead paid the horrors that raged around them much mind, so captivated were they by their exchange of lore.

At the dawn of the third day, the Red Haunt and Tressac shook hands, certainly not as friends, but as kindred spirits in their love of knowledge and power. They agreed to meet again, at a certain place and time.

The year was 622 BC, and the Irul Society had been born, had the two villains but known it.

Chapter 2: the Flower

When the two monsters met again in 626 BC, they were not alone.

Tressac, craving his legions of old, had gone out of his way to find and invite creatures which were open to the idea of exchanging secrets, tricks, and goods on a basis of equality. While they were not many, and most of them were weak, crawling things, a few *did* attend the meeting, in a cave system underlying the Forgotten Hills.

If Tressac gave thought to how the Red Haunt would react to meeting his invitees, he supposed that she might kill a few to sate her hunger. He anticipated having to step in to keep the more interesting guests alive, but that suited him; he would be able to establish his authority over the various creatures and to isolate the Red Haunt, making her controllable or an easy target once he had built his prospective lackeys up a bit.

He did not anticipate the fiend bringing her own guest, a Darkonese lich named Wormschild. Nor had he expected her to be a gracious hostess to the assembled creatures, as her hunger for knowledge far outstripped her physical hunger.

Knowledge and self-made goods were exchanged at the meeting. From the perspective of the various guests, the assembly was a smashing success – right up to the point that Tressac and Wormschild flew into a vicious argument. Where the Necropolitan was a dreamer and a quester, the lich was a historian and scholar. The one clung to ancient tales and wanted to make them real; the other stood by hard facts and wanted to record them. Neither undead was willing to back down, and things might have gotten ugly if the Red Haunt had not intervened.

The she-fiend asked Tressac to explain his fascination – his obsession – with Irul, which the Necropolitan immediately did. He held the same kind of glowing sermon that had once brought him loyal followers, expecting at least some of the horrors he had brought here to fall into line with him. Instead, rather than be taken by the tale, the Red Haunt and Wormschild analyzed the body of myth he had cobbled together out of fragments over the centuries, and asked the assembly whether any of it sounded familiar. To Tressac's dismay, his darkly shining ideal became not a rallying-cry for the gathered misfits, but a subject of at least polite discussion.

As the third day dawned, the creatures in attendance agreed to meet again in four years. To Tressac's confusion and chagrin, it was the Red Haunt who suggested naming the four-yearly meeting 'the gathering of the Irul Society.' She even suggested naming whatever place they gathered in 'Helsion' for the occasion before she left!

The year was 626 BC.

The next time the Irul Society met, their Helsion was a crumbling villa in Invidia, once the home of one of Bakholis' toadies. With the family that had owned it dead due to the machinations of Gabrielle Aderre, the various creatures felt safe enough to gather there for their wheeling and dealing – but the meeting erupted in vicious arguments right from the start.

As before, the primary movers of the group, Tressac and the Red Haunt, had invited new guests. On Tressac's side, there were various undead he had almost literally unearthed during his travels through the Core. The Red Haunt, however, had invited several mortals to attend.

Tressac demanded that these 'intruders' be either slain out of hand or else turned by one of the other attendees. If any of them were especially

worthy, he said he might be found willing to turn them into 'exalted' beings like himself through the Ritual of Crucimigration. He called upon the assembled creatures to support his wishes in this, and did get quite some support … but not the majority vote.

It now turned out that the Red Haunt and Wormschild had not, as Tressac had expected, let their contacts within the Society lie fallow between gatherings. They had remained in contact, be it by correspondence or magic items, with a sizeable portion of the Society's membership – the portion that saw benefit in maintaining beneficial relations with two such mighty beings. And the handful of mortal men and women who had sought entry into the Irul Society were known to and (be it ever so grudgingly) accepted by all of them.

Majority vote ruled the day – or night, as the case may be – and the Irul Society conducted its business as before. Tressac preached the glories of Irul to any who would listen. The various members traded minor items of power, secrets, and spells. The mortal attendants turned out to have good items and lore to trade, which granted them greater acceptance within the group.

When the sun dawned on the third day, the Irul Society agreed to meet again in four years' time.

The year was 630 BC.

Meeting followed upon meeting, on a four-yearly basis. From cave to abandoned keep to marshland to forest deep, the outcasts of light and dark continued to creep together, warming their bones and scales and hides by huddling together.

Tressac continued to attend because the society bore the name of his beloved Irul, and because he had to admit that his strength and storehouse of knowledge grew a little every time he did and traded secrets with the various members. Other than this, though, he was dissatisfied with the whole arrangement. He had expected to once again become the prophet of a horde, strong enough to sweep the petty cities of man and elf and dwarf before him like chaff. Instead, he felt that he was in competition for the souls – or what passed for them – of his audience with the Red Haunt and her cronies. His attempts to find clues to the location of Irul had no result, something he blamed on his inability to raid archives, temples, and libraries as he had once done.

In order to win the Society over to following his bidding, Tressac offered to perform the Ritual of Crucimigration on anyone who joined, suppressing his loathing of mortals for the sake of power.

The Red Haunt offered the assembly formulas she had developed, based on the secrets of Alchemical Philosophy. She called her creation *the Dark Aeon*; the concoction would effectively halt physical aging.

Tressac offered the assembly access to the body of secret lore he had assembled, supposedly gleaned from the archives of Helsion, over his long years of searching.

The Red Haunt offered the Irul Society access to the Shadow Weave and its unique secrets. Her ally Wormschild agreed to trade spells based in the Shadow Weave, which he had been developing ever since he began his alliance with the fiend.

Every time Tressac thought he had found something that would gain him the full adoration of his following, it turned out that the Red Haunt had some other gift of at least equal value to offer. At every meeting, it seemed to Tressac that the fiend's influence in the Society had grown a little stronger, her contacts with the other members a little tighter. And all the time, Wormschild was picking away at the body of myths that the Necropolitan had worn as a cloak of glory and unholy inspiration, pointing out contradictions and inconsistencies, until the darkly radiant garment of tales started to look very tattered indeed.

In part to save face, and in part to try and gain some control over the forces threatening to sweep away what little control Tressac had left over the Society, the Necropolitan created a program of exercise, study, and meditation. This program combined some of his own teachings and works with those of his opponents to create unique and potent results. As such, it was well-received by the Society, though not all members partook of it.

Only after the heady rush of this approval had left him did Tressac realize that he had now thoroughly linked his dreams of Irul to the teachings of his rivals…

Scion of Irul

Regardless of whether you truly believe in Irul or you are just out to survive in a dark world which seeks to enslave you, a Scion of Irul has but two goals: survival and the increase of your own knowledge and power! A Scion of Irul draws from the wells of the Shadow Weave and the lore of Irul, mythical land of darkness and monsters, to bolster their ability to anticipate and escape harm and to increase their knowledge and power. They also partake of the knowledge of other Scions, trading with them in knowledge and items at their unique black market.

Prerequisites (3.5):

Alignment: Any non-Good

Skills: Concentration 5 ranks, Hide 2 ranks, Knowledge (arcana, psionics, or religion) 8 ranks, Move Silently 2 ranks

Feats: Conjunctive Mind or Shadow Weave Magic; one item creation feat

Magic / Psionics: Able to either cast 2nd-level spells or manifest 2nd-level powers

Hit Dice: d4

Skill points / level: 2 + Int modifier

Class skills: Concentration, Craft, Disguise, Hide, Knowledge (all), Listen, Move Silently, Profession, Psicraft, Spellcraft, Spot

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Scions of Irul gain no proficiency in any weapon or armour.

Spells / powers per day: A Scion of Irul focuses on gaining greater power. Thus, when a new level in the prestige class is gained, the character gains new spells or power points per day, as well as spells or powers known, as if they had gained a level in whatever spellcasting or manifesting class they belonged to before adding the prestige class. They do not, however, gain any other benefit a character of that class would have gained. This essentially means that they add the level of Scion of Irul to the level of whatever other spellcasting or manifesting class the character has, then determine spells or power points per day and caster level accordingly. If a character had levels in multiple spellcasting and/or manifesting classes before taking levels in the prestige class, they must choose at each level of the prestige class to which spellcasting or manifesting class they add the new level for purposes of determining their spells and/or powers per day.

Word of Irul: At 1st, 3rd and 5th level, your trading with the Society and access to the myths of Irul grants you dark insights into powers you should not be able to touch. Select one spell from the Cleric class list or the Sorcerer/Wizard class list, or one power from the Psion class list. This spell or power should be one level lower than the strongest

LVL	Base Atk.	Fort.	Ref.	Will	Special	Magic / Psionics
1	+ 0	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1	Word of Irul; Signs of the Dark	+1 caster / manifester level
2	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1	Blood of Irul; Shadow Step	+1 caster / manifester level
3	+ 2	+ 1	+ 1	+ 2	Word of Irul; Herald of the Dark	+1 caster / manifester level
4	+ 3	+ 2	+ 2	+ 2	Heart of Irul; Speed of Darkness	+1 caster / manifester level
5	+ 3	+ 2	+ 2	+ 3	Word of Irul; Dark Aeon	+1 caster / manifester level

spells or powers you can access at this time. You may now add this spell or power to your list of spells/powers known, your spellbook, or the list of spells you may pray for. You may, as a psionic character, select an arcane or divine spell; you may, as a spellcasting character, select a psionic power; you may, as an arcane spellcaster, select a divine spell, and vice versa. Alter this spell's or power's components as appropriate. Consult with your DM when selecting a spell or power.

Signs of the Dark (Ex): One of the greatest difficulties to a Scion of Irul may be finding like-minded spirits between meetings, given that members of the Society tend to disguise themselves. Signs of the dark is, effectively, a unique language composed of gestures and other forms of recognition. The way someone dresses or parts their hair can be part of the language, which is as much a secret language as Druidic. Unlike Druidic, it is also a highly mutable language, which is updated at every four-year meeting of the Irul Society. Even if someone were to betray the Society and its secrets to outsiders, they would not be able to recognize a use of signs of the dark once they are found out and are banned from further meetings.

Blood of Irul (Su): When you reach 2nd level in this prestige class, the Irul Society presents you with a draught of one of its unique alchemical formulas. Once you have partaken of the blood of Irul, the rushing energy of the dark forever flows through your veins and lies whispering in your very bones. You gain a +1 to Initiative for every two levels you have in this prestige class.

Shadow Step (Su): Shadows and darkness are your best friends; they will embrace you and aid you in surviving the trials and tribulations an unfair world heaps upon you. Starting from the 2nd level in the prestige class, as long as you are in shadow or any sort of darkness, you gain a +10 bonus to speed on all forms of movement.

Herald of the Dark (Su): As you delve deeper into the community of the darkness, you gain an aura that is recognizable to others like you. Starting from 3rd level, when you are dealing with non-Good creatures, you gain a +2 to all social skill checks, including Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, and Sense Motive.

Speed of Darkness (Su): The darkness continues to be your best friend, ensuring your survival. Starting from 4th level in the prestige class, you gain the power to travel instantly from one dark place to another. Effectively, as long as you are within shadow or darkness of any kind, you can teleport once a day to another place that is within shadow or darkness. Most Scions of Irul use this power to travel to a previously-prepared hideout if they are sorely pressed by enemies.

Heart of Irul: The energy of the Shadow Weave; the passionate vision of Irul; these combine in you at 4th level to bolster your will to survive and continue on, in spite of all opposition. Twice a day, if you fail a save versus any effect that would have a negative effect on you, you may re-roll that save as an immediate action. You may take the better result of the two rolls.

Dark Aeon (Su): At the 5th level of the prestige class, you gain a single draught of the *Dark Aeon*, a secret formula derived from a combination of High Alchemy and the Shadow Weave. The *Dark Aeon* effectively halts your physical aging, and prevents your physical ability scores from degrading as you age. You may still improve your physical ability scores as you level up, but they will not change due to natural or unnatural aging effects. If you are mortal, you will still die at the end of your natural lifespan.

The years ground on, with Tressac growing ever angrier and more desperate to seize control over the Irul Society. From his perspective, the group had devolved from a promising body of potential recruits into a black market for weaklings and cowards, bereft of the grand vision that had guided his way. Rather than seek out fabled Irul and burn down the world that denied it, the members of the Society seemed content to study and trade. He despaired.

And then the year 740 BC rolled around, the Society gathered in the ruins of a certain manor house in Barovia … and for the first time, the Red Haunt was not in attendance. Even with the world trembling during the convulsions of the Grand Conjunction and reality seeming to succumb to madness, only this fact seemed significant to Tressac: *the Red Haunt was not there*.

Sensing his opportunity to have finally come, Tressac started throwing his arcane weight around at the assembly of the Irul Society. Although Wormschild was in attendance, as well as his new invitee, a Hag named Mother Hippe, the Necropolitan managed to bypass them.

Tressac preached his vision of Irul and the glorious city of Helsion as salvation from the chaos. He also scattered about spells of control among the terrified attendants; Enchantment for those who yet breathed, Necromancy for those who did not. His power in both had increased with his grudging embrace of the Shadow Weave, he had to admit. Finally, finally, the Society reacted in the way Tressac had desired for so long; when the second day dawned, the mortals he had so despised fled in terror, and his opponents were in disarray.

Those who remained were hanging on his every word, and soon were baying for the blood of the citizens of the light, those who Tressac preached were the reason why they were forced to lurk in obscurity instead of walking tall and proud through their own lands.

When the third day dawned, only those members of the Society willing to listen to Tressac were still in attendance, the rest having fled under cover of darkness. When the third night fell, the Necropolitan guided his ragtag band – not much of a horde, not even an organized army – to a nearby Barovian village and led them in butchery and pillaging before continuing up the nearby mountain flank to rifle through the archives of a long-abandoned monastery.

It was a pointless act of slaughter; the monastery was unguarded and unwarded, uncared for by the humans who had eked out a fearful life in the valley below, but Tressac had reveled in every moment. Even though the archives held little to nothing of interest, he considered the slaughter to have been eminently useful, as it served to galvanize his new troops. Anointed with the blood of the innocent, Tressac closed the 740 BC meeting of the Irul Society, bade his troops go to ground, to train and prepare, and await his call for the next raid. While he was overjoyed to finally be able to continue his grand quest for Irul, the Necropolitan dreamer was not so foolish as to ignore the presence of the Dark Lords and Ladies, and risk their stealing his newfound control from him.

In 744 and 748 BC, Tressac convened the Irul Society and guided those who came in three nights and two days of butchery and theft. He aimed his baying followers at soft targets; isolated villages, orphanages, poor houses, abandoned shrines. All poorly guarded, all unable to turn aside the magical and psychic might of the Necropolitan's little horde.

Those members of the Society who disagreed with Tressac dared not speak out; he seemed to be suddenly unstoppable, as though possessed by some unholy energy.

Indeed, Tressac sensed his powers growing, as though he had been blessed by some dark god. There were discomforts that came with his increasing might, but these he took to be temporary things as he adapted. Surely, when he achieved his goal of burning down the world of mortals and forced open the road to Irul, he would be free of all trifling distractions, like the maggots that suddenly crawled in his flesh and spilled out at inopportune times.

At the height of Tressac's passion, in the year 748 BC, he guided his baying followers

and animated pawns in the assault on a Falkovnian town. While many of his Scions fell, so did all of the defenders, and the rout was complete. Tressac let his creatures run wild through the streets, torturing, murdering, feasting, while he perused the town's records. He found nothing useful, but was determined to continue…

And then it happened. Every member of the Society, be they with Tressac or opposed to him, felt it: a sudden surge and shift in the Shadow Weave that left them weak-kneed and trembling. The sensation transformed into words, spoken into all of their minds in the eerily seductive voice of the Red Haunt: "***Three years. Cortton. Come.***"

When he regained his footing and walked out into the village streets, Tressac was alone with the dead and his undead puppets. No matter how much he first called and then screamed for his followers, they had fled in terror before the voice of the demon in their minds.

In the three years until the appointed meeting, Tressac did manage to hunt down his disloyal horde. But no matter how much he first wheedled, then threatened, none would return to his side. One normally sly-tongued ghast told him to his face that he was insane, and his quest for Irul a madman's delusion. "I should never have listened to you," the creature said before it leapt on him in fear-fueled rage. "*She is coming back, and she will punish us all!*"

Tressac managed to fight the maddened corpse-eater off and had his zombie slaves tear it apart, but the creature's words continued to echo in his mind down those three years. *Punishment*? Some foul, backwoods fiend, who had slunk her way into a gathering of his design and had turned his followers' hearts from his glorious dream to a black market for creatures content to hide, would punish *him*?! The more he chewed over those words, the angrier Tressac became, and he visited that anger on any target he deemed soft enough for his zombies to take.

For three years, Tressac hunted down those members of the Irul Society who had followed him until the voice of the fiend had scattered them, be they blight or werebeast, undead or abomination. He honed his craftsmanship in the creation of undead slaves, and he sated his bloodlust by tormenting the weak and innocent. Three years, with the unholy power inside him growing apace with his pain and discomfort, the maggots now spilling out of him with every word he spoke, yet never devouring him to the point that he would lose cohesion.

The year was 751 BC. And in the dead of winter, Tressac heard the single word, whispered through the Shadow Weave: "***Come.***"

He had been in northern Darkon. Incensed beyond words, Tressac started his march to Kartakass. He started out with a small army of zombies, but they fell along the way, devoured by the power boiling up inside of their master – and he never noticed their fall.

When he arrived at Cortton, a blighted village in the hinterland of Kartakass, Tressac was pleased enough to see its vast graveyard. He was offended and angry to realize that there were still humans alive in the walled town adjoining that supply of corpses. They were a mere, withering fraction of a handful, but still. Also, he was displeased when he sensed that the Irul Society had gathered not in a cave, not in a ruin, but in the Lustful Fiend Inn. They were inside an edifice *dedicated to the comfort of living mortals*, disregarding his beautiful dream of a land all their own, mimicking the weakness and venal desires of lesser creatures!

Even in the grip of his fury, Tressac was not yet bereft of all sense. He did not simply burst into the inn; he cloaked himself with every spell and power at his disposal and crept up on the building, listened to the gathering inside.

It seemed to him that every member of the Society that had run from him was gathered inside. They were the worst of the lot in his eyes; the weak, the cowardly, the mortal, the intellectual, the doubters. Unlike previous gatherings, though, they were not exchanging secrets and bidding on new items of power;

there was a set program for the evening, with a series of lectures planned.

First, there was some human, one that had been introduced into the Society by the Red Haunt. Before the gathered beings and monsters, this foolish man spoke – first haltingly and uncomfortably, then full of pain and fury – of fantasies and fables; shadowy overlords supposedly in control of the Core and the Mist-led lands beyond. The human prattled about secret influences and machinations that beggared belief. Tressac would have laughed at the creature before he slew him – but to his consternation and rage, others in the assembly started to chime in!

It was ridiculous! Ludicrous! But the creatures that should have been following Tressac's shining dream were starting to agree with some pitiful human lunatic, providing what they called 'supporting evidence' for the lore he claimed came from some cabal of human illusionists. How could they not see that this was all it was, illusion and shadow-play to finally grant the Red Haunt control over the Society?!

Next, the Red Haunt spoke. She spoke of the creatures of the Society. She spoke of their isolation, of their pain, of the unfairness of their fate. To this point, Tressac actually found himself nodding along; all of this was true, and all of this could be remedied by finding Irul. But next, she spoke of the human's fanciful overlords and compared the members of the assembly to game pieces on some vast board. Preposterous! Poppycock!

What the fiend said next shocked the Necropolitan to his core: "If this world is unfair, my friends, if we are being pushed about as game pieces, then we should overturn the board. We will burn it all down. The Core; the Clusters; the Islands. *Un-Fire* will consume it all.

"There is a pride and a malice, higher than any tower. We will tear it down for building materials. Upon the ashes, an eternal garden in our own image shall we plant: the Cosmic Necromancy. In that garden shall there be laughter and song. And all the poor prisoners will soon sing along."

Before Tressac's eyes, the fiend conjured some sort of flame upon her saber. It was blue; it was wispy; it wailed like a chorus of damned souls, scratched along his undead nerve endings and sent the maggots squirming. She blathered nonsense about this *Un-Fire*, preached about burning down the world and forging a new one out of this 'secret' she had found beyond the Core.

In short, it was clear to Tressac that the Red Haunt was finally ready to show her hand. She had stolen the essence of his dream, warped it to the point that it became unrecognizable, had cloaked it in new terms for her own purpose. Irul was real, Tressac knew it in his heart, but the Red Haunt would destroy it along with everything else for the sake of her own dream, and only ashes and laughing fiends would remain…!

The next thing he knew, Tressac was running into the common room where the Society had gathered, screaming at the top of his lungs, maggots spilling from his lips. Unto the figure of the Red Haunt, his enemy, the destroyer of his dream, he delivered a blow with his cane that carried all the power of his magic and his hatred – and she simply sidestepped and tripped him. As he fell, sprawling, the last he saw of Cortton was the fiend towering over him, terrible in her beauty, wailing fire dancing on her blade and contempt in her eyes.

"I deliver onto you the consequences of your choices, *fool*," were the last words he heard before that fiery blade tore into him and sundered his heart and his spine. He tried to cast spells, but his throat was choked with panicked maggots, and the flames tore through him too quickly…! Darkness ate at the corners of his vision … and then there was Mist.

The histories of the Core do not record the fate of Tressac, although it did not end there. Neither do they record the fate of the Irul Society, although it continued to creep and crawl through the shadows, meeting every four years in the lost corners of the Core to trade secrets and trinkets.

Neither do the histories of the Core record the new darkness that was born after the Red Haunt's presentation in Cortton of 751 BC … but they shall in time.

They shall.

Dread Possibility: Irul Exists

When the Red Haunt slew Tressac in the common room of the Lustful Fiend Inn, his body turned to ashes and wisps of fog before the eyes of the assembly, and they have not seen hide nor hair of him since. As far as the Irul Society and the Centurions of the Night know, he is finally, completely dead and gone. Certainly, Tressac expected that this was his end.

It was to his considerable surprise, therefore, that he awoke in a beautiful castle of basalt and black marble. Tressac found that the wound dealt to him by the fiend's saber had been healed – mostly. It still seeped, allowing maggots to escape through it as well as his mouth whenever he spoke, and it stung a bit. Not so badly that he could not ignore it, however, so that is what he did.

As he wandered around the castle, Tressac met others like himself: Necropolitans. They were polite enough, though they looked at his disheveled state and the creeping vermin that fell from him with some distaste. When Tressac asked where he was, they told him that this was, of course, the city of Helsion in the land of Irul.

For a time, Tressac existed in a state of heretofore-unknown delight. He did not understand how or why, but he had finally arrived in the land of his dreams! Everything was as he had expected it to be; a city of dark purity that no merely mortal mind could have conceived of, under an eternal night sky. Creatures of darkness wandered its streets, and its temples and libraries held records of a glorious history of dignity and might that stretched back to the very dawn of time.

Yes, everything was as he had wanted it – except for one thing, which he only discovered after months of study in the city's archives, because none of Helsion's citizens had considered it worth discussing. It was, after all, perfectly normal that the citizens of Helsion should engage in trade with the neighbouring cities. Cities inhabited by humans, elves, dwarves, halflings…

When Tressac flew into a rage on seeing the living on the streets of *his* beautiful city, when he ranted and raved about the purity of the city, his fellow Necropolitans restrained him before he could hurt their trading partners. They harshly scolded and lectured him, pointing out the fact that Helsion was but one city in a whole land. Even if they wanted to rule, there were not – never had been – enough creatures in Helsion to claim the whole country. No, it was far better to exist as they did, providing magic items capable of simulating real sunlight so the mortals could grow their crops and stay healthy, maintaining good relations with them.

Not to mention, Helsion needed the living. Time and decay eventually claimed even the mightiest inhabitant of Helsion, and they needed to maintain their numbers. They needed volunteers to be Turned, in other words. Also, they needed the influx of fresh ideas produced by the living, as undead minds stagnated over time. They pointed to Tressac himself as a prime example of the truth of their words; he was ravaged by grubs because he had not cared for his body, and his mind was fixated on some ludicrous notion of undead supremacy. Really, the best thing he could do for Irul in general and Helsion in particular was to lay himself down in some cozy crypt and await oblivion, rather than keep causing trouble.

Although he is not aware of it, Tressac's acts of inciting slaughter and betrayal of his allies have earned him Darklordship of his own domain. His bitter insistence on 'liberating' Irul from its 'subservient' position vis-à-vis the living inhabitants of the domain has prevented him from exploring its borders and discovering the fact that he is in fact a prisoner as well as lord.

Chapter 3: the Thorn

What the Red Haunt had come to believe, over the course of her existence in the Demiplane of Dread, was that there were unseen puppet-masters playing with the fate of all the creatures in that gaol-plane. She believed in the existence of the Dark Powers. Long before she first met Tressac, she had already been discontent with the interference in her own studies and experiments. After her fateful meeting with

the Necropolitan and the founding of the Irul Society, that discontent only grew stronger.

Contrary to what Tressac believed, the fiend had not planned to take a firm grasp of the Society and turn it into her tool. She was far more interested in learning what its members – weak, desperate, but determined and creative creatures – were capable of coming up with when it came to preserving their existence and freedom. When she opposed Tressac, it was more to keep the hearts and minds of the Scions of Irul independent – and yes, because it amused her to torment the deluded, undead dreamer a bit.

Over time, the Red Haunt had actually grown quite fond of the Irul Society, insofar as she was capable of being fond of any group, as there was always something interesting to learn or buy at their assemblies … and so it irked her whenever she heard stories that implied interference by the Dark Powers and their favourite toys, the Darklords.

In 740 BC, the Red Haunt's travels had led her to witness the formation of the distant Wartorn Cluster and the volcanic eruption of *Un-Fire* in the primal domain of Masogan. The persona of the Red Haunt known as the Centurion was born after witnessing all of this, and she conceived her vision for the future. A vision based not on myths and fables, cobbled together by a deluded dreamer, but on the ravenous desire to be free to create and study with impunity! In the depths of her dark joy, the fiend could think of no better group from which to recruit her new order of dark champions than the Irul Society.

In 751 BC, the Red Haunt held a presentation before the surviving members of the group with the aid of a disillusioned member of the Fraternity of Shadows: Aleister Smythe. Presenting to the Society a glimpse of the true mechanics of the world they inhabited, the Red Haunt shared with them her vision:

The Demiplane of Dread is, in its own way, beautiful and magnificent. Reality is malleable there in a way it is in no other place, and it offers an opportunity for eternal study and experimentation, a garden of dark delights and play without end. Really, the only thing standing in the way of such an idyllic future is the Dark Powers, who play everyone in their playground for puppets and fools without revealing the rules of the game.

But *Un-Fire* will devour anything and everything … and the Red Haunt's own daughter Clementine demonstrated that the use of *Un-Fire* could be taught even to those who had not travelled to Masogan to witness that howling eruption of Mt. Brightwell.

Centurions of the Night

Not all surviving members of the Irul Society joined the Red Haunt in her bid to overthrow the cosmic order of the Demiplane, but enough did that she could start up her new order: the Centurions of the Night. While the Scions of Irul slunk off to once again hide in the shadows, the Centurions started preparations to begin their grand assault on reality.

The Centurions are an apocalyptic society in the truest sense of the word. Following on the revelations of the Dark Powers' existence and influence, they seek the destruction of the Demiplane as it is and the death of the Dark Powers. From this death and destruction, they seek to distill the power to become the *new* Dark Powers and rebuild the Demiplane in their own image.

Like the Fraternity of Shadows, the Centurions of the Night are scholars of the dark truths of their world. Unlike the Fraternity, the Centurions seek power not through perfected understanding and ascension, but through conflict and applied power. Unlike many other, similar groups, the Centurions do not tolerate infighting of any kind; treachery leads to excommunication, and excommunication leads to death. Differences of opinion must be resolved through discussion and compromise – at least between Centurions.

They are generals, merchants, scholars; all power is power, and all power will lead to the Great Burning, followed by the Cosmic Necromancy. The Centurions recruit all those willing to learn and act in support of the cause, capable of wielding power by tooth and claw, by steel and by spell or power. Gender, species, age – none of these things matter. Any patron whose power continues to flow in service of

the Centurions' agenda is welcomed, with the exception of the Great Old Ones and powers of the Far Realm.

Only the pure of heart and noble of spirit are unwelcome among the Centurions; according to the Evil, because such people are too bigoted to accept them; according to the Neutral, because Good is too narrow-minded to accept the necessity of the chaos and slaughter that will lead to a better world.

In one hand, the Centurions wield the secrets of the Shadow Weave; secrets that perhaps could not have been discovered in any other realm. In the other, they hold the vile energy known only as *Un-Fire*, first vented from some unimaginable void when the domains of the Wartorn Cluster were forced together. *Un-Fire* manifests as wispy, blue flames that wail like the damned. It constantly devours itself and regenerates upon what it has devoured. The energy constantly hungers to devour all that is, and it will devour even the planar fabric of the Demiplane itself. When it is siphoned out of the void and into the world, it is perhaps creation itself that screams, rather than the eerie blue flames.

The Centurions of the Night look forward to the day that all the Demiplane and the Dark Powers themselves will scream as they are devoured by *Un-Fire*. Of course, it will take a great deal of time and effort before that glorious night falls across the Mists, and the Centurions may fall and rise many times until it comes. But it will be worth every act of restraint – to prevent the Dark Powers from ensnaring them – and all their patience and effort, both subtle and overt.

It *will* be worth it.

Dread Possibility: the Unimaginable Prisoner
It is possible that *Un-Fire* is itself a prisoner of the Dark Powers, suspended somewhere in the Mists. Trapped there with nothing to feed on but itself, this force can only reach out when it is conjured by lesser creatures. Maybe that is its punishment. But if it is being punished, does that mean it is sentient? And if it is sentient, what sins could it have committed to be so tormented by the true masters of Ravenloft? Perhaps *Un-Fire*'s crimes would be wholly incomprehensible to mortal or even immortal minds, as they were performed in primal times, by an intelligence with a completely different perception of reality.

If this is so, then the scope of the Dark Powers' judgment and torment could be greater than anyone has dared to imagine – or perhaps this is a rare instance where they worked in collusion with other beings of power to restrain a threat too great for even them to bear? Might the Unspoken Pact itself be compensation for the Dark Powers taking custody of a cosmic horror even the gods feared to deal with?

Role in a campaign:

Centurions of the Night can be both friend and foe; they weave cunning plans and have an agenda that stretches across decades, even centuries. Many of the Centurions are monsters with extended or infinite lifespans; others are simply devoted to the concept of creating a better world.

It is the latter aspect that distinguishes the Centurions from any other doomsday cult; the point of everything the Centurions do is to improve upon the creation in which they exist, both before and after the death of the Dark Powers.

A party might come upon a Centurion laboring to end plague in an area, as part of one of their Vows. Or they might meet a Centurion gathering money to preserve and renovate a local orphanage. In some cases, the Centurions might even sponsor or directly assist adventurers in fighting some force of darkness. These acts serve to balance the evil acts the Centurions do, and thus prevent the Dark Powers from ensnaring them. But they also take place because the Centurions genuinely believe in making the world a better place – granted, by their own definition of 'better' – not to mention out of their desire to prove that they are more than caricatures of villains, puppets to be moved about at the behest of faceless puppetmasters.

Of course, a party might also realize the presence of a Centurion of the Night when they find one gathering up an area's lycanthropes or roving undead, training them in group tactics and setting them loose on isolated communities – or worse, taking them away for some unknown purpose. They might run into a

blasted wasteland and later find out it had been a testing zone for some new weapon or spell the Centurions have been working on.

And then again, adventurers might discover that a monster they have been hunting was more than they had counted on when it suddenly summons help – or teleports away into the waiting arms of its allies, who are prepared to back it up the next time the party catches up.

Individual Centurions do regularly get up to 'recreational' mayhem, but abide by two hard rules: no infighting, and Centurion business comes first. They also have orders to look for likely recruits, to expand their numbers – and some adventurers might fit the profile of the kind of people they are looking for.

A PC Centurion of the Night can provide considerable assets to a party, and is not as impossible a concept as it might seem. The Demiplane of Dread could stand to be better than it is. The Dark Powers do deserve to be taken down. And if a heroic adventurer is among the Centurions of the Night, they might be able to make the new world a better place for those inhabiting it.

So long as they maintain secrecy about the group's plans, a PC Centurion could be on the greatest adventure of all: a quest to redeem the world.

Centurion of the Night

Prerequisites (3.5):

Alignment: Any non-Good

Skills: Diplomacy 4 ranks, Knowledge (Ravenloft) 4 ranks.

Feats: Leadership; Conjunctive Mind or Shadow Weave Magic.

Magic / Psionics: Able to cast 2nd-level spells or manifest 2nd-level psionic powers.

Special: Must either have one natural attack or the feat Improved Unarmed, Strike. Must be able to speak *Patterna*.

Hit Dice: d6

Skill points / level: 2 + Int modifier

Class skills: Concentration, Craft, Diplomacy, Intimidate, Knowledge (all except Ravenloft), Perform, Profession, Psicraft, Ride, Sense Motive, Spellcraft

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: The Centurion of the Night is proficient with the gauntlet, dagger, throwing dagger, light mace, heavy mace, light crossbow, heavy crossbow, throwing axe, handaxe, shortsword, longsword,

LVL	BAB	Fort.	Ref.	Will	Special	Manifesting / Spellcasting
1	+ 0	+ 0	+ 0	+ 2	*Cornicen*; Un-Fire I; Vow of Virtue	–
2	+ 1	+ 0	+ 0	+ 3	*Inferna*; Black Ring	+ 1 spellcasting or manifesting level
3	+ 2	+ 1	+ 1	+ 3		+ 1 spellcasting or manifesting level
4	+ 3	+ 1	+ 1	+ 4	*Inferna*; Black Hand	+ 1 spellcasting or manifesting level
5	+ 3	+ 1	+ 1	+ 4	*Consilium*, Un-Fire II; Knightly Virtue	–
6	+ 4	+ 2	+ 2	+ 5	Black Circle Leader; *Satelles*	+ 1 spellcasting or manifesting level
7	+ 5	+ 2	+ 2	+ 5		+ 1 spellcasting or manifesting level
8	+ 6	+ 2	+ 2	+ 6	*Inferna*; Snake's Head	+ 1 spellcasting or manifesting level
9	+ 6	+ 3	+ 3	+ 6	*Conventiculum*; Un-Fire III; Knightly Virtue	–
10	+ 7	+ 3	+ 3	+ 7	*Inferna*; Serpent's Coil	+ 1 spellcasting or manifesting level
11	+ 8	+ 3	+ 3	+ 7	Great Circle Leader; *Satelles*	+ 1 spellcasting or manifesting level
12	+ 9	+ 4	+ 4	+ 8	*Hypokosmos*	+ 1 spellcasting or manifesting level
13	+ 9	+ 4	+ 4	+ 8	*Hypokosmos*; Un-Fire IV	–

scimitar, saber, warhammer, and bolas. A Centurion of the Night does not gain proficiency with any armor or shields.

Magic

Spells / Powers per Day: At 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 10th, 11th and 12th level, a Centurion gains new spells or power points per day, as well as spells or powers known, as if they had gained a level in whatever spellcasting or manifesting class they belonged to before adding the prestige class. They do not, however, gain any other benefit a character of that class would have gained. This essentially means that they add the level of Centurion of the Night to the level of whatever other spellcasting or manifesting class the character has, then determine spells or power points per day and caster or manifester level accordingly. If a character had levels in multiple spellcasting and/or manifesting classes before taking levels in the prestige class, they must choose at each level of the prestige class to which spellcasting or manifesting class they add the new level for purposes of determining their spells and/or powers per day.

Cornicen (Su): One round per day per level in the prestige class, a Centurion can call the Legions of the Night to them, or bolster them in battle, by raising their voice in a powerful ululation, which can be heard within a range of 100 ft. per the character's level in this prestige class.

When used to call troops, *Cornicen* manifests as a horrible wailing noise, which has a different effect on creatures based on their alignment.

If the Centurion is Evil-aligned, Good-aligned creatures must make a Will saving throw against a DC of 10 + the Centurion's level in the prestige class + the Centurion's Charisma modifier, or else become *sickened*. Neutral-aligned creatures must make a Will saving throw against a DC of 10 + the Centurion's level in the prestige class + the Centurion's Charisma modifier, or else become *shaken*. Evil-aligned creatures must make a Will saving throw against a DC of 10 + the Centurion's level in the prestige class + the Centurion's Charisma modifier, or else are drawn irresistibly towards the source of the wailing. (Note that creatures drawn towards the Centurion are not automatically placed under their control; the Centurion must make arrangements with the horrors they draw to them some way.)

If the Centurion is Neutral-aligned, Good-aligned creatures must make a Will saving throw against a DC of 10 + the Centurion's level in the prestige class + the Centurion's Charisma modifier, or else become *sickened*. Neutral-aligned creatures must make a Will saving throw against a DC of 10 + the Centurion's level in the prestige class + the Centurion's Charisma modifier, or else are drawn irresistibly towards the source of the wailing. Evil-aligned creatures must make a Will saving throw against a DC of 10 + the Centurion's level in the prestige class + the Centurion's Charisma modifier, or else become *shaken*. (Note that creatures drawn towards the Centurion are not automatically placed under their control; the Centurion must make arrangements with the horrors they draw to them some way.)

When bolstering, the Centurion's *Cornicen* wail affects any creature considered to be allied to them at the time, regardless of alignment. The sound of the wail grants a +2 bonus to all attack and damage rolls, as well as all saving throws. This bonus stacks with *bardic music* and the effects of powers or spells. This bonus remains in effect for as long as the Centurion is using *Cornicen* and can be heard by those allied with them.

Un-Fire (Su): Through their own brand of mysticism, a Centurion of the Night learns to tap into a mad, seething energy that eternally consumes itself and regenerates on that very consumption: *Un-Fire*. When brought forth from the void that imprisons it, *Un-Fire* manifests as a bluish flame that makes an eerie, wailing sound and devours everything it touches.

In order to generate a charge of *Un-Fire*, a Centurion must 'sacrifice' a studied spell, spell slot, or sufficient power points to manifest a power. For every two levels of spells or spell slots, or for power points sufficient to manifest a power of equivalent level, a Centurion gains a charge of *Un-Fire* capable of dealing 1d6 damage to physical matter – including the bodies of enemies.

Generating a charge of *Un-Fire* counts as a move action.

Damage dealt by *Un-Fire* bypasses all damage reduction and energy resistance, and should be

considered to be cursed damage. Any victim struck by *Un-Fire* must roll a Fortitude save against a DC that equals 10 + the level of the Centurion who injured them in the Prestige Class + the level of the spell, power, or spell slot sacrificed to generate the charge of *Un-Fire*. If the target fails the save, the damage dealt by *Un-Fire* can not be healed or repaired outside of holy or unholy ground.

If a creature is killed or an object destroyed by *Un-Fire*, they must make the same save, against the same DC. If the save is passed, nothing more interesting happens than standard death or disassembly. If the save is failed, unattended objects collapse into Mist and fade away, and creatures' souls are immediately awoken as ghosts.

A charge of *Un-Fire* remains in effect for one round per 2 spell or power levels sacrificed.

At 1st, 5th, 9th, and 13th level, a Centurion can choose one form of manifesting *Un-Fire*. These forms are necessary to control how the energy flows; unshaped *Un-Fire* is likely to erupt wildly and assault everything, including its conjurer. A Centurion can choose to select the same form more than once (apart from *burning world*), but must apply it to a different weapon, natural attack, or spell each time. Some forms pre-require other forms before they can be selected. The forms available at this time are:

Burning Art: The Centurion can spin *Un-Fire* into one specific offensive power or spell as they bring it forth. This spell or power must be selected at the same time as *burning art*. The damage otherwise dealt by said power or spell is transmuted into *Un-Fire*-damage, equal to the charge held. Any feats that modify the damage output of the spell also apply to the damage dealt by the charge of *Un-Fire*.

Burning Strike: The Centurion can cloak one kind of weapon (such as a dagger, a quarterstaff, a saber, or an urgrosh) in *Un-Fire*, replacing the damage dealt by the weapon with the damage dealt by the charge of *Un-Fire*. Any feats that modify the damage output of the weapon also apply to the damage dealt by the charge of *Un-Fire*.

Burning Touch: The Centurion can cloak one natural attack in *Un-Fire*, replacing the damage dealt by the natural attack with the damage dealt by the charge of *Un-Fire*. Any feats that modify the damage output of the natural attack also apply to the damage dealt by the charge of *Un-Fire*.

Burning World: (Requires three other forms of *Un-Fire* usage) A Centurion who masters *burning world* can direct the flow of *Un-Fire* against the world around them without getting caught in the blaze. By unleashing enough *Un-Fire* on a single location to deal ninety-six (96) points of damage within thirteen (13) rounds, a Centurion tears the planar fabric in that place asunder, opening a rift with a 5-ft. radius, which leads into the Mists.

Such rifts heal naturally if left alone, at a rate of 1 point of damage per day; once the damage is zero, the rift closes. However, if a Centurion continues to blast the same area with *Un-Fire* and deals another ninety-six points of damage before the rift can heal up, its radius expands by another 5 feet. Theoretically, if a rift is widened to the point that it grows larger than the domain in which it was opened, it can cause that whole domain to crumble back into the Mists.

There are also other uses for a rift besides attempting to destroy whole domains; as long as a rift exists, a Centurion who knows its location can use it to escape from even a closed domain, be it by physically traveling into it and entering the Mists, or by using it as a focus for a power or spell that allows for transportation.

Of course, an opened rift is also a risk, if left unattended. At the caprice of the Dark Powers, any kind of Mist horror might issue from the opening at any time. Overly frequent use of a rift as a means of travel might cause a Mistway to form, drawing in unrelated traffic – such as adventurers keen on fighting whatever plan the Centurions might be hatching.

Devouring Art: (Requires *burning art* for the same power or spell) The Centurion can spin *Un-Fire* into one specific offensive power or spell (which must have been selected at the same time as *burning art*) as they bring it forth. The damage dealt by the charge or *Un-Fire* is added to the damage dealt by the spell or power. Any feats that modify the damage output of the spell or power also apply to the damage dealt by the charge of *Un-Fire*.

Devouring Strike: (Requires *burning strike* for the same weapon) The Centurion can cloak one kind of weapon (such as a dagger, a quarterstaff, a saber, or an urgrosh) in *Un-Fire*, adding the damage dealt by the charge of *Un-Fire* to the damage dealt by the

weapon. Any feats that modify the damage output of the weapon also apply to the damage dealt by the charge of *Un-Fire*.

Devouring Touch: (Requires *burning touch* for the same natural attack) The Centurion can cloak one natural attack in *Un-Fire*, adding the damage dealt by the charge of *Un-Fire* to the damage dealt by the natural attack. Any feats that modify the damage output of the natural attack also apply to the damage dealt by the charge of *Un-Fire*.

Vow of Virtue: In order to deny the Dark Powers the chance to damn and trap them, each Centurion of the Night takes up a *vow of virtue* at first level; a solemn oath to refrain from some act of Evil, even when the opportunity presents itself to indulge without a chance of their being caught and punished. Any Centurion of the Night who breaks their *vow of virtue* is instantly cast out of the order, with no chance for redemption, and finds all special abilities from the prestige class now inaccessible to them.

An example of the *vow of virtue* could be the Red Haunt's refusal to harm prepubescent children, be it actively or indirectly, and her insistence on protecting them and their immediate guardians from harm she can prevent.

Inferna (Su): As a Centurion continues in this prestige class, they gain unique insights into and uses of the Shadow Weave; these are collectively known as the *Inferna*. A Centurion gains one *Inferna* at 2nd, 4th, 8th, and 10th level, and can select each *Inferna* only once. The available *Inferna* at this time are:

Blacklance: A Centurion of the Night must already be marked by *snake's head* before they can select this *Inferna*. Once they have it, they can unleash the power of their serpent-marks against an enemy. If the Centurion only has *snake's head*, this *Inferna* has a reach of touch, and functions as a touch attack. If the Centurion also has *serpent's coil*, the attack can be delivered as a ranged touch attack with a range of 10 ft. A Centurion of the Night must declare their intention to use the *Inferna* before they make the touch attack. When making the ranged touch attack, a Centurion need not be able to move their limbs.

In either case, the serpent-marks on the Centurion's limbs seem to animate, twisting and coiling wildly as the Centurion delivers a touch attack, even seeming to lash out independently when delivering the ranged touch attack. If the attack is successful, the serpent deals damage equal to the Centurion's own unarmed or natural attack, but also delivers a mind-blasting poison. The target must make a Madness save with a DC of 10 + the attacking Centurion's level in the Prestige Class + the attacking Centurion's Charisma modifier.

Child of Shadow: A Centurion with this Inferna can work together with other Centurions to create a kind of construct, made wholly out of Shadow Weave material. The minimum number of Centurions working in cooperation to create a Child of Shadow is two (2). The maximum number is ten (10). Whichever Centurion with the *Inferna Child of Shadow* initiates the process is recognized as the principal creator; other contributing Centurions need not have the same *Inferna*.

A Child of Shadow has no Constitution score. It has a number of Hit Dice (d10) equal to the number of Centurions involved in its creation; if its hit points are reduced to zero, it evaporates back into the Shadow Weave, taking any equipment it was carrying with it. When corporeal, a Child of Shadow has Darkvision, low-light vision, damage reduction equal to the number of Centurions that contributed to its creation divided by two (overcome by weapons made of gold or an enhancement bonus of +1 and above), and both cold resistance 10 and electricity resistance 10.

A Child of Shadow is highly customizable. Each Child of Shadow starts with base scores of 8 in each ability score, save for Constitution, which remains nil. The Centurions gain a number of points to distribute among its ability scores on a 1-on-1 basis, equal to the number of Centurions involved in its creation times two (but note that no ability score may be raised above 18 at creation). A Child of Shadow gains 2 skill points per Hit Die, and its class skills are equal to the class skills of the Centurion of the Night prestige class.

In addition, a Child of Shadow gains one spell-like ability from the Sorcerer/Wizard class spell list or one psi-like ability from the Psion or Wilder class list for every two Centurions involved in its creation; these spell-like abilities must be drawn from the

schools of Enchantment, Illusion and Necromancy if spell-like, or from the schools of Clairsentience, Metacreativity, and Telepathy if psi-like.

The maximum level of spell-like abilities a Child of Shadow may have equals the highest level of spell or power that can be produced by the *weakest* Centurion of the Night involved in the Child's creation. After determining the strongest spell-like or psi-like ability a Child of Shadow can have, the next spell-like ability must be one level lower, and the next must be one level lower than the second strongest spell-like ability, and so on. A Child of Shadow may have no more than one spell-like or psi-like ability of every level, with level 0 being the absolute lowest. Spell-like abilities possessed by the Child of Shadow may be used once per day.

Any one Centurion of the Night with this *Inferna* may have one Child of Shadow active at 2nd level, and one additional Child at 4th, 8th, and 12th level. That said, a Child of Shadow can function independently within the limitations of its orders, and need not remain within any set range of its principal creator.

Devouring Darkness: A Centurion with this *Inferna* can draw the mind of an opponent into the Shadow Weave. When using one specific power to read or control the mind of one being (which must be selected when choosing the *Inferna*), the Centurion can choose to add the effects of *devouring darkness* to it. The effect is that the target must, in addition to the standard saving throw against the spell or power, make a Horror save against the same DC.

If the target creature fails the Horror save, their mind is exposed to the malice that lurks in the reaches of the Shadow Weave. In addition to suffering a moderate Horror effect, a victim that saved against the original spell must make a second saving throw against it or else fall victim to it, as the Shadow Weave erodes their sanity and mental resistance.

Masque of the Meek: A Centurion with this *Inferna* can assume the guise of something they are not to such an extent that they are virtually indistinguishable from the real thing. By immersing themselves in the substance of the Shadow Weave and imbibing the rendered substance of a creature that is fully dead – not alive or undead – the Centurion can assume the appearance of that creature. Appearance, sound and scent are all identical to those of the source creature.

Magical or psionic attempts to penetrate the disguise fail, as it is crafted of the genuine substance of the being consumed to create it. It is up to the Centurion to convincingly play the part of the being they are imitating, however, as a failure to do so can lead to their being exposed.

Ripple in the Weave: Used by Centurions who are frequently subject to magical or psionic scrutiny, this *Inferna* can cause the strands of the Shadow Weave to move with unusual strength, thus stimulating the strands of the Weave and creating the illusion that a normal spell or power is being used.

Any being or item observing a Centurion with this *Inferna* who is casting spells or manifesting powers must make a Spellcraft or Psicraft check with a DC of 15 + the spell's or power's level + the Centurion's relevant ability modifier, or is convinced that the Centurion is using regular magic or psionics.

Using *Ripple in the Weave* does not come easily for someone attuned to the Shadow Weave. A Centurion must declare their intention to use this *Inferna* before casting or manifesting (the *Inferna* is activated as a move action). After the spell is cast or the power manifested, the Centurion must make a Fortitude save equal to 10 + the spell's or power's level, or become *fatigued*. Even creatures normally immune to the *fatigued* condition are not immune to the weariness that sets in due to use of this *Inferna*.

Shadowed Mind: A Centurion with this power naturally resists and misleads those who attempt to read their minds. Whenever anyone tries to use any kind of technique to directly read the thoughts of the Centurion, the Centurion automatically gains a Will saving throw to resist, even if that technique does not normally offer one.

In addition, the Centurion gains a bonus to saving throws against attempts to read their mind equal to their level in the prestige class. If the saving throw successfully thwarts the attempt to read the Centurion's mind, the one attempting the reading instead is fed illusionary images that correspond to whatever lies or half-truths the Centurion has told about themselves – if any. If a Centurion has not provided the one attempting the reading with

any lies or half-truths, the reader instead is faced with a soul-crushing vision of the Shadow Weave, and must make a Fortitude save against the DC of their own mind-reading technique or else become *nauseated*.

A Centurion with this *Inferna* may dispel it voluntarily and reactivate it at a later date, but it otherwise continues to work without end.

Touch of Night: A Centurion can only select this *Inferna* if they already have the *black hand*. If they do, then twice a day they can focus the Shadow Weave with a touch to blind an enemy. The Centurion must declare that they are using this *Inferna* before making the touch attack. If the Centurion successfully performs the touch attack, the target must make a Fortitude save with a DC of 10 + the attacking Centurion's level in the Prestige Class + the attacking Centurion's Charisma modifier. If the target fails the save, they are blinded for the next 1d4 rounds.

Black Ring: When a Centurion gains their first *Inferna*, the skin around the base of their left ring finger (or similar extremity) becomes discolored down to the bone (if any). The resulting pattern looks much as though the Centurion were wearing a a black ring. Close study will reveal this is not an unbroken band, but rather a circle of thin, complex glyphs which lie extremely close together.

The *black ring* radiates moderate Necromancy if subjected to a *detect magic* effect, and is disquieting to look upon even without it. Unless covered by mascara, gloves, or even illusions, a *black ring* raises the Centurion's OR by +1 among beings not allied with or obedient to it. This effect stacks with other factors increasing the Centurion's OR.

Black Hand: When a Centurion gains their second *Inferna*, the skin on the palms of both their hands (or similar appendages) becomes discolored down to the bone (if any). The result makes it appear as though the Centurion's hands are permanently stained.

The *black hand* radiates moderate Necromancy if subjected to a *detect magic* effect, and is disquieting to look upon even without it. Unless covered by mascara, gloves, or even illusions, a *black hand* raises the Centurion's OR by +1 among beings not allied with or obedient to it. This effect stacks with other factors increasing the Centurion's OR.

Consilium (Su): Starting from 5th level, a Centurion of the Night gains unrivaled powers of communication to facilitate the business of the order – including troop movements. Using any available reflective or smooth, opaque surface, a Centurion can conjure the image of any other Centurion of the Night with whom they are personally familiar. They can call forth the image of one fellow Centurion for every two levels they have in the prestige class.

The conjured image can be maintained active for one round per day for every level the Centurion initiating contact has in the prestige class; these rounds need not be used consecutively. While the image is active, all Centurions connected by the image can communicate with one another.

Consilium can connect Centurions only so long as they are on the same plane of existence. For this purpose, the Demiplane of Dread counts as one plane of existence. The ability cannot connect to any Centurion who is inside a domain with closed domain borders, unless *Un-Fire* has been used to burn a rift to the Mists into its planar fabric with *burning world*.

Knightly Virtue: At 5th level, and again at 9th level, a Centurion of the Night takes up an additional constraining vow; the vow of *knightly virtue*. This vow requires them to actively perform a type of good act whenever the opportunity presents itself, at their own cost. They can select one *knightly virtue* from the following list, but can select each *virtue* only once:

To bury the abandoned dead and ensure their rest, unless they were slain by a Centurion or their bodies are needed as undead troops;

To clothe those who have no or insufficient clothing to survive, unless their suffering and death are strictly necessary for Centurion operations;

To feed innocent bystanders suffering from hunger or famine not caused by a Centurion, unless their suffering and death are strictly necessary for Centurion operations;

To free innocent bystanders who are unjustly imprisoned by someone not a Centurion, unless their suffering and imprisonment are strictly necessary for Centurion operations;

To quench the thirst of innocent bystanders who can not quench their own, unless their suffering and death are strictly necessary for Centurion operations;

To treat innocent bystanders suffering disease not inflicted on them by a Centurion, unless their suffering and death are strictly necessary for Centurion operations;

To welcome innocent bystanders into their home as guests if these bystanders are lost and wandering, so long as they are not known enemies of the Centurions of the Night or their allies, and they uphold the rules governing host and guest.

Black Circle Leader: At 6th level, a Centurion of the Night gains the ability to become a circle leader, who is the focus person for circle magic. Unlike other forms of circle magic, *black circle magic* allows for the consumption of spells and psionic powers to boost whatever form of power the circle leader wields – but they can only engage in circle magic with other Centurions of the Night.

Satelles: At 6th level, the Centurion of the Night must take up the obligation of training a *Satelles*, something akin to an apprentice or a squire. They must ensure that the strongest cohort afforded to them by the Leadership feat is ready to take up their first level in the Centurion of the Night prestige class.

A Centurion of the Night cannot proceed to the 7th level of the prestige class until their first *Satelles* is ready to take on that first level in the prestige class and has been dismissed from their service to become a free agent. At 11th level, the Centurion is called upon to present a second *Satelles* as a new fellow Centurion of the Night. Again this must be the strongest cohort they have at the time, and again they cannot proceed to the 12th level until their cohort has taken up a first level in the Centurion of the Night prestige class and has been dismissed from their mentor's service.

Snake's Head: On learning their 3rd *Inferna*, the backs of all hands (or similar appendages) of the Centurion of the Night become discolored in such a way that it looks as though they have been tattooed with the form of a black, horned snake's head. The type of snake varies, for unknown reasons.

The *snakes' heads* radiate moderate Necromancy if subjected to a *detect magic* effect, and are disquieting to look upon even without it; sometimes they seem to move, observing strangers and flicking their tongues. Unless covered by mascara, gloves, or even illusions, the *snakes' heads* raise the Centurion's OR by +1 among beings not allied with or obedient to it. This effect stacks with other factors increasing the Centurion's OR.

Receptum (Su): Starting at 9th level, a Centurion gains powers of transportation for themselves and their allies and minions. As long as a Centurion with this ability knows where another Centurion is (for example, by prior arrangement or a connection through *Consilium*), they can teleport to the other's location as a move action.

A Centurion can use *Receptum* once every day for every three levels in the prestige class. If they wish to carry others with them, these must either be allies volunteering, or minions completely under the Centurion's control. A Centurion can carry a maximum of eight (8) other creatures with them during one use of *Receptum*. Carrying additional creatures requires more power than traveling alone, however; for every three creatures (rounded up) the Centurion carries with them, they must expend an additional charge of *Receptum*.

Receptum can carry one Centurion to another only so long as they are on the same plane of existence. For this purpose, the Demiplane of Dread counts as one plane of existence. The ability cannot carry one Centurion to another if they are separated by closed domain borders, unless *Un-Fire* has been used to burn a rift to the Mists into its planar fabric with *burning world*.

Serpent's Coil: When they gain their 4th *Inferna*, the skin around the arms (or similar limbs) and shoulders of the Centurion becomes discolored down to the bone (if any) in such a way that it appears that snakes are tattooed around those arms, connecting to the *snakes' heads*. The serpents' tails entwine behind the Centurion's neck.

Close study will reveal the serpents' bodies are not unbroken bands, but rather made up of thin, complex glyphs which lie extremely close together.

The *serpent's coils* radiate moderate Necromancy if subjected to a *detect magic* effect, and are disquieting to look upon even without it. Unless covered by mascara, sleeves, or even illusions,

serpent's coils raise the Centurion's OR by +1 among beings not allied with or obedient to it. This effect stacks with other factors increasing the Centurion's OR. From time to time, these serpentine bodies seem to move in ways that do not correspond to the motions of the limbs they coil around, as though they were actual serpents, rather than markings.

Great Circle Leader: An 11th-level Centurion of the Night can be the leader of a great circle, which can have up to nine participants instead of five – but with the same rules and limitations as *black circle leader.*

Hypokosmos: At 12th and 13th level, the Centurion of the Night gains two of the prestige class's ultimate abilities. They can choose one of these abilities at each of these two levels, and cannot choose any ability more than once.

Oubliette (Su): Once a day, a Centurion with this *hypokosmos* can perform a two-hour ritual at the edge of or inside of the Mists (or the Ethereal or Shadow planes). If completed, the ritual causes an *oubliette* to form around the Centurion, with a size of up to three 10-ft. cubes per level the creator possesses in the prestige class. The oubliette remains in existence for a number of days equal to the creator's level in the prestige class. Any Centurion with this *hypokosmos* may perform the ritual within the oubliette's borders to extend its duration by an additional number of days equal to their level in the prestige class.

A Centurion can have only one oubliette active at one time, but multiple Centurions with the same *hypokosmos* can perform the ritual as a joint effort, expanding the resulting oubliette's volume to up to three 10-foot cubes per all initiating Centurions' levels in the prestige class, and a duration of one day per all initiating Centurions' levels in the prestige class. Prolonging the duration of a collaborative oubliette requires an equal number of Centurions as originally created it.

The exact appearance, nature, and effects of an oubliette created by one or more Centurions should be decided based on a combination of input from both the Centurions involved and the DM.

Phylactery: The Centurion of the Night gains the ability to create a phylactery, such as those used by fiends and liches, with the same costs as one made by a lich. Once the phylactery is created, and as long as it remains safe and intact, a Centurion of the Night is effectively immortal, stops aging, and becomes immune to ability drain, though not ability damage.

Even if the Centurion is killed, their spirit returns to the phylactery and will regrow their body over a period of thirteen (13) days. If the phylactery is destroyed but the Centurion is still whole, they lose the benefits of the phylactery, but are not instantly killed; they can create a new phylactery to replace the old.

Special: any Centurion who already has a phylactery due to being an Outsider or a lich can still select this *hypokosmos*. The second phylactery remains dormant as long as their original phylactery remains intact, but takes up its function if the first phylactery is ever destroyed. Unlike beings who do not rely on a phylactery, Outsiders and liches who lose their second phylactery before they can craft a replacement are instantly destroyed.

Reality wrinkle: A Centurion of the Night with this *hypokosmos* gains a reality wrinkle as if they were an Outsider, with a radius of 5 ft. for every four levels in the Centurion of the Night prestige class. This reality wrinkle functions exactly like an Outsider's reality wrinkle, allowing the Centurion of the Night to cross closed domain borders with impunity (and guide others through as well) and perform power rituals like a fiend.

It should be noted that, although membership in the *Scion of Irul* prestige class was not and is not required to be a member of the Irul Society in good standing, membership in the *Centurion of the Night* prestige class *is* a requirement to be accepted as a member of that group's leadership.

The two organizations have mostly friendly relations even now, though the Centurions are more organized and the Society has grown more retiring. Some creatures retain a dual membership, benefiting from the lore and products offered at Society assemblies to further Centurion goals, or offering plunder from Centurion missions at Society meetings.

Dread Possibility: the Spreading Fire

In the early years of the Centurions, they conducted many more experiments with their *Un-Fire*-related powers than they do today. One of these experiments involved combining the secret art known as *burning world* with the order's unique form of Circle Magic. Something went wrong – or at least seemed to go wrong – during this supercharged application of force, and the Centurions tore a hole through the domain they were in, into the Mists, and to … somewhere … beyond. Several young Centurions, not experienced enough to react with alacrity, were lost to the hole before it slammed shut.

Unknown to the Centurions in Ravenloft, one of the people involved with the experiment actually survived the experience and found himself in a land called Ansalon, on a world called Krynn. His name was Gregory Bellamy, a wizard from Darkon who had lost his whole family over the course of the Requiem, and who believed existence itself was meaningless and the gods a lie.

Travelling upon Krynn disabused Bellamy of the latter notion, at least, but he saw little to dissuade him from his belief that existence needed improving … and he still carried within himself all the powers of *Un-Fire* and the Shadow Weave that he had possessed in the Demiplane of Dread. The only thing he could never access in the wider multiverse was the power to project a reality wrinkle, but then he did not really need one out there.

It did not take Bellamy very long or cost him excessive effort to find like-minded beings beyond the Mists, where it was so much easier for him to travel.

Bellamy's faction of the Centurions of the Night persists beyond the Misty borders of Ravenloft. It upholds the rules of the order as it exists in that gaol-plane, but with a few twists. Rather than the Dark Powers, the Centurions in exile are aiming to tear down the gods themselves and claim their thrones. Once seated there, they shall rain *Un-Fire* down upon the Great Wheel and the Great Tree alike, consuming them all in the conflagration before they rebuild.

Should they expose the Mists and Bellamy's homeland during their work, then these Centurions expect to reunite with their 'mother chapter' and join hands in a Cosmic Necromancy even greater than what the Red Haunt had envisioned.

Currently, Bellamy's faction in exile is small, and old age has stolen much of his vigor. Still, the Centurions in exile are viciously loyal to their grand master, forever on the lookout for ways to prolong his life or help him transform into something more permanent. At grand master Bellamy's command, they are being subtle and cautious, but as his health declines, they may soon become more aggressive.

Who's Doomed

The Centurion

CE Devoratrix Medium Outsider (Chaotic, Extraplanar, Evil, Tanar'ri) Wizard 5 / Scion of Irul 2 / Centurion of the Night 12

Hit Dice: 140 hp (25 HD)
CR: 26
Initiative: +4
Speed: 40 ft., fly 60 ft. (average)
Armor Class: 23 (+4 *bracers of armor*, +2 Dex, +7 natural)
Base Attack/Grapple: +15/+19
Attack: +17 Claw (1d6+3), +19 Saber (1d8+7+1d6 (fire)), +17 Unarmed strike (1d3+3)
Special Attacks: Beget Hollow Man; body of temptation DC 20; Inferna (*blacklance*; *devouring darkness*; *touch of night*); laughing mad DC 22; mind drain; spell-like abilities; *Un-Fire* I; *Un-Fire* II; *Un-Fire* III
Special Qualities: Black hand; black ring; 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; knightly virtue; obscuring mist; parthenogenesis; phylactery; reality wrinkle 13,000 ft; resistance to acid 10, cold 10, fire 10; serpent's coil; snake's head; spare the child; telepathy 100 ft.; too familiar; vow of virtue;

Spell-like abilities: (CL 25. DC 17 + spell level) At will: Bull's strength, darkness, detect thoughts (DC19), shadow walk (self plus 50 lbs. of objects or self plus one Medium- or smaller-sized individual); 1/day - Deeper darkness, restoration
Class Abilities: Black circle leader; blood of Irul; consilium (12 rounds/day); cornicen (12 rounds/day); heart of Irul 2/day; great circle leader; hypokosmos; inferna (child of shadow); receptum 4/day; satelles; shadow step; signs of the dark; summon familiar; word of Irul (x2)
Saves: Fort. +11, Ref. +11, Will +19
Abilities: Str. 14, Dex. 14, Con. 14, Int. 19, Wis. 16, Cha. 24
Skills: Bluff +16 (+18 vs. all non-Good), Concentration +28, Diplomacy +20 (+22 vs. all non-Good), Disguise +16, Hide +8, Intimidate +9 (+11 vs. all non-Good), Knowledge (arcana) +16, Knowledge (geography) +10, Knowledge (history) +10, Knowledge (planes) +12, Knowledge (Ravenloft) + 15, Knowledge (religion) +8, Listen +9, Move Silently +8, Perform (act) +16, Perform (dance) +13, Psicraft +6, Search +9, Sense Motive + 12 (+14 vs. all non-Good), Spellcraft +18, Spot +8
Feats: Alertness (B), Improved Grapple, Improved Unarmed Strike, Leadership, Maximize Spell, Metamagic School Focus (Illusion) (Complete Mage, p.45), Power Attack, Quicken Spell, Scribe Scroll (B), Shadow Weave Magic (Forgtten Realms Campaign Setting, p.37), Spell Focus (Illusion), Still Spell (B)

Languages: Abyssal*, Casian, Celestial, Chondathan (Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting, p.84), Darkonese, Infernal, Mordentish, Moutere, Patterna, Vaasi

Hypokosmos: The Centurion has chosen to take the *hypokosmos* that grants her the ability to create a phylactery. While she hungers for a chance to shape and reshape reality, as by crafting oubliettes, she recognizes that she has a long, uphill battle ahead of her. As such, she has prepared a secondary phylactery in case the Record of Memories is ever compromised or destroyed.
The Centurion's second phylactery takes the shape of a square tile of red lava-glass with the Abyssal glyph for the letter 'R' embossed upon it. The precious item has been hidden by arcane and divine spells as well as psionic powers, underneath an unnamed city somewhere in the Demiplane of Dread.
The second phylactery is a source of some concern to the other personas of the Red Haunt, who are uncertain whether they would survive the transfer if something were to happen to their primary phylactery. In order to reassure her 'sisters,' the Centurion has been steadily adding her own security measures to the Record of Memories, and has suggested some cautious tests to see whether all the 'sisters' are equally connected to the second phylactery.

Inferna: The Centurion has access to the following Infernae:

Blacklance; *child of shadow*; *devouring darkness*; *touch of night*.

Knightly Virtue: The Centurion has vowed to bury the abandoned dead and ensure their rest unless they were slain by a Centurion or their bodies are needed as undead troops.

Un-Fire: The Centurion is familiar with the following three uses of *Un-Fire*:

> *Burning art* (*magic missile*); *burning strike* (saber); *devouring strike* (saber). Unless she can somehow overcome the final limit that prevents her from becoming as strong as or stronger than the persona "Mother," the Red Haunt will never be able to attain the power of *burning world*.

Vow of Virtue:
By this solemn oath, the Centurion is forbidden from intentionally directly or indirectly harming prepubescent children and their primary caregivers, if such harm can be prevented.

Magic
Spells / day:
4 / 5 / 5 / 5 / 5 / 4 / 3 / 3 / 2
The Red Haunt casts spells as an 16th-level Wizard. Her effective caster level counts as 17 to overcome spell resistance for all Enchantment, Illusion, and Necromancy spells, but counts as 15 for all Evocation and Transmutation spells; her spell save DC is 14 + spell level; The save DC becomes 15 + spell level for all Enchantment and Necromancy spells, and becomes 16 + spell level for all Illusion spells.

Normally prepared:
8 – *greater shadow evocation*, superior invisibility**
7 – *finger of death, force missiles* (maximized), *shadow evocation** (maximized; Metamagic School Focus)
6 – *circle of death, greater dispelling, mass contagion*
5 – *cloudkill, heart of fire, shadow evocation* (still; Metamagic School Focus), *shadow hand*
4 – *force missiles, heart of earth, magic missile* (maximized), *orb of force*, *shadow well**
3 – *contagious fog, dispel magic, greater mage armor, heart of water, shadow binding** (still; Metamagic School Focus)
2 – *heart of air, invisibility, magic missile* (still), *phantom foe, see invisibility*
1 – *color spray, dead end, magic missile* x 2, *shield*
0 – *detect magic, ghost sound, message, prestidigitation*

Spellbook:
Generally speaking, it is safer to assume that the Centurion does have access to a particular spell than that she does not; she can rely on Imogen Schlosser and her allies among the Centurions to grant her access to their spellbooks, just as she is willing to share her own knowledge with them.
Regardless, the Centurion normally keeps a collection of books around with the following spells. Spells marked with an asterisk are drawn from the school of Illusion:
8 – *blackfire* (SC, p.29), *greater shadow evocation, power word blind, superior invisibility** (SC, p.125)
7 – *finger of death, phase door, power word stun, sequester, solipsism** (SC, p.194)
6 – *circle of death, greater dispelling, mass contagion* (SC, p.51), *shades, shadowy grappler** (SC, p.186)
5 – *cloudkill, greater shadow conjuration*, heart of fire* (CM, p.107), *miasma of entropy* (SC, p.141), *passwall, shadow evocation*, shadow hand** (SC, p.183)
4 – *force missiles* (SC, p.98), *heart of earth* (CM, p.106), i*mproved invisibility*, orb of force* (SC, P.151), *shadow well** (SC, p.186)
3 – *contagious fog* (SC, p.52), *dispel magic, greater mage armor* (SC, p.136), *heart of water* (CM, p.107), *shadow binding** (SC, p.182), *skull watch* (SC, p.191)
2 – *heart of air* (CM, p.106), i*nvisibility*, magic mouth*, misdirection*, phantom foe** (SC, p.156), *see invisibility*
1 – *alarm, color spray*, comprehend languages, dead end** (SC, p.59), *mage armor, magic missile, shield, silent image**
0 - All

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; Red Garment (Quoth the Raven #28, p.466)

Combat:
When the Centurion is convinced that battle is imminent and unavoidable, she favours brute force tactics. She launches her strongest attacks first and foremost, with circumstances determining whether these should be her high-level spells or her saber cloaked in *Un-Fire*. When using the latter, she favours augmenting her strength with her spell-like abilities, as well as applying Power Attack to her blows. She tends to hyper-focus on one target at a time, relying on her defenses and speed to ward off her enemy's allies until she is ready to switch targets. Area

spells are her favourites, because these allow her to lash out at multiple targets at once.

Rather than toy with enemies as a typical demon might, or relish the sensation of battle as her elder sister Charissa definitely would, the Centurion's sole goal is to overwhelm and destroy, with little concern for collateral damage so long as she can take out her target.

That being said, the Centurion is not one to launch an attack prematurely or unnecessarily. If it is more beneficial that an opponent should be captured or go free to further the plans of her order, she will smoothly step aside for some other aspect of the Red Haunt, or else leave the job to her subordinates. What subtlety she lacks when fighting by herself, the Centurion more than makes up for when directing troops; as a general, she is cunning and patient, with backup-plans for her backup-plans and her eye always on the greater benefit.

Background:

The Red Haunt left the Core once she became aware of the full nature of Meredoth. Not out of fear, but out of genuine disgust for a creature with so much power, so much knowledge, and yet so pathetically little *vision* to call its own. She walked down roads she had trodden before, mysterious and little-known Mistways that took her to domains unknown to the people of the Core.

At first, the demon walked these lands in the way she had always done; studying, seeking new fields of knowledge to absorb and obsess over. Before, doing so had always helped her to overcome frustration when it nipped at her heels … but not this time. There was a dark restlessness in the fiend's unstable core, a feeling that a tipping point was approaching. She had no idea what kind of balance was hastening to calamity, however, and this only made the demon feel *more* agitated. In the grip of this inexplicable sensation of slippage and danger, the fiend subconsciously started bolstering her ability to survive, delving deeper into the training program of the Irul Society than she had done before.

Then came the Grand Conjunction, and where other lands shook and threatened to fall into disarray, the domains of the Wartorn Cluster came together and fused into one. While mortals cried to their gods, and animals fled everywhere in terror, the Red Haunt stood on the flank of Mt. Brightwell in the primal domain of Masogan, and saw something amazing.

The supposedly dead volcano shook and roared itself back to life and belched flame. But such flames; blue and wispy, wailing and crying like tortured souls! The sound was so beautiful, the sensation of pure peril these fires projected so stark, that the demon wept for joy. Gazing out across the lands of the Cluster, she could see other plumes of this howling *Un-Fire* rising in the distance, could hear their tones and some catastrophic grinding and churning from deep underground unite into a mighty chorus!

The fire and the noise spoke to her. They spoke of a cycle of endless death and rebirth, of cosmic destruction and regeneration.

Even for a demonic mind, the vision was too grand, too complex, and the Red Haunt fell insensate. When she rose to wakefulness, only a fraction of the vision remained, and the volcano spewed ordinary lava to roll down its flank and torment the savages below. That was alright, though; the fiend remembered enough, and now she realized what had frustrated her so.

It was an old annoyance; that the Dark Powers played such games with the wicked and the righteous alike, uplifted wretched and pathetic creatures and endowed them with might only to torment them by that same power; that such a magnificent playground as the Demiplane of Dread should be theirs to rule and shape; and that even she herself had to suffer their manipulations. Meredoth's intrusions were hardly a coincidence, she could see that now. That worm of a Darklord's attempts to infiltrate her household would potentially draw her into a war of one-upmanship that could keep the Dark Powers' *pet* occupied for centuries, at the demon's expense!

But the *Un-Fire* had told her that it hungered for everything, and could reshape reality as well.

When the Red Haunt spread her wings upon the flank of Mt. Brightwell and flew forth, she had formed a new persona, not solely out of the desire to study and experiment, but out of a desire to conquer and guide. This was the Centurion, and she would inspire other

creatures to become Centurions. She would teach them to hate the puppetmasters who lurked in the shadows and the fogs of this Demiplane; she would raise them up and make them into strong allies, so they could fight the Dark Powers together; she would bathe and dance in the blood of those enemies, she would consume the planar fabric of the Demiplane in *Un-Fire,* and she would build something new. Something magnificent.

Lair:
The Centurion is often travelling to see to the maintenance or start or some new scheme, and prefers to establish local hidey-holes, or temporarily shacks up with allies. Insofar as she has a true lair, this would be Schlosser House on the island of Castra, in the maritime domain of Malopelagio in the Wartorn Cluster. On the rare occasion that she takes the time to rest and relax, it is here she does so. While the house has a fully stocked laboratory and torture room, the fiend rarely uses either; they are more a nod to her 'sisters' and their various interests. The chambers she uses most frequently are the bedroom and dining room, where she replenishes her various energies.

Dread Possibility: Limit Breaker
The careful reader may have noticed that the Centurion's effective character level puts her just below the persona of the Red Haunt known as 'Mother,' when the fiend as a whole is supposed to suffer the curse of 'Diminishing Returns.' That same careful reader might have had questions about Katia Schlosser's power relative to the older personas.

The truth – one to which the fiend has not cottoned on herself, yet – is that the limitation imposed on her is only part occult and in a significant part psychological. As long as the developing personas of the Red Haunt roughly follow the same track – study, experiment, learn and gather knowledge in a futile attempt to fill the gap in their memory – they will suffer from Diminishing Returns.

When a persona of the Red Haunt makes a break from the previous track, however, the only limit that likely applies is that they can never grow equal in strength to 'Mother,' the oldest persona from which they are offshoots.

This explains why Katia, who has betrayed her 'sisters' in her secret heart of hearts, has already gained power equal to her direct predecessor Imogen, though she is not different enough to surpass Charissa. The Centurion, who is a conqueror and a destroyer instead of a scholar, has already become Charissa's equal.

Of course, if the Limit Breaker-principle remains true for all personas of the Red Haunt, this means that poor, suffering Genevieve – who is as different from the other personas as the sun is to the gaping void of Ginnungagap – has room to grow to a stature at least equal to Charissa and the Centurion. Maybe, just barely maybe, Genevieve alone could eventually stand on equal footing with 'Mother.' After all, she is the persona who embodies what the Red Haunt might have been, had she been good. She alone is a polar opposite to all the rest of her 'sisters' and 'Mother.'

Let the Red Haunt – especially the Centurion – hunger for war. She may yet find that the greatest war ahead will be the one within.



Secrets of the Twisted Tower

A Gundarakite Cabal

By Michail Adamis (Mephisto of the FoS)

"Dorian dug a large hole in the ground, inside which he placed the seven Zagazmonari books and many other books. Then he summoned his people to frequent said cave; but since they were rude and did not understand so much wonder, and the mythical founder decided he had to continue his exploits in other settings, he reconciled his plan that such a study be maintained with the construction of a statue of his demon-god, to which he conferred the gift of speech, entrusting to him the answers of the zealous students who really wanted to learn, as if Zagaz was there in person."
-The Exile and the Return
Petre Racula

The town of Teufeldorf has been a part of western Barovia since Gundarak was annexed in 740 BC. The towns name means village of the Devil or Dragon, since 'Teufel' is a word that can mean both. What most people apart from a few scholars do not know, is that the town takes its name from a secret long ago forgotten.

There is a Devil in Teufeldorf. In the northern part of the town, there is a hill with a strange tower overlooking Teufeldorf, the Twisting Tower or *Vrtljivin Stalp* in Luktar. This cockscrew tower is lined with menacing-looking gargoyles perched on its spirals, leering at anyone able to view them.

During Duke Nharov Gundar's reign, the Twisting Tower housed a school of magic dedicated to the black arts: the *Teufelmonance*. It was said that Medraut Gundar himself was a member of this cabal. After Gundarak was annexed by the forces of Barovia in 740 BC, Count Strahd razed the school and hunted down the cabal of sorcerers. Now the tower is used by Strahd Von Zarovich's army as a training ground for Barovian soldiers specialized in military tactics as well as intelligence.

Courses once taught to the *Zagazmonariu,* the students of the school of Teufelmonance, also known as School of the Dragon or Devil, included learning the speech of animals as well as a vile and foul speech and magic spells of necromancy, divination and demonology.

The lore of old suggests only those who were endowed with supernatural powers through their bloodline or demonic birth could be accepted as students. Their inborn magic could be activated or elevated through rigorous study and practice. The school enrolled students in classes of seven to become the Zagazmonari, also known as *Zagazmonărie or Za' farmanță.*

The Neureni, according to Gundarkite historians, were a great and noble race, though now and again they gave birth to scions who were held by their *coevals* to have had dealings with the Evil One. This prehistoric culture left traces of a prevailing demon-cult and proof of vile ritual practices that were performed in mountains and near rivers. They learned the secrets of the Evil One in the Teufelmonance, amongst the mountains over Gundar River, where the Zagaz claims the seventh scholar as his due.

Only seven scholars are admitted at a time, and when the course of learning has expired, only one emerges from the Twisting Tower. The other six are never to be seen again and are thought to be detained by Zagaz as payment. The leader of the cabal known as the *Vremenar is* mounted upon a balaur and he is the devil's aide-de-camp, assisting him in 'making the weather', that is to say, preparing the thunderbolts. Just as the *Vremenar is* a weather master tasked with conjuring the forces of the Devil or Dragon to control the weather, legends say he could also create rains of terror. The *Zagazmonari* follow the chthonic Neureni god Irlek-Khan, also known as Erlin, and try to disrupt the cosmic balance as they did in the land where the sun dies, where Nharov Ghundar originated.

According to some obscure folklore, the demon lord Zagaz himself teaches in Teufelmonance, which actually lies underground beneath the Twisting Tower. The students remained hidden from sunlight for the seven-year duration of their study. The dragon or devil is said to be kept submerged in an underwater cave in Teufelotok, an island on Gundar River northwestern of Teufeldorf, according to some accounts. As only the best student would be chosen by Zagaz to be a *Zagazmonari*, such is the fate for all those who want to be Weathermasters as only one

Vremenar can exist at a time. One could eventually become powerful enough to challenge the *Vremenar* and take his place riding a dragon in Zagaz's service; some accounts say that every time the dragon glanced at the clouds, rainfall would come while others suggest the *Zagazmonari's* dragon-mount is not actually a dragon but a *balaur,* a many-headed dragon or monstrous serpent, with seven or even more heads depending on which legend one chooses to believe.

There is some lore in which the balaur is considered to be the one that makes the weather, which also state it lives in water as a water demon. They are considered to be the vehicle of the weather-controlling Zagazmonari according to some sources. A balaur was controlled by these weather-controlling sorcerers using "a golden rein" or golden bridle. The dragon was usually kept hidden in the depths of an underwater lake until summoned by their riders. Some of the common beliefs concerning these many-headed dragons include that they start life as snakes, and that can be romantically involved with humans. The balaur in folktale are typically evil, demanding or abducting young maidens or the princess, and defeated by male heroes. There are also legends about the balaur in which they can produce precious stones from their saliva. Also, it is said that whoever manages to slay a balaur will be forgiven a sin.

A small lake, immeasurably deep, lies beneath Teufelotok. The island of the Devil is supposed to be the cauldron where thunder is brewed, and in fair weather the dragon sleeps beneath the waters of that underground lake which probably involves Erlin's death and resurrection in an underground chamber, a great hall where Zagaz taught the secrets of immortality and of life and death. Gundarakite peasants anxiously warn travellers to beware of throwing stones close to the shores of Teufelotok, the island of the Dragon, lest they should wake the dragon and provoke a thunderstorm.

It is, however, no mere superstition that in summer there occur almost daily thunderstorms at this spot around the hour of midday, and numerous cairns of stones around the shores attest the fact that many people have found their death by lightning here. On this account the place is shunned, and no Gundarakite will venture to rest in this location at the hour of noon. As one of the guardians of the Water of Life and Death, the balaur's name was traditionally invoked in times of drought. It can apparently assume human-like forms and is able to speak and ride a horse. It has the ability to regenerate any decapitated heads.

Zagazmonari

The graduating *Zagazmonariu* weather-forging sorcerers who walk on clouds, tame dragons, and commune with the old gods and the ancestors, walk a solitary and responsible path toward divine wisdom – and demonology. Some of these sorcerers are said to be so skillful that they can even grant immortality. They are feared and revered as men of divine wisdom, mysteries and the afterlife by Gundarakites. And it is this ideology of innate divinity, immortality, and practice of magical mysteries that paved the way for the emergence of what we now call Teufelmonance.

Given that the Teufelmonance are deemed to be the descendants of ancient Neureni priests who lived ascetic lives, walked in smoke and on clouds, and followed the chthonic god of Chaos, Death and Evil named Irlek-Khan, the assumption is more than fair.

To find students for the school, Elder *Zagazmonari* wander Gundarakite villages and towns, looking for seven apprentices who are innately talented that they eventually bring to the secret school of magic. There, these pupils study for seven years under *Vremenar.* They pursue divine wisdom and they document the knowledge they attain in the "*Book of the Zagazmonarios*", which records everything written therein into a compendium that has existed in the aether since times immemorial.

After the seven years of study come to an end, legends say that only one out of all seven students will survive to become a powerful *Zagazmonari* spellcaster, oftentimes seeming to display the trickster archetype. Those who become *Zagazmonari* live their lives attuned to the divine cosmos as hermits unbound by worldly temptation. They are said to live in mountains, caves, or deep forests, outside of human communities, sometimes even in the other realm, the metaphysical space in Gundarakite folklore where ancestors, gods, and magical beings dwell.

Peasant accounts from the old days describe *Zagazmonari* as humble people, dressed in white robes, carrying a staff in their hands and magic tools around their waists or in a bag. According to folklore, they also carry with them their magical book, an axe made of iron, and the golden reins with which they control the sky dragons or summon the storm dragon submerged in the bottomless underground lake beneath Teufelotok. The *Vremenar* wears a tiny semantron around his neck with which he summons the Winds. Apart

from weather-forging, the *Vremenar* can also commune with divinity and the dead, often riding the balaur dragon in the company of the *voishlacka* (an ancient word for "vampire" in Luktar) and moroi, the restless dead.

Notably, the students who have graduated the Teufelmonance seem to have a karmic quality about them whenever they partake in human communities. In truth they are agents of the Gundars, who they advise and protect, punishing the people that oppose them based on their actions or lack thereof.

The *Zagazmonari* are always drawn from Erlin's worshippers, though they do not need to be members of the priesthood. A *Zagazmonari*'s divine spellcasting class is often druid, although shamans are also accepted in the Teufelmonance. Sorcerer is the most common arcane spellcasting class, though wizards – especially diviners and necromancers – are not unusual.



The Zagazmonari Symbol

The Zagazmonari

Requirements: To qualify to become a *Zagazmonari* (Zgz), a character must be a Gundarakite and study in the subterranean caverns beneath the Twisting Tower for seven years as well as fulfilling the following criteria:

Alignment: Chaotic Evil

Base Will Save Bonus: +5

Abilities: Int 15, Cha 15

Deity: Erlin

Skills: Knowledge (arcana) 8 ranks, Knowledge (planes) 2 ranks, Scry 4 ranks

Spellcasting: Ability to cast divine or arcane spells of 3rd level or higher.

Special: Must be a Gundarakite

Class Skills: Alchemy (Int), Animal Empathy (Cha), Bluff (Cha), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Hide (Dex), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Knowledge (nature), Knowledge (Planes), Move Silently (Dex), Profession (Wis), Ride (Dex), Scry (Int), Spellcraft (Int), Survival (Wis)

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier.

LVL	BAB	Fort.	Ref.	Will	Special	Spells per Day
1	+ 0	+ 2	+ 0	+ 2	Dark Speech, Hollow Feat	+1 level of existing class
2	+ 1	+ 3	+ 0	+ 3	Create Fire	+1 level of existing class
3	+ 1	+ 3	+ 1	+ 3	Capnomancy	+1 level of existing class
4	+ 2	+ 4	+ 1	+ 4	*Summon Least Fiend*	+1 level of existing class
5	+ 2	+ 4	+ 2	+ 4	*Summon Spirit*	+1 level of existing class
6	+ 3	+ 5	+ 2	+ 5	Speak with Zagaz	+1 level of existing class
7	+ 3	+ 5	+ 3	+ 5	Greater Capnomancy	+1 level of existing class
8	+ 4	+ 6	+ 3	+ 6	Transporting Smoke	+1 level of existing class
9	+ 4	+ 6	+ 4	+ 6	Walkers in Smoke	+1 level of existing class
10	+ 5	+ 7	+ 4	+ 7	Vremenar	+1 level of existing class

Class Features:

All of the following are class features of the *Zagazmonari* prestige class:

Weapon and Armor Proficiency:

Zagazmorani gain no proficiency in any weapon or armor. Note that armor check penalties for armor heavier than leather apply to the skills Balance, Climb, Escape Artist, Hide, Jump, Move Silently, Pick Pocket and Tumble.

Primal Magic: *Zagazmorani* levels stack with other arcane or divine spellcasting classes for the purposes of determining caster level. For example, a 5th-level druid/6th-level sorcerer/ 2nd– level *zagazmorani* would have a druid caster level of 7 and a sorcerer caster level of 8.

Forbidden School: *Zagazmorani* are forbidden to use spells from the school of Transmutation as it is considered too materialistic, lacking the mystical aspect of magic.

Spells per Day: At each level the *zagazmorani* gains new spells per day as if he had also gained a level in a spellcasting class in which he had levels before entering the prestige class. He does not, however, gain any other benefit a character of that class would have gained (metamagic or item creation feats, hit points beyond those he receives from the prestige class etc.), except for an increased effective spell level of spellcasting. If a character had more than one spellcasting class before becoming a *zagazmorani*, he must decide to which class he adds the new level for purposes of determining spells per day.

Dark Speech (Ex): There exists a language so dire, so inherently full of spite, malice, corruption and hatred that it is simply called the Dark Speech. This is the secret language of evil gods, so foul and so potent that even demons and devils refrain from its use, lest it consume them. At 1st level, the *zagazmorani* gains Dark Speech as a bonus feat. (see page 48 of the *Book of Vile Darkness*)

Even though the *zagazmorani* know this vile language, they are wise enough not to underestimate the power of words. The safest way to use the Dark Speech is through spells such as *dread word*. The Dark Speech is extremely difficult to master, for mortal tongues were not designed to utter these words of pure evil and the speaker must take great care, or both listener and speaker will be harmed. There are no words for good concepts such as kindness, mercy and purity in the Dark Speech; only misery, anguish, hate and betrayal described so accurately that it is impossible for any other tongue to reproduce. Dark speech has no written form and cannot be transliterated into another language's written form without losing its meaning and power.

Besides communicating in the language of evil itself, there are four ways that a speaker can use Dark Speech.

Dread: The words spoken cause fear, loathing and dread in all who hear them. Speaking words of dread is draining to the speaker, dealing 1d4 points of Charisma damage each round the Dark Speech is spoken. When dread words of Dark Speech are uttered, all within 30 feet of the speaker must make a Will saving throw (DC 10+1/2 speaker's level+ speaker's Cha modifier). Listeners who know the Dark Speech by possessing the Dark Speech feat gain +4 circumstance bonus on this saving throw. If a listener fails its saving throw, it suffers the following effects, depending on its Hit Dice or level and alignment:

Levels 1-4, Nonevil: Characters are shaken by the intoned Dark Speech, and they flee from the source of their fear as quickly as they can, although they can choose the path of their flight. Once out of sight and hearing of the source of their fear, characters can act as they want. Characters unable to flee can fight (though they are still shaken for 1d10 rounds).

Levels 5-10, Nonevil: Characters are shaken, taking a -2 morale penalty on attack rolls saves and checks for 1d10 rounds.

Levels 11+, Nonevil: Characters are filled with loathing for the speaker and must attack him on their next action.

Levels 1-4, Evil: Characters cower and are frozen in fear. They lose their Dexterity bonus to AC (if any) and take no actions for 1d10 rounds. Foes gain a +2 bonus to hit cowering characters.

Levels 5-10, Evil: Characters are mastered by the Dark Speech, acting as if *charmed* (as described in the *charm person* spell) for 1d10 minutes.

Levels 11+, Evil: Characters are impressed, reacting to the speaker with more respect and wariness. This adds a +2 competence bonus on subsequent attempts to change their attitude.

Power: The words of the Dark Speech help energize evil magic items and spells. This is draining the speaker, dealing 1d4 Charisma damage each time the words of power are uttered. If used in conjunction with an evil spell that has a verbal component, the Dark Speech increases the spell's effective caster level by +1. If used when creating an evil magical item, the Dark Speech increases the item's caster level by +1 without increasing the cost.

Both caster level increases are considered profane bonuses. It is likely that the Dark Speech is a requirement for many evil artifacts.

Corruption: The words of the Dark Speech, whispered softly, can weaken physical objects. As a full-round action, the speaker can whisper vile words of corruption and destruction at an inanimate object such as a door or wall, reducing its hardness by half. This minor use of the Dark Speech is not draining to the speaker. It cannot be used more than once on an object.

Dark Unity: The words of the Dark Speech can create a hivemind. Up to one hundred vermin or animals (none of which can have more than 1 HD) form an evil hivemind when exposed to the words of the Dark Speech. The united consciousness of the creatures will take one command from the Dark Speech speaker, as if it were subject to the *suggestion* spell. Pulling creatures under their sway of evil is draining the speaker, dealing 1d4 points of Constitution damage each time words of dark unity are uttered.

When a hivemind forms, each individual creature becomes just a tiny part of a much larger, much greater intelligence. When at least 50 vermin or animals of the same species are arranged so that no individual is more than 10 feet from another individual, the hivemind comes into effect. All the creatures operate with an intelligence of 7, even if they previously had no intelligence score (as with vermin).

When creatures in a hivemind attack, they all gain a +1 insight bonus on their attack rolls and a +1 insight bonus to their Armor Class. Each creature knows the actions of every other member of the hivemind. The entire hivemind is aware of what every individual is experiencing.

Hollow (Ex): When a *zagazmonari* graduates from the Teufelmonance, he offers his soul to Zagaz, this means that a character receives Hollow as a bonus feat and thus gains immunity to Energy Drain, Magic Jar, Trap the Soul; the malevolence of ghosts and all forms of possession as the character has no soul. A *zagazmonari* cannot be raised from the dead and their Outcast Rating is increased by 1 when dealing with people of Wisdom 12 or more and by 4 when dealing with the Vistani.

Create Fire (Sp): From the dawn of time to the present day, fire has fascinated mankind with its power to sustain, transform, or destroy life. In many cultures, fire is a divine entity in and of itself. This power works as a *produce flame* spell and can be used once per day for every 4 levels after the *zagazmonari* has gained this power (2 times per day at 6th level and 3 times per day at 10th level).

Capnomancy (Sp): Capnomancy is commonly referred to as a divination technique for reading smoke and interpreting smoke patterns to indicate good or bad omens. Exploring the many shapes and forms it can take, from candle magic and censing to smudging, this power of divination can be used for communion with the dead. At third level, the *zagazmorani* can use this divination technique to cast an *augury* spell once per day and one more time for every 3 levels thereafter (3 times per day at 6th level and 3 times per day at 9th level).

Summon Least Fiend (Sp): The smoke of burning periwinkle can conjure the soul larvae of the Lower planes, the unclean or malignant dead who died prematurely and oftentimes violently. It was believed by the Neureni that these souls were condemned to wander forever in hatred, relentlessly seeking revenge or until they fulfilled a certain purpose. This power is similar to *lesser planar ally*, except the *zagazmorani* can summon only larvae, and these creaturesy do not ask payment for services; the lesser fiends are docile instruments to these ancient sorcerers. This power can be used once per week.

Summon Spirit (Sp): Breathing is what keeps our aethereal souls in our bodies. Every time we exhale, we are but a breath away from the other world. It is breathing in that gives us life-force. And so breath is considered as the vital principle: soul and spirit, and force of life. The air and the aether are filled with the souls of the dead and immortal entities that see the truth. Through them, these sorcerers can access that truth. One of the practices that would facilitate that would be an offering of periwinkle thrown into the fire. The smoke would not only soothe the dead but also provide them with substance for apparitions. At 5th level the *zagazmorani* can cast *speak with* dead once a day.

Speak with Zagaz (Sp): Based on the pagan belief of the Neureni ancestors, who considered the evergreen to be the Tree of Life, the Cosmic Tree and Axis Mundi, the Gundarakites consider the evergreen to be sacred and use it in rituals of renewal. It continues to play an important role in Gundarakites, being present at the most important rites of passage from birth to burial, symbolizing one's journey of spiritual ascension and the immortality of the soul. The Cosmic Tree is at once here and in *illud tempus*, connecting the three worlds:

- The dark womb and realm of the dead through its roots.
- The realm of the living and circle of life through its branches and needles.
- The heavenly realm of the gods and blessed ancestors through the top of its crown.

It is through the burning of the Cosmic Tree at the winter solstice that time renews, as the primordial spirit is rarified and regenerates once more. At 6th level a *zagazmonari* can use this power once a year during the winter solstice to cast a *commune* spell.

Greater Capnomancy (Sp): At 7th level a *zagazmonari* can use this power to cast a *divination* spell once per day.

Transporting Smoke (Sp): It is said *zagazmonari* live predominantly in the other world, that of the aether. When they do descend on human communities, they often appear and disappear surrounded by mists and fog, or clouds of smoke. The *zagazmorani* can conjure a cloud of smoke similar to an *obscuring mist* spell that can transport them to any location as if they had cast a *dimension door* spell at will.

Walkers in Smoke (Sp): By using a technique using the smoke of hemp, these sorcerers can induce ecstatic trances. They specialize in trances during which their souls are believed to leave the body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld. Theye also emphasize their role as psychopomps and the use of techniques that are theirs and theirs alone to commune with divinity and guide the dead. At 9th level the *zagazmonari* may cast *ethereal jaunt* once per day.

Vremenar: According to legend, *zagazmorani* ride dragons alongside the moroi and strigoi, the spirits of the restless dead. They conjure storms and sunshine alike, and they control the winds with their semantrons, which does indicate the use of sound and movement, even dancing, as a technique for ecstasy. To reach 10th level, a *zagazmorani* must challenge the current leader of the order, who bears the title of Vremenar, to a duel to the death. If he kills the former cabal leader, he advances the final level and becomes the head of the cabal, gaining the title Vremenar and forgetting who he was before, as the malevolent entity who controls the cabal takes complete possession of him. After reaching 10th level, the former *zagazmorani*, now Vremenar, has the power to cast *control weather* or *rain of terror* once per day. He also gains the power to control the *balauri*, the Luktar word for a serpentine magical beast known as a Mist Hydra, which lives in the subterranean caverns beneath the Twisting Tower. The Vremenar can control the magical beast as if it was an animal and ride it as a mount.



The Twisting Tower

The *Vrtljivin Stalp* stands alone on the barren *Teufelhrib* or Dragon Hill (aka Demon Hill) a lava rock hill, overlooking Teufeldorf. From a distance, the cockscrew-shaped tower looks as if it was a tool used by some giant to free himself from the bowels of the earth. A closer look reveals a crude lava formed set of staircase continuing from the rock to the tower, its dark black stone walls engraved with runes, giving the impression of scales spiraling upwards like some giant serpent or the tail of a dragon. The Tower has a no visible entrance, as initiates enter the Twisting Tower through the use of a *dimension door*. Count Strahd has applied a permanent version of this spell; now, in order to enter the Twisting Tower, someone has to have the magical means to find the entrance and then utter a magical word to be transported inside. The command word to use this magical effect changes every day.

The tower has a long stairway at its center, connecting all the above-ground levels of the building. Each floor has seven windowless rooms, that grow smaller as one ascends the tower. On the ground floor were once the reception hall and recreation rooms, but these have been turned into barracks. The first floor housed the seven students in seven separate rooms, now also used as barracks. The second floor housed a massive library separated in seven sections each concentrated to a school of magic, excluding the school of transmutation, which the *Zagazmonari* consider it to be too materialistic. When the first soldiers entered the Twisting Tower after the occupation of Teufeldorf with the aid of a warmage, the shelves of this massive library were empty. Now the Barovian soldiers use the library, though the books on strategy and warfare they have stored here do not even compare to the vast wealth of knowledge that once existed in these halls.

On the third floor existed the laboratories, wrere future *Zagazmonari* practiced the art of alchemy. The few alchemists and wizards under Count Strahd's command still use the space. The fourth floor was the hall of conjurations, its walls still covered with magical sigils of protection and other abjuration magic to force anything conjured within these walls to *stay* within these walls. The conjuration room is still used to this day to conjure natural and magical beasts for the soldiers to train with. The fifth floor once was the hall of evocations, where magical fires would burn all night long. It is now used as a detention center for interrogations. On the sixth floor are the halls of enchantment; this floor is still used to create magical equipment or magically analyze them. On this floor is where the Barovian intelligence officers

meet and exchange information and battle tactics. The Seventh floor is called the hall of mirrors, as powerful illusions expand the true dimensions of this area into a maze of mirrored corridors. An obscure legend says that by following a specific path through the illusions someone can enter the land of the dead. In actuality, the seventh floor holds a connection to the subterranean caverns beneath the Twisting Tower, which are used for divination and necromantic magic.

The tower seems to be ancient and no one knows who built it. According to Petre Racula, author of *The Exile and the Return,* the Terg leader Durukan the Unstoppable – also known as Dorian – who invaded Barovia in 320 BC, was the one who reinstated the *Zagazmorani*. He makes no reference as to how the school of Teufelmonance was transported to the Twisting Tower in Teufeldorf, however, and that still remains a mystery.

While the school was still active, the seven students lived in the windowless tower. What seems odd is that when Teufeldorf was captured and the first soldiers managed to enter the tower with the assistance of a war mage, they found the tower empty. Apparently the students and their master Vremenar Zeteni Ozola had managed to empty the school and take everything away. Count Strahd Von Zarovich ordered for their arrest and swift execution, but only a handful were found and they never spoke a word. Among those executed was none other than Vremenar Zeteni Ozola. Having killed the leader of the cabal, Count Strahd believed that the *zagozmonari* were no more. He soon realized that the Twisting Tower itself was impenetrable to his scrying powers; it seemed that something was obscuring his sight and obstructing his dominance over the town. Since he was unable to monitor the Tower with magical means, he decided to use it to train his officers and soldiers in strategy and espionage. He thought that If he was unable to pierce through the tower's protections, so too would his enemies be unable to, and so he made the Twisting Tower the center of intelligence against the Gundarakite rebels.

What the Count has not realized is that it is not a magical barrier that blocks his powers in The Twisting Tower, but instead the influence of a fiend older than the land itself. When the Terg leader Dorian reinstated the *zagazmonari*, he ordered the creation of a statue depicting the demon lord Zagaz – also known as Za'far by other accounts. The legend says the statue was imbued with magic and was able to speak and teach the Zagazmonariu students the mysteries of the world and dark sorcery.

The Caverns Below

The Twisting Tower was built over an ancient salt mine, where someone can easily lose oneself along the underground lava created chambers, shafts and labyrinthine passageways honeycombing the earth. The endless corridors of this cavern are filled with reliefs and statues depicting demons and chthonic entities. The largest chamber is where the Statue of Zagaz rests upon an altar made of rock salt this underground temple is filled with images of death and demonic creatures commanding mortals to do foul things from tricking gullible neighbors to sacrificing their daughters to a seven headed fire spitting dragon. One of these corridors leads to an underground lake beneath the island of Teufelotok where a cryohydra resides.

Training the Zagazmonariu

As the *Zagazmonariu* must have a supernatural bloodline imbued with magic, most are sorcerers. Those who are not are of demonic birth, usually calibans but a few dhampirs have been *zagazmorani* as well. While the *zagazmonariu* lived in the Twisting Tower above ground, most of their training was done in the underground chambers, where they were instructed by the Vremenar as well as the fiend imprisoned in the statue. Their training was hard and perilous as they learned the foul language of Evil, the notorious Dark Speech that could kill anyone who misspoke its words, as well as dark magic and divination. As the training progressed, less and less students would survive to continue their study. Once only three remained, they were all secretly ordered to dispose of the other two in a non-aggressive way, thus each remaining *Zagazmonariu* had to kill the others without using violence, but by tricking them. They also had to defend and guard themselves so as to not to be tricked and slain. In the end only one *Zagazmonariu* would survive to graduate, gaining the title of *Zagazmonari* and offering his soul to the Statue of Zagaz..

Dread Possibility: The Exiles

Since the annexing of Gundarak by Count Strahd Von Zarovich and his persecutions of its people, the *zagazmonari* have begun to gather together, assisting the Gundarakite rebels from the shadows. Most of them live as beggars and some of them still reside in Teufeldorf right under Strahd's nose. Their number is slowly declining, however, as the older ones die of old age and those executed can not be resurrected. Also, it has been more than a decade since the school was closed. Although the *zagazmorani* have candidate Gundarakites to become *zagazmonariu*, since the Twisting Tower is occupied and protected by Strahd's magic, they

are unable to enter the caverns below. A few of them have decided to create another way into the underground chambers. Recently, they created a mining company and they plan to ask a permit from Captain Rebeka Ditrau to dig on the Island of the Devil. Since most residents avoid Teufelotok, they can create a shaft leading down to the caverns below and continue their training.

Dread Possibility: The Headless Snake
When Strahd Von Zarovich ordered the persecution of all *zagazmonari*, his men managed to discover or capture only a handful of them. Among the few discovered was also Vremenar Zeteni Ozola, leader of the cabal and teacher of Teufelmonance. Thinking that by cutting the head of the snake the rest of the *zagazmonari* would disband, Strahd did exactly that. After managing to capture the renegade sorcerer himself in the guise of Vasili Von Holtz, the Count swiftly executed him by cutting off his head. Although this was a big setback for the *zagazmonari*, ending a tradition of centuries, the surviving *zagozmonari* decided a new Vremenar should lead them. Recently there has been a killing spree among the beggars of Teufeldorf. Although most people do not care, Captain Rebeka Ditrau does not want a murderer to go around killing people as this disruption of law and order could soon escalate into something bigger. What the appointed commander of Teufeldorf does not realize, is that these killings are not committed by a single person, but are the result of infighting for succession among the *zagazmonari*. What she believes it is to be a serial killer could soon expose the cabal itself, bringing a final end to the *zagozmonari*.

Dread Possibility: The Talking Statue
Deep in the salt caverns below the Twisting Tower lies the hidden Temple of Erlin, a temple made of salt, decorated with massive reliefs carved into its walls and menacing statues made out of rock salt. Among the statues in this temple, there is one that stands out not only because it is placed on the rock salt altar of the temple, but also because it is not made out of salt but of the blackest obsidian, contrasting with the pale walls of the temple. The archaic, crudely-made statue is over 9 feet tall and depicts a sitting, bearlike fiend with batwings and large ram's horns on his head. The statue sports a wide grin, which shows its immense teeth. Those who are familiar with fiends will see some similarities between the statue and a Yugoloth Guardian Daemon.

The truth is that the statue is the prison of just such a fiend, bound into service by Dorian himself, who was the Vremenar of this secret cabal of demon worshippers, to teach *zagazmonariu* students treachery. The fiend's reality wrinkle is what blocks Count Von Zarovich's powers in the Twisting Tower and the surrounding hill. But it is not only Strahd Von Zarovich who has noticed this abnormality in Teufeldorf.

When the arcanaloth Inajira moved into Teufeldorf in 756 BC, disguising himself as a local magistrate and alchemist, he also noticed this peculiarity in the Twisting Tower. Disguised by magic as a Barovian soldier, he managed to pass Strahd's wards and infiltrated the Tower. With his powers and intellect, he managed to pierce through the illusions leading to the caverns below and after some time in the ancient salt mines he managed to find the Temple of Elrin and the Statue of Zagaz, sensing the Guardian Demon imprisoned there. Although guardian demons are intelligent, they are not independent; they are created by yugoloths in order to heed the summonings of mortals foolish enough to attempt to call one of their kind without knowing its true name. They act similarly to golems, obeying the commands of true yugoloths. As such, the arcanaloth had discovered an unlikely ally in the Twisting Tower which informed him of the *zagazmonari*. Inajira devised a plan; he would use the traditions of the *zagazmonari* to gain control of that group as well as use the fiend imprisoned inside the statue to corrupt Strahd's men and learn of his plans, sabotaging them to enrage the Darklord.

Book of the Zagazmonarios
This relic is a massive, black, leatherbound book, overstuffed with yellowing sheets of parchment. Its magical pages hold the holy texts, divine wisdom and ancient knowledge of the *Zagazmonari*. Every time the *Zagazmonariu*, students of the school of Teufelmonance, learned something new, they would record it in this book, which holds the wisdom of ages. Whenever a True Believer of Erlin opens the book in search of answers or knowledge on a specific subject, the book has the power to open at the right page to grant those answers. The relic works as a *vision* spell, relating information about any subject be it person, place or object. Any person who is not a worshipper of Erlin who searches for knowledge in this book is bound to fail, as the book deliberately confuses non-believers by an everchanging system of cross references and because the pages rearrange themselves randomly to make the book even more complex. Non-believers who browse the book will not find anything useful in it. To use this book, a reader must worship Erlin and either sacrifice a 7th level divine slot or have the True Believer feat and at least 13 HD. A reader who uses the index at the back has 90% chance of finding any arcane spell within the tome's pages (retries for

the same spell within 24 hours fail). Spells recorded in the *Book of the Zagazmonarios* take half as long to prepare as normal. This ancient book went missing with the death of Vremenar Zeteni Ozola. Most *Zagazmonari* believe it lies somewhere in Castle Ravenloft.

Strong divination, moderate transmutation; CL 15th Sanctify Relic, Crat Wondrous Item, *Comprehend Languages, Find the Path, Minor Creation, Secret Page, Vision*; Market Price: 40.000gp; Weight 4 lb.

Dread Possibility: The Avatar of Erlin
Rumours have begun to circulate about a young handsome man with dark hair and milky white skin appearing at night on the banks of the Gundar River close to Teufeldorf. In some stories his presence is associated with the disappearance of a young girl; some believe him to be Leederick the Phantom Lover or a vampire; others believe him to be a just a man preying on young girls. There are others, however, who believe him to be Erlin the god of Death, taking girls as his brides and escorting them to his underworld realm. This is not very far from the truth as the mysterious man is the Balaur, a seven-headed serpent monster capable of assuming the form of a man, which lives in an underground lake found under the Dragon's Island in the Gundar River close to Teufeldorf.

Dread Possibility: Balaur, the Seven Headed Dragon
Until Emanuel Maryszkas first created the Cult of Erlin, the god of death seemed to have been dead himself. Before the founding of the Cult, Erlin was only worshipped because the Gundar family ordered that this should be done. Since the religion of Erlin resurfaced as an element of Gundarakite culture being repressed by the Barovians, so did many legends and stories connected to that religion. One of these legends was the legend of the *zagazmonari*, ancient mythological magicians who dominated the many-headed dragons.

The legends described them as tall, red-haired and bulging-eyed youngsters who used to be dressed in white tunics like peasants or in scattered and patched clothes. When they did not act helping the devil, they dressed like beggars so that the population would not recognize them and they carried a bag with magical instruments and a book with all their knowledge and spells entitled "Book of the Zagazmonarios". Their magical items are usually an iron axe that acted in a similar way to a wand, but also worked as lightning rods; a semantron, a percussion instrument with which they summoned the winds; and reins to direct the dragons made from birch bark.

The knowledge acquired from the devil allowed the *zagazmonari* to dominate the dragons and guide them into the sky to cause rain, hail and snow, blizzards or thunderstorms. When they disguised themselves as beggars, they studied the hearts of the inhabitants of the towns and farms and, in accordance with their behavior, favored or punished them with good or bad weather. The Neureni, the ancient inhabitants of Gundarak, did not fear the *zagazmonari* since they believed that they were fundamentally benevolent beings and even if some countryman attracted their anger through bad behavior, they could be appeased with the help of some old teacher. *Zagazmonari* lived among humans. When the Cult of the Morninglord arrived in Gundar, its priests sought to eradicate the figure of the *zagazmonari* and re-branded them as disciples of devils so that people would stop believing in them. The many-headed dragons of the myth have seven heads in some stories while in others it can have ten or even twelve.

The dragon living in the bowels of the earth is also seen by the Cult of Erlin as the means for liberating their people. Recently one such "dragon" was spotted by cult-members on the shores of Gundar River. The Cult has been making offerings to the huge beast, hoping to tame it and liberate their country with its power, as well as curse the Barovians with bad weather. These offerings involve Barovian maidens kidnapped from the villagers around Teufeldorf. The "dragon" is not an actual dragon, but the balaur: a Mist creature in the form of a seven-headed cryohydra. It resides in the underground lake beneath Teufelotok. Although it was taken care of by Vremenar Zeteni Ozola, since his death the Mist creature has been appearing outside its lair, feeding on any unlucky passerby it encounters. It is able to exit the underground lair using its mistform.



Balaur

Seven-Headed Mist Hydra
Huge Magical Beast (Cold, Mist): CR 10; Gargantuan (30ft. long); HD 8d10+38; hp 77; Init +1; Spd 20ft. (4 squares), swim 20ft; AC 17 (-2 size, +1 Dex, +8 natural), touch 9, flat-footed 16; Base Atk/Grapple:+7/+19 ; Atk 7 bites +14 (1d10+5); Full Atk 7 bites +14 (1d10+5); Face/Reach 15ft./10ft.; SA Breath Weapon (cold); SQ Darkvision 60ft., fast healing 17, low-light vision, scent; LE; SV Fort +10, Ref +6, Will +4;

Str 21, Dex 12, Con 20, Int 2, Wis 10, Cha 9

Skills: Listen +7, Spot +7, Swim +12

The Balaur has +2 racial bonus on isten and Spot checks, thanks to its multiple heads.

It also has +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.

The Balaur has a +4 racial bonus to Hide and Move Silently checks while in fog or mist.

Feats: Blind Fight, Combat Reflexes*, Iron Will, Toughness, Weapon focus (bite)
*The Balaur's Combat reflexes feat allows it to use all its heads for attacks of opportunity.

Description

The Balaur is a reptilian monster with seven heads,. that can quickly tear apart all but the most well-prepared foes, and small dragonlikie wings that seem to small for its size. Its skin is pale gray with a sickly white underbelly. It is about 30 feet long and weighs around 6000 pounds. The Balaur can also take the appearance of a handsome, dark-haired human male with milky white skin. When in this form, the Balaur appears to be dressed in a white tunic. The few people who have witnessed this form and survived believe they have seen the avatar of Erlin.

Background

The Land of Mists is a strange place, where emotional resonance can form reality itself. The Balaur is a legendary creature thought to be used by the legendary Vremenar, leader of the *Zagazmonari*, to control the weather. Few people know the *Zagazmonari* still exist, and only those who have studied in the Teufelmonance know that the seven-headed "dragon" really exists, created by the very Mists that created Gundarak. The magical beast called the Balaur is a fierce beast resembling a hydra, but made of the very substance of the Mists themselves. It shared some characteristics with the ancient vampire lord who ruled the land.
Duke Nharov Gundar was considered a hero during his lifetime, slaying monsters and organizing a rebellion against the king of the realm he originated from. His fall to undeath had deranged him and transformed him into the very things he was fighting against, however: an oppressor and a beast. Gundar's oppression went so far as to pass a harsh fine to Gundarakite families who gave birth to a girl, ostensibly because it was believed by the Duke that a girl will not labor as hard in the fields as a boy would. Although misogynistic, Gundar believed himself kind by giving each family fifteen years to pay the full fine. If the family failed to fulfill their obligations to their Duke, the girl would be seized and taken either to Duke Gundar so he could feed, or to the Twisting Tower as a sacrifice to the Balaur. The Balaur shared the same appetite for virgin blood as did the Duke, and shared the Darklord's bestial nature.
When Gundarak was created, the Balaur already resided in the subterranean lake beneath Teufelotok, the island of the Devil or Dragon as it is translated from Luktar, where it lairs unto today. The Vremenars were the only ones with the power to control this massive beast, appeasing it for more than a century with the sacrifices of virgins to protect Gundarak from it.
When Count Strahd Von Zarovich executed Zeteni Ozola, the last Vremenar of the cabal known as the *zagazmonari* and ordered their persecution, he unleashed a powerful evil into the world, because the Balaur is no mere beast.

Current Sketch

After the assassination of Duke Gundar and his release from Darklordship after the Grand Conjunction, changes began to happen in the lands belonging to Gundarak. The eastern lands of Gundarak were annexed by Barovia and the western lands were freed from rule and supported the Gundarakite Rebellion from Invidia. These changes also affected the beast living in the underground lake. But it was after the execution of Vremenar Zeteni Ozola that the most drastic change occurred. As Duke Gundar had turned from a man into a beast in his undeath and became even worse during his Darklordship the Balaur gained the power to transform itself from a magical beast into a handsome human male. Though the beast does not have the intellect of a man, it has enough to use its new form to lure maidens to him before transforming into his true form and devouring them. This is the Balaur's sole goal until further changes occur.

Combat

The Balaur can attack with all heads at zero penalty, even if it moves or charges during the round.

The Balaur can be killed either by severing all the creature's heads or by slaying its body. To sever a head, an opponent must make a successful sunder attempt with a slashing weapon (by declaring where the attack is aimed before making the attack roll). Making a sunder attempt provokes an attack of opportunity unless the foe has the Improved Sunder feat. An opponent can strike at the Balaur's heads from any position in which he could strike at the Balaur itself, because the Balaur's heads writhe and whip about in combat. An opponent can ready an action to attempt to sunder a Balaur's head when the creature bites him. Each of the Balaur's heads has 11 hit points, losing a head deals 5 damage to the body and a natural reflex seals the neck sut to prevent further blood loss. The Balaur can no longer attack with a severed head, but takes no other penalties. Each time a head is severed, two new heads spring from the stump in 1d4 rounds. The Balaur can never have more than twice its original number of heads at any one time, and any extra heads it gains beyond its original number wither and die within a day. To prevent a severed head from growing back into two heads, at least 5 points of fire or acid damage damage must be dealt to the stump (a touch attack to hit) before the new head appears. A flaming weapon (or similar effect) deals its energy damage to the stump in the same blow in which a head is severed. Fire or acid damage from an area of effect (such as a *fireball* spell) may burn multible stumps in adittion to dealing damage to the Balaur's body. The creature does not die from losing its heads until all heads have been cut off and the stumps seared by fire or acid.
A Balaur's body can be slain just like any other creature, but the Balaur possesses fast healing and is difficult to defeat in this fashion. Any attack that is not (or cannot be) an attempt to sunder a head affects the body. For example, area effects deal damage to the Balaur's body, not to its heads. Targeted magical effects can not sever the Balaur's heads unless they deal slashing damage and could be used to make sunder attempts.

Fast Healing (Ex): Each round, the Balaur heals 17 points of damage.

Breath Weapon (Ex): The Balaur can use its heads to breathe a cloud of chilling mist every 1d4+4 rounds. The cloud is similar to an *obscuring mist* spell with the difference that anyone caught within it suffers 1d6 points of cold damage per round. When the cloud dissipates, all vegetation caught in the area of effect is covered by a thin layer of rime. A successful Fortitude save DC 17 halves the damage.

Mist Peering (Ex): The Balaur can see three times the normal distance in fog or mist. Creatures five feet away from it in fog or mist are considered to have no concealment. Creatures further away than five feet have concealment, and creatures fifteen feet away have total concealment. All miss chances for concealment due to fog or mist are halved for the Balaur. For instance, the Balaur has a 25% chance to miss a creature in total concealment due to fog. Keep in mind that a creature with total concealment cannot be seen, and must be pinpointed first – and that concealment works both ways.

Elemental Resistance (Ex): The Balaur has resistance 10 to both acid and electricity

Immunity to Cold (Ex): The Balaur has immunity to all cold-based attacks.

Immunity to Enchantment (Ex): The Balaur is immune to all mind-affecting effects (*charm*, *domination*, *sleep* and similar powers).

Immunity to Polymorph (Ex): The Balaur is immune to all polymorph and shape-altering magic such as *baleful polymorph* or *flesh to stone*. The only exception is its own ability to change its form.

Human Form (Sp): The Balaur has the ability to take the form of a handsome, dark-haired man with milky white skin. This deceitful form is just an illusion and does not give the Balaur any human abilities such as speech; it is simply used to lure young maidens close to him. The Balaur can maintain this guise indefinitely.

Trackless Step (Su): The Balaur leaves no tracks or any incidental sign of its passing. Any attempts to track it using Survival fail, as well as attempts to find clues of its passing using Search. Creatures with this ability, however, may still leave evidence through ethereal resonance. One can still follow, scry or spy upon the creature unless it is protected through some other means. Purposeful signs made intentionally by the creature remain and may be found through normal means.

Mist Walking (Su): When gifted with this power, a Mist creature can travel between patches of fog as if using *dimension door*. The creature must begin and end its travel in an area occupied by mist or fog. It can travel in this fashion up to a total of 80 feet per day and may split up the distance in any fashion that it wishes

Luring Presence (Su): Any female virgin who sees the Balaur's human form must make a DC 18 Will save or be compelled to approach the creature. Those so compelled must attempt to approach the creature

each round, doing nothing but moving towards it. A compelled individual may run toward the creature if she wishes. Virgins who are prevented from moving towards the creature still move as close as they can. They will try to overcome any obstruction by any means necessary, including attack. They will continue in this fashion unless they can no longer see the creature. The target will always use whatever natural movement is necessary to approach the creature, though it is not compelled to use alternative forms of travel.
A maiden lured by this power can be compelled into travelling a route that would cause her death, if the target of this power is confronted with a path that will obviously lead to her endangerment, however, she receives a new Will save. If she succeeds, the luring enchantment is broken. This includes endangerment in combat to get to the creature.
If the target reaches her goal, the Balaur changes back to its bestial form to devour the maiden, the victim then gets a new Will save to resist. Failure means that the poor target takes damage and is counted as helpless.

Instill Aura (Sp): By extending its blessing, a Mist creature with this power can cause another to assume an "aura of vengeance." While cloaked in this aura, the target is surrounded by a tangible sensation of wrath and violence. When the target next meets the object of its vengeance, its opponent must make a Will save or become shaken. The Will save is always equal to 10 + + the target's HD + the target's Charisma Modifier. A creature with this ability cannot use the power upon itself.

Undying (Su): The Mists will not allow the Balaur to die. If it is vanquished, it dissipates into harmless vapor before it reappears in its lair the following night. To truly destroy the Balaur three things must happen: first the domain of Gundarak must cease to exist, the Vremenar must have died (both of these have already happened) and Duke Gundar must be destroyed permanently.

Fire Vulnerability: Fire is a deterrent to the Balaur and it is usually repelled by it, requiring a Will save (DC 10+1 per HD of the creature) to enter the circle of light created by a large bonfire.

Sunlight Vulnerability: One of the reasons the Balaur's lair lies in an underground cave, is that sunlight is destructive to it. If the creature is caught in true sunlight, it takes 1d4 points of damage per round until it can dive back into the Mists, call mist to it or find a place in complete darkness to hide until night. Additionally, any time the Balaur is in sunlight, it suffers –2 to all attack rolls, saving throws and skill checks due to disorientation. Spells that mimic the effect of sunlight, such as *searing light* and *sunbeam*, are also useful against it.

Reflection Vulnerability: The Balaur can be turned by being presented with a reflection of its image, just like a vampire, but only if the one presenting its reflection is a cleric with the ability to turn undead.

Vulnerability to Silver: The presence of light reflected from a silver surface is painful to the Balaur and can be used to repulse it. The light must be strongly presented to have an effect. The Balaur must make a Fortitude save (DC 10 +1 per Cha modifier of the person presenting it) to stay within 15 feet of the item reflecting the light. When someone sees the reflection of the Balaur when it is in human form through any shiny metal, the Balaur's true form is reflected. Player characters should make a Spot check DC 18 to catch sight of the creature's true image.

Vulnerability to Holy Water: The Balaur is vulnerable to holy water and quintessence, taking extra damage from such attacks.

Craving: When confronted with a female human virgin, the Balaur is compelled to eat her alive. The Balaur must make a Will save DC 18 in order to stop itself from fulfilling its Craving. A successful save means that it has mastered its compulsion for one minute. Each additional minute the Balaur is confronted with a virgin, its Craving increases the save DC by 2.

Deliverance from Sin: Any person who kills the Balaur is blessed with the effects of an *atonement* spell

The Golden Rein of Vremenar
The legends of the flying seven-headed dragon are in fact true; the *Golden Rein of Vremenar* is a magical, golden, giant-sized bridle that gives the Balaur the power of flight as an *overland fly* spell (average maneuverability) would, for up to 9 hours per day (split up as its owner desires). The beast can carry 500 pounds at a speed of 40 feet, or up to 1000 pounds at a speed of 30 feet. The whereabouts of this magical item are currently unknown.

Moderate transmutation; CL 9th; Craft Wondrous Item, *overland flight*, *permanency*; Market Price: 35.000gp; Weight 70 lb.

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Secrets of a Starving Land

Dread Possibilities for G'Henna

By Ian Fordam
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The Brotherhood of Bones

The Brotherhood of Bones is a secret platoon within the Swords of Zhakata. Outside its ranks, only Yagno Petrovna and the Warder General of the Swords know of its existence. Even the Chief Inquisitor is kept in the dark. The Captain of the Brotherhood answers only to the Prophet and to the Warder General, just like the Fangs of Zhakata[1] do.

Although Swords in general are not known for military discipline or extreme piety, the members of the Brotherhood are uniformly, fanatically dedicated to the Beast-God and His Church. They have to be. Their task is to defend the House of Bones from anyone who might attempt to uncover its secrets. The Swords of the Brotherhood know none of those secrets, as is only proper and good.

To provide additional incentive for those who serve in the Brotherhood, the Swords ensure that their families are more than properly taken care of. Nobody returns from the Brotherhood, but the sort of person invited to join is the sort of person who considers this sacrifice glorious.

The current captain of the Brotherhood is named Dorin Plessu. He calls himself *The Third Fang* although he is not, in fact, a Fang of Zhakata nor blessed with the powers of a Fang. On the other hand, in the heart of the Badlands there is nobody to correct him.

G'Hennan Rock Goats

Although the so-called rock goats of G'Henna are nearly identical to the more mundane mountain goat, they have evolved a highly unusual defense mechanism: auto-petrification. This ability serves them particularly well in winter. As an extreme form of hibernation, rock goats turn to stone when the temperature drops consistently below freezing, and they return to flesh when spring breaks. Petrified goats blend in very well with the landscape.

However, this auto-petrification also activates whenever a goat is excessively alarmed, in particular if it suffers a wound. In this case the petrification lasts only 1d6x10 minutes before the goat automatically reverts to its fleshly form. During this span, predators often lose interest in the suddenly-inedible goat.

G'Hennan rock goats are most commonly found in the valley known as the Jackal's Run. Unfortunately, the kobolds there have learned to take advantage of the goats' defense mechanism. When they encounter a petrified rock goat during the winter, they push the goat from the heights, often shattering it upon the ground below. When the auto-petrification ends, the shattering is fatal for the goat but fortunate for the kobolds, who have a meal ready when they need one most at the end of the Season of Zhakata's Banquet.

The Green Valley Vineyard

The Green Valley Vineyard is a small but very productive vineyard tucked into the foothills of the Hotath Mountains along the far eastern end of the Fertile Valley. It is known for a particularly fine vintage of G'Hennan Red. According to rumor, the quality of the wine stems from a spring of magical purity upon its lands.

The vineyard is owned and operated by an elderly woman named Ljubitsa. Every spring she comes to town to hire a crew of laborers to work her vineyard. Otherwise, she lives alone except for her manservant, a burly fellow named Gremag, and her pet raven, whom she calls Gunnd.

[1] See "Scenes from a Starving Land", *Quoth the Raven Issue 28*, for details of the Fangs of Zhakata.

The grounds have four main buildings: the "big house", the longhouse where the hired hands live, the half-sunken fermentation house, and a barn where necessary livestock and equipment are stored. (In addition to being a vineyard, Green Valley is also a farm, growing enough food for its inhabitants.) Ironically, the "big house" is markedly smaller than the longhouse and not significantly larger than any of the rest.

The supposedly-enchanted spring is on the southern end of the vineyard where the ground starts to rise rapidly into the Hotath Mountains. A small shack has been built around the spring itself; this shack serves as a coldhouse where perishables can be stored in the summer. It is not intended to obscure the spring's source.

If anyone comes to the Green Valley Vineyard in search of the spring, they may well negotiate peacefully with Ljubitsa. After all, she knows that the spring is not magical, and she has no reason to prevent anyone from taking some negligible amount of water. In exchange for the water, Ljubitsa will ask that visitors help out with minor tasks around the vineyard, particularly any visitors who happen to be strong, young men. None of these tasks are unusually arduous. Ljubitsa will watch their labor with lascivious but unthreatening delight.

Ljubitsa treats peaceful visitors, even mongrels, equally well, regardless of race. If asked about her tolerance, she will point out that her vineyard was near to the Darkonian border before the Severing. She has always been exposed to non-humans on a semi-regular basis.

Trouble is most likely to arise only if visitors come looking for it. Spells such as *detect evil* do not work anywhere in Ravenloft, of course, but other means of divination—for example, magic items which detect shapeshifters—may give a hint that something is potentially awry. Attempting to *speak with animals* with Ljubitsa's raven Gunnd will also cause alarm, because Gunnd cackles delightedly and caws, over and over, "Foolish humans! Gremag will get the flesh, Ljubitsa will get the blood, and Gunnd will get the eyes!" In the presence of visitors, Gunnd is fixated on his favorite treat and will not say anything else.

Ljubitsa is actually an annis hag. Once each year's vintage has been paid for and shipped to Dervich, she throws a feast for that year's laborers. This feast is an enjoyable affair until the laborers discover that they are the main course. Similarly, beneath the veils laid by Ljubitsa, Gremag is actually an ogre. Each year Ljubitsa uses the laborers' lives to work blood magic, guaranteeing the quality of the next year's vintage.

The Heretic's Egress

West of Dervich, the land slopes sharply downward, and both the Drogach and Eel's Flow rivers descend into the resultant valley. The terrain grows increasingly marshy as one progresses westward until eventually the land falls away into a lake, which itself vanishes into the Misty Border. However, only a third of the way across the valley, at a point where the ground is still solid enough to support horse-drawn carts, one might stumble across the Heretic's Egress.

The Heretic's Egress is a moderately reliable Mistway which runs between G'Henna and Darkon, opening partway between Viaki and Neblus. At either end, the Egress only appears in the presence of the corpse of a sentient being. Moreover, the Egress does not actually open unless there is at least one such corpse for every Medium-sized or larger creature in the vicinity. For example, four carters and two horses require the corpses of at least six humans (or mongrels or kobolds) to open the Mistway. Corporeal undead will also serve this purpose. On the other hand, incorporeal undead cannot enter the Mistway at all.

All dead flesh is destroyed during passage through the Heretic's Egress. Intelligent undead will readily notice this dissolution as it begins, and they can avoid destruction if they turn back immediately.

The location of the Heretic's Egress is one of the most closely held secrets of the Vintner's Faction of the Dervich Merchant's Guild. Any of the other factions would pay a tremendous sum for this knowledge.

The Living Rock

The Outlands are littered with many rock outcroppings, but one of the more unusual ones is known as the Living Rock. The Living Rock is an irregularly-shaped boulder roughly ten feet high and twenty-five feet in diameter. It appears to be made of limestone, almost like a coral reef without the corals. Because its material is relatively soft, it may be damaged easily. However, the Living Rock received its name because it grows back.

The Living Rock is home to a pack of osquips. These rodents live in cysts which exist naturally within the rock. When they detect noise nearby, they gnaw through the soft limestone until they can attack whatever creatures are making the noise. Fortunately, the process of gnawing free is a noisy one, but unfortunately, it's easy to miss if the wind is howling.

Apart from attacks by the osquips, the Living Rock is a good place to shelter during a sandstorm. The downside is that the human and humanoid denizens of the Outlands know this and take advantage of it. Anyone seeking shelter is likely to find themselves in the company of bandits, Swords, and/or kobolds. Accordingly, the Living Rock is widely considered to be a place of truce. On the other hand, that truce has often been broken.

Raresh the Hermit

Raresh is a mongrel hermit who lives in the Badlands of G'Henna. Although he was once a priest of Zhakata, he was stripped of his humanity years ago. Raresh's features are more insectile than the majority of mongrels. Most strikingly, he has faceted eyes, four arms, and useless tiny wings. Nonetheless, he wanders the desolate Badlands, and every night he throat-sings the praises of the Beast God.

Despite being a mongrel, Raresh is widely held to be holy by the faithful of Zhakata (at least those faithful who journey so far from civilization). Despite the many dangers of the Badlands, he survives, which does argue that he enjoys Zhakata's protection. It is considered good luck to give him food and drink, even just a bite and a swallow.

Nowadays people who know of Raresh assume he must have belonged to the Hand of Zhakata, that branch of the Church which worshipped the aspect known as the Provider. However, in his human days Raresh belonged to the Will of Zhakata, commonly called the Inquisition, which is the branch where most of the politically ambitious priests gravitate. Like many priests of the Inquisition, faith was irrelevant to him. Ambition was all. However, when he made a particular bid for power, he lost, and he narrowly avoided death instead of transformation. Only when he found himself alone and inhuman in the vastness of the Badlands did he discover faith, sincere and profound.

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The Pride Eater

Denizen of the Valley of Dust in G'Henna

By Michail Adamis (Mephisto of the FoS)

Valley of Dust, G'Henna 735 BC.

Arkan Gănescu gazed at the stars overhead while the chilling wind of the G'Hennan steppes flailed his exposed face. He and the caravan he traveled with were heading toward Zhukar, the city of hunger, for any provisions and equipment they could buy or steal. They had just emerged from a sandstorm, and by looking at the stars he knew they had lost their way. This was not how he envisioned his membership in the Ata-Bestaal. But he was a failure; he had been rejected by nature itself, and now he was trapped in this duty of caring for the mongrelfolk living in the Outlands.

He didn't mind them; he actually had a great amount of respect for them, as they had a strong sense of community and they were somehow closer to the serenity of animals than he would probably ever be. As a member of the Ata-Bestaal, his desire was to reach a perfect connection with nature, and although the state of these animalistic *corcitomenesc*, those varied animal crossbreed humanoids known as mongrelmen, was more pure than him, he would not embrace it willingly as it was a path that would block anyone's ascension to a purest animal form.

There were some mongrelmen traveling with the caravan as well, the ones who could more easily pass as human. Arkan had befriended one of them, a short female mongrelman named Theia. Her torso was covered by heavy, matted, red-brown fur. Arkan had glimpsed her breasts, and had seen two series of around ten nipples running from her chest to her belly. Her scaly right arm ended in a hand that looked more like a primate's, while her left arm was closer to a human's, though intensely hairy. Her face looked a lot like a human's, only if it weren't for those immensely large flopping ears, a pig-nose and large lips that covered half of her lower face. The most distinguishing animal feature on her was her lizard legs, brownish, heavy sheepskin robe and layers of tattered fabrics. Theia, as most mongrelfolk, had really low self-esteem, believing herself to be hideous to look upon.

The acceptance the mongrelmen received from members of the Ata-Bestaal had made them, including Arkan, respected among the mongrelfolk. Some even had begun to grow a romantic affection toward members of the Ata-Bestaal. Theia was one of those mongrelfolk; it was obvious to everyone but Arkan that she had feelings for him, making her even more secretive and shy than she normally was. She was even more enamored with him after Arkan had given her a small silver mirror medallion as a gift. Although that trinket was a piece of jewelry used for makeup, Theia was pleased to have it as it made her feel good—she was able to use the mirror to focus only on her eyes, which were the only part of her body that had remained unchanged by her transformation. Arkan had humored her by saying that the eyes are the mirrors of the soul. Not long after that, Theia confided in him that she had been arrested for heresy. She was a firm believer of Zhakata the Provider, a few years before Arkan had joined the Ata-Bestaal, and had been transformed on the High Altar of the Great Temple of Zhakata in Zhukar by Yagno Petrovna himself, like most mongrelfolk in G'Henna. Shunned by everyone, including her husband and children, she was forced to seek other mongrelfolk like her in the Outlands of G'Henna, joining their community to survive.

Arkan got lost in his thoughts and memories of the transformation ritual, practiced for all to see on the High Altar on the highest point of the imposing Temple of Zhakata. His mind traveled to images of the procession of red-robed priests of Zhakata forming a crimson arrow pointing toward the altar. Sometimes after their transformation, some mongrels would be tossed from the altar and then would fly from the gaping gargoyle mouths at the corners of the temple, plunging to the Plaza of the Faithful below, also known as Plaza of the Pitiful to blasphemers such as himself.

There were times when the falling mongrelfolk would fall on onlookers, injuring them—something the faithful would surely see as a blessing.

Arkan's mind continued to travel—he couldn't wait to see the magnificent city of Zhukar again after a year in the Outlands. He imagined watching the City of Bridges built on the cliffs overlooking the Dranach River, strolling in the marketplaces, tasting one more time fresh beer from the city's breweries. He wondered what had become of his own brewery, as he had sold it some two years ago, when he decided to join the Ata-Bestaal, to one of his cousins. He imagined how his life would have been if he had never known about the society. *The power is the beast, and the beast is the power*, the chant of the Ata-Bestaal rang in Arkan's mind. No regrets. Caring for the mongrelfolk was the right thing to do, and apparently that was his destiny.

"*You shall live neither with men, nor beasts,*" was an old Vistana's *tarokka* reading a few years ago, when he was still brewing beer and slept on a comfortable straw bed.

The whining of horses abruptly stopped Arkan's wandering thoughts, followed by another scream, although he couldn't discern if it was human or mongrel.

"Praying Mantis!"

A voice echoed into the night.

"Praying Mantis! Take cover!"

The cry was repeated by men and mongrelfolk alike as a large insect jumped off the dusty ground and landed on a horse. The rest of the horses ran panicked into the barren wasteland, still carrying their tents, rations, and water. One of the mantis' enlarged, spiked forelegs had stabbed an unfortunate mongrelman in the chest, raising him above the ground. The mantid's triangular head turned around its neck, searching for its next victim or checking for any threatening movement on our behalf with large, bulging eyes. Then it turned to the the dead mongrelman. It fixed its four palps around the mongrel corpse's head and bit it off with one strong bite. It stayed there almost motionless, chewing at the dead body, when Dragos, a foolhardy young man, seemed to be ready to attack the enormous predator.

Everyone wanted to shout to him to stop, but they were too terrified to do so, as to not attract the insect's attention. Dragos sneaked silently behind the mantis and slowly ducked as to go under it. The mantis turned its head backwards, followed by its large body, facing Dragos as it dropped the mongrelman's corpse to the ground. The large insect stood tall, spreading its forelegs, while bright colors and patterns appeared on the beast's hindwings and the inner surfaces of its front legs, to intimidate its attacker. Dragos froze in place; he seemed unable to react, or maybe he thought that standing still would somehow make him invisible to the threatening insect. Time seemed to freeze while the cold wind began to raise a cloud of dust from the surrounding dunes.

Dragos mustered the courage to attack the mantis, aiming for the insect's mesothorax, but the large insect managed to fend of the attack using the left of its raptorial frontal legs, leaving Dragos weaponless. The dusty cloud became even denser, the flailing wind covering Dragos' scream as the mantis latched its mandibles onto Dragos' left shoulder with blinding speed. The silvery dust began to hinder vision, as apparently another sandstorm was about to engulf the caravan. A second scream was heard from somewhere within the blinding cloud of dust that had trapped them all, then another. There seemed to be a commotion close by, but Arkan was unable to do anything, as his spear had been packed on one of the horses.

Another scream was heard, this time to the right, really close to where Arkan was. Arkan fearfully began to turn around his axis, looking toward his surroundings obscured by silver dust, waiting for the praying mantis to emerge from within the dusty cloud. Instead of that, Arkan saw another member of the Ata-Bestaal, Ilie Datcu, a few feet away from him. She seemed to be struggling against the shimmering dust. The moonlight reflected on the silvery dust made strange shadows on the face of the beautiful woman, who stood motionless, frozen in a mask of terror. Then out of the dusty cloud, a barely audible series of whispers, covered by the sound of the wind, was heard.

"*Don't worry, you are next…*"

"*Who are you?*" asked Arkan, inspecting Ilie from a distance to see if she was carrying a weapon.

"*The question is not who I am, but what am I, Arkan Gănescu."* The pronoun the whispers used identified the source as one individual.

"*What are you then? How do you know my name? **Show yourself**!*" shouted Arkan. His adrenaline boosted his morale, making him, as always, defiant.

"*I am here, Arkan, around you, can't you see me?*" As soon as Arkan heard those words, a pair of glowing, white eyes locked with his gaze. A pale silver mist appeared within the dusty, silvery cloud, barely visible.

"*Do you see me now?*" the whispers echoed in Arkan's head, filling him with a chill unlike any he had felt in the freezing Outlands.

"*I am the Pride Eater, Arkan, haven't you heard of me before? I wish you have, or else you will hurt my pride*." The taunting whispers were followed by an unearthly laugh.

Arkan had indeed heard of the Pride Eater, a legendary being said to dwell in the Valley of Dust, where the air is heavy with the silvery dust of the mongrelmen's lost pride. That was all he knew about this creature.

"*Indeed…"* said the whispers once more. "*I am glad you know of me—it is a point of pride, after all. I wonder, what is yours?*" the misty creature continued.

"*Ah!... yes, to be one with the animals, I could help you with that, you know…"*

"*I don't need your help,*" answered Arkan, obviously annoyed that the creature was able to read his thoughts.

"*Oh… but you do need my help. Nature has already rejected you, Arkan, don't forget that. I am the only one who can offer you the serenity you want, the serenity you need!*"

Without being able to resist, Arkan's mind traveled to the most embarrassing moment of his life. He was again led to the northern hills of G'Henna, close to the Darkonian border. There was to be a full moon that night, and Arkan anxiously waited for the ceremony of acceptance as a full member within the society itself. A month before he had attended the initiation ritual, he had entered the same series of underground caves they were heading to for the ceremony. The Ata-Bestaal headquarters was a well-kept secret from Yagno's inquisition, that would be mostly be used for monthly ceremonies during the nights of the full moon. During the initiation ritual he had forced his left arm through the bars of a cage holding a fierce werewolf. The lycanthrope mauled him as he spoke loudly the words of initiation: "*The power is the beast, and the beast is power*".

The werewolf had bitten him badly, creating a large wound along his arm that had left a large scar, lighter than his skin color. It was still fresh though when he attended the acceptance ceremony. That night's transformation into a lycanthrope would make him a full member within the society—rejection was something he hadn't really thought of, except for during the Vistana's card reading that had made him a bit nervous. Otherwise, he had been sure of his acceptance and ascension to the ancestral glory of a beast. But that was not to be. When the time of ascension came, he remained human as other novice members were transformed into lycanthropes. He was hunted down, and he barely managed to survive by escaping through the designated safe path before past failed initiates sealed the only door that had been left open. He was one of them, a failed initiate, forever obligated to follow the orders of full members within the society without question.

Although he was still a member of the society, he would forever be viewed with contempt, and had officially no other chance or option to ascend. He still remembered the look that a broad-shouldered woman gave him as she stepped out of the cave after the carnage ended—

her light-colored skin contrasting with the black beard and thick, short, raven ponytail, her thick, continuous eyebrows forming a black bar over her piercing, light blue eyes. Her gaze was full of contempt as she snarled to Arkan. He had failed, was a reject, had no true reason to live anymore. He had sacrificed everything for the Ata-Bestaal, and now he would die in the silvery sands of the Valley of Dust. There was no hope anymore, there was nothing.

A war-cry woke him up from his daydreaming thoughts. He opened his eyes, and realized that he was floating above the ground. A few feet below, he could see Theia attacking the Pride Eater with a sacred dagger she had owned since she was human.

"*Are you proud of your conquest, Arkan?*" said the Pride Eater mockingly.

"*Oh!... you didn't know, did you?...*" The mist creature's whispered voice became even more taunting. "*Maybe you should swallow your pride and betroth this miserable abomination.*"

"*She is not an abomination, she is closer to nature than you will ever be, Pride Eater!*" shouted Arkan as he struggled to escape the evil mist that had engulfed him.

"*You are the abomination, Pride Eater, a cursed creature existing only on false pride!*"

"*You dare speak to me about false pride, weakling? You, that burst with pride. You who are too proud to recognize Zhakata's magnificence? Can't you see, weakling? Zhakata* ***does*** *provide!*"

The Pride Eater's boasting was cut short as Theia managed to stab the misty creature with her magical dagger. The Pride Eater, amazed by the defiance of the mongrel and bewildered that such a creature was able to hurt it, released Arkan. It flew toward Theia, engulfing her in its misty tendrils as she desperately tried to fight the mist creature off. The Pride Eater began rising upward, carrying with it the panicked mongrelwoman. Arkan lost sight of her, his vision obscured by the cloud of silvery dust he was surrounded by. He only heard the voice of the Pride Eater inside his head.

"*Pride cometh before the fall.*"

There came a thudding sound next to Arkan. He turned to see Theia on the tumultuous, dusty ground. Arkan knelt next to her and held her head. Theia's disfigured mouth was dripping blood.

"*Theia!*" shouted Arkan. "*Theia forgive me, I didn't know!*".

Theia slowly opened her tearful eyes, glancing anxiously at Arkan.

"*Arkan!... Am I beautiful?*" Her speech was distorted by her transformation, but still comprehensible.

"*Yes you are, Theia, yes you are. Look for yourself…*" Arkan took the mirror medallion he had given her a few days before and turned it to Theia. "*You were always beautiful, you are perfect.*" Theia's face became calm and motionless, and Arkan held her body tight against his as he wailed over the loss of his friend.

"*That was really touching, Arkan. Now I understand. She was your pride and joy after all.*" The vaporous undead laughed mockingly once more.

"*Too bad she didn't live long enough for you to spend the rest of your life with her. Then again, you won't live long either.*"

The dusty cloud began to dissipate, and the large misty creature clouded Arkan from above as it moved slowly toward him. Around Arkan and Theia's body, members of the Ata-Bestaal roamed aimlessly in a catatonic state. The praying mantis lay dead on the ground, impaled by spears. Mutilated bodies of mongrelmen and men lay around the dead insect. The surviving mongrelmen had run away and were barely visible. Most probably, they were trying to head back to the mongrelmen encampment, but without water that would be an impossible task. As the misty creature came closer to Arkan, the va-

pors around its glowing eyes moved, slowly creating a menacing, feral, humanlike visage. The Pride Eater's glowing, white eyes shone brightly against its silvery, misty body.

Arkan saw the undead creature flying toward him from above. The Pride Eater slowly formed something resembling a misty human torso, with two large arms made of silvery fog ending in two clawed, hazy hands preparing for attack. Arkan looked around for Theia's magical dagger, but could not see it anywhere.

"*It is probably under the sand, not an easy task for you in such little time,*" whispered the echoing voice in Arkan's head.

"*Look at yourself, Arkan. You thought you were special, but you are not. You are just a man. A man who wants to become a beast, but I will not grand you that favor. When I finish with you, you shall be one of the wandering, trapped in the horror of your existence, exposed to the elements like Ilie. It will be a slow and torturous death out there, or a slow and torturous death inside your mind. This I promise…*"

Arkan remembered a legend about the soul of a vampire becoming a misty cloud upon its creation—the vampire's soul would be as dangerous as the vampire itself. Arkan made a logical assumption if this creature was indeed the soul of a vampire then it would probably be susceptible to a vampire's weaknesses. Still defiant even in the face of death, Arkan stretched his arm upward toward the approaching misty horror, holding Theia's mirror medallion.

"***No!*** *Look at* ***yourself****, you puffed up anathema!*"

The Pride Eater got a glimpse of itself in the small, silver mirror held against it. Rarely able to look at its form in this dry wasteland, it was unable to resist. The undead horror's gaze was fixed upon the surface of the small, silver medallion, gazing at its reflection.

"*I am…* ***magnificent****.*" The Pride Eater's voice sounded almost lethargic in Arkan's head.

Arkan, seeing the deadly creature suddenly stop in front of the mirror, as if mesmerized by its own image, slowly placed the mirror on Theia's body, facing upward. The mist creature flew closer to Theia's body, still gazing at itself as Arkan moved away from it. He didn't know how much time he had until the Pride Eater woke up from its trance, and he wasn't interested in finding out. He decided to run away from the vaporous undead horror, instead of losing time to search for Theia's dagger. The Pride Eater had seemed to be really slow, and there was a good chance that Arkan could escape it. Vigorously, he ran as fast as he could, his only worry being the chilling elements of the Valley of Dust, and the lack of water. He knew that he wouldn't make it if he tried to turn back to the encampment, as the mongrelfolk were probably trying, or if he went forward toward Zhukar.

It wasn't just the lack of water though that made him decide on an alternative destination. As the caravan's only surviving Ata-Bestaal, there was a good chance he would be punished by the society, maybe even blamed and accused of being a traitor to the cause. He knew what his punishment would be if he were accused of treason, had already witnessed it in the underground complex of the Ata-Bestaal. He had already given too much to them, to the cause, and he hadn't received anything in return. He would not offer himself as a sacrifice to them; his defiant character was the reason he had joined the Ata-Bestaal in the first place. He would not conform to their rules as he hadn't conformed to the edicts of Yagno Petrovna and his false god. As far as he knew, all gods were false—only nature existed, because it was perceptible everywhere. He would get a second chance at ascending as a beast. He would become a chosen one.

From far away, he could see the peak of a hill splitting the horizon in two. The sky had a faint rosy color as the sun slowly rose, marking east behind the hill. With a sense of security, Arkan headed toward the hill to the east and the land known as Markovia, oblivious to the fact that he was about to enter the domain of another false god, Diosamblet.

Pride Eater

Unique Crimson Death

Large size Undead (Mists); CR 11; Large (6ft. tall); HD 13d12; hp 84; Init +9; Spd Fly 30 ft. (perfect); AC 17 (Dex +5, deflection +2), touch 17, flat-footed 12; Base Atk/Grapple +11/+11; Atk incorporeal touch (Cha damage) or slam +11 melee 1d10 + Cha damage (see stuffed); Full Atk 2 incorporeal touches (Cha damage) or 2 slams +11 melee 1d10 + Cha damage (see stuffed); Space/Reach 5ft./5ft.; SA Charisma damage, lift, seize; SQ animate sandstorm, create mongrelman, darkvision 60 ft., *detect thoughts*, grant vengeance, mindlink, mist peering, pride scent, resistance 10 to acid/cold, sandstorm, spell resistance 22, trackless step, unaltered, undead traits, undying, vaporous; SW: Air vulnerability, alluring fire, fascination, sun vulnerability, stuffed; CE; SV Fort +4, Ref +11, Will +10;
Str — (11, see stuffed), Dex 21, Con —, Int 18, Wis 15, Cha 14

Skills: Concentration +14, Hide +21*, Knowledge (nature) +19, Knowledge (religion) +19, Listen +20, Search +13, Spot +20, Survival +2 (+34**)

*The Pride Eater's misty form makes it difficult to spot in fog. Before feeding, the creature receives a +8 circumstance bonus on Hide checks in dusty or smoky areas, and +24 within the Misty Border. After it has fed, the bonus drops to +4 because of its silver coloration but if it is within a silvery sandstorm it gains a +12 bonus instead. Within the Misty border, the bonus is raised to +20 if the Pride Eater has fed.
**The Pride Eater gets a +30 racial bonus (on top of its +2 synergy bonus from Search) to follow tracks by smelling pride (see pride scent).

Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Combat Expertise, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes (B), Mobility, Spring Attack (B), Track (B)

Languages: Telepathy

Signature Possessions: none

The Pride Eater is a vaporous creature that lives in the Valley of Dust in the southwestern edge of G'Henna, close to the Misty Border that once bordered Markovia. In the Outlands of G'Henna, the Pride Eater doesn't have the need to conceal its presence, as its victims usually roam that unfriendly land as mongrelmen or lost ones that frequently die from exposure to the elements. The Pride Eater normally resembles a pale, misty cloud with two glowing white eyes, without any other facial features. Other times, it has a vaguely humanoid shape, including arms and a torso. Its lower body trails off into indistinct vapor. When it feeds, its fingers elongate into tentacles. After it has fed, its misty body turns silvery. When the Pride Eater mentally communicates, its "voice" sounds like a barely "audible" series of whispers.

Background

Legends tell of a connection existing between crimson deaths and vampires. Some scholars suggest that when an undead vampire is destroyed, its spirit is transformed into a crimson death. Others suggest that when a vampire is created, the monster's lost soul is reborn elsewhere as a crimson death. An even more obscure theory suggests that a vampire may be restored to life if it is rejoined by its crimson death counterpart. There is also a third theory that says that extremely evil air elementals are condemned into a craving existence as crimson deaths. Even if any of these legends and theories are true, the existence of the Pride Eater is a completely different story. The Pride Eater was never a vampire or an evil elemental before becoming a crimson death, but a human, a vain priest of Zhakata the Provider, whose existence has been erased from all texts and archives in the Zhukar Library of Enlightenment. This man was known at one time as Bogdan Sandu, but now only Yagno and the older priests of Zhakata remember him—although none of them will ever speak of him.

When the domain of G'Henna appeared in 702 BC, the people of that land had never heard of the god Zhakata before. When Yagno Petrovna, along with Jugo Hesketh, began preaching about the beast god in the newly formed domain and gathering loyal followers to their

false religion, Bogdan Sandu was one of the first to be proselytized. Bogdan was a young, handsome man from Dervich, and although he was very attractive, he had made an oath of chastity to his god Zhakata, to the dismay of a lot of women and men. Though most people believed he was keeping himself pure for his god until the time came that Zhakata the Provider would reward him with pleasure, the truth is that Bogdan was too narcissistic to accept anyone as worthy of his affection. His beauty made people blind to his shortcomings, as well as his evil, as he was the third most powerful man in G'Henna after the chief Inquisitor, Jugo Hesketh, and the high priest, Yagno Petrovna. It wasn't long before Bogdan began to envy the adoration the people of G'Henna showed toward Yagno Petrovna, as he began to grow immune to the effects of Yagno's sermons. In time, he grew to despise the Prophet of Zhakata, but had no way to overthrow him, and was terrified of Yagno's loyal friend, Jugo Hesketh.

When Yagno Petrovna declared that Zhakata had only one aspect, that of the Devourer, and that those who believed in the Provider were heretics, Bogdan saw his chance to try to seize power. He created a network of followers loyal to him, as well as people that still believed in the dual aspect of Zhakata, little by little chipping away at Yagno's seat of power. Through dark research and the gifts of the Dark Powers, he had managed to also master the ceremony of transforming people into mongrelmen. His power was not limited only to believers of the false god Zhakata, as was Yagno's, but to nonbelievers as well. Bogdan saw this as a divine sign of him being the chosen one to lead the people of G'Henna to the new era of Zhakata the Provider. He had begun to organize a coup d'état involving the exposure of what happens with food offered to the Beast-God during Zhakata's Taking, as well as the corruption of the priesthood, but before he managed to put his plan in motion, his heresy was discovered by Jugo Hesketh.

Yagno, fearful of Bogdan's growing powers—and the realization Bogdan was impervious to his own powers—as well as the extension of his network, decided to not transform him into a mongrelman in a transformation ceremony, an act that could have made him into a martyr for the heretical ideas of Zhakata the Provider. He ordered for Bogdan's name to be erased from all records, and offered him to Jugo Hesketh to do as he pleased. Jugo tortured him for days and nights, all the while taunting him with what would happen to his corpse after he died. It was during that time that Bogdan pleaded to his false god to provide, and deliver him from torture whatever the price. Zhakata didn't answer, but other powers did; when Jugo went to Bogdan's cell to continue his torture, he didn't find anyone in there. Believing that the guards were heretics that helped Bogdan escape, he had them take his place.

Unknown to Jugo and the guards, who could not give any logical answer for Bogdan's disappearance, Bogdan had for years slowly given himself to the Mists. With every evil act, the high-ranking priest had taken a path of darkness fitting for a vain man such as himself, and with his final plea, the Mists answered. They transformed him into a unique form of crimson death, a Pride Eater, a creature forever craving pride, as well as vengeance against the man it envied most in the world, Yagno Petrovna, the high priest of Zhakata. The newly created Pride Eater roamed through the corridors of Zhakata's Temple, searching for Yagno. He managed to easily slip into the high priest's bedroom, and prepared to attack. Yagno woke up to see a swirling, white mist with glowing, white eyes floating over him, and he held his beaded cord and banished the mist creature to the borders of his domain.

Current Sketch

The Pride Eater has an insatiable craving for the characteristics it had in life: its force of personality, personal magnetism, physical attractiveness, and pride. It is inexorably attracted to humanoids within the Valley of Dust. The Pride Eater began its existence as an unthinking creature of animalistic instincts. However, as it fed on the personalities of the living so did it feed on their thoughts and memories. Over years of feeding on the fragmented memories from hundreds of victims, as well as Bogdan Sandu's own memories, these congealed into a patchwork consciousness, the Pride Eater. The

unending torment of fractured thoughts and incoherent schemes has driven the Mist creature deeper into homicidal madness. The Pride Eater occasionally forms human silhouettes in the mist, as if trying to regain its lost humanity.

It still retains some of the characteristics it had in life, such as its envy for Yagno Petrovna, the person it deems responsible for its hurt pride. Although it knows that Yagno is very powerful to confront, the Pride Eater enjoys annoying the high priest by sending mongrelmen against him, as well as by foiling the darklord's plans. The Pride Eater sees the Valley of Dust as its turf, and would surely attack any person loyal to Yagno Petrovna who trespasses there. Although the Pride Eater's craving is difficult to control, the creature can manage to resist it if it sees that by doing so it may annoy Yagno, such as by letting Petrovna's enemies survive an encounter with it. Although the Pride Eater has no coherent recollection of its previous life, it still has the same flaw as it had when it was human: its narcissistic behavior. An inflated sense of his own importance, a deep need for excessive admiration, a lack of empathy, and a preoccupation with fantasies of power. Because of its delusional sense of self and inability to see the truth, it has the misconception that the state it is in is a blessing.

Combat

The Pride Eater's attack consists of extending a vaporous tendril and wrapping it around its opponent. It avoids combat, except to feed or to defend itself. The creature prefers to attack from ambush, and it avoids physically powerful targets that might easily break free of its grasp. When attacking a creature, the Pride Eater wraps its tentacles around its victim, causing its pride to escape through the pores, eyes, nose, or mouth, with no pain or discomfort caused to the victim.

Charisma Damage (Ex): The Pride Eater siphons away Charisma, dealing 1d4 points of Charisma damage immediately upon seizing an opponent with a tendril. Each round thereafter that the opponent remains seized, the creature automatically deals an additional 1d4 points of Charisma damage. The Pride Eater craves its victim's pride, so it usually presses its attack until it can deal at least 12 points of Charisma damage. Lost Charisma is recovered at 1 point per day. If the victim's Charisma would fall below 1, he becomes a mongrelman or a lost one (see below).

Seize (Ex): When the Pride Eater makes a successful incorporeal touch attack, one of its tendrils wraps around the opponent. The two creatures are not considered grappled, but the opponent can break free with a successful Escape Artist or grapple check (grapple bonus +11). Upon seizing an opponent, the Pride Eater begins siphoning Charisma (see above).

Vaporous (Ex): The Pride Eater can be harmed only by other incorporeal creatures, +2 or better magic weapons, spells, spell-like abilities, and supernatural abilities. The creature has a 50% chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source. The Pride Eater can naturally camouflage itself within fog. To discern the Pride Eater from natural fog requires a DC 15 Spot check. The Pride Eater can only be spotted in fog so easily if it is not actively attempting to hide. If the Pride Eater actively attempts to hide in fog, it gains the bonuses enumerated in the Skills section of its statistics block above. The Pride Eater can squeeze through small cracks or openings, fitting through any opening that water can penetrate. The Pride Eater can squeeze through the smallest opening in two full rounds. Because of its vaporous nature, the Pride Eater could be imprisoned in an airtight container. This does not harm it, but when released it would immediately attack its unwitting rescuer.

Stuffed (Ex): Although the Pride Eater is virtually undetectable and very agile when not fed, it becomes progressively more silvery and tangible once it has started filling with pride. In that state, it is more sluggish, but harder to detect in the silvery dust of the Valley of Dust. The Pride Eater is normally immaterial (AC 17) but after feeding it attains solidity (AC 13) for six turns. At this time, the creature turns silver, moves more slowly (fly 15 ft.), and can be struck by magical weapons of +1 or better. However, it is also able to make a slam attack, delivering 1d10 points of damage to anyone struck, as well as

using its Charisma damage ability, siphoning off 1d4 points. While solid, the Pride Eater gains a Strength ability score of 11, and needs double the time to squeeze through small cracks or openings, requiring 4 rounds to do so.

Silent (Ex): The Pride Eater always moves silently, and cannot be heard with Listen checks if it doesn't wish to be.

Lift (Sp): As a free action, the Pride Eater can telekinetically lift another creature, or an object weighing up to 300 pounds. This ability works like the telekinesis spell (sustained force version, caster level 12th), except that it works only on an opponent already seized by a tendril of the Pride Eater. Against a struggling opponent, use of this ability requires a successful grapple check (grapple bonus +11). If the opponent has been lifted from the ground when it is released from the Pride Eater's engulfment, he suffers damage appropriate to the height of the fall.

Undead Traits: The Pride Eater is immune to mind-affecting effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, necromantic effects, and any effect that requires a Fortitude save unless it also works on objects. It is not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, ability drain, energy drain, or death from massive damage. The Pride Eater can be raised, if a resurrection spell is cast on the place where it was destroyed.

Mist Peering (Ex): The Pride Eater can see three times the normal distance in fog or mist. Creatures five feet from it are considered to have no concealment, creatures further away than five feet have concealment, and creatures fifteen feet away from it have total concealment.

Elemental Resistance (Ex): The Pride Eater has a resistance 10 to acid and cold.

Spell Resistance (Ex): The Pride Eater has a spell resistance of 22.

Unaltered (Ex): The Pride Eater is immune to shape altering magic, such as polymorph and petrification spells.

Darkvision (Ex): The creature has darkvision (60-foot range).

Craving (Ex): A Pride Eater must make a Will save DC 23 in order to stop itself from fulfilling it's craving for pride. A successful save means that the Pride Eater has mastered its compulsion for one minute. Each additional minute the Pride Eater resists its Craving, the save DC increases by 2.

Create Mongrelman (Sp): As a full round action, the Pride Eater can cause a victim that would normally be reduced to 0 Charisma to become a mongrelman instead. Any creature who adheres to a specific faith gets a DC 25 Will save against this power. Targets who fail have their Charisma permanently reduced to 1 and become mongrelmen; those who succeed on this save become lost ones instead. In both cases the victim does not gain a Charisma point each day anymore. A mongrelman can be restored back to its original form by casting remove curse during a wind storm, or with a polymorph spell. This power cannot transform anyone who is an atheist. The mongrelmen created by this power seek others of their kind.

Sandstorm (Su): The Pride Eater dwells in this land where the air is heavy with the silvery dust of the lost mongrelmen's pride. As a full-round action, a thick haze of swirling dust and sand swirls out from the point the Pride Eater designates up to 230 feet distant. It stirs and sends the dust whirling in blinding sand storms so that it may more easily slip closer to prey. The Pride Eater can create a patch of swirling dust with a 20 foot radius and 20 feet high. The patch of dust lingers for 130 minutes, though the Pride Eater can dissolve the dust at will before the duration runs out. The effect obscures all sight, including darkvision, beyond 5 feet. A creature within 5 feet has concealment. Creatures farther away have total concealment. Unprotected, non-magical flames are automatically extinguished, and there is a 50% chance that protected flames will be snuffed. In addition to obscuring sight, the swirling dust abrades any creature within it or attempting to move through it. A moderate wind (11+ mph) disperses the dust in 8 rounds; a strong wind (21+ mph) disperses it in 4 rounds. This effect does not function underwater.

Animate Sandstorm (Su): The Pride Eater has the power to move a 20 foot radius and 20 foot tall sandstorm in the direction it desires as a standard action. The sandstorm moves at a rate of 20 feet per round, always traveling along the ground, and it can move over barriers that are shorter than 20 feet.

Pride Scent (Su): The Pride Eater has a sense of living nearby creatures, equivalent to the scent ability of some monsters. This ability allows it to detect approaching enemies, sniff out hidden foes, and track by sense of "smell". With this ability, it can identify familiar personalities just as humanoids do familiar sights.

It can detect opponents within 60 feet by sense of "smell". Since this is a supernatural ability, it does not increase or decrease as normal smell does by wind. When it detects a person, the exact location of the source is not revealed, only its presence somewhere within range. It can take a move action to note the direction of the scent. Whenever it comes within 5 feet of the source, it pinpoints the source's location.

The Pride Eater can follow tracks with this power by making a Wisdom (or Survival) check to find or follow a track. The typical DC for a fresh trail is 10. This DC increases or decreases depending on how strong the quarry's personality (Charisma modifier) is, the number of creatures, and the age of the trail. For each hour that the trail is cold, the DC increases by 2. The ability otherwise follows the rules for the Track feat. The Pride Eater ignores the effects of surface conditions and poor visibility for tracking.

Undying (Su): The Mists do not allow the Pride Eater to die. If it is vanquished, it will dissipate into nothingness, only to reappear the following night.

Mental Scan (Su): The Pride Eater is able to detect thoughts as per the spell. He may use this ability at will, whenever he wishes.

Mindlink (Su): The Pride Eater is able to communicate by sending telepathic messages. The recipient of the communication must have some way of responding in order to reply.

Trackless Step (Ex): The Pride Eater does not leave any tracks of its passing, as it is made out of mist. It may still leave evidence of its passing visible to those who can see ethereal resonance.

Fascination (Ex): The Pride Eater may feed on pride, but is itself vulnerable to its own pride. Any shiny object can be used to defend against the Pride Eater, as it gains sight of its own image, which fascinates him as if it were under the effects of a hypnotism spell, although without the suggestibility. The Pride Eater may resist this effect with a Will save at DC 23. If the reflective surface is covered, or the Pride Eater is attacked, the fascination is destroyed.

Alluring Fire (Ex): Whenever a bone-fire is lit in the Valley of Dust, there is a cumulative 5% chance per hour that the Pride Eater will be attracted to it.

Sunlight Vulnerability (Ex): Whenever the Pride Eater is caught in true sunlight, it takes 1d6 damage per round. The Pride Eater will try to dive back into a sandstorm, call one to him, or find a place of complete darkness to hide until night. Spells that mimic sunlight such as searing light or sunbeam have the same effect as true sunlight.

Air Vulnerability (Ex): The Pride Eater is vulnerable to spells that mimic natural weather, such as gust of wind or control winds, as these can change the level of concealment of the Pride Eater. If cast on the Pride Eater itself, the spell forces it to dissipate if it fails a Fortitude save.

Dread Possibility: Misty Vengeance

The Pride Eater may seem to be indestructible, appearing out of the Misty Border to the southeast the following night, but there is a way for it to be permanently destroyed. As Jugo Hesketh was the one who tortured Bogdan Sandu daily, and the reason he made his dark pact with the Mists, it is only Jugo Hesketh's death that can release the Pride Eater from its cursed existence. The Pride Eater also has the power to instill an avidity for vengeance in the mongrelfolk he creates (see below). He was in fact responsible for Jugo Hesketh's death, but the dark powers

would not let go of their misty minion so easily. They brought Jugo Hesketh back from the dead as a ghast. When Yagno Petrovna faced the undead monstrosity Jugo had become, he was not able to bring himself to destroy his former friend. Instead, he drove the creature out, forcing him to flee into the wilds of Tepest. Now that G'Henna is an Island of Terror floating in the Mists, the Pride Eater's destruction is an even more difficult task.

Grant Vengeance (Sp): The Pride Eater can instill in the mongrelmen it creates, as well as others, the power of vengeance against Jugo Hesketh. The Pride Eater must touch the intended target for one full round. If the target accepts the power of the creature, he gains a +2 to hit, damage, and all saves when the target fights Jugo Hesketh. This effect lasts for 24 hours, and it is applied only while fighting Jugo Hesketh, not his minions.

Note: *Jugo Hesketh's background and personality is detailed in the 2e Ravenloft – Monstrous Compedium Appendix II, below is a 3.5e version of him retaining his clerical powers.*

Jugo Hesketh

Ghast/8th level Cleric of Zhakata

Medium size Undead: CR 11; Large (6ft. tall); HD 12d12; hp 84; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 17 (Dex +3, deflection +4), touch 12, flat-footed 14; Base Atk/Grapple:+2/+5; Atk: bite +11 melee (1d8+3 plus paralysis); Full Atk: bite +11 melee (1d8+3 plus paralysis) and 2 claws +6 melee (1d4+1 plus paralysis); Face/Reach 5ft by 5ft./5ft. SA Paralysis, stench of evil, cleric spells; SQ Darkvision 60ft. create spawn, feasting, undead traits, +2 turn resistance, spell resistance, immune to holy water; SW iron vulnerability; CE; SV Fort +7, Ref +6, Will +13;

Str 17, Dex 17, Con —, Int 11, Wis 16, Cha 18

Skills: Concentration +14, Diplomacy +14, Intimidate +12, Decipher Script +5, Knowledge (arcana) +14, Knowledge (religion) +3, Knowledge (the planes) +1, Sense Motive +5, Spellcraft +4, Balance +7, Climb +9, Hide +10 (+14*), Jump +9, Move Silently +8, Spot +9

* When not moving, Jugo has a +6 competence bonus to Hide checks; while moving, the bonus becomes +2.

Feats: Multiattack, Toughness, Spell Focus (conjuration), Augment Summoning, Skill Focus (Intimidate), Skill Focus (Knowledge, arcana)

Languages: None

Cleric Spells per day: 6/6/5/5/3 Base DC 13 + spell level

Deity: Zhakata. Domains: Destruction (smite 1/day, single melee attack with +4 bonus on attack roll and +8 bonus on damage roll. Fire (rebuke, command or bolster fire creatures 7/ day)

Combat

While much of Hesketh's brilliant intellect has been lost, he retains a cruel and deadly cunning. When he attacks, he does so savagely, with tooth and claw. Hesketh leads a band of common ghouls, and he is seldom encountered without 1 to 4 of these loathsome creatures in his company.

Paralysis (Ex): Those hit by Jugo's bite or claw attack must succeed on a DC 26 Fortitude save or be paralyzed for 1d6+4 rounds. Even elves can be affected by this paralysis.

Stench of Evil (Ex): The stink of death and corruption surrounding Jugo is overwhelming. Living creatures within 10 feet must succeed on a DC 26 Fortitude save or be sickened for 1d6+12 minutes. A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected again by Jugo's stench for 24 hours. A delay poison or neutralize poison spell removes the effect from a sickened creature. Creatures with immunity to poison are unaffected, and creatures resistant to poison receive their normal bonus on their saving throws. Sickened creatures suffer a -2 morale penalty to all attack rolls, saves, and skill checks. All good creatures within 10 feet of Jugo Hesketh must roll a second successful Fortitude save at the same DC or suffer a -4 penalty to all attack rolls, saves, and skill checks as they are

overcome by supernatural fear. The stench remains detectable for 1 hour in an area were Jugo has remained for more than an hour; creatures with the scent ability can detect Jugo's stench for up to 4 hours. The stench loses its supernatural powers, but it is noticeable, and can be identified by anyone who has encountered the stench before. If Hesketh is tracked by scent after this period, the DC increases by +2 every hour as normal.

Create Spawn (Su): Any human or demihuman slain by Hesketh will become a ghoul in 1d4 turns; only if the body is blessed is this horrible fate averted. If the victim is raised or resurrected without being blessed, he or she will rise at once as a ravening ghoul. Of course, if the body is destroyed, as for example, if Hesketh and his associates eat their victim, it cannot become a ghoul.

Turn Resistance (Ex): Jugo has +2 turn resistance.

Spell Resitance (Ex): Jugo Hesketh has a spell resistance of 19.

Holy Water Immunity (Ex): The dark powers have granted Jugo immunity to the touch of holy water; he is still vulnerable to quintessence though.

Iron Vulnerability (Ex): Hesketh is not without his vulnerabilities. He can be harmed by any weapon, be it magical or mundane, and weapons forged of cold iron will inflict double damage with each hit. He can also be held at bay with a protection from evil spell, but only if powdered iron is used in its casting.

Feasting(Ex): When Jugo eats more than 20 lbs of flesh, he regains 12 hit points, as if he had rested for a day.

Undead Traits (Ex): Jugo Hesketh is immune to mind-affecting effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, necromantic effects, and any effect that requires a Fortitude save unless it also works on objects. He is not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, ability drain, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

chibiloft 2022

To Err is Faun

By Mark Bartels (Rock of the FoS)





The Soul-Kraken

New Members of the Fraternity of Shadows

By The Fraternity of Shadows

"*Cogito ergo sum – cogito ergo creo.*"

The sound of these phrases echoed among the rough dirt walls and wooden beams of the tunnels beneath the ruins of the Radiant Tower.

"*Cogito ergo sum – cogito ergo creo.*"

The sound echoed once more, its source even deeper than the dark shadow city's catacombs known as the Well of Bones.

"*Brothers, it has been a perilous journey through the Kingdom of the Hawk, but I see that you have all managed to arrive safely.*"

The Dementlieuse voice was deep and assertive. In one of the many maze-like corridors of the Well of Bones, there was a group of men. Even by the light of torches affixed to the corridor walls, they were visible only as dark silhouettes and shadows.

"*We only have our Brother in the Shadows Ambassador Marcos Veddarak to thank for that. His assistance in securing the necessary papers for everyone was an easy task for him, I am sure, but a necessary one for this meeting, and we thank him for it.*"

"*No need, Lord Balfour.*"

Although his strong build and the mark of the Hawk on his forehead could identify Ambassador Vedarrak as Falkovnian, there was not even a hint of a Falkovnian accent to his voice.

"*Maybe not, dear Brother… As I understand there was difficulty in finding papers for Brother Ambrose, especially when only a month has passed since the Requiem?*" continued Lord Balfour de Casteelle, knowing his remark would sting the Enchanter's ego.

"*I will respectfully defend my decision not to have Ambrose Skully among us tonight, Esteemed Father. It was not difficulty in creating the necessary papers that made his visit a risk, nor his race. Both could be easily disguised by illusions, or the conjuncture of events that reshaped the land of Darkon to what we now call Necropolis. It is our Brother's reckless behavior and drinking that led me to this decision, and…*"

"*We are sorry to interrupt you, dear Brother. There is no need to explain, we all know of the gnome's vices, it is common knowledge after all. This is why we chose to let him manage Le Café de Nuit, his skills are better suited for it. But speaking of skills, we are glad to introduce to you a new member of our Fraternity tonight, gentlemen. Erik, will you make the introduction?*"
"*Gladly, Esteemed Father.*"

A thin man with long, brown hair and an unkempt beard, dressed in the red and black clothing of a Richemuloise aristocrat, stepped onto the pedestal that Lord Balfour occupied. His grey eyes looked at his fellow Fraternity members who had come to attend the meeting. The professor of Anthropology and Modern Languages spoke with the elegant voice of someone who knows better, not trying to hide his arrogance in the slightest. Not one of the attendees actually liked him, but his knowledge of the arcane had made him a respected member of the Fraternity.

"*I am pleased to present to you a scholar of the arcane and anthropology, a researcher at the University of Richemulot with a specialty in the Abber Nomads, and an expert on the lore and geography of the Nightmare Lands. This makes him not only a brilliant scholar, but a resilient survivor of that land. After much consideration and having been proposed by myself, Professor Viktor Hazan – who you all are familiar with –*

and Alfred Larner of Paridon, the Fathers of the Fraternity accepted his membership based on his character as well as his scholarly accomplishments. Gentlemen, I give you Cedrik Paddock of Paridon, also known as De Kikker."

Probably nobody understood the meaning of the last word, except Cedrik and Victor Hazan, who knew it meant "frog" in the professor's native language. It wasn't unusual for Erik Van Rijn to make such stinging insults to his subordinates, but to use one during Paddock's initiation ritual was profoundly absurd and demeaning. The tone of the professor's voice changed, becoming raspy, similar to the sound of a faint wind blowing through a dead forest of dry leaves and brittle branches.

"*Take good care of him; he is a close associate of mine.*"

With these words, a sudden chill filled the underground corridors as Erik Van Rijn's grey, piercing eyes began to melt, leaving behind two empty eye sockets now illuminated by a faint, red light. His skin turned pale before corroding, as though a bottle of caustic acid had fallen on it, revealing dead muscle tissue that slowly sloughed off to reveal the deathly visage of a skeleton, which still looked piercingly at an odd-looking man with frog-like facial features. Cedrik Paddock's bulging eyes were wide with a mixture of amazement and pure horror.

Lord Balfour de Casteelle looked at the cowering novice member with menacing, predatory eyes. He opened his mouth, spelling out the word, but its sound echoed loudly in the maze of corridors beneath Lekar:

"T-R-A-I-T-O-R!"

The large white owl on the Umbra's shoulders took off and flew over everyone's heads, locking its predatory stare on Frosc, Cedrik's frog familiar, found in the Lamordian swamps bordering Dementlieu. Frosc had emerged slightly from its master's left vest pocket, oblivious to the predatory birds fixed eyes.

The rest of the Fraternity members recoiled from Cedrik, forming a circle around him with the man at its center as the owl moved in for the kill. Their angry faces repeated the word the Umbra had spoken again and again in unison:

"Traitor! – Traitor! – Traitor! – Traitor!"

The sound of the word was deafening to Paddock's ears as he fell on his knees, his hands over his heart to protect Frosc from the stark white owl.

"No! I am not, I am not a traitor!"

Cedrik screamed as the sound of his brethren's unified voices became too loud for him to bear. He held his ears tight to protect them from the word, as if with that gesture he would be released from its meaning. Frosc, now exposed, was easy prey for Lord Balfour's familiar, which swooped down on it, grabbing it with its long talons.

"No! I never betrayed you!" Cedric shouted.

"*Oh… But you WILL…*" The suggestion was barely audible, just a whisper among the loud, echoing, unified voices of the Brothers. Paddock held his ears tighter and closed his eyes as tears ran down his face and he began to uncontrollably change form, just as his 'imposter brother' had done many years ago during his 'Wakening'.

But he was not the only one changing.

Paddock never noticed that his surroundings slowly changed as well. The ceiling rose and the walls of the stone corridor separated, creating tall arches. What was once a dark corridor now slowly was illuminated by massive, colorful, stained glass windows and became a large cathedral. As he lay helpless on the cold stone floor in a fetal position, he failed to notice the small, night-dark spiders scuttling around him. If he had, he would have been able to see that this swarm of black arachnids was coming from where Erik Van Rijn had appeared to stand a few moments before. The pedestal he

had spoken from had been stretched out and transformed into an elegantly-carved pulpit made of ebony, carved with reliefs made from the darkest thoughts imaginable, accessed by a short flight of stairs.

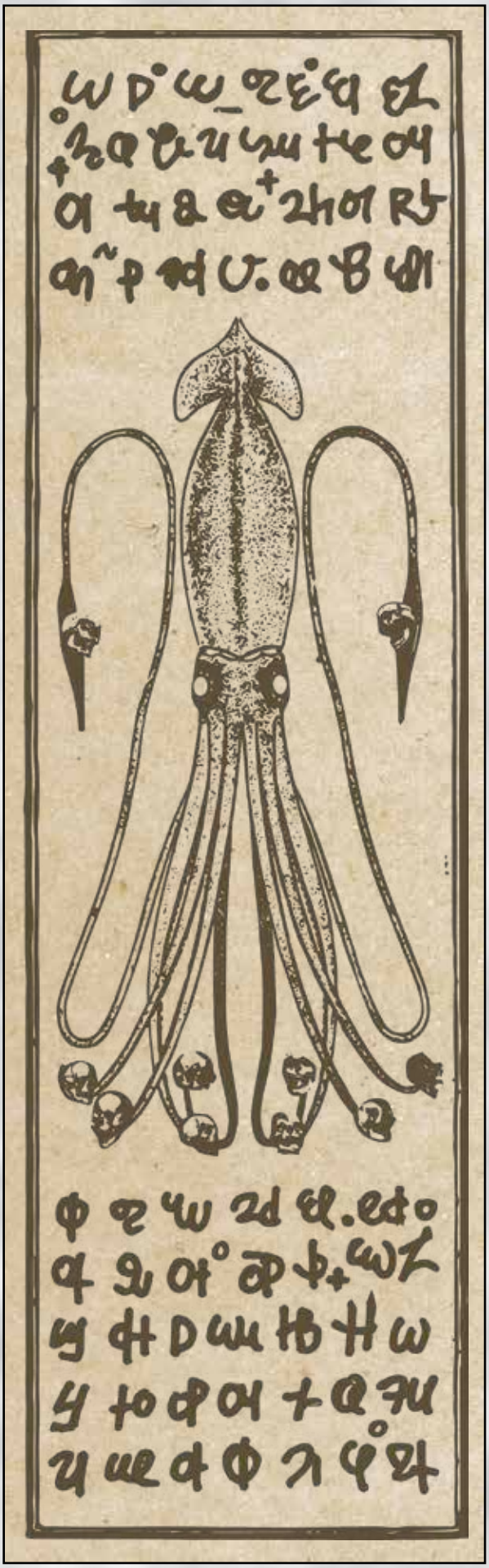
On the wooden structure overlooking the shape-shifter where he lay in front of a large, ancient altar decorated with all sorts of nightmares, stood a figure in a dark, priestly cloak. Paddock's Brothers had disappeared and Erik Van Rijn's skeletal visage was not visible anymore. Now the hood of the tattered robes that had replaced his aristocratic clothes hid the face of the cloaked figure in perpetual darkness. Only a wisp of silvery hair was visible, and a mass of black spiders was constantly weaving the dark figure's robes as it stood still, making the tattered garment seem more alive than the one wearing it. The cloaked figure seemed to be staring at the formless gray mass, the natural form of the frog-faced man, that was moments ago crying on the floor like a toddler.

"*No one leaves my realm without my permission, scholar.*"

The dark man's hoarse voice was dry and cold, making the cabin Paddock slept in change temperature. The sleeping scholar's tears were dripping down his cheeks and his breath became visible as a cloud of air escaped his mouth.

"*No one*," the dark man muttered…





To the Revered Fathers of the Fraternity

I met today with Captain Howe. He has informed me that the Black Pelican needs some repairs before we can begin our expedition of trying to find the treacherous Erik Van Rijn in the Sea of Sorrows. The Black Pelican is currently at Skibbygger Beach in Egertus, and Captain Howe is not able to tell me how long these repairs and refurbishments will take. The Captain said the shipyard's workers have already asked for baksheesh to even inspect the damage to the ship. It always amazes me how the level of venality in Nova Vaasa seems to control all aspects of life. But restoring the Black Pelican is necessary: Captain Howe professes that if a ship weathers a violent storm in the Nocturnal Sea, then there is a possibility of reaching the Sea of Sorrows and vice versa.

As it has been reported in the Survey on the Expedition to the Nocturnal Sea, there used to be a Mistway called the Call of the Claw which was traversable only during storms, connecting the northwest Sea of Sorrows to southwest Nebligtode. But since the Great Upheaval, the island of Markovia sits where the entrance of that Mistway once lay. It is not impossible that the Mistway still exists and becomes active when storms coincide in both seas. The Call of the Claw seems to be of moderate reliability. As repairs and improvements to the ship are going to take longer than expected, we should – provided all goes well – reach the Sea of Sorrows in November.

Captain Howe has already expressed his refusal to travel to Markovia. He has heard of many ships being sunk around the island's waters, having fallen victim to strong winds and sharks large enough to swallow a human whole. But what he fears more is the legend of the Soul Kraken, a sea monster believed to appear during storms and attack any ship close to the island, devouring the body and soul of any sailor fool enough to traverse the island's warm waters. Even if I manage to 'persuade him' to travel there, the island of Markovia is too large and exploring it will take precious time. Not to mention, there is the possibility of being stranded on the island. At best we would be able to reach it in late fall, which means we would be unable to reach the isle of Demise before winter. I need not remind you how fierce and treacherous the Lamordian sea is during that time.

What I suggest is sending another expedition to Markovia and to coordinate it to arrive at the same time as we enter a storm in the Nocturnal Sea. This way, we

will be able to deduce if the Call of the Claw Mistway still exists, as well as have a decoy for the Soul Kraken to allow the Black Pelican to sail safely towards the Island of Demise. If the second expedition survives, they can search for any trace of the traitor Van Rijn on Markovia.

I am aware there has been already an interaction between Frantisek Markov of Markovia and faculty members of the University of Richemulot. As I have learned during my absence from the University, a request was sent a month ago to the University's Department of Natural Philosophy for the expertise of Lecturer Cedrik Paddock on biology and metamorphosis, on the grounds of a terrible plague that has transformed the men of that island into beasts. The letter was sent from an island to the west of Lamordia, addressed by a "Dr. Fran". I am positive that the sender was none other than Dr. Frantisek Markov of Markovia by ways of an alias. I am already informed that the faculty of the University's Department of Natural Philosophy as well as the Department of Anthropology is interested in sending Brother Paddock there, as he is a lecturer in both Departments, to study the disease as well as the inhabitants of Markovia. The problem is that neither Department has the funds to do so, as it is difficult as well as expensive to find anyone willing to travel there.

I know that some of the Brothers believe that Brother Paddock may have had knowledge of Van Rijn's meddling with the dark art of necromancy, and was too intimidated by his supervisor to inform us, but I assure you that Brother Cedrik is loyal to our cause. Certainly his method of testing his theories on himself is unorthodox, and I know that most Fraternity members look down on him, believing him to be too preoccupied with his own materialistic research. Nevertheless, I believe that in this case this could be an advantage for us. Pray excuse my forwardness, but I believe we actually need Brother Cedric for this expedition. I suggest we contact the University of Dementlieu and have them send a message to the University of Richemulot, recommending they respond in the affirmative to 'Dr. Fran"s request. The University of Dementlieu can also make a donation to the Richemuloise coffers – on the condition that the money is to be used to fund the expedition to Markovia. In this way, we maintain the secrecy of the Fraternity and prevent unnecessary exposure to Dr. Markov. 'The Master of Pain' is a dangerous man to cross, as his wife Ludmilla would surely have agreed.

If you decide to follow my suggestions, I believe we may learn a great deal about Markovia. Paddock, with his expertise in metamorphosis, could learn more about Markov and the process of changing men into beasts. His own power to alter his form may also be useful in observing the island's beastmen.

If this final request is agreed upon, I suggest we send two more Brothers with Paddock. My recommendations are as follows. First, Aleister Smythe, as he is to be the one to deliver the University's answer to Dr. Markov. His earlier acquaintance with the lord of Markovia as well as the island itself may prove useful. Second, Tycho Geldnehar, whose keen eye and structured thought may help us understand the reasons why the Watchers decided to relocate Markovia as an island when they rearranged the world after the Great Upheaval. In my humble opinion, his pragmatic servant Hermitian could also be a welcome addition to the expedition.

If Van Rijn is hiding on Markovia, I am sure Brothers Smythe and Geldnehar will be able to discover his whereabouts as Cedrik Paddock distracts Markov's attention away from them. Captain Howe has told me there is only one ship that regularly makes the journey between Markovia and Ludendorf, the Hylende Wlross belonging to Captain Lennard Gaertner, a Lamordian tycoon who has made a fortune importing exotic fruit as well as silver from Markovia.
In closing, I have a request.

As I have learned in my preparatory research into the island of Demise, there is a maze located at the heart of the island, one full of illusionary traps. I do not own a gem of seeing, which would be useful if not essential to my investigation of that volcanic island, but Brother Zoltan does and has agreed to lend it to me. I will have to travel to Souragne, as he is located there, but also to search the library at La Maison Soulombre for any spell that might be useful in my expedition of Demise. To do so, I ask your permission to use The Cellar Door at Chateau d'Is, as I am not comfortable with the notion of travelling the Nocturnal Sea to reach Port d' Elhour and then travel back to Egertus to board Captain Howe's ship to sail into a storm.

Yours in Shadow,

Victor Hazan, Brother of the Fraternity of Shadows

Egertus, Late October, 760

Abruptly, the nightmare trembled and the shadows overhead squirmed.

"SSSED-RIC PAD-DOCK!" a great voice snarled. "*SSSED-RIC PAD-DOCK!*"

"*No,*" the creature behind the pulpit whispered, furious. "*No one leaves without my permission!*"

The voice ignored him, calling out for Brother Paddock again, its volume sending the windows rattling in their frames. Overhead, the shadows – burst into flame. Not normal flame, yellow, crackling and flickering with heat. This fire was blue and wispy. It wailed, like a chorus of the damned.

The temple itself lurched and started to rock as a great claw burst from the flames. It was darkness alight with keening flame, and it seized on Cedric Paddock's cowering form like a raven seizing its prey before it started pecking.

"*SSSSSEEEED-RIIIC PAAAD-DOCK!*" the voice howled while the claw shook and worried at the flesh of the transmuter, pulling him back into his human form and driving its nails into his shoulder.

"*No, no!*" the creature behind the pulpit raged. "*Mine, he's mine! Find your own!*"

The only answer it received was laughter, cruel and mocking. The claw shook and worried at Cedric Paddock, the pain – bringing him gasping awake to a cramped cabin and the smell of brine. The chamber seemed to lurch and shift as the boat rocked with the waves.

Brother Smythe stood leaning over Cedric, one hand gently shaking the transmuter's shoulder, his face coolly dispassionate. He let go as soon as Cedric opened his black bulging eyes, an involuntary transformation he had been afflicted with while investigating the small town of Ravienne in northwest Dementlieu.

"You are the last to awaken, Brother Paddock," the Brother from Dementlieu said. "The doldrums have passed. We are close to Markovia now." A mild note of reproach entered his voice: "I was not informed you suffer from night terrors. Might I recommend some laudanum in future? There are always things lurking beneath the waves, and your screams will excite them. Not to mention the crew."

Turning, the tall wizard started to leave the cabin, one hand on the hilt of a scimitar strapped to his belt to prevent it from bumping the doorframe. "Do hurry. There is still some bread and bacon if you want breakfast, but there will not be any left soon; I do not believe the crew is going to wait on your dining pleasure for too long."

"Go ahead, Aleister. I'll be there in a minute," the bulge-eyed scholar said as he wiped the cold sweat from his forehead – thus failing to notice the brief look of annoyance on his Brother's face at the use of his first name. With minimal effort, he controlled his facial muscles and dispelled the forced transformation, making him more acceptable for the Lamordian crew of *Der Verfluchte Blekksprutten*.

Brothers Paddock and Smythe arrived in time to see the last of the bacon snatched from the pan. The culprit was not a member of the crew, but a small, black-haired man, who darted in and out of the breakfast line without regard for those who had been waiting longer. One sailor started to raise his voice in protest, but he choked off the very first syllable upon meeting Hermitian's yellow-green eyes.

This was not the first time Brother Geldnehar's assistant had violated morning meal etiquette. The first time, a crewman had seized him by the arm and called him a litany of foul names, and the little man had replied: "*Learn some respect, you bed-wetting child!*" The crewman soiled himself every night for nearly a week on that voyage before begging Hermitian's forgiveness. He had apologized to Brother Geldnehar first, but the Brother had evinced no knowledge of the confrontation, leaving his assistant clearly and solely responsible for the punishment. There were whispers among the more superstitious and less informed members of the crew that the man must have Vistani blood, but Paddock and Smythe knew better. They could tell a transmuted familiar when they saw one, and they knew that petulant cats like Hermitian sometimes wielded sinister power with their demanding meows.

Now, no one dared impede Hermitian as he scurried up the stairs to the main deck with his fistfuls of swine flesh. Only one man had the will to softly mutter, "*Guess Geldnehar forgot to feed himself again,*" then another man hissed at him to keep quiet. Out of sight, the hatch banged open, admitting keening musical notes

into the lower decks even as it presumably let Hermitian out.

Paddock and Smythe looked at the raided table. There were some leftovers, but neither of the two was desperate enough for food to indulge in such obscenities. As one, they turned to find Brother Geldnehar, following the music and Hermitian's path up the stairs.

On deck, Brother Geldnehar stood facing the water. His violin was tucked into the crook of his neck, with its neck cradled in his left hand between the index finger and the stump of his thumb. His right hand drew the bow back and forth across the strings, sending a moderately paced *ricercar* out over the ocean. His eyes were turned upward, as though the notes hung in the air above his head. Hermitian had settled nearby, eating the bacon he had ostensibly gathered for his master.

Aleister Smythe stepped out of the hatch first, followed by Cedrik Paddock. They crossed the ship's deck, listening to Tycho Geldnehar's violin, and came to a stop close to the ship's aftercastle, where they leaned on the hand-carved taffrail. Tycho was a masterful violinist; the two Brothers listened in silence to his morbid Darkonese music. They should have been able to view the island of Markovia dead ahead, but the only thing they could see was a thick, swirling mist.

Suddenly a small breeze begun to blow, stirring up the obscuring fog. A crash of thunder roared out, announcing the coming storm. In a few minutes the wind had become even stronger, almost stealing Hermitian's hat away. It dispersed some of the mists that had engulfed the ship for most of the journey.

"Land!" shouted a young man, barely eighteen years old, who sat crouched in the crow's nest on the upper part of the ship's main mast.

The two scholars could now make out the hazy silhouette of the island of Markovia in the dim twilight. As the new moon had risen yesterday evening, the stars were the only lights in the sky. Soon, they would give way to the scattering light of the sun rising behind the ship, but it was not the sun that vanquished the starlight; rather, it was a front of thick clouds gathering behind *Der Verfluchte Blekksprutten*. Another roar of thunder echoed in the sky, seemingly closeby, and a flash of light illuminated the dark clouds gathering overhead, followed by another thunderclap. A storm was coming, and it was coming fast.

"It seems odd to have such quick changes of weather following each other. Are these extreme changes common in Markovia, Aleister?" Cedrik asked, suspicion written all over his face.

"Markovia *is* subject to seasonal monsoons, caused by a higher temperature over land than in the sea, but this is different," the other Brother replied.

Aleister Smythe did not waste anymore time; he had already begun muttering an incantation to determine the nature of the storm approaching. As the wind became even stronger, he had to struggle to keep his balance, shouting to Brother Paddock in order to be heard.

"Your suspicions were correct! This is no ordinary storm! Someone is using magical means to control the weather!" he shouted, even as he was preparing to cast a dispelling incantation.

"Or some*thing*! Look!" Cedrik shouted, pointing at the sea on the ship's left side.

From beneath the dark waves of the Sea of Sorrows, a white glow visibly approached the ship with blinding speed, before vanishing underneath it. Five or more enormous, translucent, glowing tentacles, each ending in an algae-tinted human skull, burst forth from the cold waters. They appeared to move slowly, but actually darted forward with lightning speed. As they arched over the sides of the ship, Cedrik ducked down, using the ship's wooden taffrail for cover.

"*Master Geldnehar, watch out!*" Hermitian shouted as he ran towards his absent-minded master. The familiar knocked his wizard down just as one of the large, luminous tentacles lashed out at him.

"*KRAKEN!*" the horrified shout of the young sailor in the ship's crow nest was barely heard, but was soon repeated by every sailor on deck. For some on the ship, it was the last word they spoke, as the tentacles wrapped around them, squeezing them, and dragged them beneath the waves. The young lookout was now crouching in a fetal position, staring with bulging eyes at the carnage happening beneath him.

Aleister Smythe forcefully concentrated on the words of dispelling, trying to end or at least

contain the storm. Fighting off the Kraken while caught in the storm would be next to impossible, and even if they managed to survive the beast they might still drown in the storm-tossed waters!

One of the enormous, skull-bearing tentacles tripped the Brother from Dementlieu over just as he was finishing his spell. Cedrik Paddock ran up to him, struggling to move quickly while maintaining his balance. His foot tangled in a rope, causing him to fall and unintentionally avoid a tentacle slapping down on the deck next to Brother Smythe. The squirming limb instead grabbed the central mast of the ship, snapping it in two and sending the young lookout to fall into the sea from a height of over a hundred feet.

"*Did you manage to break its grip on the weather?*" Cedrik Paddock hissed, anxious.

"I don't know!" Smythe snapped. "We have to wait and see. Let's get to the others, the cat found a place to hide behind those barrels!"

Turning, Cedrik saw Tycho's familiar furtively waving them over.

The two Brothers began to crawl parallel to the ship's side, heading over to where Tycho and Hermitian lay hidden behind some water barrels, next to the stairs leading to the ship's forecastle.

"What *is* this monstrosity?" Paddock exclaimed, not actually waiting for an answer. The two men reached the hiding spot Hermitian and Tycho occupied. Master and familiar made grudging space behind the barrel for the two winded scholars.

"The Soul Kraken, obviously!" Aleister Smythe replied. "I have heard of it, but I never witnessed it before. We should have traveled with Captain Gaertner as I've done before."

"Why?" asked Hermitian in a loud voice, curious as the cat he was, his voice momentarily rising above the crew's screams of absolute terror.

"*Shh! keep your voice down!* It is said that the Soul Kraken can use the senses of the heads it carries. It might hear us!" Aleister Smythe hissed.

"Skulls don't have ears," the annoying familiar tauntingly replied, but the Brother from Dementlieu paid its provocations no heed. To him, it was the beast's absentminded master's responsibility to put his cat in its place.

"Captain Gaertner's ship is the only one known to have sailed to Markovia for two decades without ever encountering the Soul Kraken. Every previous voyage I've made to Markovia was with his ship, the *Hylende Walross*. I don't know why he has never been attacked or even threatened by the Soul Kraken. He claims he is just lucky!"

"It is not luck. Captain Gaertner surely has made a pact or uses some device to travel safely to Markovia. I was invited to his manor a few years ago and he happens to own a great collection of curiosities from around the world," said Cedrik Paddock. He paused for a moment to moisten his fear-dried mouth with saliva before he continued. "Why did we not travel with his ship?"

"Budget cuts," Smythe growled.

With a thud, the headless corpse of a sailor fell next to them, the dead man's neck-stump still spurting blood.

"Gaertner asked for a lot of money to take us all to Markovia. A lot more than this Lamordian rationalist we call captain asked for. Did you know his only fear was encountering the pirate *Seehund*? I wonder if the imbecile believes in the supernatural *now*?"

Smythe's voice became even quieter.

"Between you and I," he said, looking at Tycho, "I believe the Umbra decided to give more funds to Hazan's expedition, rather than send us safely to the island. I can't imagine anyone from the University of Richemulot to be so foolish as to embezzle funds given by the Fraternity."

"You would be surpised," said Cedrik Paddock, continuing in a whisper. "We humans evolve large brains and great intelligence in order to keep up with our complex social groups and function successfully in these environments, but as you see there are exceptions." He moved his eyes as to point out Tycho, who was still silent. Although he believed Geldnehar was too immersed in his own thoughts to notice him, he knew Hermitian would surely point out any insolence directed at his master.

Hermitian, however, was not paying attention to the two scholars. Rather, he was staring at the headless corpse as if with excitement; he realized to whom it belonged to from the clothes. This had been the sailor who had dared to pro-

test when he had broken the breakfast line!

Suddenly, a glowing, semi-translucent tentacle holding the head of that same sailor turned towards the four men hiding behind the barrels. The head still had a ruddy complexion, but its face seemed frozen in a grimace of sheer terror. The severed head's eyes locked on Hermitian and it opened its mouth, roaring: *"Arrr, ye be the lad who cut me off!"*

"I believe this is my cue…" said Hermitian with a slight grin, before he transformed into an ebony cat, which bolted from hiding and tucked itself under the stairs leading to the forecastle.

Although both Smythe and Paddock were accustomed to the supernatural, they were both mortified by the idea that the Soul Kraken had discovered them. The sailor's head, looking like an obscene finger puppet on the massive tentacle, darted forward to bite Cedrik. It skimmed over Cedrik's upper left vest pocket, almost biting off his frog familiar Frosc, the little creature staring at the enemy with batrachian malice.

'My master and I must survive this, we have made a lot of progress the two of us, the Watchers will be pleased,' thought the brightly-coloured pseudo-familiar first summoned in *Essenbach Somp* over a decade ago.

"*Sorthulen gratz*!" Cedrik's verbal command made the small frog duck back down into his pocket.

With that out of the way, Cedrik Paddock concentrated on the cloudy skies above. He had earlier, without anyone noticing, called upon the powers of nature to grant him control over the lightning. Now, it seemed necessary to call forth that power to protect him from the ghostly appendage!

A bolt of lightning flashed down and hit the tentacle at its base a few feet away, but seemingly passed through the massive limb, merely leaving a black smudge on the deck. The electricity seemed to not affect the squid-like apex predator; the ghastly head attacked once more, this time sinking its teeth into Cedrik's shoulder.

Aleister snarled in rage and spat out Words of Power. Five darts of luminous energy flew forth, striking the tentacle close to where the lightning had struck – and cutting right through it. A loud growl was heard, causing the ship to tremble, even as three additional head-holding tentacles turned towards the barrels the trio of men had hidden behind.

Cedrik managed to concentrate enough to call another blast of lightning from directly overhead, striking all three tentacles at the point from where they branched forth, as well as accidentally hitting the last remaining sailor in the area. But while the unfortunate man uttered a hideous scream and fell to the deck, the beast was entirely unaffected.

"Something is not right with this equation," said Tycho, seemingly lost in his thoughts. He stood up and stepped a few feet in front of the barrels. "Take cover," was the next thing he said before beginning to chant.

The approaching tentacles were holding the heads of three more crew members, whose names the Brothers could not have recalled. The three luminous limbs were focused on the mathematician, readying to attack. Tycho Geldnehar did not pay any attention to the threat; he only concentrated on his calculations as he grabbed a pinch of sulfur from a small bag in his belt. He began chanting, his voice imposing as he declaimed in Draconic. With perfect precision, he moved his hands in an ellipse, sprinkling sulfur along its invisible trail. The sulfur was ignited in midair, forming a sparkling ellipse that imploded, distorting the area around it before bursting outwards in every direction in a powerful explosion of flames.

The tentacles continued to move for the attack, appearing at first to be impervious to the magical flames, closing in on Tycho, but in an instant all three of them caught fire and fell on the splintered, burning wooden planks of the deck as a pile of smoking meat. A powerful grunt was heard once more from beneath the ship, as the Kraken retracted its burned tentacles to immerse them in the dark sea. Three abandoned heads lay on the deck, next to a large hole with burning edges, made by the explosion. They looked like nothing so much as large pieces of charcoal sculpted into the form of skulls. The storm had begun to dissipate and the sky was not torn by lightning anymore.

For some reason the remaining tentacles had lost their glowing translucency, having become solid. Their clammy flesh had a pale, bluish gray

color. Tycho Geldnehar looked down into the hole he had created, spying the inner curve of the ship's hull.

With a sudden burst, the Kraken smashed through the hull with its beak, seawater pouring through. The ship was starting to sink. The Kraken gathered all of its remaining tentacles, readying them for an attack on Geldnehar, who stood motionless, gazing at it from among the bodies, some of them headless. Among the heads staring hatefully at the wizard from the Kraken's tentacles as they moved in was Captain Kresten's.

"Do you believe now in the supernatural, Captain?" Tycho asked, looking firmly at Kresten's head. The black cat that was Hermitian ran towards him. The familiar knew his master would not retreat unless he himself felt threatened; his dismay was made obvious by his arching back.

But Tycho was not discouraged; he saw no other choice now but to stand his ground. He was holding a pair of small canine statues attached to two small iron bars, one in each hand. In his left hand he held the effigy of a white hound; in his right hand the small statue was in the image of a black mastiff, reminiscent of a fenhound. He moved his arms in perfect coordination, stretching them, forming a cross with his body while he recited the spell's magical words. He brought his arms forward, clashing the two statues together. Where the two touched, space seemed to expand, following his arms to form an arch and stretch backwards.

Captain Kresten's head stared at Geldnehar menacingly. "*I am sure there is a perfectly logical explanation for all of this,*" it answered mockingly. "*But what is* your *explanation for mutiny, landlubber?*" spoke all heads at once, in a raspy chorus.

The nightmarish tentacles moved closer to the wizard, until they came to a stop. Some invisible force was pushing them away, preventing the tentacles from approaching Tycho as well as anyone lucky enough to be in the spell's area of effect.

"The repulsion spell worked, we are protected for now. Send this abomination where it belongs!" Tycho shouted.

Hearing this, Aleister Smythe took a single step out from cover and quickly murmured an invocation of his own. He withdrew a small cylinder of sulfur from a secret pocket and dropped it in a puddle of oil from a broken lamp, drawing the pathway his fire spell would follow. Gouts of flame began to burst upwards from the wooden planks of the deck, three more ghastly tentacles were consumed before the Soul Kraken could retrieve them. One of the larger limbs, the barb-covered ones that almost reached the length of the ship's main mast, was burning. Another loud grunt was heard as the squid-like leviathan withdrew back into the sea, dying the water black with whatever served it for ink.

The first light of dawn touched the point of what once was the north side of Mount Baratak. The stars had completely faded by now, as had the storm. *Der Verfluchte Blekksprutten* would sink faster now, due to the damage from Tycho's and Aleister's fire-spells. Some of the surviving crew ran to bring buckets, completely disoriented by terror, while two sailors were unsuccessfully trying to lower a lifeboat.

A dark bird flew over the ship. It dipped down and alighted on Aleister Smythe's arm before hopping up to perch on his shoulder. The raven held a cypress twig in its beak as it looked around the devastation the Soul Kraken and the wizards had wrought.

"Where were you, Gruorg?" Aleister asked, dryly. "You missed all the... excitement."

The raven made no sound to answer; it just stared balefully at the panicking crew, the two other Brothers and their creatures.

The three men and their familiars walked quickly but cautiously towards the sailors who were trying to save themselves by lowering the lifeboat. The Kraken had retreated, but their troubles had just begun. From afar, a ship was barely visible sailing towards the northeast of the Sea of Sorrows. A sailor gasping for air noticed it, but he succumbed to his wounds before he had the chance to say anything, his body slowly sinking to the bottom of the sea.

A tall man in black hose, shirt, shoes and coat stands up from behind the lectern. A little bit of silvery-white lace spills from his collar and the end of his shirtsleeves. A plain, golden wedding band hangs on his left ring finger; a silver ring with a black stone in the setting and a plain iron ring sit on the last two fingers of his right hand.

His face is pale and dispassionate, but there are clear signs of emotional agony survived. His prematurely greying hair is long and unkempt, tied back into a rough tail with a leather cord. His eyes are a dull green, but much sharper than the color suggests. While he is thin to the point of emaciation, there is a certain wiry strength about him – and he has just very casually put his hand on the hilt of a scimitar.

"Well then," he says. "You've found me. Shall we get started?"

Aleister Smythe

Wizard 5 / Fraternity of Shadows 3 / Swordsage 2 / Centurion of the Night 3
CR 13
NE male human (Dementlieuse) Medium (6 ft. 4 in. tall) humanoid
Init +3 **Senses** Listen +4, Spot +4
AC 21 (+3 Dex, +2 Wis, +6 greater mage armor), touch 15, flat-footed 13
hp 64 (13 HD)
Fort +4, **Ref** +9* (augmented by gloves of dexterity), **Will** +15 (+18 v. all mind-reading effects)
Note that if Aleister has cast *greater resistance*, his saves become Fort +7; Ref +11; Will +18 (+21 v. all mind-reading effects).
Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)
Melee +1 ring of *collision* (as gauntlet), +8 melee (1d3+7, x2); +2 scimitar, +9 melee (1d6+3, 18-20/x2); unarmed strike, +8 melee (1d3+1, x2)
Space 5 ft. **Reach** 5 ft.
Base Atk +6; **Grp** +8
Abilities: Str 12, Dex 17*, Con 12, Int 20, Wis 14, Cha 8
SA Spells, *Un-Fire* I (*Burning strike*: scimitar)
SQ AC bonus, Black Ring, *Cornicen* (3 rounds/day), discipline focus (Weapon focus: Setting Sun), *Inferna* (Shadowed Mind), Lore of Fraternity, Quick to act +1, Fraternity sigil ring (*deeper darkness* 3/day), summon familiar (raven), Vow of Virtue (Respect and support true love)
Skills Appraise +8, Bluff +7, Concentration +18, Craft (drawing) +10, Craft (weaving) +6, Decipher script +8, Diplomacy +7, Knowledge (arcana) +18, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) +10, Knowledge (history) +10, Knowledge (Ravenloft) +16, Knowledge (geography) +8, Knowledge (religion) +10, Listen +4, Martial lore +8, Perform (dance) +1, Profession (sailor) +5, Ride +5, Sense motive +12, Spellcraft +16, Spot +4, Swim +3
Feats Alertness, Extend spell, Improved unarmed strike, Leadership, Scribe scroll, Shadow weave magic (*Forgotten Realm Campaign Setting*, p. 37), Skill focus (Knowledge: Ravenloft), Still spell, Unnerving calm (*Tome of Battle: the Book of Nine Swords*, p.33)

Typical Wizard spells prepared when on the road: (CL 10th; spell save DC 15 + spell level; spell save DC 16 + spell level for all spells from the schools of *Enchantment*, *Illusion* and *Necromancy).*
5 (2 slots) – *bite of the werewolf*; *heart of fire*
4 (4 slots) – *Dalamar's lightning lance*; *greater resistance*; *heart of earth*; *greater mage armor* (Extended and already cast)
3 (4 slots) – *bull's strength* (Extended); *heart of water*; *shadow binding*; *Palin's pyre*
2 (5 slots) – *allergen*; *bladeweave*; *low-light vision* (Extended); *heart of air*; *wall of gloom*;
1 (6 slots) – *comprehend languages*; *dead end*; *ebon eyes*; *expeditious retreat*; *magic missile* x2; *shield*
0 (4 slots) – *detect magic* x 2; *mending*; *prestidigitation*

Typical Wizard spells prepared when among Fraternity of Shadows: (CL 10th; spell save DC 15 + spell level; spell save DC 16 + spell level for all spells from the schools of *Enchantment*, *Illusion* and *Necromancy*).
5 (2 slots) – *heart of fire*, *shadow evocation*
4 (4 slots) – *bite of the wererat* (Extended); *greater resistance*; *heart of earth*; *tongues* (Extended)
3 (4 slots) – *allergen*; *greater mage* armor (already cast); *heart of water*; *Palin's pyre*
2 (5 slots) – *bladeweave*; *heart of air*; *magic missile* (Still); *shield* (Extended); *wall of gloom*
1 (6 slots) – *comprehend languages*; *ebon eyes*; *expeditious retreat*; *low-light vision*; *magic missile* x 2
0 (4 slots) – *detect magic x 2; prestidigitation*; *read*

magic
Spellbook:
5 – *heart of fire* (Complete Mage, p.107), *sending*, *shadow evocation**, *touch of Vecna** (Complete Mage, p.120)
4 – *bite of the werewolf* (SC, p.29); *Dalamar's lightning lance* (Dragonlance Campaign Setting, p.105); *greater rebuke** (SC, p.170); *greater resistance* (SC, p.174); *heart of earth* (Complete Mage, p.106); V*ecna's malevolent whisper** (Complete Mage, p.120)
3 – *allergen** (VRA I, p.25); *bite of the wererat* (SC, p.28); *dispel magic*; *greater mage armor* (SC, p.136); *heart of water* (Complete Mage, p.107); *Palin's pyre* (Dragonlance Campaign Setting, p.110); *secret page*; *shadow binding** (SC, p.182); *tongues*
2 – *bladeweave** (SC, p.31); *bull's strength*; *elemental dart* (Dragonlance Campaign Setting, p.108); *heart of air* (Complete Mage, p.106); *knock*; *rebuke** (SC, p.170); *wall of gloom* (VRA I, p.38)
1 – *comprehend languages*; *dead end** (SC, p.59); *ebon eyes* (SC, p.77); *endure elements*; *expeditious retreat*; *low-light vision* (SC, p.134); *mage armor*; *magic missile*; *shocking grasp*; *serene visage** (SC, p.182); *shield*;; *true casting* (Complete Mage, p.121)
0 – All

Maneuvers readied:
Typically *counter charge*, *mighty throw*, *moment of perfect mind*, *sapphire nightmare blade*
Maneuvers known:
Desert wind – 1st Burning blade; Wind stride
Diamond mind – 1st Moment of perfect mind; Sapphire nightmare blade
Setting sun – 1st Counter charge; Mighty throw
Shadow hand – 1st Shadow blade technique
Stances known:
Setting sun – 1st Step of the wind
Shadow hand – 1st Child of shadow

Languages Mordentish*, Darkonese, Draconic, Falkovnian, Goblin, Lamordian, Patterna, Sithican, Souragnien, Tepestani, Vaasi

Possessions +1 psionic ring of *Collision* (as gauntlet); +2 scimitar; silver holy symbol of Hala; headband of conscious effort (*Complete Adventurer*, p.133); possum pouch (*Complete Adventurer*, p.134); Fraternity of Shadows sigil ring; gloves of dexterity +2; Canjar Evil Eye amulet; spellbook; spell component pouch; sketchbook; pencils; various scrolls containing spells recorded in his spellbook; an illuminated copy of *Tales of the Ages* (holy book of Hala).
(Note that any magical or psionic gear Aleister carries is likely to have been created by initiates of the Shadow Weave. If non-initiates try to use these items, they suffer penalties as normal.)

Combat

As soon as Aleister suspects that he might be in danger, his first inclination is to escape; in his capacity as a messenger and scribe for the Fraternity of Shadows, he is not being paid to engage enemies. In his role as a spy for the Centurions of the Night, he is even less inclined to risk death or injury. He seeks out difficult terrain to put between himself and enemies, combines his *Step of the wind*-stance with *Expeditious retreat* to get clear, and casts spells like *allergen*, *shadow binding*, (*greater*) *rebuke* and *wall of gloom* to delay pursuit.

While fleeing, or when in a position where he senses danger but can not run, he loads up on defensive spells: *greater mage armor*, *heart of air*, *heart of earth*, *heart of fire*, *heart of water*, *shield*. If forced into direct combat with no time to prepare, he tends to draw his scimitar and imbue it with *Un-Fire* (if he can do the latter without members of the Fraternity of Shadows observing him), then casts such Still spells as he has available and alternates them with martial maneuvers.

If forced to be the one to open hostilities, Aleister prefers to delay combat until after he has cast his suite of defensive spells. Regardless whether this is possible or not, he usually begins the fight by casting *bull's strength*, then initiates a battle of wills (Tome of Battle: Book of Nine Swords, p.27) and tries to get close to an opponent and strike with his *ring of collision* in an attempt to put the target off-balance. In the next round, he casts *bite of the wererat* or *bite of the werewolf* to further unsettle the target and give himself a psychological edge. If the target is too dangerous to approach to within melee range, Aleister is not shy about attacking with his strongest ranged spells first, instead.

Although Aleister owns and regularly scribes scrolls containing a number of deadly spells, given to him by his Centurion allies, he tries to keep these a secret from the Fraternity. As such, he is unlikely to prepare or cast *Dalamar's lightning lance*, *elemental dart*, *Touch of Vecna* or *Vecna's malevolent whisper* when any Fraternity personnel are likely to see him. Grudgingly, he has used *Palin's pyre* in the presence of the Brothers; the spell has fortunately been assumed to be a variant version of *fireball* so far. Rather than suspect anything amiss, the Brothers seem to be amused by the 'earthbound' and 'plebeian' nature of the spell.

Aleister has used *secret page* to hide the presence of the Centurions' gifts in his spellbook.

Lair

Aleister's homestead in Tepest is his main lair. The place has been warded to the hilt by other Centurions of the Night, making it impossible to be scryed upon or teleported into by magic or psionics. It is also well-camouflaged, virtually impossible to find unless someone knows where to look. The home includes Aleister's shrine to Hala, his private library and laboratory, and a small training area where he practices his martial arts and swordplay.

Because the homestead has served as a meeting ground for the Centurions of the Night more than once, it has built up Ethereal Resonance to the point that it has become a rank 1 Sinkhole of Evil. Aleister actually sees this as a net positive, as his home's baleful aura dissuades the Tepestani from wandering too close, and the sinkhole allows for some very interesting experiments.

A large villa in the countryside near Port-a-Lucine is Aleister's home away from home. Once, it was his main residence, where he lived with his wife and newborn son. Since the tragedy that ruined his married life, Aleister feels physically repulsed by the thought of dwelling in the place that once held his happiest memories. While the place is well-appointed and flawlessly maintained, he only stays there when he has business in Dementlieu, typically when the Fraternity of Shadows needs him to do work at the University of Dementlieu.

Cohort

Kraam, Falkovnian LE male Bozak draconian (Dragonlance Campaign Setting, p.218) Sorcerer 4

Aleister met Kraam during one of several unpleasant trips to deliver messages to the members of the Fraternity of Shadows ensconced at the Radiant Tower in Lekar. He helped the draconian escape from Falkovnia, and took him in as a combination of apprentice, bodyguard and butler. When Aleister is away, Kraam keeps the house and commands the Goblin security force.

While Kraam is not aware of the existence of either of the two secret societies with which Aleister is involved, he likely would not care if he was did; Aleister has been a more than generous employer and mentor. Already, Aleister has inducted his most loyal ally in the Shadow Weave. Once he has progressed far enough as a Centurion of the Night, it is most likely that he will appoint Kraam as his first *Satelles*.

Followers

Five 1st-level Goblins of the Blacktooth tribe, which guards Aleister's home in Tepest, have elected to serve him directly. When he travels, they accompany him. They include one Adept (not inducted into the Shadow Weave), one Ranger, one Rogue, and two Warriors.

In addition to these monstrous troops, Aleister has some more socially acceptable servants. After the death of his grandfather, Alois Smythe, three servants from the old family home begged him to take them on when no one else would. They include Henry Arkwright (N male human Warrior 1), now the butler/gardener at Aleister's villa in Dementlieu, and Lucy and Mina Easterman (two sisters, respectively CN and N young female human Commoner 1), who serve as cooks and maids at the same location.

Aleister is more comfortable with his Goblins than he is with the servants from his grandfather's home, but as he seldom stays at his Dementlieuse villa anymore, he has little contact with them. He is unaware that the three humans are ferociously loyal and grateful to him for having saved them from destitution and

probably starvation.

Familiar

Aleister's familiar is a raven named *Gruorg*, which he encountered during one of his travels. Although the dark bird is capable of speaking flawless Mordentish, it normally prefers to remain silent when its master is in company.

Religion

Aleister is a surprisingly devout follower of the goddess Hala, having been inducted as a priest 'warlock', and frequently stays in hospices run by the church when he is on one of his journeys for the Fraternity of Shadows. In spite of the mockery he has had to endure from some of the Brothers, Aleister finds himself sustained by his faith.

Where others might see his turning to the Shadow Weave as being a blasphemy against the goddess, Aleister is of the opinion that the Shadow Weave is simply a part of the greater Weave; the yin to its yang and part of the whole. As for his involvement with the apocalyptic Centurions of the Night, Aleister sees the whole world as a sick and suffering. In order to heal it, severe measures will be required, not unlike the amputation of diseased flesh and bone.

Background

Aleister's joining the Fraternity of Shadows was not his own decision; it was his father's and grandfather's. Left to his own devices, he might have become a professional scribe, or even entered the Church of Hala, whose worship he inherited from his mother.

Unfortunately for Aleister, his grandfather, Alois Smythe, had been a member of the Fraternity even before he got married and conceived his son Michel and his daughter Salome.

Michel Smythe likewise joined the Fraternity on Alois' urging, and demanded that his firstborn son Aleister do the same. Salome Smythe was not able to persuade the Fathers of the Fraternity to accept her, but gave birth to two sons and a daughter after her marriage to Honored Brother Errol Merryweather: Dolor and Bernard – who she both pressured into joining the Fraternity like her father and brother – and Serenity, who in the fullness of time gave birth to a pair of twins out of wedlock, and soon after died in an asylum, raving at the walls.

The cousins might have reached great heights in the secret society by pooling their resources and supporting one another, but there was a problem: Bernard Merryweather was an unrepentant sociopath who saw his brother and cousin as obstacles, Dolor Merryweather cared more for his research than any member of his family – save his niece Thérèse and nephew Pierce, both secretly Bernard's children by Serenity – and Aleister detested them both.

Dolor Merryweather achieved an accelerated promotion by writing a troubling thesis entitled "*cyclical decay*", which warned the Fraternity that civilizations rise but also fall, and that they might do so with unnatural regularity in the Demiplane of Dread. His proposal to create an repository for the Fraternity's most crucial lore in a secure facility found favor with the Fathers, and Dolor was appointed to create and manage just such a facility. He departed the Core for a distant Cluster known as the Sheltered Isles, taking his niece and nephew with him and cutting off all contact with the rest of the family.

Bernard Merryweather sought promotion by sucking up to his superiors and bullying his peers and inferiors so they could not claim promotions he wanted; he would steal research materials, claim credit for successful operations, slander or outright poison any who tried to defy him. Aleister had the misfortune of being one of Bernard's inferiors, and not having the social knack to shed the effects of his cousin's lies and insinuations.

Due to Bernard sabotaging him, Aleister found his career in the Fraternity had stalled before it really started. Instead of being trusted with original research, he was sent all over the Core as a fact-checker and a fetch-boy, carrying messages from one location to another, double-checking the work of Brothers placed above him and gathering components.

He might have enjoyed it, if not for the fact that he was consistently sent into the most wretched locations, and time he might have spent on his own research or on the art that was

once his only escape from an unpleasant home life was claimed and squandered by any Brother who decided to lay a claim on it.

The first time Aleister was happy since entering the Fraternity, was when he had to travel to dreary Sithicus and there met the creature who would become his bride.

At the time, she called herself Livia, but she had other names and had lived other lives before their meeting. She was an inhuman shape-shifter; beautiful, cunning, occasionally ruthless, potentially lethal, often amoral and outgoing. From the moment Aleister met her, he was enchanted in a way that had nothing to do with magic. Miracle above miracles, Livia returned his feelings; they were married in *la Ste. Mêre des Larmes* in Port-a-Lucine within the year in a private ceremony to which none of Aleister's relatives was invited. Later, they held a second ceremony in a hospice of Hala, at which Aleister's mother *was* a welcome guest.

For a time, Aleister's life was much improved. His wife taught him swordplay and unarmed combat; he taught her arcane magic and gave her access to aristocratic society; she joined him on his travels and made them mad and interesting; her social skills and sly wit improved his position at the Fraternity's gatherings and frustrated cousin Bernard to no end.

For the first time since he had been a young child in his mother's care, since before Michel Smythe took his education in hand, Aleister was simply... *happy* with his life. He was utterly delighted when his and Livia's child was born. He was considering his retirement from the Fraternity when his beautiful, healthy son was found dead in his crib one morning.

Immediate investigation showed that a subtle poison had been used – the kind that Bernard favored.

What happiness Aleister had found, all disappeared in one stroke. The child he had loved more than his own life was dead; his bride left him, citing her suspicion that the Fraternity must have tacitly allowed the attack and her fear that this was a warning to Aleister that they knew her true nature; she disappeared from his life in order to protect him. Bernard soon regained the standing that he had lost due to the clever insults Livia had used against him at the Fraternity's gatherings, such as the hateful nickname "Binky" – which stuck.

Once again forced to take to the road as a messenger, double-check the research of others and scribe for the Fraternity, Aleister sank into a numb depression. He performed his duties mechanically, made halfhearted attempts to find Livia, and his once-lavish home in the Dementlieuse countryside gradually sank into disrepair.

Then he met the stranger on a journey to Tepest; the thing that initially pretended to be a human woman. At first, she appeared to him as a bandit; when he cast his first spell to put distance between them, she shifted into the form of a wizard. The novelty of meeting another shape-shifter tickled Aleister's interest. He got to talking with the creature, which first named itself Charissa and later Imogen Schlosser. What started as a robbery became a long talk by a campfire, with the two of them sharing a meal and a skin of wine. When they parted, the fiend formally introduced itself to Aleister as the Red Haunt, and they agreed to meet again.

A chance meeting became a lasting friendship, for lack of a better word for the relationship that still binds man and demon. By ways of the Red Haunt, Aleister was introduced to what was then the *Irul Society*; a gathering of isolated beings, some monstrous, some not; some evil, some simply neutral. To his own grim amusement, Aleister found himself feeling more at home among these outcasts than he did among his family – or the Fraternity that said family had shoe-horned him into. He was wise enough to realize he was courting death and damnation when he started sharing secrets and performing special projects with other members of the Society, but he cared little for his own life by that point. All the people he had loved had left him behind. At least his work with the Society was interesting.

Gradually, Aleister managed to claw his way out of the depression that had devoured his life. He had his ruined villa in Dementlieu restored, but also built himself a new homestead in Tepest. Using a combination of spells, bribes and

support from other members of the Society – who he would sometimes host at his new home – he managed to gain the protection and service of a Goblin tribe.

The quality of Aleister's scribing was finally recognized by the Fathers of the Fraternity, who would have him travel between Fraternity strongholds to copy down newly-created spells and lore for inclusion in Dolor Merryweather's hidden archive, then transport it all in secret. The new work required less - though not zero – travel, and longer stays in faraway locations. It also gave him access to a great number of exotic spells, some of which he copied for his own use and that of the Irul Society.

When the Red Haunt contacted Aleister with her first, rough ideas for the reformation of the Irul Society into the Centurions of the Night, Aleister knew this could be his complete undoing if even one other member of the Society was stupid and revealed how much he had told them. He still honored the fiend's request to share secret Fraternity lore at the gathering of 751 BC, enlightening the Irul Society on the nature of the Dark Powers and their influence on the world, both subtle and overt. After the meeting, when the Red Haunt called for volunteers to become the first Centurions of the Night, he was among the first to raise their hands... or claws.

Aleister still finds little to care about when it comes to his life. In fact, there is little about the world he inhabits that he finds at all redeemable... so why not burn it all down and build a better world? Few things now bring joy to his battered heart. There are the rare moments he can devote to his art. There are occasions when he can indulge in happy memories or help star-crossed lovers find each other (Aleister may have lost his own love, but he genuinely enjoys seeing others find and enjoy theirs).

And there is the prospect of destroying everything that and everyone who has added to his misery.

Aleister would like to see the University of Dementlieu and the Fathers of the Fraternity burn in *Un-Fire*. He has staked a claim on the life of his cousin "Binky" with his fellow Centurions, which means they are free to torture him if they can, but only Aleister is allowed to kill his cousin.

If the Centurions do succeed in creating a new world, Aleister envisions a domain where he can reunite with his Livia and their son, and they can be happy together forever, no matter how many people need to suffer and die in order to make that happen. To that end, he will continue to play the role the Fraternity expects of him – although he has recently started to unnerve cousin "Binky", given his tendency to silently, contemptuously stare him down – for the lore he can access through them and pass on to his Centurion allies.

He scrawls a minim, two crotchets, and a quartet of quavers onto the staff, a man wearing a gray waistcoat over a bone-white shirt and black trousers tucked into knee-high, leather boots of the same color. His eyes—largely gray, but shot through with thin amber inclusions that radiate from the pupils—dart across the page, seeking out the proper place for an appoggiatura *in the melody he is writing.*

As he begins to ink it in, the notes slowly turn into letters and numbers, the music flowing into a mathematical equation as his mind catches on a thought and shifts his focus. Furiously he scribbles at this idea, wedging differential forms between the lines of the staff and adding raised and lowered indices *to* semibreves *as though they were high-rank tensors. Geodesic curvature begins to be riddled out in the top margin…*

Then he blinks, and runs his left hand through his short, dark brown hair. The thumb is little more than a nub, missing the first and second phalanges, and he scratches the stump with his other hand when he brings it back to the desktop.

"Gone and done it again," he murmurs. He loosens his violet ascot and pulls it over his head, tossing it unceremoniously onto the cloak he had draped over his nightstand. He undoes the cuffs of his sleeves next, which were held tight with thin, silver chains. "I'll just have to sort my thoughts into neat, separate piles on the morrow."

Tycho Geldnehar

Human Wizard 5, Cerebrex* 8, Fraternity of Shadows 4 (*see Dragon Magazine issue 317 page 50)
CR 17
NE medium (6 ft. 2 in.) humanoid
Init +1 **Senses** Blindsense 30 ft, Blindsight 60 ft, Scent; Listen +9, Spot +9 (Listen +11, Spot +11 when Hermitian is in arm's reach)
AC 22 (+1 Dex, +6 armor, +5 deflection), touch 16, flat-footed 21
hp 61 (17 HD); **DR** see *protection from arrows* under contingent spells
Immune telepathy and mind reading; also see *ray deflection* under contingent spells
Fort +5, **Ref** +5, **Will** +18
Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)
Ranged touch (use for ray spells) +14
Space 5 ft. **Reach** 5 ft.
Base Atk +8; **Grp** +8
Abilities Str 10, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 22, Wis 15, Cha 14
SA Aggression mastery, *clairaudience/clairvoyance*, scry on familiar, share spells, sigil ring
SQ Eidetic memory, eidetic spellcaster (*Dragon* 357 page 89), empathic link, enigma's bane, symphony of nerves, telepathic immunity
Feats Alertness (when Hermitian is in arm's reach), Craft Contingent Spell (*Complete Arcane* page 77), Craft Wand, Craft Wondrous Item, Improved Familiar, Iron Will, Obtain Familiar (*Complete Arcane* page 81), Practiced Spellcaster (Wizard) (*Complete Arcane* page 82), Ray Flexure (see below), Spatial Contracture (see below), Sudden Still (*Complete Arcane* page 83)

Wizard Spells Memorized
7th — *antimagic ray**, *ethereal jaunt*, *Mordenkainen's magnificent mansion*, *reverse gravity*
6th — *acid fog*, *analyze dweomer*, *chain lightning*, *create faux henchman* (*Gaz I* page 115), *disintegrate*, *flesh to stone*, *freezing sphere*, *mislead*, *probe thoughts**, *repulsion*, *ruby ray of reversal**, *shadow walk*, *stone to flesh*, *transcribe symbol**, *true seeing*
5th — *Bigby's interposing hand*, *cloudkill*, *cone of cold*, *control shape* (*Gaz I* page 115), *earth reaver**, *greater fireburst**, *permanency*, *prismatic ray**, *prying eyes*, *sending*, *shadowfade**, *shard storm**, *teleport*, *wall of force*
4th — *blast of flame**, *blistering radiance**, *detect scrying*, *dimension door*, *Evard's black tentacles*, *force missiles**, *Geldnehar's postmortem confessional*, *ray deflection**, *ray of deanimation**, *scrying*, *shadow well**, *shout*
3rd — *arcane sight*, *false gravity**, *fireball*, *fly*, *greater mage armor**, *illusory script*, *nondetection*, *phantom steed*, *rust ray**, *scintillating sphere**, *secret page*, *shadow cache**, *shrink item*, *slow*, *suggestion*, *tongues*
2nd — *arcane lock*, *detect thoughts*, *fireburst**, *invisibility*, *knock*, *mirror image*, *protection from arrows*, *ray of ice**, *scorching ray*, *sting ray**, *web*
1st — *alarm*, *animate rope*, *comprehend lan-*

guages, *disguise self*, *expeditious retreat*, *feather fall*, *identify*, *jump*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *Nystul's magic aura*, *ray of clumsiness**, *shield*, *targeting ray**, *unseen servant*
0 — all in *PHB* plus *amanuensis**
Spells marked with an asterisk (*) are drawn from the *Spell Compendium*.

Typical Wizard Spells Prepared (CL 17th; spell save DC 16 + spell level)
7th (1 slot) — *reverse gravity*
6th (3 slots) — *mislead*, *repulsion*, spatial contracture *scintillating sphere*
5th (4 slots) — *greater fireburst*, *prismatic ray*, *prying eyes*, spatial contracture *web*
4th (5 slots) — [*detect scrying*], *force missiles*, ray flexure *ray of ice*, ray flexure *scorching ray*, *shadow well*
3rd (5 slots) — *false gravity*, [*greater mage armor*], [*nondetection*], *slow*, *suggestion*
2nd (6 slots) — *detect thoughts*, *invisibility*, *mirror image*, *ray of ice*, *scorching ray*, *sting ray*
1st (6 slots) — *expeditious retreat*, *feather fall*, *magic missile*, *ray of clumsiness*, *shield*, *targeting ray*
0 (4 slots) — *amanuensis*, *dancing lights*, *ghost sound*, *prestidigitation*
Spells in [brackets] are cast immediately after preparation every day; *greater mage armor* is reflected in this statistic block.

Permanent Spells *arcane sight*, *comprehend languages*, *read magic*, *tongues*

Contingent Spells *protection from arrows* (triggers when, within the span of 30 seconds, two ranged weapon attacks against Tycho beat his touch AC), *ray deflection* (triggers when, within the span of 30 seconds, two ray attacks against Tycho beat his touch AC minus his deflection modifier, which is AC 11)

Skills: Appraise +10, Concentration +21, Craft (Alchemy) +14, Decipher Script +30, Disable Device +11, Forgery +11, Knowledge (Arcana) +30, Knowledge (Architecture and Engineering) +15, Knowledge (Dungeoneering) +11, Knowledge (Geography) +13, Knowledge (History) +13, Knowledge (Local) +11, Knowledge (Nature) +11, Knowledge (Nobility and Royalty) +11, Knowledge (Psionics) +15, Knowledge (Ravenloft) +26, Knowledge (Religion) +13, Listen +9 (+11 when Hermitian is in arm's reach), Perform (String Instruments) +12, Psicraft +15, Search +18 (+20 for secret doors and similar compartments), Spellcraft +32 (+34 to decipher scrolls), Spot +9 (+11 when Hermitian is in arm's reach), Survival +2 (+4 to follow tracks), Use Magic Device +9 (+13 with scrolls)

Languages Darkonese*, Draconic, Lamordian, Mordentish, Vaasi

Possessions *Geldnehar's cuff chains* (Left: *normal metamagic rod (quicken)*, *writ of communication* (marked with a *sepia snake sigil*), violin. Right: *normal metamagic rod (maximize)*, *rod of negation*, violin bow.), *wings of flying*, cursed *collimation ring* +5 (must be polished twice daily, at sunrise and sunset, otherwise it heats up as the *heat metal* spell, but does not cool down until polished), cursed *ascot of protection* +5 (must be tied by another person, otherwise the wearer cannot vocalize), *Fraternity sigil ring*, *wand of alarm*, *wand of jump*, *wand of dimension door*

Curse Collector
Tycho can be rather possessive of things that belong to him, and takes steps to safeguard his favorite possessions from use by others. When he creates an item (such as his cuff chains or the Latibulum), he generally devises some sort of trap to render the device inoperable to anyone else. When he obtains an item that he did not make (such as his *collimation ring* or his ascot), he frequently has it cursed by Hermitian to make it malfunction if some condition is not met by the wielder. When introducing an item belonging to Tycho, consider how it might be designed or cursed (up to troublesome severity) such that the unwary will suffer for taking it.

Hermitian

Midnight Cat
NE tiny magical beast
Init +7 **Senses** Darkvision 60 ft, low-light vision; Listen +9, Spot +9
Languages Darkonese*, Draconic, Lamordian, Mordentish, Vaasi
AC 31 (+3 Dex, +9 natural, +2 size, +7 luck), touch 22, flat-footed 28
hp 30 (3 HD, but treat as 17 HD)
SR 22
Fort +4, **Ref** +7, **Will** +16
Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)
Melee 2 claws +11 (1d2–2) and bite +6 (1d3–2)
Space 2-1/2 ft. **Reach** 0 ft.
Base Atk +8; **Grp** –2
Permanent Spells *control shape, create faux henchman* (human expert), *flesh to stone*
Abilities Str 6, Dex 16, Con 11, Int 14, Wis 15, Cha 20
SA Curses, steal breath
SQ Deliver touch spells, empathic link, improved evasion, speak with master

Skills Balance +11, Climb +7, Concentration +20, Craft (Alchemy) +6, Decipher Script +22, Disable Device +3, Forgery +3, Hide +12 (+16 in dark areas), Jump +11, Knowledge (Arcana) +22, Knowledge (Architecture and Engineering) +7, Knowledge (Dungeoneering) +3, Knowledge (Geography) +5, Knowledge (History) +5, Knowledge (Local) +3, Knowledge (Nature) +3, Knowledge (Nobility and Royalty) +3, Knowledge (Psionics) +7, Knowledge (Ravenloft) +18, Knowledge (Religion) +5, Listen +9, Move Silently +12, Perform (String Instruments) +15, Psicraft +7, Search +10, Spellcraft +24, Spot +9, Survival +2 (+4 to follow tracks), Use Magic Device +12

Hermitian receives a +4 racial bonus on Climb, Hide, and Move Silently checks and a +8 racial bonus on Balance and Jump checks. He uses his Dexterity modifier for Climb and Jump checks. Hermitian's Hide bonus rises to +8 in dark areas.

Feats Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse

Possessions *wand of Geldnehar's postmortem confessional* (designed into a functional quill, which the target uses to write), *hat of disguise*, *knock key* (*Ravenloft Dungeon Master's Guide* page 205), *spectral dagger* (*Magic Item Compendium* page 59), *four-fingered hand* (*Gazetteer V* page 138)

Hermitian (Human Form)
NE medium magical beast
Init +4 **Senses** Listen +14, Spot +14
AC 26 (+9 natural, +7 luck), touch 17, flat-footed 26
hp 59 (17 HD)
Fort +5, **Ref** +8, **Will** +16
Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)
Melee *spectral dagger* +12/+7/+2 (versus touch AC; 1d6 negative energy damage plus 1 Strength damage [Fort DC 11 negates Str damage] to living creatures; panics undead for 1d4+5 rounds [Will DC 11 negates; critical 19-20/x2)
Space 5 ft. **Reach** 5 ft.
Base Atk +12; **Grp** +12
Abilities Str 10, Dex 11, Con 11, Int 14, Wis 15, Cha 20
Feats Alertness, Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Bluff), Skill Focus (Disguise), Skill Focus (Forgery), Skill Focus (Sleight of Hand), Track
Skills Balance* +13, Bluff* +18, Climb* +13, Concentration +20, Craft (Alchemy) +6, Decipher Script +22, Diplomacy +9, Disable Device +3, Disguise +8 (+10 to act in character), Forgery +15, Hide* +13, Intimidate +7, Jump* +13, Knowledge (Arcana) +22, Knowledge (Architecture and Engineering) +7, Knowledge (Dungeoneering) +3, Knowledge (Geography) +5, Knowledge (History) +5, Knowledge (Local) +3, Knowledge (Nature) +5, Knowledge (Nobility and Royalty) +3, Knowledge (Psionics) +7, Knowledge (Ravenloft) +18, Knowledge (Religion) +5, Listen* +14, Move Silently* +13, Open Lock +10, Perform (String Instruments) +15, Psicraft +7, Search +10 (+12 for secret doors and similar compartments), Sense Motive* +12, Sleight of Hand* +15 (+17 to conceal a dagger), Spellcraft +24 (+26 with scrolls), Spot* +14, Survival +12 (+14 to follow tracks), Use Magic Device +12 (+16 with scrolls)

Skills marked with an asterisk (*) are class skills.

Background

"Another drink?" The little man reached out for his companion's mug. His slightly overlong fingernails, subtly tapered to rounded points, gave his hand the air of a claw.

"Why not?" said the second man, whose name was Jean-Laurent. He pushed the mug into the first man's reach. "I have to say, I never expected to have so much fun with a wizard's assistant."

The first man—Hermitian, he was called—flashed a smile as he poured from the flagon. His eyeteeth were prominent and sharp, as were the bicuspids behind them. He handed Jean-Laurent's drink back. "Master Geldnehar is often distracted by his own thoughts. Sometimes I help him focus, but most of the time…" He let out a short chirp of a laugh. "… I just enjoy the freedom of him forgetting to give me work to do."

The two knocked their cups together, laughing, then drank some more. "How does a man who can't remember to use his assistant think to get one in the first place?" Jean-Laurent asked. "I mean, where did he find you?"

"Ah," Hermitian replied, holding up his mug and extending his index finger from it. "That is where you are mistaken. I found *him*, long ago."

Jean-Laurent gave a snort. "How long could it be? He isn't even forty, and you look to be ten years younger."

Hermitian ran a hand through the black hair on the top of his head. "Why, thank you. But looks can be deceiving. Before he was born, I was actually a friend of his mother, if you can believe that."

"No," Jean-Laurent replied, looking him over with incredulity. "Have you got elf-blood in you or something?" Hermitian's ears *were* a tad pointed.

"Impossible," Hermitian shot back, waving his drink around in a loose gesture of denial. "No ancestor of mine ever had such an opportunity. I am just a fortunate man, I suppose." He took another swig, then went on. "Anyway, I knew his mother, Risidia. She was the daughter of Witness Chiron Lonvem, of the Faith of the Overseer in Martira Bay. Her life bored her to tears, and I told her she needed to make a change, to find a diversion. At my urging, she packed up some things and set off for Nova Vaasa with her favorite cat.

"That was … 728 BC? Yes, that's right. She was pretty disappointed by the squalor of Egertus, and she might have turned around and gone home right quick if she hadn't met Agnar Geldnehar."

"Your master's father?" Jean-Laurent interrupted.

"Quite right," Hermitian answered with a smirk. "He was an architect, and did fairly well for himself in that profession. They fell in love rapidly, and were married within a year. They found out little Tycho was coming along soon after. It was the start of my good fortune, and presaged the end of theirs."

Jean-Laurent sputtered a bit as he drank, so eager he was to ask, "Why? What happened?"

"It's a bit…" Hermitian hemmed and hawed over his choice of word. "… esoteric. Do you know what the Claiming of Darkon is?"

"The Claiming? No."

"How to explain…" Hermitian paused to execute a series of quick scratches behind his right ear, extending his neck and squinting his yellow-green eyes as he did so. Regaining his composure, he continued, "Have you ever had a dream wherein you forgot who you were, and became someone else?"

"I dare say I must have," replied Jean-Laurent with furrowed brow.

Hermitian nodded. "In Darkon, there are many who know that feeling—while awake. All foreigners eventually come to daydream the lives of natives, and forget their true origins."

Jean-Laurent's jaw worked soundlessly for a moment before he managed to say, "By the Loa, how horrifying!"

"Exactly. It was a fate Risidia did not want for her child, so she had to return to Martira Bay for the birth. However, a brief sojourn would not do, as she had come to hate Nova Vaasa, with its crime, squalor, and the oppressive Church of the Lawgiver looming over everything. In spite of her deep love for Agnar, she was reluctantly becoming homesick, and wanted to relocate—permanently.

"Agnar was perfectly willing to go to Darkon for the birth so she could be with her family, but his work and family were in Nova Vaasa,

so he had no interest in staying in Darkon for long." Hermitian took another few swallows, then shook his head. "There was nothing for it, I told her. Nothing for it, unless Agnar were Claimed."

"You told her to…" Jean-Laurent began, "… to trap her husband? With dark magic?"

"No, no," Hermitian contradicted, shaking his head. "My ill-chosen words were but idle talk. She was the one who took it as a suggestion. It pained her, but she thought it was the only way. She planned to keep Agnar in Darkon for the four months before the birth, allowing plenty of time for him to be Claimed. It could have happened in as little as a month, or perhaps two, but it did not. Urgent word came from Kantora, informing him that a building he had worked on had been built upon improperly surveyed ground, and was in danger of collapse. Despite Risidia's insistence that someone else could handle the matter, he went back to Nova Vaasa to design the necessary support structures to keep the building standing."

Hermitian held up his thumb, index, and middle finger. "Three crucial weeks passed before his return, making it a gamble as to whether he would be claimed before Risidia gave birth. It didn't pay out for her, sadly. Their son Tycho was born in the summer of 730 BC, and Agnar was Claimed about a month afterward." He sighed. "Agnar made sure his son took the surname Geldnehar, but when he forgot himself and became Roric Voskan, Risidia had to raise their child under *that* last name. This little alteration would be the undoing of the happy family."

With an expression of mild regret on his face, Hermitian rubbed his forehead with the back of his hand. "I am sad to say that I played a small, unintentional part in this as well. Eight years later, I found an exclusive program for Tycho, wherein he would be educated by the best and brightest and set early upon a path to a successful life. I suggested the program to Roric, but as he set about gathering the necessary papers, he came across Tycho's original birth records, wherein he found the forgotten name Geldnehar.

"When confronted about their child's name, Risidia could present no answer. How was she to explain without admitting to her terrible scheme? To betraying her husband's trust? Without an explanation, Roric concluded that the child was not his, and divorced Risidia."

"Alone, without his true memories in a foreign land," Jean-Laurent remarked. "What became of Agnar?"

"Twelve years after separating from her, he happened to cross the border of Darkon and regain his memories," Hermitian replied. "He has since returned to Nova Vaasa, and believes Risidia was a witch who ensorceled him. Other than that bit of information, I haven't cared to know much. I have always been more focused on Tycho. With his father gone, I sort of became the male role model in his life."

"So, did you finish what you started and put him in that program?" Jean-Laurent asked.

"I wasn't quite family, so it wasn't my place," Hermitian answered. "Risidia picked up where Roric left off on that matter, and thus Tycho still had the opportunity to excel under expert tutelage. By the time he became an adult, he was a polymath, with particular skill in mathematics, the arcane, and the violin. In 748 BC, he matriculated at the University of Il Aluk, and there studied his twin passions of math and magic. During this time, he adopted his original surname once more, finding it preferable to the fabricated name Voskan.

"After the Requiem, which Tycho was quite fortunate to have missed while spending time with his family, he continued his studies at the University of Il Aluk in Exile at Karg." Hermitian quaffed the remainder of his drink and filled his mug once again. "A lot of his mathier work went over my head, but I do recall that in this time, he began to examine the implications of the Lamordian *Weltaulkügel*, and decided it had some inconsistencies with the observed world. To better handle the mathematics needed, he turned his arcane knowledge toward the task of improving his central nervous system, heightening his brain function to become a human computational engine. Progressively, he developed an immense corpus of models and frameworks to govern the world, and devoted his time to finding the proper geometric shape of reality."

"The shape of reality? I don't understand,"

said Jean-Laurent.

"Ha! I don't understand it well enough to help you!" Hermitian laughed, then offered the flagon again. "Another?" Jean-Laurent handed over his mug, and Hermitian poured again as he went on.

"In 755 BC, Tycho relocated to Lamordia to have more direct access to some of the most respected mathematicians and philosophers on the subject of cosmology. In the course of his work, he met the astronomer Ruprecht Zährenner, who was a stuck-up member of this posh little gentlemen's club called the Syndicate of Enlightened Citizens. Bah! A closed-minded lot. Zährenner did not approve of Tycho's arcane interests, and so barely tolerated him for his scientific genius. It only got worse when Tycho fell in love with Zährenner's daughter, Karola."

There came a *humph* from Jean-Laurent. "That is an old tale, repeated since the dawn of man. I bet I can guess how it ends."

"Naturally," Hermitian agreed. " Zährenner built up enough pressure on Tycho that he couldn't afford to stay in Lamordia anymore, so in 758 BC, he became an adjunct lecturer at the University of Dementlieu. For a few years, he managed to periodically return and meet with Karola secretly, but once she was found to be with child, his visits were entirely curtailed. To save her marriageability, Zährenner promulgated the fiction that Karola's daughter, Lisette, was in fact her newborn sister."

"That must have been devastating for your master," Jean-Laurent spoke.

"Yes, but fortunately not for long. As I said, he is quite adept at distracting himself. Some measure of his thoughts already lied with the nature of reality—all of that geometry churns perpetually in the background. His miserable, poorly-paid work as an adjunct took care of much of the rest, as did writing and publishing, but what finally stole the last fragments of his focus from Karola was a musician in Port-a-Lucine. It was good to see his spirit buoyed by this *inamorato*, though I reserved my greatest joy for a more significant turning point in his life."

Jean-Laurent, who had mistaken *inamorato* for a vocal range and paid its true implication no mind, pressed on this last statement. "Is the University where he came into contact with the Fraternity, then?"

"That is where he finally realized he was being asked to join," Hermitian said. "They had courted him in Il Aluk, but he simply didn't pay attention. Without me, he might have missed his chance again, but once I got him to notice, he realized that the Fraternity's philosophy struck a chord with his work. His models were becoming more complicated by the day as he attempted to reconcile the observed world with his mathematics. It seemed so overwrought and artificial; why would a universe be made so, when simpler configurations were available? Tycho concluded that there must be some important reason, and it was apparently worth hiding. He accepted the invitation enthusiastically, and was inducted late in the year 759." Hermitian drained the last drops of the flagon into his mug, then added, "And that is why we are here," with an air of finality.

A little miffed that his drinking partner had polished off the the ale, Jean-Laurent had an irked tone as he pressed Hermitian further. "You can't just call that the end of your story. There is a lot that happens between induction and being called to La Maison Soulombre. You didn't even mention how he lost his thumb."

"You're right; a lot has happened in the interim, the loss of Tycho's thumb being one tale among many." He downed the last of his drink. "It was taken off by a goblyn bite in Forlorn, but the background information is long and a tad classified. It is my starkest reminder that not all parts of joining the Fraternity have been good."

Hermitian perched his fingertips around the rim of the mug and gave it a stuttering turn as he regarded it with a bitter expression. "The stupid little things he is no longer allowed to do, for little discernible reason, vex me. For example, what do you do when an expert you long sought to learn from dies before completing a magnum opus? Priests may have spells with which to speak to the dead, but Tycho figured out his own way to make one of the dead write out the contents of its head, potentially allowing it to finish what it started. Surely that is a power of great value? But since it is necromancy, he may not use this incredible tool he made."

"I see your point," Jean-Laurent replied, "but necromancy is a slippery slope. Other avenues

offer a less fraught path to knowledge."

Another chirp of laughter escaped Hermitian's lips. "The slippery slope is my favorite part. Not to mention, I thought of another use for Tycho's spell, one more suited to my needs. Care to see me demonstrate?"

Jean-Laurent's eyes widened—at least, they would have. "No. You are liable to get the both of us in truvvle. Vesithes, you thon't even have a vothyyy…" He shook his head sluggishly, then reached up to rub his numbing mouth. As his hand pulled away, red strings stretched and dripped back to his lips. His eyebrows furrowed lazily over his defocusing eyes as he struggled to read the alarming sign on his palm.

Hermitian, leering wickedly from across the table, pulled an open vial from his sleeve. It was nearly empty, but for a faint blue film on its sides, and he reached across the able to tap it to Jean-Laurent's mug before setting it down alongside the empty vessel. "Not quite yet," he replied.

Sputtering, bleeding from his nose, the corners of his mouth and even the corners of his eyes, Jean-Laurent took but a short while longer to expire, collapsing face-down upon the table. Before him, Hermitian laid a sheet of parchment and an inkwell, then reached into his coat to draw forth a long, black feather. He took a moment to focus, then drew the soft end of the feather down the arm of his dead drinking companion.

For the freshly dead, there is no creak or snap of old bones as animation comes to the body, and so Jean-Laurent's arm rose quietly—but for the light rustling of his sleeve—to take hold of the aphotically-colored quill Hermitian held out. His head rose to look at the parchment, taking in the scene dispassionately, then he dipped the quill into the inkwell and began to write his suicide note.

As the corpse scrabbled out this little fiction, Hermitian busied himself cleaning and stowing away the extra mug, and finding a second quill among the academic detritus in the chamber. He returned with this in hand just as Jean-Laurent gave his final, posthumous signature, and returned to the grave once more. After reclaiming the ebon utensil he had provided, Hermitian left the second quill in the inkwell.

Hermitian locked the chamber door from within, then returned to his victim's side. He ran a hand through Jean-Laurent's hair. "I didn't kill you because I told you too much," he assured the dead man. "I told you too much because I was always going to kill you."

With another one of his chirping laughs, Hermitian turned to the small, high window in the back wall. It was too minuscule for a man to fit through, but he opened it just the same, placed his hands on the bottom of the frame, and pulled as if to heave himself through.

With but a moment of transformation, there came to be a black cat perched in the window, its yellow-green eyes staring into the night. It breathed a chill fog into the warm outside air, then leapt out into oblivion.

Dread Possibility: Cat's-Paw

Tycho has given Hermitian many tools and tricks, and the midnight cat uses them to enact independent evils that he could not before becoming Tycho's familiar. A human form was perhaps the greatest of these gifts, but to improve its versatility, Hermitian was given a *hat of disguise*. Among other things, this makes him capable of taking Tycho's shape—which is why Tycho is actually childless. Lisette Zährenner's unique ancestry has yet to manifest itself, but the consequences of having a midnight cat and wizard's familiar as a father will surely not lie quiescent forever.

Current Sketch

Tycho's main goal of understanding the geometry of the Demiplane has not changed since joining the Fraternity of Shadows, and his inquiries into the Dread Realms focus on cosmology and related physical phenomena. In particular, he wishes to identify the simplest functional model to describe reality, then compare against observations to identify discrepancies and determine if they result from intelligent intervention by the Dark Powers. This in turn may potentially allow the Fraternity to estimate a lower bound on the power wielded by these shadowy manipulators.

When not fully engrossed in research activities, he spends his time playing the violin. His new romantic partner, Gilbert Andraud, com-

poses music for him, and in turn, Tycho composes *cor de chasse* music for Gilbert. When separated, they exchange music and letters via *writs of communication* (*VRS: Doppelgangers* page 315).

Combat

Tycho begins each day by casting *greater mage armor*, *detect scrying*, and *nondetection* on himself. He generally prepares ray and area spells, along with spells meant to assist in retreating or pushing enemies back. While he has at his disposal a fair range of spells with which to rain destruction down upon distant enemies, he is ill-equipped to handle melee, and will use spells like *repulsion*, *mislead*, and *greater fireburst* to discourage and disengage from nearby attackers. He generally prefers to avoid combat entirely, being more of an academic and theorist, so unless there is a reason for him to stay, or his foes are clearly underqualified to challenge him, he prefers to disengage immediately. If he anticipates combat and believes it to be necessary, he will recruit front-line fighters to keep his enemies distant.

In human form, Hermitian may stand beside Tycho to defend him, but if he feels threatened, their empathic link may drive Tycho to retreat as if his own life were in danger. Hermitian generally reverts to cat form when in retreat, as it makes him harder to hit and easier to carry. Outside of combat situations, Hermitian can take the form of a stone cat, which he generally uses to disguise himself as a decoration and watch goings-on, or to discourage people from picking him up while he is napping.

When describing the effects of Tycho's magic, particularly with regard to conjuration spells, use descriptions that evoke the manipulation of space. When he casts *dimension door*, describe how a hole opens in the air, a tongue of ground from another place extends to touch the earth at his feet, then snaps back to its origin when he steps onto it. People teleporting with him see the entire world curl up around them like a scroll; the destination city descends toward them, the buildings leaning and spreading apart like the petals of a blooming flower. An open window looms near, and the room within turns inside-out through the opening to present the floor of the destination just a short step away. When he casts *shrink item*, he actually expands a sphere of empty space, places the item within, and allows space to return to its original volume. If his contingent *ray deflection* triggers, the air bends around him to redirect incoming spells. Not all of his magic works this way (*detect thoughts* certainly doesn't), but these descriptions help to underscore his unique approach to manipulating reality.

Special Attacks:

Aggression Mastery (Su): Tycho has mastered the areas of the brain responsible for aggression. Once per day, as a standard action, Tycho may either cause himself or another creature to enter a rage (as a barbarian), or alternatively force a barbarian out of a rage. Non-barbarians rage as a 1st-level barbarian, while barbarians rage as normal. Tycho must touch the creature to use this ability, which provokes an attack of opportunity. An unwilling target can make a Will save (DC 16; Charisma based) to negate the effect.

Clairaudience/Clairvoyance (Sp): By concentrating for 1 minute, Tycho may expand his senses to such an extent that he can perceive an unseen area as per the *clairaudience/clairvoyance* spell. This ability is as the spell of the same name, as cast by a sorcerer of 8th level.

Scry on Familiar (Sp): Tycho may scry on Hermitian (as if casting the *scrying* spell) once per day.

Share Spells: At Tycho's option, he may have any spell (but not any spell-like ability) he casts on himself also affect Hermitian. Hermitian must be within 5 feet at the time of casting to receive the benefit.

If the spell or effect has a duration other than instantaneous, it stops affecting Hermitian if he moves farther than 5 feet away and will not affect him again even if he returns to Tycho before the duration expires. Additionally, Tycho may cast a spell with a target of "You" on Hermitian

(as a touch range spell) instead of on himself.

Tycho and Hermitian can share spells even if the spells normally do not affect creatures of Hermitian's type (magical beast).

Sigil Ring (Sp): Tycho bears a silver ring that allows him to cast the spell *deeper darkness* three times per day as a free action. The ring will not function for any other person and is the symbol of his membership in the Fraternity.

Special Qualities:

Deliver Touch Spells (Su): Hermitian can deliver touch spells for Tycho. If Tycho and Hermitian are in contact at the time Tycho casts a touch spell, he can designate Hermitian as the "toucher." Hermitian can then deliver the touch spell just as Tycho could. As usual, if Tycho casts another spell before the touch is delivered, the touch spell dissipates.

Eidetic Memory (Ex): Tycho has perfect recall of events in all five senses. This grants him a +4 competence bonus to all Intelligence checks and Intelligence-based skill checks.

Eidetic Spellcaster: Tycho does not need a spellbook, neither to record spells he knows nor to prepare known spells. He can learn spells normally, either through gaining levels in wizard or learning from other spellbooks, and he must pay all the normal costs for learning new spells (used in special incenses rather than inks), but he does not need to record them in a spellbook.

Empathic Link (Su): Tycho has an empathic link with Hermitian out to a distance of up to 1 mile. Tycho cannot see through Hermitian's eyes, but they can communicate empathically. Because of the limited nature of the link, only general emotional content can be communicated. Because of this empathic link, Tycho has the same connection to an item or place that Hermitian does.

Enigma's Bane (Ex): When confronted by a puzzle, enigma, code, or riddle, Tycho gains a +8 circumstance bonus to any Intelligence checks or Intelligence-based skill checks necessary to solve the problem.

Speak with Master (Ex): Hermitian and Tycho can communicate via cat vocalizations as if they were using a common language. Other creatures do not understand the communication without magical help.

Symphony of Nerves (Su): Tycho's neural networks are highly sensitized. Once per day, as a free action, he gains a +4 enhancement bonus to Dexterity. This effect lasts for 8 rounds.

Telepathic Immunity (Su): Tycho is immune to all forms of telepathy or mind reading. He may suppress or reactivate this immunity at will, as a free action.

Lair

Tycho has never owned a residence of his own. He stayed first with his family, then in student housing in Il Aluk and Karg, and then in rented accommodations in Lamordia. After being driven out and becoming an adjunct, his salary barely allowed him fleabag lodging in the Quartier Ouvrier. That was a fortunately short-lived situation, as joining the Fraternity of Shadows got him faculty housing at the University of Dementlieu, but it was enough to make him realize that, in spite of his vibrant internal world, his place in the outside world was important as well. Knowing his lifestyle was too itinerant to make a fixed home worthwhile, he decided to create a more flexible residence.

What Tycho calls his *Latibulum* (or his Haunt among those not conversant in Darkonese) is a four-wheeled carriage with hidden nondimensional spaces attached to it. Inside, under the backward-facing seat, is a stepladder into a small closet space full of books. Most are on geometry, cosmology, and arcana, and some are Tycho's personal copies of his own published works, all heavily annotated.

Under the forward-facing seat, another stepladder descends into a mud room, with coat racks, benches, and an enchanted boot-scraping station which cleans a user's entire ensemble with *prestidigitation* effects. A single door opposite the ladder opens on a lounge space, with two doors off of it. To the right is the door into Tycho's office space and bedchamber, and to the left is a bathroom,

where a toilet capable of emptying into the Near Ethereal acts as an emergency escape route.

An *unseen servant* operates within the carriage and the nondimensional spaces, ferrying books from the library to the lounge or office, preparing basic meals out of a magic cabinet in the lounge, and performing other small tasks. The carriage can move itself at a speed of 240 feet by creating four *phantom steeds*, and benefits from the powers of these steeds up to 12th level, as described in the spell. If Tycho gains another caster level and improves the Latibulum, it will be capable of flight. He carries the only key to the Latibulum, which is also a whistle that relays mental commands to the Latibulum at any distance (though commands have a 5% chance of being lost across domain borders, and do not transmit across closed borders). Anyone else attempting to enter or harm the Latibulum triggers an *Evard's black tentacles* effect, which attempts to crush interlopers as the Latibulum escapes.

Collimation Ring

Price (Item Level): 3,000 gp (7th) (+1), 12,000 gp (13th) (+2), 27,000 gp (16th) (+3), 48,000 gp (17th) (+4), 75,000 gp (19th) (+5)
Body Slot: Ring
Caster Level: 3rd (+1), 6th (+2), 9th (+3), 12th (+4), 15th (+5)
Aura: Faint (DC 16, +1) or moderate (DC 18, +2; DC 19, +3) or strong (DC 21, +4; DC 22, +5) evocation
Activation: —
Weight: —

This ring is almost imperceptible at first, made entirely of clear crystal. It reveals itself in the impression apparent on the finger, and in the way light refracts when passing through it.

A *collimation ring* provides an enhancement bonus to the attack and damage rolls of ray spells cast by the wearer. Even if the spell creates multiple rays (such as *scorching ray*), the additional damage only applies once. If the spell does not deal damage, the enhancement to damage has no effect.

Prerequisites: Forge Ring, Craft Magic Arms and Armor.
Cost to Create: 1,500 gp, 120 XP, 3 days (+1); 6,000 gp, 480 XP, 12 days (+2); 13,500 gp, 1080 XP, 27 days (+3); 24,000 gp, 1920 XP, 48 days (+4), 37,500 gp, 3000 XP, 75 days (+5).

Geldnehar's Cuff Chains

Price (Item Level): 36,000 gp (17th)
Body Slot: Arms
Caster Level: 14th
Aura: Strong (DC 18) transmutation (and illusion, though that is not visible in the aura)
Activation: Swift (mental)
Weight: —

Three thin, silvery chains wrap around each wrist, clasped together by engraved plates that pinch the cuffs of the shirt closed.

Tycho designed his cuff chains to operate similarly to *wand bracelets* (*Magic Item Compendium* page 147). Each chain of the pair can store up to four items, which are imperceptible and of negligible weight when so stored. A wearer who knows an item stored in one of the chains can issue a mental command to that chain, causing the item to appear in the associated hand.

If the wearer has an item in hand, he can store it with a mental command in the chain on that wrist, or switch it with an item stored in that chain, if he is aware of the stored item. Any item stored can weigh no more than 3 pounds and must be able to be held in one hand, such as a wand or a light weapon. Only the wearer of the cuff chains is able to retrieve or store items.

If an attacker makes a successful disarm attempt against the wearer of the chains, and the chain on the wrist of the hand holding the item being taken has an empty slot that can accept the item, then the item is automatically stored in that chain. The wearer is still disarmed, but the item is neither taken by the attacker, nor knocked to the ground, and can be retrieved when the wearer next gets a swift action (assuming the wearer remembers what the item is).

Tycho's memory is perfect, and these devices use that as a defense mechanism. If the wearer attempts to retrieve an item from a chain that is not stored there (even if it is present in the other

chain), or to store an item in a chain that is already at capacity, the chains constrict, attempting to sever the wearer's hands. Each chain deals 1d6 points of damage per round for six rounds, and if it is not removed by the sixth round, it cuts through the wrist it is attached to. A DC 20 Strength check removes one of the chains.

An *identify* spell reveals how the chains operate, but it does not reveal any items that are stored in the chains, and it only has a 1% chance per caster level to reveal the constriction ability. *Analyze dweomer* reveals the constriction ability and all items stored in the chains.

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *animate rope*, *shrink item*, *nondetection*, *Nystul's magic aura*.
Cost to Create: 18,000 gp, 1,440 XP, 36 days.

Geldnehar's Postmortem Confessional

Necromancy [Language-Dependent]
Level: Wiz 4
Components: V, S, F
Casting Time: 10 minutes
Range: Touch
Target: One dead creature
Duration: 5 min./level
Saving Throw: Will negates; see text
Spell Resistance: No

You grant the semblance of life and intellect to a corpse, allowing it to take up a quill and write as you direct. It can write on any topic you ask, though its knowledge is limited to what it knew during life, including the languages it could write in (if it was indeed literate). You can ask the corpse to write the answers to questions, or to take dictation, writing what you say to it.

If you choose to ask questions, you may ask up to one question per two caster levels. Unasked questions are wasted if the duration expires. Answers are usually brief, cryptic, or repetetive. If the creature's alignment was different from yours, the corpse gets a Will save to resist the spell as if it were alive.

If you choose to make the corpse take dictation, the resultant writing is authentically in the deceased's handwriting (though the quality may have suffered with decomposition), though the content may not pass as authentic (requiring a Bluff check on the part of the caster).

If the corpse has been subject to *speak with dead* or *Geldnehar's postmortem confessional* within the past week, an additional casting of the spell fails. *Geldnehar's postmortem confessional* likewise spoils subsequent castings of *speak with dead*. You can cast this spell on a corpse that has been deceased for any amount of time, but the body must be mostly intact to be able to respond. A damaged corpse may be able to give partial answers or partially correct answers, but it must at least have a hand and arm in order to write at all. This spell cannot affect a corpse that has been turned into an undead creature.

The spell does not let you actually speak to the person (whose soul has departed). It instead draws on the imprinted knowledge stored in the corpse. The partially animated body retains the imprint of the soul that once inhabited it, and thus it can write with all the knowledge the creature had while alive. The corpse, however, cannot learn new information. Indeed, it can't even remember being questioned.

This limitation can be somewhat overcome by loaning the corpse the use of your mind. By the caster taking 1d4+1 points of Intelligence burn (see *Expanded Psionics Handbook* page 67), the corpse gains the ability to synthesize the information it knew in life. A corpse so gifted may now be tasked with writing original works on the topics it knew, including finishing works it had failed to complete while alive. The corpse may also write things it would not have written while alive in a more convincing manner, giving the caster a +5 circumstance bonus on Bluff checks to pass off false documents as authored by the deceased. Using the spell in this manner prompts a Madness save with DC 10 + 1/2 the corpse's HD in life + the corpse's Wisdom modifier.

A fresh corpse can write up to 50 words per caster level over the course of the spell (or less, if the living subject was a slow writer), but rigor mortis can reduce this to 30 words per caster level, and particularly decrepit specimens may write even slower at the DM's discretion. Considering that a single page of text typically contains a few hundred words, producing large works will likely take an extended period of time and many castings of the spell.

Casting this spell requires a powers check, but burning Intelligence is even riskier. If you fail a Will save against your own spell DC, the target reanimates as a free-willed undead creature, and the ability burn becomes permanent until the creature is slain.

Focus: A raven's feather fashioned into a quill. Though it is not a spell component, ink must also be provided to write with, otherwise the target won't leave any marks (except perhaps scratches) when it writes.

Ray Flexure [Metamagic]

You can aim a ray spell around a corner by bending space to deflect the beam.

Prerequisites: Any metamagic feat.

Benefit: You can alter a ray spell to attempt to strike a target without having line of sight or line of effect. Select an unoccupied square to which you have line of sight and line of effect. That square becomes a flexure node. From the flexure node, continue the line of effect in its original direction out to the remaining range of the spell, then gradually turn this continued line up to 90 degrees from the original direction.

You are able to perceive any targets that the continued line passes over, giving you line of sight and line of effect (assuming nothing that would block either intervenes between the target and the flexure node), though they are distorted, and you may not be able to identify them. To pick out identifying information, you must succeed at a DC 15 Spot check, with normal penalties for distance and other mitigating factors. You cannot turn the continued line back toward the original direction, so you must either choose a target when you see it, or pass it and search for a target further from the original direction. If you do not choose a target by the time the continued line is 90 degrees from the original direction, the spell fails, and the spell slot is expended.

Aiming through a flexure node is difficult. If the continued line is within 45 degrees of the original direction, the attack roll has a -2 penalty. If the continued line is more than 45 degrees from the original direction, the attack roll is made at a -5 penalty.

A ray flexure spell uses a spell slot 2 levels higher than the spell's actual level.

Special: A spellcaster can ready an action to cast a ray spell back through the flexure node when the caster of the ray flexure spell becomes visible in it. This attack is only possible if the creator of the flexure node deviates from the original line of effect at least far enough to target the spellcaster who has readied the counterattack, and the counterattack is subject to the same angle penalties as those that would affect the ray flexure spell if the target were the counterattacking spellcaster.

If the ray spell creates multiple rays and allows you to target them separately, you may still do so, subject to the limitations of the spell. As you turn the continued line, choose your first target as normal, then assign however many rays you wish to fire at it. If there are still rays remaining, you may continue to turn the continued line to select a new target, assigning rays as with the first.

Spatial Contracture [Metamagic]

You can affect a greater area with your spells by folding nearby space into the effect.

Prerequisites: Any metamagic feat.

Benefit: You can alter a burst, emanation, or spread-shaped spell to effectively increase its area. Any numeric measurements of the spell's area increase by 50%, and a secondary area of spatial distortion with numeric measurements 100% greater than those of the original spell's area is centered at the same point. Any attack targeted into, out of, or through the spatial distortion has a 20% miss chance as it veers through the warped space, and the spatial distortion is treated as rough terrain. The distortion lasts as long as the base spell, or one round if the base spell was instantaneous. Other area spells cast into the distortion are not reshaped, as only the spatial contracture spell maintains its original size in the warped space.

A spatial contracture spell uses a spell slot 3 levels higher than the spell's actual level. Spells that do not have an area of one of these three sorts are not affected by this feat.



Markovia

A Preview of the Sea of Sorrows Report

By Michail Adamis (Mephisto of the FoS)

"As far as I'm concerned, if there is a supreme being then he chose organic evolution as a way of bringing into existence the natural world, which doesn't seem to me to be necessarily blasphemous at all."
— Sir David Attenborough

Size and Reach: 38x24 miles of island, 3-5 miles of surrounding seas
Darklord: Dr. Frantisek Markov
Ecology: Sparse Fauna, Full Flora
Climate/Terrain: Tropical forests, hills, mountains, formerly Temperate highlands
Year of Formation: 698 BC
Population: 1640
Races (%) 97% broken ones, mongrelmen 2%, other 1%,
Cultural Level: 1 (Stone Age)
Languages: Balok, Lamordian
Religions: Diosamblet, Akanga, The Wolf God, Sea Maiden
Government: None formally
Ruler: Dr. Frantisek Markov, Akanga

Approaching the Island (The Soul Kraken)

Ships traveling towards Markovia may travel fiftyfive miles due west from Ludendorf following a warm current or emerge from the Mists on the north of the Sea of Sorrows to suddenly see clear skies and the hot sun shining over a large green island jutting out of the island like the partial lower jaw of a shark. This happens if they are lucky enough to have reached the island during the day, or even luckier to have avoided a storm, or hurricane as these natural phenomena occur more frequently there than in other part of the Sea of Sorrows. As it happen often, sailing in the misty Sea of Sorrows someone can lose track of time resulting to the ship arriving in the island after dusk and before dawn. Reaching the island after the sun has hidden its face is really hazardous. The waters around Markovia are stalked by the Soul Kraken a terrible beast similar to an *Architeuthis dux* also known as giant squid but larger in size and not natural but magical. This main difference is obvious when the Soul Kraken attacks, as it elevates its tentacles around the ship the horrifying heads of previous victims either fresh, decomposing or without any trace of flesh on them, are firmly held by the points of the beast's tentacles in a semblance of life able to attack by biting anyone in range of its massive tentacles.

The Soul Kraken resembles a squid of the *Lycoteuthidae* family, though a thousand times larger, as it lack's hooks on its tentacles and has photophores on the viscera, eyeballs and tentacles making the magical beast change colors according to its emotions or luminous and transparent when it attacks, having characteristics similar to a ghost's. I believe this luminosity to be a defensive ability as is for those of the *Lycoteuthidae*, but compared to this natural squid that uses it to disguise from predators from below, the Soul Kraken's luminosity is a magical effect that protects it from fire and lightning effects as we so strenuously discovered. Aleister speculated it may protect it also from mundane effects such as paralysis, amputation and other kinds of massive damage but also from magical effects such as death and necromantic spells, although the latter should never be used even to battle such a creature.

The colossal magical cephalopod, as its natural counterpart, is able to fill a muscular cavity and squirt out water to propel it to the opposite direction of the squirting water. Filling up the contracting cavity I am sure it increases both the mass and drag of the Soul Kraken. Because of the expanse of the contracting cavity, the beast's velocity fluctuates as it moves through water, accelerating while expelling water and decelerating while vacuuming water.

As the *Lycoteuthidae* squid which exists in abundance in the sea around Markovia it inhabits its tropical waters staying in the bottom of the sea during the day, probably hidden in underwater caves and migrates to the surface to feed at night.

The Soul Kraken as most cephalopods is able to release a black substance when it wants to escape, I managed to acquire some of this substance after our encounter with the beast and discovered that it had the same magical properties as the effect of our brotherhood rings. After thorough experimentation I deduced that it is in fact *liquid darkness*. I believe this to be of great interest to the Fraternity of Shadows and may need further investigation, although expect to suffer casualties in the process, it was fortunate to have Tycho Geldehar and Aleister Smythe with me otherwise I believe I wouldn't have survived the encounter.

Normal squids are among the most intelligent of Invertebrates but the Soul Kraken shows evidence of being a highly intelligent predator with the magical power of controlling winds or even the weather, summoning stormy clouds and hurricanes to preoccupy the crew of a ship before and as it attacks. The sudden gathering of storm clouds when approaching Markovia is surely a sign of an imminent attack by the Soul Kraken and I recommend when such an event occurs to be ready to detect if it is caused by magic or if it is a natural event caused by Markovia's tropical climate. Its high intelligence means that it is capable of using all the natural defensive and offensive strategies observed in cephalopods of any species recorded and detailed in Adomy Ceddinas's *De piscium aquatilium animalium historia*.

The Soul Kraken has a total of ten tentacles two of them are longer reaching the length of around sixty feet. The eight smaller ones reach a length of thirty feet and I will use the proper term arms for them. The Soul Kraken uses its two long tentacles to grab prey and the eight arms to hold and control its prey while using its beak to cut food into suitable size chunks, such as a natural squid does. This attack applies only to enormously large animals but could also apply to ships. As I witnessed firsthand when the Soul Kraken attacks smaller prey it utilizes the heads stolen from its victim's bodies. It is not just a strategy utilized by the massive beast to intimidate, make no mistake as I have mentioned the Soul Kraken is an intelligent and cunning adversary, but is by some magical effect able to see, hear, speak, but also attack using those heads.

Although this image of tangling attacking heads as well as the ability to speak may be reminiscent to those of a Death's Heads Tree fruit their powers are completely different. Although the Death's Head Tree's fruit are known to able to attack and moan for help, an attempt to attract the attention of potential victims, it is as most scholars agree a mimicking speech rather than true communication, in contrast the heads held by the Soul Kraken are able to communicate as you and I.

As I personally witnessed the Soul Kraken can use the head's organs utilizing the heads senses as if that person was alive, possibly doing so by inserting the point of its tentacle through the head's skull and stimulating the brain. The Soul Kraken may even communicate using those heads in any language known to the deceased as it has the power to peer through the dead person's memories, something that is really disturbing to watch. This obvious distinction from gigantic natural squids is thus not only an aesthetic one but a key to the beasts existence as it seems the beast does not only consume the bodies but the very souls of its victims thus its name the Soul Kraken.

As there has never been an account of more than one Soul Kraken ever attacking it is more evident that it is a solitary creature, which is fortunate as I wouldn't even consider in my wildest nightmares to encounter more than one hunting cooperatively. I believe the Soul Kraken to be neither a solitary being nor one belonging to a shoal of similar creatures but a unique creature that has made the sea surrounding Markovia its hunting grounds. If this is the case there are various records by survivors who have detailed an attack by the Soul Kraken where it was amputated or had some of its tentacles destroyed. These testimonies probably highlight one of the sea monster's most profound abilities as the Soul Kraken that attacked us on *Der Verfluchte Blekksprutten* had all ten tentacles intact. This means that this magical beast is able to regrow its tentacles once they have been destroyed even by fire.

Because of the power to regrow even burned tissue, the ejection of *liquid darkness*, as well as its appearance coinciding with the emergence of our ship from the Mists and its disappearance with the dawning of the sun, I am inclined to conclude that the Soul Kraken is a nocturnal aquatic solid mist creature similar to the Mist Ferrymen or the Mist Horrors, that may be repelled or even damaged by sunlight.

The first recorded appearance of the Soul Kraken exists in the nautical archives of Martira Bay detailing an attack on the caravel *Somnos Vis* dated in late November of 742 BC the notarized statement was made by the sole survivor of the attack. Ever since there have been many reported as well as unreported attacks of the Soul Kraken and most sailors avoid sailing to Markovia. There is only one ship that has repeatedly travelled to Markovia and has returned multiple times in the past decade, the *Hylende Walross* belonging to Captain Lennard Gartner, putting unbelievable prices for services to transport people to Markovia but also for exotic fruits and plants from that island. In the past few years he has made a fortune importing silver. Some sailors speculate the precious ore comes from Markovia.

Putting aside the difficulties a ship may face in the hazardous sea around it, the land of Markovia is easily approachable to ships, as it is mostly surrounded by beaches of thin sand, gravel or pebbles, except for the southernmost part of the island, which ends up in steep seaward cliffs. Although any ship can easily be beached or shore anchored in any small cove around the island, the unpredictable weather of Markovia as well as large waves splashing on the coasts, the safest place to set anchor is Sunset Bay, named after the wreckage of the caravel *Sunset Empires* that was reported being grounded on the island in 749 BC. The shipwreck of the *Sunset Empires* should be avoided as it is one of the multiple lairs the Soul Kraken uses around the island.

Dread Possibility: Kraken's Hoard

Somewhere along many underwater caves on the south of the island of Markovia, the Soul Kraken's permanent lair is located. It is full with treasure amassed during two decades of attacking ships on the Sea of Sorrows. One of the sealfolk beastmen has discovered it, although the beastman doesn't realise the value of the treasure as he has no knowledge of the concept of money, there were some useful equipment hidden there for it to use. The broken one has some masterful magical weapons in its possession it won't be long before others begin to wonder where he has discovered them.

Side Note

You can imagine my surprise when I discovered this was the same ship that carried me from the Nightmare Lands to Egertus earlier that same month. It seems Orvin Vossler the ship's captain, a weary middle aged man looking at least a decade older was compelled to travel back to the Nightmare Lands following the Dnar River east and into the Mists which then drifted on the east of Nova Vaasa. They reached a stormy large body of sea water that they assumed was the Nocturnal Sea and were caught into the storm. While trying to navigate into the unforgiving stormy sea they were attacked by the Soul Kraken close to a large tropical island that didn't seem to be the Nightmare Lands. The sea monster killed the whole crew except one and decided to not sink the ship which drifted aimlessly in the Sea of Sorrows until it was discovered of the Jagged Coast, the sole survivor was shaken by the ordeal and taken to Martira Bay where he gave an account of what had occurred, presenting also the ships log as proof. The name of the survivor who made the testimony was none other than Orvin Vossler. The Martira Bay authorities were duty-bound to write down his testimony, as much as absurd as it sounded to them and thus I discovered it when we arrived in the port of Martira Bay safe from our expedition to Markovia. As I have learned Orvin Vossler was sent to the Mikki Sanatorium research facility. The *Somnos Vis* strangely enough continues to appear in the Sea of Sorrows as an endlessly drifting ship. My theory is that the *Somnos Vis* did actually reach the Nocturnal Sea but was caught in an early evolution of the Call of the Claw mistway.

Dread Possibility: The Dreaming Captain

Captain Orvin Vossler had accidentally travelled to the Nightmare Lands with his merchant ship while travelling the Dnar River. Somehow Cedrik Paddock's dream-walking intervened with Captain Orvin's own dreams and the two of them managed to find each other on the Nightmare Lands were Captain Orvin managed to travel back to Egertus with Cedrik Paddock as his sole passenger. The Nightmare Court decided to punish Captain Orvin by dragging him and his crew to the Nightmare Lands after all he had stolen a prisoner from them so they were justified to imprison him instead. The Dark Powers intervened to taunt the Nightmare Court or maybe they had other plans and mistraveled the *Somnos Vis* close to Markovia, where they were attacked by the Soul Kraken. Captain Orvin went mad with horror and drifted for some days in the Sea of Sorrows until his ship was discovered off the Jagged Coast. Being obviously disturbed the authorities sold his ship and funded with the money earned they hospitalized him to the Mikki Sanatorium.

What people never learned was that after the *Somnos Vis* was purchased and made its first journey into the Sea of Sorrows its crew vanished once more. The truth is that the Nightmare Court managed to claim both the captain and the ship as their own. Captain Orvin being still the captain of the *Somnos Vis* as he never voluntarily left his position sails the ship, in his catatonic state from within the sanatorium, as it drifts crewless in the Sea of Sorrows. If any ship discovers it and decide to board the ship are transported to the Nightmare Lands the first time they close their eyes to fall asleep on board the *Somnos Vis*.

Landscape

Someone cannot speak about Markovia's landscape without speaking about the domains geographical transition and the differences between the land existing in the middle of the Balinoks and its current position as an island. Before the Great Upheaval it was bordered by the ancient domain of Barovia to the south, Dorvinia to the west, the hunger domain of G'Henna to the northwest, the goblin infested forests of Tepest to the north and Nova Vaasa to the east.

Markovia was located in the middle of the Balinoks, its highest point on the south, used to be the northern part of Mount Baratak, now the highest mountain of the Balinoks but before the Great Upheaval it was surpassed only by the northern Balinok Mountains Nirka and Nyid of Arak named after the twin feuding dwarven princes and the southern Balinok Mountains the forbidding Mount Makab and its sister Mount Grysl on the barren land of Bluetspur.

Mountain Baratak overlooked the whole highland domain of Markovia filled with with large stands of pines and oaks. The lower eastern foothills of Mount Gries a once thriving source of silver in centuries past for Dorvinia ended in west of Markovia while the central part of the domain was dominated by Mount Dumnezeu extending to the west streaching to reach Mount Pios in the northwest, bordering G'Henna, now reduced into a massive sand dune. In the east of the highlands, overlooking the grasslands of Kesjermark in Nova Vaasa stood Mount Gheara. The northern part of the island was dominated by Paznic Hill bordering Tepest while on the western part the foothills of Mount Gries in Dominia still remains elevating around 500 feet above the surrounding ground now called Argint Hill.

Most of the domain's geographical features remain unchanged, the headwaters of the Dranach River years ago flowing through the hunger city of Zhukar still exists springing from Mount Dumnezeu in the central highlands of Markovia as does what used to be the Borchava River that flowed to Nova Vaasa. The Little Borchava River that begun from Lake Fiară in the foothills of Mount Gheara before flowing into its larger sibling in Nova Vaasa still exists under the second largest peak in Markovia as well as does the lake, both rivers open into the Sea of Sorrows. But Markovia's inland geography has changed since becoming an island. The frequent tropical rains have eroded the limestone ground on the south of the central highlands of the island, renamed Mount Nezeu, creating a new river that flows across the island before being issued to the sea on the southeast forming a swamp. We named the rivers Dran, Borch, Aur (gold) and Calcar the Barovian word for limestone for easy reference.

The most evident physical testament of Markovia's violent transition though are the massive steep cliffs on the southern part of the island overlooking the sea from a height of around 3,500 feet, making them the highest point in the island, although their altitude has decreased significantly. While before the Great Upheaval the cliffs were the lower slopes of Mount Baratak that reaches an elevation of 7,440 feet and their foothills began at the Balinok highlands they now begin at sea level, the once temperate slopes and foothills of the highest mountains ravaged by fierce cold winds and snow are now low green mountains filled with all kinds of tropical low plants, although the highest peaks of the island to the south is still covered by clouds most of the time.

The most notable feature of Markovia is naturally the seemingly endless surrounding Sea of Sorrows, its enormous waves smashing on the cliffs to the south and large set waves roaring on the beaches and rocks on the borderline between land and sea. As mentioned before the numerous coves around the island are formed of rocks or beaches of thin sand, gravel or pebbles. Some of the rocky areas in coastal Markovia are honeycombed with caves most of them are underwater. The Sunset Bay is a great, wide lagoon, with sharp-toothed rocks and savage boat-ripping shoals guiding the entrance. The wide beach itself on the inner side of the lagoon consisting of white sand contrasts with the dark granite surrounding rocks. The wide expanse of the white sand becomes lost in a treeline of palms and gum trees as well as other tropical trees that make the majority of trees on the island.

A notable location on the island, are the Great Stone Men on the northern coast, half-buried statues of giants that litter the sand beach and sea. These appeared after Markovia's transition to its present location and remain a mystery. The Great Stone men seem to be reaching to the skies for something unseen and unattainable, possibly the blessing of the gods some might say or are struggling to remain on the surface as if being pulled down in a pool of quicksand. Their visages both male and female are twisted in agony. Their straining muscles clearly visible carved on their faces and upper limbs. Several of them have their heads half immersed under the sea as if struggling against the powerful waves for a breath of air. The ones who are buried in the sand have been covered by vines and creepers as the jungle expands towards the coast.

Climate

The island is not only diverse in its malformed inhabitants but also in its climate. The climate of the island can range from dry tropical to wet tropical as Markovia is subject to monsoons of seasonally changing patterns of a rainy months and dry months. The north east winter monsoon, created by currents of cold air from Lamordia, brings seasonal rainfall from October to December. As winter ends, warm moist air from the Sea of Sorrows blows towards Markovia, the summer monsoon brings a humid climate and torrential rainfall lasting from June to September.

Flora

The island has one of the most diverse plants I have ever visited, combining the vegetation of the Balinoks with the trees and exotic plants of a tropical climate, as the vegetation is changing to match the new wetter, more tropical conditions. The oak forests that reigned supreme in the island's interior lowlands have thrived in the new, wetter climate alongside newer, faster growing tropical plants battling for dominance. Most of the old pines have perished and are still standing, rotting upright, in large pine barrens along the island highlands. Tropical vines and creepers have already taken a foothold, their bright greens and radiant flowers contrasting with the dead- brown needles. Along the coast tropical plants have already established themselves as dominant.

The tropical evergreen vegetation consists of five layers with the top layer being the upper tree layer. Here you will find the largest and widest trees in all the forest. These trees tend to have very large canopy so they can be fully exposed to sunlight. In a layer below that is the middle tree layer. Here some can find more compact trees and vegetation. These trees tend to be skinnier as they are trying to gain any sunlight they can. The third layer is the lower tree

area. These trees tend to be around five to ten meters high and tightly compacted. The trees found in the third layer are young trees trying to grow into the larger canopy trees. The fourth layer is the shrub layer beneath the tree canopy. This layer is mainly populated by sapling trees, shrubs, and seedlings. The fifth and final layer is the herb layer which is the forest floor. The closed canopy which blocks light to the floor allows little underbrush in the parts where coniferous trees exist with the ground being mainly bare except for various plants, mosses, and ferns while where more tropical trees exist, the forest floor is much denser than above because of little sunlight and air movement.

The coastline is dominated by palm and gum trees giving way to groves of eucalyptus as one goes further inland mainly *Eucalyptus regnans* reaching up to 100.5 metres (330 feet) but also *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* along watercourses. The mainland is mostly dominated by tropical and subtropical coniferous trees as the agathis (kauri) I believe this to be a very fast adaption from the temperate climate of Markovia prior to the Great Upheaval to a tropical one. I presume this to be another display of the Watchers power over our world.

The battle for dominance over the island between the more tropical trees and the coniferous trees that dominated Markovia before is turning towards the tropical vegetation as the yearly monsoons seem to help that side expand on the island as the temperate vegetation struggle to survive, but someone can still discover patches of an arrangement of ancient temperate species of ancient cedars, cypresses, junipers, fir, and yews. The vegetation battle lines are mostly altitude based, with a few lowland patches still dominated by temperate grasses due to rain shadow. The most common plant on the island though is the *Urtica dioica* commonly known as stinging nettle, it dominates the grasslands and forests as the main undergrowth plant of the island and it can also be found both in low and high altitudes. What I found odd is that during my stay on the island I never encountered not even a single stem of *Malva parviflora*, as mallows are a natural remedy to the nettle plant's toxin, I did find though a sketch of a plant in Dr. Markov's notes resembling the plant Althaea, it's roots and stem secrete mucilage, which is used to soften the skin, oddly there was a footnote of the plant existing only on the southeastern point of the island, I made a visit to the place described but could not find any trace of an Althaea plant. I should emphasize at this point that without any of these plants to rub the itchy, burning rash created by the stinging nettle's toxins, it makes traveling the island very irritating.

In the middle of the island someone can witness firsthand the casualties of the "vegetation war" a huge grove of heat-killed pine trees creates a haunting sight. These massive dead trees create weird shadows making the place seem haunted even during daylight. We stayed there for one night searching for cover from the beastmen, but the continuous crackling noises of the trees and the fear of some large bough falling on us during the night didn't let us rest so well. We named this forest Forêt d'Arbres Morts for obvious reasons.

There are other parts of the island that resemble the Dead Tree Forest but instead of falling victim to climate change or some plant disease these forests had been burned, and they seemed to have been set on fire instead of being burned naturally, as the humidity would make a natural fire next to impossible. I speculate that the beast king Akanga may have been responsible for these fires, using them to create awe to his beastmen subordinates. Akanga is a very intimidating beastman on whom I will descant on later on this report. We witnessed him use the egg-shaped fruit and seeds of a Sea Mango tree (*Cerbera manghas)* for trials by ordeal, the white plumed halfling sized parrot-like birdman tried was acquitted. Several mango trees exist on the coast close to the abandoned Dorvinian settlement Dr. Markov has named Piatravenin (Venomstone). A poison was extracted from the nut of the Sea Mango tree shrub and ingested by the accused, with the outcome determining innocence or guilt of an accused party. According to Dr. Markov's notes Sea Mango blossoms from March to October, with elegant, fragrant white flowers that each five petals and feature a ring of purple red in the centre. After the blooming period, the snowy white flowers compose a gorgeous picture as they fall to the ground like a

snowfall. The Sea Mango Tree's leaves and fruit are extremely poisonous as I have encountered them in Sri-Raji, but there is a species Dr. Markov mentions in his notes *Cacatua markoviana* which apparently has developed immunity to the fruit's poison. I believe the same applies to the coconut crab (*Birgus latro*) that may become toxic to humans if it eats too much mango as we realized when we found some of our ship's sailors dead on the beach around a cooking pot with large pincers and other arthropod remains laying in the sand.

Although I didn't encounter them myself, Brother Aleister Smythe says he found animals, mostly rats infected by a parasitic small fungi with egg shaped caps on their heads , neck and spine, he claims that the infected animals behavior seemed different, more aggressive. I have come to believe that these animals where infected by a rare but hazardous fungi called *Zygomycota zygom*, that infests any creature physically interacted with it. The zygom secrets an incredibly adhesive light blue colored "milk" kept under the mushrooms cap. When this blue "milk" touches flesh, zygom spores immediately infest the new host, starting to grow, thoroughly taking control of the infected individual being either beast or man. Once infected the falls under the fungi colony's complete control through the corruption of nerves and brains. Past the infection, the victim's fate is death within a few weeks. The zygoms remain in the planted body even after its death consuming it until nothing is left than bones.

Brother Tycho Geldnehar on the other hand found evidence of a *Pholidota flavusis* also known as yellow musk creeper a plant of the *Orchidaceae* family able to expel a spray cloud of pollen entrancing creatures to move towards it allowing the plant to insert its tendrils into its brain and taking control of the creature, we know of this because Brother Tycho encounter a beastman that had turned into a yellow musk creeper zombie while climbing the highlands of Markovia to reach the Ruins of the Monastery of the Guardians. I believe this fungus infestation as well as the yellow musk creeper plants to be the "plague" that befell the human inhabitants of Markovia after its relocation in the Sea of Sorrows. The residents of Markovia's abandoned settlements seem to have fallen victim on the undergrowth's continuous battle for dominance on the island it is as if during the Grand Upheaval nature itself retaliated against the humans though not the one responsible for the acts against it.

As it appears the Markovian jungle is not dangerous only because of the existence of wild beasts and beastmen but also because of the dangerous tropical flesh devouring plants that have appeared since the domains change of climate. During our visit to the island we encountered or found evidence of the existence of at least seven such plants and who knows how many are hidden in the lush jungle of Markovia. The ones we recorded were the *Vites suffocansis* (choke creeper), *Vites sicarius* (assassin vine), *Dionaea Homipula* (mantrap), *Nepethes devorator* (devourer pitcher plant), *Imperata gladius* (sword grass), Tresflos frondis (tri-flower frond) and *Ultricularia gigantis* (giant bladderwort). I discovered that at least one plant of each of these man eating species has been exported to Hazlan, to be kept in the gardens of Veneficus.

There are two plants I discovered that seem to be unique to the island since I haven't read about them or encountered them anywhere else. The first is Dolor, a thistle biennial toxic plant with large red flowers with a toxin as painful as its name suggests. Its thorns protect it from herbivores while its poisonous flower is largely avoided by animals, if it is contacted it excretes a toxin that inflicts such an excruciating pain that I believe even a masochist would fall into unconsciousness. In some notes I found in the abandoned settlement referred to Markov's notes as *Piatravenin*, I read that it can be cultivated to produce *Atingere de Tristețe* (Sorrow's Graze) a pain inflicting poison. This plant obviously survives both in temperate and tropical climates.

Another plant species unique to Markovia I encountered is the one the beastmen refer to as *Urtica Dei* or God's Nettle Tree, a willow-like tree in appearance that if encountered standing erect and round-topped, it can reach 4.5 to 18 metres (15 to 60 ft) in height. Its oblong shaped leaves are 7–15 cm (3–6 in.) long and filled with brown-hairy slightly poisonous petioles, their poison creates rushes same as the nettle plants

dominating the island. They are leathery and glossy on the upper surface, brown and silky underneath with deciduous and bluish-green color. In autumn they turn yellow, orange, or red.

The nettle tree's fruit, Diospirum, translated as God's Pear is a kind of dark red-orange pumpkin-shaped persimmon that makes the mouth feel numb but sensitive to pain at the same time. In greater doses a creature can be paralyzed as long as the fruit's poison circulates in the creatures system. As I read in the notes found in Piatravenin, the fruit of God's Nettle Trees mature late in the fall and stay on the tree until winter but its juice can be preserved to be used for a year. The Diospurum is extremely rare to find, the botanist Professor Abelhous Nicholsi of the University of Il Aluk in his *Distinctive Signatures of Flora and Floral Derivatives in Homicide* speculates that probably only one such tree exists. If this is the case and this tree is under extinction it is fortunate that it has survived Markovia's transition after the Great Upheaval.

Dolor Thistle

Dolor plants grow on the mountainous temperate regions of the island and can be found even in the highest peaks surrounding the valley. It is very easy to find them in these areas with a Profession (herbalist) check (DC 5) or a Wilderness Lore check (DC 10) but because of its biennial nature to find a blossomed dolor plant a Profession (herbalist) check (DC 10) or a Wilderness Lore check (DC 15) is needed. The highly toxic sap of the flower can be extracted with a Profession (herbalist) check (DC 18) with each flower creating one dosage of Sorrow's Graze.

Sorrow's Graze (Atingere de Tristețe)

Contact, Fortitude save (DC 15); Initial damage (special), Secondary Unconsciousness; 150 gp

Whoever ingests a dolor flower or is ingests a sorrow's graze poison suffers wracking pains that impose a -4 penalty on attack rolls, skill checks, and ability checks for 1 hour per dosage. If a creature fails a second saving throw then the pain is so overwhelming making the creature become unconscious for 1d3 hours per dosage.

Diospirum Fruit

God's Nettle Trees are a not so easy to find in the tropical lush forests of Markovia needing a Profession (herbalist) check (DC 5) or a Wilderness Lore check (DC 10). The Diospirum Fruits of the tree can be cultivated from November until January, usually when the leaves of the tree are orange or red. Diospurum Juice is very easy to extract (DC 0) but it's preservation needs a Profession (herbalist) check (DC 15) or Craft Alchemy check (DC 15). A single fruit when ingested has the equivalent of one dosage of Diospurum Juice, for the creation of a preserved Diospurum Juice someone would need three fruits for one dose of the poison.

Diospirum Juice (or fruit): Ingested, Fortitude save (DC 15); Initial damage Paralysis, Secondary damage 0; 200 gp

Paralysis from a diospirum fruit or juice lasts for 1d4 hours.

Sea Mango

Sea Mango grows in the coastal area that used to border Dorvinia before the Grand Conjunction The whole plant is highly toxic, particularly the fruit and seeds. The fruiting period is from July to December, when its fruit turns from green to red. The fruit look so much alike the edible mango, but the flesh is not juicy at all, if eaten it causes vomiting, stomach ache, limb numbness and even loss of life. They can be found in the region with a Profession (herbalist) check (DC 5) or a Wilderness Lore check (DC 10). The highly toxic seeds are very easy to extract with a Profession (herbalist) check (DC 0). A single fruit contains enough seeds and toxins to be lethal.

Sea Mango Seeds or Fruit: Ingested, Fortitude save (DC 13); Initial damage 0, Secondary damage 3d6 Con; 150 gp



Dread Possibility: Althea's Sorrow

On the northeastern end point of the island of Markovia grows an Althea plant capable of making anyone who extracts its gluy mucilage and rubs it against their skin or wound unable to feel pain in that area. If someone extracts mucilage using the whole plant then they can create an elixir that is gives anyone imbibing it immunity to poison for 1d3 hours, including the paralytic substances that Markov uses. This power makes this particular plant a useful tool for anyone who wants to confront Markov or Althea of Demise. Unfortunately there is only one such plant growing in Markovia and only when Althea sings from her island across the sea.

To extract the sap of the plant to create an *Althea's Sorrow Elixir* a character needs to roll a successful DC 18 Profession (Herbalist) check, the sap has magical effects and is not spoiled by time, while a plant creates one dose of the elixir. *Althea's Sorrow Elixir's* powers have not been discovered yet needing someone who manages to extract and collect the gluy substance to find out by trying it or via an *identify* spell, if *detect magic* is cast on the plant or mucilage they can detect a moderate aura of abjuration.

Strong Abjuration and Conjuration; *Caster Level:* 18th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *Obscuring Mist, Soul Anchor, Teleport Without Error, Vanish*, *Freedom*, *Permanency*; *Ego:* 6-20; Alignment: *True Neutral*; *Market Price:* 200,000; *Weight:* 500 lb.

Dread Possibility: The tree of life

There is only one God's Nettle tree in existence and it was situated somewhere in the middle of the island of Markovia. Frantisek Markov has forbidden the beastfolk of his island of ever tasting the fruit of the tree, as he needed its fruit as a paralytic poison for his victims. Some of the beastmen believed that to eat from this tree was to gain the knowledge to become a god, but any of those who defied Diosamblet's law was overcome with a debilitating curse that rendered them unable to move and soon faced Markov's justice. The tree was burned down by Akanga signalling the beginning of the beastmen rebellion against Diosamblet's rule. But the tree has regrown somewhere else in the domain and already one or two beastmen have become paralysed creating rumors of the trees resurface. It won't be long before the rumours reach Markov's or Akanga's ears, what is even more dreadful is that rumours of "The Tree of Life" have travelled passed the coasts of Markovia. Stories about a magical tree whose fruit can heal any disease or even make someone immortal have begun to circulate in the Core, it won't be long before people begin to believe in these stories and go to Markovia searching for the Urtica Dei. If the God's Nettle Tree is a unique tree it can be discovered with the use of Profession (herbalist) check (DC 40) or a Wilderness Lore check (DC 40) or by doing actual detective work and following the stories told by the beastmen to their root.

Zygom (CR 2+): Zugom are small, individual fungal growths consisting of short, thin stems and ovoid caps. Dozens of these creatures may join together by a rhizome structure to form a single communal creature. Zygoms are capable of surviving in earth and other damp, nourishing matter, but prefer to infest living flesh. Such infestations overtake the victim's brain and nerve connections, leading to death in 4 weeks, plus the victim's Constitution modifier. The zygom will remain until the whole of the dead body has been digested, and will then move on (the rhizome structured colony can move itself at a speed of 2ft.). As host creatures are controlled, they move, attack, and defend according to the dictates of the possessing fungi. Typical host creatures include tiny and small-sized animals (rats and the like), and occasionally small-sized humanoids. Whenever a colony of zygoms comes into rough contact with any creature, there is a chance that the pale blue "milk" of a broken cap will stick fast to the creature (roll 1 on 1d6) unless the creature rolls a successful Fortitude saving throw. The milk is extremely sticky, and can glue materials together until it crumbles to dust in 1d4+1 days. If stuck to flesh, a colony of zygom spores will infect the creature and begin growth by the time the milk crumbles, allowing the fungi to infest and control the host. The zygom infestation cannot be shaken down by a successful saving throw only a *remove disease* will remove the infestation.

Zygom Infestation: Contact; DC 25; Incubation: 1d4+1 days; Damage1d6 Con, 1d3 Int and 1d3 Cha per week. Lost abilities are recovered by one point each day after the infestation has been cured.

Fauna

As mentioned before Markovia is an island full of diversities and this applies also to the domain's animals. Before the Great Upheaval Markovia's lush forests were home to a thriving number of animals native to central mountain range of the Balinoks. Packs of wolves (*Canis lupus)* would hunt red deer (*Cervus elaphu)* or elk (*Cervus canadensis*), close to the borders with Barovia as various species of *Chiroptera* (bats) big and small swarmed the night sky, mountain lions (*Puma concolor*) would stalk wild goats (*capra ibex*) and *ovis* (sheep) in the Markovian highlands leaving arger more dangerous species of the *Suidae* family (boars) alone, while Brown bears (ursus arctos arctos) would hibernate during winter and hunt river trout (*Salmo trutta fario*) or salmon (*salmon salar*) in Markovia's rivers or Lake Fiara) as well as other animals during the other times of the year. Other smaller animals were common including *vulpes* (foxes) as well roebucks (*Capreolus capreolus*), badgers (*Meles meles)* and other *Mustelidae*, as well species of the Serpentes family and other reptiles. It seems that the only declining species in the domain were beavers (*Castor fiber*). The domain was home to a variety of birds mainly golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*), eagle-owls (*Bubo bubo*) as well as other bird of prey species as those of the *Falconidae* family preying on snakes, turtles, passerine and other smaller bird species. We also witnessed a murder of *Corvus Corax* some of them with a wingspan reaching up to 8 feet. For some reason Dr. Markov has never captured a raven to use in his experiments, it seems that except their high animal intelligence they have adapted to coordinate to escape any traps or hunters.

Since Markovia's transition in the northwest of the Sea of Sorrows the population of these species has either declined, as the islands isolation from the rest of the Balinoks has stopped land animal migration from other domains, or they have adapted to this new environment.

Other than animals close to extinction, or adapted to the climate, there are even more species that based on their small number, I have concluded they have been imported to the island and I will not relate any information on them. I believe that Dr. Markov's studies are based on the experimentation of as many different species is possible, so it is crucial for the Doctor to acquire as many different species he can. Sometimes these animals escape and if they happen to find another of their kind may reproduce offspring, but these species are insignificant in changing the eco-system of the domain.

But there are many more species of animals that neither existed before when Markovia existed in the center of the Balinoks nor where imported but rather immigrated from other lands. The obvious ones are the flippered marine mammals of the Sea of Sorrows *Pinnipeds* such as seals and walruses as well as sea lions. As the *Otariidae* and *Phocidae* family are adapted to a semiaquatic lifestyle, feeding and migrating in the water, but breeding and resting on land, certain coast especially on the northern side of the island the coasts as well as underwater caves of Markovia are filled with these animals.

Numerous avian tropical birds native to Sri Raji have possibly flown through the Emerald Stream mistway immigrating to the semi-tropical forests of Markovia filling the jungle with their calls. A large variety of *Rampastidae* birds mainly toucans exist in abundance in the island as well as *Psittaciformes* (parrots) but the most impressive avian species is the *Menuridae* or lyrebird, most notable for their impressive ability to mimic natural and artificial sounds from their environment. But beyond the dense jungle of Markovia on the massive cliffs on the southern part of the island a variety of seabird species have nested in colonies of thousands, they feed both at the seas surface and below it, and even feed on each other. Colonies of gulls, terns, skimmers, gannets, petrels, cormorants, albatrosses and skuas nest here with some species as the *Stercorarius pomarinus* and *Stercorarius parasiticus* immigrating to Nebligtode during the warm summers of Markovia, possibly using the Call of the Claw mistway that used to exist in Markovia. I could not resist but imagine flocks of seabirds entering the stormy seas to make use of the mistway.

We also observed something really amazing while searching for Markov's estate, as it was late autumn when we reached the island

throngs of salmon were swimming up river to lay their eggs in what was before Lake Fiara. Following the fish and avoiding some predators we reached the lake during the middle of the day when the sun shone over the lake making the waters of the lake take a golden color seemingly looking as molten gold, there is an absolutely natural explanation for this phenomenon though. It seems that the warm climate of the domain has made some species to evolve too fast. As it is commonly known to any naturalist or fisherman salmons are anadromous, they hatch in fresh water, migrate to the ocean then return to the exact spot where they hatched to spawn. It seems that the *Salmo salar* that swam these waters before the Great Upheaval has adapted to the warm climate of the domain. One of these adaptations occurred when the mature fish re-entered the former Little Borchava River to spawn, they changed color and appearance as their scales turned to the color of gold, naturally Dr. Markov has named this new species *Salmo aureum*.

The islands largest animal population seems to be rodents of the genus *Rattus* (rats) and feral pigs an adaptation of *Sus domesticus* (pigs). I have hypothesized that the rats originally came from shipwrecks then bred like crazy becoming numerous as well as the staple diet for meat-eating broken ones. The wild pigs are descended from domesticated livestock, and are a serious headache for Markov they knock down fences, raid crops, root up and make mud wallows out of trails, and have a special fondness for gorging themselves on the particular plants which Markov needs to medicate his experimental subjects. They're dangerous, elusive, and sometimes display an almost military coordination in their depredations. I have come to believe that this is a new species unique only in Markovia, a mutation of the *Suidae* family I have come to call *Potamochoerus larvatus markoviana* and seems to be a cross or adaptation of the *Sus scrofa* (wild boar) and the *Sus domesticus* (pig). They resemble bushpigs and have adapted well to the tropical climate of the island, they are nocturnal and predators to small animals, while they are themselves prey to other predatory creatures on the island as well as broken ones. Another unique animal on the island is the *Cacatua markoviana* mentioned before, a species of white parrot that has developed immunity to the mango tree fruit's poison.

Another peculiar finding was the *Gastronis Gigantea* a species of large carnivorous flightless birds, belonging to the clade known as Phorusrhacidae or more commonly terror birds. These very large birds, with huge beaks and massive skulls grow to the size of 2 m (6 ft 7 in). The skull of this bird is huge compared to its body and powerfully built. First recorded by Dr. Markov in 750 BC. These birds made a colony in the northwestern part of the island, hunting feral pigs and sometimes seals, they have come to be extinct as groups of broken ones led by Akanga hunt them down for their meat and for protection as these avian apex predators are extremely dangerous. I didn't see any mention in Dr. Markov's notes of an experiment involving those birds, I believe this to be because of this species hunting grounds to be in territory controlled by Akanga. I believe this birds to have been brought in the island by the Mists it would be hard for such a predator to not having been witnessed for a decade.

While some adaptations are or at least seem natural there is a mutation of a particular animal that still perplexes me, the *Rattus tentacalis*. I have not found a logical explanation nor for this rat's bipedal adaptation nor into having a pair of long spiny tentacles as long as it's body instead of front arms and claws. These tentacle rats live are quite numerous in Markovia and are very protective of their territory attacking in large swarms with their snapping teeth and spines. Their tentacles excrete some paralytic poison thus subduing their prey or opponents before feeding off their paralyzed bodies. Although this seems to not be a natural mutation, I couldn't find any notes on theses rat's creation in Dr.Markov's notes.

I have a theory though I don't have any supporting evidence for this mutation that involves a magical plant that shows a semblance of intelligence, the lasheweed (*Viriditas verberatis*). The Vistani claim that lashweed were created by a powerful necromancer when he staked a group of druids that opposed him to the fields to die. The legend says the men chanted in unison throughout the day cursing the necroman-

cer and somehow they were transformed into a patch of living plants to seek revenge. What if Dr. Markov got his hands on such a plant and while he experimented on lab rats some managed to escape? If he is indeed responsible for this mutation Dr. Markov is indeed a genius as he would have managed to combine animal and plant without the use of magic. He has either hidden the secret of this species someplace else or he is not responsible for their creation. Whatever the truth behind the creation of this new species I am positive it first appeared in the island of Markovia and since then I am sure it has managed to spread throughout the Core by first infesting ships headed to the ports of the Sea of Sorrows. What Markovia is known for are the man-beasts that populate it, creations of no other than the genius Dr, Frantisek Markov.

Local Animals and Native Horrors Wildlife:
Wildlife: CR 1/10 — bat; toad; **CR 1/8** — rat; **CR 1/6** — raven; lizard; monkey; **CR 1/4** — albatross; owl; weasel; lizard, monitor; otter; **CR 1/ 3** —hawk; scavyt; sea snake, Tiny viper; snake, Tiny viper; seal; stingray; **CR 1/2** —badger; eagle; blood hawk; sea snake, Small viper; snake, Small viper; **CR 1** — razorback *; sea snake, Medium viper ; snake, Medium viper; wolf; sea lion; shark, Medium; squid; **CR 2** —feral pig; boar; bear, black; hearth fiend; raven, giant; swarm, bat; swarm, rat; shark, Large; **CR 4** — bear, brown; swarm, centipede, shark, Huge; terror bird;
Monsters: Any Large or smaller giant or monstrous vermin; **CR 1/ 4** —plant, creeper ivy; leech, witchbane; monstrous spider, Tiny; **CR 1/ 3**— dire, rat; gremishka*; mongrelfolk; **CR 1/2** — crab monstrous, Small; geist*; monstrous spider, Small; spirit waif*; stirge; **CR 1** —bloodbloater; dire, raven; fungus, shrieker; monstrous spider, Medium; plant, fearweed*; tentacle rat; **CR 2** — assassin bug, giant; crab monstrous, Medium; dire, badger; dire, bat; plant, crawling ivy*; fungus, zygom; plant, devourer pitcher; leopard (mountain lion); plant, snake, constrictor; tri-flower frond; plant, yellow musk zombie; **CR 3** — assassin vine; broken one; dire toad; drownling*; fungus, violet;giant, wasp; lycanthrope, wereraven*; plant, bloodroot*; rust monster; **CR 4** — dire, boar; owlbear; plant, lashweed; sea cat; vine horror; yellow musk creeper; **CR 5** —ancient dead, mummy (rank 2)*; odem*; wraith; **CR 6** —ahuizotl; corpse candle*; mist horror*; shambling mound, tendriculos; will-o'-wisp; **CR 7** —plant, mantrap; plant, dark tree†; ghost; plant, hangman tree; spectre; **CR 8** — plant, canopy creeper; plant, dread treant*; **CR 9** — plant, kelp angler; plant, undead treant*; **CR 10** — quickwood; **CR 10** — choke creeper;
† See Monsters of Faerûn., published by Wizards of the Coast.

Dread Possibility: When Black Feather Brood
A murder of wereravens belonging to the Keepers of the Black Featherhave nested in the ancient oak forests of Markovia, as the domains proximity to Barovia prior to the Grand Conjunction gave them protection from Count Strahd and the capability to travel there whenever it was needed. They know about Frantisek Markov's atrocities and have always kept a low profile for more than half a century staying mostly in their animal form. Since they have been isolated in the island for two decades the newer generations have lost connection with their human self and have succumbed to their own raven instincts, behaving more like regular ravens, though they are highly intelligent. The unkindess have been isolated for so long that they do not know that Pyoor Twohundredsummers dies in 755 BC and that their society now has new leader. The reason they haven't tried to leave the island for so long is because of Markovia's new climate as a storm may brood in a matter of minutes making the journey hazardous in fact their previous leader Ovidiu Vaduva vanished trying to leave Markovia. Their current leader is Cosmina Vaduva the eldest wereraven on Markovia having nested with her late husband when Markovia was first created, since then her family has expanded to include many members. The matriarch's grandchildren have themselves given birth to younger members, but the gene pool is becoming smaller with each generation and it won't be long before the younger generations begin to degenerate, they have already become more quarrelsome a behavior more common to normal ravens. There are currently around twenty three wereravens on the island including the newborns.

Dread Possibility: The Swine Queen
There is a reason why the feral pigs of the domain often display coordination in becoming a nuisance to Frantisek Markov destroying his crops and destroying some of the plants he needs for his experiments. When Markov experimented on his wife Ludmilla for three consecutive days without anesthesia, the pain horror and slow agonizing death she suffered made her rise as a ghost, but having lost her humanity in the hands of Markov becoming a something resembling a patchwork skinned sow, so did she lose it after death. Ludmilla is a 3rd magnitude ghost, she manifests as a cloud of mist having lost her real form and not having accepted her monstrous one during death. Ludmilla has the following ghostly powers *aura of despair, dream walk* and *malevolence* though she is limited in possessing only pigs and boars with this power. Ludmilla's ghost tries to destroy Markov's plans and frustrate the darklord she uses her *dream walk* power to show Markov's real nature to unsuspecting people that encounter him, while she often wants to send a message to the ones effected by her power, her traumatic experience and now evil nature makes her show the way she died in the form of a terrible nightmare.

History

The story of Markovia begins in Barovia but is not associated in any way with Saint Markovia, a Barovian female priest with a reputation that no evil could ever touch her as most people believed. On the contrary Markovia is intertwined with none other but Dr. Frantisek Markov a descendant of an ancient Barovian family that lived in Barovia before the coming of the Tergs. A few of Frantisek's ancestors had died in the massacre at Castle Ravenloft and the remainder fled for safety in the town of Vallaki. Frantisek was born in a pig farm outside Vallaki and grew up himself to become a butcher. A few years later he betrothed a local woman from the town of Vallaki, known only as Ludmilla. He moved into Vallaki opening a butcher shop there though unknown to everyone he experimented with his pigs before slaying them, mutating them into various forms before they died.

In In 698 BC his actions were discovered by his wife and not long after villagers found a dead creature looking like a demon in the outskirts of Vallaki. When witnesses said they had seen the creature running of Markov's butcher shop, it didn't take long for a mob to storm in Markov's butcher shop, were evidence found there proved that the creature was indeed Ludmilla transformed by her husband's torturous experiments. The angry villagers begun searching for Frantisek Markov wanting to lynch him, he was hunted down like an animal escaping by entering the World End Mists. When the Mists cleared the land of Markovia had appeared through the Mists in 698 BC bordering Barovia's northern border. Markovia was a wilderness in which Dr. Markov could indulge in his passion of vivisection and experimentation. His dersire became all greater as he was cursed to always have the body of a beast warping his mind even further.

Though he has the face of man, he has the body of any beast, capable of supporting his head . His transformations are limitless but he usually takes the form of a bear or a gorilla. He desperately seeks the humanity he believes he has lost and any who fall into his grasp, human or otherwise, are mere fodder for his transformative experiments. During the first years of Markovia's appearance the domain was settled by people of neighboring domains, smugglers wanting to create a road from Bergovitsa to domains west of Markovia thus avoiding the high taxes of Nova Vaasa, refugees from G'Henna, and people trying to escape the oppression of Count Strahd Von Zarovich. At some point Frantisek Markov dispatched a group of animal-men, called the Broken Ones, to Nova Vaasa to raid a tomb of an ancient king. They brought back with them a great slab of polished marble, veined with gold, which was called the *Table of Life*. The table was said to preserve the life of any who lay upon it.

The animal men knew that Markov, who they knew as Diosamblet could use the *Table of Life*, and so brought the artifact back to Markovia. They were ambushed by thieves at the border, who in turn were robbed by the Vistani, who were also robbed by thieves, who in turn were slain by a group of knights. One of these knights belonged to a holy order dedicated to the destruction of dangerous magical items, artifacts and relics as well as tomes of arcane lore. The

knight left his own monastery to found a new retreat on the slopes of Mount Baratak called the Monastery of the Lost. Documented in a book Tycho Geldehar found in the Monastery of the Lost along with the history of Markovia was another one called *The Tapestry of Lost Souls*. This book recounted the history of another cell of the Order of the Guardians that moved to an abandoned monastery of Saint Markovia, close to the domains borders with Tepest. With them they had an artifact they were unable to destroy the *Gathering Cloth*, a tapestry weaved by magical silk brought from the Nightmare Lands.

The *Gathering Cloth* was said to have the power to gather and hold Evil imprisoned. Although seemingly a good thing, the tapestry was an object of dark desire, corrupting everyone near it. The Guardians who were immune to the *Cloths* calling had decided guard it with their lives in order to protect the world from its powers. After their previous monastery was attacked when the most powerful being trapped in the *Gathering Cloth*, the necromancer Morgoth escaped, killing everyone in the monastery but three monks, the survivors decided to move to the newly created remote domain of Markovia. Apparently they believed the appearance of Markovia, a domain named after a saint with the reputation that no evil could ever touch her was a good sign.

In 735 BC the necromancer Morgoth escaped once more, attacking the monastery with a pack of werewolves and a throng of undead minions destroying the monastery but not before the *Gathering Cloth* and Morgoth were destroyed too as well as every creature trapped in the *Cloth*. Until that time, the Order had protected Markovia and the greater world from the powers of the *Gathering Cloth* and the *Table of Life* which for decades they hid under Frantisek Markov's nose. The Order was protected by its reclusive nature and secrecy for many years supplied by agents of the order and wandering Vistani.

In 740 BC when the Great Upheaval transitioned Markovia to the northwestern Sea of Sorrows isolating it from the rest of the world. After this transition exotic diseases plagued the remaining populace and their numbers begun to decline. Dr. Markov learned of the monasteries position and that they guarded the artifact that was stolen from his beastmen. The Table of Life became of greater importance for him as the great artifact that could aid him in his research. The power of the artifact keeps anybody placed upon it alive regardless of the tortures and pain inflicted and so it would increase the survival rate for Dr. Fran's patients, especially useful during those times of scarce humanoid subjects.

In 742 BC this "new" land was discovered by Captain Magnus 'Salziger' Preiszner's ship the *Egremont*, a map of its position and the ship's log was found in a chest cast up on a beach close to Ludendorf. Many people tried to reach that island, with some succeeding to get a glimpse of it before being attacked by an enormous sea monster. The first ship to successfully map the coast around the island, beaching it and successfully return to one of the coastal ports of the Sea of Sorrows was the *Howling Walrus* in 744 BC. Its captain, Lennard Gaertner returned to Ludendorf carrying exotic fruit and animals and stories of animal men, referring to the island as Markovia.

As one of the schultebott of Ludendorf he began a campaign to settle the uninhabited island but was sidelined by Schult Gunnar Haass who after gathering support from Baron Vilhelm von Aubrecker appointed Lars Kaulbach commander of the expedition to create a Lamordian colony on the island, giving him the title of Schult. Schult Lars Kaulbach sailed in 748 BC aboard the *Stellaris* carrying volunteers and infantrymen settle on Markovia. Lars Kaulbach died during the journey from White Fever and the new commander lieutenant Jens Kreutznaer as well as the ship's captain decided to continue their journey as they would be quarantined if they went back to Ludendorf. They reached the island safely and settled in an abandoned village to the east of the island.

The settlement was fortified to defend itself against ongoing attacks by beastmen and the *Stellaris* was sent back to ask for reinforcements as well as medicine for the ongoing disease. The *Stellaris* never made it to Ludendorf as it was swept by a terrible storm and shipwrecked in the unforgiving sea. Thus the Lamordian colony vanished, neither of its settlers survived presumably falling victim to the beastmen or the disease. Then in 749 BC another ship the *Sunset Empires* fell smashing on a reef after being attacked by the

Soul Kraken. The ships few survivors who managed to escape the island related of being used by Frantisek Markov to steal the artifact from the Monastery of the Lost before a rebellion broke out, Dr. Markov has named this event on his notes as the *Beastmen Rebellion* although some broken ones refer to it as *Akanga's Rebellion*, named after the beastman who orchestrated it. Akanga helped the shipwrecked crew escape the island with the *Table of Life* and confronted Markov, the two of them battled over domination of the island with Akanga winning and Markov changing rapidly between animal forms in shock as he was strapped on his own surgical table to experience the pain he had so many times given. Markov laid there being tortured for days until Akanga's animal side superseded his human behavior and drifted back into the jungle. It seems the transformations Dr. Markov applies to his subjects are not permanent as all the beastmen of Markovia subsided making him the only person on the island. He stayed strapped for days until he managed to escape but without human subjects he was unable to continue his experiments until one day he saw a ship that had beached on Sunset Bay. Its captain was none other than Lennard Gaertner who had been sent to the island on a mission to learn what had happened to the Lamordian colony.

The dangerous beastmen that roamed the island had appeared to have vanished, and it was easier for Captain Lennard to explore the island, until he discovered Markov's estate. Dr. Markov recognizing that Captain Lennard was a ruthless man made a proposition to him. It appeared that somewhere on the island the beastmen had discovered silver before the rebellion. Markov feigned he already knew were the silver vein was and made an arrangement with Captain Lennard to be supplied with humanoids and animals not native to Markovia, to create new broken ones to mine the silver vein and splitting the silver. Captain Lennard agreed and after Markov discovered the vein and created new beastmen to work on the quarry and slowly repopulated Markovia with broken ones.

Markov's Journals

Markov's journals are currently seven massive volumes bound in red leather, in which Markov reports his successes and failures, new observations, and notes for the future. It is written in a bold clumsy hand, as Markov must physically will himself to write, conquering the limitations of his animal form. A book plate with the initials "F.M." on the inside of each cover identifies its owner. Each volume begins with a declaration that "This is the work of Frantisek Markov, Lord of the Land of Markovia, who is called Diosamblet by the twisted things which fear his shadow".

The bulk of each volume is consumed by self0pitying commentary on the writer's distorted form, and the remainder details his current projects, their success and eventual failure. When a transformation succeeds, the diarist becomes jubilant and predicts that he is within days of conquering his own curse.

When it fails, his commentary becomes morose and sullen and he speaks of creating a hunting party to destroy his failures living in the wreckage of Markovia. The end of the third volume details the creation of Akanga from the combination of a lion and Arkan Gănescu, the fourth volume details the wrenching alteration of the Grand Upheaval which plucked Markovia from its inland location and surrounded it with water. It mentions, only in passing, the plague and famine that struck many of the interior villagers at the time, decimating what population survived. Book five mentions the "arrivals" of Felix, Delphi and Orson in that order. Book six begins with the pact made with Captain Lennard Gaertner as well as the construction of a silver quarry in the southeastern part of the island its last entries contain information on contacting the University of Richemulot asking the assistance of lecturer professor Cedric Paddock and the subsequent experiments on him. After this point Book seven begins, depending on when and where it is discovered book seven may have reference details of the present. After two hours spend reading the journals a character can roll a Knowledge (History) DC 20 check to gain some information on Markovia or Markov Frantisek himself. For every two hours spend searching the journals a character can roll another Knowledge (History) check with a +1 bonus for each two hour period spend reading them. The information gained depends on the DM, anyone failing the check by 12 points or more is misinformed, as the complexity of the notes perplexes the reader.

The Beastmen

Of course no one can speak about the creatures living in Markovia without referring to the Markovian Broken Ones (*Hommo fractiunus markoviana*) results of Dr. Frantisek Markov's experiments. Each creature is a merger of a man and a beast created by the doctor with a multitude of surgical procedures without the use of magic. I must say that the expertise of Dr. Markov is beyond comparison, still though reading his notes I was amazed to learn he always sees his experiments as failures, as the beastmen he creates have not sufficiently shed their animal side. Since Dr. Markov sees himself as being hideously malformed, cursed as he says of having the body of a gorilla or any other animal he desires but never that of a human. I believe the goal of his experiments is to create beastmen who appear perfectly humanoid as to demonstrate a method for him to gain his "lost humanity".

The beastmen of Markovia are of interest not only on the basis of their creation but also as how they behave. Most of them gather in small primitive communities, although before the *Beastmen Rebellion* they mostly lived in mixed animal *familiae* groups but now most of their communities are based on animal family origin although there are a few larger groups that are of mixed stock. These communities usually have the strongest member of the community as their leader with different communities of carnivorous beastmen often competing for territory and hunting grounds. All beastmen communities are hunter-gatherer communities with the carnivorous beastmen in mixed groups usually oppressing the herbivore ones.

The other category that separates broken ones between them is their successful transformation into a more human-like appearance. There are some beastmen subjects who have either escaped before the process of transformation was completed, though most of them don't survive long, or were total failures because of the subjects lacking the stamina to transform successfully being closer to the animal of origin than a humanoid. These failures are either more animal-like or more monstrous than other broken ones and live solitary lives as they are shunned even by other Markovian broken ones.

All Markovian Broken Ones belong to the *Amniotes* natural group with the majority being of of *Mammalia* class stock but there are a few *Aves* (birds) most of them part of a community of *Falkonidae*. Strangely I never encountered any reference in Markov's notes of experiments resulting to beastmen of *Reptilia, Amphibia* or *Pisces* origin, I believe this to be due to the complicated process needed to turn a *poikilotherm* animal (cold-blooded) into a *homeothermic* one (warm-blooded). Generally I categorize the various groups of Markovian Broken Ones depending on *familiae* groups but here is also another aspect that makes categorization more complex as *Chiroptera* (bats), *Ursus* (bear), *Capra* (goat), *Suidae* (boars), *Felidae* (cats), *Cervidae* (deer), *Vulpes* (foxes), *Homidae* (great apes), *Falconidae* (Hawk), *Equinae* (horse), *Simian* (monkeys), *Pinniped* (seal), *Ovis* (sheep), *Rattus* (Rats), *Canis* (canines). There are though many other beastmen of different animal stock, some of them join groups not depending on animal class trying desperately to fit, while others live solitary lives or are used by Dr. Markov for other purposes.

While normally I would categorize the various groups of Markovian Broken Ones depending on *familiae* groups there is also another aspect that makes categorization more complex and this is level or success of transformation. While Dr. Markov is a genius in the obscure surgical procedure of fleshcraft, with a talent unparalleled by anyone I have met during my extensive research on alteration procedures, the results of his experiments are not always successful and I also found in his notes a reference on the regression of the transformation process of some of Markovia's broken ones especially after the *Beastmen Rebellion*. I have thus separated the Markovian broken ones in six different categories depending on the success of their transformation these are *bestial*, *monstrous*, *feral*, *tamed*, *domesticated* and *civilized*.

The *Bestial* category is almost undistinguishable from the animal species of origin, the only thing that distinguishes these created animals is a strange sensation of sapience usually being observed in the "animals" eyes as well as their aggression, even for animal species that would

normally be more fearful, such as the deerfolk. These broken ones are considered animals by the other beastmen and are hunted down as common animals. Even though they are more sentient than common beasts they can be part of an animal pack of their origin species, usually being the alpha with no relation to gender, or they roam the island as solitary creatures. Their behavior depends on the behavior of the species animal of origin. These broken ones are mostly the survivors of the *Beastman Rebellion* that had their transformation regressed, those that are captured by Dr. Markov's beastmen become once more his test subjects as the doctor starts over the transformation procedure to make them better versions of themselves.

The second category is consisted of those results that even Dr. Markov finds repulsive, the ones I have called *Monstrous*. These aberrations are monstrous failures that are in their majority hideous to look upon, as well as being extremely dangerous. They are usually very strong but at the same time utterly mad, traumatized by their transformation beyond repair and with no chance of ever communicating with any man or beast except "The Master of Pain" who seems to be able to issue simple commands on them (such as attack, stop, sit) as they fear him. These pathetic creatures live solidary lives based on only one motivation, hunger. Broken ones of this group are always carnivore even if their species of origin was herbivore. They avoided if not feared by other broken ones, but sometimes become pray of larger groups who hunt them down to protect their community or pack. In their majority are not bipedal even if they have formed human-like hands during their transformation. They are terrified of fire and will not come near one or anyone holding a torch.

The *Feral* category of Markovia's beastmen is the group that resembles more to a common broken one, though they don't look as the twisted fusions of humans and animals found outside Markovia which are usually the result of scientific or magical experiments gone wrong or curses. Their forms are more balanced than their counterparts outside Markovia as they don't look monstrous, mostly resembling furry humanoids with extreme animal characteristics. They are bipedal but slow moving, they are strong and can communicate with each other, independent of animal stock, in a strange horrifying pidgin of Balok and animal sounds. They are mostly at peace with their beast-folk status and live simple hunter gatherer life styles. Although they are fearful of fire they use it to warm themselves as well as to cook meat, they all have a fire continuously burning in their various camps that are scattered on the island. They are overly protective of their common hearth as they have not mastered the "magic" to create fire. This is the most numerous category and they may live as mixed groups of animals under a strong leader or depending on animal stock, following remnants of their animal instincts.

The next category is the *Tamed* broken ones, these crossings between animal and beast are far more successful than the feral and although they are clearly not human they are more humanoid and might pass for really ugly calibans. Beastmen of this category live their lives in the few abandoned human settlements of Markovia, though they avoid the Lamordian colony and the manor in *Piatravenin*. The *Tamed* broken ones live their lives in independent egalitarian hunter gatherer communities, their social customs encourage equality via sharing of food and material goods and discourage hoarding and displays of authority. They try to behave as humans and maintain this social structure of equality but their animal instincts sometimes betray them and interfere with their efforts to maintain a "human" lifestyle. Broken ones of this category are able to speak Balok although someone still needs some effort to understand their dialect since their mouths were not created for speech. They are fearful of fire and they too do their best to maintain that precious element in their fireplaces.

The fifth category is what I call the *Domesticated* broken ones that could easily pass as calibans if they lived outside Markovia. Although they are obviously non-human they appear to be in denial of their non-human state. There are a few *Domesticated* broken ones living in Markovia and all of them seem to have a need to be dependent on a leader, most of these broken ones follow Diosamblet, who they still believe is their god although some have aligned with Akanga,

believing Dr. Markov to be a god though one not to be appeased but opposed. The ones who live with Dr. Markov have learned how to cultivate the earth around Dr. Markov's estate and take care of the few farm animals that Dr. Markov hasn't used in his experiments. They seem to be in full control of their animal instincts being able to herd the animals without attacking them even if their animal origin is carnivore, if this is based on the progress of their transformation or their fear of Diosamblet is something I didn't have the time to observe or put to the test. All *Domesticated* broken ones can speak Balok fluently and have no fear of fire although they still don't know the secret of its creation.

The final broken one category is the *Civilized*, those successes that are close to perfection, being almost unmistakable from a human being. I hadn't myself realized they were broken ones until I read Dr. Markovs notes detailing the process of their creation. After acquiring this information it was easy to see the indications of their animal origin but before these could easily pass as distinct characteristics. I believe Dr. Markov cannot see beyond these minor flaws in these subjects and still believes them to be failures although very close to what he tries to achieve. These broken ones have absolutely no clue that they are creations of Dr. Markov's experiments whom they call "Father" and are absolutely loyal to him. They all display a level of human intelligence being able to read and write, educated by Dr. Markov himself, as well as knowing how to build a fire, although they will not do it without Dr. Markov's orders. Presently they are only a handful in existence all of them living in Markov's estate. Vern of *Canis familiaris* stock (dog), Ursula of *Ursus arctos horribilis* animal stock (Grizzly Bear), and the "twins" Percy and Priscilla of *Procyon lotor* stock (raccoon), but Dr. Markov's notes detail three more that used to live in the estate prior to the *Beastmen Rebellion* that apparently were killed during that time or reverted to back to a bestial state, those three were named Orson of *Ursus arctos* stock (brown bear), Felix of *Panthera uncia* stock (snow leopard) and Delphi of *Delphinus delphis* stock (dolphin) Delphi is still considered by Dr. Markov to be his most successful experiment. Although I never disclosed this to Dr. Markov I personally believe Akanga to be Dr. MArkovs greatest success, Though the outer appearance of Akanga, is not as humanlike as Dr. Frantisek would want, to be described as a success, the Lion-King, as some beastmen call him, rebelled against Diosamblet and took to the hills voluntarily, as opposed to being cast out by the broken one's god. He managed to assemble the Broken Ones in a common cause against their creator leading to the *Beastmen Rebellion* or as it is referred by Dr. Markov "Akanga's Rebellion". The Lion-man's actions seems to display more humanlike characteristics than any other beastman I encountered or read about created by Dr. Markov of Markovia, including intimidation and manipulation. Thought by Dr. Markov to be a failed experiment Akanga seems to be the Frentisek's greatest achievement.

***Canis* Stock**

This group is comprised of canines including wild dogs, coyotes as well as former mastiffs and hounds that once were owned by the human population living in the various villages that existed in the domain. These communities live in independent packs following their Alpha without question, seeking to establish their superiority over other communities. Some beastmen of hound or mastiff stock are loyal to Markov, and the few that have permission to be in his estate.

***Capra* Stock**

The goat-men are really common in Markovia as the number of goats living in the mountains has increased as they are protected from most predators and because of their use by Dr. Markov for dairy products, which makes them easily accessible subjects for his experiments. They have silver hair that cover most of their their bodies, hoof-like feet and short black horns erupting from the top of their heads. The first time I encountered one I wasn't sure if it was a broken one or a fey creature such as a satyr. Goat broken ones mostly avoid the lower parts of the island preferring the safety of the two Markovian mountains, although some have joined Akanga's group.

***Cervidae* Stock**
The deer stock are the most restless and nervous of all beastmen as they live in continuous fear of other carnivore beastmen. Because of this fear they have all submitted to Akanga for protection. Akanga has declared that anyone who touches the deer-folk will be severally punished, the few who have tried have had their skulls crashed by Akanga's spiked club.

***Chiroptera* Stock**
These broken ones are the smallest but most numerous in the domain, with huge ears that face outwards, beady black eyes and sharp long peg-like teeth. They don't have large bat-like leather wings anymore as they have been reduced to cloak-like loose folds of skin along their arms and fingers. Although they have lost the ability to fly they are able to jump from a height and spread their wings moving distances depending to the height they jumped from, descending until they reach the ground.

***Equinae* Stock**
These are the results of Dr. Markov's experiments made out of necessity when his supply of other breeding stock gave out. The horse breed are broad-shouldered and strong with long narrow faces. They are really dependable on Markov and although they are loyal to him they don't seem to be really brave.

***Falconidae* Stock**
As mentioned before Dr. Markov has managed to also create transformations of *Avian* stock, the only successful non-mammalian results of Dr. Markov's experiments. Though they are feathered and retain their wings they are unable to fly or even glide as the *Chiroptera* stock do. They have retained their keen eyesight and are able to see five times better than a humans observing threats or prey from a mile away. A few are used as scouts by Akanga while the rest of them live in a community on the highlands nesting on temperate tree branches. This community is led by a two headed avian beastman of *Falco Falkovniana* animal stock (Zweifalk), probably the result a pair of conjoined twin humans and a zweifalk. There are a few other avian non flying broken ones, including some of Gallus gallus domesticus (chicken) origin, in this community though they are often bullied by the hawk-folk and are always the last ones to eat within the community.

***Felidae* Stock**
These are the most diverse in size beastmen on the island ranging from those derived from house cats to wildcats, leopards and jaguars. They are the most independent of the beastmen but are absolutely loyal to the Lion –King Akanga, an intimidating beastman who challenges Dr. Markov's authority on the island. Some live solitary lives while others live with Akanga's group which is the largest community in Markovia that has taken the northwestern side of the island as its territory. No other community is big enough to challenge them although they wouldn't let anyone trespassing in their hunting grounds unchallenged, except if it is Akanga himself who all beastmen fear and respect.

***Homidae* Stock**
Probably the most intimidating, but fortunately smaller in population of communities these huge, hulking creations of Dr. Markov's experiments were the results his most prioritized research, mainly because of the similarity between this large primates and humans. Their small population depends on the rarity of the original animals mainly *Gorilla* (gorillas) and *Pongo* (orangotangs) as well as some of the genus *Pan* both *Pan troglodytes* (chimpanzee) and *Pan paniscus* (bonono). Those of *Gorilla* stock are grunting, heavy beings and really aggressive and territorial, their red eyes filled with hatred for humans, those of orangutan stock spend most of their times in trees eating fruit and are solidary creatures.

***Ovis* Stock**
The sheep broken ones have fingers like tiny hooves and large spiraling horns on either side of their faces. They are divided in two groups, those who have aligned with Akanga and those who still worship Diosamblet, the alias Dr. Markov uses to control the beastmen.

***Pinniped* Stock**
This community is compiled of *Phocidae* (seals) and *Otariidae* (sea lions) animal stock under the leadership of a broken one of Odobenidae (walrus) stock named Skæg. They are found near water usually lay on the coasts of Markovia. They are hairless and do not mix with other communities. Before the *Beastmen Rebellion* they worshipped one of Dr. Markov's achievements a greaten Markovian broken one named Delphi, who was created using a *Delphinidae* (dolphin). Their leader appears to be Skæg a massive overweight to the point of immobility walrus-man who is often found lying close to water. He usually lies on the beach while being fed by the sea-folk.

***Rattus* Stock**
Rats although were existent before Markovia's transition into the Sea of Sorrows, they became numerous after the domain's transformation into an island. They became Markov's most numerous subjects as they existed in abundance trying on them new surgical techniques. While most that survived are considered bestial and some other probably resulted in the creation of the forementioned tentacle rats there are few that survived their operation to become bipedal vermin. Although they are the smallest of the Broken Ones they are witty and use their size to their advantage becoming expert ambushers.

***Simian* Stock**
These monkey-folk are a little bit larger than the *Chiroptera* stock whom are known to compete over a grove of trees in the west of the island. They have wide, eerily wet eyes that look curiously around, and they have a strange sense of ownership. They believe individual property is based on what you desire to have instead of what you actually own, this becomes a rally big problem when two or more of them desire the same thing or they are known to steal from others.

***Suidae* Stock**
Markovian feral pigs, boars and domesticated swine form the basis of this group. Most of them have humped backs and tusk-like teeth jutting out of their mouths at all angles. They are known to squeak when nervous and the larger ones being of *Sus scrofa* origin are unstoppable when fighting.

***Ursus* Stock**
These morose, slow moving broken ones of bear stock rarely form communities they are mostly solitary hunters-gatherers but pairs of these enormous stock may live together in a mixed group community. They are known to stare for hours at the sky chanting hymns to some forgotten god. If they are disturbed or attacked they are vicious their strong arms able to crush a skull.

***Vulpes* Stock**
The fox-folk are the second smallest of the broken ones, but also make out the smallest community on the island. They are cunning always calculating the cons and pros of a decision, often changing sides between Akanga and Dr. Markov. This unreliability to them was the reason why so few of them exist as they were the first to be killed during the *Beastmen Rebellion*.

Attitudes towards magic

Beastmen believe that all things in nature such as fire, lightning and the winds are magical and certain rituals are needed to appease these elements, they also believe in spirits, calling them ancestor spirits, although none of them has any known ancestors. They especially revere anyone who is able to produce fire believing fire to be the greatest magic both benevolent and destructive. They also believe in various taboos and superstitions used to protect the world balance such as and have invented complicated rules to protect it. Ordinary beastmen are not allowed, for example, to touch even the shadow of Diosamblet unless he allows it, nor can they step inside sacred grove where the Diospirum Tree can be found. The punishment for breaking important rules, known as taboos, is often death. Illness and misfortune are believed to come from breaking minor taboos. Worship of Diosamblet involve chants and prayers, elaborate rituals, and sacrifices (but not humanoid sacrifice as they are more useful as test subjects) performed by various classes of shamans, some of whom act

as oracles. Shamanistic magic flourishes among the beastmen, who use incantations, charms, and spells to summon the spirits of nature or ask for their guidance or assistance. Among the biggest taboos among the beastmen is the use of fire magic, meaning even lighting a fire, which is forbidden as it can cause great destruction to anyone who cannot master its power.

Religion

The majority of beastmen tribes have become independent of Diosamblet's worship after the *Beastmen Rebellio*, although most of them still believe him to be a god and their creator they have stopped appeasing him as they have found solace or a purpose in other religions. Most of them try to create a cultural identity dependent on their species and fractured memories of their past humanoid lives, thus many different beastman tribes experiment with various religions. The two beastmen tribes living in the two feuding ex-G'Hennan villages worship a bastardized version of Zhakata's aspects, each of them reflecting their species, one is based on the image of an apelike mosaic depiction of the false-god in one of the houses and the stone monkey faced gargoyles on the few surviving roofs, while the other believe that the pig faced effigy they protect is the true form of the Beast-God. The seal-folk worship the Sea Maiden Delphi that swam in the waters of Markovia more than a decade ago while one of the Canine packs worship the Wolf God proclaiming their superiority as well as their birthright to hunt and sacrifice humanoids or other beastmen during the nights of the full moon. Akanga has proclaimed himself a god and demands from his subjects to worship him as one, referring to him as "the Breaker of Chains" although those who oppose him call him "the Maker of Chains". Those Broken Ones still loyal to Dr. Frantisek still believe him to be a god and try to appease him with offerings and absolute loyalty. These cultural differences create a larger gap among the beastmen and although some tribes are already fighting each other for dominance this could escalate into a full blown holy war among different tribes.

Creation Myth

Although most tribes follow their own traditions they all agree in a basic creation myth of the island of Markovia. In beastmen mythology the supreme creator emerged from the cosmic misty sea and started the process of creation. He (she or they depending on what they believe in) used part of the mists to create other gods. He later destroyed the father of the sky and the mother of the earth to create land and the sky. But there were other gods, who also wanted to create, and fill the emptiness around them, one of them instead of wanting to create lifeless things, wanted to create life. He filled the world with all the creatures and things that are now found in it and lived among them, he is known as Diosamblet, the god that walks among us. The supreme creator became jealous of Diosamblet for creating such wonderful creatures and cursed him to share his body with them.

As Diosamblet continued to be defiant the Supreme Being decided to destroy the world, ordering the other gods to submerge everything once again into the cosmic sea. The gods flooded the plains and forests and dragged the mountains under the surface of the misty sea, they would have destroyed everything if not for Diosamblet who confronted them and turned them to stone, thus saving all living things in Markovia. The beastmen believed that Diosamblet sent both blessings and curses, and they tried to appease him with human offerings while others believe that it is because of him that they continue to exist as he has banished the other gods into the Mists to protect the world from destruction. After some years the waters around the island of Markovia have begun to retreat and now other creations of the gods who somehow survived the flood appear in the island usually washed out on the shores of the island.

Those who have lost their faith to Diosamblet have come to believe him to be responsible for the destruction of the world caused by his defiance. They try to appease their god either by opposing Diosamblet or doing their gods will by killing other beastmen as the pack that follows the Cult of the Wolf God does.

The Realm

While prior to the *Beastman Rebellion* Frantisek Markov was Markovia's absolute ruler referred by the beastmen as Diosamblet, everything has changed in the past decade. After "Diosamblet" was shown to be vulnerable during the *Beastmen Rebellion*, the crude communities Markov had required his creations to maintain were abandoned. They've splintered into groups based on animal source, instinctive habitat preference, transformation category, inter-tribal bickering and small mixed groups held together by a few strong, pushy leaders. Some have even taken up residence in the human-built abandoned communities creating egalitarian societies while others are nomadic, striving for survival and being competitive between them but also with other groups. It seems as Markovia displays all stages of human evolution from the basic animalistic behaviors of the Beastial category to the hunter gatherer subversive communities of equality, to more competitive communities based on beastmen animal instincts and chaotic social structures to the subservient lackeys of Dr. Markov and Akanga.

Author's Note: *All these are so that DMs can have different levels of encounter difficulty, and more varied encounters, rather than just one identical cluster of huts after another.*

The Farm

While Dr. Markov used wildlife for nearly all his creations, he converted a lot of farm animals as well. Once the chaos of the rebellion ended, the livestock- and domestic dog-derived Broken Ones were left in the lurch. Unlike the others, their animal instincts couldn't tell them how to live in the jungle so Markov had them set up a crude farm close to Markov's estate to feed themselves and Markov. They are docile and menial belonging to the Domesticated and Tamed category. They are helpful to visitors, but still loyal to Markov who they fear and will inform him of anything happening in the farm. They are vulnerable to depredations by Feral and Bestial nomads.

The Pack

Most social predators such as wolves, foxes, wild dogs, as well as one big nasty hyena have mostly degenerated, but there is a pack of Feral Canine beastmen that are still smart enough to raid other Broken Ones for simple tools like knives and to steal wild game. This group of nomadic beastmen known as the Pack, roam the island raiding and pillaging in the name of the Wolf God. The Alpha of the pack is not in fact a broken one but rather a natural werewolf exile from Verbrek. Known only as the Alpha this *Stonebraker* savage is a ruthless advocate of wolf supremacy on the island and is a zealous follower of the Wolf God. During the nights of the full moon the pack falls under a massive frenzy raiding other communities to eat them, as they lose themselves in their bloodlust they hunt whatever or whoever looks edible.

The Vermin

Markov often tests out new surgical techniques on rats, which are abundant on the island so he doesn't have to worry about using up lots of them. The few rats to have survived Markovs tests are Small and vulnerable but have banded together for safety in numbers. They're Ferals who care more about surviving and depend on their wits creating traps and ambushes to capture prey or predators. They have burrows all over the island and specialize in stealing anything that's not welded down, they are known to trade items to whoever has food to spare. They've looted all the ruins on the island except the manor in Piatravenin and the ruins of the Lamordian Colony which they avoid and will not willingly go to.

Akanga's Army

After the *Beastman Rebellion* abruptly ended as most beastmen reverted to Beastial versions of themselves Akanga's alliance of the different tribes of beastmen against Diosamblet was forgotten. During the rebellion, Akanga's obsession with torturing his captive Markov led many other cats to drift away, either going Bestial or becoming solitary Feral nomads. Now, he's a bitter old has-been who bullies weaker Beast-folk into treating him like a king, but he can't prevent desertions or in-fighting long

enough to grow his "army" into an actual organized force as before. Most of the larger Broken Ones that were unsuited to the Farm ended up with him by default. He manipulates them via their appetites and their fear of fire and completly controls the northwestern side of the island.

Dread Possibility: Akanga the Modern Prometheus

Akanga the Beastman King is known for defying Diosamblet and uniting the beastfolk against him in what became known among the beastmnen as *Akanga's Rebellion*. He is also known for stealing fire from him (the knowledge of how to build one that is), and giving it to the beastmen. Since all beastmen have an innate fear of fire but also recognize its importance they believe it to be the most valuable thing in their settlements and they will all fiercely guard and protect their hearth. Akanga sometimes uses fire burning parts of the island to show his power to the beastmen, it won't be long before he proclaims himself a god. Frantisek is always thinking ways of how to influence the beastmen again and return to his rightful place as Diosamblet. Recently he has come to the idea of he can regain his "godhood" by defeating a god himself, he has devised a plan to bait Akanga into proclaiming himself a god only to entrap him and defeat him. Although death would be appropriate to the Lion King he wants to avenge for all the days of torture he suffered under his hands. He has already thought of a way to torture the lion headed beastman, his plan is to pin him on the rock face of one of Markovia's mountains and have birds of prey eating his flesh, only to grow back because of the broken one's fast healing powers overnight, only to be eaten again the next day in an ongoing cycle.

The Surfdancers

The seal-folk believe that Delphi was the Avatar of the Sea Maiden and they worship her as such, creating a cult around the worship of that entity. The seal-folk still revere Delphi's memory, and cluster around a dolphin-shaped rock outcropping to trade stories about her. The Sea Maiden Cults spiritual leader is Chaton a lion seal broken one spirit shaman3/Druid1, his animal companion is a dolphin named Delphi. When not worshipping their goddess, the Feral seal-folk can be found catching fish in simple nets, or lazing around on the beach, while trying to avoid the huge, aggressive Monstrous walrus-man Skæg who steals their food and molests their females. Skæg may seem to be impossible to move but he is a smooth swimmer. The seal-folk are the only group of broken ones that did not participate in the *Beastmen Rebellion* and as such didn't lose any of their own during that time.

Dread Possibility: The Avatar('s) Companion

Chaton 's dolphin animal companion is the actual Delphi, a greater broken-one who was Frantisek Markov greatest success. As an intelligent mammal Delphi still had memories from the island and was drawn to her old worshippers/ friends returning to the island. Chaton as a spirit shaman believes that he talks to the Sea Maiden through his dolphin companion not realizing that the dolphin is the broken one he and the rest of the seal-folk worshipped. Delphi on the other hand still remembers Markov and fears him, whenever she sees him on the beach she hides underwater, but it won't be long before Markov catches a glimpse of the dolphin and creates a plan to capture it so that he can repeat his greatest achievement, only to discover that the dolphin was his older now protegé all along.

Dread Possibility: The Mummaid

It seems that the Surfdancers have lingering traces of human memory, mainly an innate fear of the elements and superstition. These fragmented memories of legends and stories of the sea entities were combined by the seal-folk to create the Cult of the Sea Maiden. They worshipped Delphi as the "Avatar of the Sea Maiden" and has been venerated by the seal-folk as a near-goddess and since her disappearance they believe that she reached godhood and still worship her as such. Some years ago the seal-folk discovered the husk of a mermaid-like creature. They believe that this is the desquamate skin or better her empty husk, not needing it anymore since her Ascension to godhood. They make offerings to the mummified siren's husk, giving it the powers of a relic. The relic is hidden inside

one of the caves on the coast of Markovia, accessed through an underwater passage in Sunset Bay.
The continuous reverence to the mummified mermaid relic by Chaton and the rest of the seal-folk could very possibly go wrong and it has. A malevolent spirit has contacted Chaton in one of his trances and persuaded him to perform a powerful ritual calling the spirit of the deceased mermaid back to its mummified corpse. If Chaton performs the ritual with the Cult of the Sea Maiden supporting him he will unknowingly create a 3rd rank siren mummy.



Markov's lackeys
To replace the attendants he lost during the *Beastmen Rebellion*, Markov created new Civilized broken ones Vern, of mastiff stock is his most loyal subject and chief steward of his household, his new orderly Ursula, of grizzly bear stock has replaced Orson and he also has a couple of surgical assistants Percy and Priscilla both of raccoon stock. He hopes that the last two may someday gain enough proficiency to operate on him, alleviating his curse. He's also got about twenty pig-folk as menial workers and porters. He loathes having to use pig-derived minions, but has little choice: they're some of the few Domesticated that are competent enough to function as servants.

Dread Possibility: The Quiet Way
The tiger-headed caliban, Shih Suren (*Heroes of Light* p.82-84), got stranded on Markovia several months ago while following Lord Erexen Withterhand's trail from Martira Bay to the Sea of Sorrows after a failed attempt to lead him to justice. When not seeking a means of departure, he's been helping the less aggressive Broken Ones (for whom he feels an understandable empathy) to set aside their constant internal struggles between sentience and instinct, and find fulfillment in simply living day to day and protecting one another. These beastmen have formed a small but growing sect of Feral and Tamed broken ones who seek inner peace with their half-animal nature. Markov hasn't caught on that the "twinges" he's been feeling lately are from a paladin's presence but Akanga has learned about the samurai, and is not happy to see what he presumes is a rival big cat-man gain followers.

Government

Each beastmen tribe or community in Markovia is independent trying to survive the harsh antagonistic jingle that is the island. Some are ruled by powerful beastmen while others live in harmony trying to collectively defend against those who try to attack their communities, but onetime all of the Broken Ones answered to the" Master of Pain", Diosamblet. Dr. Markov had separated the Broken Ones into primitive communities himself dividing the strongest of the broken ones and appointing them tribe chieftains in order to manipulate them more easily. One of the few times the beastmen were permitted to gather and mix was during the ceremonies of Diosamblet's Judgment were the Law of Diosamblet was recited for all to hear and obey before transgressors confessed their sins to Diosamblet. Sin was considered anything that subverted their advance from a bestial nature to the ideal society Dr. Markov had in mind for his creations as well anything that undermined his power. As such it was forbidden for the beastmen to steal, murder, to succumb into basic animal behaviors such as bloodlust or acting as beasts, with the direst sin being following the words of Akanga, after

the lion man rebelled against Dr. Markov. Judgment was usually swift and harsh often resulting in the torture or killing of the sinner unless they acknowledged their sins and repented. The only sin not being forgiven was opposing DR. Markov which resulted in the sinner's swift execution in the hands of Diosamblet himself.
Now Dr. Markov still continues to perform these rituals, judgements and executions though the number of beastmen participating has declined, most of those participating are Tamed, Domesticated and Civilized Broken Ones, though a few Feral beastmen may appear.

Economy

Although before the Beastmen Rebellion Markovia was considered an unexplored dangerous place full of dangerous beastmen even before its transition in the Sea of Sorrows, in recent years it has become the focus of some merchants and entrepreneurs, especially after the discovery of silver in what once were the northwestern slopes of Mountain Gries by Captain Lennard Gaertner as well as exotic fruits, tobacco and birds. So far any attempt to break Captain Lennard's monopoly has failed including the creation of a Lamordian colony that vanished mysteriously in 748 BC. While Markovia was partly inhabited before the Great Upheaval it is now considered a no man's land and anyone who tries to establish a trading route with the island except Captain Lennard has failed miserably having their ship and fortune either destroyed by the Soul Kraken, sunk in the stormy sea or fallen victim to pirates especially the corsair known as "Seehund".
As far as the interior of the island is concerned every transaction the Markovian Broken Ones may have is based on barter economy, theft or pillaging of marooned ships. The only exception is Dr. Frantisek Markov who after years of isolation has begun to trade with Lennard Gaertner who has been his connection to the rest of the Core as well some islands in the Mists. From Dr. Markov's notes I have figured that Lennard Gaertner trades "resources" for Frantisek's experiments, these include rare in Markovia substances, animals from other domains as well as human slaves. Although I am sure the people of Ludendorf would be in sock if this information was made public strangely there is no law in Ludendorf to ban slave trade and Captain Lennard Gaertner would never be prosecuted for his criminal activities.

Diplomacy

The island of Markovia has been isolated for two decades but even before the Great Upheaval there was no official connection between the domains inhabitants and other domains. Most of the people who had settled Markovia before were refugees from Zhakata's laws in G'Henna, or of the Von Zarovichs while others were smugglers from Nova Vaasa trying to avoid Count Von Zarovich's taxes on trade to Dorvinia and G'Henna. Since the outplacement of the domain all these trade routes were unexpectedly cut and the people depending on them slowly begun to disappear falling victim to a plague or falling victims to Markov's blade.
After the trade agreement between Frantisek Markov and Captain Lennard Gaertner, the Doctor has begun to be outgoing to his endeavors to create a network with places of knowledge as is the University of Richemulot. Captain Lennard has persuaded the doctor to even export some of his creations, one of these apparently ended up in the Great Coliseum of Lekar a few months ago. Dr. Markov hasn't made any effort to communicate with other domains in the Sea of Sorrows as there are no known learning institutes located there except the Asylum for the Mentally Disturbed in the island of Dominia which Captain Lennard refuses to travel to.

Sites of Interest

The island of Markovia most dominating feature is its tropical forests, full of dangerous plants animal as well as monstrous predators. During the night the jungle seems to be more alive than during the day as the screams of nocturnal predators breaks the nightly soundscape of crickets, frogs and birds and the occasional thunder or rainfall during the monsoon seasons. While the almost impenetrable jungle and few patches of temperate forest still resisting, are the main features of the island, expanding form the highest mountains to the beaches and rocky shores of the island there are a few places that show that this island was not always a land of uncivilized man-beasts.

Abandoned Villagers

These villages were once inhabited by refugees as well smugglers from Markovia's neighboring domains before the Great Upheaval. These villages though now devoid of human life were once small communities of humans before Markovia's transition to the Sea of Sorrows. The original inhabitants of these villages have either fled or were slain by the Broken Ones or Dr. Markov, I did find some interesting notes on Dr. Markov's journals describing terrible diseases that plagued the remaining inhabitants. Although when we first encountered him he feigned to be a victim of that same disease himself, a fictional magical disease of his own imagination to explain his own cursed nature as well as hide his actions on creating Markovia's beastmen to unsuspecting fools that encounter him.

Most villages consist of 10 to 20 buildings, most with stone foundations and now-rotting upper structures. The buildings look more suitable for some cold, upland climate than the island's current tropical climate, all of them had some form of fortification to protect them from the dangers of Markovia, but most of them have openings allowing entrance inside the villagers since they haven't been maintained for decades. Most houses could be described as ruins with creeper plants tearing apart their stone foundation, while rotting worm ridden wood barely holds the few slate roofs that remain in some of the buildings. Most of these buildings have been looted by beastmen who find any metal object to be a marvel of science, the few objects that can be found here are rusted and spoiled by the elements. Most of the villages are inhabited by small groups of *Tamed* broken ones who have either settled there by vague memories of their past lives as some of them could have once been inhabitants of these buildings, or chose to follow a more human-like way of life. While some beastmen may attack any tresspassers they find others may be more peaceful, but all of the beastmen encountered in these settlements have the desire to protect their villages if they are attacked.

G'Hennan abandoned settlements (*Nouzhukar, Răzbunare, Movilă*)

During the days of Jugo Hesketh's Inquisition a large scale pogrom against the mongrelmen resulted in the death of more than half of the mongrelmen living in the Outlands of G'Henna, most of them at Jugo Hesketh's hands. Some of the mongrelmen managed to escape to neighbouring counties, a group escaped to Darkon settling in a forest, another in the unwordly dead land of Keening were most mongrelmen perished. Some tried to escape to Falkovnia but they were massacred by Vlad Drakovs troops not long after crossing the borders. The most fortunate ones managed to flee either to Tepest or Markovia. The ones who settled in Markovia created a small village *Nouzhukar* in the foothills of what would later was to be revealed to be Mount Gries. They constructed houses of roughly hewn massive stone blocks with carvings of monstrous stone faces bristling with tusks, similar to the smaller domicile architecture of G'Henna, the beastmen's pidgin Balok name of the settlement is *Noukar* (Nou-K-har).

Rumors of this settlement reached G'Henna and many heretics of Zhakata the Provider self-exiled themselves there to escape the prosecution. Jugo Hesketh learned about this heretical safe haven in Markovia and assembled a company of fanatics from the Swords of Zhakata to find the settlement and destroy it along with its heretical and monstrous residents. While the company was travelling through the forested land of Markovia they suffered heavy casualties by hit and run attacks from mongrelmen and Markovia's broken ones. They discovered where the heretical village was and decided to create a camp close to it as to protect themselves against further attacks by beastmen. While at first they set out round tents made of ragged hide decorated with sacred patterns, symbols and representations of Zhakata and bone ornaments and after building a palisade to protect their camp from the continuous broken one attacks, they finally built stone buildings as their mission to destroy the heretics took longer than expected. This second G'Hennan settlement was named *Răzbunare* but the broken ones call it *Razbunarg* (Raz-bun-Arghh).

The two settlements started a small scale conflict both trying to destroy the other that lasted

for months until Markov, needing more subjects for his experiments had both groups captured by a combined bestmen assault on both settlements, while they were fighting in a large grove halfway through the settlements.

Markov turned the humans he captured into more broken ones, and broke down the mongrelmen for spare parts when he realized that their curse-warped bodies kept reverting to mongrel after his surgical adjustments. Some of the mongrelmen managed to escape capture and moved northwest to a cedar forest in the foothills of a dune hill close to the G'Hennan border. They created cone-shaped mud houses that could blend into the dusty environment and called this place *Movilă,* the beastmen continue to use the same name for it. As the village was built on the side of a hill it had good visual range towards the barren steppes of G'Henna, in case more inquisitors of Zhakata came, but after as the fall of *Răzbunare* coincided with Jugo Hesketh's death, there were no other inquisitors send to Markovia. When the Grand Conjunction occurred and the land was shaken with tremors the mongrelmen of the village were terrified, the majority left Markovia heading back to G'Henna losing themselves in the Mists that had surrounded Markovia. When the Mists cleared and instead of the dry steps of G'Henna the few mongrelmen that remained saw a vast sea, and saw that the cedar trees had given way to large tropical trees with juicy fruits they believed they had survived the *Devourer's Apocalypse* and had had found themselves in a paradise created by the Provider for them. They rejoiced and left their huts to rediscover the altered land around them. It wasn't long before they encountered a tribe of Markovia's broken ones lead by a lion-headed beastman called Akanga. Akanga offered them two choices either they would follow him in a rebellion against Diosamblet, the bringer of pain, or they would experience pain directly from his great-club. The cowering mongrelmen were intimidated by the towering lion-man but as they were also seeking vengeance for the death of their former neighbors at the hands of Markov agreed to follow Akanga. Since then once in a while a lone mongrelman may go back to the village grieving and remembering the few years of freedom and serenity they felt before Markovia became an island.

Dread Possibility: Feuding Settlements

The palisade-bound G'Hennan settlements of Nouzhukar and Răzbunare have has fallen into ruin after many years of exposure to the elements. Răzbunare that was settled by the zealots of Zhakata has been inhabited by the dwarf sized feral monkey breed of Markovia's broken ones. Though most of the houses are in ruins the monkey breed, have discovered a few of the tents used by Yagno Petrovna's men. The leather coverings have deteriorated, but the monkey-folk make use of animal hides to patch the tents that still cling on their wooden latticework frames. All the tents have the image of a large monkey-faced demon carved on the wooden columns used to support their crown as do the gargoyles perched form the cornerstones of some surviving buildings. The rough stone structures of Nouzhukar on the other hand are now inhabited by the feral pig-faced broken ones, the boar-folk. The two breeds are constantly skirmishing, both for possession of the large grove of fruit trees nearby and over whose god, the monkey-faced one or the boar-faced one, is the real aspect of Zhakata.

Dread Possibility: Discarded Memories

The last mongrelman settlement of Movilă to the northwest were the borders with G'Henna used to exist, was the first place Akanga found refuge when he was still human, after surviving the deadly elements of G'Henna and the Pride Eater. He was cordially welcomed by the mongrelmen and this was perhaps the happiest period of his life, although it didn't last long. Sometimes he can be encountered here alone pondering, as he is sometimes filled with recollections of a past life, he doesn't stay there too long though, as this place is painful to his psych and the fragmented images bring him headaches. Though he doesn't realize what his "visions" are in reality, as being an atheist he doesn't attribute them to a "supreme being" he is curious so he visits this place often. This is the place where Akanga can be found in his most vulnerable state, something he tries to hide form the other beastmen. People who encounter him here should be careful how to react because he will behave like a wounded animal.

Borcan settlement (*Piatravin*)

This small abandoned fortified hamlet of roughly ten buildings build around a mansion was once a vineyard situated in the foothills of Mt. Baratak overlooking the Tainted woods when Dorvinia emerged from the Mists, Its name *Piatravin* which means "Wine Stone" in Balok can be found inscribed on a wooden sign bearing the Carouso family insignia, over the gate tower of the settlement. Here was the summer house of the Carouso family, aristocrats from Borca. The patriarch of the family Litovoi Caruso was once Camille Dilisnya's most trusted advisor until he betrayed her. Litovoi was embezzling some of Camille Dilisnya's funds, while secretly building his lavish summer house, a refuge in the event that Camille discovered him. When she did it was already apparently too late he had liquidized most of the assets and had disappeared from Borca, rumors quickly circulated that he was living in Barovia under the protection of Strahd Von Zarovich X. That was not completely false, as Strahd always eager to fuel his ongoing feud with the Dilisnyas, had indeed made an arrangement with Litovoi Carouso to be given troops to protect his household and at the same time guard a passage through Mt. Baratak that beastmen from Markovia were using to cross the borders. The years past and when in 711 BC Camille Dilisnya was murdered in a plot orchestrated by her own daughter, Litovoi Carouso felt as something heavy had been lifted from their chest, he and his family would be safe, from Lady Camille Dilisnya. Although they would never even think of travelling to Borca as he was still wanted there for fraud they believed that Ivana wouldn't keep her mother's grudge against them. When Dorvinia appeared in 715 BC the residents of the Carouso Manor where probably the first people to see the new land appearing through the Mists, as their manor overlooks the region. They created close connections with the Dorvinian's exporting their exquisite Markovian wine to Vor Ziyden and socializing with the elite.

It was after a dinner at Degravo, were Litovoi's oldest son Tamás, who had attended it in a false identity, offended Ivan by some minor infelicity on Tamás side. While Ivan seemed really angry in the beginning over the sudden his mood appeared to change as he indifferently spilled his red wine on the young man's shirt and left saying "I hope there is someone home to clean that up for you". When Tamás traveled back to the Carouso Manor he found the small village deserted. His whole family as well as guests, servants and guards were all dead inside the manor, most of them face down in a pool of vomit. He was holding his dear little sister Voica's dead body in his arms, when he made a vow never to find rest until the time would come to avenge his family's death. As the angry words left his mouth so did dark red vomit, apparently he had been poisoned by the same poison that had killed his family. Tamás died an agonizing death alone knowing that he would never be able to complete his vow, the last thing he saw was his sisters staring dead eyes. Some of Markovia's *Tamed* Broken Ones use the houses around the mansion as living quarters, in a caricature of simple village life, before their instincts get the better of them. The broken ones will never step into the mansion's grounds, as they know that the mansion is dangerous made apparent by the rat and beastmen skeletons lying around the entrance of the villa. Markov and the Markovian broken ones call the mansion *Piatravenin*, which means venom stone in Balok.

Dread Possibility: Venomstone

Although the Caruso's were indeed poisoned, it wasn't Ivan who ordered them poisoned, although he could. The truth is that when Litovoi embezzled Camille Dilisnya's funds they did manage to flee to Markovia, but not in time. Camille had learned about Litovoi's betrayal before he had managed to escape with his family. She had a household servant, replace an expensive cask of wine she was sure Litovoi would take with him that had been dosed with a special poison which was not lethal by itself, making it undetectable, but one that could make anyone drinking it apply an insidious deadly poison to anything they would touch. When Litovoi after many years finally decided to open that wine in the celebration of his daughters tenth birthday, everyone who tasted it, including little Voica who had a little sip since it was her birthday, began to poison everything they touched in the manor. It didn't take long for the first people to

experience the first symptom of the poison, a dark red vomit, as their stomachs were bleeding. One by one all within the household or anyone who has entered thereafter died as objects, doors, manor walls as well as dead bodies within are contaminated with the deadly poison. The poison is still there, contaminating the courtyard flagstones and the parquet floors near the crumbled skeletons of the dead. Because of the poison the house is marvelously well preserved, aside from the desiccated bird, rat, and pig carcasses here and there.

When someone touches anything within the house that is within a person's normal reach, there is a chance depending on the objects functionality that it has been contaminated by *venomstone*. When someone is contaminated with the poison but touches again some other poisoned object then he takes a second poisonous dosage. Although a dosage is not immediately lethal the accumulation of toxicity is, the rule is as long as someone is inside the building and touches things more poison dosages are accumulated. Gloves is a solution but a temporary one, the poison is so insidious that anyone or anything touching the remains of anyone who drunk *contaminari*, Camille's initial magical poison, that is any guest (except children) or Caruso family member (maybe even a servant who had a sip secretly), will be regarded poisonous themselves unless they make a successful Fortitude DC 20 save.

Contaminari: Type: Ingested DC 20; Initial Effect: None; Secondary Effect: Everything touched by the contaminated individual becomes poisonous, "venomstoned" (DC 20), until a *neutralize poison* is cast on that person. The ingested poison contaminari is undetectable even by *detect poison* spells, but objects or people who have been venomstoned can be detected normally by the spell and the venom can be neutralized by a spell. Price: 30.000 gp

Venomstone: Type: Contact DC 17; Initial Effect: 1d6 Con damage; Secondary Effect: 1d6 Con; Price: objects value +120 gp

Dread Possibility: Wrongly Accused

Tamás Caruso's vow for vengeance although not grounded on facts and having been targeted against one of the two most dangerous people in Borca has managed to ground Tamás Caruso in a state of limbo. He has become a poltergeist a 1st magnitude ghost able to have very small interaction with the physical world but one that is able to telekinetically move objects and throw them at any person foolish enough to step into the manor. Although some of the objects thrown would normally be harmless there is a chance they might be poisoned with Camille's toxin, making them deadly. Aside from his telekinetic powers Tamás Caruso's geist is able to *phantom shift* recreating the events of his death, including his vow. The only way for his spirit to rest is to be told the truth of the poison's origin, since Camille Dilisnya had already died years before the Caruso's were poisoned, the geist blames the fates and accepts the outcome of his father's actions.

Dread Possibility: Happy Deathday

The gay anniversary of Voica's birthday ended up in an incomparable tragedy for the Carouso family. After a toast was made by Litovo to his beloved daughter and everyone holding a glass of the insidious wine drunk it, hell broke loose. Everything anyone contaminated with their poison touch be it a utensil, door, a wall to get a hold on or a hug to a beloved person became poisonous. When suddenly everyone inside the building began vomiting and having convulsions, panic, confusion and grief filled the area while parents would usually see their children die first, people would feel helpless and guards would feel unable to stop everyone dying before they themselves lost their lives. The whole incident and the amassing emotional resonance of negative emotions created an ethereal resonance in the Caruso Manor. Most of the people who died there have risen as geists having being anchored to the manor because of the tragedy, while others have become restless because of an unaccomplished task. They use their phantom shift powers to show the happy gathering to people who are brave enough to search the house before everything turns into a nightmare reenactment of the massive poisoning.

Dread Possibility: Offshore Assets
Litovo Caruso knew at the time of his death that he was responsible for the tragedy in his daughter's birthday. Although after Camille Dilisnya's death in 711 BC he believed he had escaped her wrath, when everyone around him began to die, including his beloved daughter, he understood that Camille's vengeance might have delayed some years but its impact was greater than it was possible to comprehend. His guild for being responsible for this great tragedy has turned him into a bussengeist, his only goal now is to return the rest of the stolen assets back to Camille Dilisnya's heir, Ivana Boritsi. He has hidden the bank information and account codes necessary to access the secret bank account in one of Borca's banks in Voica's doll. Voica on the other hand had lost her doll before the tragedy struck the household, Voica's geist cannot be laid to rest until her doll is found and returned to her. Fortunately the doll is not poisoned but it will be after being placed on Voica's body.

Nova Vaasan settlement (*Atsivogreb*)
This abandoned village has around 14 buildings constructed of reddish beige brick on foundations of rough gray stone, with tiny windows and gabled rotten roofs of golden-yellow mold infested shingles. The architecture has elements that identify the buildings as Nova Vaasan, Knowledge (architecture) DC 10, but someone can identify them as such by surviving ornaments inside the houses, Knowledge (local) DC 10. The few things left now in these crumbling buildings suggest that this settlement was once a station in a smuggling route connecting Bergovitsa with domains west to Nova Vaasa. Some of the buildings were warehouses others sleeping quarters as well as small shops or workshops. This smuggling station was known by the name of *Atsivogreb*, a vocal anagram of the large city to the east meaning "active grip" in Vaasi. It was built in Markovia in 698 BC during the end of Prince Tristen Hiregaard's first reign of Nova Vaasa, it became a popular place among criminals where they could indulge freely in their vices as well as find all kinds of contraband from drugs to magical beast eggs, some say that this was the first station used by slave traders. Its close proximity to Barovia meant that it was also used as a refuge for bandits trying to escape Count Von Zarovich's prosecution. Nikko Hetch who now is Othmar Bolshnik's court executioner and leader of the *Straffers*, Othmar's personal police force, is rumored to have once being seated in Atsivogreb's council. In the last year of Tristen Hiregaard's rule as regent to Prince Othmar in 733 BC Atsivogreb was attacked by the combined forces of Tristen Hiregaard and those of Strahd Von Zarovich XI, in an effort to stop raiding attacks on Barovia and Nova Vaasa. Nikko Hetch was one of the few who were captured and imprisoned, though briefly, in Nova Vaasa. The rest of Atsivogreb's inhabitants either died in the attack or "escaped" in the woods of Markovia. A few eye witness reports both from Barovia and Nova Vaasa speak about hit and run attacks by animal men that brought more casualties than expected to the attacking forces.

The Lamordian Colony (*Zolotøye* a.k.a. *Seann Craobh Daraich*)
This settlement has been settled by three different peoples and every time the village has been abandoned or the townspeople vanished without any trace. It was first established and settled under the orders of the Nova Vaasan Prince Kethmar Bolshnik in 683 BC, known as Zolotøye, meaning "gold" in Vaasi. Although the village was named as such probably to attract settlers to that newly appearing no man's land its name seems appropriate now because of its close proximity to Lake Fiară and its golden salmon waters. Nova Vaasan documents report that the village was inhabited for a brief time in the late 7th century but its close proximity to Frantisk Markov's manor as well as the apparent inability of Duke Tristen Hiregaard to protect the settlement, made it an easy target for Markovia's broken ones.
It was then repopulated around a decade later by Tepestani villagers who wanted to escape the goblin infested woods, being close to the Nova Vaasan capital of Kantora without having to suffer under the yoke of the nobles of that country as well as not having to approach the cursed Wormwood to travel to Nova Vaasa. They mostly travelled using the Little Borchava to avoid the beastmen and they seemed to be ferring well. They renovated the stone walls around

the village and a palisade facing Lake Fiara to protect themselves form broken one attacks and then built more houses, crudely constructed by smooth stones and conical roofs thatched with hay or peat with central wobbly chimmneys and built a small stone temple in the middle of the village were the preexisting large oak tree was protruding from the structure letting the sunlight and rain fall in the middle of the structure. In general, the Tepestani settlement that came to be known as *Seann Craobh Daraich* meaning Old Oak Tree had been the most successful until the Great Upheaval when the whole domain along with the Tepestni settlement was relocated in the Sea of Sorrows. I can't imagine what these highly superstitious and paranoid Tepestani thought when they found their land surrounded by sea. Since the ileterate Tepestani disn't leave any records we can only assume that its villagers went to extremes, accusing one another for witchcraft. It is quite possible that they may have killed each other in their mass hysteria that might have befallen everyone.

In 742 BC a wooden chest belonging to the captain of the merchant ship *Egremont,* which had been lost at sea after sailing from Ludendorf, was found adrift on the Lamordian beach south of Ludendorf. Inside the locked chest were the ship's manifest and maps with the ship's log missing. One of the maps was apparently drawn by Captain Magnus 'Salziger' Preiszner showing a large piece of land fifty-five miles due west of Ludendorf. Schult Gunnar Haass, Ludendorf's mayor funded expeditions to the Sea of Sorrows to discover these new lands and cartograph them, some returned while others were lost at sea. The most complete map of Malkovnia was drawn by Captain Lennard "Seehund" Gaertner a few years later labeling it Markovia. Although most scholars of the Core rejected the idea, of this piece of land was once located at the center of the Core being that island as foolish, a growing number of map-makers began labeling it Markovia. Seeing great potential in commerce and and raw materials, maybe even discovering prescious minerals in the Markovian mountains Schult Gunnar Haass asked Baron Vilhelm von Aubrecker for support in creating a Lamordian colony on the island. After some preparations in 748 BC the ship *Stellaris* began ts journey carrying with it sixteen families and a platoon of around thirthy soldiers under the command of Schult Lars Kaulbach, appointed mayor of the colony. Unfortunately, Lars Kaulbach died during the journey, the victim of an anemic disease similar to the Valachani white fever. His body was thrown into the sea with his grieving young wife making a really sentimental speech about her late husband. Next in command was Lieutenant Jens Kreutznaer an inexperienced junior officer. He pressed the ship's captain to continue their mission in the pretext of them having to be quarantined if they returned. They reached the shores of Markovia but before disembarking the *Stellaris*, the colonists wrote and signed the *Stellaris Compact*, an agreement that established a rudimentary government, in which each member would contribute to the safety and welfare of the planned settlement under the commands of Jens Kreutznaer.

The first scouts Jens Kreutznaer sent found an old abandoned settlement next to a lake Lieutenant Kreutznaer not knowing what they were up against in the island ordered that they should repair the settlement's wooden fortifications first and then begin rebuilding it. During that time there were testimonies of strange animal-men creatures living in the island. Knowing that panic would soon overwhelm the colony, Jens ordered for a deep pit to be dug and walled into the settlements center, next to the Old Oak Church, calling it "Jordhul". He used this to intimidate the colony into submission, threatening to throw anyone disturbing the peace inside the hole. When beastmen were captured in traps, during expeditions in the woods, or after a failed raid they were thrown into the pit. The beastmen would turn on each other when hunger overcame them but they wouldn't survive long as they were deprived of water, their howls and animal screams would inform the rest of the beastmen of their torture. When a group of broken ones bravely went to the colony offering food for exchange for the prisoners, they were too thrown into the pit.

Akanga used the colony's aggression to his advantage, rallying the broken ones against the humans who had settled their lands. A large force of beastmen tribes was assembled and af-

ter some preparations attacked the Lamordian colony. But to their amazement there was no resistance on behalf of the humans. There was no one guarding the settlements outposts and while the door of the wooden wall that had been erected blocked them from going in, there was no sound coming from inside the settlement. Some of the beastmen climbed up the walls and opened the settlements main gate. When Akanga and the rest of the beastmen entered they couldn't find the colonists. Since then the colony is believed to be haunted by the beastmen and no broken one dares to visit it after that night. Some of the beastmen believe that the ghosts of their brothers rose up and took vengeance for their deaths, other's believe that Diosamblet killed them as the humans opposed his authority, there are others though that believe that the colonists either escaped the island undetected or have found a sanctuary somewhere in the highlands of Markovia.

Dread Possibility: The Vanishing

While most would assume that Frantisek Markov is behind the vanishing of the Lamordian colony it is not him to blame. Everything started back in Lamordia and the town of Ludendorf where Lars Kaulbach comes from. Lars Kaulbach was indeed a member of The Syndicate of Enlightened Citizens and this was the main reason he was appointed as schult for the colony in Markovia. The truth is that the so called colony was a plan established by the syndicate to create a base of operations and eradicate the beastmen that were rumoured to live there. Lars Kaulbach was selected for the task because he was responsible for successfully uprooting a band of unsavory Darkonian nonhumans murdering women in Neufurchtenburg. He managed to have them arrested, while they were set on killing another innocent woman, the beautiful Lina Emmerich. It wasn't long before Lars began courting the young woman and despite their large age difference, they got married within a month. When Lars was appointed schult of the Lamordian colony it was only logical that his young beautiful wife would follow him there.

The truth is that Lina Emmerich was the person responsible for the women deaths in Neufurchtenburg and not the demihuman adventurers from Darkon. Lina Emmerich may seem like an ordinary beautiful woman but the truth is that she is a penanggalan, a female vampiric undead creature that walks during the day in the guise of a human female resembling its original form before undeath. At night, the penanggalan's head is separated from its body, along with it's lungs, stomach and intestines attached and flies in search of prey, usually charismatic sleeping females. She enspelled Lars with her charming gaze keeping her enemy as close as possible, eventually marrying him, while she became even more cautious in her nightly exploits. When Lars was appointed schult of the Markovian colony, she found the chance she was waiting for to escape Ludendorf as she believed her feedings would soon be discovered and then it wouldn't take long until she herself was revealed to be the notorious "Virgin Killer of Neufurchtenburg". While aboard the *Stellaris* Lars recovered form the enchantment and saw in terror his wife's true form with red eyes glowing in the darkness. She was forced to kill him sucking him dry and made it seem like he succumbed into a terrible anemic contagious disease, forcing everyone on board to be quarantined.

The following night she charmed Lieutenant Jens Kreutznaer and Sven Himmelblau, the ship's captain, making them take the decision of continuing the colonization of Lamordia. Not knowing the colony's real purpose, she organized everything as if it would be for a normal colony. When problems and dissension began within the colony she decided to intimidate the colonists by digging up Jordhul before using it against the beastmen. When she understood that the beastmen would retaliate and that probably she would be discovered and destroyed, she thought of a way to survive by drugging the villgers and imprisoning them.

During the nights before the attack and as Lina was preparing her plan the colonists, began to be really aggressive towards each other she kept some of them imprisoned in Jordhul to protect them so she could use them as cattle consuming them night after night but they started killing each other. When the beastmen attacked there was no one to be found alive and Lina remained hidden in her lair, a secret

compartment behind a closet in her house. There were only dead bodies found many of them inside the pit, some of the broken ones were overcome with strange visions and rage, attacking other broken ones. The broken ones believed their brothers and sisters had been possessed by the spirits of the dead beastmen that had risen from their graves to avenge their torturing deaths, and left the colony. Since then the broken ones believe this place to be haunted and avoid it at all costs. The Lamordian Colony is the safest place for Lina to be in all of Markovia. Lina's biggest fear, if a creature like the penanggalan is capable of such an emotion, is that Lieutenant Jens Kreutznaer might have escaped the island and notified the Ludendorf authorities about her existence. Knowing that her late husband was a member of some secretive group fighting the supernatural, she is always worry about people visiting the colony, she spends most of the time watching them from the shadows, if she is discovered she will act as a traumatized survivor hiding there with her two daughters, before gaining the groups confidence and attack them during the night, she has been bored on feeding on animal blood and craves for female blood.

Dread Possibility: The Castaway

Lieutenant Jens Kreutznaer is indeed alive in the island though not necessarily well. As Lars Kaulbach he was enchanted, seduced and finally attacked by Lina Emmerich, but in contrast with him he managed to survive the attack as well as whatever took over the colonists. When Lisa revealed herself to him on the first night of her attack they were together in a guard outpost. Shocked by her hideous appearance he fell unconscious off the guard post and landed in the bushes below. Guards that heard something happening went there to investigate only to face the loathsome penanggalan, after that only cries were heard inside the colony. When Lisa managed to search for Jens to make sure he was dead she didn't find anything, just dragging marks, believing that beastmen had taken him away she thought he would be soon dead but as she never knew what exactly happened she is always worried that he might have escaped the island. Lisa's worries are partially correct, while he was indeed dragged by a beastman, it happened to be a broken one created by his own horse. The horse-beastman named Durr had a positive inclination towards his previous master and dragged him to safety watching over him until he found his consciousness. The two of them lived together in the mountains of Markovia for some time in a cave until Durr was slowly transformed back into a horse. Since then Jens has been living on his own tending for him and his friend Durr. He doesn't see Durr as an animal destined to serve men like him but an animal that should be respected and free. He talks to Durr most of the time as expecting to have an answer back. Durr is now more than 25 years old and is already getting sick, Jens would be really thankful to anyone who takes care of his friend as the horse is his only companion for the past twelve years (as of 760 BC), They still take shelter on a cave in Mount Gheara and Jens has learned to grow barley and rice. He collects grapes to make raisins, wine and vinegar and has learned how to make pottery out of clay found in the slopes of Mount Gheara. His life in the island has made him seem like crazy to people who meet him, especially when they see him talking to his horse. He is very firm on his anti-speciesist views, developed after years living in balance with nature.

Dread Possibility: The Dread Spores

There is a reason for the vanishing of the Tepestani community as they indeed killed each other in paranoia, as it is evident to anyone reading the log of the *Stellaris*. When the first Lamordian colonists arrived the scouts reported to Lieutenant Jens Kreutznaer that there were skeletons lying around the village. Lieutenant Kreutznaer ordered them to clean the place up before the rest of the settlers arrived there. While Lina Emmerich is responsible for the vanishing of the colony, there was another agent that made that possible and even probable even if the penangalaan hadn't travelled to Markovia. When Markovia was ripped from the middle of the Core and placed in the Sea of Sorrows, the Tepestani were indeed becoming paranoid and aggressive. With dread they saw that the sacred old oak in the middle of the church was diseased as red fungi appear on the trees trunk. The local priest and his acolytes tried to clean up the tree by they were infected by the magical fungus and became aggressive. They

demanded to find the witch or warlock who had conspired with the fey and was responsible for desecrating their temple and destroying the world around them. Others in time were also afflicted by the fungi and in the end the whole village was massacred as neighbor was killing neighbor. Lina Emmerich and "her daughters" are unaffected by the fungi. The dread spores affect anyone touching them or inhaling their spores. These hallucinatory spores explode when someone touches them creating dread and paranoia to anyone who is 30 feet close to one. Anyone affected suffers from the Madness effect of Paranoia as well as the Horror effects of Rage, not trusting anyone around them and becoming extremely aggressive towards anyone they perceive as the subject of their rage. The fungi are consetrated in two places within the village, the massive oak tree within the church and the Jordul pit. The fungi sustain themselves on the bodies of the people who have killed each other due to their toxic spores.

Fungi, Dread Spores: Contact, Inhaled; area of effect 30ft.; DC 20; Paranoia, Rage

Markov's Estate (The House of Diosamblet)

If someone follows upriver what used to be the Borchava will come across a primitive building in a lonely, valley between Mount Gheara and the eastern lower slopes Mount Nezeu (previously known as Mount Dumnezeu). The estate is large and is set in a clearing located on a low hill, surrounded by grass, flower and vegetable gardens overlooking the Borchava River the entire complex is surrounded by a 10 foot wooden palisade with sharpened points that replaced an older one that was lower before the *Beastmen Rebellion*. A single large wooden gate leads to the outer courtyard of the compound while dirt pathway strewn with gravel begins at the gate and runs towards the front doors of the mansion, with a small side path jutting off to include the guest house. The estates construction is crude as it was constructed for him by his early experiments it is built of spruce, fir, and other trees found only at high latitudes, not in tropical climates and the decor is simple and austere.

The building's timbers are solid and joined tightly standing firm against the monsoon sudden winds and the densely thatched inelegant roof is keeping the estate dry from the harsh rainfall. The estate consists of an interlocked series of main buildings which include the master's wing, the servant's wings, laboratory, zoological garden with caged animals and courtyard with animals which he usually uses to present himself as a naturalist and a separate guest hut. The laboratory is the largest room in the estate with a conical roof reaching 55 feet above the ground with a massive wrought-iron chandelier hanging above the center of the room with a parabolic mirror above the candles beaming the light at the middle of the room where Dr. Markov operates. It is the place most frequently used by Dr. Markov with a rustic foyer lying between the laboratory and the front door.

The house has also an interesting library filled with books salvaged from various shipwrecks around the island though they are not categorized but rather chaotic with many books and scrolls as well as various objects lying on the ground. Brother Aleister made a most interesting observation while we visited the estate's library before he and Tycho left to search for any signs of the traitorous Van Rijn. Lying on the floor of the library was a skull made of a mysterious silvery metal with tight line patterns etched into it, that we identified as a *Well of Knowledge*, a magical device common in the extraplanar city of Sigil. Known also as *mimirs* these devices which are described in *Ozno's Secular Cosmic Catalogue* allow the unlimited recording of information for later playback. When a question is asked on the skull, it responds in a matter of seconds, Brother Tycho made the remark that *mimirs* don't function outside the Outer Planes, instead it responds in gibberish, as you migh t expected we didn't lose time asking the device questions we wouldn't get answers, but it remains a mystery how this device ended up in Dr. Markov's possession. The library also had a copy of Dr. Rudolph Van Richten's Journal on the Order of the Guardians, which I will relate later in this report.

The master's wing is located in the upper floor of the main building connected directly with the laboratory through a spiral staircase but is accessible also from a menagerie filled with caged animals. The master's wing consists of Dr. Markov's room, his painting studio and Delphi's room. Delphi has

been Dr. Markov's most successful experiment but vanished during the *Beastmen Rebellion*, Dr. Markov has kept her room intact hoping that someday she may return to her home, on one wall there is a picture of the sea and close to the canopied bed rests a half finished painting of a beautiful woman with a high forehead and wide luminous eyes in a high-necked gown. Since the *Beastmen Rebellion* only his most loyal servants are allowed access inside the estate, while others who tend the botanical garden come from the *farm* which is located ten minutes distance upriver and all doors and windows are barred shut after dark. The garden is mostly compiled of vegetables as well as some rare herbs which Dr. Markov needs for his experiments. Dr. Markov before the *Beastmen Rebellion* often slept in small huts in the surrounding hills, while these haven't been used by him for more than a decade they still exist though most of them are weatherworn or inhabited by solitary broken ones.

Dread Possibility: The Old Markov House
This uninteresting house located in the Village of Vallaki in Barovia boasts two stories and an attic. All the windows are now shuttered, and an outside cellar door is held shut by a rusted iron padlock. This house was where Markov's butcher shop used to exist, he used the house's cellar as his workshop and laboratory. After the Vallakians learned his secret and the mad butcher fled the town to escape a lynch mob, they laid Ludmilla's disfigured remains to rest in the Vallaki's cemetery. When the first Thaani arrived in Vallaki less than a decade ago from Immol they laid claim to some half-crumbling houses in the north end of the village. This part of Vallaki has the same sturdy buildings found elsewhere in town, but subtle differences in decor mark this as a foreigners' neighborhood. The floral patterns ubiquitous to the wooden windowsills are replaced by delicate abstract designs reminiscent of mazes. The mazes are emblematic of this neighborhood's Thaani residents. Although common services and shops can be found here, the Thaani neighborhood is best known for its exotic wares, such as sculpted crystal, intricate tattoos (either permanent or temporary), and elaborate tapestries.
The first house inhabited was the old Markov place, which had remained abandoned since Markov transformed his wife into a beast-thing. It was claimed by an elderly bookseller named Khasad and his assistant Tashlai. Khasad and Tashlai haven't been seen in months, and they are believed to be traveling on business. The truth is that the suffering of Frantisek Markov's wife has tainted the house with a seed of madness. Khasad and Tashlai are holed up inside the house, each having undergone a terrible transformation. As the evil resonance of the house slowly drove the house's current residents insane. Khasad was overcome by the Far Realm's influence and now serves as host to a tsochar noble; the creature's slimy tentacles spill out of his gaping mouth. Khasad's assistant Tashlai fared no better: she died of fright, and her head floated up and transformed into a gauth. The presence of the tsochar has sent ripples of madness throughout the north end of town. Now, it has begun to turn the psychically sensitive Thaani against one another.
(The Old Markov House is detailed in the adventure *Fair Barovia* from *Dungeon Magazine #207.*)

Dread Possibility: The Aberration Triangle
Since Markovia's transition to the Sea of Sorrows and the recent incidents in Vallaki, Markov's butcher shop in that village, evil resonance has been evolved into a strange mistway connecting the cellar of the Old Markov House in Barovia with a cave located in Mount Dumnezeu in Markovia and the underground caverns of Mount Grysl of Bluetspur. The mistway is one way from Barovia leading to any of the two domains for any creature except aberrations who can use this mistway to enter or escape from the island going either to Barovia or reach a far more unwelcomed alien place, that even the illithids avoid under Mount Grysl. This mistway is the cause of tentacle rats invading also other domains of the core as they can travel freely as aberrations from one domain to the other. The spirits of the tormented mind flayers who remain within Mount Grysl, cannot use the mistway as they are undead but the High Master Illithid can use it to gain allies in his efforts to undermine the Illithid-God-Brain.

The Aberration Triangle: Village of Vallaki to Central Markovia or Mount Grysl in Bleutspur
2 way for Aberrations, excellent/ 1way for other, excellent.

The Order of the Guardians

The Order of the Guardians is a monastic organization that exists throughout Demiplane of Dread, Radaga of Kartakass is reputed to once have been a member of this Order before her fall from grace and subsequent short-lived darklordship of the domain of Daglan. This reclusive order is devoted to the discovery and destruction of evil magical items. Each monastery or retreat is dedicated to a single powerful magical device, relic, or artifact. The brothers and sisters of this order dedicate their lives to researching and understanding and comprehending the devices they guard and ensuring that they do not find their way into the general population. Those items that are all but impossible to destroy are guarded by monks in various monasteries across the Lands of the Mists. Each monastery is an independent unit, and they rarely communicate with each other.

Two of the oldest retreats of this order were founded in Markovia. The Monastery of the Lost guarded the *Table of Life*. This large marble slab created keeps anybody placed upon it alive regardless of the tortures and pain inflicted. . The other group of monks called the Guardians guarded the Tapestry of Dark Souls. The monks of this monastic organization take sacred vows and oaths of commitment to abandon individuality wearing the same heavy gray wool robes that usually hide their features in dark shadows. The symbol of the order is a monk in blue robes with a high-necked collar that gives him a sinister appearance. The monk is shown holding a closed box in his hands, both presenting it and guarding it securely. It seems that members do not consciously choose to join the Order but rather are affected by a mystical compulsion that brings them to the Order's doorstep the monks refer to this as the Calling.

Rudolph Van Richten's journal on the Order of the Guardians found in Frantisek Markov's library mentions six more monasteries guarding magical artifacts. The oldest monastery founded in the Land of the Mists was the Brootherhood in Kartakass that guarded the famed *Crown of Souls* that later was used in Duke Gundar's and Dr. Dominiani's failed scheme to annex Kartakass. It corrupted Radaga of Kartakass and subsequently was stolen by her after she destroyed the Brotherhood. She later came to be known as Radaga Priestess of the Undead while one of the few surviving members of that sect Calum Songmaster founded the *Brotherhood of Broken Blades*. These zealot arcane hunters are not considered an offshoot of the Order of the Guardians though but a product of it, thus their name, they believe that to kill a snake you have to cut off its head. Their organization is dedicated in hunting evil spellcasters as they view them to be responsible for the creation of evil artifacts.

The Iron Sanctum founded by one of the survivors of the Markovian sect of the Order that guarded the Tapestry of Dark Souls, guards the Iron *Flask of Tuerny the Merciless* and is located somewhere in the Red Wizard's domain of Hazlan. The Haven of Spirit Flesh guards a mysterious item called the *Transubstancial Halo* somewhere in Mordent while the Keepers of the Coil guard a magical snake known as the *Shadow Serpent* in Sithicus. The Watchers at the Gates a stronghold located in Darkon used to guard the *Key to the Abyss*, a strangely human shaped object the size of a human head that was discovered by the Kargat in 580 BC and used it to summon the Whistling Fiend. Azalin Rex punished the Kargat wizards and the Key lay in Castle Avernus for centuries until the Guardians stole it in 675 BC. After the Requiem during Azalin's absence Master Bralkain one of the Kargat wizards that discovered the Key led a team of agents from the Unholy Order of the Grave to attack the Order of the Guardians stronghold but the Whistling Fiend resurfaced and begun a murderous rampage. The whereabouts of the *Key to the Abyss* and the Whistling Fiend remain unknown. Finally the newest monastery recorded by Dr. Van Richten was founded in 722 BC in the woods of Kartakass and is called the Chancel of the Note. It guards the *Flute of the Piper of Hamelyn* and is supposed to be the flute of the famed Pied Piper the flute is rumored to transform anyone who plays it into the notorious boogey man of children fairytales.

The Monastery of the Lost Souls

The monastic order who established this holy asylum, have been dead for decades, this order of monks called Order of the Guardians believe in shielding the world from dangerous artifacts and truths. The monastery rests 500 feet above the valley below on a promontory in one of the high peaks of what was once Mt. Baratak on the southern side of the island, surrounded by steep cliffs. It is located so high that it is usually covered by the towering *cumulonimbus* clouds of Markovia that hug the cliff face where the monastery rests. The cliffs are riddled with tunnels and caverns with underground rooms. The sanctum is far removed from everything that happens in the jungle below. Fragmented stories about a sanctuary beyond the north border were told years ago by elderly Barovians, relating tales of a tragic place haunted by troubled souls bound in this monastery by misery and faith. As much disrespect I have for Barovians and their superstitions I must admit their description of this place couldn't have been better. This isolated sanctum was nearly invisible to those ignorant of its position before the Great Upheaval but the lower altitude and sunny weather conditions of the island Markovia revealed it to Dr. Markov before the *Beastman Rebellion* bringing havoc to the monks that "lived" there.

In spite of this ascending the steep storm-washed cliffs and jagged escarpments to reach the monastery can be deadly which was what protected it from the outside world.

The Monastery of Lost Souls has two accesses, one is a narrow trail wound around up the side of the mountain, up which the initial supplies and materials were brought but was later blocked by a series of avalanches set off by the monks after the construction of the lift which is the easiest way into the monastery accessible from the valley floor below the cliff. A hollow metal tube serves as the monastery's door-knocker by striking the tube its deep sound resonates and bounces off the valley floor to reach the Brethren above who lower a large basket which serves as a lift and anyone entering it is slowly lifted up to the monastery until suddenly it stops within 50 feet of the Lift House, only to continue to be lifted up after being inspected.

Tycho or rather Hermitian described the bewilderment he felt when after being lifted up the through the lift they didn't see anyone operating it. At first impression the monastery the buildings of the monastery are of uniform construction of plastered fired brick though the plaster is weatherworn and has cracked in many places while the roofs are made of fired red clay found in the slopes of the mountain. The balconies and frames are made of worn wood, and the timbers are exposed on the interior walls. In general it shows a feeling a desolation and Hermitian believed it to be haunted at first, until they were greeted almost half an hour later by a robed monk who introduced himself as Father Milhouse, apparently the Brethren have taken a vow of silence and communicate only through smooth hand gestures. Although visitors were once more common to the monastery, the surviving Brothers continue to offer hospitality even after the misfortune that befell the monastery.

The Monastery of Lost Souls complex consists of the Lift House, on a promontory were looking down to the valley is usually obscured by misty clouds, the dining hall set over the kitchen in the building called Hall of Necessity, the Library which extends far below the surface and an above ground passage connects it with the Contemplation Hall were monks painstakingly copy books and scrolls and the Quarters of the Brethren, a one story building which connects to the Temple the main hall of worship with a balcony that views the Sea of Sorrows. The Temple is the largest building in the monastery and here is where the notorious *Table of Life* was stored, protected, and venerated.

Below the promontory the monastery rests upon the rock is honey honeycombed with intersecting tunnels, opening here and there onto small alcoves, these criss-crossed corridors extent far into the rock creating a maze of twisty passages inside the mountain. Here is where most remaining members of the order live or rather continue their unloving because all the brethren of the Monastery of Lost Souls are ancient dead, their flesh withered and decayed from exposure to the Table of Life. The ones who remain call themselves the Withered Brethren

and are their faces have rotten with flacking skin exposing in parts the yellow-white skulls and their hollow mouths have a few remaining teeth. Bones protrude from their hands and their skin has stretched tight over the bones of their arms and legs while their eyes look more like wrinkled pits. When Tycho and Hermitian first encountered the first of these monks they believed falsely that they had found Erik Van Rijn's hideout, this was not the case fortunately for them as unlikely as it would be an alliance between the traitor and the monks would have been deadly for them.

All the monks except their abbot Father Milhouse have taken a vow of silence which they are allowed to break two times a day in the Hall of Necessity during eating. Although they are all undead they seem in denial unaware of their transformation, which believe it to be a blessing of the *Table of Life*. The remaining Brethren rise at dawn and have a breakfast at the Hall of Necessity they spend the rest of the day in meditation, contemplation, scroll copying, and general repairs before having a late afternoon meal and then attend vespers between that meal and sunset after which they retire to their individual cells.

Ways into the Monastery of Lost Souls

There are three ways to reach the monastery high up on the cliffs, the easiest is to discover and ring the tube doorbell waiting for the lift to slowly come down. The other two are more hazardous involving mountaineering experience, one of them is finding the old path that lead to the monastery while it was built and the other is climbing the sheer cliff.

The Lift

The great hollow bronze tube is partially buried in the ground at the base of the mountain, it measures around 10 feet and is set in an upright position. It is molded in the shape of a figure in robes with a high collar, carrying a box, the figures face has been worn away. When the tube is struck a large basket is lowered from the lift to the valley floor. The lift, a huge wicker basket with a floor of wooden planks, can carry about 800 lbs, or roughly four player characters at a time. If the basket is overloaded, then the heavily-corded rope will strain, but the basket will not leave the ground until sufficient weight has been removed. It takes half an hour for the lift to be pulled up or down, including a five minute stop about 50 feet from the top, while the monks check out the riders to ascertain if they are Broken Ones or pose a threat to the monastery. As the individuals are hauled up the two monks operating the lift will retreat to the catacombs below the monastery. No Broken Ones or other obvious agents of Markov will be admitted to the monastery, nor individuals who brandish weapons or attack with missiles or spells. In such cases, the lift reverses itself and lowers these undesirables back to the ground.

The Old Path

Finding the old path from the southern side of the Monastey is a difficult task requires a keen eye and a successful Search skill check DC 20). It is steep and narrow, twisting from one side of the mountainside to the other and some parts of it are missing since Markovia's transition to the Sea of Sorrows and its detachment from Mount Baratak. The path has areas entirely blocked or altogether swept away by rockslides for fifty to a hundred feet at three separate points. Each individual attempting to cross such sections must succeed at a Climb skill check DC 15, anyone who fails any of the three checks will fall 20 to 120 feet (roll 2d6 x 10 feet; to determine the distance before asking for the check). Individual carrying climbing tools may use their Climb checks to circumvent the rockslide for anyone else willing to accompany them. It takes about four hours to reach the monastery by way of the path.

Climbing the Cliff

For anyone to climb the cliff to the monastery they have to succeed in ten Climbing checks DC 15. If they have to have the right mountaineering tools only one check is needed per climber. Such a climb takes 8 hours but is the only way for anyone to enter the monastery in stealth.

The Table of Life

The notorious *Table of Life* was unearthed by Dr. Markov's servants more than sixty years ago from the depths of a series of ancient catacombs in Nova Vaasa were an undead mortician and her servants had used it to prepare the dead. The *Table of Life*'s origins are lost in time though many stories exist of people who used it and perished. One story relates about a paranoid researcher so afraid of dying that he acquired the *Table of Life* and spend more than fifty years on the table receiving his meals there as well as sleeping, refusing to leave it. When an earthquake knocked him of the artifact his body disintegrated in mid-air leaving a pile of bones on the ground. Another story tells about a pasha who ordered as amusement to his court, the sickening display of grisly acts on those strapped on the table. After hundreds of gruesome deaths on the *Table* family members of the deceased as well as commoners annoyed by the atrocious acts ordered by the pasha, rebelled and after capturing the bloodthirsty monarch they strapped him on the table where they spend a year killing him. The *Table of Life* was stolen from the Monastery of Lost Souls on behalf of Dr. Markov who had learned of its existence and has gone missing since the events of the *Beastmen Rebellion*. Somehow it was spirited away from the island of Markovia and no one knows its whereabouts. The Brethren of the Order of the Guardians have been searching for it for two decades, there were times they were about to retrieve it but their quest has failed so far.

The Table of Life

The *Table of Life* is a single slab of greenish-black marble shot with thin veins of gold it is eight feet in length, three in width and six inches thick. Its surface is smoothly polished and reflective while its corners are smoothly rounded and unmarred. The *Table* radiates with a soft, milky glow that accumulates over time, so that after a few days the area it is stored in will seem to be filled with a radiant mist. This mist is not obscuring it is rather illuminating the entire area with an unearthly light.

The *Table of Life* has one primary function, any creature placed on it cannot die, requiring no food or drink (though it can experience hunger and thirst), can survive poison (though it can feel the venom running through its veins) and survive any injury, including removal of organs and severing limbs (though it can feel the pain of these injuries). The *Table of Life* prevents loss of life no matter what damage or harm is done on the individual on the slab, while doing nothing to ease the pain felt. A person bound on the table and enduring with agony the pains and horrors of its own body reduced to components may easily go mad.

At any time the individual who is bound to the *Table of Life* is freed from it, any effects and damage suffered while on the artifact have full effect at an instant they lose contact with the *Table of Life*. Poisons take full effect unless they have been negated, severed limbs begin to bleed and cannot be reattached except through magical means, the same applies to severed heads which result in the instant death of the individual.

The *Table of Life* affects also those close to it even if they are not in direct contact with it. Those who spend a great deal of time near it are slowly transformed into Ancient Dead (mummies). While most creatures exposed are transformed into mummies of the 2nd rank, those of 8 HD or higher are transformed into mummies of the 3rd rank. This transformation is not immediate but rather takes a period of months of exposure as those affected lose their appetite and as time goes by do not need food or drink to sustain themselves as well as losing the need to sleep. To be transformed into an undead creature someone has to be exposed to the table for six months. If an individual is not exposed to the *Table of Life* daily then the effects wear off in a similar time of non-exposure. Once transformed, there is no way back, but those bound to the table are immune to this effect while bound to it.

The *Table of Life* is indestructible and will survive fire, cold, weapon attacks, massive damage and destructive spells.

Dread Possibility: The tables are turned
When the Brethren of Lost Souls get their hands on the *Table of Life* they plan to return it to the Monastery of Lost Souls. Its position in the island of Markovia's is remote enough to protect the populace from it and since Dr. Markov's influence on the island has deteriorated after the *Beastman Rebellion* they believe it will be safe there as Frantisek Markov believes the Monastery to be abandoned and will not search for it there.

Dread Possibility: Pain is inevitable suffering is optional
Elgin Denuzi (male human ermodenung, Rog3/Exp6) and Rozalina Denuzi (female human ermodenung, Rog2/Exp7) having lost the ring of regeneration after the events of the Anything for the Muse Dread Possibility (cut from Gazetteer IV) have acquired the *Table of Life*. The sadomasochist couple uses the *Table* to model their paintings of "*Glamour Grotesque*" in new extremes.

Dread Possibility: Never eat at the table of a Priest
Pave Stavroz Vatrisk commands the Iron Faith across the land of Hazlan from the Iron Citadel-Fane at the western edge of Toyalis under the distant direction of Himmelsk Naeve Pieter Jergaar. The Pave is constantly balancing between the Himmelsk Naeve and Hazlik trying to avoid angering both as both individuals are extremely dangerous. Although the Church of the Lawgiver's reception in Hazlan has been successful, the monarch it supports goes against the doctrines of the Church. Things have become worse since Hazlik lifted the ban on the practice of arcane magic which is considered a blasphemy by the Church. If Stavroz obey's to Himmelsk Naeve's demands the Pave of Hazlan may suffer the consequences of such a decision as Hazlik may ban religion in a whim. Recently the Pave came into position of the *Table of Life* he plans to offer it as a gift to the Red Wizard Hazlik to gain his favor, as he is seriously thinking of declaring himself Himmelsk Naeve of Hazlan and needs the darklords support. If his plan succeeds he will create a schism within the Church of the Lawgiver that could even escalate into a holy war between the two churches.

Dread Possibility: The Surgeon's Table
After Dr. Emil Bollenbach created his doppelganger super- golem in 752 BC to destroy othr golems he did it with the help of a band of doppelgangers (*Children of the Night: The Created* p.49). These doppelgangers were in fact Sodo's agents and the doppelgangers they had targeted were dissidents of Sodo's rule. When Emil fled a band of heroes who spoiled his plans he was ruled to Paridon were he infiltrated the City Guard becoming Paridon's coroner. Sodo offered the doctor the alchemical, technological and physical resources to construct the perfect golem in return for its use for a week. In 755 BC when the time arrived for the Bloody Jack's 14th killing spree Sodo demanded from Emil to borrow the golem as they had agreed to play the part of Bloody Jack (*Shadow of the Knife* p.4). Sodo had in fact made security arrangements to assure the doctors compliance by placing a *timed scarab of death* in the mad scientist's heart. When adventurer's eventually confronted Emil with evidence of his involvement in the killing spree he confessed also promising to help them catch the Bloody Jack, his golem. The truth is that Emil hoped for his golem to seek him out for further orders and that he could use it to overwhelm the adventurers. The golem attacked him instead but in a decisive moment Emil's psionic talent made him switch minds with his creation and battled the adventurers. When both Emil and the golem were killed they ended up in Paridon's morgue, but when a few days later the new coroner reopened the coroner's office everything was in disarray and the two bodies, that of Emil as well as the golem's were missing. Somehow the mind of the golem inside Emil's body preserved it and when Emil still trapped within his creation woke up he took his body and escaped Paridon. Emil is still within the Bloody Jack doppelganger golem and is searching for a way to remove the magical scarab and revive his body. He has learned of the *Table of Life*'s existence as well as its whereabouts and plans to steal it and use it to operate on himself.

Ruins of the Monastery of the Guardians

The Ruined Monastery of the Guardians is located in the southeastern slopes of Paznic Hill that bordered Tepest to the north before the Great Upheaval. It is another monastery of the Order of the Guardian though this one is abandoned and in ruins. A crumbling wall surrounds the weathered stone temple and keep, and the main gates hang wide open. An overgrown, weed-choked road leads to the monastery's gates. The Guardians in this monastery were entrusted to guard the *Gathering Cloth*. The tale of this enchanted tapestry, which took place before the Great Upheaval is detailed in a volume named *Tapestry of Dark Souls* which exists in the library of the Monastery of the Lost among other volumes detailing the various other sect of the Order and the artifacts they guard. The monastery itself is empty as the surviving brethren abandoned it, and even the symbols of the order have been removed, leaving only oval frames behind.

The Gathering cloth

It is said that the *Gathering Cloth* had the power to gather and hold Evil imprisoned. Although seemingly a good thing, the *Gathering Cloth* also known as *Tapestry of Dark Souls* was an object of dark desire, corrupting everyone near it. It brought out and enhanced preexisting negative emotions and sins to the point that those around it entered states of moral degradation. Many would murder and steal to possess it and it was known to contain even supernatural beings, such as undead and lycanthropes.

The silk for the Gathering Cloth was found by the Aber Nomads in the Nightmare Lands and was traded the vast majority of it away to a Nova Vaasan weaver in Arbora. He wove the silk into the Cloth and pridefully hung it in his shop, but the magical cloth brought misfortune to him as people tried to steal it, one of his sons was murdered while watching over the *Cloth* and then he murdered his other son for the role he played in the *Cloths* theft. He confronted the thief in Egertus and but was imprisoned by the *Cloth* the thief reclaimed the *Cloth*, and it disappeared, its whereabouts the subject of myth and legend. According to some tales, a warlock sought it out to imprison his enemies, paying a small fortune to buy it. Yet, as the wages of sin weighed upon his soul and he felt drawn to it, the warlock payed a fortune to get rid of it that was ten times larger than what he had purchased it for.

Regardless of whatever happened to it prior, the *Cloth* eventually ended up in the hands of the Guardians. Only those who felt the calling of the Guardians were immune to its corruptive power.. The Guardians were many and powerful, yet perhaps a little less wise as they venerated, even worshiped the *Cloth*. This changed when a powerful wizard named Morgoth upon the orders of his master.

The most powerful evil creature imprisoned within the *Cloth* was a powerful undead wizard, Morgoth known as the Silverlord. The Silverlord was sold by his parents to a powerful necromancer who instructed him to the dark arts. However Morgoth grew in power and recognition over time such that his master became jealous and worried about the potential of rebellion. Thus Morgoth was ordered by his master to travel to the Monastery of the Guardians and destroy it, or be destroyed by it. Morgoth got to the *Cloth*, but his overconfidence allowed it to imprison him. However, Morgoth soon discovered a way to free himself and all the prisoners in the *Cloth*. On the night of a full moon, he unbound the Evil souls. The Order of the Guardians managed to seal all the Evil back in the *Cloth*, but only with a great sacrifice. All the monks of the monastery met their doom, save for three survivors, one also was blinded by Morgoth and a prophecy was given, that the Tapestry will be undone by corruption from within, the "corruption" of love. Despite his defeat, Morgoth discovered how to lure more victims for the *Cloth* to absorb.

The disaster brought the surviving monastics to move to a place remote, to Markovia. There they resided in seclusion within the warded, fortified monastery of Saint Markovia. A handful of others would join them in time, coming at the behest of the Calling. Meanwhile, in nearby Tepest, the *Cloth* became woven into local beliefs about the afterlife, that

the Tapestry somehow cleansed the world beyond as as a paradise after death.

In 717 BC Morgoth brought a couple Vhar and Leith to Markovia near the Monastery in Markovia. In the chaos that followed their initial exposure to the *Gathering Cloth*, Morgoth raped Leith from inside the *Cloth* and impregnated her. In 718 BC, Leith gave birth to their son and handed him over to the Order of the Guardians, whom named him Jonathan and raised him as their own child. Having herself been infected with lycanthropy, Leith surrendered her life to the *Tapestry of Dark Souls*.

Morgoth waited seventeen years before he was fully able to fully manipulate his son. Casting the Guardians as liars and deceivers, Morgoth manipulated Jon into freeing him. Portraying himself as a benign father figure and teacher, Morgoth persuaded an oath of loyalty from his son, with the implicit threat of doom to his loved ones. Beyond the corruption of Jonathan, Morgoth set about gathering strength and recruiting allies. He accomplished the former through draining the life from goblins and humans alike. Morgoth gained minions by animating the corpses of his victims. In addition, he seduced and tempted a lycanthrope, Maeve and through her, manipulated her lycanthropic pack. With his pawns and undead servants, he attacked the Guardians' monastery, to retrieve the magical tapestry. However, he was lured into a trap and the Guardians were able to destroy both the *Tapestry* and Morgoth, though at the cost of some of their members.

(The tale of the Gathering Cloth's origin is detailed in the story *The Weaver's Pride* from the anthology *Tales of Ravenloft* and the story of the Guardian's fight with Morgoth in the novel *Tapestry of Dark Souls*).

Dread Possibility: Leaves of three, let it be

Death hangs heavy in the air and thick in the soil and has permeated the ruins of the Monastery of the Guardians as well as the lingering evil resonance that the *Gathering Cloth* and all the evil contained in it. As such it was very logical for a dedly plant as the *yellow musk creeper* to grow in this dethly soil.

The unholy plant has climbed the ruins of the Monstery like common ivy.

The yellow musk creeper's method of procreation is singularly frightful as it needs to infest and slay the living to procreate by targeting nearby creatures with its pollen spray. The victim become temporarily entranced stumbling helplsly towards the plant until they are close enough for it to insert its tendrils, which drill into the brain and turn them into *yellow musk zombies*. These zombies serve the plant as a guardian for several days not able to be further from the plant than a range up to 200 feet, staying close to protect it. When new zombies are created, older ones wander off into the surrounding wild, collapsing and breaking apart within 4d6 days to give seed to a new yellow musk creeper. The seedling that has been growing in its head now sprouts and flowers within an hour, feeds upon the corpse, and becomes a new creeper. This creeper covers the same surface area as the prone body.

The creeper attacks any creature larger than a house cat that approaches, but it can only create zombies from man-sized humanoids. It feeds on the bodies and on the soil in which it is planted. The bones or personal items held by those it kills are buried by the zombies close to the root. The zombie does not eat, being partially supported and kept alive by the seedling in its head. The creepers only natural enemies are disease, insects, and a lack of food.

The creeper has 2d6 flowers and 1d4 buds. It can control one zombie for every two flowers. If a victim dies, a new flower opens from a bud, and a new bud appears. The zombies' main goal is to drag creatures, particularly humanoids, into the creeper.

Sunset Bay

The Sunset Bay is a wide lagoon, with sharp-toothed rocks and savage, boat-ripping shoals guarding the entrance. The water waves reach the wide white sanded beach on the inner side of the lagoon in the form of small swells. The beach is running up about 20 feet before be-

coming lost in a thick treeline of tropical trees that define the thick jungle of Markovia. There are numerous tropical birds hiding in the tropical vegetation and the jungle becomes alive by their calls. These birds may suddenly fall silent whenever there are beastmen in the vicinity.
This is the safest place to dry dock a vessel since the bay protect the ship from the massive waves of the Sea of Sorrows. The waters are not deep there but the shore is lined with underwater boulders and sinkholes. The most distinguishing aspect of the bay is the shipwreck of the *Sunset Empires*, the entrance of the lagoon, still upright but canted at a 15-degree angle from port to starboard. The masts have snapped off, and a very visible hole runs along a third of the port side, facing inland, the ship's quarterdeck is half-slid off the superstructure of the vessel and dangles precariously over the open water and the ship's boat and the anchors are all missing, It is quite clear that the *Sunset Empires* will never sail again. The *Sunset Empires* was a two-mastered, lanteen-rigged caravel that sailed from Ludendorf under Captain Eli Stewart, a man of dubious fitness for his post as it was proved by the sinking of his ship in 749 BC around the time of the *Beastmen Rebellion*.
The beach is usually filled with seals as well as seal-folk that sunbathe in the white sandy beach but they all avoid the shipwreck. On the north side of the bay the silhouette of a gigantic man can be seen this is one of the Great Stone Men the half-buried statues of giants lining the northern coast of the island.

Dry Docking a ship in Markovia
Although there are places more approachable than Sunset Bay the natural protection of the bay makes it the seemingly best place to dock a ship. A ship can safely pass through the shallow entrance of the bay only two times per month during the highest flood tide that coincide with the dusk hours before the full and new moon and anytime during the days of the solstice as the waters are on their highest. This means that if a ship docks in this beach it will be able to leave again after about 29.5days, that is if the ship is not attacked by the Soul Kraken during that time.

Kraken House
There is good reason why the seal-folk avoid the *Sunset Empires* shipwreck, while the whole place looks peaceful it hides a deadly secret as the shipwreck's hold is more dangerous yet, having become one of the lair of the Soul Kraken as most shipwrecks around the island. The area which previously held the water barrels at the starboard stern has been ripped away, and the Soul Kraken may be encountered there during daylight hours and it will attack anyone foolish enough to search the shipwreck. The water is shallow enough to allow attacks against the creature's body by heroes standing in the hold. Fortunately the shallow waters in of the lagoon protect any ship docked in Sunset Bay.

Moon Phase, Deadly Tides
While anyone docking in Sunset Bay during the lagoon's high tide may have their ship protected for a month, anyone traveling with Captain Lennard Gaertner aboad the *Hylende Walross* may have avoided an attack by the Soul-Kraken but may soon become victims of the bloodthirsty Captain and his crew of infected seal-wolves. As the sun sets behind the horizon on the idyllic tropical sunset and the full moon rises the inffected crew begins to howl and simutanuelsy transform into their beastly forms. Anyone witnessing this will be surely horrifyed not only becuse of the mssive transformation tking place but also with the knowledge that even if they seurvive this, they will be stranded in the island as the ship that is supposed to bring them back to the eastern shores of the Core is a bunch of crazed lycanthropes.
Captain Lennard is not going to let anyone who has witnessed this and knows his secret survive or at least escape the island. He will surely inform his collegue Dr. Frntisek Markov for the existance of anyone escaping his crew, making any survivor being hunted down not only by the *Hylende Walross's* crew but also from the beastmen loyal to the darklord of Markovia.

The Great Stone Men

The northern coast of the island is littered with the half-buried statues of giants. There is no record of these statues before Markovia's transition to its present location, and it is possible they appeared when Markovia was surrounded by the Sea of Sorrows. The Great Stone Men jut partially above the sandy soil with only the heads, arms, and bare shoulders visible. They seem either to be sinking in quicksand struggling to avoid being pulled beneath the earth or trying to reach for some reaching for some unseen and unattainable object. They are both male and female looking with their grotesque faces, twisted in agony, straining muscles clearly etched on their faces and upper limbs. Several are half-drowned by the waves and look like dying men and women cast in stone. The jungle has expanded and has mostly covered the ones that exist on land covering them with vines and creepers. What these enormous statues are or how they came to end up in the shores of the island remains a mystery. The beastmen who still believe Dr. Markov to be the "God who walks among us" have explained them as giants who tried to drown the world and were stopped by Diosamblet, others don't have an explanation. What all beastmen have in common though is that they avoid this area by all costs either because it is taboo to enter the "holy" place where Diosamblet displayed his power or because they believe it to be haunted.

Dread Possibility: Creepers
Although the Broken Ones avoid the area where the Great Stone Men are littered out of superstition they are in fact fortunate to do so, as a massive Choke Creeper has made the beach its hunting grounds attacking unsuspecting animals who wander in the northern side of the island.

Huts of the Broken Ones

Since the *Beastmen Rebellion* many of the Broken One inhabitants live either independent lives or in small communities. Dr. Markov has selected only a few of them to live with him in his estate while the rest either live in the few abandoned settlements of the domain or a nomadic life. These beastmen slowly revert to their natural states or die as the effects of Dr. Markov treatments subside. Most of those who live in the wilderness have banded together in small communities, usually led by the strongest member of the group. After the *Beastmen Rebellion* most of these animal- men have turned to their animal instincts fighting each other or having become wild game if they have devolved. Some of these Feral Broken Ones have selected to settle living in thatch roofed huts built around the most precious thing in their settlements, the hearth. Most of these Broken One villages consist of two to five conical huts and most communities have ten to sixty beastmen. Most of them are still afraid of Dr. Markov still believing him to be a god but believe him to be weaker than before. They are still afraid of him though and will probably flee when he approaches. They encounter any humans are treated as curiosities unless they know they have aligned with Dr. Markov, in which case they will usually be treated with reverence as the three greater broken ones who serve him. Those not aligned with Diosamblet are viewed as prey and will be attacked on sight.

The Quarry

On the western side of the island close to the first G'Hennan settlement on the east side of Argint Hill Nezeu exists the silver Quarry which was discovered around a decade ago, on the hills overlooking Calcar River's source. While the Doldak Heights of the Dorvinian side of the silver mines had been almost depleted after centuries of excavations, the excavations in the Markovian foothills of Mountain Gries began during the last decade. If these mines had been discovered before Markovia's isolation, the area around the abandoned G'Hennan village would have surely had turned into rich and influencial hub by now.

While Dr. Markov lived a reclusive life for decades the domain's natural blockage had made the acquisition of resources for his experiments, depended on anything he could

salvage from shipwrecks and anyone foolish to explore the island. The events of the *Beastmen Rebellion* and acquaintance with Captain Lennard Gaertner made him more extroverted. His agreement with Captain Lennard has allowed him to gain even more test subjects as well as resources from around the corners of the Demiplane in exchange of the monopoly of Markovia's resources including its newfound silver.

While before the *Beastmen Rebellion* the Markovian Broken Ones were punished by death for not following the law of Diosamblet now the ones who still follow Dr. Markov out of fear and violate his laws are punished by forced labor in the silver quarry. But there are also some more unfortunate Broken Ones who were created just with the purpose of working there in the first place. Most of these unfortunate beastmen who have never run free since their creation are a combination of strong humanoid individuals and strong animals, supplied by Captain Lennard for this purpose. The stronger and most fearsome of these is Gorg a beastman around fifteen feet tall created by the combination of an ogre purchased from the tyrant Maloccio Aderre of Invidia and an *Elephas maximus* (elephant) brought from Sri Raji. This feral beastman is as hideous as it is strong with large ears and a proboscis that he uses to carry heavy objects, his feet are constantly chained with a massive chain.

The original workings were excavated during the past decade after the eroding limestone, revealed the silver vein, and since then further economic deposits of silver or lead have been found. Although the limestone is no longer visible in the Silver Mine Quarry, a section through the overlying mudstones, siltstones and sandstones can be seen. The Calar River deposits become coarser grained towards the top with good sedimentary structures, including ripple marks created beneath shallow water and burrows created by creatures, mostly jermlaine living in the sediments. The silver excavated is around ten tons of silver per year and has made both Dr. Markov and Captain Lennard extremely rich, though both of them seem too obsessed with their own goals to sit down and enjoy their fortune.

Dread Possibility: Minute Wars

The jermlaine of Paznic Hill that once bordered Tepest to the north have learned of the silver mines to the west of the island, the territory of another jermlaine clan. The Paznic's approached the jermlaine of Argint Hill demanding the surrender of their lands, the Argint clan refused on the grounds that they have already been invaded by the beastmen digging their hill and destroying their caves and passages. They offered the Paznic's a share of the silver in their hill if they help them get rid of the invaders. Recently the silver quarry has been plagued by continuous accidents slowing down production, it wont' be long before the assailants are discovered and Frantisek Markov orders the capture of these minute creatures to be used as lab rats for his experiments.

The White Marsh

This wetland has formed in the edge of the Calar River in the southeast of the island where it forms a delta were it forms a transition between the terrestrial to the aquatic ecosystem. As its name forebodes the marsh is created by white deposits of limestone originating from where the Calar River springs out from the foothills of Mount Nezeu and Argint Hill. The White Marsh is dominated by herbaceous plants and has a few low-growing *Salix alba*, a willow tree similar to the *Salix tetrasperma* but with stark white leaves probably due *chlorosis* caused by the highly alkaline soil. Not many animals exist in this mild toxic environment as the water is basically non-potable, if ingested, it may burn upper gastrointestinal tract tissues, sometimes resulting in esophageal or gastric perforation. Symptoms may include drooling, dysphagia, and pain in the mouth, chest, or stomach while strictures may develop later. Beastmen avoid this area as they believe it to be cursed. The few animals that have made the marsh their home are mostly dehydrated and sickly looking slowly poisoned by the alkali in the water.

There exist two dangerous plants in this marsh the first is the sword grass *Imperata gladius*. This weed spreads not only by

an aggressive root system but also by fluffy white seed heads that produce an abundance of wind-blown seed in the early summer, this makes it closely related to ferns and mushrooms. It reproduces by spores, and the plants blades grow from a central underground rhizome and cut like razor. It is very tolerant of soil type and wide variations in soil fertility, moisture, and light conditions. Sword grass is a perennial; the leaf blades die during cold weather, and the root stalk goes dormant, becoming active again in spring. The usual prey for sword grass is small animals, with the plant using blood and decaying bodies to supplement its diet.

The second plant is the *Ultricularia gigantis* (giant bladderwort) an aquatic species that can be observed below the water surface where it forms long branching stems or *stolons*. To these stolons are attached both the bladder traps and photosynthetic leaf-shoots. The name *bladderwort* refers to its bladder-like traps. These aquatic members of the genus have the largest and most obvious bladders, and can initially be thought to be flotation devices before their carnivorous nature was discovered. The vacuum-driven bladders of *Utricularia* are the most sophisticated carnivorous trapping mechanism to be found anywhere in the plant kingdom. The trapping mechanism of *Utricularia* is purely mechanical as no reaction from the plant (irritability) is required in the presence of prey, in contrast with the triggered mechanisms employed by mantraps (*Dionaea Homipula*), waterwheels (*Aldrovanda*), and many sundews (*Drosera*). The only active mechanism involved is the constant pumping out of water through the bladder walls by active transport.

As water is pumped out, the bladder's walls are sucked inwards by the negative pressure created, and any dissolved material inside the bladder becomes more concentrated. The sides of the bladder bend inwards, storing potential energy like a spring. Eventually, no more water can be extracted, and the bladder trap is 'fully set'. Once the seal is disturbed, the bladder walls instantly spring back to a more rounded shape, the door flies open and a column of water is sucked into the bladder. The creature which touched the lever, is inevitably drawn in, and as soon as the trap is filled, the door resumes its closed position. Once inside, the prey is dissolved by digestive secretions.

Dread Possibility: Hiding under the table

When the adventurers who stole the *Table of Life* brought it to Frantisek Markov, the House of Diosamblet was attacked as the *Beastmen Rebellion* started. Markov was confronted by Akanga and overwhelmed strapped on the magical table and suffered unbelievable tortures by the avenging beastman leader. When Akanga began feeling confused as the transformation powers of Markov started to fade he abandoned the unconscious darklord still strapped on the table. Brother Millhouse of the Order of the Guardians along with some of the Withered Brethren entered the seemingly deserted estate and found Markov.

They unstrapped him and left him on the floor of his laboratory fleeing with the *Table of Life*. Instead of trying to place it back to their monastery which had been compromised after their discovery by Markov or take it away from the island, a difficult, time consuming and reckless task as they would be at the mercy of the sea and the table could easily fall to the wrong hands, Father Millhouse decided to create a bluff. He led his Brothers to the White Marsh and ordered them to throw the cursed artifact in one of the deepest parts in the delta. Anyone who comes searching for the Table is sent to a wild goose chase, the Intact Brethren "searching" for the *Table* are actually searching for other evil artifacts.

The misty glow the *Table of Life* radiates is covered by the marshes murky white water but its corruptive power is obvious to the few "living" animals in the marsh, as withered mummified frogs, rodents, lizards, turtles and some species of birds have made the marsh their home. Anyone familiar with the powers and effects of the *Table of Life* may make the connection, but the alkaline water makes a good cover for any naturalist observation of the marshes ecosystem.

DM's Appendix

Markovian Broken One

"Markovian broken one" is a template that can be added to any animal of Small through Large size that has limbs and an internal skeleton (referred to hereafter as the "base animal"). The creature's type changes to "aberration" and its size changes to Medium-size if the animal is Medium or Large and Small if the humanoid is of Small size and the animal Small or Tiny, If there is more than one size difference between subjects the transformation is not possible. A Markovian broken one uses all or some of the base creature's statistics and special abilities depending on the category it belongs to as well as the ability, race and size attributes of the humanoid creature. Humanoid skill racial bonuses apply only when the animal base creature doesn't have them.

Bestial: It retains the standard animal's stats with the Aberration type and its Hit Dice change to 1d12; It looks like a normal animal, aside from a few confused memories and gains special abilities of animal source as well as a +1 to the animal's Intelligence score and either damage reduction 10/magic or frenzy once per day. Frenzy gives it a +2 enchantment bonus to Strength and Constitution and a -2 penalty to Armor Class until it or its opponent is dead. A bestial broken one resembles the animal of origin but is not a natural creature and it cannot be affected by Handle Animal skill checks, only Frantisek Markov can use this skill successfully on them.

Monstrous: When a broken one degenerates it doesn't become Monstrous but becomes bestial after passing the Feral state, Monstrous is the result of an experiment gone wrong. It gains baseline attack types of their animal source, its type changes to Aberration and its Hit Dice change to 1d12 as well. It gains the Improved Natural Attack or Improved Natural Armor Feat but its base animal's mobility is reduced by 10 feet (to a minimum of 10 feet). Its transformation changes the following base animal abilities as follows: Str +4, Dex –2, Con +8, Int +1, Cha -2. A Monstrous Markovian broken one can also select one of the following powers damage reduction 10/magic, frenzy (as mentioned above), Improved Grab (hitting with a slam attack as the broken one has a massive arm or arms), Inhuman Strength (the creature adds +4 to its Strength score) and gains a +2 challenge rating. A monstrous broken one is terrified of fire and must roll a fear check with a -2 penalty whenever is confronted by it. Frantisek Markov can use his Animal Handling skill on monstrous broken ones to issue simple commands (such as attack, stop, sit).

Feral: The animals type changes to Aberration, it gains one Hit Dice and its Hit Dice change to 1d12 and its base animal speed is reduced by 10 feet (to a minimum of 20 ft). If the base animal does not have a normal land speed (i.e. it only has a burrow, climb, fly, and/or swim speed), it gains a land speed of 20 ft. If the base animal has a burrow, climb, or swim speed, that speed is changed to half its normal value. If the base animal has a fly speed, it loses that form of movement.

A feral broken one retains the natural attacks of the base animal, though the damage dealt by those attacks may be changed. Additionally, the broken one may now wield weapons and tools as a humanoid would.

A Feral broken one that attacks with its natural weapons and wielded weapons in the same round suffers the normal –5 penalty, as if the wielded weapon were a secondary natural weapon. This penalty is reduced to –2 if the broken one has the Multiattack feat, which can be taken even if the broken one has less than three natural weapons. Obviously, a broken one that is carrying or wielding items cannot use its claw attacks or certain slam attacks. Broken ones are automatically proficient in the following weapons: dagger, sickle, club, halfspear, quarterstaff, shortspear, dart, sling, javelin, throwing axe, handaxe, greatclub, and shortbow.

The base damage dealt by a feral broken one's natural weapons remains the same as the base creatures.

Face/Reach: Changes to 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: The feral broken one retains any special attacks possessed by the base animal.

Special Qualities: The feral broken one retains any special qualities possessed by the base animal, and also gains those listed below.

Fast Healing (Su): Broken ones have fast healing 1.

A Feral Markovian broken ones abilities increase from the base animal as follows: Str +4, Dex –2, Con +8, Int +4, Cha +4.

Skills: Feral broken ones are illiterate but receive an extra skill point plus Intelligence modifier for each Hit Die due to the awakening of their sentient minds. Any skills listed in the base animal's statistics may be purchased as class skills with these extra skill points. The following skills may also be purchased as class skills if they are not already listed in the base animal's entry: Animal Empathy, Balance, Climb, Craft, Handle Animal, Heal, Hide, Intimidate, Jump, Knowledge (nature), Listen, Move Silently, Spot, Swim. All other skills are considered cross-class skills of the purpose of spending these extra skill points. If the broken one later advances in a character class, its purchases skills as a normal character of that class would.

Feats: Broken ones gain the Alertness, Endurance, and Improved Initiative feats if they do not already possess them.

Climate/Terrain: Warm forest, hills, and mountains Organization: Solitary, pair, gang (3–6), band (7–12 plus 1 petty chief of 2nd-4th level), or tribe (20–30 plus 2 petty chiefs of 2nd-4th level and 1 chief of 5th-7th level)

Challenge Rating: As the base animal +1

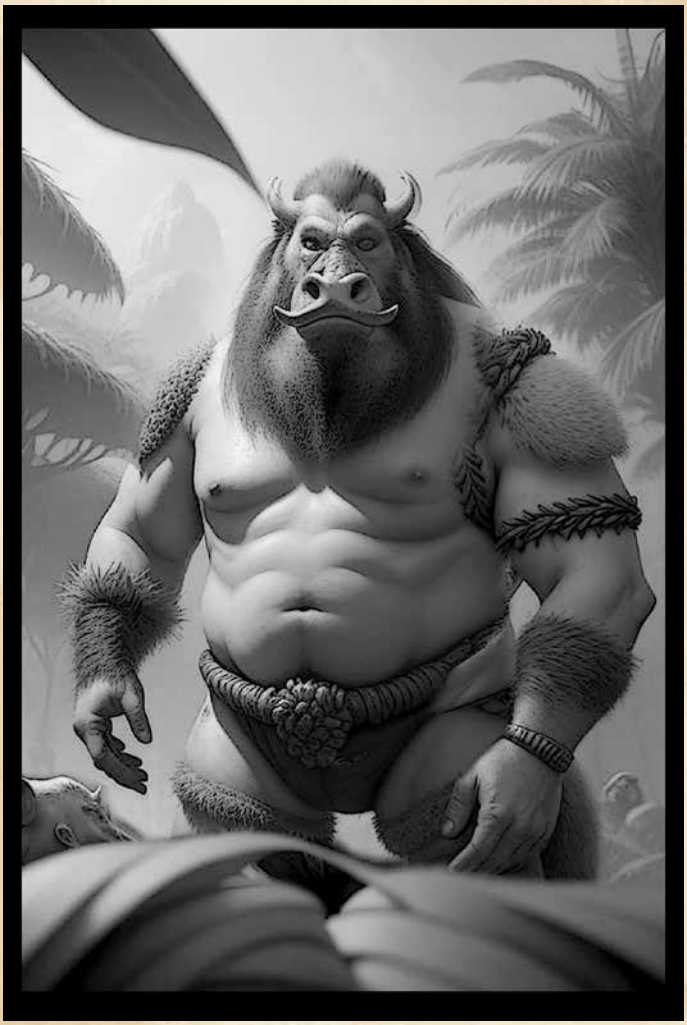
Treasure: No coins; 50% goods (no metal objects); 50% items (no metal objects)

Alignment: Usually neutral evil

Advancement: By character class

They are fearful of fire and will not approach anyone holding a torch against them unless they succeed on a fear check.

Tamed: As above but with a speed of 30 feet, half-strength natural and special animal attacks and their ability score change from the base creature as follows: Str +3, Dex –2, Con +8, Int +6, Cha +5. Tamed broken ones are illiterate but receive 2 skill points plus Intelligence modifier for each Hit Die due to the awakening of their sentient minds. Any skills listed in the base animal's statistics may be purchased as class skills with these extra skill points. The following skills may also be purchased as class skills if they are not already listed in the base animal's entry: Animal Empathy, Balance, Climb, Craft, Handle Animal, Heal, Hide, Intimidate, Jump, Knowledge (nature), Listen, Move Silently, Spot, Swim, and Wilderness Lore. All other skills are considered cross-class skills of the purpose of spending these extra skill points. If the broken one later advances in a character class, its purchases skills as a normal character of that class would. They also gain the Alertness, Endur-



ance and Improved Initiative feats if they do not already possess them.
Tamed broken ones make a successful Will save each time they are presented with something that arouses their animal instincts (smell of blood, thrill of the hunt, sex drive) or succumb to them becoming bestial for 2d4 rounds until they can gain their composure once more.
To understand their peculiar dialect and speech patterns a character must know Balok and succeed on an Intelligence check per encounter.

Domesticated: These broken ones have the same stats as the template above except that they have a speed of 30 feet, they retain their natural attacks and animal feats but they are halved and lose any special attacks based on their animal of origin. Their ability scores change from their base creature as follows: Str +2, Dex -2, Con +8, Int +8, Cha +6. They speak Balok fluently and no check is needed to communicate with a Domesticated broken one but are illiterate. They receive 12 extra skills due to their highly sentient minds and gain the Alertness and Endurance feats if they do not already possess them plus another feat of their choosing. They gain fast healing 1 but their challenge rating does not change.

Civilized: The Civilized or Greater Broken Ones are indistinguishable from humans, physically but their type changes to Aberration type, their Hit Dice increase by 2 to their animal of origin stats and change to 1d12, they also gain Fast healing 2. Reading their thoughts does not require a Madness save and have fast healing 2. Their ability scores change from their base creature as follows: Str +2, Dex 0, Con +8, Int +10, Cha +10
They can read and write Balok and gain 8 extra skill points plus one extra skill point plus Intelligence modifier for each Hit Die due to their high sentience and Dr. Markov's tutoring. They retain their animal feats and gain the Endurance feats if they do not already possess it as well as an extra feat. Their alignment varies and they advance by character class as humans do.



Delphi

Devolved Greater Markovian Broken One (Dolphin, Bestial)
Male Medium Aberration: CR 1/2; Medium (6ft. tall); HD 2d12+; hp ; Init +2 (Dex +2); Spd swim 80ft.; AC 13 (+2 Dex, +1 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 11; Base Atk/Grapple: +3; Atk melee +3 (1d4+1 slam); Full Atk melee +3 (1d4+1 slam); Face/Reach 5ft by 5ft./5ft. SA none; SQ blindsight 120ft., damage reduction 10/magic, fast healing 1, hold breath, low-light vision; LN; SV Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +1;
Str 1, Dex 15, Con 13, Int 13, Wis 13, Cha 8

Skills: Jump +10, Listen +9, Spot +9; Swim +13 (+8 racial modifier),

Feats: Alertness, Endurance, Weapon Finesse

Languages: Dolphin

Signature Possessions:

Description: Delphi looks like a regular playful dolphin she is not aggressive just confused. If Frantisek Markov ever catches her he will recognize her from a particular white circled birthmark on her blowhole.



Skæg

Markovian Broken One (Walrus, Monstrous)
Male Large Aberration: CR 5; Large (12ft. long); HD 9d12+63; hp 121; Init -1 (Dex -1); Spd 10 ft. swim 30ft.; AC 13 (-1 size, -2 Dex, +7 natural), touch 7, flat-footed 15; Base Atk/Grapple: +6/+13; Atk bite +7 melee (1d8+8); Full Atk bite +7 melee (1d8+8); Face/Reach 10ft/5ft. SA none; SQ damage reduction 10/magic, hold breath, Inhuman Strength, low-light vision; NE; SV Fort +9, Ref +2, Will +2;
Str 26, Dex 7, Con 20, Int 3, Wis 1, Cha 4

Skills: Listen +7, Spot +7, Swim +15 (+8 racial bonus)

Feats: Alertness, Endurance, Improved Natural Armor x2, Improved Natural Attack

Hold Breath (Ex) Skaeg can hold his breath for 120 rounds

Description: Skæg looks like a massive overweight though a bit malformed walrus with long deadly tusks. The distinct characteristic of this beastman except its enormous size I that his frontal flippers are look more like human webbed hands, he cannot use his hands to do anything else than swim and walk.

Gorg

Markovian Broken One (Elephant, Feral)
Male Large Aberration: CR 8; Large (15ft. tall); HD 11d12+66; hp 146; Init +3 (Dex -1, Improved Initiative +4); Spd 30ft.; AC 15 (-1 size, Dex +7 natural), touch 11, flat-footed 10; Base Atk/Grapple: +8/+28; Atk gore +20 melee (2d8+17); Full Atk slam +20 melee (2d6+12), 2 stamps + 15 melee (2d6+6), or gore +20 melee (2d8+17); Face/Reach 10ft./10ft. SA trample 2d6+18; SQ fast healing 1, low-light vision, scent, illiterate; N; SV Fort +12, Ref +7, Will +6;
Str 34, Dex 8, Con 23, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 11

Skills: Intimidate +6, Listen +12, Spot +10, Swim +17

Feats: Alertness, Endurance, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Skill Focus (Listen)

Languages: Balok (pidgin)

Signature Possessions: *Shackles of Pain*

Description: Gorg is the largest beastman Frantisek Markov has ever created (by merging an shipwrecked ogre and an elephant brought from Sri Raji) reaching the height of ten feet. He is extremely strong though large belly, fat pillar-like legs and



arms hide his muscles. He has the head of an elephant with large ear flaps, a large trunk and tusks and his skin is tough and grey as an elephants.

Combat

Trample (Ex): Gorg can use a full-round action to trample opponents, to do this he has to be able to a move up to twice his speed and literally run over any opponents at least one size category smaller than himself. Gorg merely has to move over the opponents in its path; any creature whose space is completely covered by the trampling Gorg's space is subject to the trample attack. If a target's space is larger than 5 feet, it is only considered trampled if Gorg moves over all the squares it occupies. If Gorg moves over only some of a target's space, the target can make an attack of opportunity against the trampling creature at a -4 penalty. If Gorg accidentally ends his movement in an illegal space returns to the last legal position he occupied, or the closest legal position, if there's a legal position that's closer. The save against Gorg's trample attack is Reflex half DC 27. The save is Strength based.

Shackles of Pain

These magical metal restrains made of a mysterious black metal full with evil runes on their surface, are consisted of one pair of manacles to confine the subject's legs connected with a chain made of the same material to a pair that restrains the hands. They do not come in various sizes but rather magically change to confine a creature of any size. These shackles can be opened only by using a magical black key with its bow in the shape of a rune of pain. When the wielder of their key speaks the command word the subject suffers the effects of a *symbol of pain* spell without any negating saving throw allowed, the range from where this power can be invoked is based on vision. When the power of the shackles is invoked the runes embossed in the shackles are illuminated by a faint pulsing red light.

Strong necromancy, faint transmutation; CL 9th; Craft Wondrous Item, *Enlarge*, *Permanency, Shrink item, Symbol of Pain*; Price 20,000 gp



Chaton

Markovian Broken One (Lion Seal, Tamed), Spirit Shaman3/Druid1

Male Medium Aberration: CR 5; Medium (6ft. tall); HD 3d12+15 +3d8 +15 +1d8+5 ; hp 70; Init +4 (Improved Initiative); Spd 30ft.; AC 13 (+3 natural) , touch 10, flat-footed 13; Base Atk/Grapple: +4/+11; Atk bite +11 melee (1d3+3) or by weapon +10 (damage +6) ; Full Atk bite +11 melee (1d3+3); Face/Reach 5ft by 5ft./5ft. SA none; SQ animal companion, chastise spirits, detect spirits, fast healing 1, hold breath, low-light vision, nature sense, scent, spirit guide, wild empathy, illiterate; N; SV Fort +11, Ref +1, Will +6;
Str 20, Dex 11, Con 20, Int 8, Wis 14, Cha 11

Skills: Concentration +6, Heal +6 , Diplomacy +5 , Listen +7, Spot +7, Swim +11, Survival +10, Knowledge (nature) +7

Feats: Alertness, Brew Potion, Endurance, Improved Counter Spell, Improved Initiative, Weapon Focus (bite)

Spirit Shaman spells per day (DC 10+ spell's level) 4+1/4+1/2+1

Shaman (Druid) spells retrieved by day 3/2/1
Favorite spells: *detect poison*, *purify food and drink*, *guidance*; *calm animals*, *speak with animals*; *delay poison*

Druid spells per day (DC 12+ spell's level) 3/1+1
Favorite spells: *create water, cure minor wounds*, *light; detect snares and* pits, *entangle*

Languages: Balok

Signature Possessions: Holy symbol of the Seal Maiden made by washed out twigs and seaweed.

Description: Chaton looks like a tall man with the smooth skin and face of a lion seal with long whiskers. Though he is very sympathetic when he talks his mouth shows his blackened by bacteria sharp teeth, when he eats he usually eats his food whole as his teeth are designed for grasping and tearing it than eating.

Combat

Wild Empathy (Ex): Chaton can improve the attitude of an animal. This ability functions just like a Diplomacy check made to improve the attitude of a person. Chaton rolls 1d20 with a +1 modifier to determine the wild empathy check result.The typical domestic animal has a starting attitude of indifferent, while wild animals are usually unfriendly. To use wild empathy, the druid and the animal must be able to study each other, which means that they must be within 30 feet of one another under normal conditions. Generally, influencing an animal in this way takes 1 minute but, as with influencing people, it might take more or less time.Chaton can also use this ability to influence a Beastial Markovian Broken One but he takes a -4 penalty on the check.

Spirit Guide (Ex): Dolphin, (Intelligence, resourcefulness)

Chastise Spirit (Su): Chaton can use the divine energy of the Sea Maiden to damage hostile spirits. Chastising spirits is a standart action that deals 3d6 damage to all spirits within 30 feet of Chaton. The affected spirits get a Will save (DC 13) for half damage. When using this ability against incorporeal creatures he does not have to roll a 0% chance to miss, the effect hits the spirit automatically. Chaton can use this ability 3 times per day.

Detect Spirit (Su): Chaton's spirit guide perceives nearby spirits. Chaton can use this power at will as a spell-like ability. It functions just like detect undead, except it detects only those creatures that are considered spirits (geists, ghosts, wraiths, spectres etc.)



Capra

Markovian Broken One (Goat, Domesticated)
Male Medium Aberration: CR 1; Medium (6ft. tall); HD 1d12+4; hp 12; Init +0; Spd 30ft.; AC 10, touch 10, flat-footed 10; Base Atk/Grapple: +0/+1; Atk melee +0 or weapon +0 (pitchfork); Full Atk ram +1 (1d2+1) melee weapon +2 (pitchfork 1d8+2); Face/Reach 5ft by 5ft./5ft. SA none; SQ fast healing 1, low-light vision, illiterate; LE; SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +0;
Str 14, Dex 10, Con 19, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 11
Skills: Climb +8, Jump +12, Spot +6, Listen +4, Profession (Farming) +4

Feats: Alertness, Endurance, Spirited Charge (can use it without a mount) +1

Languages: Balok

Signature Possessions: pitchfork

Description: When Capra is encountered for the first time he looks like a small horned satyr with white hair covering his face and body. He has black mutton chops and eyebrows and a long white goatee the only thing that makes him differentiates from the sylvan creatures are his human legs, although they are hairy, with his feet though small resemble those of a halfling.



Vern

Greater Markovian Broken One (Mastiff, Civilized), Fighter 3

Male Medium Aberration: CR 5; Medium (7ft. tall); HD 4d12+24 +3d10+18; hp 78; Init +6 (Dex +2, Improved Initiative +4); Spd 30ft.; AC 12 (+2 Dex) , touch 12, flat-footed 10; Base Atk/Grapple: +4/+7; Atk melee +4 melee or +5 (1d8+3, longsword); Full Atk+4 melee or +5 (1d8+3, longsword); Face/Reach 5ft by 5ft./5ft. SA none; SQ fast healing 2; LE; SV Fort +12, Ref +5, Will +2;

Str 17, Dex 15, Con 23, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 16

Skills: Intimidate +10, Jump +11, Listen +7, Spot +7, Swim +6, Survival +6

Feats: Alertness, Dodge, Endurance, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Power Attack, Track, Spring Attack, Weapon Focus (longsword)

Languages: Balok (pidgin)

Signature Possessions: *long sword +1* , plate mail

Description: Vern is a muscular man with dark grey black hair on the sides and a wrinkled face with a strong jawline, covered by a greyish beard and black mustache. His eyes are relatively small for his face but fierce and confident. He is utterly loyal to Frantisek Markov and will follow any instruction he is given. He usually dresses in a men's court dress including a velvet coat and waistcoat as well as a ruffled shirt, velvet pants and silk stockings tucked inside leather shoes with silver buckles. He has an air of aristocracy on him as he walks proudly and expects to be respected both by beastmen and humans as the right hand of Frantisek Markov.





Ursula

Greater Markovian Broken One (Brown Bear, Civilized), Fighter 1

Female Medium Aberration: CR 8; Medium (7ft. tall); HD 8d12+48+ 1d10+8; hp 130; Init +1 (+1 Dex); Spd 30ft.; AC 11 (+1 Dex), touch 11, flat-footed 10; Base Atk/Grapple: +6/+19; Atk melee +17 (Greatsword +2 1d10+11); Full Atk melee +17, (long sword 1d8+11); Face/Reach 5ft by 5ft./5ft. SA none; SQ fast healing 2, intuition, resolve; LE; SV Fort +15, Ref +5, Will +5;
Str 29, Dex 13, Con 27, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 16

Skills: Climb +4, Listen +4, Spot +7, Swim +12, Gather Information +2, Sense Motive +6, intimidate + 12, Hide + 6, Move Silently +6

Feats: Alertness, Endurance, Run, Track, Power Attack, Cleave, Great Cleave

Languages: Balok

Signature Possessions: *Greatsword +2*

Description: Ursula is a massive woman with broad shoulders, strong arms and big breasts, she is more hairy than most women with thick brown hair visible on her arms and legs as well as excessive facial hair and thick eyebrows. The most distinctive feature on her is her left eye which is missing, leaving behind an empty eye socket, a present from Akanga when she confronted him a few years ago. Ursula dreams of the time when she will catch Akanga and take off both his eyes. She usually dresses up in simple pants and a shirt with a scabbard belt hanging from her shoulder where her greatsword is seathed.



Percy & Priscilla

Greater Markovian Broken Ones (Racoons, Civilized), Exp 3

Male and Female Medium Aberrations: CR 2; Small (4ft. tall); HD 2d12+12+3d6+18; hp 21; Init +5 (Dex +5); Spd 20ft.; AC 16 (+5 Dex, +1 size) , touch 16, flat-footed 11; Base Atk/Grapple: +4/+; Atk melee +4; Full Atk +4; Face/Reach 5ft by 5ft./5ft. SA none; SQ fast healing 2; LN; SV Fort +11, Ref +11, Will +6;
Str 10, Dex 21, Con 20, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 15

Percy's Skills: Climb +2, Hide +11, Listen +6, Move Silently +15, Spot +5, Swim +3, Jump +2, Craft (alchemy) +12, Craft (fleshcrafting)+3, Craft (clockmaking) +6, Craft (woodworking) +12, Handle Animal +5, Heal +4, Knowledge (nature) +10, Knowledge (monster lore [aberration]) +3, Profession (herbalist) +7, Concentration +6

Percy's Feats: Alertness, Endurance, Skill Focus (Knowledge [anatomy]), Skill Focus (Knowledge [alchemy]), Skill Focus (Knowledge [nature])

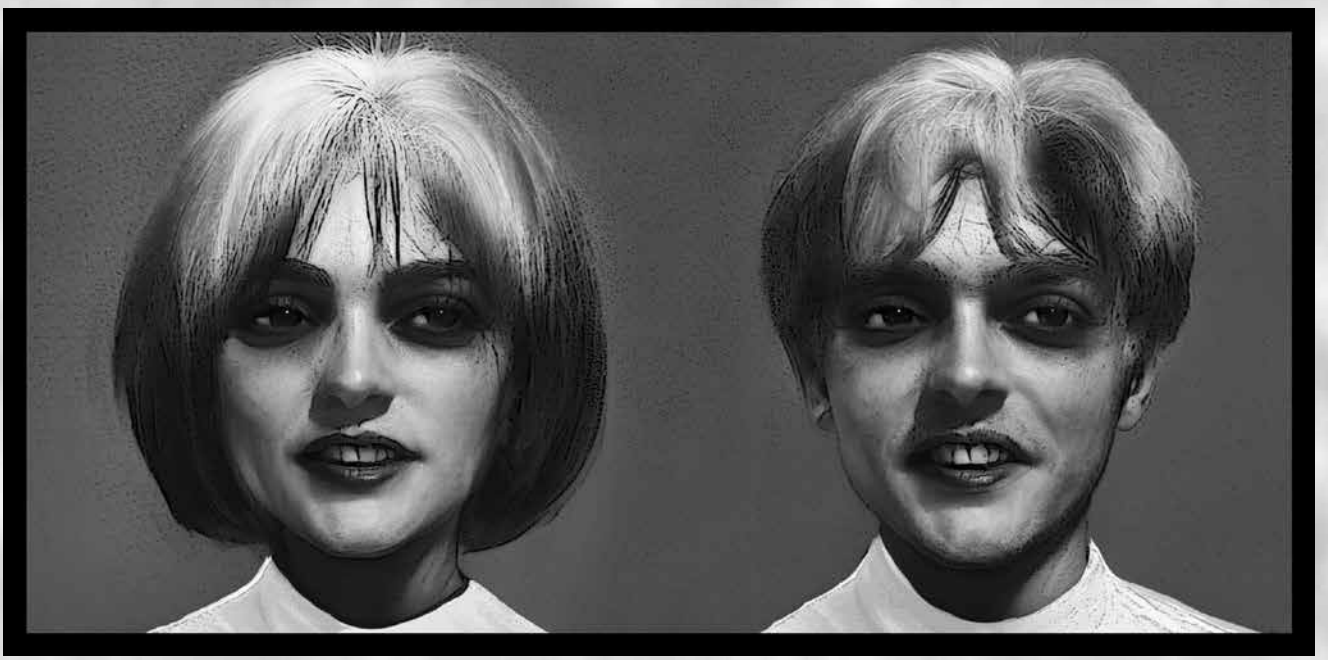
Priscilla's Skills: Climb +2, Hide +11, Listen +6, Move Silently +15, Spot +5, Swim +3, Jump +2, Craft (alchemy) +7, Craft (fleshcrafting) +10, Craft (clockmaking) +12, Handle Animal +5, Heal +12, Knowledge (nature) +3, Knowledge (monster lore [aberration]) +3, Profession (herbalist) + 4, Concentration +11,

Priscilla'ss Feats: Alertness, Endurance, Skill Focus (heal), Skill Focus (Craft [fleshcrafting]), Skill Focus (Craft [clockmaking])

Languages: Balok

Signature Possessions: Medical robes,

Description: Percy and Priscilla look like two Halfling sized fraternal identical twins something that is odd on its own, they both have wild bushy grey white hair with a thick black stripe in the middle and thick white eyebrows and black circles around their eyes as if they haven't slept for a while but still oddly being hyper active. Frantisek Markov created these two Broken Ones using a pair of male and female Halfling twins and two raccoons. His purpose was not so much creating perfect specimens for his research in reversing his curse but rather creating nimble handed surgeons that some day will be able to perform the needed flesh-crafting surgery on himself. They are usually dressed in medical robes assisting Dr. Markov in his research, although they are aware of the doctors experiments they are in denial that they are the result of one of them. They are both feel oppressed by Markov, who they fear, to learn the secrets of Markov's surgical procedure and alchemical formula's needed for his operation but they lack knowledge of human anatomy as does Markov and they are doomed to fail. Also they are more interested in creating mechanical objects than the gory art of fleshcrafting. They both are talented clockworkers obsessed with creating elaborate cuckoo clocks. The servant's loft of Markov's estate where they all sleep is fool with these wooden clocks though none of them are in operation as both Ursula and Vern have threatened to break them all if even a simple clocking sound disturbs their sleep.



Brethren of the Monastery of the Lost Souls

The Brethren of the Monastery of the Lost Souls is separated between the Intact Brethren who live in the quarters above ground and the Withered Brethren, who live in the honeycombed complex of corridors and chambers dug within the hard stone that the monastary. While the Intact Brethren can pass as living while the Withered Bretren are obviously undead.



The Intact Brethren (Priest)

Ancient Dead (2nd rank mummy), 3rd level cleric

Medium Undead: CR 5; Medium (6ft. tall); HD 3d12; hp 18; Init +1 (Dex +1); Spd 20ft.; AC 19 (+1 Dex, +8 natural) , touch 11, flat-footed 18; Base Atk/Grapple: +4/+; Atk slam + melee (1d6+4 plus disease); Full Atk slam + melee (1d6+4 plus disease); Face/Reach 5ft by 5ft./5ft. SA divine spells, disease (mummy rot), fear, rebuke undead; SQ resistant to blows, damage reduction 5/+1, iron, non magical silver weapons do half damage, turn resistance +2, immunity to cold, undead traits, improved grab, rejuvenation (rank 2); SW fire vulnerability LN; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +7;

Str 20, Dex 13, Con - , Int 11, Wis 18, Cha 14

Skills: Climb +13, Hide +9, Listen +12, Move Silently +9, Spot +23, Concentration +3, Craft (calligraphy, drawing or other) +2, Profession (any) +5, Heal +8, Spellcraft +2, Knowledge (history) +3, Knowledge (religion) +4

Feats: Alertness, Combat Casting, Scribe Scroll

Priest spells per day (DC 14+ spell's level) 4/3+1/2+1

Improved Grab (Ex): When the Intact Brethren deal normal damage with their slam attack they may attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking attacks of opportunity.

Fear (Su): These ancient dead can impose a supernatural fear on those who see them. Those viewing them must make a successful Will save DC 13 or become paralyzed with fear for 2d4 rounds. Those targeted by this power cannot be affected by this fear aura for that day.

Disease (Su): **Smallpox rot:** Contact; DC 15; Incubation 1day; 2 Cha/week; fatality 1d12 weeks After the incubation time the initial symptoms of the disease include fever and vomiting. This is followed by formation of ulcers in the mouth and a skin rash which develops on their skin 24 hours after affliction that turn into mucous membranes as the disease progresses. Typically the macules first appear on the forehead, then rapidly spread to the whole face, proximal portions of extremities, the trunk, and lastly to distal portions of extremities. Over a number of days, the skin rash turns into fluid-filled blisters with a dent in the center, the bumps then scabs over and falls off, leaving scars. Often, those who survived had extensive scarring of their skin.

Rejuvenation (Su): The Brethren of the Lost are capable of drawing Positive Energy Plane to heal damage. This is a relatively slow process and requires the ancient to be inert for a period of time. A member of the Brethren of the Lost has to stay inert for one day for the process to begin in which they heal 6 hit points per hour of rest. After the ancient dead is healed it must stay inert for another one day.



The Intact Brethren (Warrior)

Ancient Dead (2nd rank mummy), 4th level fighter

Medium Undead: CR 6; Medium (6ft. tall); HD 4d12; hp 20; Init +1 (Dex +1, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 20ft.; AC 19 (+1 Dex, +8 natural) , touch 11, flat-footed 18; Base Atk/Grapple: +4/+10; Atk slam +10 melee (1d6+6 plus disease); Full Atk slam +10 melee (1d6+6 plus disease); Face/Reach 5ft by 5ft./5ft. SA divine spells, disease (mummy rot), fear, rebuke undead; SQ resistant to blows, damage reduction 5/+1, iron, non magical silver weapons do half damage, turn resistance +2, immunity to cold, undead traits, improved grab, rejuvenation (rank 2); SW fire vulnerability LN; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +4;

Str 23, Dex 13, Con - , Int 11, Wis 16, Cha 14

Skills: Climb +15, Craft (calligraphy, drawing or other) + 4, Profession (any) +9, Hide +9, Listen +13, Move Silently +9, Spot +17, Gather Information+ 7, Knowledge (history) +1, Knowledge (religion) +1

Feats: Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Power Attack

Improved Grab (Ex): When the Intact Brethren deal normal damage with their slam attack they may attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking attacks of opportunity.

Fear (Su): These ancient dead can impose a supernatural fear on those who see them. Those viewing them must make a successful Will save DC 14 or become paralyzed with fear for 2d4 rounds. Those targeted by this power cannot be affected by this fear aura for that day.

Disease (Su): **Smallpox rot:** Contact; DC 15; Incubation 1day; 2 Cha/week; fatality 1d12 weeks

After the incubation time the initial symptoms of the disease include fever and vomiting. This is followed by formation of ulcers in the mouth and a skin rash which develops on their skin 24 hours after affliction that turn into mucous membranes as the disease progresses. Typically the macules first appear on the forehead, then rapidly spread to the whole face, proximal portions of extremities, the trunk, and lastly to distal portions of extremities. Over a number of days, the skin rash turns into fluid-filled blisters with a dent in the center, the bumps then scabs over and falls off, leaving scars. Often, those who survived had extensive scarring of their skin.

Rejuvenation (Su): The Brethren of the Lost are capable of drawing Positive Energy Plane to heal damage. This is a relatively slow process and requires the ancient to be inert for a period of time. A member of the Brethren of the Lost has to stay inert for one day for the process to begin in which they heal 6 hit points per hour of rest. After the ancient dead is healed it must stay inert for another one day.





The Withered Brethren (Seeker)

Ancient Dead (2nd rank mummy), 5th level cleric/ 1st level Guardian Seeker

Medium Undead: CR 8; Medium (6ft. tall); HD 5d12+1d6; hp 26; Init +1 (Dex +1); Spd 20ft.; AC 19 (+1 Dex, +8 natural) , touch 11, flat-footed 18; Base Atk/Grapple: +2/+; Atk slam + melee1d6+5 plus disease); Full Atk slam + melee1d6+5 plus disease); Face/Reach 5ft by 5ft./5ft. SA divine spells, disease (mummy rot), fear, rebuke undead; SQ resistant to blows, damage reduction 5/+1, iron, non magical silver weapons do half damage, turn resistance +2, immunity to cold, undead traits, improved grab, rejuvenation (rank 2); SW fire vulnerability LN; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +11;
Str 20, Dex 12, Con -, Int 14, Wis 20, Cha 16

Skills: Climb +13, Hide +9, Listen +13, Move Silently +9, Spot +13, Diplomacy +6, Knowledge (arcana) +10, Knowledge (history) + 7, Knowledge (religion) + 7, Search +6, Spellcraft +8, Profession (any) + 6, Craft (calligraphy, drawing or other) + 4, Concentration +6

Feats: Alertness, Iron Will, Spell Focus (Divination)

Priest spells per day (DC 15+ spell's level) 5/5+1/4+1/3+1

Improved Grab (Ex): When the Withered Brethren deal normal damage with their slam attack they may attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking attacks of opportunity.

Fear (Su): These ancient dead can impose a supernatural fear on those who see them. Those viewing them must make a successful Will save DC 15 or become paralyzed with fear for 2d4 rounds. Those targeted by this power cannot be affected by this fear aura for that day.

Disease (Su): Smallpox rot: Contact; DC 15; Incubation 1day; 2 Cha/week; fatality 1d12 weeks After the incubation time the initial symptoms of the disease include fever and vomiting. This is followed by formation of ulcers in the mouth and a skin rash which develops on their skin 24 hours after affliction that turn into mucous membranes as the disease progresses. Typically the macules first appear on the forehead, then rapidly spread to the whole face, proximal portions of extremities, the trunk, and lastly to distal portions of extremities. Over a number of days, the skin rash turns into fluid-filled blisters with a dent in the center, the bumps then scabs over and falls off, leaving scars. Often, those who survived had extensive scarring of their skin.

Rejuvenation (Su): The Brethren of the Lost are capable of drawing Positive Energy Plane to heal damage. This is a relatively slow process and requires the ancient to be inert for a period of time. A member of the Brethren of the Lost has to stay inert for one day for the process to begin in which they heal 6 hit points per hour of rest. After the ancient dead is healed it must stay inert for another one day.

Forbidden Lore (Ex): As Guardian Seekers these ancient dead are always alert for lore pertaining to evil items. Seekers can make a forbidden lore check with a +3 bonus to see if they know something on a particular object. The object in question must be evil, intelligent magical item or artifact that requires a powers check to bear or use. This ability is similar to bardic knowledge.

The Stain of Evil (Ex): Seekers can recognize magical items of great evil just by looking at them. In the view of an item that requires a powers check to bear or use the ancient dead

may make a Spellcraft check (DC equal to caster's level). If it is successful the Guardian instantly becomes aware of the item's corrupt nature, knowing that the object "holds great evil" and nothing else.



The Withered Brethren (Warrior)

Ancient Dead (2nd rank mummy), 4th level fighter

Medium Undead: CR 7; Medium (6ft. tall); HD 5d12; hp 22; Init +5 (Dex +1, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 20ft.; AC 19 (+1 Dex, +8 natural) , touch 11, flat-footed 18; Base Atk/Grapple: +4/+10; Atk slam +10 melee1d6+ 6plus disease); Full Atk slam + 10 melee1d6+6 plus disease); Face/Reach 5ft by 5ft./5ft. SA divine spells, disease (mummy rot), fear, rebuke undead; SQ resistant to blows, damage reduction 5/+1, iron, non magical silver weapons do half damage, turn resistance +2, immunity to cold, undead traits, improved grab, rejuvenation (rank 2); SW fire vulnerability LN; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +5;
Str 23, Dex 12, Con -, Int 12, Wis 18, Cha 16

Skills: Climb +14, Craft (calligraphy, drawing or other) + 5, Profession (any) +8, Hide +9, Listen +13, Move Silently +9, Spot +16, Gather Information+ 5, Knowledge (history) +1, Knowledge (religion) +1

Feats: Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Power Attack

Improved Grab (Ex): When the Withered Brethren deal normal damage with their slam attack they may attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking attacks of opportunity.

Fear (Su): These ancient dead can impose a supernatural fear on those who see them. Those viewing them must make a successful Will save DC 15 or become paralyzed with fear for 2d4 rounds. Those targeted by this power cannot be affected by this fear aura for that day.

Disease (Su): **Smallpox rot:** Contact; DC 15; Incubation 1day; 2 Cha/week; fatality 1d12 weeks
After the incubation time the initial symptoms of the disease include fever and vomiting. This is followed by formation of ulcers in the mouth and a skin rash which develops on their skin 24 hours after affliction that turn into mucous membranes as the disease progresses. Typically the macules first appear on the forehead, then rapidly spread to the whole face, proximal portions of extremities, the trunk, and lastly to distal portions of extremities. Over a number of days, the skin rash turns into fluid-filled blisters with a dent in the center, the bumps then scabs over and falls off, leaving scars. Often, those who survived had extensive scarring of their skin.

Rejuvenation (Su): The Brethren of the Lost are capable of drawing Positive Energy Plane to heal damage. This is a relatively slow process and requires the ancient to be inert for a period of time. A member of the Brethren of the Lost has to stay inert for one day for the process to begin in which they heal 6 hit points per hour of rest. After the ancient dead is healed it must stay inert for another one day.

The Soul Kraken

Unique Magical Beast (Aquatic, Mist)
Gargantuan Magical Beast: CR 15; Medium (6ft. tall); HD 20d10+180; hp 290 (arms 10, tentacles 20); Init +4; Spd 20ft.(swim), jet 280ft. (straight line); AC 20, touch 6, flat-footed 20 (–4 size, +14 natural); Base Atk/Grapple:+20/+44 ; Atk Tentacle +28 melee (2d8+12/19–20); Full Atk 2 tentacles +28 melee (2d8+12/19–20) and 8 arms +23 melee (1d6+6) and bite +23 melee (4d6+6) ; Face/Reach 20 ft./15 ft. (60 ft. with tentacle, 30 ft. with arm) SA Head snatch, improved grab, constrict (2d8+12 or 1d6+6), soul puppets, cold resistance 10, electricity resistance 10; SQ Darkvision 60 ft, low-light vision, jet, ink cloud, jet, glowing form 1/day, head craving, immunity to mind-affecting effects, immune to altering magic, spell-like abilities, undying; SW Sunlight vulnerability; NE; SV Fort +21, Ref +12, Will +13;
Str 34, Dex 10, Con 29, Int 21, Wis 20, Cha 20

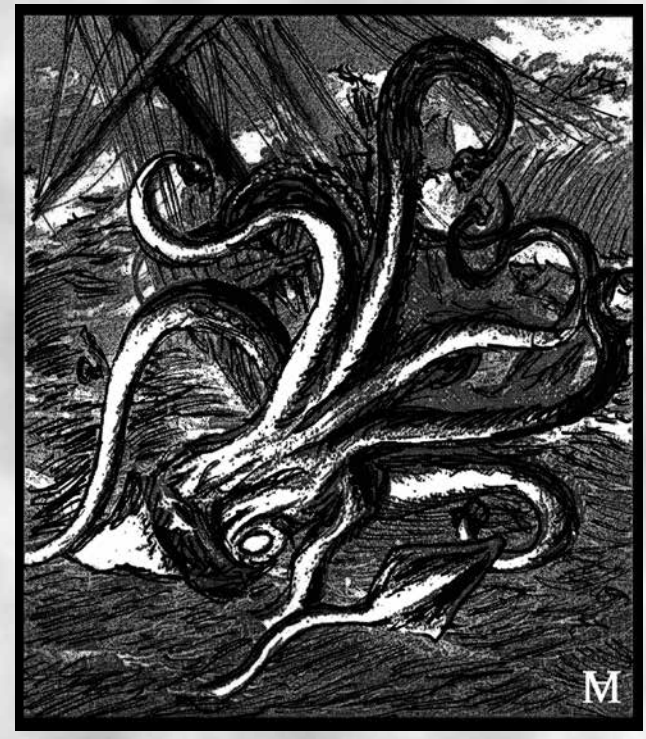
Skills: Listen +30, Spot +30, Concentration +21, Hide +0 (+4), Move Silently +0 (+4) Search +28, Survival +5 (+7 to follow tracks, avoid getting lost, or avoid hazards), Swim +20, Use Magic Device +16, Diplomacy +7, Intimidate +16, Sense Motive +17, Knowledge (geography) +17, Knowledge (nature) +16

The Soul Kraken has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action of 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 moves in a straight line.

Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Combat Expertise, Improved Critical (tentacle), Improved Initiative, Improved Trip, Iron Will, Mist Peering
Languages: Aquan, dead man's tales (see text)

Spell-Like Abilities: 1/day—control weather (7th), control winds (5th), resist energy (2nd). Caster level 9th. The save DC 15 + the spell level.

Description
The Soul Kraken resembles a massive, monstrous squid around 70 feet long. Its clammy flesh is a pale, bluish gray, with a black beak and silvery eyes. Eight of the beast's tentacles



are shorter arms about 30 feet long; the remaining two are nearly sixty feet long and covered with barbs. Each tentacle ends with a large gripping tendril, and the Soul Kraken mounts the heads of its recent prizes at these ends. If it has been a long time since it has fed, it may bare naked skulls at the end of its tentacles. Its beaklike mouth is located where the tentacles meet the lower portion of its body. Although all witnesses of a Soul Kraken's attack describe its most horrifying aspect that of the beasts tentacle ends mounted with the heads of its victims most describe it as a ghostly squidlike creature with a translucent shell mantle and tentacles. This is because of the Soul Krakens glowing form power which makes it almost invincible.

Background
The Soul Kraken of Markovia is a unique creature that emerged from the misty Seas of Sorrows after the Grand Conjunction collapsed and Markovia was transported from the Balinoks and became an island. It is a gift of the Dark Powers to Frantisek Markov to aid him in acquiring humanoid speciments as well as any other thing he could find useful from the wrecked ships that fall victim to the Soul Kraken. The Soul Kraken is a nocturnal creature, being active from dusk till dawn and has claimed the waters around Markovia as its hunting ground attacking any ship that crosses it's path.

Current Sketch

The hunting grounds of the Soul Kraken, meaning the sea around the island of Markovia has acquired an accursed reputation among the mariners of the Sea of Sorrows as a place where ships vanish without trace. Several "ghost ships" have been found drifting without their crews. Many superstitious old salts insist that these doomed crews met their strange fate when they were unlucky enough to encounter the Soul Kraken, although it seems unlikely if one considers the Soul Kraken's strategy. The Soul Kraken is a cunning and cruel creature, it usually uses its magical powers to create storms driving ships onto jutting rocks, before attacking the ship and devouring the crew. Once the Soul Kraken has destroyed all resistance, it smashes a hole in the ship's hull, drags the ship to the seabed, and slips inside to surround itself with its sunken treasures. The Soul Kraken can even roam in relatively shallow waters, even lingering near coral reefs or rocky outcroppings making it a constant nocturnal threat around the island of Markovia. Fortunatelly during the daylight hours, the Soul Kraken tends to slumber inside one of its multiple lairs in underwater caves in the depths around the island of Markovia, or even in the hulls of sunken ships, waiting for the daylight to fade.

The Soul Kraken's most disturbing trait is its habit of ripping the heads off humanoid victims and skewering them on the tips of its writhing limbs. A soul kraken can manipulate these heads like puppets and, so long as flesh clings to their skulls, can scry through their senses and even gain limited access to the corpses' memories. A soul kraken extends its skull-tipped limbs into crippled ships to track down any victims attempting to hide. Sailors who dare speak of soul krakens claim that they eat not just men's flesh but their very souls—thus the name.

The only ship that has survived multiple times an encounter with the Soul Kraken is *Hylende Walross*, the only reason being Captain, Lennard "Seehund" Gaertner's posession of the *Sextant of the Mists*, which makes his ship somehow invisible to the Soul Kraken. The chance that a ship encounters the Soul Kraken depends on the time of day (or night), the density of the Mists and the ship's location, with the waters west of Markovia being the most hazardous as more ships travel that area for thr Soul Kraken to attack.

The Soul Kraken understand Aquan, though it cannot communicate by any means humanoids can understand. Through its dead man's tales ability, The Soul Kraken can also communicate through its *soul puppets*, gaining the ability to understand and speak any language known to a fresh severed head's former owner—usually one or more domain tongues of nearby coastal regions. It uses this power to intimidate its victims.

Combat

The Soul Kraken strikes its opponents with its barbed tentacles, then grab and crush victims with their arms or drag them into their huge jaws. If opponents take cover, the Soul Kraken uses the severed heads mounted on the ends of its limbs to seek out or taunt hiding prey. An opponent can make sunder attempts against a soul kraken's tentacles or arms as if they were weapons. A soul kraken's tentacles have 20 hit points, as its arms have 10 hit points. If a soul kraken is currently grappling a target with one tentacle or arm, it usually uses another limb to make its attack of opportunity against the sunder attempt. Severing a Soul Kraken's tentacle or arm deals damage to the Soul Kraken equal to half the limb's full normal hit points. The Soul Kraken usually withdraws from combat if it loses both tentacles or five of its arms. the Soul Kraken regrows severed limbs in 1d10+10 days.

Head Snatch (Ex): If the Soul Kraken successfully performs a coup de grace against a helpless defender at least one size category smaller than itself (but no smaller than Tiny), then instead of the usual coup de grace result, it forcibly tears the creature's head from its body, instantly killing the creature. If the Soul Kraken has the victim grappled when it performs a head snatch, it can maintain its grapple on both the victim's head and body with a single tentacle or arm if it so desires. Creatures that do not need their heads to survive are not instantly slain, suffering the normal coup de grace effects instead.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, the Soul Kraken must hit a Huge or smaller creature with an arm or tentacle attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking attacks of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can constrict.
If the Soul Kraken simply uses the part of its body it used in the improved grab to hold an opponent, it has a total +24 grapple modifier.
The Soul Kraken has the option to conduct the grapple normally, or simply use the part of its body it used in the improved grab to hold the opponent (an optionthe Soul Kraken often takes while fishing victims out of a crippled ship). If it chooses to do the latter, it takes a –20 penalty on grapple checks (for a total +8 grapple check modifier), but is not considered grappled itself; the Soul Kraken does not lose its Dexterity bonus to AC, still threatens an area, and can use its remaining attacks against other opponents.

Constrict (Ex): The Soul Kraken deals automatic arm or tentacle damage with a successful grapple check.

Soul Puppets (Su and Ex): As a move action, the Soul Kraken can insert the end of a tentacle or arm into the severed head of any Small or Medium animal, humanoid, or monstrous humanoid. The slender tendrils at the end of the Soul Kraken's arms and tentacles wrap themselves around the facial skeleton and pierce the skull, partially fusing themselves to the creature's brain. An attached head grants the Soul Kraken several abilities. If for instance the Soul Kraken attached a sahuagin's or reaver's head to the end of a tentacle, it would use the following statistics attacks with that tentacle's bite attacks: Tentacle bite +23 melee (1d4+6), reach 65 ft.

Dead Man's Eyes (Su): The Soul Kraken gains the ability to use the head's senses as if scrying through an arcane eye. If the head had any extraordinary sensory qualities (such as low-light vision, darkvision, scent, and so on), then that head retains those qualities. Barring other factors, an attached head decays beyond the ability to transmit its senses one week after it is severed.

Dead Man's Teeth (Ex): The Soul Kraken can physically work the head like a puppet. If the creature had a bite attack, then the Soul Kraken can make a bite attack with that arm or tentacle. A bite attack is always considered a secondary attack (taking a –5 penalty on the attack roll), and does not benefit from any feats that apply specifically to the Soul Kraken's tentacle attacks (such as Improved Critical). Use the original creature's base bite damage, plus half of the Soul Kraken's Strength modifier. When used to make a bite attack, that specific tentacle gains an extra 5 feet of reach, since only the very tip of the tentacle needs to reach its target. The head loses all special attack forms (such as poison). The Soul Kraken can alternate between making tentacle rake attacks or bite attacks as it chooses, but the same arm/tentacle cannot make both a bite and a rake attack in the same turn. However, a single tentacle can both constrict and bite a previously grappled foe in its clutches. The Soul Kraken can continue making bite attacks with its attached heads well after the head has been reduced to an algae-tinted skull, so it tends to keep old skulls attached until it can replace them with fresh heads.

Dead Man's Tales (Su): Once it fuses with a brain, the Soul Kraken contacts the lingering imprint of the slain creature's soul as a free action. This ability is similar to speak with dead (caster level 9th), except that the soul kraken only needs the head intact. The head gets a Will save to resist, as normal. On a failed save, the Soul Kraken can ask the head up to four questions (as per the spell), which usually pertain to the capabilities and/or hiding places of the corpse's allies, and gains the ability to understand any language known by the dead creature for as long as the head remains relatively fresh (about a week).

Liquid Darkness (Ex): The Soul Kraken can emit a cloud of jet-black substance in the water with a 80-foot spread once per minute as a free action. The cloud has the same effects as a *darkness* spell providing total concealment, which the soul kraken normally uses to escape a fight that is going badly or the damaging rays of the sun.

Jet (Ex): The Soul Kraken can jet backward once per round as a full-round action, at a speed of 280 feet. It must move in a straight line, but does not provoke attacks of opportunity while jetting.

Head Craving (Ex): The Soul Kraken must make a Will save DC 30 in order to stop itself from fulfilling it's craving for the heads of its victims. A succesful save means that it has mastered its compulsion for one minute. Each additional minute the Soul Kraken resists its Craving increases the save by 2.

Glowing Form (Sp): The Soul Kraken is able to assume a glowing, white form that is slightly translucent once per day, the effect lasts for 90 minutes or until 108 points of damage are absorbed by the power. While in this form, the creature is not incorporeal, but is immune to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage, ability drain, fatigue, exhaustion, energy drain, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, necromantic effects, as well as electrical and fire attacks. If the Soul Kraken is suffering from any of the above effects when it assumes this form, the effects are suppressed until the Soul Kraken returns to its natural state. When assuming this form the Soul Kraken may induce Horror checks from any witnesses.

Mist Peering (Ex): The Soul Kraken can see three times the normal distance in fog or mist. Creatures five feet from any of the Soul Kraken's severed heads with the *dead mans eyes* power in mist or fog are considered to have no concealment. Creatures further away than five feet have concealment, and creatures fifteen feet away have total concealment.

Sunlight Vulnerability (Ex): The light of the sun is anathema for the Soul Kraken so it always attack ships between dusk and dawn. If the Soul Kraken is ever forced to be exposed to direct sunlight it suffers 1d4 points of damage per round until it can dive back into the depths of the Sea of Sorrows or find a place of complete darkness to hide until night. Spells that mimic sunlight, such as *searing light* and *sunbeam*, are also useful against the Soul Kraken having the same effect as true sunlight.

Undying (Su): The Mists do not allow the Soul Kraken to die. If it is vanquished, it simply steps forth from the Mists again on the following night. Even if the creature's body is disintegrated, the creature eventually returns comming forth from the Mists. If the creature's body is watched, it eventually dissipates into harmless vapor befor it reappears again.

Darklord's Pet (Ex): Whenever Frabtisek Markov closes the borders of his domain the Soul Kraken becomes alert, it defies even the harmful rays of the sun seeking and attacking any ship that tries to cross Markovia's borders.

Tactics Round-by-Round
The Soul Kraken attacks without warning, using its long reach to pull an initial round of sailors to their doom. If the remaining survivors hide out of sight, the Soul Kraken uses its soul puppets to hunt them down and say them all before turning the wreckage of their ship into a new lair.

Prior to Combat: The Soul Kraken uses control weather and control winds to drive an unlucky ship onto rocks or reefs, crippling it and possibly even punching holes in the hull. One round before it surfaces to attack, the Soul Kraken will use its glowing form power.

Round 1: The Soul Kraken surfaces adjacent to the ship, possibly grappling the ship itself with an arm. It uses its arms and tentacles to reach onto the upper decks and attack any visible crew, grappling as many as possible.

Round 2: The Soul Kraken constricts any creatures it has grappled, plucks them off the deck, and pulls them underwater to drown them. Any arms or tentacles that have not successfully grappled an opponent continue their attacks on deck. The Soul Kraken begins to bite the ship itself, gnawing through the wooden hull with its beak.

Round 3: The Soul Kraken continues to constrict opponents while holding them underwater. As soon as a victim reaches –1 hit points or otherwise becomes a helpless defender, the soul

kraken uses its head snatch attack. If the remaining crew on board retreat below decks, the Soul Kraken uses any free arms or tentacles to blindly reach inside the ship and grope around for victims (treating hidden foes as if they were invisible). The Soul Kraken alternatively uses its bite to attack the ship or devour decapitated corpses, as appropriate.

Round 4: The Soul Kraken attaches freshly severed heads to its arms and tentacles, then immediately extends them into the ship to attack the remaining crew. The Soul Kraken uses its soul puppets to find and sense foes below decks, negating their total concealment.

Round 5: When the Soul Kraken has claimed at least ten victims, it replaces its rotted soul puppets with fresh heads, and eats the headless bodies, it may continue its attempts to smash the ship's hull and drag it to the bottom.

Soul Kraken Lore
Characters with bardic knowledge or ranks in Knowledge (arcana) and Knowledge (monster lore) may have information about the Soul Kraken. When a character makes a successful skill check, the following lore is revealed, including the information from lower DCs.

DC 10: This massive squid-like creature is the Soul Kraken, easily distinguished by the skulls and rotting heads skewered onto the end of its tentacles. This result reveals all magical beast traits and the aquatic subtype.

DC 15: The Soul Kraken often attacks during sudden storms. It can reach onboard a ship to snatch up sailors with its long tentacles, pulling them down into the water to drown or be devoured. The Soul Kraken devours both the flesh and the spirits of their victims. It sinks ships to use as its lairs.

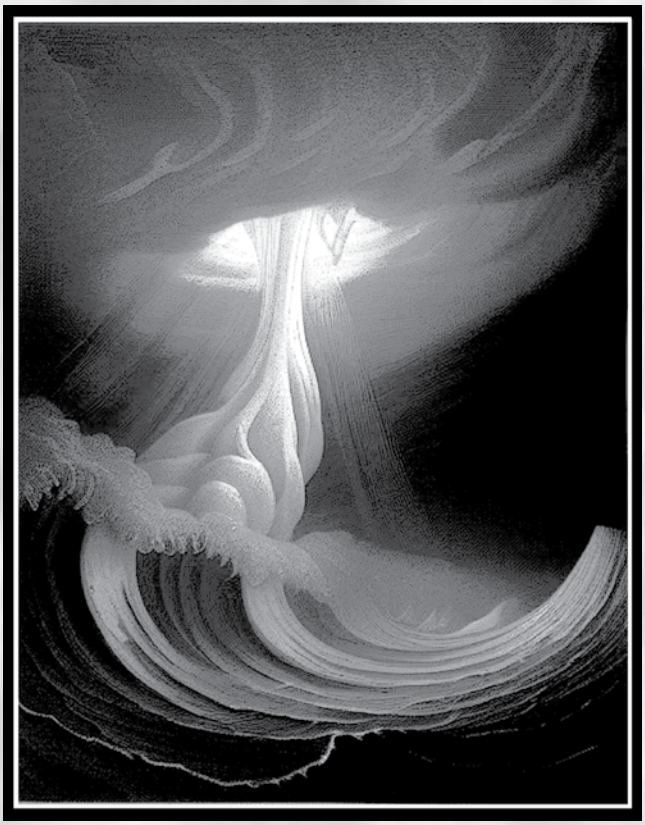
DC 20: If the Soul Kraken gets its clutches on a helpless sailor, it can rip the hapless victim's head off with one violent motion. The Soul Kraken may retreat if its foes manage to sever several of its tentacles. The retreating Soul Kraken can propel itself through the water at high speeds and mask its escape with a cloud of black ink.

DC 25: The Soul Kraken is highly intelligent and can see, hear, and even speak through the rotting heads mounted on the tips of its tentacles. Beware the Soul Kraken with skulls on the end of its tentacles — the beast will want fresher replacements.

DC 30: It's no coincidence that the Soul Kraken attacks during storms. It can control the winds and waves, often driving ships onto rocky shoals just before launching a sudden attack.

DC 40: Although the Soul Kraken has attacked ships during the day, it distastes the sun which is harmful to it.

I created a unique Soul Kraken based on John W. Mangrums template posted on the FoS forum and adding some stuff from Neither Man Nor Beast and VRGtt:Mists.





Portrait of Delphi created by Dr. Frantisek Markov in 749 BC, finished a few days before the *Beastman Rebellion*. It rests on the wall separating the darklords studio from Delphi's old room.

Plant, Devourer Pitcher

Carnivorous Plant

Large Plant: CR 8; Medium (14 ft. tall); HD 8d8+16; hp 52; Init 0; Spd 0 ft. ; AC 16 (+4 natural, -1 size, +3 Improved natural armor), pitcher 17 (+4 natural, +3 Improved natural armor), tendrils 21 (+8 natural, +3 Improved natural armor), touch 10, flat-footed 14, (17), (21); Base Atk/Grapple: +8/+16; Full Atk none; Face/Reach 10 ft./none; SQ plant, camouflage, fire resistance 20, attractive aroma, acidic nectar, improved grab; N; SV Fort +12, Ref +2, Will +4; Environment: warm or temperate forests and marshes; Organization: Solitary; Treasure: none; Adv. Range: - 9-12 (Huge)
Str 18, Dex —, Con 14, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 2

Skills: —

Feats: Improved natural Armor x3

The devourer pitcher plant is a rare but dangerous plant that can be found in some forests, jungles, and swamps. It is a carnivorous plant known for its ability to suddenly devour large animals and even hapless humanoids who wander within its reach. These carnivorous plants which have modified leaves known as pitfall traps—a prey-trapping mechanism featuring a deep cavity filled with digestive liquid. These plants attract their prey with their nectar, when a creature lured to the plant's pitcher cups a lid closes trapping them inside the sticky internal of their cups.

This nectar is actually a powerful acid that can dissolve a human in mere minutes, and the plant's walls are tougher than they appear from the outside. Once trapped within, there is no easy way to escape. Trapped creatures must destroy the plant's pitchers and tear their way out, or be quickly dissolved in the pungent acid. Each plant has as many pitcher's as half its hit dice and each pitcher has 2 HD (extra to the plants hit dice). The tendrils that hold the plant's cups are very thick and strong (AC 20).

These plants are prone to overeating, but any excess nutrients that the plant can't store or use are pumped back into the ground around it to nourish other plants. The surrounding plants help to conceal the pitcher, and lusher plants not only conceal better, but attract larger beasts that the pitcher can consume.



Combat

Attractive Aroma (Ex): This giant pitcher plant's nectar emits an sweet aroma that can attract creatures within 60ft. of the plant, to one of its pitfall trap leaves if they fail a DC 14 Fortitude saving throw. Creatures who fail the saving throw are poisoned by the plants aroma and are considered to be charmed, incapacitated, and are forced to use all their movement to get inside one of the plants pitchers. An affected target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. Upon a successful saving throw, creatures are immune to being poisoned in this manner for the next 24 hours.

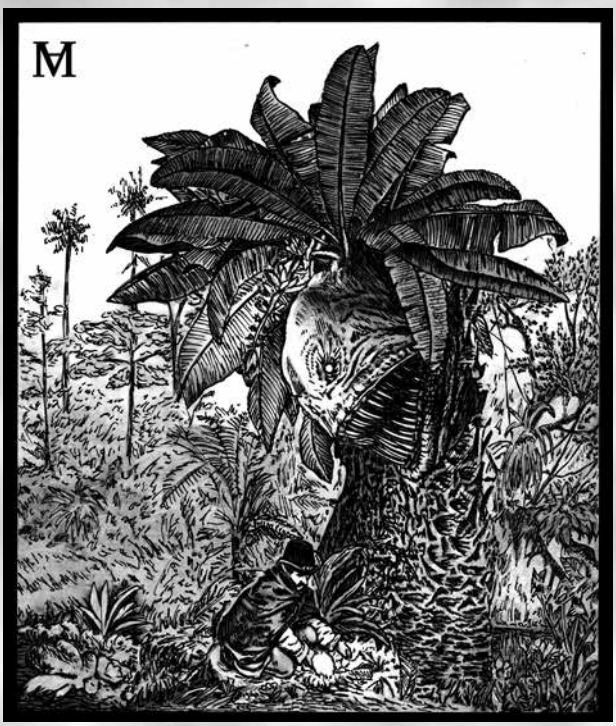
Pitfall Trap (Ex): Any creature trapped inside one the plant's pitfall traps are devoured by the plant's acidic nectar suffering 5d6 acidic damage per round at the start of each of the trapped creature's turns. The trapped creature inside the pitcher cup is blinded, restrained, cannot breathe or speak but has total cover from attacks and other effects outside the plant. Trapped creatures can attack with a –6 circumstance penalty to any action and a –2 penalty to melee damage rolls because of being confined and drowned inside a sticky substance and can only use small or natural piercing or slashing weapons to escape. They can attempt to cast spells requiring only somatic components by making a Concentration check (DC 15 + spell level); if they fail, the spell is lost. A creature can

escape with a successful grapple check then an Escape Artist DC 30 check or by destroying the pitcher. If the plant dies, all the creatures trapped in its pitchers are no longer restrained and must spend 20ft. of movement to exit the plant, prone. Each pitcher can engulf only one creature at a time. Creatures reduced to 0 hit points while devoured are killed. To open the closed lid of a pitcher from the outside a creature or creatures need to make a successful grapple check.

Camouflage (Ex): The pitcher can only be distinguished from an ordinary plant with a successful DC 16 Knowledge (Nature) or Survival check.

Fire Resistance (Ex): The plant's humors give it a resistance 20 to fire.

The acidic nectar of the plant can be gathered with a successful Profession (herbalist) DC 15 and distilled with a Knowledge (alchemy) DC 15 skill check to gather a flask of acid. Each pitcher can produce 5 flasks of acid. Because of the overwhelming effect the scent of their nectar has, some alchemists use it as an ingredient of philters of love. To do so an alchemist would need to do make successful Knowledge (alchemy) DC 25 skill check to distil the nectar as to create the magical philter. A pitcher can produce one dosage of this magical potion.



Plant, Anglerplant

Carnivorous Plant

Huge Plant; CR 10; Huge (20ft. tall); HD 13d8+91; hp 146; Init +8; Spd 5ft. ; AC 22, touch 12, flat-footed 18 (+4 Dex, +10 natural, –2 size; Base Atk/Grapple: +9/+22 ; Atk bite melee +15 (2d6+7 plus grab), vines grapple +22 constrict (1d6+3); Full Atk bite melee +15 (2d6+7 plus grab), 2 vines (grapple) +20, constrict (1d6+3); Face/Reach 15ft. by 15ft./20 ft. or 5ft. SA constrict, engulf, swallow whole; SQ plant, immune mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, polymorph, sleep, stun, resist acid 20, low-light vision, surprise, blindsight 60ft, tremorsense 60 ft. improved grab; N; SV Fort +17, Ref +8, Will +5; Environment: warm forests, temperate swamps; Organization: solitary, pair, or grove (3–6); Treasure: none; Adv. Range: —

Str 25, Dex 18, Con 25, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 6

Skills: Spot 10, Hide +9 (+17 in undergrowth, racial modifier +10)

Feats: Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (bite), Weapon Focus (bite), Multiattack

Known also as "sneaky trunk tree", the giant angler is a hardy plant resembling a palm tree with a thick trunk, that grows in areas with poor soil but abundant animal life and preys on animals, humanoids, and anything else foolish enough to draw too near. The anglerplant's fruit are illuminated dates, looking like amber, that grow on its stem that attract unwary prey close to its trunk before it attacks. The plant's bulbous "head" which makes part of the trees trunk is covered by the plants foliage covering it and thus it can blend in with the surrounding plants. Each anglerplant also has four large vines that it can use to capture prey and lead them to its mouth to feed. The plant's "head" spontaneously attacks anyone who is close enough to pick up its berries, with a bulbous trapping "head" lined with "teeth" that give it a savage appearance resembling an anglerfish. An anglerplant's jaws and stalks are swift-moving, it reaches out and snaps at prey with lightning speed and then digests them by secreting digestive enzymes. The plant itself even has a

modicum of intelligence, and is capable of limited tactical choices, such as knowing when to break off an attack against a powerful foe.

An anglerplant's "bulb" is relatively close to the plant's central mass, it's vines can reach 20 feet and their number is the same as their carnivorous bulbous heads. A set of full-grown giant angler jaws is 10 feet across. A typical giant angler weighs 9,500 pounds.

Combat

Luminous Fruit (Su): The anglerplant's luminous dates hang from a lone clump connested to the plant's stem. They are able to mesmerize and attract prey close to it, to pick up fruit fallen to the ground, treat this as a gaze attack with a 60ft. range. Any creature close enough to be affected hat has cted must to roll a successful DC 14 Will save or be mesmerized by the berries and lured within 5ft of the plant in which case angler plant makes a surprise attack with it's fanged mouth.

Grasping Roots (Ex): A Large or smaller creature within 20ft. can be attacked by the four of the plant's vinelike roots. When an anglerplant makes a grapple attack grappled, restrained, and pulled 20ft. towards the plant. As a bonus action, the angler plant can then swallow whole a creature. The creature usually uses this power when it's luminous berries power fails to attract any prey.

Constrict (Ex): An anglerplant can use each of its roots to crush an opponent, dealing bludgeoning damage, after making a successful grapple check inflicting constriction damage.

Grappling Bite (Ex): When an anglerplant makes a successful bite attack it can try to grapple its opponent as a bonus action with its frightening teeth.

Swallow Whole (Ex): If an anglerplant begins its turn with an opponent held in its mouth,
it can attempt a new grapple check (as though attempting to pin the opponent). If it succeeds, it swallows its prey, whole in its mouth and its jaws close completely around the foe and the opponent is engulfed. The opponent has to be two size categories smaller than the anglerplant to be swallowed whole. A swallowed creature is considered to be grappled, while the angler plant is not. A swallowed creature can try to cut its way free with any light slashing or piercing weapon, by inflicting hit point damage to the bulb or it can just try to escape the grapple. The interior of an anglerplant has an AC 15, if the swallowed creature escapes the grapple, success puts it back in the anglerplant's mouth, where it may be bitten or swallowed again.

Engulf (Ex): When an anglerplant begins its turn having been swallowed it has been engulfed and suffers 2d6+7 points of damage and 2d6 acid damage as the cavity floods with digestive enzymes. The seal formed is airtight, so an engulfed creature risks suffocation. Engulf is a special form of pinning, and an engulfed creature can escape in the same way as he can from being pinned, but since an engulfed creature is contained wholly inside the plant's jaws, the angler plant's victim cannot be targeted by effects or attacks that require line of sight or line of effect. An anglerplant that is grappling or pinning a foe cannot attack other targets with that bite, but is not otherwise hindered.

Rooted Defense (Ex): The anglerplant has advantage on saving throws and ability checks against be pushed, shoved, or knocked prone. This ability is cancelled while the anglerplant uses it's vines to change position. It takes an anglerplant a full turn to root itself back to the soil.

The angler plant's fruit can be harvested as ingredients to create hypnotism potions.



Plant, Sword Grass

Carnivorous Plant

Small Plant: CR 1; Small (1ft. long); HD 1d8+4; hp 8; Init +1; Spd 0ft.; AC 13 (+1 Dex, +2 natural), touch 11, flat-footed 12; Base Atk/Grapple: +0/+4 ; Atk +2 melee (1d4+2); Full Atk 8x +2 melee (1d4+2); Face/Reach ft by 5ft./5ft. SQ camouflage, plant traits; N; SV Fort +6, Ref +1, Will +0 ; Environment Temperate and warm plains, hills and swamps; Organization: Solitary or patch (1-6); Treasure: none; Adv. Range: 2-4 HD (Medium); Str 15, Dex 13, Con 18, Int —, Wis 11, Cha 1

Skills: —

Feats: —

Sword grass grows in clumps of 1-6 green plants, each plant appearing to be similar to lemongrass (1 feet - 6 feet tall) growing up from a central spot on the ground and is easily recognizable from common lemongrass to those who know of its existence as it lacks the scent of lemons. The main stalk of each plant lies 1' under- ground and is treated as 100% concealed against anyone trying to destroy it without first digging it up. Sword grass is not a true grass, but is closely related to ferns and mushrooms. It reproduces by spores, and the plant's "blades" grow from a central underground rhizome. Sword grass is a perennial; the leaf blades die during cold weather, and the root stalk goes dormant, becoming active again in spring. The usual prey for sword grass is small animals, with the plant using blood and decaying bodies to supplement its diet. People may grow plots of sword grass in place of moats or in addition to them; sword grass can also been used to form defensive lines around farms and military bases.

Combat

Bladed Leaves (Ex): The main body of the plant has hit points equal to the total number of bladed leaves it has. Each leaf also has 1 hp, and destroying the leaf blades reduces the amount of damage the plant does by a percentage of leaves destroyed but does not cause the death of the plant. Damage is incurred upon walking through patches of



sword grass. The leaf blades are amazingly strong (AC 13) and extremely sharp; the body is AC 10 (AC 20 underground). Collective damage occurs as the blades slash at whatever passes through them. Damage varies according to the height of the blades (1 foot, 1d4+2, damage; 2 feet-3 feet, 1d6+2 damage; 4 feet-5 feet, 1d8+2 damage; 6 feet, 2d6+2 damage). Blades attack as 1 HD monsters.

Blunt weapons and thrusting weapons do not harm the plant. The blades may be uprooted, with a successful grapple check, but if precautions are not taken to protect one's hands, maximum damage is automatic. The blades may be burned but will grow back at the rate of 6 inches a week.

False Appearance (Ex): While motionless, the sword grass is indistinguishable from a normal plant.

Sword Grass can be used as ingredient for causing wounds potions.

Plant, Dewstalk

Carnivorous Plant

Large Plant: CR 7; Large (14 ft. long); HD 6d8+6; hp 39; Init +3; Spd 5ft. climb 5ft.; AC 16 (natural +4, Dex +3, size -1), touch 12, flat-footed 13; Base Atk/Grapple: +4/+12; Atk: leaf +8 melee (1d6+3 plus grapple); Full Atk 6 leaves +8 melee (1d6+3 plus grapple), constrict damage 1d6+3; Face/Reach 10ft by 10ft./5ft. SA adhesive, constrict SQ plant, healing feeding, fire proof sap, rooted defense, improved grab, tremorsense 60ft., blindsight 60ft.; N; SV Fort +9, Ref +8, Will +5; Environment : warm forest and swamps; Organization: Solitary or 1-2; Treasure: none; Adv. Range: 7-9 size H, 10-12 size G
Str 17, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 1, Wis 10, Cha 1

Skills: Spot +4, Hide +7 (+17 in undergrowth, racial modifier +10)

Feats: Improved Grab, Weapon Focus (leaves), Weapon Focus (grapple)

Dewstalk plants produce strap-like leaves, up to 10 feet long which, are covered in brightly colored tentacles which secrete a sticky mucilage that traps creatures. The flowers can self-pollinate upon closing and produce copious quantities of very small, spindle-shaped seeds, which are released from the capsules that form when the flowers have died. The plant thrives in full sun locations on nutrient-poor, waterlogged and lime-free soils. Sundews are characterized by the glandular tentacles, topped with sticky secretions, that cover their leaves. The trapping and digestion mechanism usually employs two types of glands: stalked glands that secrete sweet mucilage to attract and ensnare prey and enzymes to digest them, and sessile glands that absorb the resulting nutrient soup. Prey is attracted by the sweet secretions of the peduncular glands. Upon touching these, the prey become entrapped by sticky mucilage which prevents their progress or escape. Eventually, the prey either succumb to death through exhaustion or through asphyxiation as the mucilage envelops them and clogs their spiracles. Death usually occurs within minutes. The plant meanwhile secretes esterase, peroxidase,



phosphatase and protease enzymes. These enzymes dissolve the plant's prey and free the nutrients contained within it. This nutrient mixture is then absorbed through the leaf surfaces to be used by the rest of the plant.

Adhesive Leaves (Ex): Medium or smaller creature in range can be hit by the plant's adhesive vines suffering bludgeoning damage. The dewstalk adheres to anything that it touches its vines, upon a hit, creatures are considered grappled and restrained. A Medium or smaller creature that is adhered to the dewstalk is considered grappled and restrained. A creature can escape by making a successful Strength check DC 19 or escape artist DC 23. Anyone who makes an unsuccessful melee attack against a dewstalk must succeed on a DC 14 Reflex save, or the attacker's weapon sticks to the sticky leaf and is yanked out of the wielder's grasp. Creatures using natural weapons are automatically grappled if they get stuck. Pulling a stuck weapon or limb from the leaves requires a DC 20 Strength check. A dewstalk plant has one leaf per Hit Die and each leaf has 11 hit points. Damage inflicted on the leaves will not damage the body of the plant. Attacks on a constricting leaf holding prey inflict half the damage on the prey being constricted and half on the leaf itself.

Improved Grab (Ex): As other sundew plants the dewstalk is able to move its tentacles in response to contact with edible prey. The tentacles are extremely sensitive and will bend toward the center of the leaf to bring its prey into contact with as many stalked glands as possible.

Constrict (Ex): Any Medium or smaller creature that is adhered to the plant's leaves must roll a grapple check the following round or become constricted by the massive sticky leaf. If the dewstalk plant is successful it begins to crush an opponent, dealing bludgeoning damage, after making a successful grapple check inflicting constriction damage. A creature must roll a successful grapple check DC 23 or escape artist DC 25.

Healing Feeding (Ex): While constricted by the dewstalk, creatures take 4d6 acid damage. The dewstalk regains hit points equal to half the damage dealt as it feeds from its prey's humors.

Fire Proof Sap (Ex): The dewstalk cannot be set aflame and upon succeeding a saving throw against an effect that deals fire damage, it takes no damage, if it fails it takes half damage instead.

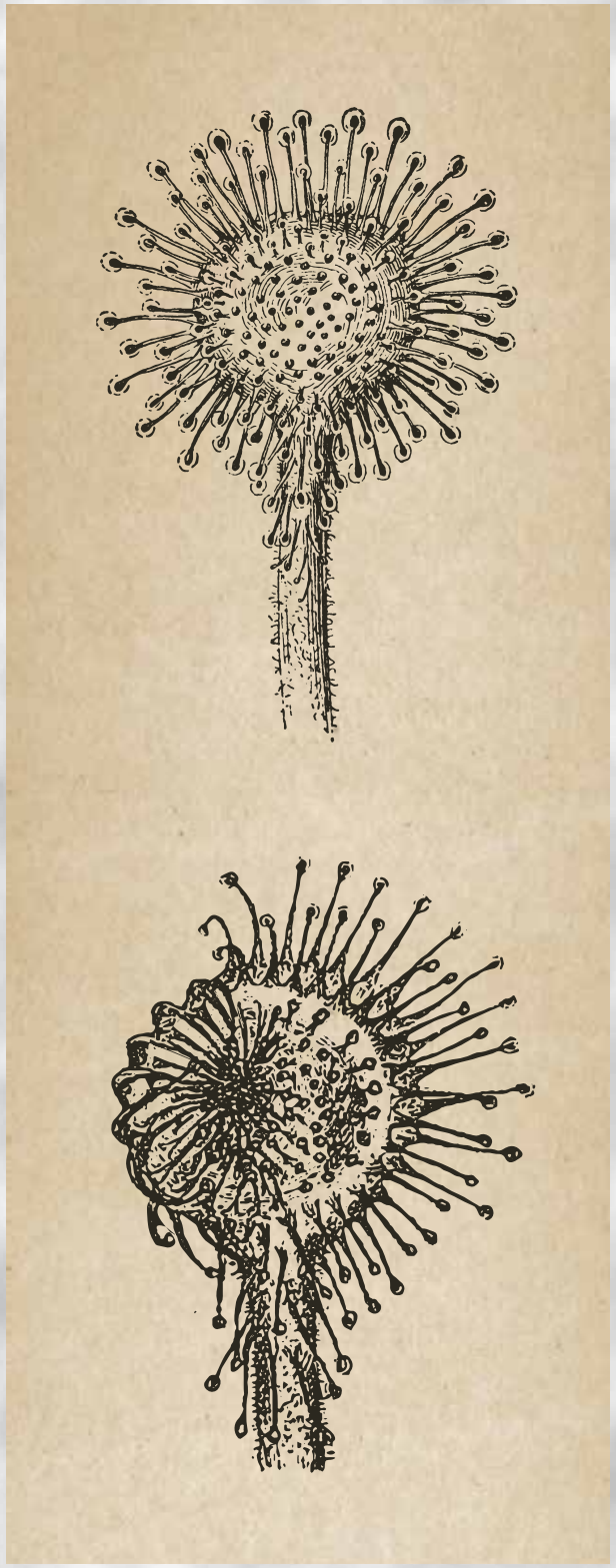
Reactive (Ex): The dewstalk can take a reaction on every creature's turn. This reaction can only be used to make a sticky vine attack of its choice against a creature that provokes opportunity attack or first enters within 10ft. of the dewstalk.

False Appearance (Ex): While motionless, the Dewstalk is indistinguishable from a normal plant.

Attractive Aroma: Creatures that first enter or start their turns within 10ft. of the plant must succeed a DC 13 Will save or be charmed. A charmed creature is forced to use all its movement and cannot take actions or bonus actions on its turns to get as close to the dewstalk as possible. An affected target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. Upon a successful saving throw, creatures are immune to being charmed in this manner for the next 24 hours.

Rooted Defense (Ex): The dewstalk has advantage on saving throws and ability checks against be pushed, shoved, or knocked prone.

The adhesive mucilage of a dewstalk plant can be collected with a Profession (herbalist) DC 25 check and used as an ingredient for the creation of potions of *spider climb* as long as it is created three days after being collected from the plant.



Plant, Giant Bladderwort

Carnivorous Plant

Large Plant: CR 9; Large (8 ft. tall); HD 8d8+40; hp 80; Init +1; Spd 0ft. (floating); AC 14 (+4 natural, size -1, Dex+1), touch 10, flat-footed 14; Base Atk/Grapple:+6/+17; Atk special; Full Atk 11-20 (traps) special; Face/Reach 10ft by 10ft./5ft. SA vacuum trap; SQ surprise, digestion, immunity to fire; N; SV Fort +, Ref +, Will +; Environment : Stagnant swamps or marshes; Organization: Solitary or 1-2; Treasure: none; Adv. Range: 9-10 HD (14-16 traps) size H, 11-12 HD (17- 20 traps) size G Str 26, Dex 12, Con 20, Int — , Wis 10 , Cha 1

Skills: —

Feats: —

The giant bladderwort is a rootless, free-floating water plant found drifting just beneath the surface of stagnant waters in deep marshes or swamps. It may grow in combination with other marsh plants in huge floating mats, which appear solid but through which even small animals quickly sink. The greenish-brown stem may grow up to 50 feet or more if conditions are right, and it usually has 1d10 + 10 traps, each about 4 feet across, attached to its feathery green branches.

Combat

Vacuum Trap (Ex): The traps are translucent. bladders, each containing a partial vacuum, that lie beneath the water. Due to the slightly greater pressure of the water outside the trap, the sides of each bladder are slightly concave around the middle, giving it a pinched-in look. Water is kept out by a flap at the mouth of the trap, which is sealed with a weak glue and acts as a valve. Long guide hairs and shorter trigger hairs surround the mouth of the bladder. When the trigger hairs are touched, the valve opens inward and the victim is swept along with some water into the chamber. The flap reseals and the water is absorbed (to be expelled later), restoring the partial vacuum. The triggering, activation, and closure of a trap all take place in less than a second.

A small-size creature (4 feet or less) is wholly engulfed, while a larger one may have only part of its body caught in the bladder, which will still close and seal its flap, doing damage to the victim thereafter. In such cases, DMs should roll per



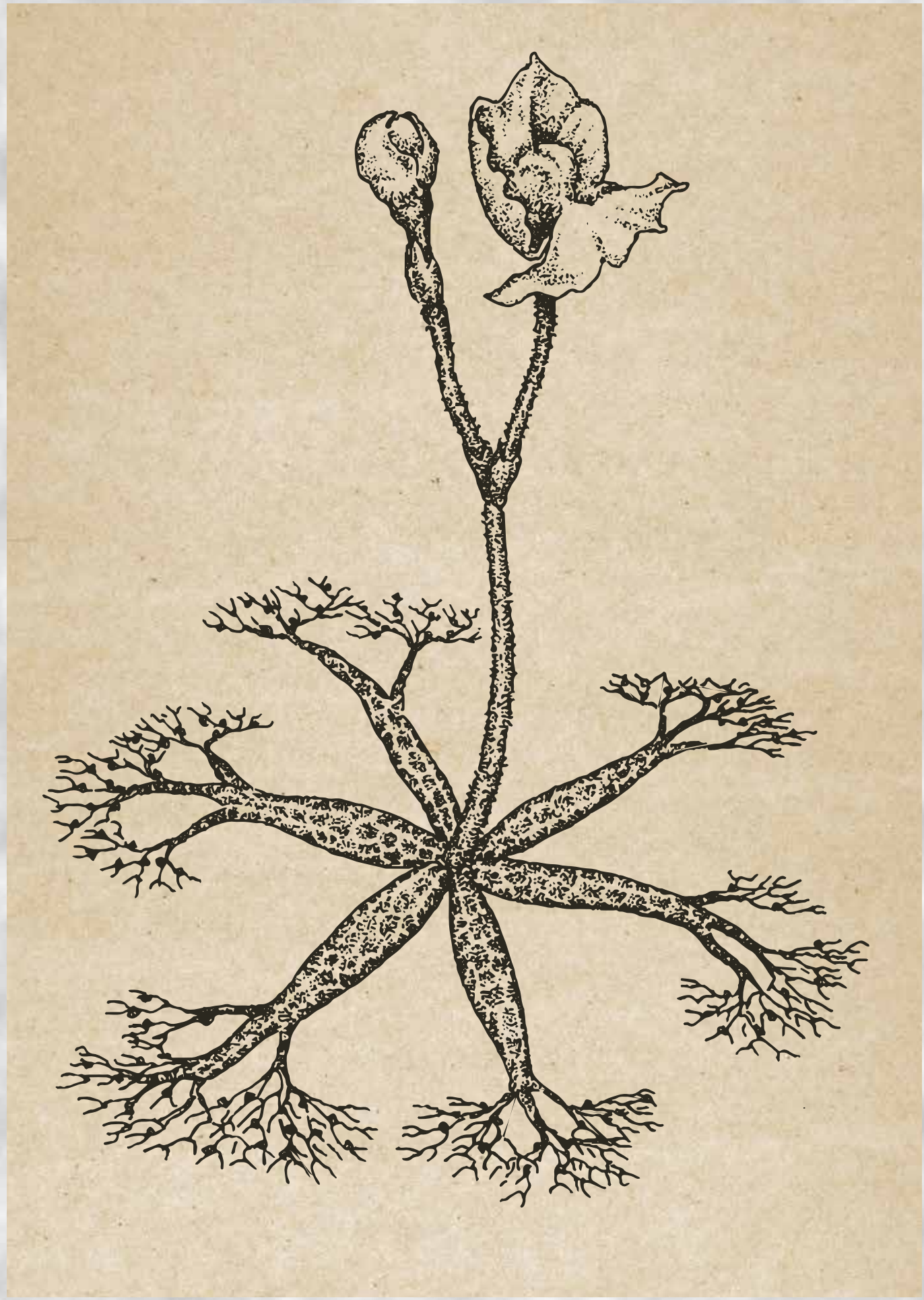
centile die to determine what area of the victims body has been caught (1-20 right arm; 21-40 left arm; 41-60 head and upper torso; 61-80 right leg; 81-100 left leg). A character caught may attempt to break free by making a successful grapple check or by attacking the trap itself.

Each trap has 20 hp and the body of the plant has 8d8 +40 HD. Damage inflicted on traps will not damage the body of the plant. Outside attacks on a trap holding prey inflict half the damage on the prey within and half on the trap itself. Victims wholly engulfed by the trap may attack only with teeth, claws, or daggers.

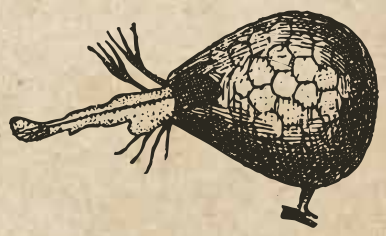
Digestion (Ex): When a creature is trapped in one of the vacuum traps, digestive fluids begin to flood the chamber, causing 1d4 hp damage per round. Due to the very small quantity of air inside the bladder, a victim may suffocate in 1d6 rounds unless assistance is given.

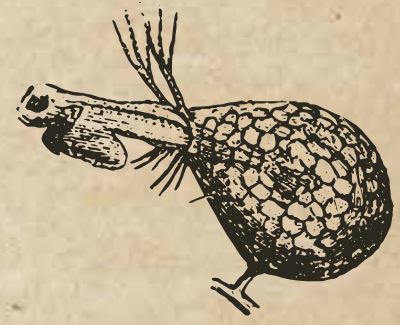
Bladderworts usually reproduce by pollination. Their purple and white flowers rise just above the water on narrow stems. During the winter, this plant forms green buds, called turions, that sink to the bottom of the marsh and rise up again in spring to develop into mature plants. If a bladder can be wholly raised above water (by itself, it weighs 50 lbs.), it collapses with a loud popping.

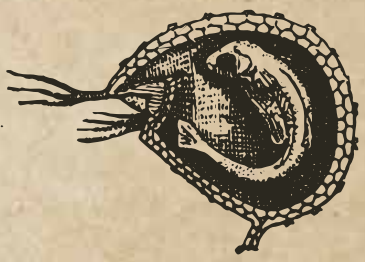
Immunity to Fire (Ex): As the giant bladderwort drifts beneath the water surface it's humidity makes it impervious to damage by fire.

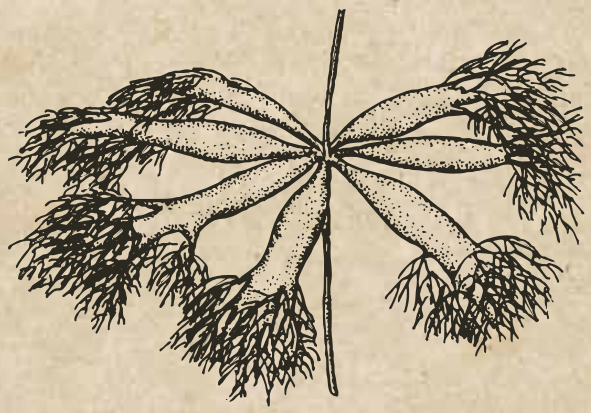


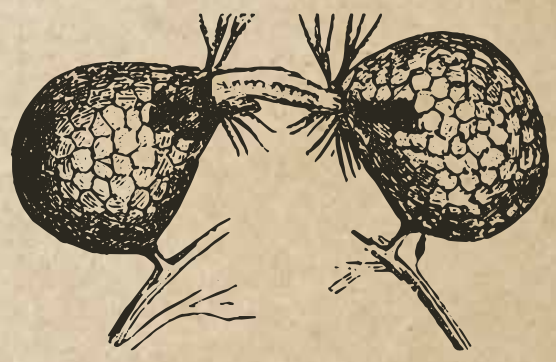




















Markovian Feral Pig

Medium Animal: CR 2; Medium (4ft. long); HD 3d8+12; hp 25; Init +0; Spd 40ft. swim 20ft.; AC 16 (+6 natural), touch 10, flat-footed 16; Base Atk/Grapple:+2/+4 ; Atk Gore +4 melee (1d8+3); Full Atk Gore +4 melee (1d8+3); Face/Reach 5ft by 5ft./5ft. Ferocity; SQ Low-light vision, scent; N; SV Fort +6, Ref +3, Will +2; Environment: Temperate or Tropical forests, hills, mountains, swamps; Organization: Solitary or herd (5-8), Advancement: 4-5 HD (Medium); lvl adj: -

Str 15, Dex 10, Con 17, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 4

Skills: Listen + 7, Spot +5, Swim +4

Feats: Alertness, Toughness

Combat

Ferocity (Ex): A Markovian hog is such a tenacious combatant that it continues to fight without penalty even while disabled or dying.

Adult Markovian hog stand from 66 to 100 cm (26 to 39 in) at the shoulder and mature boars can reach a weight of 150 kg (330 lb), although 60 to 80 kg (130 to 180 lb) is more common. Sows are 45 to 70 kg (99 to 154 lb). They resemble the domestic pig, and can be identified by their pointed, tufted ears and face mask. Markovian hog vary in hair color and skin color from dark reddish to almost black. The coat color darkens with age. Their heads have a 'face mask' with a contrasting pattern of blackish to dark brown and white to dark grey markings, or may sometimes be completely whitish. The ears have tassels of long hairs. Their very sharp tusks are fairly short and inconspicuous. Markovian hogs run with their long and thin tails down. Males are normally larger than females. Old males develop two warts on their snout. Piglets are born with pale yellowish longitudinal stripes on a dark brown background, these soon disappear and the coat becomes reddish brown, with a black and white dorsal crest in both sexes. This mane bristles when the animal becomes agitated. Markovian hog can be found in forests with high trees, montane forests, forest fringes, thick bushveld, gallery forests, flooded forest, swampland and in any altitude, almost on any habitat on the island.





Markovian hogs are quite social animals and are found in sounders of up to twelve members, usually three to five. A typical group will consist of a dominant male and a dominant female, with other females and juveniles accounting for the rest. Groups engage in ritual aggressive behavior when encountering each other, but will actually fight for large food sources. Sounders have home ranges, but are not territorial and different home ranges overlap. Groups generally keep away from each other. All intruders near the sounder are attacked, also non-Markovian hogs. Almost half the population consists of solitary wandering animals. Small bachelor groups of young males also form, these have ranges which overlay those of a few. The young males will avoid the sounders to escape confrontation. Litters of one to nine, usually three, young are born. From mating to the end of the gestation is a period of eight to ten months. After six months of age the alpha sows will aggressively chase the young males off, she will do the same to a few one to two year old beta sows. The alpha sow builds a nest three metre wide and one metre high during the winter, with bedding consisting of stacked hay, twigs or plant debris from floods, to keep the litter of piglets for approximately four months while they wean. The males are the main care-givers the sows only visit the nest to wean the piglets. They snort and grunt harshly while foraging or alarmed.

Markovian hogs are essentially nocturnal, hiding in very dense thickets during the day. They are very aggressive and extremely powerful, they are fast, and can swim well. Wounded hogs are very dangerous; their spoor should not be followed alone.

They are omnivorous and their diet can include roots, crops, succulent plants, water sedges, rotten wood, insects, small reptiles, eggs, nestlings and carrion. Tubers, bulbs and fruit are the most important food. Eggs and nestlings are also a favorite. Both fresh and very rotten carrion is eaten. Small young deer are stalked and consumed. Although they are hunted fairly extensively by predatory animals and beastmen the population remains stable due to largely inaccessible terrain, abundance of food, relatively high reproductive potential, and their rapid ability to adapt to hunting methods.

Markovian Raven, (ex-lycanthrope)

Medium Animal: CR 2; Medium (4ft. long); HD 3d8; hp 13; Init +2 (Dex +2); Spd 5ft. fly 45ft. (poor); AC 14 (+2 Dex, +2 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 12; Base Atk/Grapple:+5/+4 ; Atk Claws +5 melee (1d4-1); Full Atk 2 claws +5 melee (1d3-1), bite +0 melee (1d4-1) ; Face/Reach 8ft by 5ft./5ft. SA Eye strike, curse of lycanthropy; SQ Raven empathy, N; SV Fort +5, Ref +7, Will +6; Environment : Markovian forests, hills, plainsand mountains; Organization: Solitary, pair or murder (4-16); lvl adj: -

Str 9, Dex 21, Con 15, Int 10, Wis 16, Cha 10

Skills: Intimidate +1, Listen +16, Spot +16

Feats: Feral Rearing, Weapon Finesse (claws), Weapon Finesse (bite)

Markovian ravens are wereravens who have evolved (or de-evolved) from chronic use of their animal forms and the domains influence to animals, having lost their ability to shapechange to human form. They resemble and behave as giant ravens, with the only difference being that they are more intellgent and that they are still carriers of the dreaded curse of lycanthropy.

Combat

Markovian ravens attack with both claws, combining them into a single attack form or their beaks. Fortunately only the latter can deliver the curse of lycanthropy, and they rarely use it.

Eye Strike (Ex): If a Markovian raven deals a critical hit with its bite attack, it plucks the victim's eye out. This blinds the eye. A victim reduced to just one eye suffers -a 2 competence penalty to all Dexterity-modified rolls due to the loss of depth perception. A creature that loses all of its eyes is blinded. Only *regeneration* and *heal* spells can cure this form of blindness.

Curse of Lycanthropy (Su): Because of their evolution to animals any humanoid hit by a Markoviann raven's bite attack must succeed at a Fortitude save DC 15 or contract lycanthropy

Raven Empathy (Ex): Markoviann ravens have a +4 racial bonus when influencing ravens attitudes and allows them to communicate with them.



Who's Doomed

Dr. Frantisek Markov

Male Unique Shapechanger, Expert 7

Male Cursed Human (Shapechanger): CR 10; Medium-Large (4-10ft. tall or long); HD 7d6 + animal HD + Con bonus; hp 31 + temporary hit points (varies); Init + varies (+ varies Dex, +4 improved initiative); Spd varies (-5 feet in legged forms); AC animal form's (varies); Base Atk/Grapple: +5/+ varies; Atk animal form's except bite, and gore attacks (varies); Full Atk animal form's except bite, and gore attacks (varies); Face/Reach: (varies). SA create broken ones, the thousand forms, plus animal forms (varies); SQ darkvision 60ft. plus animal form's (varies); LE; SV Fort +2 +varies (*+1), Ref +2 +varies (*+1), Will +6 (*+1); (*cloack of resistance)

Str varies, Dex varies, Con varies, Int 17, Wis 10, Cha 8

Skills: Craft (Alchemy) +13, Craft (fleshcrafting) +14, Craft (painting) +12, Bluff +9, Handle Animal +9, Heal +12, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (local) +13, Knowledge (nature) +13, Sense Motive +10, Knowledge (anatomy) untrained

Feats: Improved Bull Rush, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Skill Focus (Heal) + special**

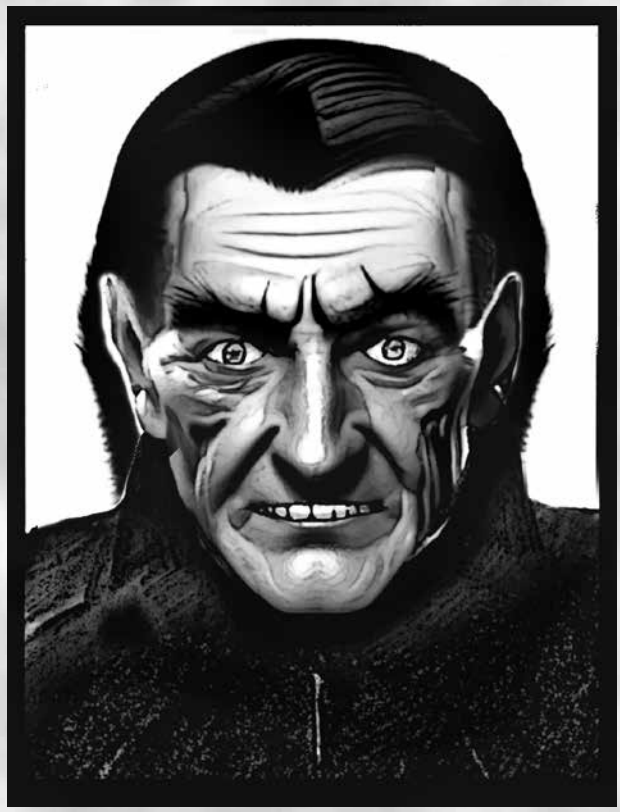
**If the animal form Markov takes has Endurance, Run, Toughness or Weapon Finesse Markov has them as well.

Languages: Balok, Mordentish, Tepestani, Vaasi

Signature Possessions: Silvered dagger, robe of resistance +1 (as cloak)

Description

Frantisek Markov appears to be a massive lumbering man with thick bones, a massive gut, slight hunchback, visibly bowed legs and arms that seem too long. His eyebrows are large and bushy, his jaw large and wide and his broad features are set in a round face with green eyes that are fixed open as if he is afraid to miss any detail. He is in his mid 70's and though he remains physically powerful he walks with a slight limb caused from the tortures he suffered on the *Table of Life*, as his dislocated joints were healing and mending by his shapechanging power. His once-black hair has gone nearly



white but since his acquaintance with Captain Lennard Frantisek has begun to make use of a natural black hair dye recipe he has created by combining fermented leaves of the *Indigofera tinctoria* (true indigo plant) and black walnut drupes imported from Verbrek. He keeps his hair straight and he wears it slicked back. He often flashes a broad, toothy grin and has taken to present himself as a friendly old hermit, but his smile is not reassuring but rather threatening and predatory. He dresses from head to toe in loose high-necked, black or white robes. When interacting with the broken ones he usually adds a necklace of humanoid and animal teeth. People usually assume him to be a malformed pitiful soul victim of the "magical plague" that turns men into animals and may pity him.

If he has guests for dinner who know his cursed nature he wears specially tailored long double breasted coats with turned down collars known as *fraque* fitted loosely on the body with long sleeves, waistcoats and ruffled silk shirts leaving the lower part of his body unclothed showing his gorilla body. He does that as he uses the awkwardness it creates to gaslight and manipulate them.

Background

The Markovs lived in Barovia long before the invasion of the Tergs. When Strahd became a vampire some of Markov's ancestors died in Castle Ravenloft with the remainder fleeing to nearby Vallaki. Frantisek was born and raised on a small pig farm outside the Vallaki, surrounded by the Svalich woods in the slopes of the towering Mount Baratak. Frantisek or butchered swine for sale at the market. Frant liked the work, and had a natural talent for it, but the other children where mocking him calling him *băiat porc* (pig boy), things were far worse in his house as his drunk father used to beat him calling him "Frant", meaning broken in Balok. He would often lash against the pigs in his farm and the joy of butchering them.

When he came of age, he married a young woman from the village and opened a butcher shop in Vallaki. Although his busyness was sucessful he soon grew tired of simple butchery. At first, he merely studied the workings of the livestock he carved up, becoming fascinated with the genius behind their function. As time passed, he began to experiment on animals, attempting to perform surgical amputations and grafts. When he got his hands on a strange book of transmutation he was fascinated by it. Though he could not read the weird text in the book he was fascinated by the imagery and begun experimenting with alchemical substances he created on his own performing also glandular injections to living animals, often the pigs in his butcher shop that were ready for slaughter, before operating on them. They all died within a few days, but the hobby cost him nothing as he could still grind the malformed meat for sale.

His kind-hearted wife Ludmilla discovered his ghastly pastime. His experiments horrified and revolted her and she threatened to leave him and tell the villagers what kind of perverted toxic meat they were buying to feed their families. Furious at her betrayal, Frantisek made sure she never reached the door and made her his next experiment. Ludmilla lived for three days and when her body was first discovered in the outskirts of town the villagers thought it was the body of a beast or demon. When an eyewitness said he saw the monstrous creature smashing through a window in Markov's butcher shop before running in the streets, the apparent strange disappearance of Ludmilla and the strange alchemical concoctions found in a makeshift lab in Markov's butcher shop, they came to realize the truth of what had occured. They assembled a mob and hunted down Frantisek into the World's End Mists to the north. Within the Mists he found himself running in all fours with horror he realized that his arms and legs had transformed into pig feet his man's head rooted grotesquely to the body of one of the swine he had grown to despise. He could hear bounty hunters searching him in the Mists. Eventually, the harried pig-man tired of fleeing from his pursuers, ambushed one. His body reverted to that of a gorilla in mid air killing the man outright with a deathly blow, the very death he had lacked the honor to grant to his suffering Ludmilla. The Mists cleared and he found himself in a clearing n front of a thatched roof wooden residence, complete with operating theater and laboratory facilities the domain of Markovia had accepted him as its darklord.

Current Sketch

The Dark Powers have granted Frantisek Markov the ability to perfect his work in a land suited to his nature. Through decades of observation, dissection, vivisection and arduous experimentation, Frantisek Markov has nearly perfected an abominable procedure for the creation of men from beasts or creatures with a suggestion of humanity, to combine aspects of different species or to add bestial attributes to human subjects.This procedure involves no arcane or divine magic, but the agonizing reconstruction of an entire organism's morphology through surgical and alchemical techniques. It demands the technical genius of a craftsman, the diligence and patience of a physician, and the cold detachment of a hog slaughterer, unfortunately Markov possesses all of these traits

Most of his experiments have created broken ones and though his results are seldom perfect, most subjects live. The simplest creatures are animals who have acquired human qualities while others were humans who have acquired bestial attributes through his handiwork.

Markov has created scores of broken ones through the years and the misshapen creatures

have even started to form their own primitive societies. Broken one culture is based on their observation of human behavior. Markov himself is viewed by many as fearsome deity, both creator and destroyer. In their pidgin Balok tongue they call him Diosamblet "the god who walks among us".

The Dark Powers gave a lot to Markov but they have also cursed him terribly. He must always have the body of a beast, he can change his body to that of any animal, but he can never assume humanoid form and so, like most his creations he is hideously deformed. Markov usually assumes the body of a gorilla to take advantage of its man-like shape.

Markov considers himself to be hideously deformed and is desperate wants to restore his "lost humanity". He continues his experiments on animals, seeking to create broken ones who appear perfectly human and then, somehow, to use those techniques on himself. He spends long hours in his lab, vivisecting animal subjects and transforming them into animal men. He will never succeed, doomed to failure as he will never be able to undo the powerful curse set upon him by the Dark Powers.

Before the Grand Conjunction human subjects were in short supply as a lot of people avoided travelling through Markovia and the few settlements that existed were fortified. In spite of that Markov organized some careful attacks by his beastmen and managed to capture some of the humans living there, some never made it to his operating table falling victim to his beastmen animal instincts, a deed punishable by death.

Both human and animal subjects had been in short supply since Markovia shifted to the Sea of Sorrows, but the arrival of explorers or would be colonists occasionally provided him with with a fresh supply. During the *Beastmen Rebellion* he was subjected to incredible torture in the hands of Akanga, his body changed rapidly from one form to the other while the *Table of Life* sustained him to life and his bones would sometimes heal disjointed as the lion-man was holding them to the wrong position while he was healing, this has left him even more malformed than before and with a permanent limp that slows him down to any legged form he takes. Now he wants to not only reverse his curse but also fix his disjoined legs.

Though he has suffered under the effects of the *Table of Life* he believes it to be crucial for his experiments and the operation he one day plans to have. For this reason, he created Percy and Priscilla and has began to train them in his techniques. He is most watchful of the other broken ones under his authority, trusting only Vern because of his dog origins, Ursula because of her hatred towards Akanga. Though he believes Percy and Priscilla to be loyal to him his narcissism prevents him from fully trusting them in operating on him, he believes they have much more to learn but the truth is that he believes, and possibly correctly that they will never be able to reach his brilliance and mastery in the operation table.

When Frantisek Markov met Captain Lennard Gaertner he begun to feel optimistic again, he saw it as an opportunity to make more money as to fund his research as well as the means for more animal and human subjects, as Captain Lennard had already been cooperating with Vaasi slavers. Since then he has managed to create many new broken ones all the time trying to surpass himself and achieve his goal. He has also created broken ones not necessarily for his research but as slaves to his silver quarry as well as exporting them to the rest of the Lands of the Mists with the help of Captain Lennard to be used in gladiatorial fights in Falkovnia or game for decadent nobles.

Since then he behaves as a nouveau riche, sometimes dressing in fine clothes when he accomodates people to his estate and giving the appearance of a dedicated naturalist philosopher, sage and physician, with an expertise in the anatomy and physiology of animals and a lot of funding. Frantisek enjoys human company and often entertains his visitors for several days before subjecting them to the knife. He is a talented painter and enjoys painting portraits of his guests. He has a poor eye for human anatomy, resulting in stiff and awkward figures, but his paintings often seem to capture the subject's inner, primal nature.

He is currently finishing a massive manuscript book he has named *The Birds of Markovia* but sometimes calls it the "Double El-

ephant Folio" (because of its size) measuring 39.5 inches tall by 28.5 inches wide. This book is a collection of hundreds of drawn bird illustrations detailing all the species of birds he has discovered in Markovia. He hopes of finding a publisher in one of the other domains as he has no way of knowing how to operate the mechanichal movable–type printing press that was salvaged from a shipwreck around a decade ago, the printing press lies in his estate's salvage storage.

Combat

Frantisek Markov does not consider himself a violent man, but if pressed into combat, he lashes out with his powerful gorilla arms or transforms into more fearsome animal forms. If possible he prefers to send his broken ones to fight in his place.

Create Broke Ones (Ex): Markov is an exceptional surgeon and fleshcrafter who can transform any Medium size or Large animal into a Medium broken one or a Small or Tiny animal into a Small broken one. The creature must be helpless, and Markov must devote at least eight hours a day to the meticulous surgeries that the transform requires. The process takes 3d6 day, after which the creature emerges as a Markovian Broken One. Creatures rescued after the transformation has begun but before it is complete suffer 1d4 permanent Constitution drain each day they are out of Markov's care. At the end of the process Markov rolls a Craft (alchemy) DC 15, Craft (fleshcrafting) DC 18 and Heal DC 15 check to determine the success of his experiment. If any of these rolls result in a natural 1 then the result of the experiment is a total failure and the subject has to succeed a Fort save DC 15 or die due to complications during the procedure, those subjects who succeed are tied to the estates salvage storage until they devolve into their native forms. If any roll fails then the result is a Monstrous beastman as the alchemical, surgical or healing process didn't do as it should, Markov either destroys these poor creatures for spare parts or leaves them to roam in the island to be hunted down by the other broken ones. If all rolls are successful then the result is a Feral broken one but thought as failures by Markov, they are freed to join the other broken ones or follow their animal instincts. If any roll is a natural 20 then the result of the experiment is a Tamed broken one, though these are more humanoid than the previous versions Markov still believes them to be failures and they are left on their own. If two skill checks give a natural 20 then the result of the experiment is a Domesticated beastman that looks more like a Caliban than a human, these broken ones are usually kept by Markov as servants to be used in the farm to the west of his estate or guard the areas close to it, the other broken ones believe them to humans and do not accept them as one of their own, attacking them on sight. If all three rolls result in a natural 20, then the experiment seems like a complete success and a Greater Broken One is created, Markov keeps these broken ones as trusted servants.

But Markov's curse compromises these successes in the form of these Greater Broken Ones being human outwardly or inwardly. That means that those who look like humans (or humanoid) have personalities that closely resemble their animal side and are docile to Markov. Those who more closely resemble a human in their soul, lack the outward resemblance to humans and so are considered a failure by Markov. Although Markov believes Delphi to have been his most successful result, it was her dolphin side that made her behave more human than the other Civilized broken ones of the household. So far only the Lion-King Akanga has become the latter, being the result more closely behaving as an independent human being. It is possible for Markov to create broken ones from cold-blooded animals but the he has to roll a DC 30 + HD of the animal to succeed in all three skill checks. Since he has failed to even produce one such beastman he has abandoned experimenting with reptiles, amphibians and fish.

Any animal broken one created by Markov that leaves Markovia gradually reverts to its native form if it fails a Fortitude save DC 20, becoming one step closer to its true form with every failed check, from Civilized to Domesticated, then Tamed, Feral, Bestial and finally Animal. This applies also to broken ones that were human before becoming broken ones as

the chemicals in heir bodies make them more animalistic. The broken one is susceptible to this save every month it is away from Markovia, which means that the first transition to its native form happens one month after escaping the island. A *restoration* spell can be used to restore a creature to its original form counting each spell cast as one month and the broken one has to fail the saving throw as its organism resists being reverted back to its natural form. A *restoration* spell is the only way a humanoid can revert to its original form. To do so all *restoration* spells needed to turn it to its original form must be cast within a month or else it slowly turns back to the broken one form it had before restoration begun. The spell has to be cast outside Markovia as Markov's mystical connection to his domain remains undisputed. Those who have suffered this ordeal must roll madness checks as the painful transformation and recollections of leaving as beasts is highly traumatizing.

Monstrous broken ones are failed results of Frantisek Markov's experiments (they are true broken ones as the ones detailed in *Denizens of Darkness*, *Denizens of Dread* or the *Ravenloft Monstrous Compedium I*) and so are doomed in this monstrous existence forever, only a *wish* spell reverts them to their original form.

Limp (Ex): Because of his tortures in the hands of Akanga on the Table of Life and his disjoined healing of his bones Markov walks with a limb in any form that has legs being either bipedal or quadrupedal having a problem with his rear legs in these forms. Because of this dislocation his speed is reduced by 5 feet in any animal form that has legs and must make a Dexterity DC 10 if he tries any other movement than walking when in a bipedal animal form.

Horrifying Mutilation (Su): Markov's connection to the land as Markovia's darklord gives him the ability to create a Sinkhole of Evil by an act of merciless butchering of animal or humanoid bodies, dead or alive. By spending a turn injecting with chemicals and scattering the bodies around in a horrifying design of carnage Frantisek Markov can animate them by using the resonance of the Sinkhole of Evil he has created. The severed hands and torsos of animals and men began to move by a semblance of life and under the orders of Dr. Frantisek. When Markov uses this power the Sinkhole of Evil in his manor increases by 1 point.

Animated Body Parts, Medium Construct (Swarm): CR 2; Medium (10ft. variable); HD 5d10; hp 27; Init +0; Spd 20 ft.; AC 14 (+2 Dex, +2 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 14; Base Atk/Grapple:+3/- ; Atk Swarm 1d6; Full Atk 3 Swarm 1d6; Face/Reach 10ft./5ft. SA Distraction, smite fallen; SQ Construct traits, tremoresense 30ft., swarm traits, regeneration; NE; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will -2; Environment: Any (Markovia); Organization: Solitary, pair or aplause (3-4 swarms); lvl adj: -

Str 10, Dex 10, Con -, Int -, Wis 5, Cha 1

Skills: -

Feats: -

Smite Fallen (Ex): Animated body parts inflict double damage against prone combatants.

Distraction (Ex): Any living creature that begins its turn with a swarm in its square must roll a DC 12 Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1 round.

Regeneration (Su): As long as Frantisek Markov is within 60 ft and above 0 hit points the swarm of body parts regenerates 1 hit point per round.

The Thousand Forms (Su): Markov can transform as a standart action into any Medium-size or Large animal (except dire animals) as though using the *polymorph self* spell gaining the Strength, Dexterity and Constitution scores of the animal form but retains his own Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma scores. The animal's hit dice are considered temporary hit points and the increase in Markov's Constitution score gives him more hit points that can be restored and are not lost first as temporary hit points are. Markov can heal damage by changing forms from one animal to the other as if he had rested for a night.

He also gains all extraordinary special attacks of the beast his form takes but in a grotesque twist, Markov always retains his human head in every animal form, thus he never receives a bite attack or special attack's related to bite attacks (such as a snake's venom) or gore attacks, he doesn't receive low-light vision, scent special qualities or racial bonuses to Listen or Spot. Markov can choose to retain his human hands in any animal form, instead of the paws of the animal he becomes, in which case he does not have claw attacks.

Markov can never have a "normal" human form, the statistics below reflect the ape form he typically takes as well as a tiger and large constrictor snake (python) forms to show the changes in his stats.

Dr. Frantisek Markov (Ape Form)
Male Unique Shapechanger, Expert 7
Large Animal Form: CR 10; Large (8ft. 2in. tall); HD 7d6 +14 4d8 +8; hp 45+(29); Init +2 (+2 Dex, +4 improved initiative); Spd 25ft., climb 25ft.; AC AC 14 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +3 natural), touch 11, flat-footed 12; Base Atk/Grapple: +5/+14; Atk claw +10 melee (1d6+5) or +10 melee (dagger 1d4+5); Full Atk; 2 claws +10 melee (1d6+5) or +10 melee (dagger 1d4+5); Face/Reach: 10ft./10ft.. SA create broken ones, the thousand forms SQ darkvision 60ft.; LE; SV Fort +4(*+1), Ref +3(*+1), Will +6(*+1); (**robe of resistance*)

Str 21, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 17, Wis 10, Cha 8

Feat: Toughness (+3 temporary hit points)

Skills: In ape form Markov has a +8 racial bonus to Climb checks and can always choose to take 10 on Climb checks even if rushed or threatened.

Dr. Frantisek Markov (Tiger Form)
Male Unique Shapechanger, Expert 7
Large Animal Form: CR 10; Large (3ft. tall, 9ft. long); HD 7d6 +21+ 6d8+18; hp 52+(45); Init + 6 (+2 Dex, +4 improved initiative); Spd 35 feet; AC 14 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +3 natural), touch 11, flat-footed 12; Base Atk/Grapple: +5/+14; Atk claw +11 melee (1d8+6) or none (human hands); Full Atk; 2 claws +11 melee (1d8+6) or none (human hands); Face/Reach: 10ft./5ft) SA improved grab, pounce, rake, create broken ones, the thousand forms SQ darkvision 60ft.; LE; SV Fort +5, Ref +4 +varies, Will +6;
Str 23, Dex 15, Con 17, Int 17, Wis 10, Cha 8

Improved Frab (Ex): If Markov hits with a claw attack he can attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If he wins the grapple check he establishes a hold and can rake.

Pounce (Ex): If Markov charges a foe, he can make a full attack, including two rakes.

Rake (Ex): Attack bonus +11 melee, damage 1d8+3

Skills: In tiger form Markov has a +4 racial bonus on Balance, Hide and Move Silently checks. In areas of tall grass or heavy undergrowth the Hide bonus rises to +8.

Dr. Frantisek Markov (Python Form)
Male Unique Shapechanger, Expert 7
Large Animal Form: CR 10; Medium (16ft. long); HD 7d6 +7+ 6d8+6; hp 38+(33); Init +7 (+ 3 Dex, +4 improved initiative); Spd 20ft., climb 20ft. swim 20ft.; AC 15 (+3 Dex, +2 natural), touch 13, flat-footed 12; Base Atk/Grapple: +5/+9; Atk: none; Full Atk: none; Face/Reach: 5ft./ 5ft. SA constrict, improved grab, create broken ones, the thousand forms; SQ darkvision 60ft.; LE; SV Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +6;
Str 17, Dex 17, Con 13, Int 17, Wis 10, Cha 8

Constrict (Ex): With a successful grapple check Markov deals 1d3+4 damage.

Improved Grab (Ex): Markov can use this ability only on sleeping, prone or immobile creatures. He can attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking attacks of opportunity. If he wins the grapple he establishes a hold and can constrict.

Closing the Borders: Before the Grand Conjunction when Markov wanted to seal Markovia the Mists would rise at the borders. Unlike other vapors these Mists caused excruciating pain to anyone who entered them. The pain was incapacitating, leading first to paralysis (over 1d4 rounds) and then to madness. Only one thing could alleviate it, stepping back towards the heart of Markovia. Since the transition of Markovia into an island in the Sea of Sorrows, the sea rises and tumble in violent bursts against the shores, and sharks team in the waters, seeking the objects of Markov's wrath. Strangely the rise of the sea enables ships from Sunset Bay to leave the lagoon even without the tides. It is possible to enter and leave Markovia through the Mists, but they usually do not rise if Markov doesn't want them to. The Soul Kraken remains dormant during this time as some sharks are so large they are threatening to the sea monster.

Akanga

Greater Markovian Broken One, Barbarian 5
Male Aberration: CR 9; Medium (7ft. tall); HD 6d12+36+ 5d12+ 24; hp 125; Init +5 (Dex, improved initiative); Spd 40ft. ; AC 18 (+2 Dex, +6 natural) , touch 12, flat-footed 16; Base Atk/Grapple: +9/+16; Atk claw +16 melee (1d6+7) or +16 melee (1d8+7, greatclub); Full Atk 2 claws +16 melee (1d6+7) and bite +14 (1d8+3); Face/Reach 5ft by 5ft./5ft. SA Pounce, Improved grab, rake 1d6+3, Rage 2/day, ; SQ fast movement, low ligh vision, scent, trap sense +1, improved uncanny dodge; NE; SV Fort +14, Ref +7, Will +3; Str 25, Dex 15, Con 23, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 12

Skills: Balance + 12, Climb +11, Handle Animal +5, Hide +12 (+20), Listen +8, Move Silently +15, Spot +10, Intimidate +13, Jump +12 (+16 when charging), Survival + 7

Feats: Alertness, Endurance, Improved Grab, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (claw), Multiattack, Power Attack, Track, Run

Languages: Balok (pidgin)

Signature Possessions: Spiked Greatclub

Description
Akanga is a large muscular broad-chested lion-headed man, with a flattened nose and a feline scarred muzzle. His body is covered with light buff fur and most of his chest and muzzle is scarred by years of competing with other beastmen. His dense, dark brownish mane, tinged with yellow, rust and black hairs is his most recognizable feature, that and his predatory eyes. When he wants to intimidate someone he will usually smile showing his razor sharp fangs or protracts his large lion claws. He usually wears leggings made out of animal hide and leather feathered armbands. He speaks with a dominating voice and when enraged, growls and roars like a lion while wagging his tail that ends in a dark, hairy tuft.

Background
Although Akanga has long lost the memories he had before being transformed into a



beastman, his origins can be found in Markov's archives of 735 BC under the name Arkan Gănescu, the name of the man Akanga used to be before voluntarily participating in one of Frantisek Markov's experiments. His story begins in the now dying island of G'Henna, bordering Markovia on the northwest, before it was torn along Markovia from the center of the Core, leaving in their place the gaping dark maw known as The Shadow Rift. Arkan was a successful beer brewer from Zhukar, the city of hunger, and always had a rebellious spirit and as such he found a way to express this rebellion against the status quo through joining the Ata-Bestaal. In that dry and chilly devastated land there are regular ceremonies in which men are transformed into mongrelmen. Some family members of transformed people by this ritual formed Ata-Bestaal, a secret society in G'Henna with the ultimate goal of finding a way for men to become beasts. They believe that as beasts they will receive the bounty of animal peace and serenity. The fearlessness members of the Ata-Bestaal show if they are subjected to the mongrelman transformation ceremony frustrates and worries Yagno Petrvna, High Priest of Zhakata and has issued an edict of prosecu-

tion against the Ata-Bestaal.

Arkan Gănescu's life changed dramatically when he failed the initiation ceremony to the society, involving forcing his left arm through the bars of a cage and letting a ravenous lycanthrope maul him and infect him with the terrible curse. Since he wasn't infected he was perceived as a failure, rejected by nature itself he was sent by the Ata-Bestaal to the Outlands of G'Henna to take care of the mongrelmen living in the hills, there he met Theia a mongrelwoman and the two of them became good friends. One night as he and Theia were travelling in the unforgiving steppes of the Outlands with a caravan heading to Zhukar, the city of hunger, to gather provisions for the mongrelmen, they came upon a sandstorm. Apparently they had lost their way and had entered the Valley of Dust, the Pride Eater's hunting grounds. While battling an ambushing giant praying mantis a silvery dust rose and they were all caught into a blinding cloud. The Pride Eater attacked them one by one and eventually caught Arkan in his misty embrace draining his sense of self from him. Theia managed to distract the Pride Eater making him release Arkan, but she was in turn attacked by the misty creature lifting her up and releasing her to a deadly free fall. Theia died in Arkan's arms professing her love to him. The devatated Arkan managed to keep the Pride Eater at bay using a mirror medallion he had gifted Theia a few days before. Arkan managed to escape with his life and his pride intact leaving Theia's body there.

He headed east until he found himself into a sparse cedar forest. Going further east the forest became denser, a big contrast to the dusty G'Hennan landscape. There in the forest he saw with amazement a deer headed beastman, he tried to approach it but the antlered hybrid run away spooked by the human. It wasn't long before he discovered a village of beehive-shaped mud houses similar to the ones found in the Outlands of G'Henna. This village was inhabited by mongrelmen from G'Henna, they had heard rumors about the beastmen living in the forests to the east, in the land of Markovia. A band of them had traveled to Markovia hoping that a cure from their miserable existence might exist, but after learning about Diosamblet they decided to stay in Markovia but as far away possible from Frantisek Markov. Arkan told them that as mongremen they are closer to the purity of animals and as such they are blessed, his openness to them made him gain their trust really fast. The mongrelmen told him rumors about "the god that walks among us" referred to by the beastmen as Diosamblet, creator and destroyer. Arkan heard stories about the power of Diosamblet to fleshcraft animal-men and was filled with new hope. Nature as it seemed had not rejected him but had challenged him with all these ordeals not because he was a failure but to prove his worth, because he was special.

He traveled the beast infested forests of Markovia until he heard the beating of drums and an odd mystic chant. Following its source he found himself into a clearing in the forest, animal-men pedal shaped gathering was focused on a massive lumbering man in loose black robes, with black straight slicked back hair wearing a necklace with teeth instead of beads. The beastmen were chanting Diosamblet as they fell on their knees, arms or whatever else they had extended in prayer, as the hulking man stood on a low platform circled by skulls on stakes, some of them apparently human. Arkan witnessed Diosamblet's judgment and saw that this man who acted as a god was indeed following the opposite doctrine of what the Ata-Bestaal believed. Always the rebellious spirit he couldn't resist and in spite of putting himself at risk revealed himself and interrupted the man-god's ritual. He professed that animals are better than humans and that he would be subjecting himself to one of Frantisek's experiments to prove his point. Frantisek although angered at first by the defiant man and was about to order his beastmen followers to tear him to pieces, thought that it would be better if he proved Arkan wrong. Arkan looked as a really good human speciment and Markov had never before had a willing subject for his experiments. Also he could always make the process of Arkan's transformation really painful to punish him for his insolence.

He saw it fitting that this brave, or foolish, man would be combined with the aspects of a newly acquired lion from Valachan and after accepting Arkan's challenge he took him to his wooden and thatched manor, in a ceremonial

procession. Markov spend the following days preparing the operation, or as Arkan called it "ascension" and debating about nature. Arkan is probably the only person that Markov openly opened up and confessed his view of himself as a hideously deformed man, desperate to restore his lost humanity. Arkan argued that Markov should accept his beastial nature and that only this way he would be truly free. Having completely opposite worldviews, made these conversations long and frustrating, making Markov all the more eager to "experiment" on Arkan. When the operation began it lasted for days, in Arkan's agony, while Markov indulged in inflicting unimaginable pain to his subject. As the last traces of Arkan's humanity were literally being fleshed out, Markov proved to be right. In his last moments before loosing consciousness Arkan tried to cling to the simplest thing that defined him as human, his name. Unable to articulate the (r) sound as he was grasping for air, he screamingly uttered a rhotacistic version of his name before falling into oblivion, A'kan-Ga...

Current Sketch

Akanga is Frantisek Markov's greatest success and at the same time his most bothersome creation. Akanga has no recollection of his life as a human, the only constant between his past life and his life as a beastman is his rebellious nature. After the Grand Conjunction Akanga began to rise from the ranks of his people to become their leader, first of a small group of beastmen, then of related tribes, and lastly the island itself. His scattered memories of false gods have made him into a warped atheist, he believes that there are no true gods and knows that Frantisek is a fraud preying on the weakness of others. Since there are no beings truly worthy of worship he sees himself as someone who can fill this gap. Akanga is highly territorial and sees Frantisek Markov as the only entity that stands in his way of total dominance. Although he despises Markov, Akanga uses the same methods of intimidation to dominate the other broken ones. He recognizes Markov's ingenuity to be perceived as a god and he uses tricks and ceremonies for his subordinates to acknowledge him as one too. His knowledge of fire-making is one of the things that make him seem godly to the primitive beastmen and keep his hold on them along with his deadly temper. He offers the gift of fire to the various tribes existing in the island in exchange of obedience and alliances. The beastman tribes are really careful to keep their camp fire burning, if their camp fire dies out then they will have to negotiate and offer something new to Akanga in order to be given again that precious element. Akanga is an intimidating bully, he uses a greatclub to threaten his subordinates or in rare cases punish those who have failed him, with maiming or even death.

Combat

Akanga's lion heritage makes him an expert in stealthy attacks, this is not to say that Akanga will ever avoid face to face combat as he is a formidable opponent. He is usually seen holding a spiked greatclub but he uses it mostly to intimidate other beastmen. He is far more dangerous using his natural weapons though. When he attacks he prefers to have a running start, leaping against his opponents trying to pin them down with his mouth and use his feet to cleave his opponents from their flesh.

Lions Stealth (Ex) : In areas of tall grass or heavy undergrowth Akanga has a +8 bonus to Hide checks.

Improved Grab: When Akanga hits with a bite attack), he deals normal damage and can attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If he wins the grapple he establishes a hold and can rake. He does not lose its Dexterity bonus to AC, still threatens an area, and can use its remaining attacks against other opponents. Each successful grapple check it makes during successive rounds automatically deals the damage indicated for the attack that established the hold. If he gets a hold after an improved grab attack, he pulls the opponent into its space. This act does not provoke attacks of opportunity. He can even move (possibly carrying away the opponent), provided he can drag the opponent's weight.

Rake (Ex): When Akanga grapples a foe he gains two additional claw attacks that he can use only

against the grappled foe. Rake attacks are not subject to the usual -4 penalty for attacking with a natural weapon in a grapple. Akanga must begin his turn grappling to use rake, he can't begin a grapple and rake in the same turn.

Pounce (Ex): When Akanga makes a charge, it can follow with a full attack—including rake attacks.

Rage (Ex): Akanga's hot temper makes it possible for him to fly into a rage 2 times per day. In a rage, Akanga has the following changes in abilities Str 29 Con 27 Constitution, and a +2 morale bonus on Will saves, but he takes a -2 penalty to Armor Class. The increase in Constitution increases his hit points by 10 points, but these hit points go away at the end of the rage when his Constitution score drops back to normal. (These extra hit points are not lost first the way temporary hit points are.) While raging, Akanga cannot use any Charisma-, Dexterity-, or Intelligence-based skills (except for Balance, Escape Artist, Intimidate, and Ride), the Concentration skill, or any abilities that require patience or concentration. His fit of rage lasts for 11 rounds but he can prematurely end his rage. At the end of the rage, Akanga loses the rage modifiers and restrictions and becomes fatigued (-2 penalty to Strength, -2 penalty to Dexterity, can't charge or run) for the duration of the current encounter. Entering a rage takes no time itself, but Akanga can do it only during his action, not in response to someone else's action.

Improved Uncanny Dodge (Ex): Akanga retains his Dexterity bonus to AC even if he is caught flat-footed or struck by an invisible attacker and can no longer be flanked. However, he still loses his Dexterity bonus to AC if immobilized. This defense denies a rogue the ability to sneak attack Akanga by flanking him, unless the attacker has 9 rogue levels.

Fast Healing (Su): As a greater broken one Akanga has fast healing 2.

Trap Sense (Ex): Akanga has a +1 bonus on Reflex saves made to avoid traps and a +1 dodge bonus to AC against attacks made by traps.

Scent (Ex): Akanga can detect approaching enemies, sniff out hidden foes, and track by sense of smell. He can detect opponents by sense of smell, generally within 30 feet. If the opponent is upwind, the range is 60 feet. If it is downwind, the range is 15 feet. Strong scents, such as smoke or rotting garbage, can be detected at twice the ranges noted above. Overpowering scents, such as skunk musk or troglodyte stench, can be detected at three times these ranges. Akanga can detect another creature's presence but not its specific location. Noting the direction of the scent is a move action. If he moves within 5 feet of the scent's source, Akanga can pinpoint that source. He can identify familiar odors just as humans do familiar sights.

Track by Smell (Ex):Akanga can follow tracks by smell, making a Wisdom check to find or follow a track. The typical DC for a fresh trail is 10. The DC increases or decreases depending on how strong the quarry's odor is, the number of creatures, and the age of the trail. For each hour that the trail is cold, the DC increases by 2. The ability otherwise follows the rules for the Track feat. Akanga ignores the effects of surface conditions and poor visibility. Water, particularly running water, ruins a trail for tracking through smell.

Low-light Vision (Ex): Akanga's eyes that are so sensitive to light that he can see twice as far as normal in dim light. He can see outdoors on a moonlit night as well as he can during the day.

Dread Possibility: Theia's silver mirror medallion

Although Akanga has no recollection of his previous life, he is sometimes plagued by nightmares originating from his subconscious. When he wakes up he has fleeting impressions of images of his life as the brewerer Arkan Gănescu, although his name is never imprinted when he wakes up some of these dreams stick to him. When Arkan escaped the Pride Eater leaving Theia's body behind in the Valley of Dust, she still wore the silver trinket Arkan had given her. If the small mirror is presented to Akanga he may become fascinated by the object as memories of his past life come flooding back to him. In this state Akanga can be treated as if under the effects of a *hypnotism* spell, although with-

out the suggestibility, Arkan remains transfixed in a trance as if paralyzed for 2d6 rounds, if Akanga is attacked during this time the fascination is destroyed. The silver medallion has a reflective side while it's back side is curved and decorated with floral designs. A crudely carved Barovian inscription reads "*To my dear friend Theia. Arkan*", although it is not easily readable if magical means are used on it as a *mending*, *make whole* or *identify* spell. Only a *Legend Lore* spell will reveal this items connection to Akanga. The whereabouts of the silver mirror medallion are unknown, it could be still upon the remains of Theia in the Valley of Dust, covered by sand, or it could have been discovered by travelers and sold anywhere in the Demiplane.

Felix

Devolved Greater Markovian Broken One (Snow Leopard, Feral), Rogue 2/ Thief Acrobat 5

Male Medium Aberration: CR 10; Medium (7ft. tall); HD 3d12+18 5d6+30; hp 99; Init +7 (Dex +3, Improved Initiative +4); Spd 30ft. Climb 15ft. ; AC 15/16 (+3 Dex, +2/3 Agile Fighting) , touch 15/16, flat-footed 10; Base Atk/Grapple: +6 /+11; Atk bite +11 melee (1d6+5) or +11 (weapon); Full Atk bite +11 melee (1d6+5) and 2 claws +6 (1d3+2) or + (weapon); Face/Reach 5ft by 5ft./5ft. SA ; SQ agile fighting +2/+3, acrobatic stance, fast acrobatics, kip up, steady stance, slow fall (30ft.), skill mastery, defensive roll 2/day, improved evasion, fast healing 1, sneak attack +1d6, trapfinding; CE; SV Fort +12, Ref +13, Will +4;
Str 20, Dex 17, Con 23, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 10

Skills: Balance +14(+8), Climb +14(+8), Jump +14(+8), Hide +13(+4), Move Silently +13(+4), Tumble +12, Listen +6, Spot+6, Diplomacy +2, Bluff +5, Intimidate + 7

Skills: Felix has a +4 racial bonus on Hide and Move Silently checks and a +8 racial bonus on Jump, Balance and Climb checks. Felix can always choose to take 10 on a Balance, Climb, Jump or Tumble checks, even if rushed or threatened or distractions would normally prevent him from doing so.



Feats: Alertness, Endurance, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Spring Attack, Weapon Finesse

Languages: Balok (pidgin), Vaasi

Signature Possessions: Cardinal Robes

Description

When Felix was still a Civilized broken one his neck and the back of his hands were marked with spots, now that he has become Feral his snow leopard origin is clear as he has the face of a large feline with a short muzzle with large nasal cavities and a domed forehead. His thick fur is whitish with black spots on head and neck as well as larger rosettes on the back, flanks and bushy tail, while his belly is whitish without any spots. His body is stocky and his legs are short. The more distinguishing characteristic except his spotted fur are his pale grey predatory eyes, always gleaming with anticipation and he has the habit of periodically liking his mouth when doing a task.

Background

Felix was one of Frantisek Markov's most successful experiments and his laboratory assistant for many years. He also had the position

of Vern as major domo of Markov's estate. He is silent, quick-tempered and impatient while his better aspect of being quick-witted has deteriorated since his de-evolution from a Civilized Greater Broken One to a Feral one. He regards everyone he encounters with disdain and still wears the ragged red robes of a cardinal though he has lost the small pillbox-style hat. He still wears these clothes as he still believes they set him above the other beastmen who he sees as savages. Even though Felix was a close assistant to Markov he secretly conspired against him acting as Akanga's eyes and ears within the darklord's compound. When the *Beastmen Rebellion* broke Felix found the opportunity to attack his second master and becoming lord of Markovia. He attacked Akanga from behind while he was torturing Markov, but the lion man retaliated and overwhelmed Felix who managed to feign his death by falling into the river close to Markov's compound and later escaped in the mountains of Markovia.

But Felix's background is more complex, his life, before being transformed into a broken one, began in Zhukar as Felix Zăpadescu, a devoted priest of Zhakata. Felix was a curious fellow who needed more answers than those given by the prophet Yagno Petrovna. During the night under the cover of darkness he would secretly visit the Zhukar Library of Enlightment, searching for holy texts while he would ask his elders too many questions, questions that soon labeled him as a heretic, a believer of Zhakata's second aspect, that of the Provider.

Felix was imprisoned for his herecy and was subjected to the *Rite of Tranformation* by Yagno Petrovna on the highest altar of the Temple of Zhakata in G'Henna's capital. He was transformed into an amalgam of human and beasts and exiled into the Outlands of G'Henna. Though Felix was transformed he still kept the secret knowledge he learned in the Zhukar Library of Enlightment. Within the ancient scrolls and books of the great abandoned library he had found the description of a powerful witch living in a cursed place in the western steppes of G'Henna.

Felix travelled for days in the steppes looking for a cursed place lined with bones where birds don't sing and animals tremble, as the texts were describing it, close to the Tepestani border.

He new he was approaching the place the holy text referred as the canary he held in a cage during the whole trip, stopped singing. It didn't take long for him to discover the staked humanoid and animal skulls and scattered bones on the ground. He shouted for the crone Stavrala Nefaermyth living in that place to reveal herself and so she did. A tall woman ravaged by age stepped out of a cavern, her skin was of a yellow brown hue, tough and leathery and her hands were twisted resembling talons. Her long white hair, were constantly blown by a bitterly cold wind that seemed to follow her whenever she went. Although she wore tattered thin robes she had a regal look as she was able to command the elements and this was her kingdom.

The shrieking hag easily accepted Felix's wish to "not be a mongrelman anymore", she cryptically said, "I will grant you your wish, priest, for no reward. From now on you will not be a mongrelman anymore..." before turning him into a snow leopard. She laughed as she uttered "Your deeds will be their own reward…", as the newly formed animal played a little bit with the cage trying to get the dead canary out of it. After playing for a while the snow leopard took its own way seeking for food in Markovia.

Current Sketch

Since Felix's form begun to change during the *Beastmen Rebellion* he is dreaded of becoming a beast again, he knows that his mind and body have deteriorated since Markov was strapped upon the table of life and wants to find a way to turn himself as he once was, "human". He knows that the only person on the island able to help him is Markov but would never go to him as he believes that his treachery to Diosamblet has been revealed. Lately he has been spying Markov's estate and knows that his two new petite twins are his new assistants. He hopes to find a way to convince them to make him human again, he just needs leverage.

Felix's lair is located close to the Monastery of the Lost, he keeps an eye on the gray robed monks and the come and goings around the monastery. Felix is one of the few creatures on the island to know that the Monastery is still inhabited by the monks, an information he keeps

to himself for the time when it is most useful. He is also the only beastman who knows what has happened to the *Table of Life* although this is an information that he knows is not for sharing. He knows that he can use it to manipulate potential allies to his cause which is to become lord of Markovia. He may tell potential "allies" that the artifact was taken away from the island during the *Beastmen Rebellion* if he wants to get rid potential enemies or may claim that he knows were the Order of the Guardians hid it if he is determined that he has use of his "allies". Whichever of the two is true he will sure keep it to himself, he knows that the information is to important to share it with strangers.

Combat

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability Felix must hit with his bite attack. He can attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If he wins the grapple check he establishes a hold and can rake.

Pounce (Ex): If Felix charges a foe he can mke a full attack, including two rakes.

Rake (Ex): Attack bonus +11 melee, damage 1d3+2

Fast Acrobatics (Ex): Felix can avoid the normal penalties for accelerated movement while using his acrobatics talents. He ignores the normal -5 penalty when making a Balance check while moving at his full normal speed. He can climb at half his speed as move action without taking -5 penalty on his Climb check. Finally he can tumble at his full speed without taking the normal -10 peanalty on his Tumble check.

Kip Up (Ex): Felix can stand up from prone position as a free action that doesn't invoke attacks of opportunity. This ability works only if Felix wears light or no armor and carries no more than light load.

Steady Stance (Ex): Felix remains stable on his feet when others have difficulty standing. He is not considered flat footed while balancing or climbing and he adds his class level as a bonus on Balance or Climb checks to remain balancing or climbing when he takes damage.

Agile Fighting (Ex): A whirling, spinning acrobat, Felix is a devilishly difficult target. Starting at 2nd level he gains a +2 bonus to Armor Class. When fighting defensively or using total defense this bonus becomes +3. In adition Felix takes no penalty to his Armor Class melee attack rolls when kneeling, sitting or prone. This ability works only if Felix wears light or no armor and carries no more than light load.

Slow Fall (Ex): Felix as an acrobatic cat-folk reduces the effective distance of falls by 30 feet.

Acrobatic Charge (Ex): Felix can charge in situations where others cannot. He can charge over difficult terrain that normally slows movement or through allies blocking his path. This ability enables him to charge across a cluttered battlefield, leap down from a ledge, or swing across a chasm to get to his target. Depending on the circumstance, he may need to make appropriate checks (such as Jump, Tumble, or Use Rope checks) to successfully move over a terrain.

Defensive Roll (Ex): Twice per day Felix can reroll a potentially lethal blow to take less damage from it than he otherwise would.

Improved Evasion (Ex): Felix can avoid damage from certain attacks with a successful Reflex save and takes only half damage on a failed save.

Sneak Attack (Ex): If Felix can catch an opponent when he is unable to defenf himself effectively from his attack, he can strike a vital spot for extra damage. Felix's attack deals extra damage any time his target would be denied Dexterity bonus to AC or when Felix r flanks his target. This extra damage is 1d6, should Felix score a critical hit with a sneak attack, this extra damage is not multiplied.

Trapfinding (Ex): Felix can use the Search skill to locate traps when the task has DC 20 or higher.

Dread Possibility: Rivalries Resurface
Neither Markov nor Akanga knows that Felix is alive, if the Lion-King learns about his old lackey being alive he will sure demand his head for his treachery. Markov on the other hand is oblivious to his old henchman's treachery, he believed that Felix died along with Orson during Akanga's attack to his compound, until he saw him while being semi-unconscious when Felix attacked Akanga. He believes this was a delirium caused by the extreme pain he suffered in Akanga's hands, but if he learns that Felix is alive he will firmly believe that Felix tried to save him from the lion-mans clutches. He may well invite Felix back to his compound where he will make repairs to his devolving body turning him again into a Greater Broken One.

Father Milhouse

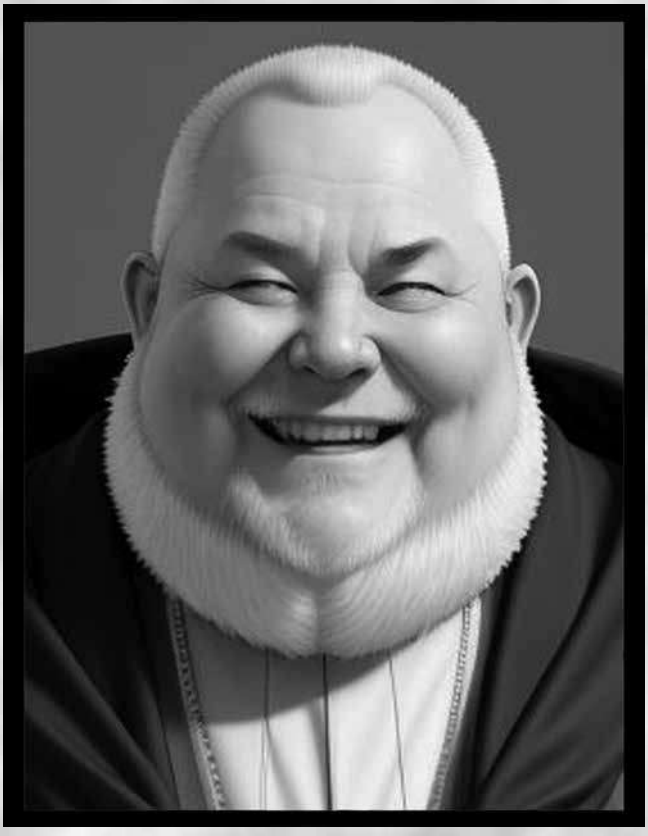
Ancient Dead (3rd rank mummy), 7th level cleric/ 2nd level Guardian Seeker
Medium Undead: CR 12; Medium (6ft. tall); HD 9d12; hp 48; Init +2 (Dex +2); Spd 30ft.; AC 21 (+1 Dex, +10 natural) , touch 11, flat-footed 20; Base Atk/Grapple: +5/+11; Atk slam +11 melee 1d6+6 plus disease); Full Atk slam +11 melee (1d6+6 plus disease); Face/Reach 5ft by 5ft./5ft. SA divine spells, disease (mummy rot), fear, rebuke undead; SQ darkvision, resistant to blows, damage reduction 10/+1, iron, non magical silver weapons do half damage, turn resistance +4, immunity to cold, immunity to fire, undead traits, improved grab, rejuvenation (rank 3); SW fire vulnerability LN; SV Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +12;
Str 22, Dex 11, Con -, Int 10, Wis 20, Cha 18

Skills: Hide +14, Listen +13, Move Silently +8, Spot +13, Concentration +6, Heal +7, Spellcraft +6, Knowledge (arcana) +8, Knowledge (history) +4, Knowledge (religion) +4, Diplomacy +8, Search +9

Feats: Alertness, Combat Casting, Leadership, Scribe Scroll +2

Languages: Vaasi, Balok

Cleric spells per day (DC 15+ spell's level) 6/6+1/5+1/4+1/3+1/2+1
Deity: Deneir. Domains: Knowledge (cast divination spells at +1 caster level), Rune (Scribe Scroll feat)



Signature Possession: Holy Symbol of Deneir (a lit candle above a purple eye with a triangular pupil), scroll with a *regeneration* spell, Order of the Guardian robes.

Description
Father Milhouse is in pristine condition though one of the Ancient Dead, his undead status is not apparent. He appears a somewhat overweight abbot with broad shoulders and a prodigious belly, all wrapped in heavy dark robes. His priestly grey robe is hooded, and he normally wears it with the hood down (as opposed to his followers) to reveal chubby features and short hair which has gone entirely silver. He normally has a friendly, amused smile on his face.

Current Sketch
Father Milhouse is the leader of the Brethren of the Monastery of the Lost and, though one of the Ancient Dead, his undead status is not apparent as it seems that his Calling protects him from the *Table's* decaying power. As with his fellow monks, he is relatively unaware of his own undead status. The fact that he neither eats, nor sleeps, nor drinks is merely a fact of everyday "life" for him. If the oddity of all this should be thrust beneath his nose, he merely credits it to the blessings of the *Table*. Father Milhouse is the

only member of the monastery not bound under a vow of silence he will give any visitors a warm welcome, explaining the purpose of the monastery if questioned, even freely admitting the existence of the *Table of Life*. As his gods dogma is that Information should be free to all and all should be able to read it so that lying tongues cannot disturb things out of proportion. Though after what happened to the monastery about a decade ago he will not disclose any information about the *Table's* sightings unless he knows the *Table's* whereabouts in which case he may send anyone interested in a wild goose chase. He also firmly believes that literacy is an important gift from the god and filling idle hours with the copying of written work, for in such a manner do you propagate knowledge and aid the pursuit of the Metatext of Deneir. Before the theft of the *Table of Life* he believed that the *detect thoughts* spell was too intrusive to use, but since two large tragedies in his life were caused by human greed he has changed his views on the matter and has always one such spell readied.

He has no affiliations with the *Brotherhood of Broken Blades* which he believes them to be fanatical zealots going down a dark path. He knows what has happened to Radaga and he feels at peace that in the end she has been punished for the atrocities she commited as well as releaved that the *Crown of Souls* and Daglan Daegon have been destroyed. Deep doen he still feels guilt for not stopping her from destroying the monastery as well as for losing the *Table of Life*.

Background

Father Milhouse was an orphan raised in the monastery of the Brootherhood in Kartakass a sect of the Order of the Guardians that guarded the notorious *Crown of Souls*. He was raised by the monastery monks along with another orphan Radaga who was found crying in the mists a few years before he was left at their doorstep. In the multi religion environment of the Order of the Guardians, some of them being outlanders he and Radaga were raised to venerate different gods, the young Milhouse became a follower of Deneir protector of knowledge, literature and cartography while Radaga followed Akidi the elemental embodiment of air.

Although Radaga was a very beautiful and flirty girl, Brother Milhouse was too busy copying books and by the time they reached adulthood they had become distant. Milhouse had come to distrust Radaga who seemed too caught up with her appearance and her inclination to be adored by the men in the monastery. She seemed to follow the doctrine of her goddess in finding enlightenment in her interests, usually young foresters from a small thorp close to their monastery. As the dogma of her goddess dictated, as soon as she lost interest she would leave that interest as to find further spiritual growth, pursuing her personal dream of one day becoming an Akadian followed by her own worshippers.

They had so much grown apart that Brother Milhouse failed to notice the changes in Radaga's personality as she begun to have darker interests. Radaga had begun to feel that her oath as a member of the Order of the Guardians where imprisoning her in a commitment that she did not want to follow. Feeling that she had been manipulated by the monks of the Brotherhood to live a life of servitude to the Order's cause she made a plan to be released form her imaginable chains, after all her dogma also said that to let one self fettered and imprisoned in a constrained life was a little better than death, so she chose death to release her form her constraints in a perverted interpretation of her deities dogma.

Radaga managed to slowly seduce and corrupt some members of the Brotherhood and turn them against each other. On Midsummer of 694 BC the holiest of Akadi's days she claimed herself Akadian and as a massacre started in the monastery she claimed the Crown of Sould as her own. Brother Milhouse and a few others among them Calumn Songmaster managed to escape as the Mists transported everyone in the monastery to the Dead Hills of Kartakass known as Arkalias Hills, a misnomer of Akadia's Hills in the Kartakan dialect. All the monks who followed Radaga became her eternal servants as they were transformed either to goblyns by the Crown of Souls or into undead to serve her, adding them to the army of skeletons that awaited her in the catacombs of Kartakass.

Brother Milhouse felt betrayed but also responsible for what had happened, if he hadn't been so caught up with spending his time in the library reading and copying books, he may have

seen the signs of Radaga's treachery. Though he found the blame in Radaga he was not as zealous at avenging every arcane user in the Lands of the Mists, believing this to be a blasphemy to Deneir and the protection of knowledge. When Calumn decided to kill a young sorceress they found in the woods, Milhouse opposed him, as the dogma of his god dictated to punish those who deface or destroy a book in proportion to the value of the information lost, as such arcane users should be punished by their actions and not because of their knowledge of arcane magic. Calumn attacked the young girl only to be blocked by Milhousen and the two of them dueled. When in a decisive blow both of their swords were broken, the girl managed to escape, an angry Calumn proclaimed Milhousen's betrayal of their cause by getting the answer that killing inocents was never his cause. After that they both went on different ways never to see each other again.

Milhousen travelled the lands until he reached the domain of Nova Vaasa and presented himself to Sir Armand Rivtoff "Ironhand", a religious knight who was an agent of another sect of the Guardians, the Order of Tramalaine. Sir Armand welcomed the monk in his household as tutor to his children. Milhousen convinced Sir Armand to write his experience against the Black Duke, following Deneir's dogma that information that is not recorded and saved for later use is information that is lost. He helped him write *The Beast of Ehrendton, a tragic saga* that was published in 695 BC.

Milhousen and Sir Armand became close friends and he would sometimes ride with him and his fellow knights on quests by the Prince Tristen Hiregaard of Nova Vaasa. One of these quest involved a series of attacks by malformed man-beasts reported to have occurred in Dommark north of the Rivtoff lands. Sir Armand Ironhand sent Brother Milhousen with some of his men to investigate. The rumors about the animal-men and strange tracks led them to a clearing, close to the border with the newly revealed land of Markovia, were they found the malformed bodies of the beastmen. It was there that Milhouse felt the Calling for the first time, something that gave him purpose since the destruction of his monastery. His intuition led the group to a trail in the goblin infested land of Tepest were they discovered the bodies a band of thieves. It seemed as if whatever mystical force was guiding him was leading him in a bloody trail as once more the Calling led them to a burning Vistani camp in the Wormwood forest, the only survivor managed to say something about a cursed slab before expiring.

Milhouse bacame restless as the Calling seemed to become stronger, knowing that they were close to whoever had murdered the Vistani. They kept on going though the land of Tepest until they they reached the cursed land of Arak where they were ambushed by a band of murderous thieves. When the battle was over and the thieves lay dead on the ground Brother Milhouse found the source of his Calling, wrapped inside a ragged cloth was a greenish black marble slab shot with thin veins of gold. When he saw the *Table of Life* he recognized the evil within it. He brought it back to Sir Armand were they spend the following months searching for the *Tables* origin and ways to destroy it. When they understood that destroying it was near to impossible they decided to found a monastery to protect the world from the table. Since Brother Milhouse felt the Calling in the borders of Markovia he traveled where his Calling was leading him with the cursed artifact and discovered an old abandoned monastery perched upon Mount Baratak. Sir Armand funded the renovation of the monastery and after gathering support from the Order's network, more brothers of the Order of the Guardians moved there to guard it naming Milhouse Abbot. They contacted with the outside world through agents of the Order and the Vistani, protected by the table itself by giving them extended life with its ghostly radiance. Unliving in denial about their true nature and the corruption of the Table on their bodies.

When the Grand Conjunction occurred the monastery became more self sufficient, it helped that the blessing of the *Table* made them resistant to hunger and thirst and being completely cut off from the outside world and their allies they became more determined to keep the cursed treasure which they guarded secret from Frantisek Markov who they knew ruled over the beastmen as Diosamblet. When in 749 BC beguiled adventures stole the table from the monastery and brought it to Markov they tried to take it back but to no avail. He made an attempt to step down from the leadership of the Monastery of the Lost

Souls but everyone supported him as their leader. After the theft the sect was scattered in the multiple corners of the Land of Mists as they vowed to never rest until they bring back the artifact to their monastery. Their vows of silence and decaying bodies makes it difficult to interact with people to learn the whereabouts of the table though.

Combat
Father Milhouse commands the loyalty of his fellow monks, regardless of their state of deterioration. They attack on his command, but he will only give such an order if the heroes draw weapons first. In a conflict, Father Milhouse casts *spell immunity (lightning bolt)* on himself if at all possible; this protection applies only to himself and not to his flock. He is immune to all cold and to fire as a result of his nature as one of the Ancient Dead.

Improved Grab (Ex): When Father Milhouse deals normal damage with his slam attack he may attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking attacksof opportunity.

Fear (Su): Father Milhouse can use his fear power at will. This is a matter of willpower as the leader of the Monastery of the Lost bends all his will to flood the victim's mind with sheer terror. Those viewing him must make a successful Will save DC 18 or become paralyzed with fear for 3d4 rounds. Those targeted by this power cannot be affected by this fear aura for that day.

Disease (Su): Father Milhouse's touch can spread disease if he so wishes.

Greater smallpox rot: Contact; DC 23; Incubation 1d6 hours; 1d3 Str, 1d3 Con and 1d6 Cha/day; fatality 1d8 days.

The loss of Charisma is permanent if the individual is healed. While affected, the victim cannot recover hit points save by a *wish* spell.
This disease may only be cured by magical means. The mummy rot reduces the victm's Strength and Constitution by one point per day. After 1d6 hours, the victim experiences convulsions causing it to suffer a -2 penalty on all skill checks and making spellcasting impossible. A simple cure disease will banish the effects of the disease, but unless it is followed up within 24 hours by a *regeneration* spell a relapse occurs. Father Milhouse knows how his dreaded disease can be cured and he owns a scroll with a *regeneration* spell inscribed on his person. Although he may share the information for the cure he will not save anyone he doesn't feel worth saving as well as use the spell as leverage to press someone into making amends by assisting the Brethren in their quest.

Rejuvenation (Su): Father Milhouse is capable of drawing Positive Energy Plane to heal damage. This is a relatively slow process and requires the ancient to be inert for a period of time. To do so he has to stay inert for one day for the process to begin in which they heal 12 hit points per hour of rest. After Father Milhouse is healed he must stay inert for one hour.

Forbidden Lore (Ex): As a Guardian Seeker Father Milhouse is always alert for lore pertaining to evil items. Father Milhouse can make a forbidden lore check with a +3 bonus to see if he knows something on a particular object. The object in question must be evil, intelligent magical item or artifact that requires a powers check to bear or use. This ability is similar to bardic knowledge.

The Stain of Evil (Ex): Father Milhouse can recognize magical items of great evil just by looking at them. In the view of an item that requires a powers check to bear or use the ancient dead may make a Spellcraft check (DC equal to caster's level). If it is successful the Guardian instantly becomes aware of the item's corrupt nature, knowing that the object "holds great evil" and nothing else.

Quest of Destruction (Ex): Father Milhouse receives a +1 morale bonus to all attack rolls, damage rolls, saving throws, and skill checks whenever he is engaged I a quest directly related to the destruction of any evil, intelligent magic item or artifact that requires a powers check to bear or use.

Dread Possibility: The Chained Fiend
Father Milhouse is desperate to find the *Table of Life* he is on the verge of casting a *lesser planar binding* spell, but casting this spell attempts the dangerous act of luring a creature from another plane to a specifically prepared trap and then coerce to hold the fiend in the trap until it agrees to find and retrieve the *Table of Life* in return for its freedom. Even if the summoning succeeds the

summoned fiend may well resist being held in the trap, so Father Milhouse still searches for ways of how to secure the fiends imprisonment and this is the reason why he hasn't cast this spell yet. If he goes on with his plan he may make the same mistake as Brother Micah of the Order of Tramalaine around seventy-five years ago when he summoned the Black Duke. But even if he traps and coerces a fiend to help him, when the task is done and Father Milhousen has again the *Table of Life* in his possession the creature will be vengeful against the ancient Father as he will not be able to go back to its plain of existence, creating more problems than solving them.

Captain Lennard "Seehund" Gaertner

Sea Stalker, Rogue 2 / Scarlet Corsair 5

Medium size/Large Shapechanger: CR 13; Medium (7ft. tall), Large (15ft. long); HD 4d10+8 2d6+4 5d8+10; hp 77; Init +2 (+3); Spd 30ft. (human form),10 ft., swim 40 ft. (seawolf form) or 30 ft., swim 20 ft. (hybrid form), +20 feet when within mists; AC 18 (+2 Dex, +4 natural, +2 ring of protection), touch +14, flat-footed 16 (human form) or 17 (+3 Dex, +4 natural), touch 13, flat-footed 14 in seawolf or 19 (+3 Dex, +4 natural, +2 ring of protection), touch 15, flat-footed 16 hybrid form; Base Atk/Grapple:+10/+15; Atk : Bite +17 melee (1d6+6) in seawolf or hybrid form; or cutlass +14 melee (1d6+3/19–20) in human form; Full Atk Bite +18 melee (1d10+5) in seawolf form, or bite +18 melee (1d8+5) and 2 claws +12 melee (1d6+2) in hybrid form, or cutlass +14 melee (1d6+3 19–20/×2) in human form; Face/Reach 5ft by 5ft./5ft. SA Curse, rend, sneak attack, scourge of the seas, ; SQ Change shape, darkvision 60 ft., hold breath, low-light vision, scent, dodge (+2 bonus to AC while onboard a ship); NE; SV Fort +7 (+11), Ref +9 (+10), Will +7;

Str 17 (25), Dex 14 (16), Con 15 (21), Int 13, Wis 12, Cha 15

Languages: Lamordian*, Balok, Darkonese, Mordentish

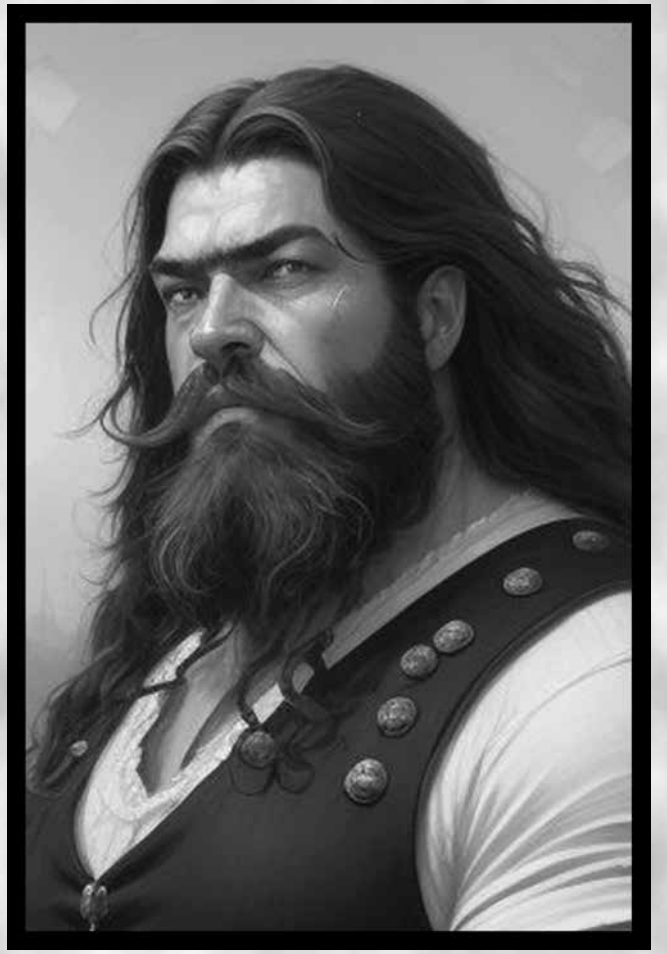
Skills: Bluff +10, Intimidate +11, Profession (sailor) +8, Craft (Cooking) + 3, Hide +7, Listen +10, Move Silently +7 (+14 underwater), Spot +10, Swim +10 (+18), Knowledge (geography) +10, Climb +7 (+12), Sense Motive +5, Gather Information +7, Diplomacy +8, Survival +5

Skills with an asterisk have ranks invested in the *Figurehead of Spiritual Expansion* (see below), the item also grants the Alertness feat giving him +2 to Listen and Spot checks.

In the form of a seawolf he has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform a special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming provided it swims in a straight line.

Feats: Alertness*, Improved Control Shape, Improved Natural Attack (bite), Power Attack, Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Feint, Improved Bull Rush, Iron Will, Awesome Blow, Weapon Focus (bite), Item Familiar* (See below)

Signature Possessions: *Ghost Touch Cutlass +1*, Ring of Protection +2, *Sextant of the Mists*, *Figurehead of Spiritual Expansion*, *Hylende Walross* (ship, collier)



Hylend Walross
The "Howling Walrus" is a bulk cargo full-rigged ship the sailing vessel has a small forecastle and sterncastle, and three masts, all of them square-rigged. It is sturdily built with a broad, flat bow, a square stern, and a long box-like body with a deep hold. It has a flat-bottomed design making the ship well-suited to sailing in shallow waters and allows it to be beached for loading and unloading of cargo and for basic repairs without requiring a dry dock. The hull, internal floors, and futtocks are built from traditional white oak, the keel and stern post from elm, and the masts from pine and fir. The ship also has a double keelson to lock the keel, floors and frames in place. It's armament consists of 12 6-pounder cannons and 12 swivel guns, small cannons mounted on a swiveling stand or fork which allows a very wide arc of movement.

Collier: Colossal vehicle; Seaworthiness +4 (special); Shiphandling +2; Speed wind × 30 ft. (average); Overall AC –3; Hull sections 28 (sink 7 sections); Section hp 80 (hardness 5); Section AC 3; Rigging Sections 3; Rigging hp 80 (hardness 0), AC 1; Ram 4d6; Mounts 2 light and 2 heavy; Space 77 ft. by 24 ft.; Height 15 ft. (draft 5 ft.), 100 ft. (main mast) ; Complement 25; Watch 10; Cargo 180 tonnes (Speed wind × 15 ft. if 90 tons or more); Cost 14,000 gp

Description
Captain Lennard is an enormous man with large muscles he has hairy arms and chest that he usually displays by wearing an open shirt and roll up sleeves. He wears his fizzy black hair long and has bushy beard that he sometimes trims into mutton chops. His bushy thick eyebrows meet in the middle above the bridge on the nose highlighting his predatory green eyes that gleam with the knowledge of him being more powerful than the people he encounters. His manners are rough and he rarely has patience for been perceived as polite. He usually dresses in the comfortable clothes of a sailor, making him almost indistinguishable from his men except from his large size. When he has to attend something more official he will wear the jacket of a captain but he distastes hats and he will never wear one unless he really has to (like for instance to cover his head from being recognised). Even when in human form Lennard is a pure carnivore, and cannot stand the taste of grains or vegetables. Whenever Lennard enters the Mists either on board his ship or on land he becomes excited and issues a strange grieving howl, sounding like a grieving woman.

Background
Lennard was born and spend most of his life in Baytown, as seawolves make poor parents from an early age he had to depend on himself to survive as those seawolf children who cannot keep up with the pack are left to drown or die of exhaustion. He matured to become a strong adult but he was also vain after some time believing that as seawolves they could do better than just grow fat in Baytown and made the mistake of challenging Rudolf for leadership of Baytown. Lennard had underestimated Rudolf who was strong enough to beat him to near death and while he was angry with the young seawolf decided to let him live in disgrace and exiled him from the pack. Lennard left bitterly and injured with a promise to become fiercer than anyone in Baytown ever was. After surviving his ordeal he moved to Ludendorf and worked for some time as a bouncer in many of Ludendorf's dock bars gaining notoriety as a man who could make people vanish without trace. It didn't take long for him to board a ship, gaining a reputation of someone not to be trifled with. He traveled the misty waters of the Sea of Sorrows, with a number of ships, reaching as far as Sri'Raji, his bloodlust and animalistic nature sometimes overcame him and he was more than once accused of some sailor's disappearance. When on board the colier *Hylende Walross* (Howling Walrus) importing coal from Nosos, he was punished in front of all his shipmates by the captain of the ship, only to be transformed into his hybrid form, killing or injuring everyone on board and keeping the ship as well as it's treasures for himself.

The incident although it was never known in its entirety it became known as "Mutiny on the Walrus" and it was the first time he realized that he could not just control his progeny but could also force them to change into whichever seawolf form he wanted them to.

Although all of those who survived were known to be mutineers and criminals according to Ludendorf's law they managed to escape imprisonment or hanging by the Ludendorf authorities and they were all pardoned. Although Lennard brags about the way he escaped prosecution when he gets drunk, back then it was a common secret known only to his subordinates. He managed to infiltrate Schloss Gaertner, the estate of the *Howling Walrus's* aging owner, as a cook. By mixing his blood in the red wine served he managed to force the owner adopt him making him his sole heir. When Kilian Gaertner was killed in a shipyard accident, Lennard gained a seat as one of the schultebott, he used his new found influence and fortune to sponsor his expeditions rarely visiting the mainland. But his cruel nature was not something that could be hidden for a long time, stories about how he behaved to his subordinates began to circulate and once more he was shunned by society. When the Grand Conjunction came to pass his enterprise as well as his costly expeditions made it difficult to maintain the Gaertner fortune and he was in the verge of losing the lands that gave him his seat among the schultebott. When in 742 BC rumors of a new land being discovered by Captain Magnus 'Salziger' Preiszner's vanished ship, he made arrangements to travel to that island. Captain Lennard "Seehund" Gaertner was the first to make the round of the island beaching it for the first time in 744 BC. At some point after drawing the map of the island he noticed the island's shape was similar to the land of Markovia existing before the Grand Conjunction was the gaping maw of the Shadow Rift exists. He theorized that somehow the land mass that disappeared from the middle of the Core emerged from the depths of the Sea of Sorrows and became obsessed with this theory, inviting scholars to his manor to help him prove his theory. It wasn't until years later when he decided he had to explore the island to find the proof he needed. As schultebott he organized a new expedition to the island feigning to want to find out what happened to the Lamordian colony. With support from the town of Ludendorf he set sail in early 750 BC.

Arriving to the island he didn't find the threatening beastmen he had encountered before, searching through the jungle he discovered a wooden house with thatched roof, there he encountered Frantisek Markov and seeing a chance to make profit by exporting Markovia's new found silver and providing the Doctor with raw materials for his experiments he made an agreement with him. He traveled back to Ludendorf with a map of the island naming it Markovia, bringing with him exotic fruits and vegetables as potatoes and turnips, as well as silver, thus he managed to save his inherited fortune and keep his seat of power among the schultebott.

Current Sketch

Lennard has turned his fortune more than once but it was never out of luck but out of fierce determination and ruthlessness. He is mostly known among sailors as the first man to map as well name the island Markovia as well as having the monopoly of safely traveling to Markovia. Other ships vanish or are found shipwrecked (sometimes by none other than Lennard himself). He has been the sole raw material supplier of Frantisek Markov for almost two decades amassing a fortune from Markovian exports.

During the last five years silver was discovered in western Markovia, Markov and Captain Lennard made a rearrangement. Markov would give permission as well as labor hands to mine the silver and Captain Lennard would offer his own services for one third of the silver extracted from the mine. Captain Lennard's services include supplying Markov with exotic animals from across the demiplane as well as humanoids to be used in his experiments. He would also become his contact with the "civilized" world and would do anything he could to locate the *Table of Life* and bring it back to him.

Around once a month Captain Lennard travels to Markovia, unloading slaves and animals and uploading silver and other goods. He often stops to Markovia on his return from Sri Raji using the Emerald Stream Mistway, bringing Dr. Markov exotic animals as well as slaves purchased in the market places of Muladi. Other times he travels to Rokushima Táiyoo bringing more exotic animals as well as rare plants,

drugs and narcotics. Although he has become Frantisek's sole connection to the world outside Markovia, Captain Lennard does not bother so much with finding the whereabouts of the *Table of Life* preferring to spend his time and resources to things that interest him more than a cursed table.

Even if Captain Lennard doesn't travel to Sri Raji or Rokushima Táiyoo he is still able to find the raw materials Markov requests as he has ties with Nova Vaasan slavers. If for some reason he fails to arrange for the specific number of people Markov requests, he may raid a small ship, leaving no witnesses behind, there are many times he has used his position as schultebott to cover his illicit activities and has created an alter ego called "Seehund" to scape goat his criminal activities. Although he is still known as a ruthless seadog no one has managed to make the connection between him and Seehund and live.

He has managed to destroy any opposition to his monopoly by using "the façade of the bloodthirsty pirate Seehund" he even donates money sometimes for the purpose of apprehending the Seehund. At times when a "ghost ship" is discovered sailing adrift, and Captain Lennard happens to be in Ludendorf he is going to be the first to start rumors claiming that the ship was attacked by Seehund. The notoriety of Seehund has even reached other coastline domains, no one knows the name of Seehund's ship but most people outside Lamordia assume (correctly) that Seehund is not a man but a monster.

Lennard is a power hungry ruffian and although he is one of the schultebott, he holds that position because of his wealth and ruthlessness and not out of respect. Most people in Ludendorf know him as a dangerous and wealthy man better not to be associated with and definitely not crossed with. Fortunately for the people of Ludendorf, Lennard spends most of his time at sea and only rarely does he stay's more than a few days in Ludendorf.

His tasteless decorated manor is full with nautical equipment and exotic things from his travels which he calls "Wunderkammer" meaning wonder-room. This cabinet of curiosities, containing even some minor magical items, presented in a manner dominated by a horror vacui aesthetic and a predilection for the exotic. This microcosm he has collected is not only a subconscious way to control the world around him, the macrocosm, but also serves as a symbol of Captain Lennard's socioeconomic status as well as entertainment. In the few days he spends in Ludendorf he often organizes luxurious dinner parties, inviting prominent members from Lamordia as well as learned scholars form across the Core. These dinners of "learned entertainment" are organized by Captain Lennard purely for investigative purposes, inviting business competitors or even people he detests. His favorite paraphrased motto is "eat your friends first cause your enemies are tastier". Although he has many times invited the now bedridden Baron Vilhelm Von Aubrecker neither he nor his daughter Gretta have ever attended any of these dinners.

Combat

As a seawolf Lennard is a ravenous predator that combines the worst aspects of land and sea animals. Worse, he can use his human form in order to lure ship's crews to their doom. A typical attack by his crew is boarding a ship in humanoid form, seeking to steer it towards a vulnerable position to his ship the Hylende Walross (Howling Walrus). Once in position, the lookouts are overwhelmed and murdered in order to clear the way for the rest of his crew to board and engage in an orgy of mayhem and violence. The ships are usually scuttled after the crew is slaughtered, but some are allowed to float free as bait, or are used to gather a new crew to murder and consume. He rarely leave victims alive but those who he finds worthy, he keeps them alive to be transformed into seawolves themselves. In hand to hand combat he is formidable and he often uses dirty tricks to catch his opponentsoff-guard. His favorite weapon in human form is a heavy bladed *ghost touch cutlass +1*, found in a deserted island years ago, it's heavy basket hilt gives the wielder a +2 circumstance bonus on any checks to resist being disarmed and as a ghost touch weapon it can deal damage normally against incorporeal creatures, regardless of its bonus. . When he wants to intimidate his opponents on board a ship he will turn into either his hybrid form of his natural form. In his natural form he prefers to use his

body mass to push opponents back from a staircase or throw them overboard.

Curse of the Sea (Su): A humanoid hit by the attacks of Lennard's seawolf or hybrid form must succeed a DC 18 Fortitude save or be cursed to turn into a seawolf at midnight of the next new moon. . A newly transformed seawolf escapes into the ocean if possible upon transforming, and its first victims are usually its traveling companions. The infected lycanthrope remembers only dimly fragments of its original life, but its humanoid form is recognizably the same as it was before, albeit with a feral personality, essentially the inflicted lycanthrope becomes a different, crueler, person.

Progeny Control (Su): When Lennard afflicts another creature with lycanthropy, the afflicted lycanthrope is under his command, this gives him a +4 bonus on checks to influence the progeny's attitude, if it is friendly Lennard can give commands to his progeny. This control lasts only while the progeny is in animal or hybrid form. Lennard can also trigger his progeny's form changes at will. The progeny can make a Control Shape check to resist the change, but Lennard can try again the next round.

Power of the Blood (Su): Captain Lennard has a unique salient ability affecting anyone who tastes his blood as if a *suggestion* spell was cast on them. He uses this power when he wants to make a deal or start rumors about the Seehund.

Change Shape (Su): Lennard's natural form is that of a large black wolf-headed seal, but he can assume two other forms: a human or a wolf-human hybrid. His human form is unique and has already been described, In human form, a Lennard cannot use its bite attack, and he does not convey its curse. In hybrid form, a Lennard's swim speed is reduced to 20 feet, but he has a much faster land speed, and it gains two claw attacks (or can use its claws to wield weapons, if he prefers). This form otherwise resembles the seawolf form. A Lennard remains in one form until he chooses to assume a new one. A change in form cannot be dispelled, not does a Lennard revert to his natural form when killed. A true seeing spell, however, reveals his natural form if it is in human form.

Rend (Ex): If Lennard hits with both claw attacks in hybrid form, he latches onto his opponents body and tears the flesh. This attack deals an additional 2d6+10 points of damage

Damage Reduction (Ex): In animal or hybrid form Lennard has damage reduction 15/+1 or silver

Chemical Bane (Ex): Lennard Gaertner is vulnerable to corals. Lennard would never voluntarily travel to the island of Dominia as the blood coral that grow around the island are lethal to him.

Hold Breath (Ex): As a seawolf Lennard can hold his breath for 126 rounds or over 12 minutes.

Darkvision (Ex): Lennard has the ability to see 60 feet even in total darkness in any of his forms. Darkvision is black and white only but otherwise like normal sight. Darkvision does not grant one the ability to see in magical darkness.

Scent (Ex): This extraordinary ability lets Lennard detect approaching enemies, sniff out hidden foes, and track by sense of smell. He can identify familiar odors just as humans do familiar sights and can use this ability also in the water, detecting opponents by sense of smell, generally within 30 feet. If the opponent is upwind, the range is 60 feet. If it is downwind, the range is 15 feet. Strong scents, such as smoke or rotting garbage, can be detected at twice the ranges noted above. Overpowering scents, such as skunk musk, can be detected at three times these ranges. He can detect another creature's presence but not its specific location. Noting the direction of the scent is a move action. If he moves within 5 feet of the scent's source, Lennard can pinpoint that source. False, powerful odors can easily mask other scents. The presence of such an odor completely spoils the ability to properly detect or

identify creatures, and the base Survival DC to track becomes 20 rather than 10.
Sneak Attack: Lennard has known how to be stealthy in his attacks since he was young attacking ships close to Baytown. He has the ability to deal an extra 2d6 points of damage when he catches a foe off guard.

Corsair's Feint (Ex): In his years as a seadog, Lennard has mastered dirty fighting and trickery. He can make Bluff check to feint in combat as a free action and render his foes flat-footed and thus make sneak attacks against them. Once he has surprised his enemies with such a feint, it takes time before he is able to fool them again. He must wait 2d4 rounds before using corsair's feint again. Waiting requires no specific actions on his part, he can fight normally during this time.

Sailor's Step (Ex): Lennard has learned to use the chaos of a ship at sea to his benefit, taking advantage of the swaying ship and swinging rigging to remain out of reach of his opponents. While aboard a ship and wearing nothing more than light armor he gains a +2 dodge bonus to his Armor Class. If he is caught flat-footed or otherwise denied his Dexterity bonus, he also loses this bonus.

Scourge of the Seas (Ex): Lennard can instill fear into those who recognize him as Seehund. When he uses Intimidate to demoralize foes, the attempt affects all enemies within 30 feet who can see and hear him, and the effect lasts for two rounds. This is a mind-affecting ability, and multiple uses of this ability don't stack.

Awesome Blow (Ex): When he is in his natural seawolf form Lennard may choose to subtract 4 from his melee attack roll and deliver an awesome blow, as a standard action. If the Lennard hits a corporeal opponent of Medium or smaller size his opponent must succeed on a Reflex save (DC = damage dealt) or be knocked flying 10 feet in a direction of Lennard's choice and fall prone. The seawolf can only push the opponent in a straight line, and the opponent can't move closer to Lennard than the square it started in. If an obstacle prevents the completion of the opponent's move, the opponent and the obstacle each take 1d6 points of damage, and the opponent stops in the space adjacent to the obstacle.

Mist Speed (Ex): Whenever Lennard is enveloped in mist, either being the effect of a spell, on board the Sea of Sorrows or the Mists themselves his speed increases by +20 feet.

Mist Sense (Ex): The Dark Powers have gifted Lennard with sensing the presence of Mist creatures within 60 feet of him. He cannot, however, pinpoint the Mist creature. The exact location is not revealed, he can however, discern the number of such creatures within his area.

Mist Dependence (Ex): Lennard becomes weak if he does not make a journey of at least one day length each week. If he stays away from the Mists for a week he begins to lose a point of Constitution for each day that passes after that week has ended without visiting the Mists. His Constitution returns at a rate of one per day after he has entered the Mists again from one sunrise to the next.

Figurehead Vulnerability (Ex): If Captain Lennard is separated from the *Figurehead of Spiritual Expansion* for a continuous period of two weeks or if the figurehead is lost or destroyed he loses the mystical bond with the figurehead and some of his skills as well as one class level (Scarlet Corsair). If that happens he loses most of his nautical skills and he will want to gain revenge from the people responsible for weakening him. He will still be captain of his ship but his power would depend on domination rather than seafaring expertsese.

Seehund Lore
Characters with Knowledge (history), Knowledge (local), or Gather Information can research the Seehund to learn more about him.

DC 10: Some seamen, as the Seehund, are so notorious that are capable of striking fear into entire crews just by the utterance of their name.

DC 15: The Seehund may have cemented his reputation as a cutthroat and a monster, but no one knows how he looks like.
DC 20: The Seehund is known to attack most ships traveling due west from Ludendorf.

DC 25: The Seehund began his attacks around 742 BC, he is said to have connections with Nova Vaasan slavers.

DC 30: The Seehund is an actual monster a sea stalker or otherwise known as a seawolf. His Howling cry can be heard before an attack.

DC 40: The Seehund attacks ships heading towards Markovia. Captain Lennard has never encountered the Seehund's ship and has a monopoly of bringing goods from Markovia.

Captain Lennard Gaertner Lore
Characters with Knowledge (history), Knowledge (local), or Gather Information can research Captain Lennard to learn more about him.

DC 10: Captain Lennard Gaertner is a renowned sea Captain and the first man to map the island of Markovia.

DC 15: Captain Lennard Gaertner is a member of the schultebott, he is a vulgar without any manners and the only reason for his seat is his large fortune.
DC 20: Captain Lennard aquired his large fortune when his adopted father Kilian Gaertner died.

DC 25: Captain Lennard has a very strange habit of howling whenever his ship "The Howling Walrus" disappears into the Mists of the Sea of Sorrows. There are some who say that he howls also when he is on land when entering a fog. His howl sounds like that of a wailing woman.

DC 30: Captain Lennard has in his possession the *Sextant of the Mists* which allows him to travel the misty waters of the Sea of Sorrows unhindered. The only place he will never travel to is the island of Dominia, people believe he has a dislike and disrespect to those who have lost their connection with reality, the clinically insane.

DC 40: Captain Lennard used to work as a bouncer in the dock bars, many years ago. He is a ruffian and he was responsible for some people disappearing back then. Some people say he never stopped his illicit activities he just changed his services. He is said to be cooperating with slavers from Nova Vaasa, although this has never been proved.

Sextant of the Mists
This silver sextant is a sophisticated doubly reflecting navigation instrument that measures the angular distance between two visible objects. The primary use of a sextant is to measure the angle between a celestial body such as the Sun, the Moon, or a star and the horizon for the purposes of celestial navigation to determine latitude and longitude. The device has the shield of Ezra embedded on its main axis and consists of an arc of a circle, marked off in degrees and various sacred runes, and a movable radial arm pivoted at the center of the circle. A telescope engraved with belladonna leaves and berries is mounted rigidly to the framework, lined up with the horizon. The radial arm, on which a mirror is mounted, is moved until the star is reflected into a half-silvered mirror in line with the telescope and appears, through the telescope, to coincide with the horizon. The angular distance of the star above the horizon is then read from the graduated arc of the sextant. From this angle and the exact time of day as registered by a chronometer, the latitude can be determined by means of published tables.
Normally it would be used to determine a vessel's position by measuring the angle formed by the sun or stars and the horizon, but since the misty waters of the Sea of Sorrows are usually overcast these devices are almost useless. But the *Sextant of the Mists* is not a regular nautical instrument, it is in fact a prison for a Mist Ferryman who was bound into this magical device by an anchorite to navigate himself in the Sea of Sorrows. This magical device is able to grant its user the normal +2 circumstance bonus on Knowledge (geography) checks to set and hold course. It also grands the user the ability to pilot the ship as if the weather was clear. The wielder of the S*extant of the Mists* can also navigate himself into a Mistway. Whenever the wielders ship travels via a Mistway, the chance of the Mistway drifting is decreased by 65%.
The bound Mist Ferryman's aura imprisoned in the sextant also protects the wielder of the sextant's ship from creatures with the Mists descriptor as long as no one on board takes any action against them. Mists creatures may not attack a person holding S*extant of the Mists* or target him with spells or spell-like or supernat-

ural abilities, so long as he refrains from attacking them in kind. This ability is similar to the sanctuary spell, save that the creatures are not allowed a WiII save to attack normally, and the effect's duration is permanent until broken by the person using the sextant. The *Sextant of the Mists* also carries a curse whenever a person holding it fails a powers check he comes even closer of becoming a Mist Ferryman himself.

Strong conjuration and abjuration; CL 13th; Craft Wondrous Item, Bind Greater Undead, *Obscuring Mist*, *Summon Monster VII*, *Sanctuary*, *Know Direction*, *Repulsion*, *See Ethereal Resonance, Permanency*; Price 80,000 gp

Track of the Mist Ferryman

Stage One: The Caress The character is able to walk faster when he is within the Mists (+20 feet). When entering the Mists the character is overwhelmed with excitement and forced to issue a strange, wailing howl, like that of a wailing woman. The character gains a +1 Outcast Rating to anyone who witnesses this.

Stage Two: The Enticement The Dark Powers have gifted the character with the power to sense the presence of Mist creatures within 60 feet of him. He cannot, however, pinpoint the Mist creature. The exact location is not revealed, he can however, discern the number of such creatures within his area. The character becomes weak if he does not make a journey of at least a day's length each week. If he stays away from the Mists for a week he begins to lose a point of Constitution for each day that passes after that week has ended without visiting the Mists. His Constitution returns at a rate of one per day after he has entered the Mists again from one sunrise to the next.

Stage Three: The Invitation The Dark Powers have gifted the character with the power to call upon the Mists. The character is able to cast Obscuring Mist 3/day as a 12th level caster. The character also develops a ravenous appetite for rotting meat, if he does not eat at least 10 pounds of rotten meat each day, he slowly becomes insubstantial (1d4 points of temporary Constitution damage) turning to mist. He has to consume all appropriate amount of food missed plus 10% more to begin the process of solidifying again.

Stage Four: The Embrace The character is able to inflict a terrible rotting disease to anyone he bites. This supernatural disease - Injury, Fortitude DC 15, incubation period 1 week, initial damage 1d4 Constitution. This disease causes the victim's skin to harden and flake off. Unlike normal diseases , this disease continues until the victim's Constitution reaches 0 (and dies) or receives a *remove disease* spell or similar magic. If an afflicted victim dies it's skin and flesh flakes away into dust, leaving a skeletal corpse that turns into mist in 6 rounds. The characters visage and body becomes that of a rotting corpse and his mouth becomes full of sharp incisors which often have bits of rotting flesh caught between them -2 Cha, Outcast Rating +6, Int -4.

Stage Five: The Creature The character has acquired the ability to travel anywhere he desires in the Demiplane, but is always surrounded by the Mists. The character has turned into a Mist Ferryman a frightful skeletal undead creature enveloped in a dark robe. Swirling clouds of mist hide the shape of the creature, allowing only glimpses of its horrifying figure.

***Sextant of the Mists* Lore**

Characters with Knowledge (religion), Knowledge (arcana), Spellcraft, or Bardic Knowledge (DC 25) can research *Sextant of the Mists* to learn more about it.

DC 15: This is the Sextant of the Mists a nautical device able to help anyone using it be able to navigate himself even in the most extreme weather conditions.

DC 20: The Sextant of the Mists was created in Dementlieu by an anchorite. Anyone using it inside a Mistway has more chances of navigating through it without drifting aimlessly through the Mists.

DC 25: The *Sextant of the Mists* was created by Warden Hervé Héroux of Port-a-Lucine, an anchorite from Ste. Mere des Larmes who was searching the Mists for the revelation of Ezra. It is said that he created the magical sextant out of the Mists themselves, giving the one holding it protection from the Mists.

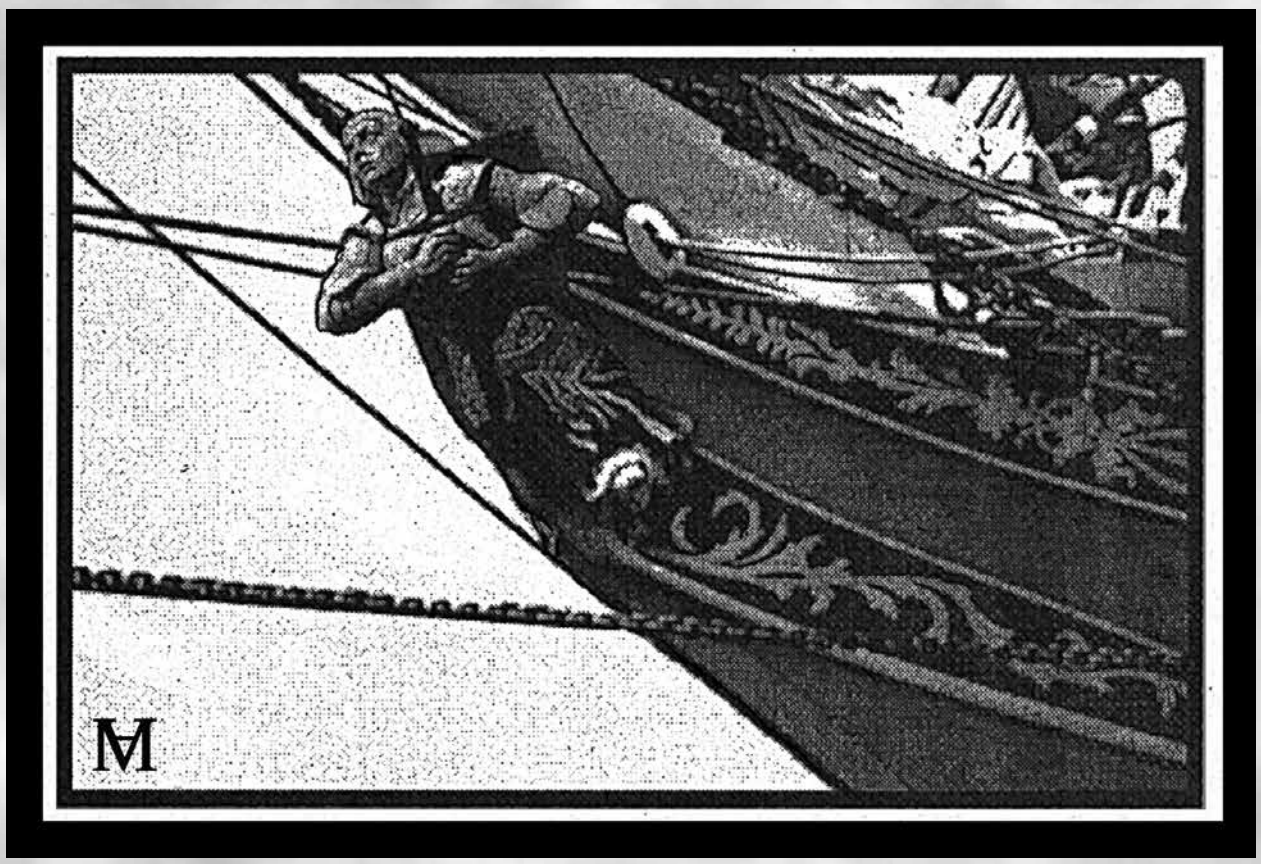
DC 30: The *Sextant of the Mists* can be destroyed only by dispelling the magic spells used to create it and then melting it with magical fire while inside the Mists. (By doing so the Mist Ferryman that is trapped within the sextant will be released calling others of its kind and attacking any living creature present).

DC 40: It is said that Warden Hervé Héroux imprisoned a Mist Ferryman inside the sextant to use the misty creature as a conduit for its powers. He thought that by imprisoning the undead creature he would be able to mistwalk anywhere he wanted, even outside the Demiplane. The sextant presumably does have this power although most people believe its powers are limited in helping navigation through the Mists.

Figurehead of Spiritual Expansion

This master-crafted painted wooden magical figurehead is carved in the shape of a full armored maiden emerging from the mists, wearing a tunic waist down wearing a shield with the image of a belladonna plant sculpted on it on her back and holding a sword with both its hands, as if in prayer. Her wool frame hair is short and her eyes are locked in the sky, her face locked in a puzzling expression between fear and epiphany. It is currently in the possession of Captain Lennard "Seehund" Gaertner adorning the *Hylende Walross*'s bow.

Figureheads are the carved wooden sculptures that decorate the prows of sailing ships. In the perilous life of a sea-going ship, figureheads are believed to be the embodied spirit of the vessel, offering the crew protection from harsh seas and safeguarding their homeward journeys. As such, they are often lovingly cared for by the superstitious seamen. The figureheads hold great significance to those on board and they would go to great lengths to protect it. The *Figurehead of Spiritual Expansion* is exactly what the seamen believe it to be, its magical powers protect the ship but with a price.



If the figurehead is set up on a ship's prowl it has the power to grand the ship with any magical protection the person bonded to the figurehead has. In order to establish this empathic connection, the person has to be the captain of the ship. The figurine grants the captain the Item Familiar feat as long as they are bonded. The captain of the ship has to offer a drop of his own blood to the mouth of the maiden figurehead to create this bond. By establishing a link with the figurehead the captain may grant his ship spiritual protection depending on his Hit Dice as follows.

Character HD	Ability
1	Grant Spiritual Energy, Invest skill ranks
7	Sapience, Senses, Communication, Ward Against Metal
10	Mistwalking
14	Greater Mistwalking
18	True Mistwalking
21st or higher	Ezra's Will

Grant Spiritual Energy: Any positive protective magical effect the captain of the ship has it is granted to the ship as well. For instance if the captain wears a +1 ring of protection, the ship shares also this protection. In return the character makes a promise to invest a portion of his life force to the figurehead, offering 600 XP per level and giving 10% of any XP gained after the bond to the figurehead. If the figurehead is destroyed or the character loses the item these XP are lost as they have been absorbed by the figurehead.

For Example Captain Lennard has 11 HD (Sea Stalker, Rogue 2 / Scarlet Corsair 5) to establish a bond with the figurehead he invests 6,600 XP. If he goes on a quest that would normally earn him 20,000 XP he gains the 20,000XP normally but 2,000 XP are absorbed by the figurine. With which he has an empathic link.

If the captain is separated from the ship after bonding with the figurehead for a continuous period of more than a day per level or if the figurehead is lost or destroyed he would immediately lose the 6,600 XP he initially invested on the figurine to establish the bond and 10% of the XP he gained since that bond was established. So if he had made the bond when he was only a level 2 Rogue (4 monster HD + 2 class levels = 15,000 XP) and the figurine was destroyed when he was also a level 5 Scarlet Corsair (11 character levels = 55,000) he would then lose an extra 4,000 XP (10% of 40,000) for a total loss of 10,600 XP. This loss would reduce his XP to a total of 44,400 and his character level to 10 (losing one level of his Scarlet Corsair prestige class).

Invest Skill Ranks

Whenever a captain bonded to the figurine gains skill points, he may choose to put some or all of those skill points into the figurehead using his empathic link. He assigns the skill points normally, but notes that they now reside in the figurine. For every 3 ranks he assigns to the figurine, he gains a +1 bonus that he can apply to any single skill. This bonus can be applied to a skill in which he already has maximum ranks. He can apply multiple bonuses to the same skill, but he may not have more points in a skill than he has ranks. If the character loses the item familiar, is separated from it for one day per level, or if the item familiar is destroyed, these skill points and bonuses related to them are lost.

For example, Captain Lennard has just achieved five class levels as a Scarlet Corsair since bonding with the figurehead. Because of his above average Intelligence score and 5 class levels as Scarlet Corsair he has gained 25 skill points. He has invested 24 skill points to Bluff (3), Diplomacy (5), Craft (Cooking) (2), Knowledge (geography) (6), Gather Information (5),

Profession (sailor) (3) and has gained 8 skill points assigned to Diplomacy (1), Knowledge (geography) (3), Profession sailor (1), Gather information (3). He uses an asterisk to note which skills have been stored in the figurehead. If he loses connection with the Figurehead of Spiritual Expansion he loses all these ranks and bonuses from those skills and would be a captain by means of force and not competence.

Sapience

If a captain bonded with the *Figurine of Spiritual Expansion* is at least 7th level, the figurehead gains rudimentary sapience. It gains Intelligence 13, Wisdom 10 and Charisma 13. The figurehead also gains an Ego score. As the figurehead's powers are unlocked so does its intelligence and Ego score

increase. The *Figurine of Spiritual Expansion* begins with an Ego score of 6, as its owner becomes more powerful so does it until it can reach a final Ego score of 21 and its ability scores will have increased reaching Intelligence 19, Wisdom 10 and Charisma 19.

Senses
If a captain bonded with the figurehead is at least 7th level, the figurehead can see in a 60-foot radius as if it were a creature. It does not normally make Spot or Listen checks separately from the captain, but the captain gains the benefit of the Alertness feat when on board his ship. If the bond between the captain and the figurehead is broken the feat is lost.

Communication
If a captain bonded with the figurehead is at least 7th level, the figurehead begins to communicate with him using basic emotions or feelings. The figurehead may try to tell the master of danger, for example, by putting forth a feeling of fear. It can only communicate in this manner while the captain is on board his ship.

Ward Against Metal (Su)
If a captain bonded with the figurehead is at least 7th level, the figurehead grants the ship DR 20/+2 against cannonballs. The captain must hire an anchorite to bless the figurehead in a ceremony and donate a large sum of money to the Church of Ezra. The whole process of empowering the figurehead takes 24 hours and costs 50,000gp. This is considered a lesser power for determining the figurehead's Ego score.

Mistwalking (Su)
If a captain bonded with the figurehead is at least 10th level, once per month the figurehead grants the captain the power to travel with his ship and crew from one domain to another adjusted domain by entering the Mists. The only restriction is that it has to appear in a large body of water such as the sea for a coastline or island domain. The captain must hire an anchorite to bless the figurehead in a ceremony and donate a large sum of money to the Church of Ezra. The whole process of empowering the figurehead takes 24 hours and costs 81,000gp. This is considered a lesser power for determining the figurehead's Ego score.

Greater Mistwalking (Su)
If a captain bonded with the figurehead is at least 14th level, the figurehead's *mistwalking* power now can be used to use any point of departure from three categories: Core, cluster or island. The destination must be in the same category but the ship can now appear in any body of water large enough to make sailing possible sea, lake or river. The captain must hire an anchorite to bless the figurehead in a ceremony and donate a large sum of money to the Church of Ezra. The whole process of empowering the figurehead takes 24 hours and costs 100,000gp. This is considered a greater power for determining the figurehead's Ego score.

True Mistwalking (Su)
If a captain bonded with the figurehead is at least 18th level, the figurehead's *mistwalking* power now can travel through the Mists from any domain to any other domain, whether Core, cluster or island. With true mistwalking there is no need for a body of water to exist from neither the destination nor the point of departure. This power does not summon the Mist's they have to appear on their own. The captain must hire an anchorite to bless the figurehead in a ceremony and donate a large sum of money to the Church of Ezra. The whole process of empowering the figurehead takes 24 hours and costs 130,000gp. This is considered a greater power for determining the figurehead's Ego score.

Ezra's Will (Su)
If the borders of a domain are closed, the captain of the ship has the power to try exit the domain. The captain can make an opposed Will roll against the darklord, if the attempt fails, the darklord knows the exact location of the ship and he continues to know it until dawn of the following day. *Ezra's Will* can be attempted once per month. The captain must hire an anchorite to bless the figurehead in a ceremony and donate a large sum of money to the Church of Ezra. The whole process of empowering the figurehead takes 24 hours and costs 200,000gp. This is considered a purpose and dedicated power for determining the figurehead's Ego score.

Strong Abjuration and Conjuration; *Caster Level:* 18th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *Obscuring Mist, Soul Anchor, Teleport Without Error, Vanish*, *Freedom*, *Permanency*; *Ego:* 6-20; Alignment: *True Neutral*; *Market Price:* 200,000; *Weight:* 500 lb.

Purpose
The *Figurehead of Spiritual Expansion* was discovered in an old shipwreck north of "Pierre du Mort" (Death Rock) the notorious prison for those who draw the unwanted attention of the domain's darklord Dominic d' Honaire. As this vast fortress, was once the domicile of a knightly order, it is speculated that the ship belonged to them and that the figurehead was created by an unknown powerful Anchorite Wander. The purpose of the figurehead is to travel in the Mists searching for the goddess Ezra, a revelation that could be the 5th and final sign of Ezra.

Figurehead of Spiritual Expansion Lore
Characters with Knowledge (religion), Knowledge (arcana), Spellcraft, or Bardic Knowledge (DC 25) can research *Figurehead of Spiritual Expansion* to learn more about it.

DC 15: This figurhead depicting the goddess Ezra and by some accounts the Sea Maiden aspect of Ezra. It was found decades ago in a shipwreck discovered in the bottom of the Sea of Sorrows north of Isle d'Orleon. The masterfull wooden carved sculpture protects the *Hylende Walross*, Captain Lennard Gaertner's ship.

DC 20: Though thought to be magical and protect the captain and the crew of *Hylende Walross* it didn't manage to protect the ship's previous captain when his crew mutinied against him. The notorious "*Mutiny on the Walrus*" orchestrated by the current captain of the ship, gave him great navigating skills he didn't have before. It is said that the more experienced the captain of the ship with the *Figurehead of Spiritual Expansion* on his ship is, the more hidden powers he unlocks.

DC 25: It is said that the knightly order who built the fortress now known as the prison "Pierre du Mort" were anchorites who created the figurehead to help them control the Mists to travel wherever they wanted, even to places where there was no water.

DC 30: If the *Figurehead of Spiritual Expansion* is placed on the prow of a ship and the captain smudges the statues mouth with a drop of his blood, a spiritual bond is created between the ship and its captain protecting the ship if the captain has himself magical protection. Some say the figure head can also protect the ship from cannonballs, making the ship's wood impervious to them. But this protection is not without a price, if the figurehead is lost or destroyed Captain Lennard weakens as some of his powers are stored in the figurehead.

DC 40: The *Figurehead of Spiritual Expansion* is sentient, as its powers grow so does its intelligence. The purpose of its existence is to explore the Mists searching for the goddess Ezra to bring the 5th revelation of the Church of Ezra. Legends say that a ship that travels on a holy quest to find Ezra is under the protection of the wooden sculpture, is actually under the protection of the goddess herself, no power is strong enough to prevent this vessel from travelling the Mists searching for the Guardian in the Mists.

Lina Emmerich

Penanggalan, Expert 3 / Aristocrat 1
Female Medium size Undead: CR 6; Medium (6ft. tall); HD 4d12; hp 26; Init +8 (Dex, improved initiative); Spd 30ft. fly 50ft. (good maneuverability); AC 18 (+4 Dex, +4 natural) or 19 (+1 dodge), touch 18 (+1 dodge), flat-footed 14; Base Atk/Grapple:+3/+4 ; Atk +3 (entrails) (1d4+1) , -2 (bite) (1d6); Full Atk ; Face/Reach 5ft by 5ft./5ft. SA improved grab, constrict, blood drain, domination, fear aura; SQ damage reduction 5/+1, cold and electricity resistance 20, alternate form, fast healing 5, +4 turning resistance; LE; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +6;
Str 13, Dex 19, Con -, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 21

Skills: Craft (Alchemy) + 9, Heal + 11, Concentration +10, Knowledge (Nature) +9, Search +17, Bluff +19, Diplomacy +11, Gather Information + 12, Listen + 15, Sense Motive +12, Forgery +6, Sleight of Hand +6, Spot +10, Move Silently +10, Hide +10, Intimidate + 10

Feats: Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Investigator, Lightning Reflexes, Persuasive, Skill Focus (Heal)

Languages: Lamordian*, Darkonian, Mordentish, Falkovnian, Balok , Abyssal

Signature Possessions: none



Description

Lina Emmerich is an mesmerising and spirited woman, her once dark auburn combed hair are now wild and hair milky white skin is stained with dirt. Her green almond-shaped eyes are still enchanting with a spark of great intelligence, the first clue that this scruffy woman is not actually insane but a survivor. Though in her human form she looks like someone barely able to survive in the wilderness of Markovia in the contrary the truth is completely different. When her head detaches from her body it rises vertically and flying off in search of prey. Her eyes take an infernal red glowing eyes and her face becomes feral with fangs ready to feast upon blood. Attached to the base of her head is a 3' long, slimy "tail" of trailing organs still attached. As she flies about, she sometimes makes a hissing noise, and at other times it makes a gurgling speech that is barely recognizable. If an Intelligence check is made, the listener understands the speech, which is usually a pronouncement of doom or whispered secrets about what it is like to experience undeath.

Background

Lina Emmerich was born in the town of Leidenheim, once the epitome of science, it's once great university and hospital had fallen into neglect for many years. The only daughter of a peasant family, Lina grew up in a loving home. In contrast with her parents who were a simple folk, she was always keen in learning finding scientific truth the path to enlightenment and civilization, the thing that distinguished men from animals. Most of Leidenheim's inhabitants suffer from fever attracted from the marshes of the Musarde Delta around the town. The notoriety of the University of Leidenheim of once including Dr. Victor Mordenheim as one of it's students has stopped funding for medical training for many decades. Although there is a cure for this illness, there is no medical expertise or money given to the town to procure it, all that can be done is to care for the sick. Lina was determined to help her hometown get rid of this sickness, not necessarily out of compassion but more out of vanity. Her excellence in her medical studies gave her a scholarship for the Brautslava Institute on the shores of Stagnus Lake in Darkon, although at first she was focused on her medical studies her interest changed into the study of abnormal physiology under Professor Pacali. One night curious about the professors private studies she sneaked into his laboratory while he was making a nightly presentation in the university. In his lab the professor had what appeared to be a glass tank filled with some yellowish liquid, floating inside the yellow ichor was the body of a young beautiful woman. To her horror the woman appeared to be alive, quickly she unlocked the lid of the large container to free the young woman, as she opened the lid the face of the woman became the terrifying visage of a red eyed fanged monster, the head detached by it's torso and along with intestines floated over the glass container and the now terrified Lina. This was the last thing she remembered before gaining her consciousness in a basement, a hatred for all living things seethed through her very being she had become a penanggalan.

Lina began a killing spree during the night while pretending to still be a normal student during the day. The authorities with the help of Professor Pacali were looking after a monster under the de-

scription of the young woman Lina had released from his laboratory, they never expected that what they were looking after was the young student in the professors classes. Everything changed when a group of adventurers began to close in on Lina, fearing she would be soon exposed she left the Boglands of Darkon and headed back to Lamordia. Not wanting to interact with her family she looked after a position as a physician in the town of Neufurchtenburg, she had forged her degree and found work in the town morgue. Although many were talking with amazement about the beautiful leichendiener (mortuary assistant) no one expected she was responsible for the recent killing spree of young teenage girls. News of the murders traveled fast reaching Ludendorf were The Syndicate of Enlightened Citizens, sure that something supernatural was behind the murders and sent one of their own Lars Kaulbach to investigate. At the same time the demihuman adventurers that were hunting the penanggalan of Stagnus Lake had followed the trail of bodies to Neufurchtenburg, identifying the monster they were looking for with the "Jungfrauenmörder von Neufurchtenburg".

Feeling that the circle was closing in again on her Lina decided to make a bold move, she courted and finally enspelled Lars Kaulbach, who she would frequently meet at the morgue when he was investigating the murders. With his help she managed to frame the Darkonian adventurers who were all sentenced to death for the murders. Her plan took her even further marrying the old but wealthy aristocrat and gaining a place in the high society of Ludendorf. She continued her feedings but this time she was more cautious, usually attacking young women in docked ships or people that would never be missed as criminals and the homeless. But then again a trail began to form again and some people became curious about the connection between some disappearances in Ludendorf. Fortunately for her, Lars was appointed schult of the Lamordian colony in Markovia and she as his wife as well as a physician, and according to The Syndicate of Enlightened Citizensa physician with knowledge on abnormal physiology, would travel with him to the colony.

During the travel to Markovia though the unexpected happened, Lars overcame his wife's domination and since she was unsuccessful in enchanting him again and decided to kill him instead. He was found the following morning dead in their cabin, but during the night Lina had already set the foundations of her plan. She had slipped in the second in command person of the colony Lieutenant Jens Kreutznaer as well as the ship's captain Oli 'Die Ruhe' Rahmer and had enchanted them both. Keeping a hold on both of the colony's remaining authority figures she managed to create the colony in her image. She began dominating every person who would be a potential danger to her as well as secretly feeding on the few girls of the colony, as they believed Lars Kaulbach had died of the contagious Valachani white fever she could feed without being discovered easily as she was also the colonies physician. Everything went well until the people began to get panicking about the broken ones being witnessed on the island, not knowing that the colonies actual objective was the destruction of the broken ones, she devised a plan to study them. She ordered through Jens Kreutznaer the construction of Jordhul to imprison any broken ones captured and study them. Her torturous ways instilled a feeling of unity among the beastmen who assembled to attack the colony, fearing she wouldn't survive this she devised a plan to kill everyone in the colony and dispose of their bodies with the use of various chemicals that were thrown inside Jordhul. She decided to create two penanggalan as extra protection or scapegoats, she chose the two youngest girls in the colony, the twin daughters of a herbalist expert so that they wouldn't be strong enough to challenge her. When the broken ones entered the colony they didn't find any sign of life, while she and her subordinate penanggalan stay hidden in a secret compartment in her house.

Current Sketch

Lina may seem as an innocent damsel in distress but she is formidable and merciless. She is a survivor who has learned from her mistakes, she knows that stealth and innocence are her best weapons in her arsenal and she will use them at maximum effect. As a penanggalan she is particularly fond of the blood of women in their late teens to early forties, (preferably with a Charisma of 13 or greater), something she has missed while stranded on the island of Markovia. Her focus on that group is not one out of need but one of insane jealousy, as

a penanggalan can no longer give or receive love, so she is able to survive with the blood of animals or broken ones, which she finds distasteful. Although Lina in her human form is very attractive she is not good at seduction, though she can flirt in some small way while in human form, she cannot express love, or engage in any displays of affection, she was fortunate that Lars Kaulbach was asexual and that his attraction to her was purely platonic.

When discovered in human form, she will pretend to be a frightened colony survivor, she will identify as being the colony's physician telling a fake story of how she survived after her husband and other colonists died either from a disease or killed by broken ones. She will attempt to help anyone needing healing assistance, and may in fact prove extremely useful. That does not mean that she will not make deliberate errors, or feign ignorance in some areas, if by doing so she can weaken the group. If Leni and Anika, Leni's spawn are discovered she will feign of being their mother, not revealing their existence as she is cautious and protective of her "daughters". People who spent too much time with them may understand that something is off as the trio are not really affectionate between each other. Her plan when people encamp in the colony is to wait for them to fall asleep before attacking with her "daughters", if she is already with them she may offer to keep guard while the others sleep. Other than the blood she drains from her victims, she does not need to eat or drink, though she will often pretend to do so to hide her true nature from potential victims.

Although she has been "living" in Markovia for more than a decade she has never encountered Frantisek Markov. She knows that there is a genius biologist able to create the broken ones through a series of surgical procedures but she is smart enough to know that she is better off avoiding the person called Diosamblet. There are times she has witnessed an enormous slightly hunched man with unusually long arms, bowed legs and broad features walking around the island, she believes this to be Dilosamblet and she does what she can to avoid him. She will never disclose this information to anyone as she is cautious to not be discovered in the event anyone she has told about Diosamblet gets captured and reveals her existence. There are rumors of some flying demons or ghosts haunting the island and feeding on them among the broken ones, but Akanga as well as Markov believe them to be superstitions.

Although Lina wants to leave Markovia at some point she prefers to stay in the island for the time being. She knows that her husband was part of a society hunting creatures like her and since they have been so close at exposing and destroying her, she doesn't plan to return to Lamordia. Maybe she could travel to another domain but she believes that the organization Lars was a member of has people everywhere. The best option she had so far was to wait, she is immortal after all so she can outlive those people who knew her husband, who were already old. She has already spend twelve years on the island which means that some of her husbands comrades may have already died from old age. If she is pressed too much in Markovia there is a chance she may decide to travel back to the mainland, she knows that the group her husband was a member of is called "Fer'ein Birjre Ensejchtijch" and although she doesn't what it is about she may have to expose or destroy them so as to leave her alone to continue her existence.

Combat

Domination (Su): Lina can crush an opponent's will by looking into their eyes. This is similar to a gaze attack except that she has to make a standard action. Those merely looking at her are not affected. Anyone she targets must make a Will save (DC 22) or fall instantly under her influence as though by a domination spell cast by a 12th level caster. This ability has a range of 30 feet.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability Lina has to hit with her entrails attack. If she gets a hold, she can constrict and bite the victim.

Constrict (Ex): Lina deals automatic entrails damage to a Medium sized or smaller opponent with a successful grapple check.

Blood Drain (Ex): Lina can suck blood from a living creature with her fangs if she pins her victim. By draining blood she inflicts 1d4 points of Con drain each round the pin is maintained.

Create Spawn (Su): Lina usually kills her victims with strangulation before draining all their

blood. If a female dies from her blood drain ability however the victim is at risk of rising as a penanggalan. If the body remains unburied for three days, it is transformed into a penanggalan. The new creature is not under the control of the penanggalan that created it, but it is irredeemably evil, feeling no attachment to it's previous life.

Damage Reduction (Su): Lina's body is tough giving her damage reduction 5/+1

Turn Resistance (Ex): Lina has a tyrn resistance of +4. She cannot be turned in her human form.

Resistance (Ex): Lina has cold and electricity resistance 20

Alternate Form (Su): Lina can make herself appear human by squeezing her entrails back into the shell of her original body. She must first soak her entrails in vinegar to to reduce their engorgement. If sunlight strikes her head when it is separated from the body, the head will be paralyzed and fall helplessly to the ground until nightfall. If the head and body are not reunited after the initial exposure to daylight, both will start to decay rapidly as the evil life-force which animates the creature fades away. Therefore, she will always attempt to reunite her head with her body before the first rays of dawn. The head will "know" when intruders have reached her body, and this is the only occasion when the penanggalan will actively seek out and attempt to destroy an enemy who is awake. If her body is destroyed while her head is separated from it she dies in 1d4 days.

Fear Aura (Su): As a free action in her natural form she can create an aura of fear in a 30 foot radius. Creatures within this distance from her must succeed at a Will save (DC 22) or become shaken. Shaken creatures suffer a -2 morale penalty on attack rolls, weapon damage rolls and saving throws.

Fast Healing (Ex): Lina heals 5 points of damage each round.

Reflexes (Ex): Lina can make four additional attacks of opportunity. She can make attacks of opportunity even when she is flat-footed.



Lina's spawn

Lina has deliberately turned two young girls from the colony into penanggalan spawn. Although she has no magical control on them they follow her being respectful of her experience. Although Lina if encountered on her own will behave as if she is the sole survivor from the Lamordian colony, if encountered with the two girls they will pretend to be castaways who have managed to survive in the island by constantly hiding in the settlement. They claim that the beastmen never step their foot inside the colony. The girls Leni and Anika Erhard are twins and were 12 years old when Lina killed them. They are weaker than Lina having only 1 HD and although they have the same penanggalan powers as Lina these are saved on a Will save DC 16. They also have less feats and skills.

Leni and Anika Erhard

Penanggalan (children), Commoner 1

Female Small size Undead: CR 3; Small (59.4 in. tall); HD 1d12; hp 10; Init +5 (Dex, improved initiative); Spd 20ft. fly 50ft. (good maneuverability); AC 16 (+1 size, +1 Dex, +4 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 15; Base Atk/Grapple:+0/-1 ; Atk +0 (entrails) (1d4-1) ,-5 (bite) (1d6); Full Atk ; Face/Reach 5ft by 5ft./5ft. SA improved grab, constrict, blood drain, domination (DC 16), fear aura (DC 16); SQ damage reduction 5/+1, cold and electricity resistance 20, alternate form, fast healing 5, +4 turning resistance; LE; SV Fort +0, Ref +3, Will -2;
Str 8, Dex 12, Con -, Int 8, Wis 7, Cha 10,

Skills: Bluff +6, Climb -1, Listen +7, Spot +7, Hide +12, Move Silently +8, Search +4, Sense Motive +4,

Feats: Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Flyby Attack, Wingover

Description

The two identical twins look in their human form as they used when they were alive. They have blond hair and blue eyes and their features don't have anything remotely resembling Lina. If someone mentions this to her or their children they always reply they both took for their fathers side of the family. They both wear tattered dirty clothes and pretend to be terrified of strangers, even cowering as ostriches closing her eyes with their hands in pretence.

Current Sketch

Penanggalan are normally solitary creatures but the frailty these two penanggalans feel as they are very weak has made them align with their creator Lina. She knows that they are dependent on her for their survival and knows they will not even think of betraying her. They dream of a way to become more powerful so that they can at last go on their own way and will not hesitate to betray Lina if they can find a way to escape the island. They know that in this island they are easy prey for most of the broken ones, but if they manage to travel back to the mainland they know that by feigning innocence they will be able to survive and taste female humanoid blood that is so scarce in Markovia.

Combat

As Lina except that their powers have a Will save DC 16. They have also mastered hit and run tactics in their head form as they are safer for their weaker forms.



Jens Kreutznaer

Fighter 3/ Ranger 2/ Beastmaster 3

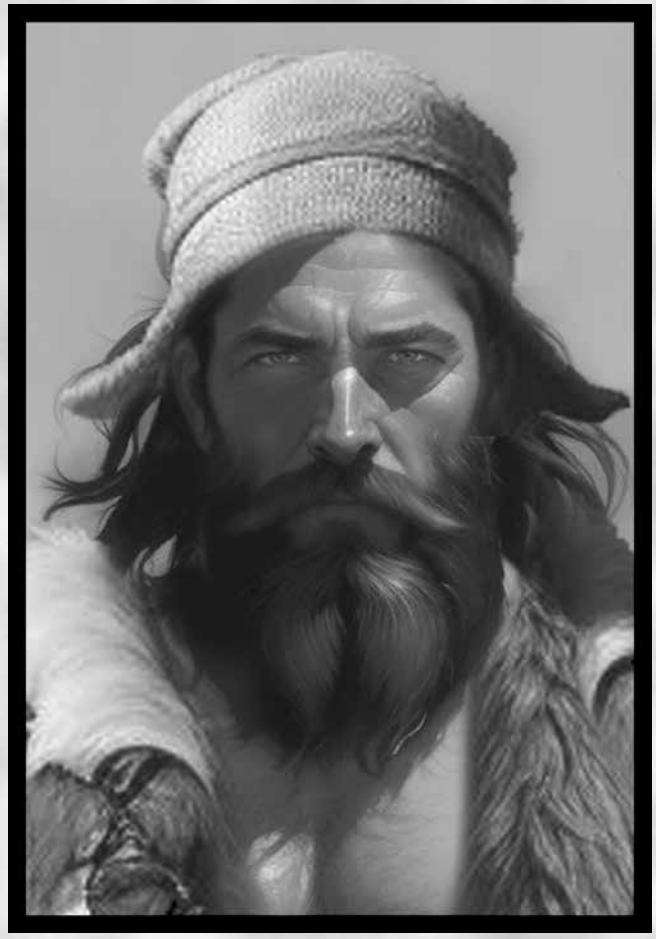
Male Human: CR 8; Medium (5.83 ft. tall); HD 3d10+3 2d8+2 3d10+3 ; hp 53; Init +3; Spd 30ft. ; AC 13 (+3 Dex) ; Base Atk/Grapple:+8/+9; Atk +11 (1d8, long bow) ; Full Atk +9 x 2 (long bow) ; Face/Reach 5ft by 5ft./5ft. SA ; SQ ; LN; SV Fort +9, Ref +7, Will +2;
Str 15, Dex 17, Con 13, Int 13, Wis 15, Cha 14

Skills: Climb +4, Craft (pottery) +3, Craft (bow-making) +3, Handle Animal +12, Intimidate +6, Jump +3, Ride +9, Swim +2, Heal +3, Hide +9, Knowledge (nature) +8, Move Silently +7, Listen +7, Survival +12 (+14 when tracking), Search + 6, Wild Empathy +6, Spot +4, Profession (farming) +3,

Feats: Alertness, Dodge, Manyshot, Mobility, Point Blank Shot, Rapid Shot, Shot On The Run, Skill Focus (Handle Animal), Track

Description

Jens Kreutznaer is a man handsome man broad shouldered man in his early thirties, he has dark brown hair and light blue eyes, his face and arms are tanned from years of exposure in Markovia's sun and since he is so many years living away from civilization he wears a beard and a long mustache. He wears a shapeless cap made of goatskin, with the hair on the outside, to shoot off the rain, a short jacket with the skirts coming down to about the middle of his thighs and breeches both loose and made of the skin of an old goat, whose hair hang down in such a length on either side that, like pantaloons, it reaches to the middle of his legs and footwear, also out of goat skin. He also carries a goat skin umbrella to protect him from the sun and the rain. He wears a broad belt of dried goat's skin, which he ties together with two thongs of the same instead of buckles, and in a kind of a frog on either side of this, hangs a little saw and a hatchet, one on one side and one on the other. He has another belt although not so broad, and fastened in the same manner, which hangs over his shoulder, and at the end of it, under his left arm, hang two pouches, both made of goat's skin too, in one of which hangs his powder, in the other his shot. At his back he carries a basket, and on his shoulder his musket, he holds a pistol tied in his belt.



Background

Jens Kreutznaer was born in Ludendorf the son of Leopold Kreutznaer a successful Lamordian lawyer and Alzina Tavolys sister of the current mayor of Bergovitsa. Their parents marriage was an arranged one after Alzina was spirited away to Ludendorf, when she was attacked by an unknown assailant. Jens grew up in a loving household although he always felt as his parents were hiding something from him. He grew up loving horses and pigeon-shooting which his parents encouraged as the sports of a nobleman, he was supposed to follow in his fathers footsteps and study law but from a young age he decided to follow an adventurous life choosing to enlist in protecting the people of his homeland. Jens Kreutznaer studied in the Stangengrad Military Academy a privilege given to Lamordians who want to follow a military carrier as part of the non-aggression treaty between Baron Vilhelm von Aubrecker and the Kingführer of Falkovnia. In 744 BC he was posted in Neufurchtenburg as schepmeista where he stayed in that position for two years until the "Virgin Killings of Neufurchtenburg" began, his

inability to solve the murders demoted him and he was sent to Ludendorf as a lieutenant of the Ludendorf militia. When in 748 BC he made a connection between the murders in Neufurchtenburg and the vanishings of young women in Ludendorf based on a similar pattern he told his theory at Lars Kaulbach who was head of the investigation for the "Virgin Killings of Neufurchtenburg" after him. Lars Kaulbach professed that the killers had been apprehended and dealt with, but he saw a spark for justice in the young man and decided to take him with him to Markovia to head the colony's militia. During the journey when Lars Kaulbach was found dead in his bedchamber, Jens had already been dominated by Lina Emmerich. Lina's plan was to discredit the young man so as to not been threatened by him anymore, her plan was to make him behave in a criminal way and then somehow board one of the ships that would travel between the colony and Ludendorf. As she had no idea about the existence of the Markovian broken men before her plan didn't go as she had planned. Jens managed to escape the colony before the beastmen attack with knowledge of his nemesis also being stranded on the island.

Current Sketch

Jens Kreutznaer is a self-reliant man who uses his practical intelligence and resourcefulness to survive on the inhospitable island. He is in constant moral and ethical dilemmas that deal with animals and survival, as he is in a very precarious situation and needs to do drastic things in order to survive. The combination of his ingrained morals and his precarious situation may have led to his decisions of his treatment towards the domestic animals found on the island and those that he took with him. When confronted with the broken ones, Jens wrestles with the problem of cultural relativism. Despite his disgust, in how they behave, he feels unjustified in holding the natives morally responsible for practices so deeply ingrained in their nature. Nevertheless, he retains his belief in an absolute standard of morality. He knows that his nemesis the so called "Jungfrauenmörder von Neufurchtenburg" is stranded with him on the island, that she is a monster and that she has made the colony her lair. He avoids the colony as he doesn't want to be discovered and hopes for one ship to be able to take him back to Lamordia. He knows that there are some ships docking in the east side of the island from time to time, but knows that these are ships carrying contraband and sometimes human captives for the whoever lives in the wooden manor in the center of the island. He knows that this person is the one the beastmen call Diosamblet as he has seen beastmen serving him usually by carrying boxes and equipment from ships or shipwrecks to his manor.

Since Jens left the colony he made immediate plans for food, and then shelter, to protect himself from wild animals and beastmen. He brought as many things as possible from wrecked ships along the coast of Markovia. In addition, he began to develop talents that he had never used in order to provide himself with necessities. He found a cave, in the mountains of Markovia, which he used as a storage room, as time passed, Jens became a skilled craftsman, able to construct many useful things, and thus furnished himself with diverse comforts. He also learned about farming, as a result of some seeds found in a ship. A few years later an illness prompted some prophetic dreams, and Jens began to reappraise his duty to the gods, especially the warrior goddess Skogul. Cut off from the company of men, he began to communicate with the gods, thus beginning the first part of his religious conversion. To keep his sanity and to entertain himself, he began a journal. In the journal, he records every task that he performs each day since he left the colony.

Combat

Since Jens left the colony he relies on stealth on the island to survive. Although he still has his musket and his pistol he will use it only if it his only means of survival, as the sound of a gunpowder weapon on the island is sure to attract more unwanted attention. He usually attacks with his long bow while he stays hidden, he tries to do as much damage possible in his first shot as he knows that he may not have a second chance.

Favored Enemy (Ex): Jens gains a +2 bonus on Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot, and Survival checks when using these skills against aberrations. Likewise, he gets a +2 bonus on weapon damage rolls against such creatures.

Wild Empathy (Ex): Jens can improve the attitude of an animal. The typical domestic animal has a starting attitude of indifferent, while wild animals are usually unfriendly. To use wild empathy, the ranger and the animal must be able to study each other, meaning they must be within 30 feet of one another under normal visibility conditions. Generally, influencing an animal in this way takes 1 minute, but, as with influencing people, it might take more or less time. Jens can also use this ability to influence a Markovian broken one with an Intelligence score of 1 or 2, but he takes a -4 penalty on the check.

Point Blank Shot (Ex): Jens gets a +1 bonus on attack and damage rolls with ranged weapons at ranges of up to 30 feet.

Rapid Shot (Ex): Jens gets one extra attack per round with a ranged weapon. The attack is at his highest base attack bonus, but each attack he makes in that round (the extra one and the normal ones) takes a -2 penalty. He must use the full attack action to use this feat.

Manyshot (Ex): As a standard action, Jens may fire two arrows at a single opponent within 30 feet. Both arrows use the same attack roll (with a -4 penalty) to determine success and deal damage normally. If he scores a critical hit, only one of the arrows fired deals critical damage.

Shot On The Run (Ex): When using the attack action with a ranged weapon, Jens can move both before and after the attack, provided that his total distance moved is not greater than his speed.

Mobility (Ex): Jens gets a +4 dodge bonus to Armor Class against attacks of opportunity caused when he moves out of or within a threatened area. A condition that makes him lose his Dexterity bonus to Armor Class also makes yhim lose dodge bonuses. His Dodge bonuses stack with each other, unlike most types of bonuses.

Dodge (Ex): During his action, Jens can designate an opponent and receive a +1 dodge bonus to Armor Class against attacks from that opponent. He can select a new opponent on any action. A condition that makes him lose his Dexterity bonus to Armor Class also makes him lose dodge bonuses.

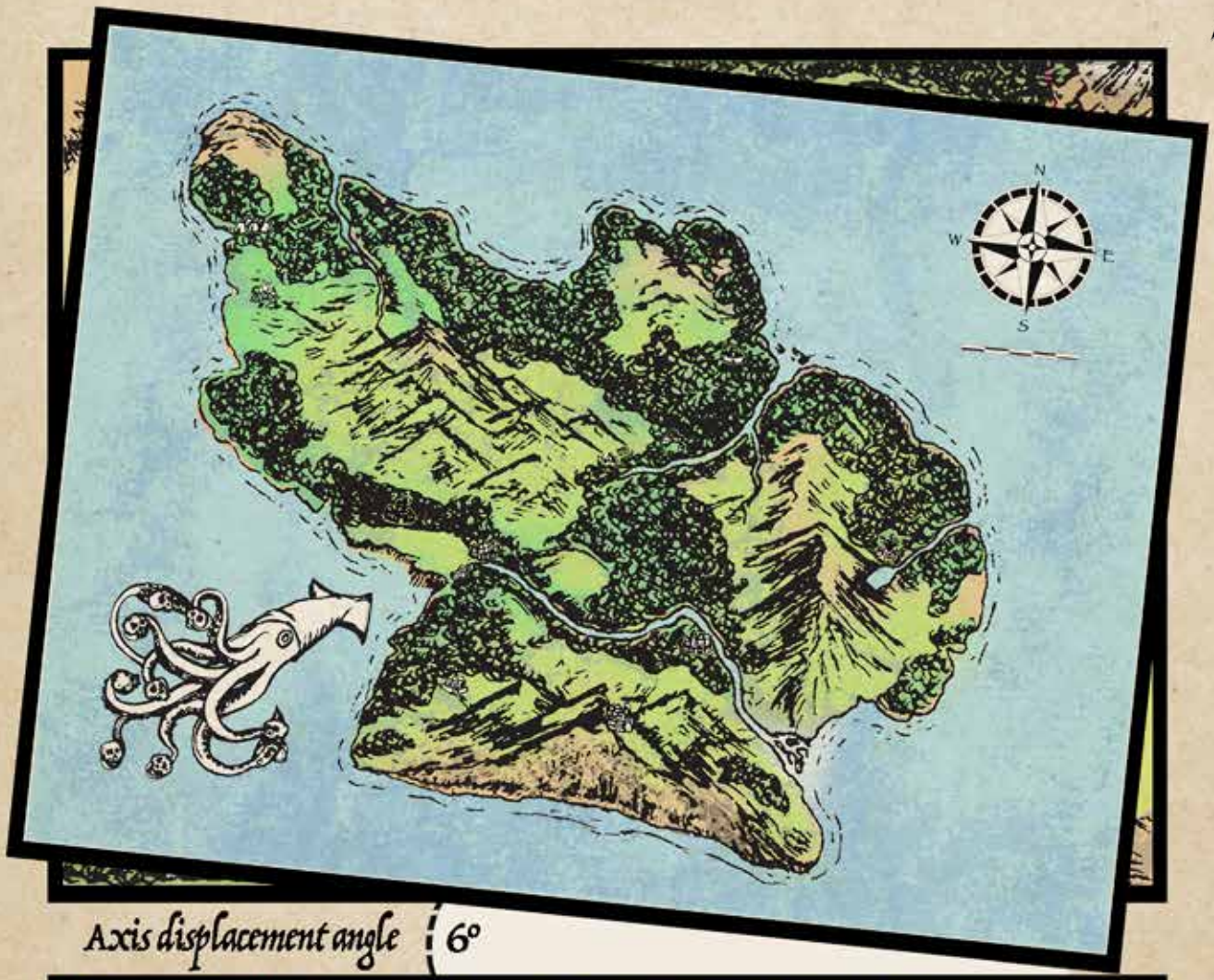
Speak with Animals (Sp): Jens can *speak with animals* once per day as if he was a 3rd level caster.

Dread Possibility: Noble Descendant

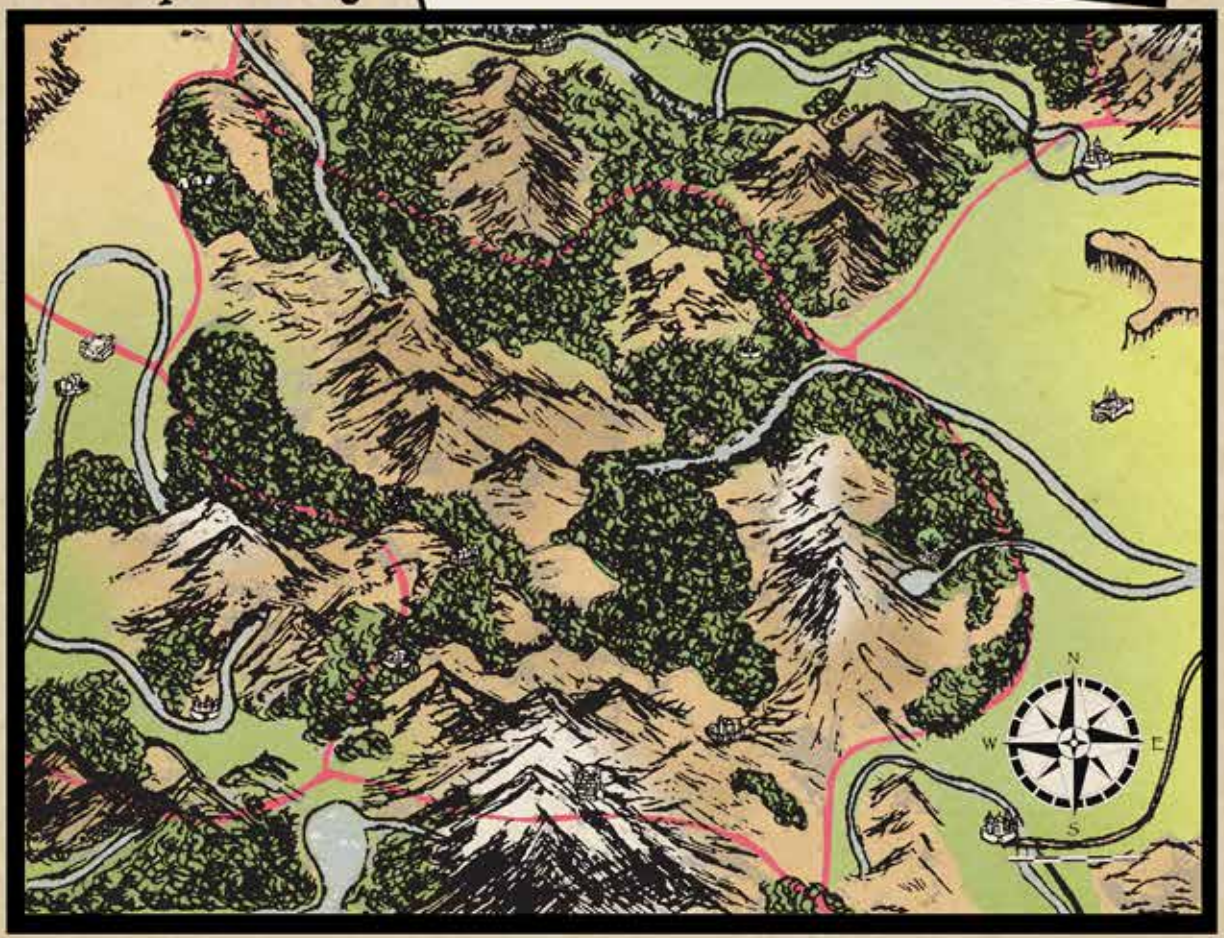
What Jens Kreutznaer doesn't know that his biological father isn't Leopold Kreutznaer, but Tristen Hiregaard. Alzina Tavolys was one of Sir Tristen's lovers when she lived in Bergovitsa, unfortunatelly for them Sir Tristen's curse put a mark on her back by none other than Malken himself. After surviving an attack by Nova Vaasa's serial killer, she was sent the following day away to Lamordia to be safe. There she was arranged to marry Leopold Kreutznaer, little did they both know that Alzina was pregnant carrying Tristen Hiregaard's illegitimate son. As a Hiregaard Jens has the following family traits.

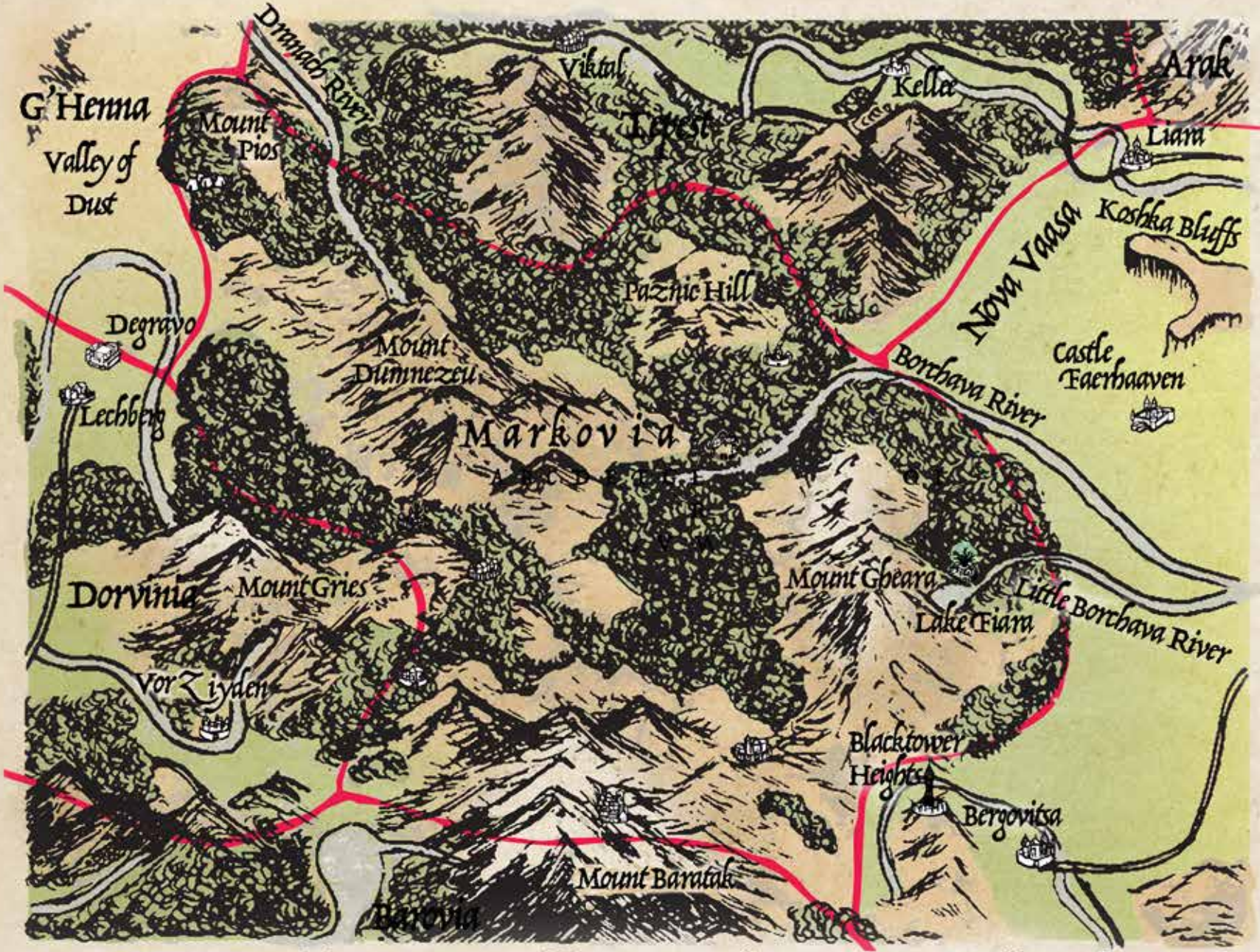
Jens Kreutznaer receives a +2 bonus on all Diplomacy and Gather Information checks, as he is pleasant and affable.
He is blessed with a long life he ages as half-elf rather than as a human.
He suffers a –1 penalty on madness saves.
A hereditary blood curse plagues all Hiregaards and makes them descent down the Path of Madness as described in Legacy of Blood





Axis displacement angle 6°





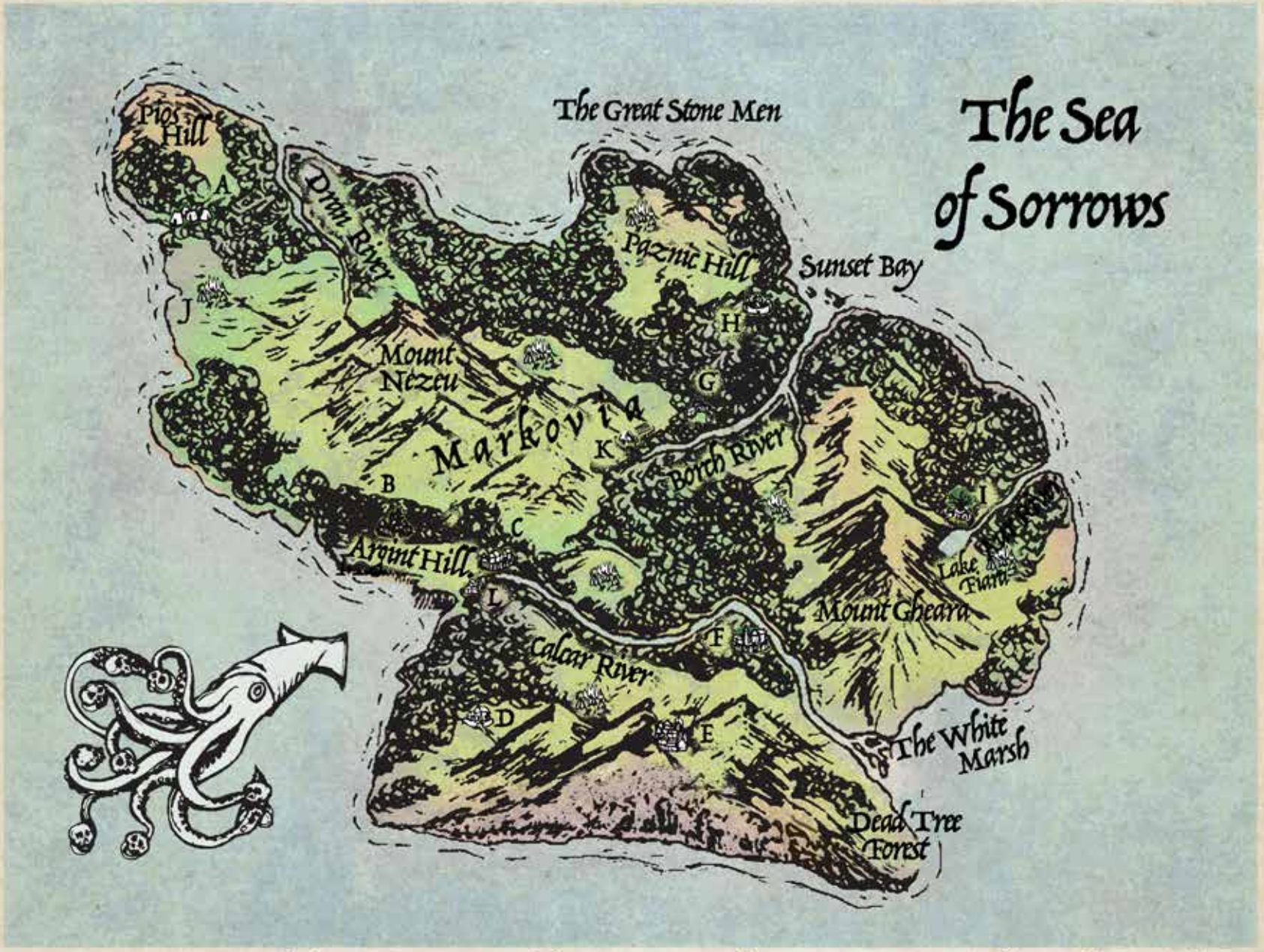
MARKOVIA and surrounding lands prior to the Grand Conjunction

- Forest
- River
- Lake
- Mountain
- 501-1000ft Steppe
- 501-1000ft Grassland
- 1001-2500ft Highland
- 2500-3500ft Snow
- 3501-7440ft Peak
- City
- Keep/Stronghold
- Settlement

N

Scale 1 inch = 5 miles

A. Movila
B. Răzbunare
C. Nouzhukar
D. Piatravin
E. Monastery of the Lost Souls
F. Atsivogreb
G. House of Diosamblet
H. Monastery of the Guardians
I. Zolotoye/ Seann Craobh Daraich



MARKOVIA

Post-Grand Conjunction.
An island in the
Sea of Sorrows

N

Scale 1 inch = 5 miles

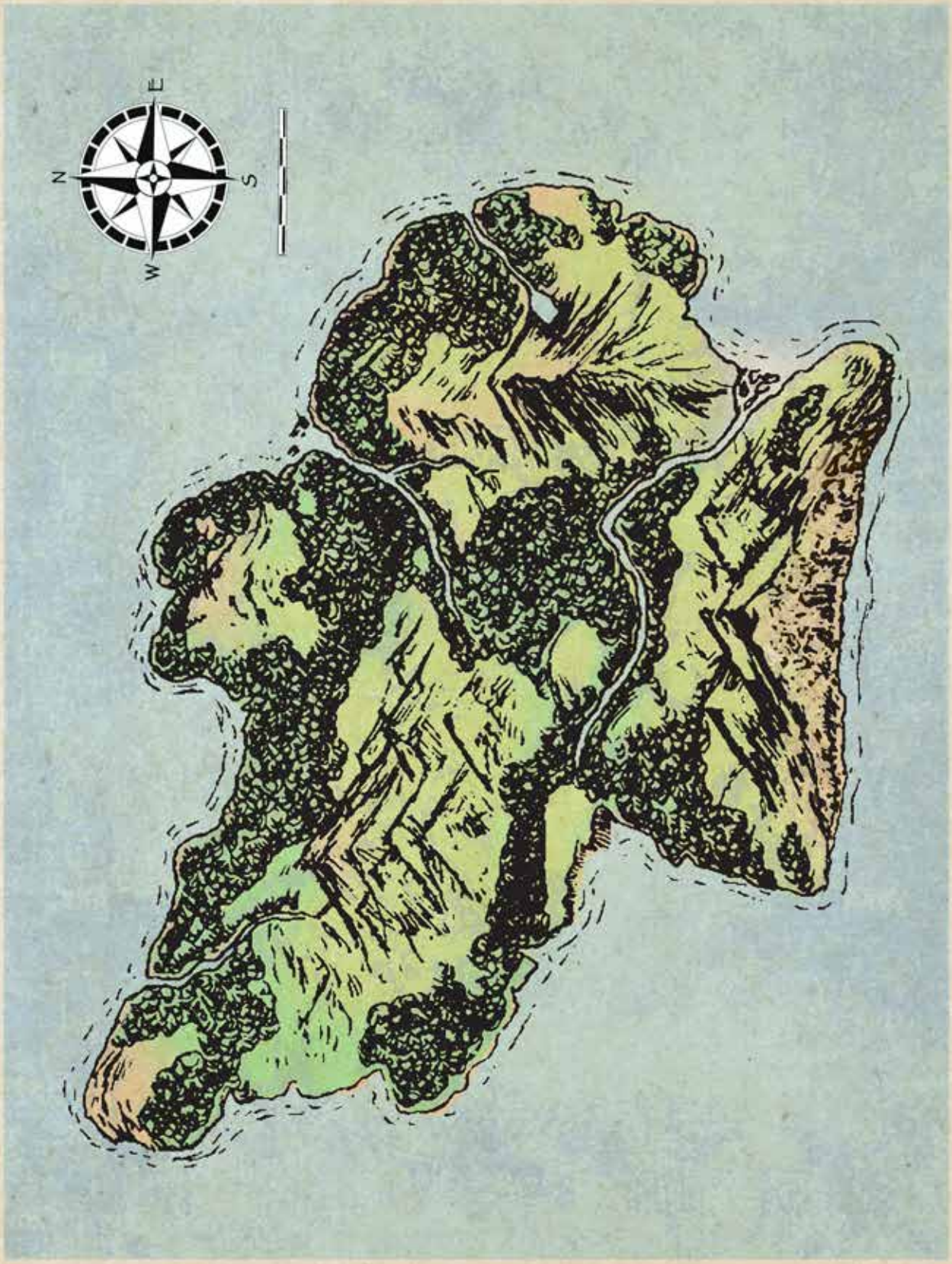
- Forest
- River
- Lake
- Mountain
- 0-200ft Sand
- 201-500ft Grassland
- 501-2500ft Highland
- 2500-3500ft Peak
- Rocks/ Cliffs
- Beastman Camp
- Abandoned Settlement
- Settlement

A. Movilă
B. Răzbunare
C. Nouzhukar
D. Piatravenin
E. Monastery of the Lost Souls
F. Atsivogreb
G. House of Diosamblet
H. Monastery of the Guardians
I. The Lamordian Colony
J. Akanga's Camp
K. The Farm
L. The Quarry

PC Map pre-Grand Conjunction Markovia



PC Map post-Grand Conjunction Markovia



Acknowledgments

The Markovian Report was based on the 2e module *Neither Man Nor Beast* by Jeff Grubb, additional information taken from John W. Mangrum's template on the Soul Kraken posted on the FoS forum. *The Markovian Broken One* was based on Andrew Wyatt's template from the Kargatane's *Book of Sacrifices* and the idea of Sharon "Rotipher of the FoS" Dornhoff to separate them in evolutionary stage.

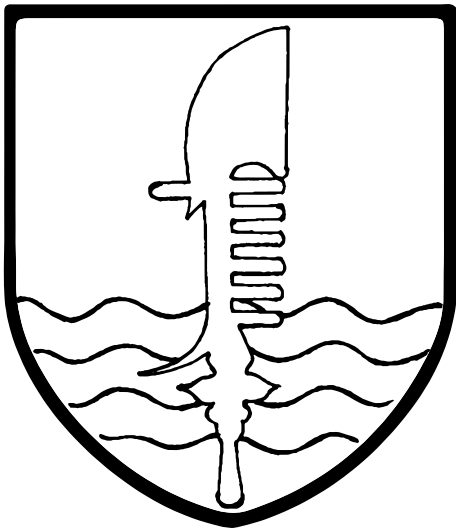
Special thanks to Sharon "Rotipher of the FoS" Dornhoff for the skeleton left on the floor and for any of the ideas used and developed in this article as well as the other FoS members whose ideas inspired me to write the *Markovian Report*.



Casques Safran
(Saffron Helmets)



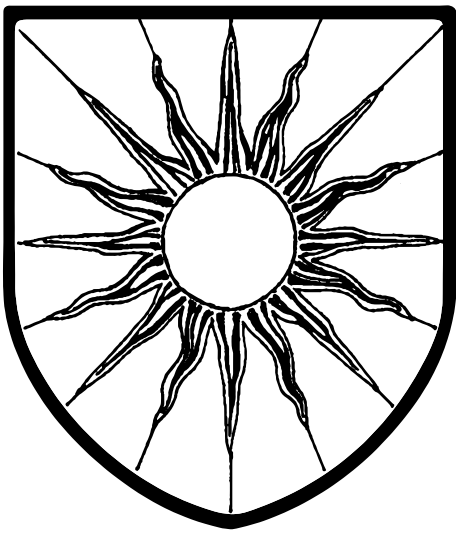
Colombes Blanches
(White Doves)



Observateurs des Bateaux
(Boat Watchers)



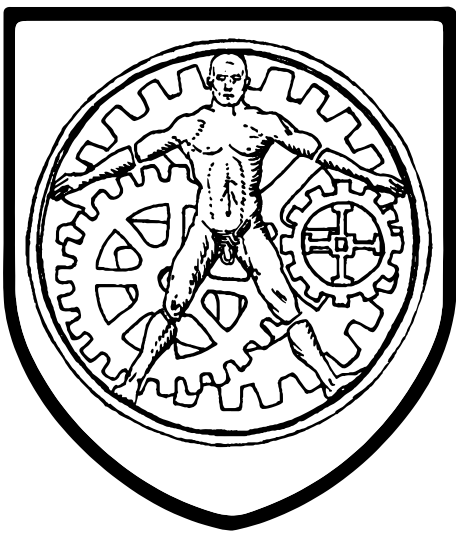
Lions de La Rue
(Street Lions)



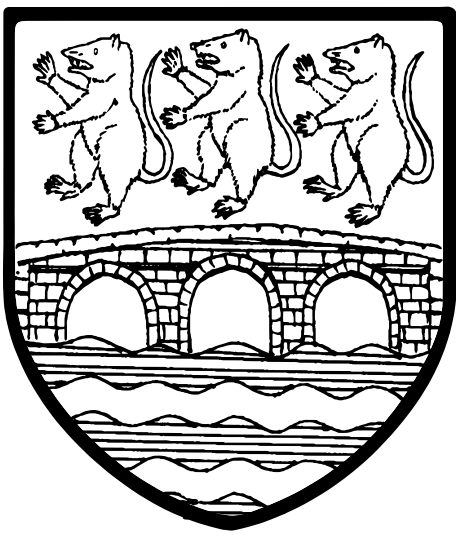
Soleils Craimoisi
(Crimson Suns)



Phénix Doré
(Golden Phoenix)



Talon Cassés
(Broken Talon)



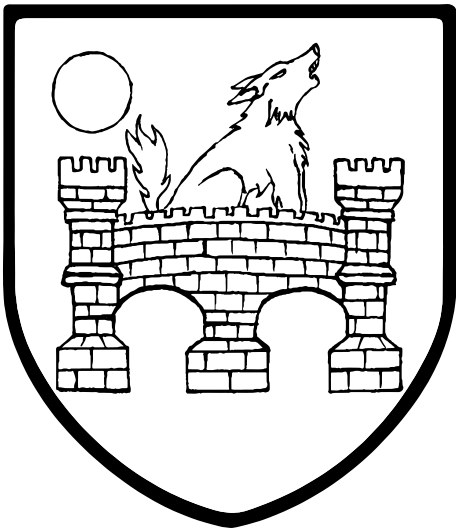
Attrape-Ræts
(Ratcatchers)



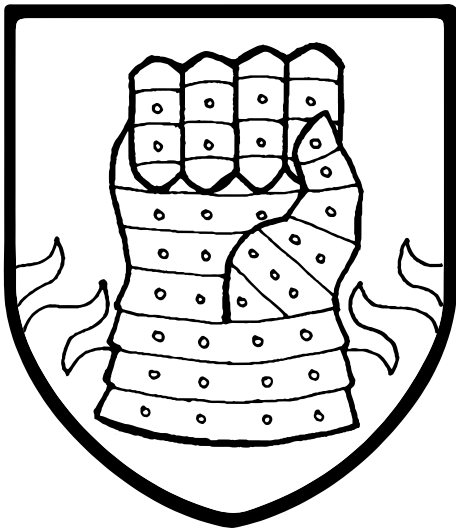
Ancre d'Argent
(Silver Anchor)



Corbeaulames
(Crowblades)



Loups Fous
(Mad Wolves)



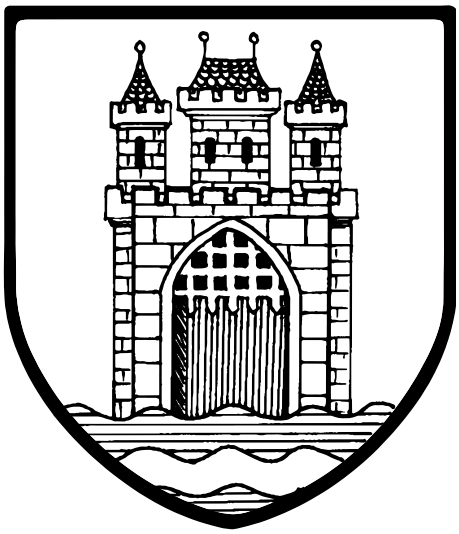
Verts Vibrants
(Vibrant Greens)



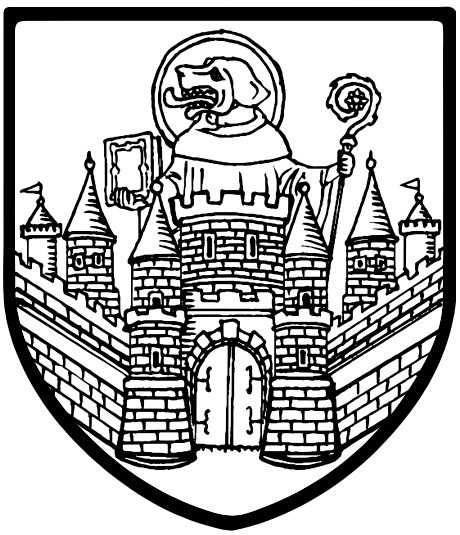
Bosquet de Cyprès
(Cypress Grove)



Coques de Sanglier
(Boar Husks)



Porte d'Eau
(Water Gate)



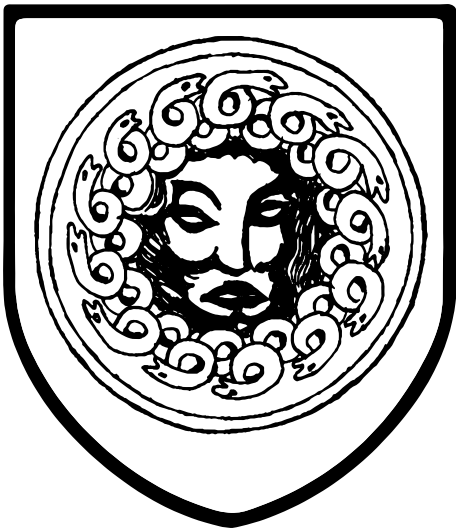
Griffes à Ronger
(Gnawing Claws)



Écailles de Dragon
(Dragonscales)



Fléaux Fantômes
(Wraithbanes)



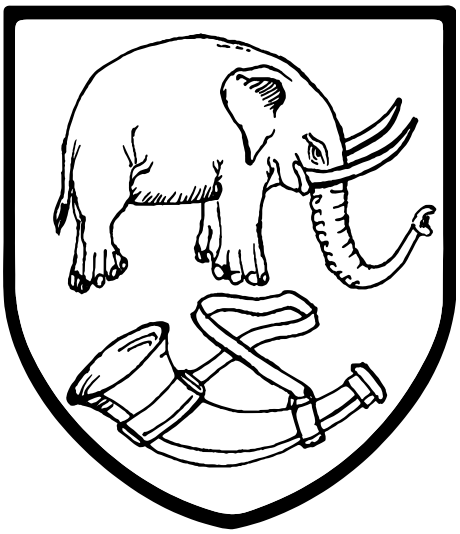
Yeux de Gorgon
(Gorgon Eyes)



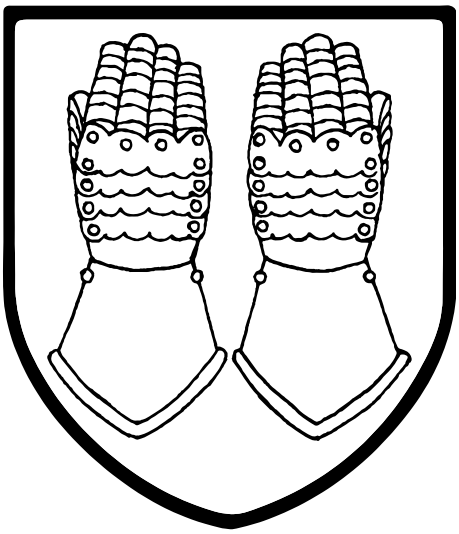
Tuers de Chat
(Cat Killers)



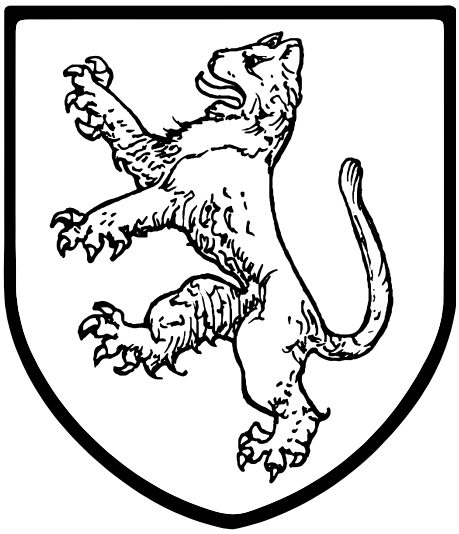
Chiens de Garde
(Watchdogs)



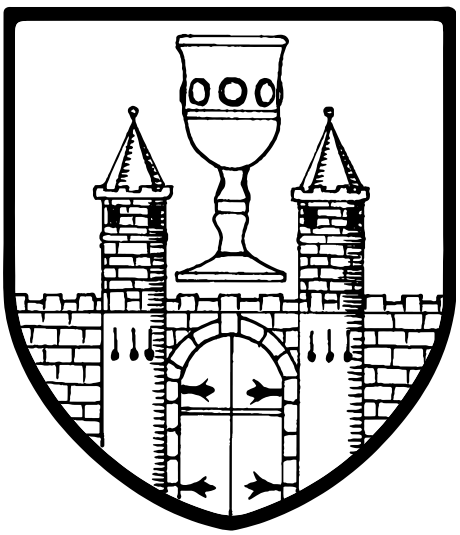
Éléphants Hurlants
(Screaming Elephants)



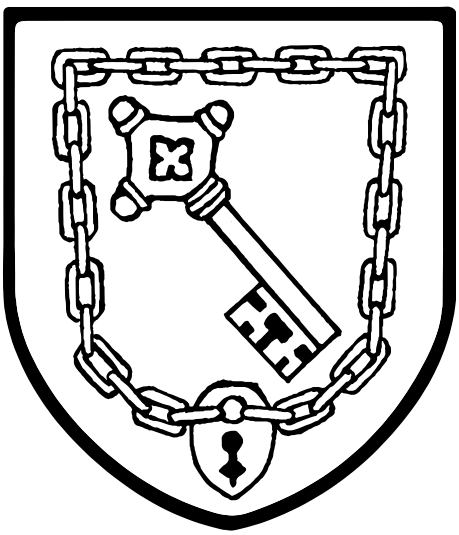
Gantelets en Acier
(Steel Gauntlets)



Jellicles



Gardiens de la Coupe
(Keepers of the Cup)



La Serrure et Clé
(Lock and Key)



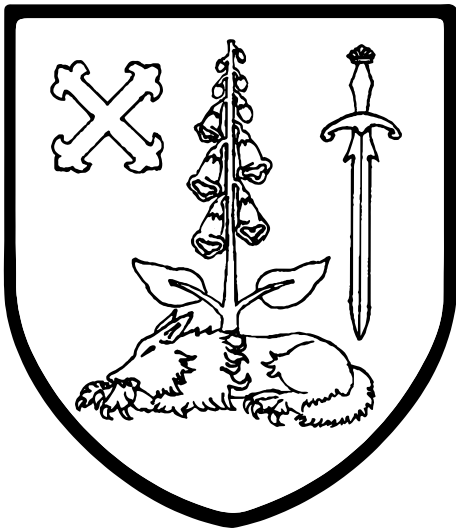
Balance de la Justice
(Scales of Justice)



Bella Domna
(Beautiful Lady of the House)



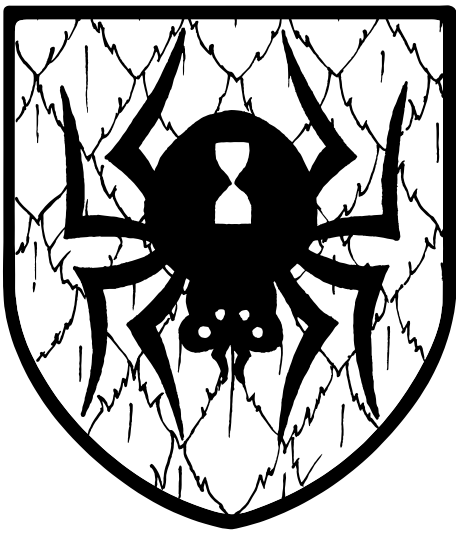
Lames d'Ange
(Angel Blades)



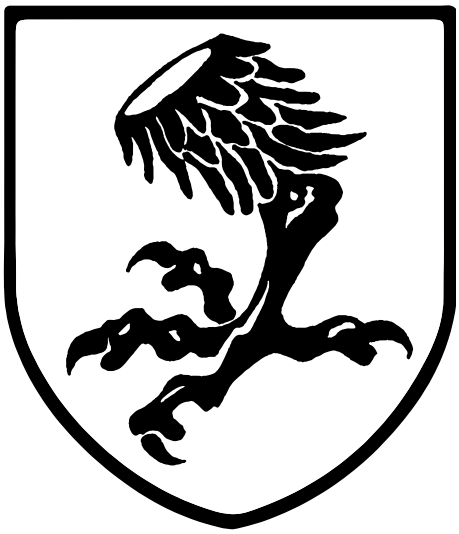
Tue-Loup
(Wolfsbanes)



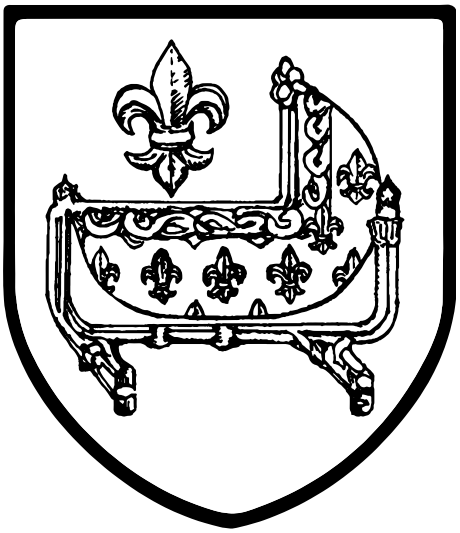
Protecteurs de la Musique Céleste
(Protectors of Heavenly Music)



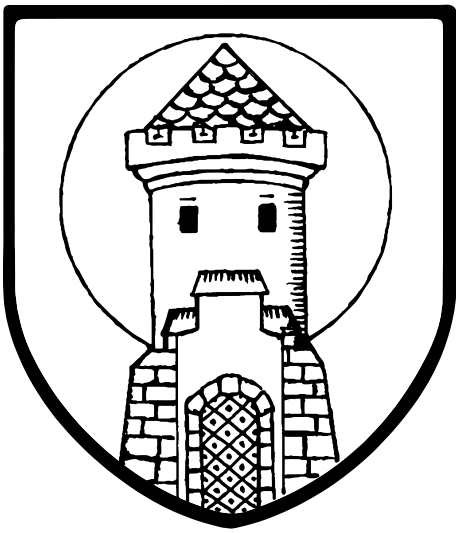
Confrérie de l'Araignée
(Brotherhood of the Spider)



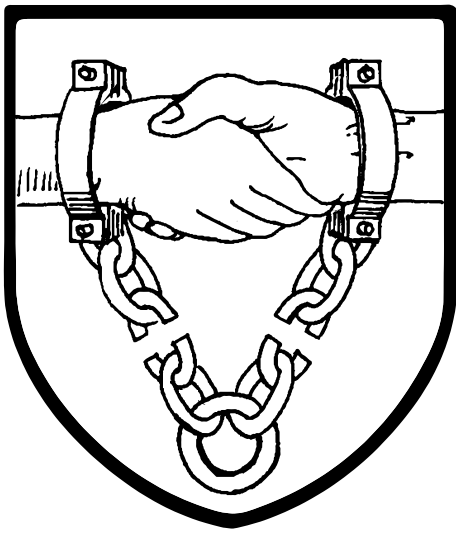
Exilés du Faucon
(Exiles of the Falcon)



Berceaux de la Race
(Cradles of Race)



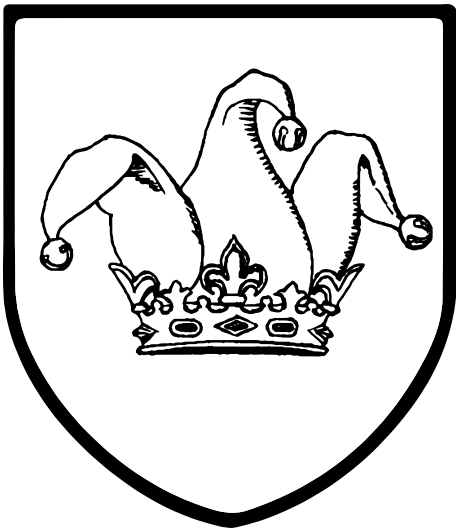
Ombres de la Lune
(Moonshadows)



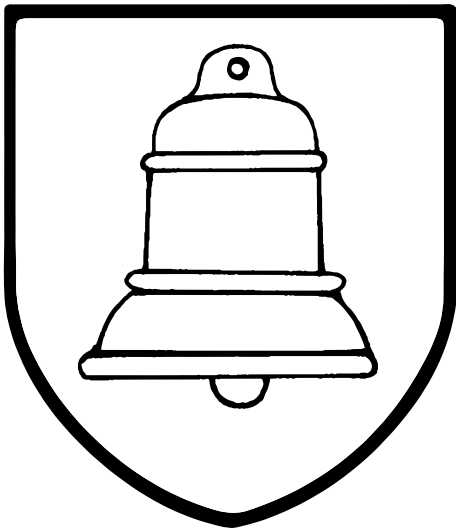
Le Pacte des Hommes Libres
(The Pact of Freemen)



Les Plumes Violettes
(The Purple Plumes)



Roi Nu
(Naked king)



Sonneurs de Cloches
(Bellringers)



Les Paroles du Saint
(The Words of the Saint)



Griffes de Démon
(Demon Claws)

Do not keep secret from your friend what your enemy already knows.

— Danish Proverb