

# QVOTH THE RAVEN – 31<sup>TH</sup>



A FRATERNITY OF SHADOWS NETBOOK (RAVENLOFT)  
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# INTRODUCTION

*"This Revolution is genuine because it was born from the same womb that always gives birth to massive social upheavals - the womb of intolerable conditions and unendurable situations."* — Martin Luther King, Jr.

*"The revolution won't be televised."* — Gill Scott Heron

Esteemed members of the Fraternity,  
Miladies,

Here's the time where once a year we release the Quoth the Raven netbook. This thing you have in your hand is issue 31.

Ravenloft is filled with darkness, sorrow and injustice from the harsh rule of Duke Nharov Gundar of Gundarak and the annexing of the largely populated parts of Gundarak by the troops of Count Strahd Von Zarovich XI to the oppression of the people of Falkovnia by the "Hawk's" iron claws and the fear Hazlik's dark magic instills to the people of Hazlan. Ravenloft is filled with tyrannical rulers that oppress the common folk to obedience. But Ravenloft is also filled with stories of defiance against oppressors like the successful uprising of the people of Skald following the legendary bard Harkon Lukas's speech, that freed Kartakans from their Invidian oppressors to the riots of 707 BC in Dementlieu that ended with the execution of Lord-Governor Foquelaine and the appointment of a new Council of Brilliance.

A social upheaval has the power to change the world as much as a cosmic upheaval has. As long as there are oppressed people in the world there will be uprisings, with the power to possibly change the world towards something better or even something worse.

*"There is a difference between an uprising against oppression and mob rule."* — Abhijit Naskar

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

THE FRATERNITY OF SHADOWS

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# Four Came to Melesku'ta

by Ian Fordam

Four came to Melesku'ta. They never would have done so except that they had been attacked by a pack of ustilagors, and Yralki had fallen. Not dead, but more than unconscious, he had simply gone comatose while his mind healed his body. This was one of several psychic tricks that Yralki had manifested. His three fellow ruineers were used to this, and they intended to wait patiently while their leader was out of commission, as they had many times before. Unfortunately, though, with nightfall—the daily fading of the horizon's roseate glow—came a sudden, unexpected change of seasons. Sky-Quiet turned to Sky-Terror, and lightning lanced from the starless sky.

"Oh, that's not good," Tomaz grumbled.

Qualion Rathenas declared, "We need to find shelter." Which was obvious, but still. Better that someone take command, and he felt that he was best suited during Yralki's convalescence. Neither Tomaz nor his sister Lidia were bothered enough to protest.

"Carry Yralki," Lidia said to her brother. Tomaz had been born a caliban, but at least he had gained great strength in exchange for his brutish appearance. He picked up Yralki easily and slung him over his shoulder.

"Which way?" Tomaz asked.

As an elf, Qualion had the best night vision of the group. He scanned the surroundings, a task made very momentarily easier by another lightning strike.

"There," he said. "I think I see a building."

"A building?" Lidia said, already moving in the indicated direction. "That's good." Buildings were often protected from Sky-Terror's lightning, a parting gift from the Yldi'Thaan who had constructed them. The trio gathered up their supplies and their leader, and they jogged toward the building that Qualion had seen. Although moving too quickly across the broken landscape was dangerous, remaining exposed to the lightning was even more dangerous yet.

Had he been conscious, Yralki would have been unable to perceive the building, and he would have refused to approach any building which he could not observe. However, his companions lacked his psychic talents, and so they had no such qualms. Thus the three brought the fourth to Melesku'ta.

\* \* \*

The sky held no moon, no stars. Lidia and Tomaz could not have distinguished the large, solid blackness of the building from the large, solid blackness of Mount Grysl itself. They had to follow Qualion by sound and lightning flashes. It was a harrowing journey.

Qualion drew to a halt. "We're here," he said.

And then the most marvelous thing happened.

A glow appeared ahead of them.

None of the three had been born in the Badlands. They were all familiar with the concept of lanterns. For that matter, they were familiar with the concept of magic. The sudden illumination was entirely

explicable to them. That did not make it any less marvelous.

The pale yellow glow emanated from a glassy sphere, mounted just above the keystone of an arched doorway. The doors stood wide open. The stones of the archway had been decorated with writing.

None of the trio were native speakers of Thaani, but they had grown quite comfortable speaking that language. Reading and writing was more complicated—for one thing, the curling Thaani script was highly unfamiliar to them all—but Tomaz had become more proficient than the others. (He looked like he might be stupid, but he was not.)

“Melesku’ta?” he read.

“What does that mean?” Lidia asked.

“I don’t know. Is it a name?”

“Maybe.”

“It feels like a trap.”

“It does. Should we just lurk against the outside walls?”

“Won’t be the least comfortable night we’ve spent.”

“No,” Lidia agreed with a sigh.

Qualion interjected. “We should not, in fact, lurk against the outside walls. See the glint?”

Tomaz grunted his understanding. “That’s steelgrass. We don’t want to stay near that.”

Steelgrass drew the lightning.

“No, we don’t,” Lidia said. “Let’s go inside. Can’t be worse than out here.”

Which was blatantly untrue, but somehow convincing regardless. After Qualion took the first step, the other two followed on his heels.

*Welcome*, a voice whispered as they entered the building’s courtyard.

Although Yralki did not possess the discipline of telepathy, his companions had encountered enough mind-talkers to have grown accustomed to the touch of another’s thoughts. (Even the ustilagors, whose attack had wounded Yralki so badly, could project debilitating emotions at victims who had not learned any psychic defense.) Although they had learned how to erect some psychic barriers, active defense required explicit concentration.

Lidia whipped around, expecting to see the doors closing behind her, hoping that she could hold them open until her brother brought his strength to bear. Her concern was unfounded. The doors had not budged.

Tomaz gave his burden a ferocious pinch upon the rump. “Boss man! This would be a good time to wake up.”

*Welcome to Melesku’ta*, the voice repeated, still softly. *Please do not be afraid.*

“Who are you?” Qualion demanded.

*My name is Xhafer.* It was clearly a Thaani name, with the initial *xh* pronounced as the *z* in *brazier*.

“A pleasure to make your acquaintance, Xhafer. But who *are* you?”

*I am your host. Please. Come in. Steelgrass has grown along the inside walls too. Even if you are wary of entering an enclosed area, I encourage you to step into the center of the courtyard.*

“We can’t really see,” Lidia interjected.

*Oh. I’m sorry.*

Several more glassy spheres started to glow around the perimeter of the courtyard.

*Is that bett—*

A lightning bolt erupted behind them. Although it had been drawn to the steelgrass on the outside of the wall, it was still alarmingly close. All three ruineers jumped.



Please, Xhafer urged, but the trio was already moving away from the walls.

\* \* \*

It was not, in fact, the least comfortable night that they had spent, but neither was it easy. The lightning storm persisted, as it would every night until Sky-Terror turned to Sky-Quiet once again. Worse yet, the strikes were punctuated by brief but savage downpours. (Rain from empty skies was the least of the mysteries of the Badlands.) They spent the night wet and chilled, but at least they could replenish their water supplies. And Xhafer, whoever he was, had the courtesy to leave them alone.

Yralki awakened only shortly before dawn, and it was not a smooth awakening. Ordinarily his healing coma lasted a shorter span, and he snapped from unconscious to alert without any difficulty. That night he tossed fretfully for an hour before he finally gained consciousness.

Gaining consciousness was a mixed blessing. On the good side, it meant he had healed. On the bad side, there was something wrong with him. His eyes refused to see. He was not caught up in darkness, but his mind refused to accept that there was anything to see. His ears had failed him similarly and, worse yet, so had his sense of touch. Somehow he knew which way was down, but he could not feel whether he clutched at rock or dirt or glass or metal or nothing at all whatsoever. He pounded his fists without noticeable impact. He tried slamming his head, hoping to break loose whatever had gone wrong or, at least, drive himself back into unconsciousness. When that proved equally free of sensation, his whimpers escalated into screams.

—until suddenly he blacked out.

Around him, his three companions stared at each other in bewilderment and alarm. Qualion crouched atop Yralki with one forearm wrapped tightly around his throat. Only when Yralki had gone still did Qualion

cautiously release the sleeper hold which had returned their leader to unconsciousness.

Tomaz sprawled prone nearby, his large hand still held between Yralki's head and the flagstones of the courtyard. "How badly hurt is he?" He was afraid of the answer. He could feel Yralki's blood in the palm of his hand.

Qualion looked up, a haunted look in his eyes. "He's unconscious again. Hopefully he heals."

"I don't think that works unless he puts himself into a healing coma."

Lidia stood not far away. Perhaps because she had thought of nothing to do to help, she was even more distraught than the other two. "What happened to him?" she demanded. More loudly, she called out, "Xhafer!"

The light globes in the courtyard brightened. Yes?

The night had finally turned to day. In sunless Bluetspur, that meant the horizon had gone pink, although their view of the horizon was blocked by the walls of Melesku'ta. More importantly, the lightning storm had stopped until night-time, when the horizon would go black again.

"What happened to him?" Lidia repeated.

*Your friend is psychic, yes?* It was phrased as a question and tentatively at that, but Lidia suspected that Xhafer already knew the answer.

"Of course," she snapped. "He's the only damn reason that the three of us have survived in this place."

*Melesku'ta is guarded against psychics. Illithids in particular, of course, but the shield applies to the Yldi'Thaan as well.*

"Very well, but what does that actually mean?"

*As long as he remains here, he will be unable to perceive anything about his surroundings.*

"Anything?"

*Anything.*

"That's a lovely little slice of horrific, don't you think? Tomaz, Qual, can Yralki be moved? If so, pick him up. We need to get out of here."

Xhafer whispered, *Before you leave—*

"Yes?"

*—please look outside the gate.*

"What do you—oh."

The doors to the outside world swung open. Even with the horizon-glow of day, very little light fell across the wasteland. Even so, it was enough to see silhouetted shapes crawling over the broken terrain.

"Are those—"

Qualion stared at the shapes as well, and with his excellent vision he could discern their details more clearly than the others. "They look like illithids, but they don't move like them. My guess is that they are undead."

"Vampiric illithids, then?"

"Probably."

*Exactly, Xhafer said. They can't sense you here, but if you leave, they will notice you immediately. I am sorry for the suffering of your friend, but at the moment, you truly are safer here.*

"You'll let us go once the illithids are gone?" Lidia asked.

*Of course. You are free to go now. However, I would recommend that you not.*

Tomaz had taken in the conversation without commenting. Nor did he comment now, but instead swiveled his gaze to stare hard at Lidia. He knew his sister's moods. In turn, she recognized his expression. It was the same one he had adopted whenever their father had taken out his grief on his caliban son, who had been born too dangerously large for their mother to survive.

His face said: 'Leave it be. This trouble too will pass if we are patient.'

"Fine," Lidia sighed. "We will stay. Briefly."

Tomaz nodded his approval, and the doors swung quietly closed. Qualion stepped back from the gate with a mixture of relief and anxiety. He did not want to fight the vampires, but neither did he want to be trapped in Melesku'ta. He had become a ruineer in part because he could not stand living in the confines of the tunnels beneath the surface.

"I'm sure we could get out if we had to," Qualion said as he patted the pouch at his waist. Tomaz and Lidia both frowned. They knew that pouch was where Qualion carried his teke grenades. He had originally found six, but had subsequently used two. Although he was entirely too eager to use the remainder, they were too valuable to waste upon frivolous mayhem.

"Don't even think it," Lidia warned, knowing that Qualion would understand.

Qualion said, "Fine, fine. So what do we do now?"

*Are you interested in food?*

Tomaz looked skeptical, but he said, "Always interested in food."

*Make yourselves—and your companion—comfortable. I will have some brought shortly.*

"You're very kind," Lidia said. Her sharpness was more apparent than she intended.

Tomaz assumed that Yralki could still feel his own body, even though Xhafer had claimed he was insensate. He tried to rearrange Yralki to be more comfortable.

"I think he's comatized again," Tomaz announced.

"Good," Qualion replied.

"Only until the next time he wakes up," Lidia said.

"By that time we hope the illithivamps have wandered away."



"And if they haven't?"

"Then we evaluate what to do from there. One step at a time, Lid."

The walls of Melesku'ta encircled more than the courtyard where the four ruineers had spent the night. Opposite the front doors was the inner keep, with its own pair of doors. These doors now swung open.

A creature—of sorts—emerged. It was mostly humanoid in appearance, with two arms and two legs. In place of a head, three antennae protruded from its shoulders. Each one was a metal rod, capped with a cut crystal. In fact, the creature's entire body appeared to have been crafted from brass and crystal. It glittered as it walked carefully across the courtyard toward the ruineers. It carried a laden tray.

*I had already initiated food preparation, Xhafer confessed. I had hoped you would stay.*

"Very kind of you," Lidia said.

"Is that... tea?" Tomaz asked.

*Yes. Of a sort. Not quite what you are used to, I suspect, but the best I could do.*

Tomaz chuckled. "I will gladly try something other than what I've become used to. You Bluetspureans don't know how to make a decent cup of tea."

*I am not Bluetspurean. I am Yldi'Thaan.*

Xhafer's mental voice rang with the same pride that Yralki showed when he spoke of his people. Tomaz, Lidia, and Qualion—who were all of them foreigners and therefore not Yldi'Thaan—exchanged glances and little smiles.

"No offense intended," Tomaz said as he lifted a cup of tea from the brass-and-crystal creature's tray. The cup was real ceramic. Undecorated, but real. Its contents steamed, and it had a real tea-like scent. Even without taking a sip, Tomaz was already delighted. He took a sip. He was even more delighted. "This is wonderful."

*I apologize. It is made from mushrooms.*

"It doesn't taste like it. Not much, anyway."

*The flatbread rolls and their contents are also mushroom-based, but I have tried to give them a better texture. More like vegetables.*

"These are great. Thank you, Xhafer."

*You are all welcome.*

Qualion cleared his throat. "Xhafer, you are of course welcome to join us. We would not object to your company."

*Alas, I cannot. I am occupied with the task of maintaining Melesku'ta.*

"Nonetheless, when you have a moment, we would be pleased to meet you face-to-face."

*I would like nothing better, but I am sorry. That cannot happen.*

Which was exactly what Qualion had expected was the truth, but he had wondered whether Xhafer would admit it. Even more surprising than the admission was the regret evident in Xhafer's tone.

\* \* \*

Shortly Yralki stirred again, but only briefly. He settled back into stillness without the assistance of a sleeper hold.

"Definitely gone comatose again," Tomaz opined. As the person usually delegated to hauling their leader during his comatose periods, he was familiar with the signs.

"Good," Lidia said. "That means he's healing."

"Hopefully he will be able to recover his senses," Qualion said, although he sounded skeptical of his own assertion.

"I doubt it," Lidia said, "but at least he should repair any concussion." Brain damage was a particularly terrible fear for any Yldi'Thaan with psychic powers.

"Not that it will matter much if he remains insensate. He'll just try to harm himself again."

"True," Tomaz said. "Xhafer?"

Yes?

Tomaz appreciated how Xhafer pretended he wasn't listening until called. In his experience, that's what polite telepaths did.

"Our companion? When he wakes up? Can you speak with him telepathically?"

*I can certainly try.*

Perhaps this sliver of hope brightened Lidia's attitude. She pointed to Yralki and the bedrolls where Tomaz had laid him out, his own beneath the length of his body, Qualion's bulked beneath his head. "Can you think of any other way to make him more comfortable? And by 'comfortable' I mean 'less likely to split his head open like a melon'?"

It was a particularly foreign phrasing; there were no melons in Bluetspur, and she had to fall back upon the Balok word. Despite that, Xhafer picked up her meaning. He said, *The soldiers slept in protective hammocks. Plenty of them remain in good condition. You are welcome to use them. For your companion and for yourselves, if you like.* The doors to the inner keep swung open again.

Given his excellent vision, Qualion led the way into the keep, longsword at the ready. In the middle Tomaz carried Yralki over his shoulder. His axe hung from his belt, close at hand. Behind him Lidia served as rear guard. She carried her precious bow of Barovian yew, not drawn, but with an arrow nocked. The arrow was one of six they had found years ago in an Yldi'Thaan ruin. It was made of some unfamiliar metal, light but strong. Walking into the keep felt like walking into a trap. Fortunately Xhafer did not discourage their paranoia. That would have only fed it.

Fortunately, their caution proved unnecessary. They passed two of the brass-and-crystal automata,

tromping down the hallway upon their own mysterious business. Otherwise they encountered nothing else, much less any threats.

"Are we the only ones here?" Qualion eventually asked.

*The five of us. Yes.*

"Why is this keep so large if you're the only one who lives here?"

*I am certain that the Thaan built Melesku'ta as a research facility—and as barracks—during the First Illithid War.*

"The First Illithid War? There's been more than one?"

After a long silence, Xhafer replied, *Yes. We won the first one. We have not yet won the second.*

Tomaz glanced over his shoulder at Lidia. It seemed to him that the Second Illithid War had ended, and the Yldi'Thaan had lost. Ruineers were just scavengers in the rubble, and everyone else huddled beneath the surface.

Qualion had caught the word *barracks*. "Are there weapons here?"

Another long pause before Xhafer replied, *Not any longer.*

"What happened to the weapons?"

*Others have discovered Melesku'ta before you. They took the weapons with them when they left.*

"Ah."

*Turn here.*

Globular lanterns suddenly glowed along the hallway to their right. On both sides of the hallway were regularly spaced doors. The doors were made from an unnatural but sturdy material that the ruineers had encountered before in other ruins. They called it *falsewood* because it was crafted to look like wood, although its texture was unnaturally smooth. An



amber-colored crystal had been set into each door where a handle would ordinarily be.

*Pick any room that pleases you. Or you each may if take one, if you prefer. Be as greedy as you like! Or not. None of them are in use.*

Qualion raised his sword, and with his free hand he touched the nearest door's crystal. The falsewood door opened, retracting into the wall soundlessly. Another lantern globe cast light upon the room beyond, which was clearly a barracks. A single table with a single chair, both constructed from falsewood, sat opposite the door. To either side hung three mesh hammocks. They did not look particularly sturdy—or comfortable, for that matter—but they must have been, given that they had endured the many years since the Yldi'Thaan lost their last war. As for comfort, what mattered was that the mesh would keep Yralki's precious head from colliding with the stone walls, even if he woke up and started thrashing.

"Looks cozy," Tomaz remarked.

"It will serve," Lidia replied. She pointed to a hammock at random. "Put him there."

Tomaz and Qualion struggled briefly, but between the two of them they managed to get Yralki arranged in a hammock. When they were done, they both stared at their still-comatose leader.

*The latrine is at the end of the hallway. I can also show you the mess hall, or I can direct one of the autonoma to bring you food if you are still hungry.*

Tomaz said, "You go find the mess. I'll wait here. I hate the thought of Yralki waking up alone."

Gently Qualion pointed out, "He won't know if you're here or elsewhere."

"Unless he does," Tomaz said. "Xhafer, can you tell us when he awakens?"

Yes.

"When he does, will you try to contact him? Tell him that we are here and just waiting for the illithivamps to wander away."

*I shall do my best.*

"Thank you."

\* \* \*

Even in the absence of ustilagors, vampire illithids, and the lightning storms of Sky-Terror, traveling upon the surface called for continuous alertness. Relaxation was difficult, not to mention ill-advised. As a consequence, whenever the ruineers returned to the settlements beneath Mount Grysl, they would separate in their searches for diversion. Distance simplified the process of letting go of the need for alertness.

Without any need for discussion, in the relative safety of Meleske'tu the three conscious ruineers went their separate ways, just to get enough distance to think about their predicament. None of them were convinced that they were fully safe, but they all expected that staving off danger would require a clear head.

Lidia did not remember her mother, who had died in the birthing bed when Lidia was just over two years old. She did remember the woman who should have been her stepmother, except that she eventually decided she would rather marry a man who did not come with pre-existing children, one of whom was a caliban. Their father had been damaged by their mother's death, and he was broken entirely when someone subsequently *chose* to leave him. Fortunately, though, when her never-to-be-stepmother left, both Lidia and Tomaz were old enough to fend for themselves. They both learned to hunt and fish, although Lidia was always better with the bow and Tomaz was always better with the rod.

Lidia taught herself other skills as well. In particular, she was the one who broke into the second-story window of her never-to-be-stepmother's new husband's house, picked the lock of the chest in his

study, and stole away with his small fortune. Unfortunately, she didn't adequately prepare for the questions that arose when she tried to exchange a gold coin for copper. Fleeing from their hometown had been the first step of many which had led them ultimately (if inadvertently) to Bluetspur.

She wandered the hallways of Melesku'ta, trusting her instinct to guide her. She knew she was on the right track when Xhafer said,

*Miss? Perhaps I can direct you where you would like to go?*

"Oh, I'm just wandering."

*I might recommend that you double back. There is nothing of interest to visitors in the direction you are currently heading.*

"Nothing of interest is what I'm looking for," Lidia lied. She lied knowing that Xhafer would know she lied. That was nothing to do with telepathy but merely human nature.

She reached the end of the hallway. There was a falsewood door with an inset crystal. When she touched the crystal, nothing happened.

*I am sorry, Xhafer said. That's a private area.*

"Mm hm," Lidia said absently as she knelt before the door. She extracted a set of specialized tools from her pouch. This wasn't the first time she had encountered Thaan psitech; far from it. "I'm sure it is."

\* \* \*

Like Lidia, Qualion Rathenas found his own destination, although his instincts led him in a different direction. From outside of Melesku'ta, his eyesight had revealed that the overall structure extended a short distance up the slope of Mount Grysl. He followed corridors which sloped upward, noting that Melesku'ta had very few steps. Perhaps the automata did more poorly on steps than slopes.

*Sir? Is there someplace in particular that you wish to go?*

"I'm exploring," Qualion said. "I like high places. They let me see farther. I want to keep an eye on the illithivamps."

*Oh. Xhafer paused. In that case, I shall direct you to the Sorcerer's Tower.*

That caught Qualion's attention. "The Sorcerer's Tower?" he repeated. "The Sorcerer isn't still there, is he?"

*No. And there may never have been a sorcerer. That's just what we called that tower to distinguish it from the other.*

"What did you call the other?"

*The Psion's Tower, of course.*

"Of course."

*Follow the lanterns. I will guide you.*

The hallway ahead went dark, but it remained illuminated behind. Given that little bit of light Qualion could see quite well into the darkness, but there was no need to push forward. He decided to trust Xhafer's guidance. Several minutes later, he reached a rounded room which appeared to be the base of the tower.

"Are there stairs?" Qualion asked because he could see none. Nor were there any ladders. There was merely a large circular hole in the ceiling.

*Use the floating pathway. Step into the center of the room.*

"Directly beneath the hole?"

Yes.

"And how will I get down?"

*I will reverse the pathway whenever you wish. Or hold your arms outside of the pathway to give yourself some downward weight. It's fun. We used to spend whole afternoons bobbing in midair.*

Qualion did not comment. With trepidation he stepped beneath the hole in the ceiling and felt himself grow weightless. Before joining with Yralki's band, he had travelled briefly with a telekinetic. Being lifted by her talent felt much like ascending the floating pathway.

He ascended to the second story. A crystalline dome overhead rolled open, and he ascended to the roof.

*There*, Xhafer said.

It was still daytime, pinkly illuminated by the horizon's glow.

"I don't see any illithidvamps. Do they have a lair nearby?"

*I have very limited perception beyond Melesku'ta, so I would not know.*

The horizon-glow gave Qualion a good view of the walls of Melesku'ta, including brass tubes mounted on swivels at intervals along its length. Each tube appeared to be as long as his arm, although that was difficult to gauge at such distance.

"Those tubes? What are they?"

*They are remote-viewing devices. They are how I can see what little I can see beyond the walls. However, only some of them still function.*

"Do you see any threats nearby?"

Two of the tubes swivelled in the direction where the vampire illithids had been moving earlier.

*I do not.*

"Good. Also. What is *that*?"

Qualion pointed to an open area. It was at the far end of the compound from where they had entered, but it was almost directly below the Sorcerer's Tower.

*The back courtyard.*

"And are those skeletons?"

*Yes. The automata cannot dig through rock, so the back courtyard is where I direct them to place the bodies of those who die here.*

"Hmm. You know, Xhafer, it looks to me like quite a few people have died here."

*I have been in Melesku'ta for just shy of a century and a half. People discover Melesku'ta every decade or two. It would happen more often if psychics could find us, I am sure.*

"Except that Melesku'ta is a torture chamber for psychics. Yes. But non-psychics sometimes choose to stay here?"

*Yes. Not always, but sometimes. I can provide food and safety, after all, and neither one is guaranteed below the surface.*

"Or upon it. Have you seen any sign of those illithivamps yet?"

*No. But I cannot perceive things nearly as well outside of Melesku'ta. I can't use telepathy at that range, so I have to rely upon my far-crystals.*

"I see. Fortunately for us you don't seem to mind company."

*Not at all. I get lonely when there is nobody here.*

Qualion gave a visible shiver. "It's cold up here. I'm ready to go back inside."

*The floating pathway has been reversed.*

When Qualion stepped into the circle at the center of the Sorcerer's Tower, he floated, instead of plunging, downward. Not that he had expected such vicious tricks. Xhafer got lonely without company, after all. No, his concern was much the opposite. He had seen those many skeletons in the back courtyard. Fortunately, though, he was native to Sithicus, where one learned very quickly to close away feelings of despair and apathy and guilt. He had also survived for years in Bluetspur, where one learned equally quickly to defend one's thoughts.



Qualion was very good at hiding the moment when he slipped over the edge.

\* \* \*

Tomaz went directly to the mess. He got another cup of tea and another serving of flatbread rolls. He wasn't really hungry, but he enjoyed having food, and he was curious to learn whether Xhafer would prevent him. The food supply couldn't be infinite, but how tight was it?

The tea was still good. The flatbread roll was still good. Tomaz took a small bite and washed it down with a long sip. Then he said, "Xhafer, we need to talk."

*I would be delighted to.*

"Who are you?"

*I am Xhafer.*

"Are you human?"

*Yes. I am Yldi'Thaan, in fact.*

"Clearly you are a telepath, although not a very strong one. I notice that you speak to us in Thaani, not in meanings, if you follow me. I also notice that you haven't called any of us by name. All of which tells me that you can't push far inside our heads."

*I prefer to respect your privacy.*

"I appreciate that, Xhafer. My name is Tomaz, by the way. So you are a telepath, but you aren't stripped of your senses. Why not?"

Tomaz noticed a slight pause before Xhafer replied, *My circumstances are unusual.*

"What is your circumstance?"

*I supervise Melesku'ta.*

"How long have you done so?"

*One hundred and forty-nine years. Approximately.*

"You must get lonely."

*Of course. Fortunately, I do have occasional visitors such as yourself.*

"Did you have any questions for me?"

*Yes, and thank you for asking. I did not want to push. However, I must confess that I am eager for any news of the Second Illithid War.*

Tomaz chuckled. He took a large bite of flatbread roll. He took a long sip of tea, emptying his cup.

"Sorry," he said. "I'm stalling. The way I see things, the Second Illithid War ended many generations ago. It's hard to say how long. Time is hard to track when you don't have real days and you don't have real seasons. Regardless. The Yldi'Thaan lost."

*I assume the survivors continue to fight.*

"Some of them. Some just try to survive."

*Is there any hope for victory?* There was desperation in Xhafer's mental voice. For the first time Tomaz was convinced that Xhafer really was human.

"Well, there was the Second Release. A year or so a band of Yar'Thaaladan freed a bunch of people from the Citadel Subterrene itself."

*Was there a First Release?*

"The Great Release. Yes. About twenty years before."

*Is there a Third Release planned?*

"Not that I know of. But I wouldn't know."

*And these Yar'Thaaladan? Those-Who-Are-Yet-Sapient? Who are they?*

"Yldi'Thaan, mostly. Foreigners like myself who have gotten trapped here. Shattered Ones who escaped from the Citadel. Anyone who isn't on the side of the illithids, really."

*This is why your companion asked earlier about weapons, yes? So you could use them to fight the illithids?*

"Not really. We're ruineers. We don't actually try to fight the illithids, although sometimes we have to. No, we scour the ruins of the Yldi'Thaan in search of weapons and other valuables so that we can trade them to the various settlements beneath the surface. It's a hard life, but it beats huddling beneath the surface and never seeing the sun. Or what passes for the sun here."

*I miss the sun.*

"Me too, Xhafer. Me too."

*Tomaz?*

"Yes?"

*I apologize. The woman is going where she shouldn't—*

"She does that."

*—and I can't stop her. She's probably going to start screaming any minute now, but I promise you, I am not hurting her.*

\* \* \*

Qualion Rathenas had no particular liking for Bluetspur, but then he had no particular liking for his homeland either. He had not forgotten the night that his small village had been caught between two warring tribes of the Iron Hills. Everybody in the village—everybody who had not been killed in the initial attack, anyway—had been locked inside the old granary, a stone building in the heart of the village. There were too many people to fit within its walls, but their captors shoved until bones broke and everyone was inside. Worse yet, the summer had been unusually hot, made far worse by the press of bodies.

There was no food. There was no water. There was no sanitation. When people started dying, there was no room for their bodies to fall. For two days the villagers had suffered, and many of them had died, while they listened to the conflict which raged in fits outside the stone walls. Finally, a miracle happened,

and warriors from Hroth drove the tribes back into the Iron Hills. In the end, only seven people survived, including Qualion Rathenas. He had stood by while the Hrothans laid out the bodies of his family and neighbors, all in neat rows, much like the bodies in the back courtyard.

Qualion had not forgotten, but he remembered as little and as rarely as possible.

Yralki still lay insensate in the hammock. Qualion unhooked the hammock from the wall and lowered it gently to the ground before unhooking the other.

He said, "Come on, boss man. We are getting out of here. Lidia and Tomaz will catch up when they can."

\* \* \*

Lidia did not scream. She stared at the mummified corpse and scowled.

"Xhafer? Is this you?"

... Yes.

"I don't wish to be indelicate, but... you do realize that you're dead, right?"

*I do.*

"Good. I hate to think of you lying there without anybody bothering to tell you."

*I knew. I had to flee entirely into the psitech when it happened. Fortunately I had already grown accustomed to living partially in the crystals. Death was just more of the same.*

"Do you want me to remove... all those tubes and such? Give you a proper burial?"

Xhafer laughed. *Ironically, I was just talking with one of your companions about the back courtyard. But, no, thank you. Please leave me be. I'm afraid to disturb anything. I know that I'm already dead, but I would rather not be destroyed.*

"I think I understand. Xhafer, that's really..." She could not think of a word that was sufficiently

horrific. "... not good. Who did this to you? Was it the illithids?"

*What? No! It was the rest of my squad. But it's fine. We all knew that one of us would have to stay. I drew the short straw, that's all.*

"I can't believe you're so calm about this."

*I've had a century and a half to adjust.*

"I suppose. But still. Why did someone have to stay?"

*To drive the not-here field to screen out the illithids. My squad stumbled across Melesku'ta after a skirmish. This was toward the beginning of the Second Illithid War, after the Silent Masters had psychoported the heart of Thaan-Saanu to their realm. We were still horrified to think of the power at their disposal to allow them to shift two mountains and all the land between and beneath. The illithids and their servitors were pouring out from below. We were trying desperately to reorganize. So many people did not survive the translation. We all knew that the situation was bad. Terribly bad.*

*"So we got ambushed by the illithids, and it was clear that our company would be largely destroyed, so my squad did what we had been ordered to do, and we retreated. We got cut off from the others, and we stumbled across Melesku'ta. At first we assumed it was a military base, and I suppose it was, because it had barracks and weapons and such. But it was really a research facility. We assumed it had been abandoned when Thaan got psychoported. The illithids could shift the land, but they couldn't shift most of the people. We all hoped that the Melesku'tans got left behind, anyway, because the alternative is that they were lost in transition. Psychoportation is very dangerous if you lose control. You can spread your essential components across multiple realms, and—*

"Research facility," Lidia prompted.

*Yes. Yes. So we found Melesku'ta, which was full of incomplete weapons and defenses. Some of it was completely beyond our comprehension, because it*

*had involved the fusion of psi and wizardry. Very much on the sharpest edge of what could be done, and we didn't have any wizards in the squad. But we did have someone whose talent was psychometry—that's object reading—*

"I know," Lidia said. Psychometrists were important for evaluating ruineers' salvage.

*—who could tell us what the psitech was intended to do. The furthest along was the not-here field, and of course we really liked the idea of being able to hide from the illithids. There wasn't much work yet to do to bring up the not-here field. The researchers left notes that we could follow. I mean, they were really close to finishing. And so we finished it. We just needed someone to drive the field.*

*As I said, I drew the short straw. But, really, I was the lucky one.*

*I regained consciousness inside the crystals. I was already hooked into the not-here field and driving it, but in order to communicate with the outside world, I needed more time to learn how to affix myself to some of the other psi-tech. My telepathy was not working, you see. I couldn't contact anybody.*

"How long had you been unconscious?" Lidia asked.

*Eleven days. Plenty of time for the rest of my squad to die of thirst while they lay insensate on the floor around me. We were all Yldi'Thaan. We were all psychic to one degree or another.*

Lidia looked with mild concern at the floor as if she might find bodies still there, less well-preserved than Xhafer's was.

*Once I gained control of the automata, one of their first tasks was burying the bodies. Well, not burying. But placing them respectfully in the back courtyard.*

"Very well, so you couldn't save them, but why can't you just turn off this not-here field for a bit? Just enough to let Yralki recover and leave?"

*Because I might not be able to turn it back on again. Because I might die.*



"Are you sure? Because—"

"Lid! There you are! Xhafer, she isn't screaming."

"Screaming? Why would I scream?"

*She didn't scream. I'm sorry. I thought she would.*

Tomaz looked down at the intubated corpse. "You thought a dead body would make her scream?"

Yes.

"Huh. No. I could have told you that. Say, Xhafer, is that body yours?"

Yes.

"My condolences."

*Thank you?*

Lidia said, "Xhafer and I have been talking. Let's find Qual, and Xhafer can catch you and him up on the situation both at once."

"Very well. Xhafer, where is Qualion?"

*I... don't know. He's blocking my telepathy. I'm looking for him on my remote crystals, but I have not found him yet.*

Lidia and Tomaz exchanged a look, and they didn't need to exchange a word. They both turned and bolted out of the chamber where Xhafer's corpse hung in its crystalline web.

"Check our room!" Lidia cried.

*He's not there. But neither is your companion.*

"Yralki's awake?"

*No. He's not.*

The siblings burst into the room that they had claimed. It was, indeed, empty of both Qualion and Yralki, not to mention the hammock where they had left Yralki.

"What does he think he's doing?" Lidia demanded.

"Escaping with our boss man," Tomaz replied. "Xhafer, can you dim all of your lanterns except the ones leading to the front courtyard?"

*I can*, Xhafer said, and he did.

"That's not going to slow Qual down much," Lidia said. "You know he's got elf eyes."

"Probably not, but it might, and it helps guide us where we're going."

*He's in the courtyard! He's doing something to the front gate.*

Tomaz said, "Those would be his teke grenades. If you want to keep your front gate, then open it. Now. Or else he's going to open it for you." And expend some valuable armament in the process.

*But if I open—*

"Do it!" Lidia said.

They reached the courtyard. Every lantern in the courtyard was flashing. Tomaz and Lidia did not know whether it was an attempt to distract Qualion or merely a sign of Xhafer's panic.

Qualion heard them coming and called out over his shoulder. "The illithivamps are gone! Gone! We can break out of here!" They could hear the wildness in his mind in the wildness of his speech.

Lidia bellowed, "Let Xhafer just open the gate, Qual! Just let him open the gate!"

Indeed the front gate started swinging open. At least Xhafer was listening.

"Too late!" Qualion cried. He flung himself away from the gate and on top of a large bundle, which happened to be Yralki still netted in the hammock.

The teke grenade went off. It was a shaped charge, so most of the blast was directed at the front gate, knocking it the rest of the way open. Even so, the backlash caught Tomaz above the waist and Lidia squarely in the chest, toppling them both. To add to the confusion, Xhafer made a telepathic noise of

dismay. Although their ears were ringing, Xhafer's projection cut directly to their brains.

*You have to stop him!* Xhafer cried. *He's out of my reach!*

Tomaz stumbled to his feet and then helped his sister to hers. Qualion had already dragged Yralki through the gate and yards away from Melesku'ta. Apparently the hammock's mesh provided an excellent grip.

*That boom must have carried for miles. Everything in range will be coming for them!*

Tomaz grunted, "If Yralki wakes up, he can defend them both." He could not hear himself but trusted that Xhafer could.

*If he does wake up, Xhafer said. And if he doesn't, perhaps I can.*

Tomaz and Lidia neared the gate, which was swinging closed. Apparently being blown further open hadn't destroyed the mechanism.

"Don't! Don't close it!" Lidia cried. (She was equally deafened.) "We need to get out there!"

*The vampires are back. I can't risk them getting in.*

Tomaz planted himself between the closing doors and tried to hold them open. He failed, yanking his fingers free only at the last second.

"The Devil take you, Xhafer!" he cursed.

Lidia cried, "You can't just leave them defenseless!"

Xhafer said, *I won't.*

Atop the wall to either side of the gate was a brass tube mounted upon a swivel. At the corners of the courtyard were two more brass tubes. One of the tubes remained motionless, but the other three swivelled to point somewhere outside the wall.

One of the tubes went **Zzzott**.

\* \* \*

As soon as Yralki's brain got dragged beyond the reach of Melesku'ta's *not-here* field, it stirred from its slumber. Ordinarily he emerged from one of his healing comas fully alert and adrenalized. In this case, the waking was a struggle, and even as he opened his eyes he did not realize where he was. He was caught in a web, and he was being dragged. However, he was also groggy, which meant that he was not able to stifle his first impulse, which was to let out an alarmed gurgle and fight against the web which held him.

The dragging stopped immediately, and it took Yralki no time at all to recognize Qualion crouching over him.

"Welcome back, boss," Qualion said, reaching for the net. "Let's get you out of there."

Something went **Zzzott**. Qualion and the landscape behind him were momentarily lit by a harsh white blaze. Some creature outside of Yralki's view screamed: an animal noise, a dying noise. The air was flooded with ozone, which was entirely too familiar to any ruineer who had even been caught huddling under an outcropping while the lightning storms of Sky-Terror raged.

Yralki saw Qualion look up, and his eyes widened.

"Oh, damn," he said.

Although he was reacting to some menace before him, from Yralki's vantage the horizon-glow silhouetted something else looming directly behind Qualion. It was humanoid but tentacled, and it did not move like a living illithid.

"Behi—" Yralki cried.

Illithids lived on brain matter. Vampires lived on blood. Vampiric illithids sated their hunger on both. The creature behind Qualion sank its fangs into the back of his neck, and it wrapped all four of its face tentacles around Qualion's head. One tentacle pulled his mouth open. Another ejected an eye.

All grogginess was gone now. With a terrified, angry cry Yralki summoned a psionic knife and slashed open the web which encased him. He started to peel himself out when he heard a slithering sound behind him.

And then he heard half of a **Zzzott**.

\* \* \*

There was little that Lidia and Tomaz could do. The sound of the brass tubes firing was loud enough, but otherwise the ringing of their ears prevented them from listening properly. They did not know what was happening.

"What's going on!" Lidia demanded, not for the first time.

Xhafer did not respond.

A third brass tube fired, and then a fourth did not.

*I think I got them all, Xhafer said.*

"And Qualion? And Yralki?"

There was only the slightest of pauses. *The vampiric illithids got them.*

Tomaz asked, "Is it safe to go out? To get their bodies before something else does?"

Lidia could almost hear him. Her hearing was finally returning.

Xhafer said, *I can't see any more threats. But that does not mean it is safe.*

"That just means we should hurry."

*If you must. You may bring them to the back courtyard. That's where all my guests are laid to rest.*

"That sounds good, Xhafer. That sounds good."

The front gate opened again. Lidia and Tomaz exchanged looks. She nodded. He nodded back. She drew her bow and one of her precious metal arrows and stepped first through the gate, but he followed shortly.

*Be safe, Xhafer urged. I will hold the gates open until you come back.*

Lidia reached her companion's corpses quickly. They had both been badly burnt by the brass tubes' discharge. They were surrounded by three similarly burnt illithid corpses.

"Watch for foes," Tomaz said. "Whatever weapon Xhafer used, it does not appear to be precise in its targeting."

He crouched down and carefully touched Qualion's sword. It was hot enough to burn, so he doffed his shirt and used it for protection from the heat. The sword would cool quickly, and hopefully it would still be good, perhaps good enough to sell. Once the sword was free, he rolled Qualion halfway over to get at a pouch which had been half-shielded from the **zzzott**. The pouch contained two teke grenades, miraculously unharmed. That was one benefit of psitech: It was usually inert unless activated by the proper thoughts.

"Damn fool used two on the door," he muttered.

Clearly Lidia's hearing was nearly back to normal. "So we've got two left?"

"Two left," Tomaz confirmed.

"Anything else?"

"No."

"If we go back to Melesku'ta, do we trust Xhafer to let us go again?"

Tomaz frowned down at the burnt bodies of his companions. According to Xhafer, the illithids had killed them, yet it looked to him like Xhafer had. "Not particularly."

"So. Away, then?"

"Yes."

They both turned away from Melesku'ta and started marching downslope. They had to find shelter before



night fell and Sky-Terror brought down lightning of its own.

"So what's to keep Xhafer from firing on us as we leave?" Lidia asked.

"Nothing," Tomaz said. "Nothing except the possibility that we might return."



# Thaan Fallen

## BLUETSPUR FROM THE YAR'THAALADAN PERSPECTIVE

BY IAN FORDAM

This survey details the domain of Bluetspur, not from the perspective of the illithids but as seen by the **Yar'Thaaladan**, that is, those Thaan, Shattered Ones, and unfortunate others who eke out their lives in (or, more commonly, *below*) the wasteland.

### THE LAND

#### BLUETSPUR AT A GLANCE

**Cultural Level:** Savage (0).  
**Ecology:** Sparse Climate/Terrain: Temperate Hills, Plains, and Mountains  
**Year of Formation:** 581BC  
**Population:** Unknown  
**Races:** Illithids, Humans (Yldi'Thaan, Foreigners), Shattered Ones, Others  
**Languages:** Illithid, Thaani  
**Religions:** None  
**Government:** Autocratic Psionocracy  
**Ruler:** The God-Brain Darklord: The God-Brain  
**Coinage:** Unknown  
**Exports:** eldritch horrors beyond mortal comprehension

*See Domains of Dread, p.84-85, and the Ravenloft Campaign Setting, p.166-167.*

### LANDSCAPE

*See Domains of Dread, p.84, and the Ravenloft Campaign Setting, p.167.*

Even as recently as two centuries ago, Bluetspur could readily have been mistaken for one of the surrounding domains, Barovia or Forlorn or Kartakass. It had a sun and a moon and stars overhead. Although it was more barren than its neighbors, still plenty of plants and animals lived upon its surface. Nonetheless, as time has passed and the illithids have exerted their influence over the land, it has turned increasingly bizarre and inhospitable.

Bluetspur has always been dominated by two peaks, **Mount Makab** and **Mount Grysl**. Both peaks achieve a height over 7500 feet. They are surrounded by other, shorter mountains collectively called the **Makab Range** and the **Grysl Range**. The area around and between these mountains is known as the **Badlands** because it is broken and desolate and hardly less treacherous than the mountains themselves.

However, since the Great Upheaval detached Bluetspur from the Core, the landscape has further twisted into nightmarish shapes. (Mathematicians from Gothic earth might call them "non-Euclidean".) Narrow, twisted spires hang in the sky in utter defiance of gravity. Streams of viscous, occasionally clotted red- purple liquid seep between the crags of the broken badlands. Boulders tumble themselves into new positions as if they were billiard balls in a cosmic game of snooker.

As another side effect of the Great Upheaval, the surface of the domain appears to have crumbled away at the borders, leaving the bulk of the domain resting atop a massive plateau. Although the plateau has no particular name, its edge is known as the **Vekle'farr** ("crumbling ridge") in Thaani. The denizens of Bluetspur believe that the land is gradually breaking away into the Mists, and most of them are reluctant (if not outright terrified) to descend the ridge. Indeed, anyone who descends into the **Lowlands** will feel that gravity is an uncertain thing there, as if at any moment they might fall sideways over the edge and into the Void. Only the bravest and most desperate venture over the Vekle'farr and into the Lowlands.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — FALLING OVER THE EDGE

The Vekle'farr is not actually crumbling, nor is gravity shifting. Both sensations are entirely mental in nature. Of course, that is little consolation when those sensations take effect in the middle of combat.

Anyone who descends into the lowlands of the Vekle'farr is potentially subject to this psychic vertigo. It will only strike during moments of stress such as combat or even scaling the ridge to reach the Lowlands. Under these conditions, a character has a noncumulative 10% chance of being afflicted each round; if afflicted, the character must make a DC20 Will saving throw or else be badly disoriented enough to become incapacitated for 1d8 rounds.

Illithids are immune to this effect.

While there is evidence that Bluetspur is geologically active—the Misty Mouth upon the surface and the Hot Springs below Mount Grysl, for example—it has no actual active volcanos, and there exists no surviving record of earthquakes. Of course this geological stability is fortunate for everything that lives beneath the surface.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — EARTHQUAKES AS A WEAPON

In the hands of someone with sufficient psionic or magical power, earthquakes could be used as a terrible weapon, whether invoked against the illithids beneath Mount Makab or against the Yar'Thaaladan beneath Mount Grysl.

Alternately, the struggles of Arcturion to escape might also inadvertently cause an earthquake. While less malicious, the effects would still be deadly.

Streams are common in Bluetspur, particularly along the western side of the Makab and Grysl ranges, although many appear only after a heavy rain. Over time these streams have cut narrow but deep canyons into the rock. The **Usko-Farr'ev** is the most impressive of such canyons.

In the Grysl Range, various streams combine into an actual river flowing eastward over the Vekle'farr and into the Mists. When Bluetspur was part of the Core, the Hazlani called this river the **Felgmøsg** ("Mistmoss"), and perhaps these Bluetspurean waters still feed that river through the Mists. The Yldi'Thaan call this river the **Fel'Garan** ("Green River"). Similarly, two rivers flow westward out of the Makab Range. These rivers are known as the **Upper and Lower Makabo** rivers; the northern river appears to start higher up on Mount Makab itself, while the southern river has its source somewhere in the surrounding range. Both rivers flow over the Vekle'farr and pool into a large lake called the **Bru'Spaa**. Another lake, the **Otl'Spaa**, exists over the Vekle'farr east of the Makab Range. It has no obvious single source, but doubtless it is fed by many streams running out of the mountains. Its waters eventually flow eastward into the Mists.

Water sources are also common beneath the surface of both the Makab and Grysl Ranges. Many natural chimneys open to the surface to the caverns below, which means that plenty of water runs from the surface into the depths. As such, the tunnels are replete with pools and trickles and even underground rivers. (The same chimneys help to keep the air fresh and allow smoke from fires to



escape.) When communities do form, they usually form in proximity to some source of water.

The landscape is dotted with the abandoned settlements of the Hulvi'Thaan. Over the decades, the Yldi'Thaan have raided these ruins, often seeking weapons and defenses for use against the illithids but just as often seeking furniture and utensils. Nearly all of these sites have been stripped of their valuables except for those few sites with unusual defenses.

During the time of the original Thaan society, the most commonly available building materials were stone and wood. Most military structures, such as Yrkat Yrkatru, were built entirely from stone. Nearly everything else, including most of the city of Thaan, featured a ground story built with stone with the roof and any additional stories constructed from wood. Due to the ravages of time, the typical Thaan settlement has rotted away to nothing but the ground story walls. However, due to the ravages of the Four-Fingered Ones, many of the ground story walls have been torn down as well. Nonetheless, those foundations which remain indicate that Thaan architecture was fond of edges and asymmetry.

## SEASONS AND WEATHER

Bluetspur has no proper seasons, nor does it have proper day and night. Always the sky is dark and sunless. During the "day" the horizon has a pinkish glow. During the "night" the horizon is fully black.

The two "seasons" are sometimes called **Sky-Terror** and **Sky-Quiet**. During Sky-Terror, the landscape is ravaged by lightning storms every "night". During Sky-Quiet, lightning strikes only sporadically.

Unfortunately the "seasons" have no discernable pattern. The only real solace is that once Sky-Terror gives way to Sky-Quiet, the "season" is unlikely to change again for at least thirty days, perhaps as long as three hundred. Of course, once Sky-Terror returns, it may linger for as long as three hundred days as well.

Regardless of the season, sometimes it rains, occasionally just a light sprinkle but usually a heavy downpour. Similarly, a breeze often blows across the broken landscape, and it escalates regularly into a

steady wind. Once in a while the wind becomes a raging windstorm, particularly during the nights of Sky-Terror.

The entirety of Bluetspur hums with a ceaseless tone. Always. No, really, *always*. It's enough to drive a person mad.

## FLORA, FAUNA, AND FUNGA

The flora and fauna of Bluetspur are generally unrecognizable to foreigners. Moreover, the natural world (such as it is) of Bluetspur is dominated by its funga.

### *Upon the Surface*

Very few creatures inhabit the surface of Bluetspur. Most prevalent are the illithid vampires. Sometimes a chuul may be encountered, particularly near the Felgmøgsge River or within gorges such as the Usko-Farr'ev.

Similarly, very little grows on the surface of Bluetspur. Most of the topsoil, once sufficient to provide food for the Thaan, has been washed into the Void by the storms. At lower elevations there are some sickly evergreens. Their wood is too soft for use in any sort of construction, but it may be used for decorations, utensils, or simple (if fragile) weapons such as javelins and clubs. At higher elevations grow scattered clumps of faded yellow grass.

However, two types of grass are worthy of note. The first, **glassgrass**, grows with crystals along the edges of its long, green-yellow blades. Glassgrass is very sharp, inflicting up to 1d6 slashing damage to someone who falls into a thicket. Unfortunately, glassgrass tends to grow among the less dangerous grasses, making it more difficult to avoid. Horses and similar creatures learn quickly that they cannot eat glassgrass, although it may be harvested (carefully) for use as fuel for fire.

The second, **steelgrass**, resembles a large seeded dandelion threaded through with metal tracery. Steelgrass is harder to burn and even less edible than glassgrass, and it is far more dangerous. During the "season" of Sky-Terror, the nocturnal lightning storms are drawn to steelgrass and any creatures

unwise enough to be near it. Saving throws against lightning are made at -4 by any creature within 15' of a patch. However, anyone between 15' and 30' of a patch of steelgrass will discover that the steelgrass draws the lightning; saving throws are made at +4, and a successful saving throw indicates that no damage is taken. The steelgrass itself does not appear to be harmed by these discharges, which may even be an essential part of its reproductive cycle.

A potentially lifesaving form of flora is the **bloodscrub**, a leafless scrub brush. Its stems are blood-colored, and if broken, they ooze a disturbingly sanguine liquid. However, the liquid is nothing more than red-colored water, which eases thirst without harm. Eventually the bloodscrub stems dry out and die, and the surface portion of the plant breaks free of its roots to blow across the surface, spreading seeds in a fashion reminiscent of tumbleweed. While bloodscrub grows at all elevations, gravity ensures that most stem clusters wind up at the lower elevations.

Attentive rangers and druids will note the presence of areas where forests once stood. After the sun stopped rising over Bluetspur, the forests all died. The lightning storms of Sky-Terror have largely destroyed the dead trees as well. Such areas have a taint of despair for anyone who recognizes them.

Nearly every standing body of water, in particular the Bru'Spaa and Otl'Spaa, acquires a film of algae across its surface. The numerous varieties of algae may often be distinguished by their color, shades of red, green, brown, and sometimes gold. Moreover, macroalgae—that is, seaweed—grows in the largest bodies of water. Algae forms an important food source for creatures such as the molluscoids of the Bru'Spaa. Although most freshwater algae outside of Bluetspur is toxic to humans, the algae of Bluetspur generally is not. In fact, it can be a valuable source of protein and other nutrients.

Finally but crucially, in some areas of Bluetspur mushrooms dot the landscape after a downpour. These mushrooms are usually called **foxfire mushrooms** because they emanate a blue-green light. They are not true foxfire mushrooms as known in the Core; for one thing, true foxfire requires decaying wood, which is in very short supply in

Bluetspur. However, the difference is utterly unimportant to anyone desperate for a light source during the Bluetspurean night.

### ***Below the Surface***

Below the surface, life exists in a slightly wider variety of forms. The most obvious form is **glowmoss**, a phosphorescent moss which grows along many of the tunnels beneath Bluetspur. Glowmoss continues to emit light for hours after it has been stripped from its root system.

The same algae which film the waters upon the surface also grow upon bodies of water underground. The Yar'Thaaladan have learned which algae are toxic and, equally importantly, which may be used as food or even as spices.

Two of the most useful fungi are **twineroot** and **leatherroot**. The mycelium (root system) of both these mushrooms may be harvested and used. The twineroot mycelia are pale, thin, and coarse to the touch, and they may be woven into sturdy string or even rope. The leatherroot mycelia are darker and thicker, and they may be pressed into a leather-like material. A third type of mushroom, the **leathercap**, is so called because it grows a cap of a leathery material.

Fortunately for the Yar'Thaaladan, there are a great number of edible mushrooms and slime molds. One of the more notable varieties is the slime mold known as **manna**, which has a texture similar to chewy scrambled eggs when cooked. Crucially, it also suppresses psionic ability and even psionic activity, including the low-level thought leakage which illithids use to track their prey.

Of course, there are many toxic fungus species to be found. One of the most pervasive are the **puff plants**. When mature, the puff plant will burst at a touch into a cloud of spores which infects and kills any host which inhales them. A discerning eye is necessary to distinguish between an immature and mature puff plant. Usually it's just easiest to pay attention to which puff plants are studiously avoided by the other denizens.

In addition to fungus, some of the few animal lifeforms are tasty. So-called **cave chickens** look as

much like eyeless lizards as they do chickens. Cave chickens live primarily on puff plants, and many become infected by the spores. Fortunately most people learn to tell the difference between a cave chicken which is safe to eat and one which is about to explode into a new puff plant. In addition, cave chickens and people alike consume the long, thick worms which are known as **bone worms** because of their color and size; stretched out, a fully-grown boneworm resembles a human ulna in appearance. Moreover, the tunnels beneath Bluetspur contain many shallow pools, where blind albino fish may be found, caught, and consumed.

Not everything found in Bluetspur is benign, however. In addition to the illithids themselves (not to mention horrifying variants such as the vampiric illithid and the alhoon), other monstrous creatures are found in the tunnels beneath Mount Makab and Mount Grysl. Most of them are fungoid in nature, such as the ascomid, phycomid, or myconid. However, bizarre animals such as carrion crawlers, carrion stalkers, flail snails, and hook horrors prowl the depths as well. Purple worms likely tunnel through the deepest depths. In addition, humanoids such as subdwellers and quaggoths may be found. One particularly vicious denizen of the depths is the sporebat (from the *Monstrous Compendium Annual Volume II*, p.18), which is called an *obb* in Thaani.

### **Over the Edge**

Ever since the Great Upheaval of 740BC, the entire domain has been surrounded by a sunless void. However, the sunless void is not a sign of border closure. It is simply how the Mists manifest around Bluetspur. Anyone who ventures into the void will reappear at another point randomly around the domain's perimeter.

For all that there are a number of one-way Mistways leading into Bluetspur—including the Worm's Path, the Song of Obscene Hunger, and the Shattered Passage—the only known Mistway out is the Sparking Vortex, which manifests as a swirling purple lightning storm at the edge of the sunless void. It may appear anywhere along the border, and it never lasts more than 20 minutes.

## **SALIENT SITUATIONS**

In addition to the unnatural days and seasons, Bluetspur has several other unusual salient situations to which visitors must adapt.

### **Arcane Resonance**

Whenever someone casts a spell (arcane, divine, or natural), there is a 2% chance per level of the spell that the illithids notice the casting. If they do, then 1d4 minutes later 2d6 illithids will teleport to the place where the arcane resonance occurred. In these circumstances the illithids' goal is to capture and enslave interlopers.

The arcane resonance applies regardless of the type of spell in use. However, it does *not* apply when magic items are used. From this distinction, it may be inferred that however the illithids detect the use of spells, the mechanism is somehow related to the casting in particular. Enchanting a magic item, then, is especially dangerous. The arcane resonance triggered by such a feat has a base 10% of detection by the illithids, plus an additional 4% chance per level of each spell involved in the creation process.

Certain powerful psionicists have developed a devotion which allows them to suppress arcane resonance. Apparently the use of this devotion is highly draining, perhaps even physically dangerous.

### **Psionic Resonance**

Similarly, the Illithid God-Brain is always alert for psionic activity. Under ordinary circumstances, the God-Brain always knows when psionics are used.

However, it is also important to note that the God-Brain does not send out illithids to investigate every psychic ping which it detects. It does so only when it feels threatened, and given its tremendous psionic might, it does not often feel threatened. In fact, most of the time it considers others' thoughts to be *entertainment*.

### **Invasion of Dreams**

Sleeping is dangerous business in Bluetspur. To sleep is to dream, and in Bluetspur dreams twist into nightmares. Sleepers gain little rest. A horror check is required every time a character awakens.

Consuming manna reduces the vividness of the nightmares to the point where horror checks are not needed.

### ***The Unrelenting Drone***

Finally, visitors to Bluetspur cannot escape an unrelenting drone which emanates from the very land.

The drone is at least partially psychic (because consuming manna helps diminish the drone) but not entirely (because stabbing one's ears out also helps).

Left unfettered, the unrelenting drone causes madness in those who linger in Bluetspur.

### ***Psychic Shielding***

Fortunately there are several ways to avoid the worst of the psychic effects of being within Bluetspur:

- ❖ The *Sacred Barrier*, also known as the *Rod of Houtras*, is the most effective method. Even the God-Brain may only fight through the Sacred Barrier's shield given proximity and effort. The invasion of dreams and the relentless drone are halted entirely within the shielded area.
- ❖ Many Yldi'Thaan sites are psychically warded. Nearly all of these wards are flawed, but they decrease the likelihood of madness.
- ❖ The psionic defense mode *tower of iron will* also shields psionic activity. Psionists who survive in Bluetspur quickly learn to use this defense.
- ❖ The consumption of the slime mold called *manna* reduces psychic leakage in general, and it causes psychic signatures to grow fuzzy to the God-Brain.
- ❖ The Shattered Ones beneath Mount Makab have developed a vile but effective potion. This potion may involve *manna*, but then it may not.
- ❖ Certain psychotropic mushrooms alter thought patterns into unrecognizability. Of course, they also make ordinary thought difficult as well.

## History

### History of the Den'ni'Thaan

Nearly two centuries ago, a human society called the Thaan existed upon the slopes of Mount Makab and Mount Grysl. Illithids lived below the surface, but the leaders of Thaan possessed their own psionic abilities, and united they were generally able to defend their people against the illithid threat.

When Mount Makab was drawn into the Mists and the domain of Bluetspur created, most of the Thaan were unaffected and remained behind in their Outland world. However, some of the Thaan—perhaps the most wicked, but perhaps merely those with the most psychic sensitivity—were drawn into the Mists as well. Those unfortunate Thaan believed that all of their kinsfolk had been killed.

Shortly many of the Thaan fled their home, eventually arriving in the village of Immol in Barovia.

When the Thaan of Immol have need to be specific, they refer to their lost kinsfolk as the **Hulvi'Thaan** ("Lost Thaan"), and they refer to themselves as the **Den'ni'Thaan** ("Thaan Who Endured").

### History of the Yldi'Thaan

However, many of the Thaan remained behind in Bluetspur, determined to reclaim their homeland from the Masters of Thought. They called themselves the **Yldi'Thaan** ("Righteous Thaan").

After seven years of continued struggle against the illithids, eventually a small group of Yldi'Thaan acknowledged the need to retreat and regain strength. According to legend, thirteen Yldi'Thaan (later known as the **Thirteen Survivors**) came to Immol, where each wrote one of the **Thirteen Texts of Thaan**. Subsequently the Thirteen Survivors scattered, most of them leaving Immol, each tasked with protecting the Text which they had written.

Over time, the tale of the thirteen survivors has overrun the fact of the initial group of Den'ni'Thaan who came to Immol. At this point most of the Thaan in Immol believe that they are all descended solely from the thirteen survivors. Certain professors across the Core, most notably Dr. Anthony Reuland of the University of Richemulot, have asserted that



this cannot possibly be true without introducing corruption due to inbreeding.

### THE WAR AGAINST THE ILLITHIDS

Meanwhile, the Yldi'Thaan who remained in Bluetspur continued to wage war against the illithids. The majority of these Yldi'Thaan forces occupied **Yrkat Yrkatu**, the mighty fortress where once the leaders of Thaan society had lived.

Although the Yldi'Thaan had a number of true psions and many wild talents among their number, the illithids were far superior psionically. On the other hand, the illithids lacked any magical ability, while the Yldi'Thaan could claim a half-dozen powerful wizards. For many years, the fight between the Yldi'Thaan and the illithids was more even than tales might indicate.

Eventually the Yldi'Thaan used their magic to create two mighty flying fortresses. Using these fortresses, they planned to bring the battle to the heights of Mount Makab without needing to fight through the illithids' many ground-based forces. Unfortunately, the Yldi'Thaan did not realize that the illithids had prepared for such an eventuality, and the Yldi'Thaan were unprepared to meet "slime wyverns" serving as troop carriers. The first flying fortress was brought to earth in the lower reaches of the Makab Range. The second came closer to achieving its goal, eventually crashing into the slopes of Mount Makab itself. Several of the most powerful Yldi'Thaan wizards were killed in the fortresses' destruction. It was the beginning of the end for Yldi'Thaan society.

### FOUNDING OF THE ILDI'THAAN

According to further legend, a century after the formation of Bluetspur, a Thaan man calling himself Chorin Mur'Thaan escaped from Bluetspur. The legend claims that he was the only person to escape Bluetspur with his sanity intact since the Thirteen Survivors. This Chorin Mur'Thaan founded a secret society which calls itself the Ildi'Thaan. The society generally believes that none of the original Yldi'Thaan survive in Bluetspur. Meanwhile, the original Yldi'Thaan—who still call themselves by that proud name—know nothing of the secret society.

Although the fates of the Thirteen Survivors are generally lost to legend, it seems inevitable that at

least one of the Thirteen was drawn back into Bluetspur. Otherwise how would Chorin Mur'Thaan have known about the Survivors and the Texts of Thaan?

### DEFEAT OF THE YLDI'THAAN

Perhaps inevitably, the Yldi'Thaan could not sustain their struggle against the illithids. Yrkat Yrkatu fell. The Yldi'Thaan were either captured and enslaved or else scattered to the cornerless corners of the domain.

Following the illithid victory, the land grew increasingly warped. The sun appeared gradually smaller and more red, and eventually it ceased to rise over the horizon at all. Shortly afterward, lightning stormed from the empty sky in the first Sky-Terror.

### THE GREAT RELEASE

In 737BC, a group of adventurers raided the illithids' lair under Mount Makab. During the course of the raid, they freed hundreds of Yar'Thaaladan who had been enslaved by the illithids. Although many of these people were subsequently hunted down by the illithids or otherwise died, many of them found shelter beneath the surface and survived.

The anniversary of the Great Release is celebrated by many Yar'Thaalad settlements. Of course, given the difficulty of keeping a calendar underground, these anniversaries are not celebrated on any consistent day among the various communities.

### THE GREAT UPHEAVAL

The Great Upheaval of 740BC upended the Core and beyond. Bluetspur was one of that handful of domains which was physically torn from the Core. From the perspective of those few Yar'Thaaladan who ventured to the surface, the entire domain was now surrounded by a sunless void. Naturally the Yar'Thaaladan blame the illithids, assuming that the Thought Masters have found some way to further tighten their noose.

## TIMELINE

Date	Years Ago	Event
<b>The Sixth Century</b>		
581BC	179	Bluetspur is drawn into the Mists. Most of the citizens of Thaan vanish without a trace.
581BC	179	Most of the surviving Thaan escape Bluetspur into Immol in Barovia.
582BC	188	Kraol is founded.
584BC	176	Jenyi (@23) comes into her full psionic strength and ceases to age.
≈588BC	172	Thirteen Yldi'Thaan survivors escape from Bluetspur to Immol. They start writing the <i>Thirteen Texts of Thaan</i> .
≈590BC	170	The authors of the <i>Thirteen Texts of Thaan</i> scatter.
<b>The Seventh Century</b>		
611BC	149	Xhafer becomes the driving intellect within Melesku'ta.
≈620BC	140	Ga'i'ya founded.
≈660BC	100	The Delve is founded.
≈678BC	82	The two flying fortresses of the Yldi'Thaan assault the Makab Range, but both are destroyed.
≈679BC	81	Edul'va is founded.
≈683BC	77	Yrkat Yrkatu falls.
≈683BC	77	Jenyi and Trellin Hev settle in Edul'va.
≈695BC	65	Azaax is founded.
≈710BC	50	Weyez is founded.
≈720BC	40	The Forge is founded.
≈730BC	30	The Nest is founded.
<b>Recent History</b>		
737BC	23	The events of <i>Thoughts of Darkness</i> occur.
737BC	23	The Great Release. Scores of Yar'Thaaladan escaped the Citadel Subterrene after being freed by adventurers.

Date	Years Ago	Event
740BC	20	The Great Upheaval occurs, and Bluetspur is torn from the Core.
742BC	18	Oo'oo'pada is founded.
742BC	18	Sakka-gor is founded.
748BC	12	Hevnens Ambolt is founded and destroyed.
757BC	13	Mora is founded.
759BC	1	"The Second Release". Grozirg and Orolahr lead a raid upon the fringes of the Citadel Subterrene. Many thralls are freed, but many die in the freeing.
<b>Now</b>		
760BC	0	Now.

## THE SECOND RELEASE

In 759BC, the githzerai Grozirg and Orolahr organized a raid upon a mushroom garden cavern at the edges of the Thought Masters' territory. The goal was to perform a Second Great Release, liberating the several hundred Yldi'Thaan thralls working in the mushroom garden. While technically successful, significant losses were suffered by the war party and the freed refugees alike. In addition, the communities beneath Mount Grysl were burdened with the difficulty of integrating a hundred new mouths to feed. As a consequence, this raid is known as the Second Release, but the word "Great" is rarely applied.

## POPULACE

- ❖ **Hulvi'Thaan ("Lost Thaan")** Those Thaan who were not drawn into Bluetspur. Those Thaan who were not drawn into Bluetspur.
- ❖ **Den'ni'Thaan ("Thaan Who Endured")** Those Thaan who were drawn into Bluetspur. Technically the Yldi'Thaan are also Den'ni'Thaan, but nowadays *Den'ni'Thaan* is used to refer to those Thaan who escaped to Immol.
- ❖ **Yldi'Thaan ("Righteous Thaan")** Those Thaan who remained in Bluetspur to challenge the illithids. The descendents of the original

Yldi'Thaan still describe themselves as Yldi'Thaan.

- ❖ **Ildi'Thaan (variant of "Righteous Thaan")** A secret society of psionic wild talents founded by Chorin Mur'Thaan. It started in Immol but has spread to nearby areas. Although Chorin Mur'Thaan was the only Yldi'Thaan in this society, to this day the Ildi'Thaan have pretensions of being the rightful heirs to Thaan society.
- ❖ **Avev'Thaaladan ("Foreigners")** People who are drawn into Bluetspur from the lands beyond the sunless void. Sometimes Outlanders from beyond the Land of Mists are actually called Outlanders, but mostly they are considered particularly foreign foreigners.
- ❖ **Yar'Thaaladan ("Yet Sapient")** The blanket term for those who continue to resist the illithids. It is almost always used to include the Yldi'Thaan and foreigners who find themselves in Bluetspur. Depending upon the speaker, it may or not also encompass Shattered Ones who have escaped from captivity by the illithids. (This article uses the term inclusively.)
- ❖ **Nnarl** A cluster of communities. Used to describe independent communities which are nonetheless close enough to interact. A *nnarl* is a geographic description rather than a governmental one.

Ordinarily the Den'ni'Thaan refer to themselves as the Thaan, using the longer term only when there is a need to distinguish themselves explicitly. The Yldi'Thaan sometimes do the same, although they are more likely to call themselves Yldi'Thaan.

From the illithid perspective, they divide non-illithids into two categories: servitors and thralls. Servitors are more highly regarded than thralls, so they are allowed more freedom and are less likely to have their brains consumed. Drow and duergar are the most common examples of servitor races, which explains why they are both regarded with extreme suspicion by the Yar'Thaaladan.

## APPEARANCE

Especially given the scarcity of food in Bluetspur, most Yldi'Thaan are thin, even emaciated. Similarly, they tend to be shorter than foreigners from the Core, although their physical proportions make them appear taller than they actually are. The Yldi'Thaan have slightly longer limbs relative to their torsos than most of the rest of humanity.

Among the Yldi'Thaan, pale violet eyes are associated with psionic wild talents. Such individuals are both respected (because they might possess psionic abilities) and feared (because they might draw the attention of the Thought Masters). They might be kept to the outskirts of a community, but equally likely they might be leaders or trusted advisors.

Human foreigners are generally taller than the modern Yldi'Thaan. When they first arrive in Bluetspur, most of them are more heavily built as well, although the constraints of a Bluetspurean diet shortly change that. Even a foreigner who has survived years in Bluetspur tends to stand out as a foreigner, just because their features are not Yldi'Thaan features.

Shattered Ones vary greatly in appearance. Often little of their original humanity remains. Very few of them are mistaken as unmodified Yldi'Thaan or foreigners.

## FASHION

The surviving Yldi'Thaan have scavenged the ruins of their ancestors for scraps of durable clothing. Of course, much of that clothing, no matter how durable, has failed to survive the decades. At this point, most of the ancestors' clothes are used only ceremonially.

Therefore, many Yldi'Thaan wear clothing made from fungus. Fortunately leatherroot and twineroot can be used to shape and stitch clothing. In addition, certain mushroom caps provide a leather-like material as well.

The daily temperature throughout Bluetspur is mild and rarely changes much. Given that, many Yldi'Thaan don very little clothing, instead using their scarce materials for essentials like pouches and tool

belts.

Shattered Ones who remain humanoid in shape often dress as the Yldi'Thaan do. Those who do not usually wear no clothing whatsoever, if only because clothing fits them at best awkwardly.

Foreigners are valued for the goods which they carry with them into Bluetspur, and clothing is highly prized. Of course, over time foreigners tend to dress like the Yldi'Thaan, if only because their precious clothing only lasts so long.

## Economy

Most Yldi'Thaan settlements are isolated from the rest. In cases where settlements do interact, they rely entirely upon barter. The most valuable items are artifacts of the ancestral Yldi'Thaan and items brought into Bluetspur by foreigners. In addition to weapons and armor, these valuables include standard adventuring gear such as poles, ropes, tinder boxes, torches, lanterns, oil, pitons, caltrops, backpacks, pouches, and iron rations—anything metal, wooden, wearable, or edible, really.

However, most Yar'Thaaladan communities understand the need for "new blood" (that is, genetic diversity). As such, a marriage between two settlements in a nnarl is highly valuable. The settlement which gains new blood gives something valuable as a dowry to the settlement which loses someone; this dowry is given regardless of gender. Also note that the dowry is paid to the settlement as a whole, not any particular person or family.

## LANGUAGE

The people of Thaan spoke a language called Thaani. That language endures among the scattered human population of Bluetspur and in the town of Immol in Barovia as well. The two versions of the language have drifted enough to be considered distinct dialects, but the spoken forms remain mutually intelligible. However, the Thaani of Immol write their language using a modified Balok script, while the Thaani of Bluetspur continue to use their own native script.

Thaani makes extensive use of the glottal stop, frequently written in Balok as an apostrophe. The primary purpose of the glottal stop is to interrupt the

flow of syllables which the Thaani believe would otherwise draw the attention of the Four-Fingered Ones.

Consider an example of the difference between Immolesse Thaani and Bluetspurean Thaani: The Thaani of Bluetspur use the suffix *-n* to indicate plurals, while the Thaani of Immol have tacked the Balok *-i* onto *-n* for the same purpose. (However, the secret society known as the Ildi'Thaan favors the traditional plural.)

As another example, Bluetspurean Thaani has two distinct letters for the similar sounds which were originally represented in Balok as the letters "Y" and "I". However, in Immolesse Thaani the letter "Y" has fallen into disuse in the initial position of a word, so the words *yldi* and *yrkat* are now spelled *ildi* and *irkat*. Pronunciation has also drifted accordingly.

The suffix *"-i"* is used to mark a word used as an adjective, but only when applied to sapient creatures. For example, the word *yld* means "righteousness", and so an *yldi'thaa* is a righteous person. However, lakes are not sapient, so *Bru'Spaa*, without the *"-i"*, is the "vast lake".

The suffix *"-u"* means "of". The usual construction places the possessed object, including the *"-u"* suffix, after the possessing object. For example, *Thaan-Naagaaru* is the glory (*naagaar*) of the Thaani. However, certain other constructions omit the *"-u"*. For example, *Aark'tluch Thaan* is the lore (*aark*) book (*tluch*) of the Thaani.

Note that *"mur"* is used in a fashion similar to the German *"von"*. That is, when used as part of a name, it indicates not only a place of origin but also a sense of noble entitlement to that place. In particular, Chorin Mur'Thaan uses this convention to assert the authority of his claim upon the lost Thaani society. To further bolster himself, he applies the same surname to each of the Thirteen Survivors, implying that he has a particularly strong claim to their inheritance.

Finally, *Thaan* originally meant "The People", and the Thaani-Saanu was "The Nation of the People". Other intelligent races were called *Thaaladan*, "The Sapient", but they were not considered to be among "The People".



While nowadays the term *Thaan* is more often used as a claim of descent and a cultural grouping, there remains the lingering sense among some of the Yldi'Thaan that other races are not actually proper people.

Word	Meaning	Letter(s)	Sound	Example
Aark	lore	a (non-terminal)	<i>a</i> in <i>mach</i>	Makab
Aev	distance	a (terminal)	<i>a</i> in <i>idea</i>	Va
Bru	giant, vast	aa	<i>a</i> in <i>mach</i> (but longer)	Spaa
Den'ni	(those who have) endurance	ae	<i>ey</i> in <i>fey</i>	Athaekeetha
Eduł	safety	ao	<i>ou</i> in <i>foul</i>	Kraol
Evhe	eclipse	ar	<i>ar</i> in <i>far</i>	Farr
Farr	ridge	ch	<i>ch</i> in <i>loch</i>	Thuch
Farr'ev	chasm, gorge	e	<i>e</i> in <i>hen</i>	Vekle
Fel	green	ee	<i>ee</i> in <i>eel</i>	Athaekeetha
Gar	water	er	<i>er</i> in <i>her</i>	Ermal
Garan	river, lit. "waters"	g	<i>g</i> in <i>get</i>	Genke
Hulvi	(those who are) lost	gj	<i>dg</i> in <i>ridge</i>	Gjon
Ildi	variant of <i>Yldi</i>	i (non-terminal)	<i>i</i> in <i>ill</i>	Dritan
Irkāt	variant of <i>Yrkāt</i>	i (terminal)	<i>i</i> in <i>ill</i> or <i>ee</i> in <i>eel</i>	Yldi
Kaat	building	ir	<i>ear</i>	Irkāt
Mur	from	j	<i>j</i> in <i>jewel</i>	Jenyi
Naagaar	glory	k	<i>k</i> in <i>kick</i>	Kuqo
Nnarł	cluster of communities	nn	<i>n</i> in <i>hen</i> (but longer)	Nnarł
Otl	east	o	<i>o</i> in <i>over</i>	Otl
Qurr	city	oo	<i>oo</i> in <i>broom</i>	Oo
Saan	nation	q	<i>q</i> in <i>qadi</i>	Qamil
Spaa	lake	s	<i>s</i> in <i>say</i>	Sokol
Thaa	person	sh	<i>sh</i> in <i>shave</i>	Shpresa
Thaalad	sapient being	sz	<i>z</i> in <i>azure</i> (but softer)	Sziszim
Thaan	people	t	<i>t</i> in <i>cat</i>	Yrtak
Thuch	book	th	<i>th</i> in <i>thin</i>	Thaan
Ulde	dwarf	u	<i>ue</i> in <i>glue</i>	Bru
Usko	infinite, bottomless	ur	<i>ur</i> in <i>fur</i>	Mur
Va	place	x	<i>x</i> in <i>ax</i>	Azaax
Vekle	crumbling	xh	<i>g</i> in <i>genre</i> (but really soft)	Xhafer
Yar	still, yet	y (initial)	<i>yi</i> in <i>yip</i>	Yldi
Yldi	(those who are) righteous	y (non-initial)	<i>y</i> in <i>byte</i>	Hysni
Yrkāt	stronghold	yr	<i>year</i>	Yrkāt
Zorr	hunt	z	<i>z</i> in <i>buzz</i>	Anjerza
		zh	<i>z</i> in <i>azure</i>	Zhaklina

## NAMES

See *Gazetteer Volume I*, p.27.

Although many Shattered Ones choose names which reflect their inhuman condition (e.g. Snarler for a leonine-seeming Shattered One), many others choose Thaani or Thaani-inspired names for themselves. Some Yldi'Thaan take offense at the latter choice.

## EDUCATION

Bluetspur is a brutal domain. There is little room for education outside of what is necessary to survive.

That said, cultural values are taught through stories and chants. Yldi'Thaan learn the history of their people and that they were not always forced to hide beneath the surface. One important cultural value is the strengthening of the mind against the Thought Masters. As such, most of the Yldi'Thaan possess some measure of psionic defense if not actual wild talents. Foreigners can learn how to better protect their minds as well.

## ARTS AND CRAFTS

What, you think this is some namby-pampy domain like Vorostokov, where they have time for arts and crafts? Cave paintings are about as artsy and crafty as things get in Bluetspur. And even those you might not want to stare at too long.

In truth, though, arts and crafts actually do exist in the caverns beneath Bluetspur. The most obvious would be stone carvings, sometimes made from free rocks, sometimes carved into stagmites. The Singing Frog Cavern provides an impressive if inexplicable example of this art form.

Also, the Yar'Thaaladan make jewelry from the bones of cave chickens (which are also useful for piercing ears) and from beads strung with sinew. More transiently, ochre is used to draw designs on skin.

Crystals of various sorts were important to Thaani society for two reasons. First, they were an essential component of Thaani psitech. Second, they are pretty. In fact, the presence of crystal veins beneath Mount Grysl and Makab was one of the factors behind the original vitality of Thaani society and then

the subsequent clash with illithid society.

Unfortunately, by now most of the Thaani crystals have been taken by the illithids for study and destruction. Most of the crystals which remain tend to be decorative rather than psitech because the illithids actively seek out such devices for destruction. Nonetheless, even the decorative crystals are highly valued by the Yldi'Thaan as a reminder of the beauty which their civilization once offered.

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS MAGIC

Most of the Yar'Thaaladan are terrified of arcane magic, knowing that the illithids are drawn to the arcane resonance created by spellcasting. Some view divine magic with similar suspicion, but others consider it something harmless or else worth the risk. The natural magic used by druids (such as Queen Hazel) and rangers is viewed as divine magic if the druid or ranger worships a nature deity.

Otherwise, if they revere the force of nature itself, then their magic is often viewed more benignly, though opinions do still vary.

Unfortunately for the Yar'Thaalad, regardless of the various opinions on the subject, the arcane resonance makes all spells equally dangerous to cast.

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS NON-HUMANS

Some Yldi'Thaan believe that anything which has been touched by the illithids is contaminated. However, most of them recognize the Shattered Ones as fellow-warriors in the fight against the illithids.

Demihumans and humanoids are fully welcomed by the bulk of the Yar'Thaaladan. Really, once you've accepted that the Shattered Ones are people, dwarves and calibans are easy to accept.

## RELIGION

There is no organized religion in Bluetspur.

That said, refugees from other domains and from Outland worlds often continue to worship those deities whom they followed before coming to Bluetspur. There is no ban on religion (although casting divine magic is sometimes frowned upon

because of the risk of attracting the illithids' attention). In fact, sometimes entire communities will settle upon a single god or pantheon to worship. However, this shift usually has less to do with belief and more to do with community. Other groups may simply gather to worship "the gods" without ever specifying any particular gods. The Yldi'Thaan and Shattered Ones appear to like the idea of religion better than they understand its actual practice.

However, despite the lack of a general ban on religion, certain practices absolutely will not be tolerated. In particular, anyone who appears to worship the illithids or their deities will doubtless meet an uncompromisingly violent end.

### ATTITUDES TOWARD PROPERTY

The Edul'vans have a saying: "Private is private. Community is community." A similar attitude is held in many other Yar'Thaalad settlements.

Property which newcomers bring to Bluetspur is private, and only the most desperate Yar'Thaalad would attempt to steal it or take it by force. On the other hand, once someone dies, their property becomes community property, and it cannot be claimed by any single person thereafter. (Rare exceptions may be made for "inherited" property, and then only if the property is claimed by someone dangerously powerful.)

However, even after a particularly valuable item has become community property, it will carry its original owner's name indefinitely, regardless of who carries it. Morlack's Sword is an excellent example of this sort of legacy name. In this manner, Yar'Thaaladan honor those who provide material wealth for their communities.

## THE REALM

### GOVERNMENT

There exists no domain-wide government among the Yar'Thaaladan. Each individual settlement has its own government. Some are direct democracies, but most are lead by a headman or headwoman. Although such leaders often lead only at the sufferance of the led, sometimes they consolidate enough power to become local tyrants.

### DIPLOMACY

The Yar'Thaaladan do not have any way to interact with lands apart from Bluetspur, and so they engage in no inter-domain diplomacy.

Yar'Thaaladan settlements which are close enough to interact with each other are considered part of a **nnarl**. They conduct trade, sometimes fight over resources, and occasionally intermarry. Such engagements may also occur between settlements which are not part of a nnarl, but they are less common out of geographical necessity.

Note that conflicts between communities rarely become deadly. The weaker party in a conflict will back off as soon as their relative weakness is revealed, and the stronger party will let them. How foolish it would be to risk unnecessary losses, and particularly to fight to extinction, in a conflict which does not require such sacrifices.

## SITES OF INTEREST — OVERVIEW

The Citadel Subterrene, that foul heart of illithid society, is located beneath Mount Makab. Naturally, then, few Yar'Thaaladan communities have been established there, much less survived. Instead, most communities exist in the relative safety beneath Mount Grysl. The illithids launch an occasional patrol, particularly around sites such as Yrkat Yrkatu, the city of Thaan, and other places where Yldi'Thaan have historically been known to cluster. Otherwise, they are unlikely to go raiding unless they detect one of three conditions: a powerful psychic presence, a sizable gathering of Yldi'Thaan minds, or a shortage of thralls in the Citadel Subterrene.

Each community description is accompanied by a sidebar with the following details:

- ❖ **oundation** - The year that the community was founded. Given the difficulty of accurate timekeeping in Bluetspur, all dates should be considered approximations.
- ❖ **Population** - The approximate number of residents in the community, broken down by race and (when applicable) ethnicity.

- ❖ **Nnarl** - The nnarl to which the community is broadly considered to belong, if any.
- ❖ **Depth** - How far from the surface is the community? "Upperdark" indicates that the community is near to the surface, perhaps even with a connection to the surface. "Middledark" communities are deeper beneath the surface, and their members likely never see the surface. "Lowerdark" indicates that the community is deeper yet.

Some non-community sites are accompanied by a shorter sidebar.

## SITES OF INTEREST – THE SURFACE

### BADLANDS (Geography)

See the map on page 84 of *Domains of Dread*.

The portion of the surface of Bluetspur between and surrounding Mount Makab and Mount Grysl.

### BRU'SPAA (Lake)

The Upper and Lower Makabo Rivers pour over the ridge of the Vekle'farr and empty into this massive lake.

The Bru'Spaa is inhabited by many varieties of molluscoid, which live upon each other and upon the algae which frequently covers the lake's surface. Some larger creatures—chuuls, perhaps—live beneath the surface, but fortunately they seem to spend much of their lives somnolescent between short periods of frenzied feeding.

### DESOLATE PEAKS (Ruin)

Once a small clan of stone giants lived in the crags of the Grysl Range. Generally they refused to involve themselves in the war between the illithids and the Yldi'Thaan. Unfortunately, though, when the Yldi'Thaan finally convinced the stone giants to join them, the stone giants discovered that their unprotected psyches were easy pickings for the illithids. Most of the clan was lost in one battle, and the remaining stone giants—who were all elders and children—retreated to their crags.

However, the clan's misfortune continued. Forty years later they were discovered by the mercenary Bonespur, who recruited the now-grown children to his cause. These younger giants were frustrated from decades of hiding, and they wished to join the winning faction. Unfortunately, when Bonespur's band of drow and stone giants ran afoul of powerful adventurers, all of the younger giants were killed.

Nowadays the Desolate Peaks are an abandoned ruin. Stonework of surprising delicacy and beauty still adorns the site, but otherwise there is little sign that anyone ever lived there.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY – THE LAST SCULPTOR

The Desolate Peaks are not entirely abandoned. Three of the stone giant elders remain, shaping monuments dedicated to the community that has been lost. All three are reaching the end of their natural span. In addition to the usual abilities of elder stone giants, they have acquired the ability to *meld with stone*. Two of the elders will use this ability to avoid all contact with intruders. The third does the same unless he is too involved with his latest sculpture. This giant, Hrinthannon, may also reveal himself to visitors who speak their appreciation of his half-finished work.

If the party has previously encountered Oskauga and Suroid in the Usko-Farr'ev, then Hrinthannon will be very interested in the young giants' return to the Desolate Peaks. If the party agrees to bring the young giants home again, then Hrinthannon will offer them a very ordinary-looking rock which nonetheless has the powers of a *wand of earth and stone*.

### THE FALLEN TOWER (Ruin)

One of the two flying towers of the Yldi'Thaan crashed high up on Mount Makab, and the impact reduced it to a jumble of stone blocks and fragments. However, the other flying tower was brought down at the base of the mountain, and its destruction was less complete.

Two portions of the fallen tower remain, held



together by remnants of magic. The first portion is oriented properly, while the second lies upon its side. Both portions are surrounded by cut stone blocks.

Although the fallen tower has been thoroughly looted, it remains an important site for the Yldi'Thaan. Inasmuch as any of the Yldi'Thaan understand religion, it is a sacred site to them. It is also a protected site, since the lightning storms of Sky-Terror do not reach anyone hiding within the fallen tower.

### FEL'GARAN (River)

This river originates on the northeastern slopes of Mount Grysl, although it vanishes into the Mists after a relatively short run.

Back when Bluetspur was part of the Core, the Fel'Garan was also known as the Felgmøgsge after it ran into Hazlan.

### LOWER MAKABO RIVER (River)

A river whose source is somewhere within the Makab Range. It flows over the Vekle'farr and into the Bru'Spaa.

### MELESKU'TA (Site)

On the northeastern slope of Mount Grysl stands one of the best-preserved Yldi'Thaan sites. Its state of preservation is entirely due to an experimental defense. Melesku'ta is protected by a psionic projection which insists there is *nothing here*. This projection has proven effective against illithids and, by unfortunate coincidence, anyone else with psionics or significant psionic potential. In other words, the Yldi'Thaan are also incapable of finding Melesku'ta.

Melesku'ta was originally constructed by the Thaan as a military outpost where weapons and defenses for use against the illithids were developed. Psions and wizards worked side-by-side toward their common goal. Unfortunately, nothing had been quite finished before Bluetspur was drawn into the Mists. All of the occupants were among the Hulvi'Thaan, who were not drawn into Bluetspur, and so Melesku'ta and its secrets were lost for years.

Eventually, though, a band of Yldi'Thaan stumbled across the outpost, and they learned how close the scientists had come to finishing the *nothing here* projection. They decided to finish the effort, except that they discovered they needed an intellect to monitor and focus the projection system. None of the approaches considered by the Hulvi'Thaan seemed viable, and the Yldi'Thaan were desperate. A young man named Xhafer drew the short straw.

Not only did the projection system work, but it has worked for the century and a half ever since.

The God-Brain detects Melesku'ta as a numb spot in its psychic awareness of the domain. However, none of the illithid scientists which it has sent out to investigate have ever found anything unusual. Besides, it hasn't changed in nearly two centuries, so clearly it is harmless, yes?

The exterior spaces of Melesku'ta are vulnerable to the lightning strikes of Sky-Terror, but the interior spaces are protected.

### THE MISTY MOUTH (Site)

A fumarole in the side of Mount Makab. It is active and emits a steady gout of sulphurous steam.

Many Yar'Thaaladan believe that breathing in the fumarole's mists and meditating nearby will increase one's psychic power.

### MOUNT GRYSL (Mountain)

See the *Realm of Terror* poster map.

### MOUNT MAKAB (Mountain)

See the *Realm of Terror* poster map.

### OBSIDIAN FOREST (Site)

Before the rise of the illithids, Bluetspur—and the land of Thaan before it—had a healthy surface ecosystem. One of the lingering monuments to that truth is the Obsidian Forest. According to legend, on the night that Yrkat Yrkatu fell, this formerly vital evergreen woodland turned to obsidian. Skeptics insist that the transformation probably occurred shortly afterward at the four-fingered hands of the illithids. By destroying one of the crucial resources of

the Thaan, they could help ensure that the fallen would stay fallen.

### Otl'Spaa (Lake)

A lake in the Lowlands beyond the Vekle'farr east of the Makab Range. It has no obvious single source (and therefore is likely fed by many little streams), but its largest outflow extends into the Misty Border.

As a body of usually-drinkable water, the Otl'Spaa is a valuable resource to ruineers and anyone else travelling upon the surface of Bluetspur. However, experienced ruineers also warn that visitors to the Otl'Spaa should be wary. Something lives beneath the surface, they say.

### Thaan-Qurru (Ruin)

See *Book of Sacrifices*, "The Illithid God-Brain", p.24.

Once the capital of the nation of the Thaan. Sometimes called simply Qurr ("the City"), sometimes called simply Thaan after its former inhabitants. Now a ruin.

When the city of Thaan fell, shortly after Bluetspur was created, the survivors retreated to Yrkat Yrkatu, which they defended for many decades afterward. The ruins of Thaan had been looted long before Yrkat Yrkatu fell.

After the fall of Thaan, the two most widely remembered districts are the military district and the noble district. The military district has been looted for its weapons ever since the city's fall, but as more and more Yldi'Thaan were driven underground, the noble district has been looted as well by ruineers seeking fine goods. The illithids regularly patrol both districts, but this threat has not completely discouraged ruineers from searching for anything which their predecessors have overlooked.

Another district worth mentioning is the former jeweler's district. In addition to gems and jewelry, this district also handled the development of those crystals which were used in Thaan psitech. Although it has also been heavily picked over, doubtless there are still one or two undiscovered vaults where latent psitech might be stored.

## DREAD POSSIBILITY — THE GATE TO BENEATH

A whispered secret among the Yar'Thaaladan holds that a gateway of some sort (either psionic or magical or perhaps a combination of the two) leads from the former military district to a nnarl far beneath the surface. This rumor could not possibly be true, though, because the military district has been so thoroughly searched. Besides that, what community could still be powerful enough to maintain such a gate?

### Thaan-Saanu (Ruin)

The nation of the Thaan. Thaan-Saanu once encompassed everything that is now in Bluetspur and more. However, its heart was Thaan-Qurru, the City of the Thaan.

### The Tluch-Kaat (Ruin)

An ancient library of the Thaan, still warded by spells which keep the illithids at bay. A favorite place for Yldi'Thaan ruin-divers to explore, although few have penetrated the defenses to reach the most valuable books.

The Tluch-Kaat is encircled by a wall which once defined the boundary of a contemplative garden. The garden is long since destroyed and the plants once within it have died. The building of Tluch-Kaat itself still retains its defenses, but experienced ruineers share tales of how to bypass them. Most of the chambers within have been thoroughly looted of any lore of value. However, perhaps something previously-undiscovered yet remains.

However, within the main building of the Tluch-Kaat are smaller chambers, known as The Vaults. Special books and artifacts are kept in The Vaults to preserve them for future generations. (Any of the Thirteen Texts would qualify.) In nearly every case, The Vaults remain sealed and well-defended by Thaan psitech.

The Tluch-Kaat is inhabited by a psychic odem which is all that remains of Izu'un of the Thirteen Survivors. As a former archivist of the Tluch-Kaat, he knows how to open any of the Vaults, but he will not

provide the keys unless he can be convinced that releasing such knowledge into Bluetspur will lead to the imminent downfall of the illithids.

### UPPER MAKABO RIVER (River)

A river whose source is somewhere upon Mount Makab itself. It flows over the Vekle'farr and into the Bru'Spaa.

### USKO-FARR'EV (Geography)

"The Bottomless Chasm". A chasm (very deep but not actually bottomless) in the Badlands just northeast of Mount Makab. The hunting is better within the Usko-Farr'ev than anywhere else on the surface, although that is saying very little.

Usko-Farr'ev is inhabited by plants and creatures not found elsewhere upon the surface of Bluetspur. For example, the **veinworm** is a type of caecilian which has black skin with bright red markings; it can grow to three feet in length. **Thorn kelp** is a common macroalgae in the Usko-Farr'ev; both the stipes and bladder-bulbs are edible, although the blades are covered with many tiny needle-like structures to deter consumption. The **chalk-shelled snot clam** is a type of small mollusc with a brittle gray shell; it is poisonous to most creatures apart from the veinworm.

At least one marl (from *Monstrous Compendium Annual II*, p.85) inhabits the Usko-Farr'ev, as do the stone giants Oskauga and Suroid.

### VEKLE'FARR (Geography)

The name of the ridge which divides the Bluetspurean plateau from its lowlands. It is sometimes used as the name of the lowlands.

### VOID OF INFINITY (Geography)

The Yar'Thaaladan call the edges of Bluetspur "The Void of Infinity", "The Sunless Void", or simply "The Void". The Void is simply a particularly empty manifestation of the Mists. Anyone who ventures into its blackness will reappear at another point randomly around the domain's perimeter.

### YRKAT YRKATU (Ruin)

For over a century after Bluetspur was drawn into the Mists, the Yldi'Thaan stronghold of Yrkat Yrkatu ("fortress of fortresses") held out against the Masters of Thought and their minions.

Until it didn't.

The ruins of Yrkat Yrkatu still stand upon the southeastern slopes of Mount Grysl, overlooking the ruins of the capitol city of Thaan. They are a popular place for scavengers to seek treasures such as metal, wood, cloth, and magic. Unfortunately the illithids know this, and so the ruins are also a popular place for the illithids to hunt for thralls. The illithid vampires have also learned that tasty prey may sometimes be found here.

## SITES OF INTEREST – UNDER MOUNT GRYSL

### AZAAX (Settlement)

<b>Founding:</b> ~65 years ago <b>Population:</b> (90% Yldi'Thaan, 10% Foreigner) <b>Nnarl:</b> Nnarl Edul'va <b>Depth:</b> Upperdark
--

A Yar'Thaalad settlement under Mount Grysl. It features an exit to the surface which stands relatively close to the entrance to Edul'va, and it interconnects to the same larger system of tunnels.

However, the inhabitants of Azaax are almost entirely Yldi'Thaan except for a handful of human foreigners. Years ago in another settlement, the founders of Azaax were betrayed by one of the Shattered Ones, which forced their resettlement to Azaax. The leaders of Azaax have refused to give shelter to a Shattered One ever since.

The current leader is Zaaxul III.

Known citizens of Azaax include the following:

- ❖ Haxhi
- ❖ Melikish
- ❖ Mirjona
- ❖ Zaaxul I
- ❖ Zaaxul II

- ❖ Zaaxul III
- ❖ Zaaxul IV

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — BROKEN SUCCESSION

After Zaaxul III's son Zaaxul IV died in the Second Release, the succession has been in doubt. A pair of young men have presented themselves as illegitimate sons of Zaaxul III, and in one case it's feasible because of a known affair between his mother and Zaaxul III. One of III's advisors and one of his bodyguards have been positioning themselves similarly.

And Zaaxul III? He's grieving too much to care.

### CAVERN OF MANY SUNS (Site)

Far beneath Mount Grysl is a site known as the Cavern of Many Suns. Floating in the center of the large cavern is a collection of nearly a dozen burning spheres. The light emitted by each of these spheres is equivalent to sunlight.

Periodically the mad druid Queen Hazel ventures to the Cavern of Many Suns to coax one of the suns to come to her own cavern. Perhaps using her magic, perhaps because of the power of her delusions, she has always succeeded.

As part of the Second Release, Bramduhr ag-Thulrak and the other participants from The Forge revealed a secret weapon: They had discovered a way to cage a sun, which they intended to use against the heliophobic illithids. Unfortunately, the glow of the sun diminished significantly during its journey across the surface of Bluetspur, and the secret weapon proved ineffective.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — THE DIMMING SUNS

Perhaps the suns in this cavern appear to be dimming, and the party is sent to discover why.

### THE DELVE (Settlement)

**Founding:** ~100 years ago  
**Population:** 200 (100% Duergar)  
**Nnarl:** Nnarl Ulden  
**Depth:** Middledark

A duergar settlement beneath Mount Grysl. It is home to approximately 200 duergar. They aren't exactly enemies of The Forge, but they certainly aren't allies either.

The Delve is led by a warrior named Brovna Grimeye.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — DELVING DEEP

The duergar are native to the plane from which the Thaan and the illithids originated. They were servants of the illithids for many years. Their own rebellion was fought in parallel with the surface war of the Thaan. Much like the Thaan, the duergar eventually lost. Very few survived. Most of the survivors remained under Mount Makab as servitors to the illithids. The duergar of the Delve are the only free duergar in Bluetspur.

Many Yldi'Thaan refuse to see past the many years of conflict between the Thaan and the duergar. However, others are willing to consider the Delve-Ulden as tentative allies.

### EDUL'VA (Settlement)

**Founding:** 679BC  
**Population:** 70 (60% Shattered Ones, 37% Foreigner, 3% Yldi'Thaan)  
**Nnarl:** Nnarl Edul'va  
**Depth:** Upperdark

See the Fraternity of Shadows Forum, "Community Idea: Settlements!" topic.

Unfortunate souls stranded in Bluetspur might do well to seek a particular (but well-hidden) cave entrance on the lower end of the southwestern slope of Mount Grysl. Within caverns accessible via that hidden entrance is the sprawling settlement called Edul'va.

Edul'va was founded by refugees of two sorts. The first are



Shattered Ones who escaped from Mount Makab, and the second are travellers from the Core who arrive via one of the several Mistways which lead into Bluetspur. The settlement varies between 60 and 80 members, consisting of approximately 60% Shattered Ones and 40% others.

People who stumble across Edul'va learn very quickly to pronounce the glottal stop between *Edul* and *va*. The word *edulva*, without the glottal stop, is part of a mantra used in summoning Those Who Slither Into One's Thoughts, and nobody in Edul'va wants to summon *them*.

The headman of Edul'va is a Shattered One named Gult, but the heart of the community may be the priest Trellin Hev.

Inhabitants of Edul'va include the following:

- ❖ Boros Gyula
- ❖ Gult
- ❖ Jenyi
- ❖ Kellek Rowe
- ❖ Sytara
- ❖ Trellin Hev

### THE FORGE (Settlement)

**Founding:** ~40 years ago  
**Population:** (70% Dwarf, 30% Gnome)  
**Nnarl:** Nnarl Ulden  
**Depth:** Middledark

The Forge is a community of Outlander gnomes and dwarves located beneath Mount Grysl. It is centered upon a particular large cavern, called *The Heart of the Forge* in Dwarven, where a deep rift provides plenty of geothermal energy. However, even apart from the Heart of the Forge, the settlement extends into a great many smaller caverns where individual (if extended) families live.

The smiths at the Forge suffer great difficulty making steel. Their traditional techniques have failed them, as have their subsequent innovations. Fortunately they are still able to work iron. Although iron rusts badly in the damp caves beneath Mount Grysl, even so their iron weapons give the Forge considerable defensive strength.

The inhabitants of the Forge have been growing fungal food sources which they carried with them when they arrived. These fungi compete with the native Bluetspurean varieties. In particular, the

myconids and Oo'oo'padans are unhappy about their dwarven and gnomish neighbors.

The leader of the Forge is Gedmun Zinc-Cutter. He is a svirfneblin, although he does not draw attention to the fact that he is anything different from a surface gnome.

Inhabitants of the Forge include the following:

- ❖ Bramduhr ag Thulrak
- ❖ Gedmun Zinc-Cutter

### GA'I'YA (Settlement)

**Founding:** ~620BC  
**Population:** 300 (90% Yldi'Thaan, 10% Quaggoths)  
**Nnarl:** Ga'i'ya  
**Depth:** Lowerdark

An Yldi'Thaan settlement far beneath the surface. Its inhabitants include handlers who establish telepathic dominance over quaggoths, which does imply that the Ga'i'yan might have learned the wrong lessons from the Masters of Thought.

Over generations, Ga'i'ya has turned into a storehouse for Yldi'Thaan technology and magic looted from the surface world. As such, it is one of the best-defended, best-fed settlements in Bluetspur. Although a significant number of refugees from the Second Release came to Ga'i'ya, that community was able to

absorb them with minimal difficulty. In terms of their physical needs, at least. The difficult part has been accepting several dozen people who theoretically might yet be spies for the Four-Fingered Ones.

Inhabitants of Ga'i'ya include the following:

- ❖ Vahktang

### GRATH'S HERMITAGE (Hermitage)

**Founding:** long ago  
**Population:** 1 (100% Grath)  
**Nnarl:** —  
**Depth:** Middledark

Far below the surface of Bluetsput and nowhere too

close to anyone, the hermit Grath inhabits this small complex of interconnected caves. The outer caverns, the ones which he grudgingly allows visitors to see, are as austere as any other settlement beneath Mount Grysl. The innermost cavern, though, is a treasure trove of psitech. Not that anyone has ever glimpsed it and survived to tell the tale.

### HEVNENS AMBOLT (Ruins)

**Founding:** 748BC

**Nnarl:** —

**Depth:** Upperdark

Hevnens Ambolt was originally a settlement founded by Shattered Ones near the surface of Mount Grysl. However, it was discovered by a Mulan wizard who accidentally led a cabal of followers into Bluetspur via the Song of Obscene Hunger. This wizard readily conquered the settlement and renamed it, and he prepared to strip all of Bluetspur from the illithids. His ambition was exceeded only by his folly. The illithids could not help but notice the arcane resonance which his war preparations generated, and they invaded in full force. The wizard and his followers fell swiftly.

The illithids periodically return to ensure that Hevnens Ambolt remains abandoned. To cover the periods of their absence, they have left behind a crystalline growth which is particularly sensitive to the use of arcane magic. Any wizard spell cast with 100 feet of the crystal will have its arcane resonance amplified by the crystal and echoed to the Citadel Subterrene, which will inevitably provoke a response.

Fortunately this crystal is not similarly attuned to divine or natural magic.

The inhabitants of "nearby" communities (none are particularly close) know to avoid the region of Hevnens Ambolt.

### THE HOT SPRING (Site)

**Nnarl:** Nnarl Edul'va

**Depth:** Upperdark

The cavern known simply as The Hot Spring stands at the intersection of several nnarls. It is a mammoth cave, but most of its floor area is filled by massive pool of water heated by geothermal activity.

Occasionally water spouts upward from the center of the pool, reaching heights of two dozen feet or more. Because of these spouts, the Hot Spring is known in Thaani as *The Place Where Water Flies*.

The Hot Spring is fed by a slow-moving underground river, although the river's entrance and exits are not visible from above the waterline. Because of this flow, the waters continually refresh themselves, making the Hot Spring an ideal place to bathe and wash clothing, especially at the edges where the pool is pleasantly, not scaldingly, hot.

The Hot Spring is widely considered to be a place of sanctuary. Not only is violence forbidden at the Hot Spring, but Yar'Thaaladan from different settlements will generally pretend that others are not present at all, just to give the illusion of privacy. However, the Hot Spring is also used as a neutral place where settlement leaders can meet to discuss any conflicts.

### MORA (Settlement)

**Founding:** 757BC

**Population:** (100% Kartakan Foreigners)

**Nnarl:** ???

**Depth:** Middledark

A settlement formed by expatriate Kartakans. It was founded and is still led by Juhasz Gergo, a man of excellent voice and raging temper who could not manage to cooperate with others in the Yar'Thaaladan settlement where he originally lived after Bluetspur abducted him.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the heart of Mora is a cave with wonderful acoustics. While Juhasz Gergo retains his position as leader because he founded the settlement, in Kartakan fashion his circle of advisors is largely comprised of the community's best singers. Otherwise, this cave is treated as a sacred space for entertainment and teaching.

Inhabitants of Mora include the following:

- ❖ Juhasz Gergo
- ❖ Tevin Dakken
- ❖ Varga Nora

### THE NEST (Settlement)

**Founding:** ≈30 years ago  
**Population:** (100% Steeders)  
**Nnarl:** Nnarl Ulden  
**Depth:** Middledark

Decades ago a pregnant steeder stole deep into the tunnels beneath Bluetspur. Some of her children survived, and they continued to breed. Now the steeders have a community of their own, sometimes called The Nest.

While the steeders have only low intelligence, rumor holds that they are led by a queen who is much more canny, perhaps even psionic. It is not certain that this queen is actually a steeder. Outlanders familiar with the drow have guessed that she might be a drider. Or she might be some entirely new arachnid aberration.

### NNARL EDUL'VA (Nnarl)

A cluster of communities consisting of Edul'va, Azaax, Weyez, Oo'oo'pada, The Stump, and the cavern where Queen Hazel lives.

Two communities in the nnarl provide access to the surface, Edul'va and Azaax. Accordingly, Azaaxans refer to the nnarl as Nnarl Azaax. However, the other communities have better relations with Edul'va, and so the most common name for the nnarl is Nnarl Edul'va.

### NNARL ULDEN (Nnarl)

Literally the "Nnarl of Dwarves". A nnarl beneath Mount Grysl which includes The Forge, The Delve, and The Nest.

### Oo'oo'PADa (Settlement)

**Founding:** 742BC  
**Population:**  
**Nnarl:** Nnarl Edul'va  
**Depth:** Upperdark

Oo'oo'pada is an underground settlement, seemingly inhabited by humans. Visitors are welcome, but almost immediately they will notice the pervasive oddity of their hosts. The Oo'oo'padans seem perpetually distracted, as if they are incapable of focusing their concentration. Or perhaps their concentration is already focused upon something undetectable to visitors.

In truth, the Oo'oo'padans are no longer fully human. They are symbiotes, possessing human bodies and fungoid (in particular, myconid) nervous systems. They understand full well their nature, and they consider themselves akin to humans and myconids alike. They look kindly upon both. Like myconids, they are fervently non-violent.

The air in Oo'oo'pada is thick with "rapport spores" which allow its citizens to communicate with intelligent beings via a kind of slow-motion fungal telepathy. However, they usually reserve such communication for themselves, preferring to speak Thaani with visitors if possible.

The original symbiotes formed after a group of Yldi'Thaan hid among a group of myconids for months on end. Ever since, the myconids and Oo'oo'padans alike have been wary of allowing anyone to stay with them for more than a week. While the Oo'oo'padans are perfectly content as they are, they do not wish to shoulder the moral burden of unwittingly inflicting the same change upon others.

The peculiar nature of the Oo'oo'padans renders them psychically invisible to the illithids. On the other hand, they also never manifest full psionics or even wild talents.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — A NEW SPECIES?

Oo'oo'padans are *not* actually a new species. That is, they remain capable of breeding with non- enfunginated ("pure strain") humans. An Oo'oo'padan woman will always give birth to an Oo'oo'padan child; infection occurs *in utero*. An Oo'oo'padan man will father a pure strain baby if the mother is pure strain.

Like many settlements beneath Bluetspur, the Oo'oo'padans fear the dangers of inbreeding. Young Oo'oo'padan women are encouraged to seek out other settlements and seduce any willing men. This behavior rarely makes them popular with non-Oo'oo'padan women.

Oo'oo'padan youths are also encouraged to woo un-enfunginated girls. However, most such courtships fail because pure strain humans tend to be horrified at the thought of having their brains consumed by fungus. Oo'oo'padans, on the other hand, generally fail to understand why this is a concern at all.

Oo'oo'padan morality prevents them from seducing pure strain women by deceit. In particular, when courting they will never deny that they are Oo'oo'padan. However, they feel no particular compulsion to inform a pure strain bride that she will probably become infected after living many months in Oo'oo'pada.

After 3d4 months of exposure to the Oo'oo'padans' rapport spores, a pure strain human must make a saving throw against poison; 1d3 months later, they must make another; 1d2 months after that, a third. If any of the three saving throws fail, the human is infected and becomes a symbiont. If all three saving throws succeed, then that particular human is utterly immune to the Oo'oo'padan infection.

Any time before a saving throw has been failed, spells such as *cure disease* will eliminate potential infection entirely. However, after any failed saving throw the Oo'oo'padan infection has taken intractible root. If *cure disease* is cast upon a host who has failed a saving throw, then another saving throw should be rolled immediately. Success indicates that the victim is cured but suffers a loss of 1d3 intelligence and 1d2 dexterity. Failure indicates that the victim is cured but can no longer sustain independent life.

Oo'oo'padans insist that anyone who becomes infected remains the same person despite the infection. In truth, new Oo'oo'padans do retain most of the host's memories and many of their behavioral patterns.

Even so, anyone who knows the host well enough will be able to discern significant differences.

In time, as the Oo'oo'padans evolve to become more dependent upon the fungoid structures in their central nervous systems, babies fathered by Oo'oo'padans will lack such non-fungoid structures. Such children will suffer -2 to intelligence and dexterity. However, they might show unusual power in other areas, such as a warlock's connection to incomprehensible fungoid elder beings.



## SAKKA-GOR (Settlement)

**Founding:** 742BC

**Population:** ≈150 (60% Foreigners, 25% Shattered Ones, 15% Yldi'Thaan)

**Nnarl:** —

**Depth:** Lowerdark

A settlement deep under Mount Grysl. It has a particularly fell reputation. Its ruler, Thuxa, is one of the most ruthless tyrants beneath the mountain.

Thuxa has organized the best fighters and the best psychics of Sakka-gor into an elite bodyguard which she originally called The Talons. However, because nearly all of the foreigners associate "The Talons" with Vlad Drakov, these people have become known as "Thuxa's Talons" to differentiate them. Thuxa also calls them "Thuxa's Talons" because she is not the sort of person to be bothered by speaking in the third person. Being inducted into Thuxa's Talons is considered both a great honor and license to generally do as one pleases, but it also carries a certain risk. If Thuxa ever feels threatened by one of Thuxa's Talons, she ensures that they meet a bloody end in short order.

There is only one true law in Sakka-gor: *Do as the Tyrant-Queen commands*. Other crimes are not crimes in Sakka-gor, not unless Thuxa's inconsistent judgement decrees otherwise. Even murder is permitted if Thuxa does not object. Then again, if she does object to any particular behavior, the usual punishment is execution.

Inhabitants of Sakka-gor include the following:

- ❖ Ro
- ❖ Thuxa

## Singing Frog Cavern (Site)

One of the sites beneath Mount Grysl is a large cavern known for its "singing frog" statues. Approximately three dozen stalagmites have been carved into four-foot high figures which resemble red- and black-mottled frogs. Their toothless mouths are all open, making them appear as if they were singing. Water drips steadily from stalactites directly overhead, giving the "frogs" a milky white coating

which has failed to obscure the detail with which the statues were originally carved. The coating also indicates that the statues were carved a very long time ago, probably even before the original conflict between the Thaan and the illithids.

Nobody knows who carved these statues.

## THE STUMP (Settlement)

**Founding:** prior to 581BC

**Population:** (100% Myconids)

**Nnarl:** Nnarl Edul'va

**Depth:** Upperdark

A colony of myconids has established itself in a gigantic cavern which they call "The Stump". The center of the cavern is occupied by a forty-foot diameter stump which provides most of the nutrients necessary for the myconids to thrive. No sign remains of the rest of the tree. It is also unclear how any tree, much less a tree of such significant size, ever grew so far underground.

Having learned their lesson from the accidental creation of the Oo'oo'padans, the myconids of The Stump will not allow visitors to linger for more than a handful of days.

## DREAD POSSIBILITY — THE FALLEN TREE

The stump at the heart of The Stump originally grew upon the slope of Mount Grysl. Somehow, though, the earth split and swallowed it up and then closed again behind it.

During particularly heavy rainstorms on the surface, the rain runs through the nearly-invisible cracks in the ceiling, causing a curtain of drizzle across The Stump. The myconids consider this a holy occasion, and they will line themselves up beneath the curtain, hold fungoid hands, and drone a song of communion.

## WEYEZ (Settlement)

**Founding:** ≈50 years ago  
**Population:** (100% Shattered Ones)  
**Nnarl:** Nnarl Edul'va  
**Depth:** Upperdark

A Yar'Thaalad settlement under Mount Grysl. It lacks an entrance to the surface. However, it is interconnected to other settlements such as Edul'va and Azaax.

The population of Weyez consists entirely of Shattered Ones. Unsurprisingly, they exist in perpetual tension with the citizens of Azaax.

## ZORR'VA (Site)

**Nnarl:** Nnarl Edul'va  
**Depth:** Upperdark

At the center of the Nnarl Edul'va is a series of caves which are not claimed by any of the settlements in the nnarl but are used by all as a hunting ground for cave chickens and other, frequently more formidable creatures. This is the Zorr'va, the "hunting place". It is neutral territory.

## SITES OF INTEREST – UNDER MOUNT MAKAB

### CITADEL SUBTERRENE (Settlement)

The primary illithid settlement beneath Mount Makab.

### KRAOL (Settlement)

**Founding:** 582BC  
**Population:** (100% Yldi'Thaan)  
**Nnarl:** —  
**Depth:** Upperdark

An underground settlement located at the western edge of the Makab Range. Whenever the "season" of Sky-Terror ends, the bravest of the people of Kraol depart their lair to descend the Vekle'farr near the Lower Makabo River and venture to the shores of

the Bru'Spaa. The lake teems with molluscoid creatures which the people of Kraol snare in nets and haul back to their home, where they salt them using an odd greenish mineral found in abundance beneath their caverns.

The people of Kraol eat little but salted molluscoid. Scurvy is a problem.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — AN EXCELLENT PRESERVATIVE

The mineral which the Kraolan use as salt is, in fact, such an excellent preservative that most deceased Kraolan rise as rank 1 ancient dead after they die. They look much as they did when alive, except that their eyes glow the same odd greenish color as the mineral.

The caves around Kraol proper are occupied by these ancient dead. They simply sit. And stare. And sit. And stare. And sit. And stare.

Rather than causing fear, the Kraolan mummies invoke revulsion instead.

### THE MUSHROOM GARDEN (Settlement)

**Founding:** prior to 581BC  
**Population:** 200 (85% Yldi'Thaan, 10% Shattered Ones, 5% Foreigners)  
**Nnarl:** —  
**Depth:** Upperdark

An immense cavern beneath Mount Makab where a community of nearly two hundred Yldi'Thaan thralls worked to grow mushrooms to feed other thralls in deeper communities. This cavern is not the only mushroom garden beneath Bluetspur's surface, but since it was the target of the Second Release, it is the one that most Yar'Thaaladan mean when they say "the mushroom garden".

Following the Second Release, the illithids have presumably brought thralls from elsewhere to labor in the mushroom garden. However, they have equally likely increased their security in anticipation

of a Third Release.

### **Nnarl Drow'u** (Nnarl)

Over the decades of conflict, the Yar'Thaaladan have encountered enough of the illithids' servitor races—most notably drow and duergar—to know that there must be at least one community of servitors beneath Mount Makab. They call these communities the **Nnarl Drow'u**, the nnarl of the drow.

The drow and duergar call this community Tekenzza.

### **Tekenzza** (Nnarl)

<p><b>Founding:</b> presumably prior to 581BC</p> <p><b>Population:</b> (Drow, Duergar, Lizardfolk)</p> <p><b>Nnarl:</b> Tekenzza</p> <p><b>Depth:</b> Upperdark</p>
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Long before Bluetspur was created, the illithids beneath Mount Makab enslaved the drow who also lived beneath the mountain. The drow were the first among the illithids' servitor races, and they have always ranked the highest (or perhaps merely the least low). Before their enslavement, the greatest city among the drow was called Tekenzza. That city has fallen, but Tekenzza remains the name given to the whole of drow society beneath Mount Makab.

In addition to the drow, this nnarl also includes at least one duergar community (not to be mistaken for The Delve, which lies under Mount Grysl). These duergar are servitors of the illithids. Those who have trained steeders serve as cavalry.

Similarly, this nnarl includes a community of lizardfolk. The lizardfolk are not quite a servitor race. However, the illithids leave the lizardfolk alone in exchange for allowing the illithids to periodically claim a few of the lizardfolk for ceremorphosis into tzakandi. Although the lizardfolk loathe the illithids, they know that rebellion would be a disaster for them.

## SITES OF INTEREST – MISTWAYS

### **ABERRATION TRIANGLE** (Mistway)

See Quoth the Raven Issue 29, p.331.

A three-way mistway between Bluetspur, Markovia, and Barovia explains why there are tentacle rats in Markovia. From Bluetspur, it opens only for aberrations, allowing travel to either Markovia or Barovia.

### **SHATTERED PASSAGE** (Mistway)

See *Ravenloft Third Edition*, p.110.

A one-way mistway of moderate reliability linking Kartakass to Bluetspur.

### **SONG OF OBSCENE HUNGER** (Mistway)

See *Gazetteer Volume I*, p.43.

A one-way mistway of excellent reliability linking Hazlan to Bluetspur.

### **SPARKING VORTEX** (Mistway)

The only known Mistway out of Bluetspur. It manifests as a swirling purple lightning storm. It may appear anywhere along the border, and it never lasts more than 20 minutes.

According to rumor, the Sparking Vortex also manifests in certain caverns beneath the surface. Not every cavern, but certain caverns, and not upon any schedule discernable to mortal minds.

### **WORM'S PATH** (Mistway)

See *Gazetteer Volume I*, p.87.

A possible mistway linking the tunnels beneath southeastern Kartakass to Bluetspur, identified and named by the author of the *Doomsday Gazetteer*.

## NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

### **Aldu** (one of the Thirteen Survivors)

One of the Thirteen Survivors. Unlike most of the Survivors, he possessed no psionic ability, but he was a knowledgeable historian. His Text is a history of the Thaan and their mortal foes, the illithids.

### **Arcturion** (sun dragon)

Arcturion is a sun dragon (as described in the *MC9 Spelljammer Monstrous Compendium Appendix II*). He has been imprisoned beneath Mount Grysl for approximately two hundred years. In addition to being perpetually furious, he is also quite mad. He no longer remembers who imprisoned him, and so he lashes out at anyone he encounters.

Arcturion is bound by special chains: although they appear to be crafted from silver, they are a fusion of iron, chromium, and trace amounts of other heavy minerals bound together by heat and magic. In addition, each link has an intricate crystalline structure embedded, which is an indication of Thaani psitech. Arcturion has been unable to damage, much less destroy, any of these links.

The cavern where Arcturion is imprisoned is significantly colder than the surrounding areas. Investigation will reveal that the chains absorb heat, an effect which intensifies whenever Arcturion struggles against his bonds, which he perpetually does.

Occasionally Arcturion manifests his rage in physical form, and he spits out a miniature sun. These suns rise into various chimneys in the roof of the cave where Arcturion is imprisoned, eventually floating upward into the Cavern of Many Suns.

### **Boros Gyula** (inhabitant of Edul'va)

A human woodsman recently arrived from Kartakass. A travelling companion of Kellek Rowe, with whom he has much in common. However, Boros Gyula is a much nicer fellow. He stands better odds than anyone else of talking Kellek Rowe out of a foolish idea.

### **Bramduhr ag Thulrak** (inhabitant of the Forge)

A dwarven fighter. An inhabitant of The Forge. He ranks highly among the dwarven faction of The Forge, and he is a trusted advisor to Gedmun Zinc-Cutter.

Bramduhr ag Thulrak commanded the Forge-Ulden who participated in the Second Release. He joined the war party willingly, even knowing that he was likely to lose loyal dwarves or even his own life.

However, he now quietly regrets The Forge's participation, not because of the two lives lost, but because of Grozirk's cavalier attitude toward those Yar'Thaaladan under his command. (The two dwarves lost were respected warriors, not pieces on a game board.) All in all, Bramduhr ag Thulrak would not join Grozirk in another expedition, although there is some chance he would join Orolahr alone.

### **Brovna Grimeye** (leader of the Delve)

The leader of The Delve. In addition to the usual duergar abilities, she also possesses the ability to "orecut", that is, to walk through solid stone as an urdunnir does. She may use this ability 2/day for 5d6 rounds each use.

Brovna Grimeye has a quiet truce with Gedmun Zinc-Cutter, the leader of The Forge. Although duergar are historically at odds with dwarves, gnomes, and svirfneblin, Brovna Grimeye recognizes that her community is better served by working with The Forge than against it. Because many of the duergar might disagree violently with her, she is not outspoken regarding this understanding.

### **Chorin Mur'Thaan** (founder of the Ildi'Thaan)

See *Forbidden Lore: Cryptic Allegiances*, p.14.

The founder of the Ildi'Thaan, at least according to the legends of the Ildi'Thaan. These same legends claim that Chorin Mur'Thaan was the only person to escape Bluetspur with his sanity intact since the Thirteen Survivors emerged to write the Thirteen Texts of Thaan.

The current leader of the Ildi'Thaan claims to be the same Chorin Mur'Thaan who founded the society, despite the many years which have passed since his escape from Bluetspur.



## DREAD POSSIBILITY — THE BODY SNATCHER

The entity known as Chorin Mur'Thaan has survived over a century by using the Switch *Personality* telepathic science. Ordinarily this science causes Constitution loss for the psionist and victim alike, a loss which continues until the switch is reversed. However, over the decades Chorin Mur'Thaan has learned how to overcome this obstacle. Each new body which he inhabits suffers such loss for no more than a week before recovering, and he never returns to his previous host. In fact, he usually kills his previous host once the switch is complete.

Given such behavior, one might reasonably question whether Chorin Mur'Thaan actually escaped Bluetspur with his sanity intact.

### Dardan (hermit)

Dardan is a foreigner who spent many miserable years skulking in the nnarls below Mount Grysl. One day his hunt for food happened to bring him into a cavern where the Sparking Vortex had appeared.

Unfortunately it was already closing when he saw it, and he was not able to pass through.

Subsequently Dardan has made that cavern his home. He leaves only to gather edible mushrooms from nearby caverns. He is filthy, emaciated, malnourished, and frequently ill. (More so than most Yar'Thaaladan, even.) He is also very determined to pass through the vortex the next time it appears.

Unfortunately, though, he has been waiting at least five years without success.

### Gedmun Zinc-Cutter (leader of the Forge)

The leader of The Forge.

Gedmun Zinc-Cutter has an understanding with Brovna Grimeye, the leader of The Delve. Fighting between the two communities is more harmful than cooperation, and so he has decreed that the Forge-Ulden are to treat non-violently with the duergar unless the duergar commit violence first. Many of the Forge-Ulden resent this policy, and Zinc-Cutter does not entirely fault them for their suspicion. Although Zinc-Cutter has come to trust Grimeye to

keep her word, he does not trust the duergar as a whole.

While Gedmun Zinc-Cutter misses many things about his world of origin, more than anything else he complains more about missing tea. "What I wouldn't give for a decent cup!"

### Genke (one of the Thirteen Survivors)

One of the Thirteen Survivors who escaped Bluetspur in 588BC. Author of the Sixth Book of the Thirteen Texts of Thaan. Given how many years have passed, clearly he must be deceased.

### Grathelax (alhoon)

When Commissioner Seldrig came to the Citadel Subterrene to betray the Thaan in his quest for a more powerful, more pure psionic mastery, not all of the illithids were satisfied with their new Elder Brain.

Grathelax was one of those who objected. So strongly, in fact, that he left the Citadel for the caverns beneath Mount Grysl.

In the nearly two centuries since Bluetspur's creation, Grathelax has lurked in isolation, using his psychic abilities to pose as a wizened hermit. (The Yar'Thaaladan call him "Grath" and mistake him for an odd kind of half-elf.) He is not on particularly good terms with any of his neighbors, but neither is he upon poor terms. He will, in fact, aid the Yar'Thaaladan against illithid incursions. He hopes that the Yar'Thaaladan will grow strong enough to bring down the God-Brain. However, the moment that the God-Brain falls Grathelax will turn upon the Yar'Thaaladan.

Given that illithids live only 125 years at the outside, clearly Grathelax is an alhoon.

### Grozirg (githzerai fighter/mage)

A githzerai fighter/mage trapped in Bluetspur after a *rakkma* hunting party went terribly wrong. A companion to the githzerai monk Orolahr.

Since finding himself in Bluetspur, Grozirg has spent his time wandering the tunnels beneath Mount Grysl, seeking to organize a rebellion against the Thought Masters. He has been discouraged by what he has encountered thus far. Humanity, he feels, has

done a miserable job of resisting its own oppression.

Grozirg has been encouraged by his and Orolahr's success in organizing the Second Release. Then again, he doesn't have to feed any of the refugees whom he helped rescue, so it's easier for him to declare an unambiguous success.

While Grozirg has a fierce temper, he is also loyal to anyone who has earned his trust. Unfortunately, he has a tendency to treat non-githzerai as expendable pawns.

#### **Gruft** (leader of Edul'va)

See the Fraternity of Shadows Forum, "Community Idea: Settlements!" topic.

The current leader of Edul'va is Gruft, a Shattered One who appears mostly human until he reveals the fanged mouth which opens directly into his stomach. His two bodyguards appear to be Shattered Ones as well, but they are in fact hook horrors. The rest of their pack has been killed by the other monstrosities of Bluetspur, and so they have latched onto Edul'va as their new pack.

#### **Haxhi** (inhabitant of Azaax)

Claims to be an illegitimate son of Zaaxul III, or at least his mother claims he is. She had an affair with Zaaxul III in the appropriate timeframe, which gives strength to her claim.

Haxhi is physically frail but nimble and very clever. He isn't certain that he wants to become Zaaxul III's heir, but in truth he would probably become a good leader with experience.

#### **Hrinthannon** (stone giant elder)

One of three remaining elders of the Desolate Peaks, and the only one who might reveal himself to visitors.

#### **Izu'un** (one of the Thirteen Survivors)

Two hundred years ago, before Bluetspur was drawn into the Land of Mists, Izu'un was an archivist at the Tluch-Kaat. Once Bluetspur was created, Izu'un joined the Thaan who resisted the resurgence of the illithids. He knew that his telepathic abilities would be valuable to the cause.

Several years later Izu'un became one of the Thirteen Survivors, and as such he wrote one of the Thirteen Texts. Once his text had been written, he returned to Bluetspur to the Tluch-Kaat, where he felt the Thirteen Texts would be safe. In that he was right, but upon his departure he was ambushed by illithids just outside of the Tluch-Kaat.

Although Izu'un did not survive the ambush, his telepathic abilities have allowed him to linger as an odem. However, he is different from the traditional odem in two ways. First, he is psychic rather than magical in nature. Second, he is not at all evil. Once he possesses someone, he can communicate with them via telepathy, and unless they give their consent to his possession he will release them immediately. Ultimately Izu'un haunts the Tluch-Kaat, and his mission is to gather the Thirteen Texts for safekeeping there.

#### **Jenyi** (assistant to the priest of Edul'va)

A young woman who assists Trellin Hev in his priestly duties. In truth, Trellin Hev could no longer perform those duties without her support. She reminds him of his sermons and redirects him when they wander too far off course. More importantly, her contact with "the gods" is more consistent than Trellin Hev's, and so she performs most of the healing in Edul'va.

If asked her age, Jenyi will contemplate a moment and answer, "Twenty-three." She looks younger, though. Her pale skin is not unusual, not in the sunless tunnels of Edul'va, but her pale violet eyes are.

Jenyi cringes every time someone calls her "an old soul", which is a shame because she hears it a lot. She really is remarkably patient for someone her age.

## DREAD POSSIBILITY — AN OLD SOUL

Jenyi was once nothing more than what she appears to be: a young woman helping her community survive despite the dangers of Bluetspur. However, that was one hundred and eighty years ago, and much has happened to her since. Perhaps most crucially, she was one of the Thirteen Survivors who escaped Bluetspur in 588BC. She fell in love with Traian Hevescu, an itinerant priest of the Morninglord who came to Immol. When the thirteen Yldi'Thaan survivors scattered, the priest insisted upon coming with her. She allowed him. (In fact, she married him.) Having learned that Barovians took her less seriously because of her gender, at that time she started disguising herself as a young man, calling herself Genke. Under that name she wrote the sixth of the Thirteen Texts of Thaan.

For several years the subterfuge was successful, and Jenyi and her husband evaded the illithid minions who skulked after them. Eventually, though, they were forced to flee into the Mists. Neither was surprised to find themselves transported to Bluetspur, but fortunately they were deposited near a cave complex at the base of Mount Grysl. There they founded the settlement of Edul'va.

Among her many talents, Jenyi possesses the psychometabolic science *Complete Healing* and the devotion *Cell Adjustment*. In addition to curing disease and healing damage, her psionics have also prevented her from aging normally. For decades she used her gifts upon her husband as well, but it merely slowed his aging. In fact, she has not used her gifts upon him since she realized that it no longer prevented his mental deterioration. Although her husband no longer remembers the discussions, he has told her repeatedly that he does not wish to live with a vacant mind in a healthy body.

In order to retain the use of her psionic abilities, Jenyi does not actually consume manna. However, having survived in Bluetspur for more than a century and a half, she has confidence in the robustness of her mental shields.

### Juhasz Gergo (leader of Mora)

An expatriate Kartakan who founded and now leads the settlement of Mora. He has an excellent voice and raging temper.

### Kaziki (gatekeeper for Edul'va)

See the Fraternity of Shadows Forum, "Community Idea: Settlements!" topic.

A shattered one named Kaziki lives on the very fringes of Edul'va. In appearance she resembles a cross between a woman and a centipede.

Her wild talent allows her to perform "distributed mental processing" on unused portions of nearby brains. Her baseline intelligence is 7, but she gains +1 point for every human-like brain of greater capacity (i.e. higher intelligence) within 100 yards. (If Kaziki is operating at an effective intelligence of 14 when a

creature with intelligence 14 comes within range, she gains no benefit. However, if a creature of 15 intelligence comes within range, her intelligence increases by a point.)

As a side effect, Kaziki is capable of speaking any language which anyone within her psychic range actively speaks for 1d6 rounds. Once all speakers have departed her range, she forgets their languages within 1d6 rounds as well. (Kaziki does speak Thaani natively.)

Furthermore, although Kaziki cannot directly read minds, arcane magic leaves a particular imprint upon the brain, and so Kaziki can cast a nearby wizard's memorized spells from within their own brain.

All of Kaziki's psionic abilities are blocked by any psychic defense or a thin sheet of lead.

Kaziki refuses to eat manna because without her psychic abilities she loses most of her intelligence. Given her refusal, the Edul'vans are terrified to have her live within their community for fear that she will bring the Masters of Thought down upon them. At the same time, Kaziki is afraid to travel too far from Edul'va because that would also cause her to lose intelligence as well.

**Kellek Rowe** (inhabitant of Edul'va)

See the Fraternity of Shadows Forum, "Community Idea: Settlements!" topic.

The leader of the human faction of Edul'va is Kellek Rowe, a human woodsman recently arrived from Kartakass. He would like to take Gult's place as leader of Edul'va. He believes that when he moves against Gult, all of the humans in the settlement will join him, but in truth many of the humans have no interest in a rebellion. Life is difficult enough without infighting, isn't it?

Boros Gyula came to Bluetspur with Kellek Rowe. Gyula is a more reasonable man than Rowe, and fortunately Rowe usually listens to him.

**Kuqo** (one of the Thirteen Survivors)

One of the Thirteen Survivors. Like Shalva, he went mad while writing about the illithids. Unlike Shalva, though, Kuqo's text is not poetic, merely opaque.

**Lidia Tanase** (ruineer)

An expatriate Barovian, now a member of the band of ruineers led by Yraliki. Her brother Tomaz is also part of Yraliki's band.

**Lirushe** (one of the Thirteen Survivors)

One of the Thirteen Survivors. Nicknamed "The Wise", although she never cared to be called such. Her text focused upon clairsentience.

**Melikish** (inhabitant of Azaax)

An ambitious young man who claims to be an illegitimate son of Zaaxul III.

Melikish possesses a unique wild talent which allows him to inflict 1d6 psychic damage upon a single target within 30'. Targets with psionic defenses gain

a wisdom check to avoid all damage, even if no defenses are currently active. Moreover, if a target does have a psionic defense active, then they roll with advantage. When using this talent, Haxhi's eyes appear violet, but otherwise they are dark.

**Mirjona** (inhabitant of Azaax)

An inhabitant of Azaax. Frequently serves as bodyguard to Zaaxul III. Now carries "Cymu's sword", which had been wielded by Zaaxul IV before his death.

Mirjona participated in the Second Release, and she witnessed the death of Zaaxul IV. She wishes that Zaaxul III would recover from his grief and lead Azaax properly again.

**Nelsku** (one of the Thirteen Survivors)

Nelsku was one of the Thirteen Survivors. He wrote one of the Thirteen Texts, focused upon psychoportation.

Nelsku simply vanished one day. Given his psionic specialty, none of the other Thirteen Survivors thought much of his disappearance, but they eventually grew concerned when he failed to return. In time they decided that he must have fallen victim to the Four-Fingered Ones somewhere upon his journeys.

**DREAD POSSIBILITY — TEMPORALPORTATION**

Perhaps Nelsku has actually psychoported himself into the future.

Or did he attempt to dreamwalk and get drawn into the Nightmare Lands?

**Orolahr** (githzerai monk/psionist)

A githzerai monk trapped in Bluetspur when a *rakkma* went badly astray. A companion to Grozirk.

Along with Grozirk, Orolahr helped organize and lead the Second Release. He is perhaps more willing to consider the shortcomings of their venture.



Orolahr rarely shows emotion. For that matter, he rarely feels any. Coldness is the best defense he has found against hopelessness. Orolahr would give his life fighting beside Grozigr, but any other being he would leave to die instead.

#### **Oskauga** (stone giant)

One of two young stone giants from Desolate Peaks who survived the Great Release. The other is Suold.

Following the deaths of their fellows at the hands of foreign adventurers, Suold and Oskauga have been hiding in the Usko-Farr'ev, too ashamed of their failure to return to the Desolate Peaks.

#### **Qualion Rathenas** (ruineer)

A member of the band of ruineers led by Yralki. He is an expatriate from Sithicus. He is also severely claustrophobic.

#### **Queen Hazel** (druid)

An Outlander druid gone mad from her lack of connection to a natural world. She now calls herself Queen Hazel, and she maintains a gigantic forest in a large cavern beneath Mount Grysl. Of course, most of the supposed plants are actually fungi, and most of the supposed animals are too. Much of the time she believes that they are true plants and animals.

Queen Hazel is not inherently wicked, just terrified by the unnatural world in which she has found herself. Visitors who treat her gently may be welcomed and treated well, at least as long as they do not disrupt her delusions. On the other hand, if she perceives a threat she will lash out violently.

Unfortunately she has many days where everything feels threatening to her.

Two ambulatory mushrooms defend Queen Hazel, even unto their own destruction. They should be treated as fungoid treants.

Queen Hazel's garden is a wonderful place to find fungus-related spell components. She won't even mind, assuming she is asked nicely and she isn't in one of her moods.

Even more crucially, the combination of Queen Hazel's delusions and her magic have altered the

fungi which grow in her garden. They contain nearly the same nutritional value as the plants and animals which they mimic. In particular, Queen Hazel's garden is the best place under Mount Grysl to find "fruits" and "vegetables".

Queen Hazel's garden has one other property of note: It is a dead zone for arcane resonance. Spells cast here—by Queen Hazel or anyone else—do not attract the attention of the illithids. Queen Hazel did not create this effect deliberately, nor does she realize that it occurs. The "creatures" and "flowers" of the garden appear to create the dead zone.

#### **DREAD POSSIBILITY — ROOT OF HER MADNESS**

Queen Hazel is the last surviving member of an Outlander adventuring party which was drawn into Bluetspur. The group knew nothing of Bluetspur's arcane resonance, and so they used high-level magic indiscriminately. Queen Hazel's companions were slaughtered in their very first encounter with an illithid patrol. She escaped only because of a desperate use of a magic item which allowed her to *transport via plants* once. The brief communion with the sparse flora of Bluetspur may have contributed to her fragile mental state.

#### **Ro** (pterrax)

The pterrax who is perhaps Thuxa's pet and perhaps her truest friend. It is only half the size of most pterraxes.

#### **Seldrig** (traitor to the Thaan)

See *Book of Sacrifices*, "The Illithid God-Brain", p.24-26.

A member of the ruling elite of Thaan who betrayed that city to become the God-Brain of Bluetspur.

#### **Shalva** (one of the Thirteen Survivors)

One of the Thirteen Survivors. Like Kuqo, she went mad while writing about the illithids. Her text is beautifully poetic and completely incomprehensible.

**Surold** (stone giant)

One of two young stone giants from Desolate Peaks who survived the Great Release. The other is Oskauga.

Following the deaths of their fellows at the hands of foreign adventurers, Surold and Oskauga have been hiding in the Usko-Farr'ev, too ashamed of their failure to return to the Desolate Peaks.

**Sytara** (inhabitant of Edul'va)

A Rasheman originally from Hazlan. Now an inhabitant of Edul'va. She participated in the Second Release.

**Tevin Dakken** (inhabitant of Mora)

An expatriate Kartakan now living in Mora. He is short and slight, not at all imposing. He can sing, of course, but he is not noticeably superior to the other citizens of Mora.

**DREAD POSSIBILITY — WOLF IN THE FOLD**

Varga Nora is not a wolfwere; Tevin Dakken is.

**Thuxa** (mul)

The tyrannical ruler of Sakka-gor. A foreigner from Kalidnay. The pterrax Ro is her constant companion.

For the most part, Thuxa appears to be a seven-foot-tall, umber-skinned human. (She is actually a mul, but because muls are virtually unknown in the Land of Mists, she is assumed to be human.) However, because her left arm and hand are reptilian, she is also frequently mistaken for a Shattered One. Even after many years living in Bluetspur, she remains thickly muscled and in apparent good health.

Like most inhabitants of Kalidnay, Thuxa has psionic abilities. In her case she is a powerful psychometabolist. However, Kalidnayan minds *feel* different from Yldi'Thaan or illithid minds, which makes her threatening to the Yldi'Thaan and illithids alike. If Thuxa's mental shields were not so strong, her presence would doubtless draw no end of attention.

Thuxa always wears a certain leather mask. It is rumored to be the source of her powers. (It is not.)

As a mul, Thuxa was born and bred to be a gladiator. She achieved considerable success in the arena of Kalidnay. However, the usual pattern for successful gladiators is to reach a peak and then either retire or else swiftly fall, if only because notoriety draws challengers. As a slave, Thuxa did not have the option of retirement, but her original owner decided to sell her in order to make one last chunk of profit before she made some fatal mistake in combat. To everyone's surprise, Thuxa was purchased by a nobleman never known for an interest in the arena. After her purchase, the nobleman told her that he was certain her success as a gladiator was partially due to her latent psionic ability, and he wished to train her and return her to the arena, demonstrating to other nobles that the Way of the Mind was a formidable enhancement to mere brute strength. Thuxa agreed (she had little choice), and she proved an adept student. She never did return to the arena, though. When she had learned enough to confront her new master, she killed him. Brute strength also has its place.

**DREAD POSSIBILITY — A DRAGON ASPIRANT**

In the grand tradition of Athasian sorcerer-kings, Thuxa desires to become a dragon. Her attempt to start the transformation involved the creation of a psychic network among several dozen people; everyone else was killed, but Thuxa caught the attention of a distant qabal of illithids. Upon her second attempt, the illithids were ready, and they drew her into Bluetspur. They expected a six-against-one psychic battle. They did not expect to a physical brawl against someone with mental shielding which allowed her to ignore their attacks.

Having failed twice, Thuxa is now proceeding more carefully before her next attempt to become a dragon. She intends to snare as many people from the nnarls beneath Mount Grysl as she can.

**Tomaz Tanase** (ruineer)

An expatriate Barovian, now a member of the band of ruineers led by Yralki. He was born a caliban. His sister Lidia is also part of Yralki's band.

**Trellin Hev** (priest of Edul'va)

Trellin Hev has been the spiritual leader in Edul'va for decades. He is now an old man, the oldest in the settlement, still healthy in body but losing his mind to age. In truth, he could not fulfill his duties without the aid of his assistant Jenyi.

Once per week (as best a week may be judged in the caverns and tunnels), the Edul'vans gather to listen to Trellin Hev read from the Sacred Text. Sometimes he stumbles over the words. The Edul'vans don't mind. Trellin Hev has their respect regardless. Very few in Edul'va live so long.

In truth, Trellin cannot read a word of the Sacred Text, for it is written in Thaani in its original script. (Although he speaks Thaani, its writing has escaped him in recent years.) When he preaches, he makes up a "reading" based upon vaguely remembered teachings of the Morninglord. Much of what he preaches makes little sense, but the Edul'vans don't mind. Trellin's sermons are a good opportunity for the community to gather.

Trellin Hev was originally a priest of the Morninglord in Barovia. In his distant youth he travelled to Immol and fell in love with a Thaani girl. The two of them left Immol—he no longer remembers why—and ended up in Bluetspur, where they were lucky to stumble across Edul'va. He recalls many happy years with his Thaani wife. He is convinced that Jenyi is actually his granddaughter.

**DREAD POSSIBILITY — THE SIXTH TEXT OF THAANI**

The Sacred Text of the Edul'vans is actually *Evhe'tluch Thaani*, the Sixth Text of Thaani, which was written by Genke of the Thirteen Survivors.

*Evhe'tluch Thaani* is largely focused upon the psychometabolic psionic discipline.

**Vahktang** (inhabitant of the deeper nnarls)

An Yldi'Thaan psionist from Ga'i'ya, one of the deeper nnarls beneath Mount Grysl. He participated in the Second Release, acting as third-in-command after Grozigr and Orolahr. Like Grozigr, Vahktang considers the Second Release an unquestionable success, but then Ga'i'ya was in a better position to absorb Yldi'Thaan refugees than most settlements.

**Varga Nora** (inhabitant of Mora)

An expatriate Kartakan now living in Mora. She just might be a werewolf. She just might be the true power in the community. Certainly she is a more subtle and patient person than Juhasz Gergo.

Varga Nora has the finest voice in Mora, and she plays the lute as well. As the finest voice in Mora, she is perpetually in Juhasz Gergo's inner circle.

**Xhafer** (brain in a jar)

The psyche at the heart of Melesku'ta, driving its *nothing here* projection.

Unfortunately, Xhafer has gotten lonely over the many decades. Once someone (non-illithid, non-Yldi'Thaan) enters the outpost, he will divert psychic energy to keeping his new "friends" present and content. He doesn't mean to hurt them, even indirectly. He's just terribly lonely.

**Yralki** (ruineer)

The leader of a band of ruineers which also includes Qualion Rathenas, Lidia Tanase, and Tomaz Tanase. He is an Yldi'Thaan with some psionic abilities, including the ability to heal himself by lapsing into a recuperative coma.

**Zaaxul I** (founder of Azaax)

The founder of Azaax after the community where he had lived was betrayed by Shattered Ones and destroyed by illithids. Upon his death, Azaax was then ruled by his son Zaaxul II, starting a dynasty which persists to this day.

**Zaaxul II** (former headman of Azaax)

The previous headman of Azaax. The second of his line. The father of Zaaxul III. Got old, went mad, was

killed by his son. It's the circle of Bluetspurean life.

#### **Zaaxul III** (headman of Azaax)

The current headman of Azaax. The third of his line. The father of Zaaxul IV. Possible father of Haxhi and Melikish. Since the death of Zaaxul IV, he has declared no new heir.

#### **Zaaxul IV** (heir to Azaax)

The heir to Azaax. The fourth of his line. The son of Zaaxul III.

Zaaxul IV was killed in the aftermath of the Second Release. He carried the weapon known as "Cymu's sword" until his death, after which it was passed on to Mirjona.

## FACTIONS, CABALS, AND SECRET SOCIETIES

### RUINEERS

Nomadic bands of Yldi'Thaan who roam from ruin to ruin, seeking lost treasures and the secrets of their ancestors. Most ruineers have contacts with communities beneath the surface.

#### *The Public Face*

Ruineers hide from the illithids, of course, but not from the Yar'Thaaladan. Indeed, most Yar'Thaaladan treat them as conquering heroes, somewhat in the hope that the Ruineers will share their treasures.

#### *The Hidden Face*

Although individual Ruineers may possess secrets that they want to remain hidden, bands of Ruineers as a whole are entirely forthright about their mission.

#### *Allies and Enemies*

The illithids are their foremost enemies. Most Ruineers are at best skeptical of (if not outright hostile to) Shattered Ones. They are willing to work with foreigners, but foreigners are always considered inferior to the Yldi'Thaan.

## THIRTEEN SURVIVORS

See *Forbidden Lore: Cryptic Allegiances*.

The Thirteen Survivors of legend are those Yldi'Thaan who escaped from Bluetspur to Immol in 788BC. They wrote the Thirteen Texts of Thaan and then scattered to the corners of the Land of Mists in 590BC.

Geographical Note: At the time of the scattering of the Thirteen Survivors, the Core was much smaller than it is today. Bluetspur bordered upon Barovia and Forlorn. Upon Barovia's northern border stood Keening and Arak. Darkon occupied the far north. Mordent clung to Darkon's western edge. Over the next twenty-five years, Gundarak, Indivia, and then Kartakass formed. Off in the Mists, Har'Akir, Paridon, Sebu, Kalidnay, and Pharazia could be found. Vechor, Sanguinia, Shadowborn Manor, and Nidala would all appear shortly thereafter. Therefore, some of the Thirteen Texts might reasonably be found in any of those domains.

Although the Thirteen Survivors scattered across the Land of Mists, they are included in this gazetteer because of their close ties to Bluetspur. Besides, several of them were drawn back by the Mists.

#### *The Public Face*

Fearing that the illithids would track them down, the Thirteen Survivors strove to avoid calling attention to themselves, although the Den'ni'Thaan of Immol knew who they were.

#### *The Hidden Face*

The Thirteen Survivors included the following Yldi'Thaan:

- ❖ Aldu
- ❖ Genke
- ❖ Izu'un
- ❖ Lirushe
- ❖ Kuqo
- ❖ Nelsku
- ❖ Shalva



### Allies and Enemies

Like all Yldi'Thaan (and any other right-thinking people), the Thirteen Survivors were steadfastly opposed to the illithids.

## NEW MAGIC ITEMS

### BEACON CRYSTALS

Beacon crystals are created by the illithids using psitech copied from the Thaan in the hope of obscuring their actual origins. They appear as glassy shards, usually the approximate size of a human hand.

A beacon crystal has three modes: quiescent, attractor, and transporter:

- ❖ *Quiescent Mode*: In the first mode, the beacon crystal does not radiate any form of magic. However, when someone with actual or latent psionic ability draws within 10' of the crystal, it transitions to attractor mode.
- ❖ *Attractor Mode*: Anyone within 10' must pass a Will save, except *subtracting* instead of *adding* their WIS modifier. Those who fail become fascinated with the crystal.
- ❖ *Transporter Mode*: Finally, an indetermined amount of time later, the crystal switches briefly to transporter mode, teleporting every sapient creature within 20' to the surface of Bluetspur. (Unless the crystal is activating in a domain with closed borders, in which case the teleportation fails.) The crystal itself does not teleport. It simply reverts to quiescent mode.

Except in quiescent mode, the beacon crystal radiates magic. This radiance is artificial, part of the trap which the illithids have set. However, in conditions where *detect magic* would ordinarily reveal the relevant school of magic, instead it reveals the artificiality of the magic. As such, canny adventurers may recognize that danger is present.

### LIGHTNING CANNON

An example of the fusion of magic and psionics, lightning cannons are rarely found anywhere but

Melesku'ta. While not all of that outpost's armament still functions, the front wall of Melesku'ta has three working cannons, while the back wall has two. Removing a lightning cannon from its mount would likely ruin the device and would certainly disconnect it from its trigger mechanism.

Each lightning cannon functions as if it casts an 8d6 *lightning bolt* every third round. Each cannon has a maximum 4d4 charges, and it recharges at a rate of 1 charge per hour.

### MORLACK'S SWORD

A longsword +1 claimed by the community of Edul'va. It was brought to Edul'va by a foreigner named Morlack, and it has borne his name ever since his passing.

Why does a mere +1 longsword warrant an entry in this article? Because even commonplace magic is rare in Bluetspur. And because calling Morlack's Sword by name is the best way to honor Morlack for bringing his sword into Bluetspur, where it can continue to defend Edul'va down through the generations.

### TELEKINESIS GRENADES

Telekinesis grenades (commonly called "teke grenades") are a type of psionic item occasionally found in Thaan ruins. Like most Thaan psitech, they are constructed from psionically charged crystal.

Teke grenades are similar to the beads from a *necklace of missiles* from 2nd edition or the *necklace of fireballs* from 3rd and 5th editions. Unlike those magic items, telekinesis grenades have a hemispherical area of effect, and they cause force damage instead of fire damage. Typically 1d8 grenades are found at a time.

Outside of Bluetspur, teke grenades grow increasingly unstable. They have a cumulative 5% chance per day of spontaneously triggering. They may also trigger upon a sudden forceful impact. Fortunately for anyone carrying a grenade, the grenade emits an increasingly high-pitched whine as it grows unstable.

## THE THIRTEEN TEXTS OF THAAN

The following information is known about the *Thirteen Texts of Thaan*:

#	Title	Author	Subject	Current Location
??	???	Izu'un	telepathy	Bluetspur — Thuch-Kaat
??	???	???	psionic combat	???
??	???	Lirushe	clairsentience	???
??	???	???	psychokinesis	???
5	???	Nelsku	psychoportation	Nightmare Lands
6	Evhe'tluch Thaan (Book of the Eclipse of the Thaan)	Genke	psychometabolism	Bluetspur — Edul'va
??	Book of Thaan-Naagaaru	???	???	retrieved from Bluetspur in 637bc
??	???	Aldu	Thaan history	???
??	???	Kuqo	???	???
??	???	Shalva	???	???
11	Aark'tluch Thaan	???	illithid lore	???
??	???	???	???	???
13	???	???	metapsionics	???

Legend holds that all thirteen texts are necessary to unlock their full power, and only then will the mind flayers be driven out of Thaan.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — THE TRUTH OF THE TEXTS

Unfortunately, legend has run far ahead of reality here. Most of the texts contain valuable information about Bluetspur and its inhabitants, yes, but only half of the texts describe psionic disciplines in sufficient detail to allow a psionist or even a wild talent to expand their power. In other words, the Thirteen Texts are not actually the mystical fix-all solution that legend claims they are. Not even when combined.

Another truth of the matter is that none of the Thirteen Survivors had enough time to finish writing their texts before illithid minions tracked them down in Immol. If they had, then they would have used the Texts! Some of the survivors finished their texts after scattering, but some of the texts were never completed.

### THUXA'S MASK

Thuxa, the Tyrant-Queen of Sakka-gor, always wears a leather mask stained a deep red. (Stained with blood, many say, but it's actually not.)

The mask is a psionic item, not a true magic item. It offers two benefits. First, it provides +2 *protection*,

improving armor class and saving throws. Second, it provides its wearer with a reserve of an additional 20 PSPs, which activates only when the wearer uses all of her own natural PSPs.

In other words, Thuxa's mask is useful, but it's not truly the source of her power.

## NEW MONSTERS

### HOPE LIGHTS

<b>Climate/Terrain</b>	Bluetspur
<b>Frequency</b>	Very Rare
<b>Organization</b>	Swarm
<b>Activity Cycle</b>	Any
<b>Diet</b>	Psychovore
<b>Intelligence</b>	Low (5-7)
<b>Treasure</b>	Nil
<b>Alignment</b>	Neutral
<b>No. Appearing</b>	1d4
<b>Armor Class</b>	0
<b>Movement</b>	Fl 12 (A)
<b>Hit Dice</b>	5
<b>THACO</b>	15
<b>No. of Attacks</b>	1
<b>Damage/Attack</b>	Special
<b>Special Attacks</b>	PSP Drain
<b>Special Defenses</b>	Spell Immunity, Invisibility
<b>Magic Resistance</b>	Nil
<b>Size</b>	T (6" diameter)
<b>Morale</b>	Unsteady (5-7)
<b>XP Value</b>	800

Before the Great Upheaval, travellers upon the surface of Bluetspur attested to the presence of a phenomenon known as the "hope light" or the "will o'mind". (For example, see *Realms of Terror*, p.64-65.) Much like the will o'wisp, these phantom lights float aimlessly above the broken terrain of Bluetspur.

The name "hope light" was given by newcomers to Bluetspur desperate for signs of civilization.

Much like the will o'wisp, hope lights can become *invisible* at will unless involved in combat. When visible, they manifest in a great variety of colors, slowly changing hues as they wander. Regardless of whether they are visible, anyone who is psychically sensitive feels a mental prickliness at their presence.

Subsequent to the Great Upheaval, hope lights have grown exceedingly rare. Recent sources fail to mention them at all.

### Combat

Hope lights have exactly one attack: Upon a successful hit, they drain 1d10 PSPs from their victims. In fact, they often swarm whichever nearby target has the most available psionic strength. Hope lights can cause no damage to non-psychic people, and they will ignore such individuals altogether.

Although hope lights are vulnerable to non-magical weapons, most spells have no effect upon them. Spells such as *darkness* will drive them away but cause no harm.

After draining 20 or more PSPs, a will o'mind becomes sated and will casually depart.

### Habitat/Society

Hope lights are found in Bluetspur, although there is nothing to prevent them from inhabiting other lands where psionics are widespread enough to provide them with sustenance. Although most reports describe hope lights floating upon the surface, they exist underground as well.

Hope lights wander in small swarms, seeking psychic creatures to feed upon. They do not show particular signs of society other than proximity.

According to one theory, hope lights are the ghosts of psychics who died within Bluetspur. Of course, if this theory is true, then there should be more hope lights as time passes, not fewer.

### Ecology

Hope lights subsist on psychic energy. Both the Yldi'Thaan and the illithids find them dangerous nuisances. While hope lights cannot kill someone directly, they can leave them psychically defenseless.

### MOLLUSCOID

<b>Climate/Terrain</b>	Bluetspur
<b>Frequency</b>	Uncommon
<b>Organization</b>	Colony
<b>Activity Cycle</b>	Any
<b>Diet</b>	Omnivore
<b>Intelligence</b>	Animal (1)
<b>Treasure</b>	Nil
<b>Alignment</b>	Neutral
<b>No. Appearing</b>	10d10

<b>Armor Class</b>	10
<b>Movement</b>	3, Sw 12
<b>Hit Dice</b>	½
<b>THACO</b>	20
<b>No. of Attacks</b>	1
<b>Damage/Attack</b>	1d4-3
<b>Special Attacks</b>	See Below
<b>Special Defenses</b>	None
<b>Magic Resistance</b>	Nil
<b>Size</b>	S (6"-24")
<b>Morale</b>	Unreliable (2)
<b>XP Value</b>	0

The name "molluscoid" is given to a number of similar creatures found across Bluetspur. In all cases, molluscoids are soft-bodied invertebrates. Like so many Bluetspurean creatures, they possess four tentacles surrounding their mouths. While their size varies among subspecies, their bodies generally range from 6" to 12" long with tentacles doubling their length.

#### Combat

Most molluscoids are harmless to human-sized creatures. However, some notable exceptions do exist. The blue-ringed molluscoid, for example, has a deadly venomous bite. The inky molluscoid ejects a stream of liquid which may blind its foes.

#### Habitat/Society

Molluscoids are commonly found in the Bru'Spaa, a lake in southwestern Bluetspur, but they also may be found in the Otl'Spaa or any other permanent body of water in Bluetspur. Unlike terrestrial octopi or squid, molluscoids are adapted only to freshwater environments.

As a species molluscoids survive using a technique known as *having lots and lots of offspring*. After mating, males die. Females deposit strings of fertilized eggs in rocky crevices for protection from predators, and then they defend the eggs while they develop. Eventually the many eggs hatch into many hungry molluscoids, who proceed to devour their mother and each other. Even despite the carnage of birth, many molluscoids typically survive to mature, mate, and begin the cycle anew.

#### Ecology

Molluscoids provide a crucial source of protein for creatures of Bluetspur, including the inhabitants of Kraol. They live primarily upon algae and each other

#### SLIME WYVERN

<b>Climate/Terrain</b>	Bluetspur
<b>Frequency</b>	Very Rare
<b>Organization</b>	Herd
<b>Activity Cycle</b>	Any
<b>Diet</b>	Carnivore
<b>Intelligence</b>	Non- (0)
<b>Treasure</b>	Nil
<b>Alignment</b>	Neutral
<b>No. Appearing</b>	1d4
<b>Armor Class</b>	6
<b>Movement</b>	9, Fl 9
<b>Hit Dice</b>	15
<b>THACO</b>	5
<b>No. of Attacks</b>	2
<b>Damage/Attack</b>	2d12/2d10
<b>Special Attacks</b>	See below
<b>Special Defenses</b>	Nil
<b>Magic Resistance</b>	Nil
<b>Size</b>	G (25' long)
<b>Morale</b>	Fanatic (17-18)
<b>XP Value</b>	13,000

Slime wyverns resemble winged purple worms, although their color is a mottled purple-pink. They were largely responsible for the fall of the Yldi'Thaan's two flying fortresses, and so they have become creatures of terrible legend to the surviving Yldi'Thaan.

#### Combat

Slime wyverns have no eyes, and of course their tremorsense does them no good when they are flying. Instead they rely upon psychic images conveyed by their illithid handlers.

Like purple worms, slime wyverns attack by biting (and potentially swallowing) and by stinging. Their bite causes 2d12 damage, and a critical hit indicates that the victim has been swallowed whole (assuming the the victim is 8' tall or smaller). The stinger causes 2d10 damage, and it injects a poison which causes 1d4 WIS damage and the loss of 1d6 PSPs for psionic



characters.

After suffering its first wound, the slime wyvern secretes a protective mucus across its entire body. While bludgeoning weapons are unaffected, piercing and slashing weapons slide away, causing half damage.

The protective mucus can be washed away by a sufficient quantity of water, or else it hardens after 10d6 minutes and then crumbles away.

### Habitat/Society

Slime wyverns are naturally solitary creatures. When not involved in combat maneuvers, they must be kept in separate caverns to keep them from attacking each other. Only in combat, when they are under the steady control of their illithid handlers, do slime wyverns act in a coordinated fashion.

### Ecology

Slime wyverns were bred by the illithids as weapons in the war against the Yldi'Thaan. As such, slime wyverns don't have a natural place in the ecology of Bluetspur.

However, given their significant size and hunger, slime wyverns have an equally significant effect upon the local ecology. Fortunately they spend much of their lives sleeping, and the illithids post under-handlers to telepathically prolong the slime wyverns' somnolence.

## THOUGHT TRACKER

<b>Climate/Terrain</b>	Bluetspur
<b>Frequency</b>	Uncommon
<b>Organization</b>	Pack
<b>Activity Cycle</b>	Any
<b>Diet</b>	Carnivorous
<b>Intelligence</b>	Semi- (2-4)
<b>Treasure</b>	Nil
<b>Alignment</b>	Neutral
<b>No. Appearing</b>	2d4
<b>Armor Class</b>	6
<b>Movement</b>	15
<b>Hit Dice</b>	2+2
<b>THACO</b>	19
<b>No. of Attacks</b>	1
<b>Damage/Attack</b>	0 or 1d4

<b>Special Attacks</b>	Paralysis
<b>Special Defenses</b>	Nil
<b>Magic Resistance</b>	Nil
<b>Size</b>	S (3' long)
<b>Morale</b>	Steady (11-12)
<b>XP Value</b>	120

Thought trackers appear similar to greyhounds, except that they have doubled hocks and four tentacles instead of muzzles. Just as humans raise certain breeds of dog specifically for their hunting abilities, so do some illithids raise thought trackers. However, whereas dogs rely upon scent, thought trackers rely upon psionic activity. In particular, thought trackers are able to discern psionics at a greater distance than even intellect devourers.

Close inspection reveals that thought tracker tentacles more strongly resemble the tentacles of a carrion crawler than those of a mind flayer. However, very few people ever have the chance to inspect a thought tracker's tentacles so closely.

### Combat

Thought trackers attack first with their tentacles. (All four tentacles make a single attack.) Although the tentacles cause no damage, anyone struck by them must save vs. paralyzation or be paralyzed for 2d4 rounds.

Once their prey has been paralyzed, thought trackers instinctively want to attack with their stubby beaks, automatically causing 1d4 slashing damage per round. However, most of them have been trained to avoid feeding and turn their attention to other, non-paralyzed prey if so commanded by their handlers.

### Habitat/Society

Like dogs, thought trackers live in packs, usually guided by a mind flayer handler.

### Ecology

Thought trackers are bred and raised by the illithids. Theoretically a thought tracker could escape and live on its own, but it might have trouble finding sufficient meat to survive.

## REFERENCES

The following canonical Ravenloft adventure modules and supplements contain useful information about Bluetspur:

- ❖ *Realm of Terror*
- ❖ *Forbidden Lore: Cryptic Allegiances*, "Ildi'Thaan"
- ❖ *Domains of Dread*
- ❖ *Ravenloft Campaign Setting*

The following netbook articles are less canonical but equally interesting:

- ❖ *Book of Souls*, "The Realms Beyond"
- ❖ *Book of Sacrifices*, "The Illithid God-Brain"

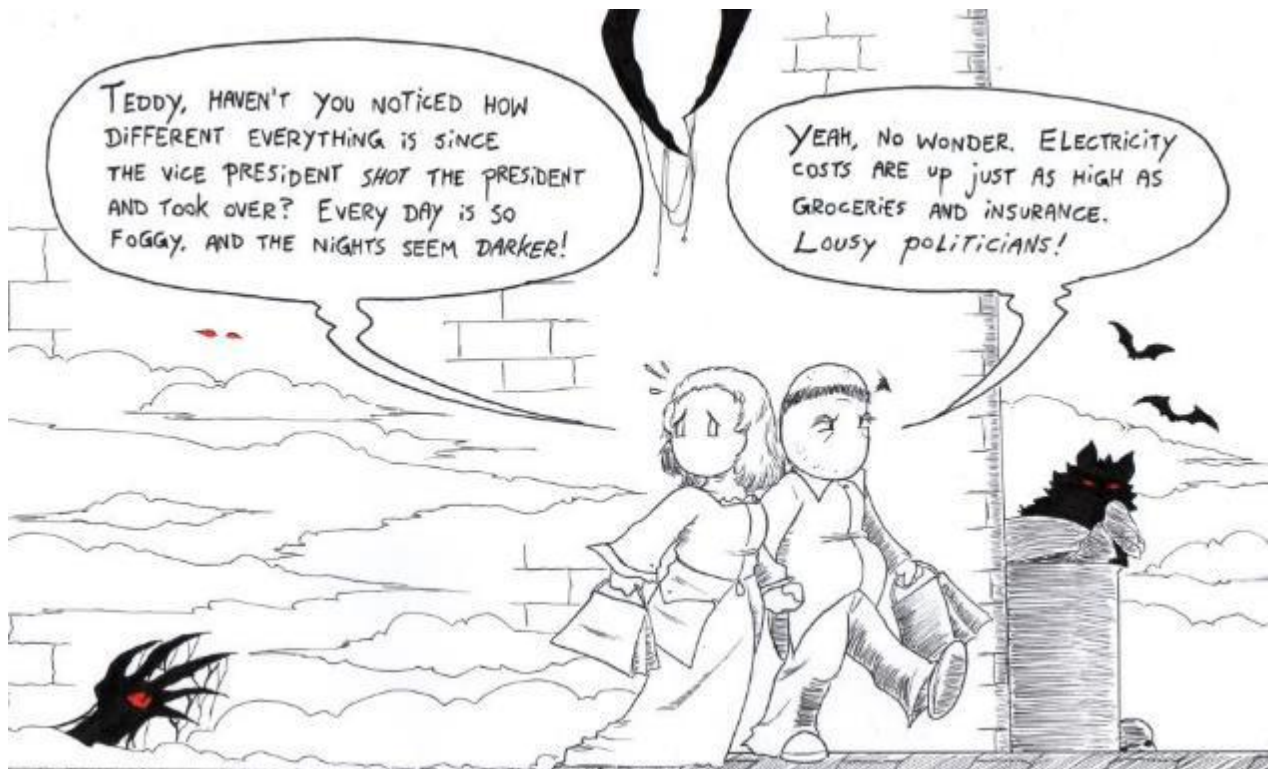
Two of the Thirteen Texts, the *Aark'tluch Thaan* and *Book of Thaan-Naagaaru*, first appeared in the Teeny Tiny Tales of Terror on the Fraternity of Shadows forum at :

<https://www.fraternityofshadows.com/forum/viewtopic.php?p=55572> and <https://fraternityofshadows.com/forum/viewtopic.php?p=53344> respectively.

In addition, despite not being published as part of the Ravenloft product line, the *Complete Psionics Handbook* and *The Illithiad* are also valuable references.

Finally, I found inspiration in the following tidbits gleaned from the Internet:

- ❖ [Culinary Ethnography: A Discussion of Eating in the Underdark](#)
- ❖ [Prehistoric Arts and Crafts](#)



# Teddy and Sammy

by Helen McLaughlin Art



# THE ARCAÑE AGE OF DARKON

BY MATT "STRAHDSBUDDY" DOYLE

*(Races of demihumans are referred to as "ethnicities" and "tribes" in this document.)*

The Darkonians arrived with Darcalus Rex in 383 BC. They found a large, lushly forested land, dominated by the mighty Vuchar River. From their initial foothold on the Jagged Coast, Darcalus led them inland, splitting the realm like a knife, and established a capitol on the site the four native tribes had been using as a trading post. The Darkonians brought the other tribes to heel, but managed to establish a government where the cultures could exist side by side, and even independently of the centralized Darkonian feudal system in isolated areas.

Before the arrival of Darcalus, the realm was shared, but dominated mostly by the Nevuchar, translated literally as "People of the River." The Nevuchar are tall, sometimes up to six and a half feet, with long, slender limbs and fingers. Their skin is pale, as is their hair, with light-colored eyes—gray and violet are not uncommon.

Before the arrival of Azalin, the Nevuchar lands stretched further north, including their capital at Cannuine and the mighty tower called Histirion. Their control is still strongest in the north and east, from the Nezron River to the Mountains of Misery, and east of the Khoux River. The Cities of Neblus, Maykle, Sidnar and Nevuchar Springs all still show signs of the Nevuchar style of architecture, which tends to leave living trees as a part of their structures. They are skilled foresters and gardeners, as well as woodworkers and herbalists. They are

cultural vegetarians, eschewing meat as unnecessary since so much is already provided by the forests.

As their power waned, the Nevuchar negotiated positions of power in the government the Darkonians were creating. As such, there are still many of them in positions of influence, though few in direct power.

The Nevuchar worship a large pantheon of gods, mostly in secret due to the influence of the Eternal Order of the Grave. Their main goddess is called Sehann, and she is said to reside in the moon, which the Nevuchar venerate for guiding souls to eternal rest in the Grey Realm. Second to Sehann is Mestarine, who encourages the Nevuchar to be independent and stand on their own knowledge rather than depending on others. The Nevuchar tongue is known for its lilting rhythms and sing-song sound, and it can tend to put non-speakers to sleep.

Geography protected the Tempites from ever being fully dominated by either the Darkonians or the Nevuchar, who called them the Polda, meaning "strong." Rather than taking the compliment, the Tempites dramatically translated the appellation to mean stubborn or inflexible, and ironically proved their own theory to be correct. Their traditional lands began between the Corvus and Tempe Rivers and climbed southeast into the Mountains of Misery. Since the Great Upheaval, they have gleefully expanded south into the rocky barrens around Mount Nirka, discovering artifacts left by the Sand Scourge of 588.



Tempites are of average height with thick builds, quite the opposite of the Nevuchar in nearly every way. Their hair grows in many colors, but is uniformly coarse and often worn long, especially in the form of beards and mustaches, which are typically decorated with precious metals. Tempites have tan to brown skin-tones, and their eyes are either blue or brown.

Stone and metal are the media of the Tempites, and they dig their homes directly into mountainsides, creating very defensible, if a bit unwelcoming, cities lit day and night by torch-fire and filled with the echo of pick on stone. Tempites raise hogs and coarse grains, and every meal is accompanied by beer, giving them a reputation as drunken miners. Their gruff demeanor toward outsiders has done little to endear them to travelers, but the quality of their smithing makes the effort of getting it worth a few rough words.

The Tempites have a strong cultural need to protect their women and children from other tribes. Many view this as a backwards and discriminatory practice, but the Tempites insist it is because they value their women so much, they dare not let anything happen to them. They say this extends back to the Arcane Age, when the Nevuchar captured families of the Tempite noblemen to help leverage their negotiations—an allegation the Nevuchar dismiss out of hand. Because of this, Tempite women are rarely seen outside the home, and when they do venture out, they tend to wear false beards and disguise themselves as Tempite men during their quick, silent errands. A few stories among other tribes revolve around this tradition, and it is sometimes joked that there are no Tempite women, and the hard-headed Tempites are just hewn from stone when there is work to be done.

Tempites are monotheistic, worshipping Amman, whose scripture speaks highly of those who travel and explore, leaving the safety of their clan behind. Despite this, Tempites are known to stick together and the majority of their travel occurs in a downward direction as they seek veins of metal in their beloved caverns and mines.

The Tempite language is full of clipped consonants and a steady rhythm of syllables, which tends to demand the attention of listeners. Tempites eagerly learn the languages of their neighbors to conduct trade, but it is considered a serious cultural breach to teach their language to outsiders.

Once the most numerous of the native tribes, the Kuduk ranged across the realm in the years after the fall of Darcalus. They are called the Halamat by the Nevuchar, which translates as “fish eater.” The description is incomplete, however, as the Kuduk have voracious appetites that bely their slight frames. The Kuduk are practical alchemists, turning every plant or animal they encounter into something that can be devoured, spiced, imbibed, smoked, pressed, or rubbed on the skin.

The Darkonians split Kuduk lands more or less in half, and the two main Kuduk towns, Rivalis and Delagia, have taken very different paths culturally. Delagians are rustic boaters who pull a living from Lake Korst, while Rivalisians tend to avoid water at all costs and have leaned heavily on their contact with Lamordia to become academics and craftsmen. Indeed, those Kuduk from swampy lands near the Vuchar’s southern banks chose to pull up stakes and look for new homes, and they can be found in great numbers further south in the Core.

Kuduk are short and thin when young, but their eating habits catch up with them in early middle age, when they become plump and tend to give up physical activity to take up more sedentary hobbies like gardening or genealogy. It is rare to find a Kuduk with any facial hair at all, but their curly hair rarely falls off their heads, even well into old age. Eyes tend toward green, hazel and brown. A Kuduk makes friends easily, and they rarely forget a favor or a debt, although they are polite regarding both.

Kuduk religion focuses on an afterlife directly opposed to the idea of the Grey Realm’s quiet repose. Rather, their pantheon of gods host an eternal feast with drinking and practical jokes. A

Kuduk who dies is said to have been “invited”, and their funerals tend to look like their version of the afterlife for at least a couple days before work needs to get done again. In mixed company, Kuduk still remain somber regarding death, so as not to offend.

Kuduk speak a clear tongue that seems made for singing, a testament to how many of its nouns actually rhyme. The language is easily picked up by outsiders, and other languages have a tendency to draw slang from it in areas where the Kuduk have migrated.

The Forest of Shadows is home to the Chzemel, who the Nevuchar refer to as the Ambal, which simply means “skilled.” Their capital was at Nartok, although only a few score still remain there, as the war-footing caused by the Dead Man’s Campaigns did not mesh with their peaceful nature. Hence Mayvin is the last city that can truly be considered Chzemel territory, and they have followed the lead of the Kuduk and migrated to other nations. They are particularly fond of spending some time in Lamordia, where their skill for invention is appreciated by that nation’s scientists.

Chzemel tend to be short, with average builds. They go bald early in life, but keep finely manicured mustaches or pointy beards—though rarely both. They are not overly athletic, but their hands are dexterous and well suited for fine work, such as gem-cutting or working with machinery. Eyes are usually dark brown, but rarely a baby will be born with steel blue eyes. This is considered lucky for the family, however a blue-eyed Chzemel of either sex will be thought to have a streak of unfaithfulness — this belief is mostly unfounded.

Chzemel are bookish and sometimes eccentric, throwing themselves into their work and hobbies with equal vigor, sometimes to the exclusion of all else. They tend to marry late in life, having small families. Chzemel diet consists mostly of beef and dairy, and they prefer barley bread to that made from wheat.

The Chzemel deity is called Fland, and he has several brothers who may or may not be divine themselves. Fland teaches that nothing in life should be taken too seriously, and warns that obsession is right around the corner from eccentricity. Still, Fland’s priests sponsor feats of engineering and invention to set the Chzemel apart from other tribes in their innovation and daring.

Their language is a staggering combination of consonants, where the vowels are often implied in a maddening mishmash of sound, and the dense lexicon of tenses and noun genders makes the learning curve steep for non-native speakers.

The Darkonians, mighty conquerors from beyond the sea, have made Darkon their own. The Nevuchar dubbed them Ciryam when they arrived, the “shipbuilders” or “seafarers.” From their foothold on what would become the city of Martira Bay, they expanded Il Aluk and built Karg and Viaki in defiance of the soft, marshy ground that surrounded them.

Taller than average, the Darkonians have a proud bearing and athletic build. Hair ranges from blond to black, and tends to be straight. Eyes of all colors can be found, and they always burn with the fire of leadership.

The Eternal Order of the Grave sprung from Darkonian interpretation of the Nevuchars’ original creation myth, taking place in the Grey Realm of the not-yet-born. The upstart Church of the Overseer has no such connection to any specific myths discovered when the first Darkonian ships made landfall. Today, both religions are losing ground to the foreign Church of Ezra, especially since the founding of the Darkonian sect in (ironically) Nevuchar Springs, trampling the old ways of the Nevuchar on its way to prominence.

The Darkonian language is known for its flexibility, and it is said the words in a sentence can have their order scrambled without changing the meaning of the statement.

Darkonians enjoy law, and enforcing laws. The government they created is a successfully layered feudalism that does not tout any ethnicity as above another, but they tend to sway policy just by their sheer numbers. Darkonian numbers are inflated by a mystical condition that has existed since the rise of Azalin Rex in 579. Namely, the memory-leeching phenomenon that convinces people who spend time in Darkon that they are from Darkon. While rarely discussed due to a social taboo on the topic, this phenomenon has caused census numbers to skew significantly toward the Darkonian ethnicity in Darkon.

The description above seems very general, but there are several omissions that may point to a Darkonian lineage being imagined. First is hair color; the original Darkonians did not have any redheads among their number, and silver before middle age is also unusual, although it may indicate there is Nevuchar parentage mixed in. Also, Darkonian hair is straight, so coarse or curly hair is another clue that the individual may have been adopted by the realm (although again, this could indicate Kuduk or Tempite blood.) Next is eyes, which vary in color, but not in shape. Because of this, any almond-shaped eyes are likely not from Darkonian parentage. One could look at skin tone, which on a Darkonian is light tan and bronzes nicely in sunlight. Pale, olive or brown skin is a major indicator that an individual may not be of Darkonian stock. A sure method to verify Darkonian ethnicity is to look at the toes; the second and third are the longest and equidistant past the big toe. Sandals are uncommon in Darkon, however, so this can often be difficult to verify. Consider the Valachani, whose physical traits are very homogenous due to their isolated location before the Great Upheaval, and are particularly unique among the other ethnicities of the Core. If a Valachani were to be adopted by Darkon, he or she would stand out from other Darkonians physically, but social norms would prevent the neighbors from pointing this out.

The realm tends to modify the memories of people on an individual basis. Outlanders who stumble in from the Mists, sailors abandoning the sea to stay with a lover, and even a branded Falkovnian left behind by his unit are the types of people usually claimed by Darkon. There are a few examples, however, of groups of people that have been absorbed by Darkon. The largest, and possibly most tragic, are the group of people known by archaeologists as “Arakites,” which is a distinction made to show they were from the doomed domain of Arak. The Arak are actually what the Shadow Fey call themselves, after their martyred leader, Arak the Erlking.

The human population that existed when the domain of Arak formed called themselves the Daoine, which meant simply “the People.” Daoine society had reached a technological and magical level that has yet to be replicated in the Land of Mists, and they single-handedly helped stave off famine in Barovia and Mordent during their brief history by sharing some of these secrets with their neighbors. The mighty cities of the Daoine were destroyed in 588 during an event known as the Sand Scourge. All living creatures in the domain were killed during this calamity, and it caused a fair amount of xenophobia in neighboring domains. However, the trade relationships between the Daoine and their neighbors were such that a few enclaves were outside the affected area when the sandstorm hit. A large number of them were in Darkon, and although they had an affinity for their own kind, within a generation, due mostly to the memory phenomenon, their culture had been subsumed by the Darkonians and their archaic language became extinct.

An observant person will easily notice Daoine features: pale skin, a high number of redheads and a thick accent which is attributed to living so close to the Tempites, although there are hardly any Tempite modals that would lead to distortion of the Darkonian tongue in such a way.

In their heyday, the Daoine considered their own souls to be a perfect representation of their actions in life and worshiped no specific gods, but they did quickly adopt the pantheon brought north by their Forfarian allies, and this may be the reason for the resurgence of the worship of Belenus in nearby Tepest. Daoine artifacts litter the windswept crags of the Mountains of Misery, and Darkon's annexation of this region after the Great Upheaval has made mountaineering, spelunking, and archaeology the newest fad in active scholarship following the destruction of the old university system during the Requiem.

The newest tribe in Darkon did not exactly arrive in the kingdom like most nomads; they were already there. When the Requiem destroyed Il Aluk and its inhabitants became the walking dead, the city was renamed Necropolis. For a long time, it was assumed all the creatures in the Slain City were servants of the entity calling itself Death, however it soon became apparent that many of the tragic inhabitants retained their own minds, and they were going about their lifeless existence in whatever way made sense.

Originally called Necropolitan, the free-minded residents referred to their condition—and themselves—as Insepulta: the Unburied. Isolated

from the living by the negative energy field that surrounded their home, the Insepulta have thrived in a closed society. The lack of hunger or fatigue created the conditions for intricate crafts to be completed in half the time a living man could do so. Fields were switched from grains to textiles and the cold hearths in homes allowed fuel to be used to spark forges instead.

Many of the Insepulta want to rejoin Darkonian society, but are not so foolish to think they can show up on the doorsteps of their relatives and expect a warm welcome. Additionally, the agents of Death have no interest in diminishing the city's population through a mass exodus, since the ability to naturally reproduce is something else they have lost through their transformation. Still, if the Shroud could be overcome and the great city reopened, the collected knowledge of the university and the hard work of its people could make Il Aluk into the gem of civilization it had been for centuries, although with considerably less shine.

--Professor Mortimer Wachter, University of Port-a-Lucine, excerpted from his essay "*On Our Neighbors and Their History*"





# STRIGOI OF A STARVING LAND

BY IAN FORDAM

Featuring D&D 3.5 stat blocks created by Jeremy Roby

## THE NATURE OF THE STRIGOI

The journal of Jaro Morys, recovered from the ruins of Dervich in 747BC, contains this curious entry:

*The Journal of Jaro Morys, 745BC*

*Miserable weather tonight. Spent the evening around the fire at Strahinja's questing house, listening to others tell tales. Thought I should note: The G'Hennans speak of creatures they call the strigoi.*

*"The strigoi drink blood. They are sorcerers. They enchant their victims when they drink their blood. All in all, the strigoi sound remarkably similar to vampires of commonplace Darkonian legend, except that apparently they can walk unharmed in the sunlight. A terrifying thought, no?"*

The strigoi of G'Henna are not merely legends. Most appear to be human, and they are typically very attractive in a feline sort of way. They possess fangs and claws, although they are capable of hiding both. Like Darkonian vampires, they drink blood. However,

contrary to Jaro Morys' assumptions, most strigoi are living beings.

Many of the strigoi have talent with wizardry. Female strigoi are known to have stronger magic than male strigoi. Also, a strigoi's magic is most powerful within its lair, and its power diminishes with distance.

Perhaps the most crucial fact about the strigoi is that they have no souls. When they die, they are utterly extinguished. This knowledge makes most strigoi bitter towards creatures whose existence continues after death, even though they argue that possession of a soul makes one sentimental and weak. Indeed, the secret shame of the strigoi is that they are perpetually haunted by this lack. G'Henna being G'Henna, one might even say that they all hunger for a soul.

Strigoi are incapable of love.

Strigoi are born as mortal creatures. In this stage, they refer to themselves as *strigoi vii*, the living strigoi. They possess none of the immunities or vulnerabilities of the undead. In particular, as G'Hennan lore attests, they are utterly unharmed by sunlight.

However, knowing that death is a final end for them, some strigoi vii choose to avoid destruction by performing the Rite of Ascension. (This can only be performed successfully by a strigoi wizard, which is doubtless why certain strigoi study magic in the first place.) The details of the Rite are considered dark knowledge among the strigoi; however, although the Rite is supposed to be a secret, most strigoi know something about it regardless. Not every strigoi dares to risk the cost of failure, but very few are willing to deny themselves the possibility of Ascension. However, blood sacrifice is certainly a necessary component, and that sacrifice may even require the blood of other strigoi vii.

Strigoi vii, like all living creatures, are animated by life force, that is, a spark of energy from the positive material plane. (Not to be confused with a soul; this spark does not persist after death.) The Rite of Ascension attempts to invert this life force, converting the positive energy to negative and strengthening it in the process. (Some strigoi may even hope that this negative energy will become a soul; it will not.) If the inversion fails, the strigoi's life force is utterly dispersed. However, even a successful inversion does not guarantee that the negative life force remains bound to the strigoi's material form.

Those who succeed with the Rite of Ascension become *strigoi urcat*, ascended strigoi. Those who fail often die, but sometimes they are transformed into *strigoi mort*, dead strigoi. Both strigoi urcat and strigoi mort are undead creatures, still dependent upon blood, still lacking souls.

### STRIGOI AS MONSTERS

Strigoi vii should be treated as vampyres. Like vampyres, their favored class is fighter. Male strigoi can reach 5th level as a wizard; female strigoi, 10th level. They cannot become clerics.

Curiously, strigoi cannot summon familiars.

Strigoi urcat are equivalent to vampires, usually with salient abilities such as those described in *Van Richten's Guide to Vampires*. They cannot Create Spawn. They are unbothered by garlic or mirrors, although they may have other vulnerabilities. Moreover, strigoi urcat can achieve higher levels as wizards than strigoi vii.

Strigoi mort are similar to crimson mists, except that they are also undead with all attendant immunities and vulnerabilities. They also gain the ability to possess and animate another creature's corpse for 1d6 hours. (They cannot animate their own.) Any corpse possessed by a strigoi mort decays much more slowly than normal, even when it is not actively possessed.

Strigoi mort are considered pitiable and miserable creatures, foolish enough to attempt Ascension but not strong enough to succeed at it.

## HISTORY OF THE STRIGOI

### *The Archived Journals of the Chief Inquisitor in Dervich, 726BC*

Apparently we need not marshal a search for Sretko, our disobedient Senior Fang of Zhakata. A week ago he announced to the High Priest that he intended to confront the Mistress of the Manor. The High Priest told him that he should do no such thing. The Warder-General forbade him to do so. Sretko reminded both men that he answers to the the Warder-General of Zhukar, not to anyone in Dervich. While the High Priest was still composing an indignant letter to the Warder-General in Zhukar, Sretko armed himself with the Sword of Nicu Osovei and rode south. There has been no word from him ever since, and the High Priest and the Warder-General have been knotting themselves in debate whether they are permitted to seek him out before they hear back from the capitol. Foolishly, it took them five days to decide to involve me in their debate. Unfortunately, though, they have not yet decided to listen to what I have to say.

But no matter. Tonight the Sword of Nicu Osovei was delivered to the front door of Serghei's Temple. It was accompanied by a note from Amanta Maradici, the Mistress of the Manor herself. In politely cool terms she requested that we not interfere with her solitude again.



*I am inclined to heed her request. Now I just have to convince the High Priest and the Warder-General.*

## TIMELINE OF THE FOUR FAMILIES

Date	Event
700BC	The Grand Rebellion fails, and the Four Families are driven into G'Henna.
702BC	Yagno Petrovna emerges from the Outlands and deposes the Domnitor.
705BC	The Calatori come to Maradici Manor.
707BC	Voroslav Kvernadze leads his family to Maradici Manor and requests sanctuary.
709BC	The Calatori depart Maradici Manor.
716BC	Voroslav Kvernadze leads his family, including his sister Rozalia, back into the Outlands. The Calatori return to Maradici Manor.
719BC	Zdesklav Maradici is assassinated. Desimir Maradici slays many of the Calatori, who abandon the Maradici family again.
724BC	Desimir Maradici fails to Ascend.
726BC	Sretko, a Fang of Zhakata, attempts to kill Amanta Maradici and fails.
739BC	Voroslav Kvernadze successfully Ascends. His sister and two of his three children are killed as part of the ritual.
740BC	The Severing occurs.
741BC	The Calatori depart G'Henna.
745BC	Goju Cojec kills Octaviu Kvernadze. Amanta Maradici invites Pesha to her manor. Malistroi destroys Dervich.

## THE FOUR FAMILIES

The Four Families originally came from Lekar in Falkovnia. They had engaged in a Great Rebellion against their prince, but they had failed to usurp him. Knowing that they were no longer welcome in their homeland, they fled to G'Henna, where they were subtly twisted by the Starving Land.

- ❖ The **Jeladze** family had been the most prominent of the Four Families before the Great Rebellion. They went to Zhukar with the

intention of establishing a new principality, only to discover that city already held in the formidable grasp of the Domnitor. After a quick political calculation, they chose to ally themselves with the existing ruler. While this alliance was never destined to be long-lived—neither the Jeladze nor the Domnitor were either trusting or trustworthy—it ended more suddenly than either side anticipated. Yagno Petrovna led his First Circle out of the desert and usurped the Domnitor. The Jeladze vanished in the aftermath.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — VENGEFUL SCIONS

Perhaps the Jeladze were not entirely exterminated. Instead, a survivor or two linger at the fringes of Zhukar society, plotting against the mad priest of Zhakata who somehow destroyed their family. To consume the soul of Yagno Petrovna? Now that would be a tasty revenge.

- ❖ The **Gugunava** family had turned south into the Badlands. Their choice had been hailed by the other families as an unwise decision, given the dearth of prey in that direction, but word of their continued existence still trickles north upon occasion.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — A PRINCIPALITY IN THE DESERT

The Gugunava family has found a niche in the Badlands of G'Henna, and they have had decades to consolidate their strength there. They have gone feral, which makes them a threat to any of their neighbors. Certainly they would resist any intrusion by Voroslav Kvernadze into their territory.

The Gugunava are served by a tribe of desert tasloi. (See the 2nd edition Monstrous Manual or, if you want to get really old school, the 1st edition adventure module I1 - Dwellers of the Forbidden City.) These tasloi are no less vicious (and far more numerous) than their strigoi lords.

- ❖ The **Maradici** family ventured to Dervich, intending to rebuild their strength by discretely feeding upon an unsuspecting populace. Zdeskav Maradici established a manor well to the south of that city, where he lived with his wife Rozalia and two children. Eventually the Maradici family and the Calatori tribe of Vistani learned of each others' presence. They came to an agreement: Zdeskav Maradici offered his protection to the Calatori during the brutal G'Hennan winters in exchange for blood voluntarily given. (See "The Calatori", below, for more detail on that tribe and its relationship with the strigoi.)

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — A TASTE OF INFINITY

If one were to ask a strigoi vii why they prefer the taste of Calatori blood, they might respond that it simply tastes richer. They will certainly not confide that Calatori blood makes them feel a hint of what it must be like to possess a soul.

- ❖ The **Kvernadze** family slipped away without notifying the others of their plans. However, three years later they appeared at the Maradici manor, requesting sanctuary. Voroslav Kvernadze never did explain where he had led his family, but Zdeskav Maradici always believed that the Kvernadze family was driven to Dervich after a confrontation with the Prophet, the Church, and the Swords of Zhakata.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — THE LONELY TOWER

At the heart of G'Henna is a crossroad where the Wine Road, the Trail of the Discarded, and the Goblin Trail split away from the road to Zhukar. South-southwest of this crossroad is a ruin known as the Lonely Tower. It is reputed to be haunted, although reports differ regarding the nature of the haunting spirits.

The Lonely Tower was once a wizard's tower. While that wizard's magic was stronger than Voroslav Kvernadze's, the physical strength of the Kvernadze family was sufficient to overpower the wizard. He spent the last years of his life maimed and imprisoned, providing sustenance for Voroslav and his kindred.

While the wizard did not specialize in necromancy, Voroslav Kvernadze learned enough from his spells and notes to attempt the Rite of Ascension.

### BLOOD TIES

Zdeskav Maradici felt duty-bound to accept Voroslav Kvernadze's plea for sanctuary. After all, his wife Rozalia had been born a Kvernadze, and he knew better than to believe she would not betray him for her brother. However, the cohabitation was always uneasy. Voroslav and his three children refused to be subordinate to their host and his own two children, yet Zdeskav lacked the might to turn them out. Moreover, Voroslav refused to abide by Zdeskav's agreement with the Calatori, since he had not been an original party to it; the Calatori departed mid-winter and did not return the following autumn. Meanwhile, Rozalia remained neutral in all conflicts between her husband and brother.

Almost a decade after his arrival, Voroslav Kvernadze apparently decided that, despite his failure to usurp Zdeskav Maradici's authority, he had otherwise regained his strength from whatever ignominy had forced him to seek sanctuary. He departed suddenly with his children and sister in tow, leaving Zdeskav and his own offspring alone at Maradici Manor. Once again, Voroslav Kvernadze's destination was unknown.

The winter after the departure of the Kvernadze family, the Calatori returned to Maradici Manor. However, the renewed peace lasted only a handful of years. In 719BC Zdeskav Maradici was killed by a spell-trapped book delivered by one of the Calatori wintering at the Manor. Although it was not clear whether the Calatori had realized that he carried a trap, **Desimir Maradici** retaliated by killing a dozen of his kinsfolk, including the raunie and her husband. The ancient agreement had been broken for the last



time; the surviving Calatori departed the manor again, never to return. Zdeskav's oldest child, **Amanta Maradici**, was left as the mistress of the manor.

### THE MISTRESS OF THE MANOR

Both Amanta and Desimir believed that the spell-trapped book had been sent by their uncle Voroslav. Knowing that Voroslav was both older (and therefore more physically powerful) and a wizard (which Desimir was not), Desimir's secret plan to avenge his father included becoming a *strigoi urcat*. However, he failed the Rite of Ascension, becoming a *strigoi mort* instead. In retrospect his attempt seems particularly foolish. Not only did Desimir lack any skill as a wizard, he also failed to incorporate his sister's blood.

In 726BC, a Fang of Zhakata named **Sretko** challenged Amanta Maradici in her seat of power. Sretko had recently become the Senior Fang when his predecessor died in the Outlands, failing to protect Chief Inquisitor Jugo Hesketh. It was a foolhardy gesture, intended to prove to Sretko himself that he deserved his exalted station. Instead, it proved the contrary. His corpse remains at Maradici Manor as Desimir Maradici's favorite vessel. However, as the Church archives indicate, Amanta returned Sretko's weapon to the Church in Dervich. She knew that the Church would never give her peace as long as she retained the Sword of Nicu Osovei, and she did not wish to be bothered.

For many years thereafter, Amanta and her undead brother inhabited the Maradici Manor alone. Occasionally she ventured to Dervich or Ungur for sustenance, but she preferred to leave her victims alive and so drew little attention to herself. The Great Upheaval, known locally as the Severing, occurred in 740BC, and several years afterward nearly all of the Calatori departed G'Henna entirely.

Given this departure, Amanta was surprised to discover a *giomorgo* named **Pesha** remained in Dervich. Unfortunately, Pesha had also been discovered by another strigoi vii: **Octaviu Kvernadze**, Amanta's youngest cousin. Octaviu and Amanta fought, and Amanta proved the victor only with the aid of **Goju Cojec**, the Senior Fang of Zhakata, who killed Octaviu with the Sword of Nicu Osovei.

Afterwards, Amanta Maradici and Goju Cojec reached an understanding: They would continue the implicit truce which had held since Sretko's attack on the Maradici Manor.

Mere months later, Amanta Maradici's magic warned her when the fiend Malistroi was released from his prison in the House of Bones. She rescued Pesha from Dervich before Malistroi razed that city and created an army of Altered. She was able to shield the Maradici Manor well enough to withstand those Altered who ventured south from Dervich.

To this day, Amanta Maradici remains the Mistress of the Manor, accompanied by Desimir and Pesha. However, before Octaviu's death he informed her that his father Voroslav had successfully Ascended, sacrificing his sister Rozalia and his other two children in the process. Voroslav is now the last of the Kvernadze, but he is more powerful than ever. Amanta does not rest easily, knowing that her hated uncle remains somewhere in G'Henna.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — THE PRIDE EATER

Consider the Pride Eater. This monster was introduced, if glancingly, in the adventure module *Circle of Darkness*. Subsequently a write-up of the Pride Eater was presented by Mephisto in *Quoth the Raven* Issue 29. As an alternative to Mephisto's description, the Pride Eater may be a strigoi mort who once belonged to the Gugunava family before it failed to Ascend.

#### The Public Face

The Calatori were a Vistani tribe within the Kaldresh tasque. They were known primarily as traders, willing to transport goods which non-Calatori might hesitate to transport. Historically the Calatori roamed the middle lands of the Core: G'Henna, Markovia, and Dorvinia. However, they were by far most often encountered within G'Henna.

## THE CALATORI

A Letter from Madalina, 745BC

Pesha came wooing tonight. Or that's what I first assumed, anyway. That he had tired of his other girls and come back to me for a bit. He is a half-blood Wanderer, after all, although to be fair I've known plenty of boys without a drop of Wanderer blood who are similarly unwilling to settle down. I heard Pesha calling at my window. I ignored him at first, long enough to show him that I wouldn't come running whenever he called.

Finally I threw open my window. "Yes?" I hissed. Not too loudly, though. I didn't want to waken Papa.

Pesha said my name in that heartbroken tone he gets when he wants something he can't have. I sighed. "Oh, it's you."

"Madalina, come with me," he said.

"What, you think I'm going to lift my skirts just because—"

"Come with me," he repeated, more urgently. "Something very bad is about to happen."

This was a new approach to seduction. He didn't sound like he meant *naughty*. He sounded like he meant something honestly terrible. "What kind of bad?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said. "My Mistress won't tell me. I'm not sure that she knows."

[Editor's Note: Here the author uses the Balok word *stapana*, which implies ownership, rather than the word *iukitsa*, which means mistress more in the sense of the author herself.]

I did not like his use of that word. I could hear the authority of the capital letter. "Your Mistress?"

"Yes. The Mistress of the Manor. She has promised me protection. She will protect you too. That was one of my conditions."

Even without the ridiculous title drawn from grandmothers' stories of the strigoi, this situation sounded less and less like something I wanted to be a part of. "And what sort of price would I pay for her 'protection'?"



*"None. I would pay for both of us. She is fond of... those of us with Calatori blood. She honors the old ways."*

*Something in his tone chilled me. "You are serious," I said.*

*"I am serious," he agreed.*

*Playing our little games is one thing. Running away with him is another. "I couldn't possibly," I said. "My reputation would never survive the scandal."*

*"Damn your reputation!" he said, but he sounded frightened, not angry.*

*None of this eased my worries. "Let me think about it. Come back tomorrow night."*

*"Madalina, no. We have to leave tonight. Now, in fact. We must reach the manor soon. My Mistress is strongest there. Please come with us."*

*"Us?" I said, but then I saw her, Pesha's Mistress, standing in the shadows behind him. Except that I did not simply see her. She let me see her.*

*"Pesha speaks truly," she said, more softly than a whisper, although I heard every word. "I offer you my protection. But we must leave now."*

*Perhaps I would have accepted if she had not been so beautiful. However, with one glance I knew that my own attractiveness would not last long compared to hers. I would become drab beside her, and she would remain beautiful. She would still be the Mistress of the Manor. I would become little better than an unloved pet.*

*I pulled the window closed before either tears or words could betray me. I have shed my tears as I have written these words, and I swear that I do not know if I have made the right decision.*

However, nearly all of the Calatori departed G'Henna shortly after the Severing in 740BC. Perhaps they (like most G'Hennans) were alarmed at being cut off from the Core. Perhaps they had some premonition of the forthcoming release of Malistroi. Regardless of their reasons, they rode into the Mists and have not been seen elsewhere since. (Not yet, anyway.)

A woman named **Marda** was the only full-blooded Calatori known to have remained in G'Henna, likely because of her giomorgo half-sister **Callian** and

nephew **Petchko**. However, even Marda and her relatives have not been seen since Malistroi's rampage in 745BC.

A man named Pesha is a giomorgo descended from the Calatori, although he is not so closely related to Marda as Callian and Petchko were. In addition, it is entirely possible that other giomorgos remain in G'Henna as well.

### *The Hidden Face*

Within the borders of G'Henna, the Calatori were willing to smuggle anything except food. Even the Calatori were hesitant to commit outright heresy, if only because of the likely punishment.

### *Allies and Enemies*

The Calatori frequently conducted business with the Black Market of Zhukar. They competed directly against the Teamsters' Faction of the Dervich Merchants' Guild. The enmity between the Guild and the Calatori meant that the Calatori risked starvation (even more than most G'Hennans) over the long winters.

The Church of Zhakata distrusted the Calatori, suspecting them of smuggling food. However, the Church never managed to catch them in such a blatant act of heresy, and so the Church never had sufficient reason to move directly against them.

Once the rest of the Calatori had departed G'Henna, Marda became involved with the heresy known as the Circle of Darkness. However, she may have had ulterior motives. Her role in the release of Malistroi is uncertain.

Most significantly, though, the Calatori had an agreement with the Maradici family. Even winter, the Calatori allowed the strigoi to feed upon them—but not unto death. In exchange, Zdesklav Maradici provided food and also protection from the Guild and Church. (The domination ability of the strigoi proved useful in acquiring food. The Guild's losses would be blamed upon the Jackal and other predators in the Run.)

Somehow the Calatori endured these prolonged periods at Maradici Manor without suffering from static burn, which threatens other Vistani who remain in one place too long. Among those few scholars who have studied the Vistani, there has been some speculation that the Calatori are somehow less pure-blooded than other Vistani. Others have contemplated a supernatural tie to G'Henna which shielded the Calatori in that land. Even so, despite the lack of static burn, the Calatori were inevitably eager to depart the manor every year once the weather broke.

### **DREAD POSSIBILITY — Lost in the Mists**

At least until their disappearance, the Calatori appeared to be tied to G'Henna in some unexpected way. While they were able to travel elsewhere, they rarely travelled far, even before the Severing.

Their disappearance from the Domains of Dread may be a simple matter of the Dark Powers not wanting to release them from the Starving Land. Perhaps some day the Calatori will emerge from the Mists in some far-flung Island of Terror, finding themselves involved with the fate of that new land. Or perhaps they will be returned to G'Henna.

### **WHO'S DOOMED**

#### *The Journal of Amanta Maradici, 717BC*

*Fondly I recall evenings in the parlor: A fire burning in the hearth. One of the Calatori playing the violin while another tapped out a rhythm on his darbuka. Papa using his handkerchief to gently wipe away flecks of blood from the neck of the beautiful young woman who had volunteered to feed him for the season. Desimir, with the incaution of youth, feeding more deeply and stopping only when Papa chastised him. Perhaps I would have been equally incautious with my young man, except that he was also a storyteller, and I was reluctant to interrupt his tales...*

*Meanwhile, outside the manor, the rest of the Calatori huddled in the warmth of their wagons, secure in the protection of their strigoi lord. Papa would ensure that they were fed, just as they ensured that he was.*



## AMANTA MARADICI

Amanta lives in Maradici Manor south of Dervich. She is tall, fair-skinned, raven-haired, and beautiful. She appears neither old nor young, nor does she appear to age. G'Hennans don't know whether to address her as *doamna* or *domnisoara*. Before the fall of Dervich, she was known as a sorceress of sufficient power that neither the local Church nor the Dervich Merchants' Guild risked interfering with her. Following the fall, however, the Church appears to have forgotten her, or at least it is more concerned about laying proper claim to the Fertile Valley.

Amanta is the daughter of Zdeskav and Rozalia. Desimir was her slightly younger brother.

Amanta grew up bullied by her cousins, and she saw that her uncle Voroslav was strong enough to bully her cousins in turn. She blames Voroslav for the deaths of both her parents, but she fears him too much to seek vengeance, especially after learning that he has Ascended. If Amanta ever realizes that she is comparably formidable, particularly when bolstered by allies, then she might finally strike against him.

Amanta is a thoroughly amoral creature, but she abides by certain practicalities. Because a trail of bodies would draw attention, she strongly prefers to drink from her victims without killing them. In fact, she uses her *domination* ability to encourage her victims to forget her. If she strikes a bargain, as she did with the Calatori and then later with Goju Cojec, she will uphold her word. (Unless betrayed, of course.) This same practicality explains why Amanta allowed Pesha to invite Madalina to the manor. Better to have a contented source of blood (and possibly two) than a resentful one.

In addition to her magical studies, Amanta practices regularly upon the flute and fiddle. Her father had insisted that she learn to play the flute as a sign of proper breeding, and she taught herself the fiddle after Pesha brought his to the manor. Furthermore, following her encounters with Sretko and then Goju Cojec, Amanta has taught herself how to fight with saber, rapier, and dagger. In the absence of a weapons master, she has taught herself from books which her father left behind, so as yet she has little practical

skill.

Most unexpected, though, may be Amanta's relatively recent hobby of gardening. Pesha needs people food, after all. After the fall of Dervich, both the strigoi vii and the city-raised giomorgo had to learn how to grow something to sustain him. Much to Amanta's surprise, she enjoys tending to living greenery, even if she derives no sustenance from it herself.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY

Amanta Maradici is the last surviving member of her family. Because she believes the Jeladze family has been extinguished and she does not know how to contact the Gugunava family, her only option to continue her family line is to mate with a human. Perhaps Pesha has been her chosen mate, and a brood of young strigoi inhabit the Maradici Manor. Or perhaps she will go seeking a mate, preferably one with enough magical power to strengthen her bloodline.

## DESIMIR MARADICI

Desimir was Amanta's younger brother. He attempted the Rite of Ascension but failed, dying in the attempt. He remains in Maradici Manor as a *strigoi mort*. He sometimes uses the corpse of Sretko as his vessel.

Desimir fights with his sister, as siblings do, but his loyalty to her is boundless. He loathes his Uncle Voroslav, blaming the elder strigoi for the death of his father Zdeskav.

Although Desimir despises Pesha and his prominent position in Amanta's life, he will allow no harm to come to Pesha unless Amanta finds a more suitable person with whom to continue the Maradici family line.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY

Desimir does not feel that Amanta has properly avenged their father's death, and so he has formulated a plan of his own. As a strigoi mort, he can animate another creature's corpse, but he has been trying to extend that ability to the living. He has risked venturing outside of the Maradici Manor, far from his own bones, to possess travelers from the nearby town of Ungur. He cannot possess anyone who is awake, at least not at such distance from his bones, but he has learned how to possess a sleeper for several hours.

Desimir hopes to find an ideal person to possess so that he may confront Voroslav Kvernadze. Perhaps a physically formidable adventurer who happens to arrive at the manor. Or perhaps even one of Amanta's children once they come of age.

### LENUSA KVERŃADZE

A strigoi vii. Daughter of Voroslav and therefore cousin to Amanta. Killed by her father during his Ascension. Like many strigoi women, she possessed significant magical ability, although clearly that did not save her. She also possessed the innate salient ability to *alter self* at will.

Lenusa was no less a bully than her older brother Nicusor. She was simply more subtle.

### ŃICU8OR KVERŃADZE

A strigoi vii. Eldest child of Voroslav and therefore cousin to Amanta. Killed by his father during his Ascension.

Nicusor possessed no magical ability whatsoever, but he was easily the most physically formidable of the Kvernadze and Maradici children. He enjoyed bullying Amanta and Desimir, and he treated ordinary humans far worse. In appearance he gave the subtle feline impression which most of his kind convey, but in Nicusor's case he came across as a mighty black-furred lion.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY

Did either Lenusa or Nicusor Kvernadze survive their father's Ascension somehow? They might be out for revenge upon Voroslav, perhaps even desperate enough to approach Amanta for aid. If so, is Amanta willing to lend her strength despite the years of torment which she suffered at the Kvernadze family's talons?

### OCTAVIU KVERŃADZE

A strigoi vii. Youngest child of Voroslav and therefore cousin to Amanta. He escaped his father's Ascension and fled to Dervich, where he was slain by the Fang of Zhakata Goju Cojec.

### PESHA

A half-Vistani who once lived in Dervich. He sheltered at Maradici Manor during the razing of Dervich, and he never left. His continued presence may be because he has no place else to go, or it may be because he is Amanta's thrall.

Pesha spends his time serving Amanta, playing the fiddle, practicing knife-fighting with his Mistress, and gardening to provide himself with food. He also strives to avoid going mad despite having been the kept companion of a strigoi vii for fifteen years.

### ROZALIA KVERŃADZE-MARADICI

A strigoi vii. Married to Zdeskav. Mother of Amanta and Desimir. Killed by her brother Voroslav during his Ascension.

Rozalia came across as particularly passionless. While no strigoi vii is capable of love, Rozalia lacked even the condescending fondness which both Voroslav and Zdeskav felt for their children. On the other hand, Rozalia never sacrificed her children in a bid for Ascension.

During her life, Rozalia was the most accomplished sorceress of the Maradici and Kvernadze families alike. Since Rozalia's death, Amanta has likely surpassed her mother.

## ŠRETKO

Formerly one of the Fangs of Zhakata. Unlike most Fangs, Sretko was from Dervich. In an attempt to prove his worth, he decided to confront the infamous sorceress Amanta in her manor. A week later she sent the Sword of Nicu Osovei back to Dervich.

Although Sretko has gone to join Zhakata's Feast, his corpse remains in Maradici Manor, occasionally used by the *strigoi mort* Desimir as a vessel.

## VIORELA GUGUNAVA

The current head of the Gugunava family. Her father led the family at the time of the Great Rebellion, but she has subsequently taken the position. Although Viorela calls herself a princess, this exalted position is not recognized outside of the Gugunavas and their tasloi allies.

Although Viorela (like all the Gugunava) has gone feral, she clings to the trappings of civilization. Crucially, she retains a certain canniness about battle tactics and a sense of how to lead a mob without falling victim to its rages.

## VOROSLAV KVERNADZE

A *strigoi urcat*. Maternal uncle to Amanta and Desimir. Father of Nicusor, Lenusa, and Octaviu. Brother to Rozalia. He sacrificed Nicusor, Lenusa, and Rozalia as part of his Rite of Ascension.

As a *strigoi vii* Voroslav was tall, thin, and handsome in his severity. Although he succeeded in his ascension, his appearance suffered. (Perhaps he had a flawed Rite, or perhaps one of his victims managed to partially sabotage him.) He has grown somewhat taller and markedly thinner, and he is now faintly repulsive. Maybe it's that he is now completely hairless, which reveals his pointed ears. Maybe it's the deathly pallor and papery texture of his skin. Or maybe it's the fangs and talons that he cannot readily hide.

In life he possessed some minor talent with wizardry. In death that talent—or at least the power behind it—has increased.

## DREAD POSSIBILITY

Voroslav Kvernadze has slain the rest of his family over the course of his Rite of Ascension, but he transitioned to undeath successfully. He is not the sort to cower in the Outlands indefinitely. Doubtless he is building his own base of power to protect himself from the Church and the Swords, as well as from Lord Petrovna himself. At the moment he is recruiting outcast humans and mongrels, but once he has built up these first foundations, he is likely to seek more powerful allies to dominate. When he establishes his own principality, it won't be an uncivilized farce like the one that the Gugunava claim.

## ZDESKLAV MARADICI

Father of Amanta and Desimir. He possessed a minor magical talent, but given that his more physically powerful brother-in-law never attempted to challenge him directly, his skills were apparently superior to Voroslav's. He was particularly fastidious; he hated getting blood on his clothing.

## REFERENCES

An invaluable source of inspiration for this article was *The Weiser Field Guide to Vampires* by J.M. Dixon as excerpted at [strigoivii.org](http://strigoivii.org).

The Maradici Manor may be found on the map of G'Henna from *Circle of Darkness*. The city of Dervich is located in the northwestern corner of the map, and Maradici Manor is two hexes south of the city.



## STAT BLOCKS FOR SELECT NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

### AMANTA MARADICI – STRIGOI VII

**Female Strigoi Aristocrat 4 / Wizard 8:** CR 10; SZ Medium Humanoid (5 ft. 8 in.); HD 4d8 + 8d4 +12; hp 44; Init +5; Spd 30 ft.; AC 16 (touch 11, flat-footed 15); Atk +8/+6 melee (1d4+1 bite), +6/+4 melee (2 1d4+1 claws), +5/+3 melee (1d4+1 dagger, 1d6 +2 rapier); SA Blood Drain, Domination; SQ Darkvision (60 ft.), Weapon Proficiency (Martial/Simple); AL LE; SV Fort +6, Ref +10, Will +17; Str 12, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 15, Wis 15, Cha 17

**Skills:** Bluff +5, Concentration +10, Decipher Script +5, Diplomacy +6, Gather Information +6, Hide +6, Intimidate +8, Knowledge (arcana) +10, Knowledge (history) +3, Knowledge (local) +6, Knowledge (religion) +5, Listen +9, Move Silently +6, Perform (flute) +5, Ride +4, Sense Motive +7, Spot +8

**Feats:** Diligent, Improved initiative, Item Familiar, Negotiator, Precise Shot, Scribe Scroll, Spell Focus (abjuration)

**Languages:** Balok, Falkovnian, Infernal, Vladantilan

**Signature Possessions:** Dagger, Flute, Masterwork Rapier, Monocle of True Seeing, Silver Ring (item familiar)

**Wizard Spells per Day** (4/4/3/3/2, DC 12 + spell level, 8<sup>th</sup> level caster): 0 – *acid splash, arcane mark, dancing lights, daze, detect magic, detect poison, flare, ghost sound, light, prestidigitation, ray of frost, read magic, resistance*; 1 – *color spray, mage armor, magic missile, obscuring mist, shield, shocking grasp*; 2 – *detect thoughts, glitterdust, protection from arrows, resist energy, Tasha's hideous laughter, web*; 3 – *dispel magic, fireball, lightning bolt, nondetection, phantom steed, tongues*; 4 – *dimension door, globe of invulnerability, ice storm, phantasmal killer, remove curse, scrying, stoneskin*

**Blood Drain (Ex):** Amanta can suck blood from a living victim with her fangs by making a successful grapple check. If a foe is pinned she drains blood, inflicting 1d4 points of permanent Constitution drain each round the pin is maintained.

**Domination (Su):** Amanta can crush an opponent's will just by looking into their eyes. This is similar to a gaze attack, except that the strigoi must take a standard action, and those merely looking at her are not affected. Anyone Amanta targets must succeed at a Will save or fall instantly under the strigoi's influence as though by a *dominate person* spell cast by a 12th-level sorcerer. The ability has a range of 30 feet.

### PESHA - GIOMORGO

**Male Half-Vistani Fighter 2 / Rogue 4:** CR 3 1/2; SZ Medium Humanoid (5 ft. 10 in.); HD 2d10 + 4d6 +6; hp 30; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 13 (touch 10, flat-footed 13); Atk +5 melee (1d4 dagger), +5 ranged (1d8 crossbow); SA Evil Eye, Sneak Attack (+2d6); SQ Evasion, Trap Sense (+1), Weapon Proficiency (Martial/Simple); AL N; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +5; Str 10, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 11, Wis 13, Cha 14

**Skills:** Appraise +3, Bluff +5, Climb +3, Diplomacy +2, Escape Artist +4, Gather Information +4, Handle Animal +6, Hide +2, Knowledge (geography) +3, Knowledge (local) +6, Knowledge (nature) +5, Listen +4, Move Silently +5, Open Lock +6, Perform (fiddle) +3, Profession (trader) +4, Search +4, Sense Motive +4, Sleight of Hand +5, Ride +3, Spot +4, Survival +6

**Feats:** Athletic, Dodge, Nimble Fingers, Voice of Wrath

**Languages:** Balok, Patterna

**Signature Possessions:** Crossbow, Dagger, Masterwork Fiddle, Silver Locket

**Evil Eye (Ex):** Peshas must take a standard action to employ the evil eye. This is treated as a gaze attack and those merely looking at the Vistani are unaffected. A DC 15 Will is needed to resist one of the following effects (chosen by Peshas): *domination, fear, paralyzed, or suggestion*.



## VIORELA GUGAŢAVA – STRIGOI VII (FERAL)

**Female Strigoi Barbarian 8:** CR 8; SZ Medium Humanoid (5 ft. 9 in.); HD 8d12 + 8; hp 56; Init +1; Spd 40 ft.; AC 16 (touch 11, flat-footed 15); Atk +10/+8 melee (1d4+2 bite), +7/+5 melee (2 1d4+2 claws or 1d4+2 wrist claw); SA Blood Drain, Domination; Rage (3/day); SQ Damage Reduction (1/-), Darkvision (60 ft.), Trap Sense (+2), Uncanny Dodge (Improved), Weapon Proficiency (Martial/Simple); AL CE; SV Fort +9, Ref +9, Will +3; Str 14, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 11, Cha 10

**Skills:** Bluff +4, Climb +8, Craft (weapons), Disguise +5, Handle Animal +8, Hide +7, Intimidate +10, Jump +6, Listen +7, Move Silently +6, Ride +6, Spot +9, Survival +8

**Feats:** Alertness, Cleave, Diehard, Power Attack

**Languages:** Balok, Tasloi

**Signature Possessions:** Anklet of Striding and Springing, Belt of Skulls, Wrist Claw

**Blood Drain (Ex):** Viorela can suck blood from a living victim with her fangs by making a successful grapple check. If a foe is pinned she drains blood, inflicting 1d4 points of permanent Constitution drain each round the pin is maintained.

**Domination (Su):** Viorela can crush an opponent's will just by looking into their eyes. This is similar to a gaze attack, except that the strigoi must take a standard action, and those merely looking at her are not affected. Anyone Viorela targets must succeed at a Will save or fall instantly under the strigoi's influence as though by a *dominate person* spell cast by a 12th-level sorcerer. The ability has a range of 30 feet.

**Rage (Ex):** Viorela can fly into a rage 3 times per day. While in a rage, she temporarily gains a +4 bonus to Strength, a +4 bonus to Constitution, and a +2 morale bonus on Will saves, but she takes a –2 penalty to AC. Viorela gains two hit points per level, but these hit points go away at the end of the rage. While raging, she cannot use any Charisma-, Dexterity-, or Intelligence-based skills, nor any abilities that require patience or concentration. A fit of rage lasts 7 rounds, but she may prematurely end her rage. At the end of

the rage, the Viorela loses her rage modifiers and restrictions and becomes *fatigued*.

## VOROSLAV KVERŢADZE – STRIGOI URCAŢ

**Male Strigoi Aristocrat 2 / Warrior 5 / Wizard 7:** CR 13; SZ Medium Undead (6 ft. 2 in.); HD 7d12 + 7d12 + 14; hp 87; Init +5; Spd 30 ft.; AC 16 (touch 11, flat-footed 15); Atk +9/+7/+4 melee (1d4+2 bite), +8/+6/+3 melee (2 1d4+2 claws), +7/+4 melee (1d6+2 staff); SA Blood Drain, Domination; SQ Darkvision (120 ft.), Undead Traits, Weapon Proficiency (Martial/Simple); AL CE; SV Fort +9, Ref +10, Will +13; Str 15, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 14

**Skills:** Appraise +1, Bluff +8, Climb +3, Concentration +8, Craft (potions) +5, Decipher Script +5, Diplomacy +4, Gather Information +10, Handle Animal +3, Hide +8, Intimidate +6, Knowledge (arcana) +10, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +3, Knowledge (history) +4, Knowledge (local) +3, Knowledge (the planes) +5, Knowledge (religion) +1, Listen +9, Move Silently +8, Ride +7, Search +8, Sense Motive +10, Spot +8. Survival +6

**Feats:** Alertness, Brew Potion, Combat Expertise, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Item Familiar, Scribe Scroll

**Languages:** Abyssal, Balok, Falkovnian, Infernal, Vladantilan

**Signature Possessions:** Gold Ring (item familiar), Staff of Withering

**Wizard Spells per Day (4/4/3/2/1, DC 13 + spell level, 7<sup>th</sup> level caster):** 0 – *acid splash, arcane mark, close/open, dancing lights, daze, disrupt undead, flare, light, mage hand, mending, message, prestidigitation, ray of frost, resistance, touch of fatigue*; 1 – *burning hands, chill touch, mage armor, magic missile, protection from good, ray of enfeeblement, Tenser's floating disc*; 2 – *arcane lock, eagle's splendor, flaming sphere, owl's wisdom, spectral hand*; 3 – *haste, lightning bolt, stinking cloud, summon monster III, summon undead III*; 4 – *animate dead, confusion, Evard's black tentacles, fear, fire shield, force orb, shout*

**Alternate Form (Sp):** Voroslav can assume the shape of a giant lizard as a standard action. This ability is



similar to a *polymorph self* spell cast by a 12th-level sorcerer.

*Blood Drain (Ex):* Voroslav can suck blood from a living victim with his fangs by making a successful grapple check. If a foe is pinned he drains blood, inflicting 1d4 points of permanent Constitution drain each round the pin is maintained.

*Bone Control (Sp):* Voroslav can form an existing piece of bone into any shape he desires. When this ability is used against any creature with a skeleton (via a touch attack) it acts similar to a *fireball* spell, inflicting 1d6 bludgeoning damage per caster level (up to a maximum of 10d6). Targeted creatures must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 13) to take half damage. Voroslav can use this ability up to twice per day.

*Children of the Night (Su):* Once per day, Voroslav can call forth a pack of 4d8 desert lizards, 8d6 jerboa, or 2d4 osquips as a standard action. These creatures arrive in 2d6 rounds and serve Voroslav for up to 1 hour.

*Domination (Su):* Voroslav can crush an opponent's will just by looking into their eyes. This is similar to a gaze attack, except that the strigoi must take a standard action, and those merely looking at him are not affected. Anyone Voroslav targets must succeed at a Will save or fall instantly under the strigoi's influence similar to a *dominate person* spell cast by a 12th-level sorcerer. The ability has a range of 30 feet.



# BAROVIA

## THE LAND OF STRAHD AND MYSTERIES

BY MISTMASTER

<b>Official Name:</b>	The County-Kingdom of Barovia
<b>Culture level:</b>	Medieval
<b>Ecology:</b>	Full
<b>Climate &amp; Terrain:</b>	Continental. Barovia is landlocked and dominated by the Balinok mountains and by the fertile Luna River Valley and the West Gundar River Valley. A number of forests grows along the southern and northern borders. It has frigid winters.
<b>Languages:</b>	Common (Baloki), Lazendraki (Baloki), Valachani (Baloki), Gundarakite (Terg), Invidian (Terg), Kartakassian (Terg), Forfarian.
<b>Religions:</b>	Andaral the Morning Lord, Ezra (Homefaith), Cult of Hala, Cult of D'vla, Cult of Kanchelsis.
<b>Races:</b>	Humans 97%, Other 3%.
<b>Government:</b>	Hereditary feudal monarchy.
<b>Ruler:</b>	Count King Strahd XII von Zarovich.
<b>Darklord:</b>	Strahd von Zarovich.
<b>Lightlord:</b>	Sergei von Zarovich.
<b>Inhabitants:</b>	10 million.
<b>Surface:</b>	230,000 square kilometres.
<b>Analog:</b>	XV Century Romania.
<b>Capital City:</b>	Barovia City (30,000 in, Non-Standard, LE),
<b>Important towns:</b>	Vallaki (50,000 in, Standard, LN), Hoessla (35,000 in, Standard, LG), Cuzau (30,000 in, Standard, LN), Renika (28,000 in, Standard, LE), Krezk (25,000 in, Non-Standard, LN), Berez (21,000 in, Standard, NE), Jarvinak (17,000 in, Standard, LG), Immol (15,000 in, Standard, N)
<b>Borders:</b>	North: Lazendraki; Northeast and East: Nova Vaasa; South: Hazlan, Forlorn, Kartakass, and Gundarak; Southwest: Gundarak; West: Invidia, Borca, and Dorvinia

## TROPES

Barovia is a land of insulation and mysteries, but more than other lands it is the land of its darklord. Strahd has created current Barovia in blood and tears and has ruled it since the very beginning. Barovia, even more than Darkon, is a land under a spell, with an immortal evil ever changing but always faithful to itself. Strahd is the land of Barovia in many ways.

## DOMAIN OVERVIEW

### THE LAND

Dominated by the Balinok mountain range, the valleys of Barovia are rich in forests and rivers. Patches of fertile land are cultivated in groves, terraces, and valleys. Barovia's relatively small cities give a deceptive look to the land as being sparsely populated. In truth, a myriad of villages fills it out, and an efficient net of roads allows surprisingly quick travels for people and goods. The tallest mountain in the Balinoks and in the whole Core, Mount Ghakis,



dominates Barovia City. The not equally tall, but more massive Mount Baratak in the north is the source of the Barataki River, and the lake of the same name. The city of Krezk sits on the river Little Luna, which is navigable up to Levkarest in Borca. The city of Vallaki, the largest in Barovia, sits on the shores of the Zarovich Lake, the second largest lake in the Core after Kronov Lake in Tepest.

The town of Hoessla is a thriving mining town in the region of the Sawtooth Mountains. In the northwest of the same region you can find the city of Cuzau, an important hub of wood-trade and manufactories and carpentry. Renika is a fortified city at the feet of mount Baratak. It sits on a strategically and economically vital crossroad halfway between the gold mines of Mount Baratak and Lake Zarovich, the source of many fundamental rivers in Barovia. Berez is in the centre of the Duskwood, Barovia's largest forest, and is the main leatherworking centre and timber source. Jarvinak is the northernmost city of Barovia, on the Bloodmarked Pass which separates Barovia and Lazendrak, and it is also the most renowned metalworking centre in all the County-Kingdom. Immol is the southernmost city of Barovia, and its main producer of food.

## THE PEOPLE

Barovians are a determined and hospitable people who are particularly attached to their traditions and customs, which explains why they are reluctant to employ steam machines like other nations have. Barovians put a lot of faith in traditional lore and have a very rich oral tradition. In harsh Barovian winters, you need each member of the community to survive, so families and villages become close-knit. This can be hard to appreciate for strangers, and non-human people, aside from the longtime settlers, might not find themselves at ease. Barovians have a strange relationship with their legendary hero—and boogeyman—Strahd I, the Devil, the man who defeated the Terg invaders and was the first Count-King of Barovia. He is mentioned in a myriad of stories and legends, and every village has its own set of anecdotes about him. His eleven successors with the same name have all made some impact, but Strahd the Devil remains the figure more ingrained in

popular culture. Kids sing nursery rhymes about him and play Strahd in his Castle, a sort of king of the mountain game. Strahd's coronation day is a national festivity and commemorates the Dislinyas' Treachery too. There are plays about the Dilisnyas' Treachery and the rise and fall of Strahd I, which are periodically reenacted in theatres and even puppet-theatres. Barovia fears the supposedly turned vampire former ruler, but on the other hand, they respect his undying loyalty to his country.

Barovian society is divided into three classes. The aristocracy is made up of the landowners (boyars) and the upper echelons of the national militia (cozaks). The middle class is made up of artisans, clergy, tradesmen, free farmers, innkeepers, national militia soldiers, merchants, factory owners, and scholars. The lower class is made up of miners, farm workers, factory workers, boyars' soldiers, and domestic servants. Vistani, on one hand, are seen as strangers following their own laws, but on the other, they are protected by a compact between the Crown and the Great Raunie of the Zarovan tribe. The Vistani are vital to the Barovian economy, as they can transport people and goods quickly, navigating the Mists. dusk and mist elves, half-elves, busyhands and finfeet halflings, and stone and copper dwarves are small but common minorities. Dhampyrs are a rare and feared bloodline descendant from vampires, protected by the law but sometimes still victims of distrust and fear. Magic users are respected but feared, and sometimes are victims of the ignorance of rural communities.

## HISTORY

### AGE OF CREATION

In the Age of Creation, nine deities created the world, but then they disagreed on who had to rule it among them. Andaral the Morning Lord and Erlin the Lord of Death fought in Barovia. During this fight, their blood mingled, and two young deities were born: The Rake and Beast, Kanchelsis, Lord of Vampires, and D'vla, the Queen of Night.



## AGE OF EMPIRES

In the Age of Empires, the Olympian Empire (its capital, Olympia, seated where Barovia Town would be built) dominated the Core Continent, and extended its dominion even onto the other two continents, the Amber Reaches and the Verduous Lands. The Olympians were destroyed by a cataclysm 1000 years ago.

## AGE OF DARKNESS

In the Age of Darkness, the Terg Horde, from the Amber Reaches, invaded and conquered a good part of the former Olympian land. The Terg Empire dominated for 500 years, before the Olympian (in Terg, Baloki) people rebelled under the leadership of the von Zarovich dynasty, a dynasty of remote Lamordian and Vistani origins.

Barov I von Zarovich was a Count, a Terg military title reserved to vassal non-terg nobles. When he successfully rebelled and created the free Baloki state of Vallaki, he was hailed king, but humbly kept the title Count. Count-King became the traditional title of the rulers of Vallaki.

## THE MODERN AGE

Strahd I von Zarovich defeated the Tergs and proclaimed himself first Count-King of Barovia. Strahd I the Devil was embittered by a long campaign against the Tergs. While alive, he was a strong ruler and a dabbler in the Dark Arts, a cruel and violent tyrant who fought a long, excruciating civil war against the treacherous house of Dilisnya, getting himself slain in an elaborate trap by Leo Dilisnya after 13 years of reign.

Strahd II, the Unexpected, succeeded his father after the latter's death. He got revenge for his father and dedicated his reign to pacifying the boyars. He was assassinated by his wife's brother the day after his second marriage, after 10 years of reign.

Strahd III, the Conqueror, appeared as a young man, and after avenging his father, started a series of military campaigns which made Barovia a huge nation, with large swathes of Invidian, Gundarakite, Forfarian, and Borcan land. After his death during the campaign in Lazendrak, killed by Night King Ezekiel,

he was succeeded by his eldest son, Strahd IV. He had reigned for 35 years.

Strahd IV, the Grim, abandoned his father's conquests and dedicated his long reign to the search for a bride, and to weeding out the opposition. He is remembered as a detached king, and under his reign, Castle Ravenloft started to fall into ruin, and the Kingdom of Barovia closed itself to the world. Strahd IV was killed by assassins sent by rebel boyars and was succeeded by a grandson. He reigned for 70 years.

Strahd V, the Atoner, or the Alchemist, is remembered as one of the kindest rulers of Barovia. He dedicated his life to bettering the lives of the Barovian people, atoning for his predecessors' crimes. Tragically, he had to pay for his ancestor's mistakes and lost his beloved third wife the day of their marriage, fighting a demon, Inajira, allegedly contracted by Strahd I. Heroically, he slew the fiend and died in the process. He had reigned 20 years.

Strahd VI, the Cunning, or Friend of Vistani, was allegedly a cousin of his predecessor. He was a lot less benevolent than his cousin was, but he restored Castle Ravenloft to its previous glory and signed the treaty with the Vistani Zarovan tribe, which allowed Barovian trade to flourish. Strahd VI was reportedly killed by a headless woman after 42 years of reign.

Strahd VII, the Rich, allegedly the grandson of the previous Count-King, was particularly involved in Barovia economics, reforming the taxation system and encouraging mercantile activities. His long reign was ended, apparently, by robbers who managed to steal Barovia's regalia. He reigned for 60 years.

Strahd VIII, the Merciless, grandson of the previous one, returned to insulation in Castle Ravenloft, enforcing draconian law against criminality and ruling with an iron fist in a velvet glove. He was killed by bandits and succeeded by his youngest son after 29 years.

Strahd IX, the Silent, was never seen or heard by his subjects, with few exceptions. He kept his kingdom going smoothly, but infrastructure and buildings decayed after his long reign, Castle Ravenloft included. Under his reign, the Markov family decided to embark on a colonial adventure that ultimately resulted in the founding of Markovia. Allegedly, he

died peacefully in his bed, and his great-grandson succeeded him after 80 years of reign.

Strahd X, the Wise, was the best ruler in Barovian history. Under him, Castle Ravenloft was rebuilt to its former glory, the borders were opened, population soared, and trade flourished. He became the patron of many great heroes, financing the good fight across the Core. It was during his reign that Barovia welcomed an exiled Darkonian wizard called Firan Zal'honan, code name Azalin Rex. After a good initial relationship between the two, they had a fight which claimed both the Count-King and his future wife, concluding 38 years of reign.

Strahd XI, the Cursed, supposed son and heir of Strahd X, was a cruel, manipulative, and machiavellian ruler, who kept Barovia in a state of fear and anguish. He was notorious for playing sadistic games and trying to corrupt innocent people. He surrounded himself with undead and evil creatures and turned himself into a vampire. Under his rule, the people revolted, and he was killed by his own son after 17 years of reign.

## THE CURRENT AGE

It began 10 years ago when Strahd XII, the Restorer, ascended. He is slowly making people forget his father's rule, restoring Barovia to the glory of his "grandfather's" age. While he is a harder man than Strahd the Wise, and way more conservative, under Strahd XII, Barovia has grown back to a regional power level. He regularly hosts meetings of boyars in Castle Ravenloft and in Vallaki, welcomes diplomats, and participates regularly in various mundane events.

## PLACES OF INTEREST

### BAROVIA CITY

The Barovian capital was built on the site of ancient Olympia. There are several ancient ruins that are forbidden to visitors without permission from the Lord Burgomaster. The main monuments include the Barovian Ezrite Cathedral of Saint Markovia. The massive form of Castle Ravenloft dominates the city from the flank of Mount Ghakis. The Wolf's Den is a

shady, yet popular inn owned by Daria Fidatov (Half-Elf Rogue 4, N). The city has a theatre and is famed for its royal museum.

On the road from the city to the castle you will find a village of about five hundred people, also named Barovia. Barovia Village houses the families of the many employees of the castle. There are 5 kilometres of mountain road between the city and the castle, and only 700 metres between the castle and the village. The village is complete with a postal service, a small garrison, an inn (the Blood o' the Vine), a temple of Andaral, a hospital, a bookshop which double as a library, a school, and a bazar. There is also a semi-permanent camp reserved for the personal Vardo of the Zarovan Vistani Grand Raunie, Madame Eva.

### VALLAKI

Barovia's largest city, on the shores of Lake Zarovich, Vallaki houses the Council Hall of the Diet of Barovia. The Diet is summoned once every four years and is one of the few moments in which even the more reclusive of the von Zarovich monarchs have shown their face. The Royal Residence is a distinctive fortified manor; allegedly it was House von Zarovich's seat of power before their ascendance as monarchs. Now Vallaki is ruled as a royal estate by the steward branch of the von Zaroviches. The most renowned inn of the city is the Blue Water Inn, renowned for its bardic performances. It is owned by the Martikova family, with Amelia Martikova being the innkeeper. The Great Nest of the Sunraven, the cathedral of the Church of Andaral, is the greatest known temple of the County-Kingdom. Vallaki also has the only Barovian institute of higher learning, the Queen Ravenovia Memorial University, it includes a hospital, an asylum, a library, an observatory, a theatre, an art gallery, and a museum.

### HOESLA

A thriving mine town and a major industrial centre. Iron, coal, copper, silver and gold are mined in abundance, and exhausted galleries have been transformed into inhabited districts by the collaboration of humans and dwarves. The boyar family of Petrov rules it from the Iron Maw castle. The main inn of the city is the Pick and Ladder, famed



for its ale, owned by the boisterous Marwin Silverbeard Aundrin (Old Dwarf Fighter 3, LG). There is a small temple of Andaral, and several shrines of the Dwarven deities.

### CUZAU

A lumberjack town, built on the northwestern side of the Sawtooth Mountains. It has a friendly rivalry with Hoessla, reinforced by the fact that a sizeable population of elves and half-elves lives in the city. The Buchvold, an old family of cozak extraction, rules from the Old Tower, a massive wooden motte which dominates the city. The Rusty Axe is the main inn of the city, and it is owned by Ermelline "Axe Widow" Azanau. There is also a shrine of the Elvish deities and one of Hala.

### RENİKA

A fortified city which guards the gold mines and the stone quarries of Mount Baratak and guards the fundamental crossroad between the Mountain and Lake Zarovich. The city hosts one of the biggest garrisons of the national militia, the biggest temple of Ezra in Barovia, the Cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Baratak. The principal inn, the Lame Dragon, just at the gates of the city, is frequented by both soldiers and officers and it is owned by Petru Rala, a retired officer of the militia. The boyar house of Vallakovich governs the city from their Viper Bastion, the fortress which is also the garrison for the militia.

### KREZK

A major trading hub, Krezk is a Terg city, and was once the capital of the Terg Empire's province of Krezakis. Being a major river port on the Little Luna River, it has a sizable population of halflings. There are several small temples in different corners of the city, with three big ones in honor of Andaral, Hala, and Ezra, and small shrines of the halfling deities. The Market Square of Krezk is the most diverse and well-furnished market in Barovia. House Wachter rules the city from their elegant manor in the most important district of the city, near the Needle of Ghaddar, the ancient Terg palace of the government. Among the many inns and restaurants, the most famous is the Smouldering Ember.

### BEREZ

In the centre of the Duskwood, Berez is a thriving centre for both timber and leatherworking. There is a sanctuary of Andaral in the middle of the town, and a permanent autonomous settlement of dusk elves, called Oathstone, in the woods immediately adjacent the northern outskirts of the city. A house of Lamordian descent, House von Holt, rules Berez from Von Holt Manor. The Bloodfall Inn is the most luxurious inn in the city, famed for its prestigious red wines. It is owned by Ludmilla von Holt, a side branch of the Von Holts.

### JARVINAK

The northernmost larger town in Barovia, it guards the way to the Bloodmarked Pass, and it is the primary centre for metallurgy and smithy. Several small temples, including one of Ezra and one of Andaral, dot the town. It heavily relies on Vistani for transportation and refurbishment, so it is not a surprise that it holds a semi-permanent Vistani camp. House Markov, from which spawned the Markovs of Markovia, rules Jarvinak from the Boar's Fang, their solid stronghold at the gate of the city. The Hand of the Devil, run by the adult Ezekian dhampyr Lomak Fitzezekiel (Rogue 3, CG) is a lively and well-known inn which is famed for its bardic performances. There is a small sanctuary of D'vía in Jarvinak, seen as a token of goodwill towards the dhampyrs.

### IMMOL

The southernmost city in Barovia, Immol controls the grainbasket of the County-Kingdom, Immols has a big temple of Andaral, and houses a theatre. The Immol Harvest Festival is one of the more important events in Barovia. Harvest Fort is the luxurious manor of House Olszanik, the richest house of Barovia, which rules Immol and the surrounding region. Immol's cattle market is the biggest in the core, and animals from all over the continent and beyond are sold and bought there. The Bolting Stag is the most famous inn in the city and has exceptional food provided by its Forfarian cook and owner, Iorweth apLamallan.

## RELIGION

The Church of Andaral is a LG religion which is the most ancient iteration of the Cult of the Morninglord. It teaches care for the neighbour and hope. Light vanquishes darkness, and wisdom is the necessary complement of valor. The Church has a profound relationship with ravens, which are seen as the messengers of Andaral, whose symbol is a solar disk with a raven feather. The church is organised in a hierarchy, with the Arch-Hierophant in Vallaki being the faith leader, major cities having their own Hierophants and archpriests, and villages and small towns being served by priests and novices. Priests of Andaral are usually healers and teachers, while wandering clerics and paladins help those in need. The church's favoured weapon is the bastard sword. Every echelon of Barovian society has a strong core of believers in the Morninglord. Andaral is depicted as either a young man with fiery golden eyes and hair, or as an old, kind long-bearded man surrounded by ravens. His priests' domains are Community, Good, Healing, Law, Protection, and Sun.

The Church of Ezra is a LN religion in communion with the home-faith in Borca. Ezra the Protector, a goddess of Justice, Order, Trade, and Defense, teaches to maintain ties between communities, to protect each other, and to respect the Mists without fearing them. The Mists are dangerous but are also a force which connects everyone. The Arch-Sentire in Renika is the head of the faith in Barovia, elected by the Barovian council of Arch-Sentires and confirmed by the Bastion of Borca. The Ezrite faith is popular in the mercantile class. The symbol of the Church is a shield with a twig of belladonna and a longsword. Its favoured weapon is the longsword. The clerics have access to the following domains: Law, Protection, Strength, the Mists, and Travel. Priests of Ezra in Barovia are spiritual advisors and protectors of travellers and pilgrims.

The Cult of D'vla is a popular religion of the dhampyr minority, centred around the CG Goddess of Night, Dance, Second Chances, and Happiness. Priests of D'vla, often female, are storytellers and dancers, and often double as entertainers. They teach that there is beauty in the night and that blood is life and sharing blood is an act of love. Vampires do not need

to be monsters, as they are among the rare beings able to feed without killing living beings. The night-dancers of D'vla prefer to maintain a low profile with the regular, superstitious Barovian population. Her favourite weapon is the dagger and her domains are Air, Chaos, Charm, Darkness, and Good.

The Cult of Erlin was popular among Terg invaders, and while currently forbidden, it survives in clandestinity. The god of Death, Murder, Bloodshed, Graves, and Undead, his faith teaches that life will end and Erlin will rule over everyone, so the only wise thing to do is submit to him and be blessed with the gift of undeath or with a quick and painless death in old age. Erlin priests keep a low profile and live mundane lives during the day, donning black tunics and sickles (Erlin's holy weapon) only at night, when they make their unholy sacrifices. Erlin is NE, his holy symbol is a crowned skull, and his domains are Death, Destruction, Evil, Magic, and Repose.

The Cult of Hala is an ancient religion tied to the natural world and its magic, Hala is the Goddess of Magic, Nature, Life, Family, and Motherhood. She is revered by Vistani too. Hala's priestesses are midwives, healers and caretakers for the young. Hala teaches the importance of family, respect for nature, and to use magic wisely. Hala is NG and her favoured weapon is the quarterstaff. Her holy symbol is a pentacle with a triskelion inside. Her domains are Good, Healing, Knowledge, Magic, and Plant.

The Cult of Kanchelsis is a clandestine cult of vampires, dhampyrs, and deranged aristocrats looking for depraved pleasure. Kanchelsis is CE and has two aspects: The Rake is a god of Reveling, Vice, and Corruption, who teaches to be debauched and hedonist and to look for pleasure, while the Beast is a god of Hunger, Hunting, and Blood, who teaches that all that matters is who hunts and who is hunted; to be the predator and not the prey. His priests keep their identities hidden and are often vampires. Kanchelsis' favoured weapon is the gauntlet, and his domains are Chaos, Destruction, Evil, and Madness, plus Trickery for the Rake or Strength for the Beast.



## THE FAMOUS AND THE INFAMOUS

### **Sergei von Zarovich**

*(Young Adult Human 5th Magnitude Corporeal Ghost Swashbuckler 20, CG)*

Sergei appears as he did in life, a bright young man wearing his best dress. He appears alive, but a quick glance at his neck and chest reveals the deep cuts which killed him in life. Sergei roams Barovia at will—even though his body is buried in the crypts of Castle Ravenloft—protecting the inhabitants and at the same time trying to mend things with his brother. He is the only one to know for sure where and when Tatyana is reborn. His burden is the love he still bears for his brother.

*(Adventure Hook: When a handsome gentleman starts to offer the adventurers valuable information about Barovia and its ruler, they soon or later notice oddities about their friend, like the fact he never eat or drinks. Will they still trust a ghost?)*

### **Adrian Martikov**

*(Adult Human Wereraven Ranger 5, LG)*

The innkeeper of the Blood of the Vine Inn in Barovia Village, Adrian is a loyal friend and advisor for anyone who needs an ear. His family is native to Krezk, where they have the biggest vineyard in Barovia. Only a few close friends outside of his family know that Adrian is a Wereraven, because many of the von Zarovich monarchs have persecuted them, starting with Strahd the Devil.

*(Adventure Hook: One of his closest friends is the Archpriest of Barovia Village, and when the man disappears, he is ready to risk his secret to help the adventurers to find him.)*

### **Lady Afina Khyristrix**

*(Adult Human Witch 5, NE)*

Afina is the Court Alchemist of Barovia and one of the more important advisors of the Count-King. A young, fascinating woman, she often visits the village and the city of Barovia to gather ingredients for her concoctions.

*(Adventure Hook: The truth is that Afina works for Strahd because she is forced to. She made a deal with*

*a demon for power, and her master, whose name she has taken as her surname, wants her in Strahd's good graces. She is not enthusiastic about it, and might be persuaded to help desperate adventurers escaping Castle Ravenloft, for a price.)*

### **Alina Vaduva**

*(Adult Human Werewolf Ranger Woodcutter 3, CN)*

A trapper and a furrier, she came to live in Barovia after her husband Laszlo's death, and she lives with her three-year-old son. She is an expert in her trade, and a capable guide if someone needs to reach the Svalich Pass faster than possible but is also reserved and quiet.

*(Adventure Hook: Alina is a werewolf, and when her prejudiced husband discovered it, he tried to kill both her and their unborn baby. She transformed and killed him in self defence, but when a mysterious stranger starts stalking her and her child, she starts to fear that her past has come back, and the adventurers might be her only chance to survive.)*

### **Queen Widow Anastrasya Karelova**

*(Adult Human Vampire Wizard Necromancer 8/Aristocrat 6, LE)*

The last wife of Count-King Strahd XI, the Cursed, allegedly the mother of his successor, is an unexpectedly pleasant woman, involved in a lot of charity projects, who animates Castle Ravenloft's social life with balls and other events, despite her son's reluctance in participating.

*(Adventure Hook: Anastrasya is in truth a vampire, and she keeps it very private. When the adventurers are charged with retrieving a jewel stolen from the Queen Widow, they can't suspect that the alleged thief is instead a person who stumbled onto the Queen's secret, and now she wants that person silenced.)*

### **Andrea von Zarovich**

*(Adult Human Wizard Diviner 6, LN)*

A member of the cadet branch of the von Zaroviches, she is the Burgomistress of Vallaki, and a renowned scholar. She teaches arcane arts at Queen Ravenovia Memorial University, and she devotes a lot of her time and resources to the institution. She is married and has one son, Kurt von Zarovich.

*(Adventure Hook: The Queen Ravenovia Memorial University is an ancient institution founded by Strahd I five centuries ago. Its vault has come to store several artefacts over time, some belonging to the royal house itself. When the heavily warded vault is robbed, Lady Andrea needs the help of the PC's to recover the stolen contents.)*

### **Lady Anna Krezkova**

*(Middle Aged Human Cleric 7, NG)*

The wife of Lord Wachter, Lady Anna is the respected leader of the Cult of Hala in Krezk. She is respected as a spiritual advisor and sought out as a midwife.

*(Adventure Hook: After a visit from Duke Basil von Holt, women in Krezk are falling ill. Lady Anna charges the adventurers with investigating.)*

### **Annika Bogareva**

*(Young Adult Zarovan Vistani Blooded [see QtR 28 page 379] Dancing Dervish Bard 3, CG)*

Annika is a beautiful young woman of Vistani blood and a great dancer. She is a performer at the Blue Water Inn, where she performs unforgettable dances, mixing skill and magic.

*(Adventure Hook: Annika has been invited to perform at court, but her grandmother, the raunie of the Vardo, has a bad sensation, and she asks the adventurers to escort and protect her.)*

### **Arabelle Zarovan**

*(Adult Zarovan Vistani Blooded Human Wizard 5, N)*

The great-granddaughter of the Great Raunie of the Zarovan tribe, Arabelle has inherited her great-grandmother's gift of the Sight. She is the main overseer of the Zarovan commercial activities in Vallaki.

*(Adventure Hook: Arabelle is secretly an agent of the Order of the Red Cloak, the secret knightly order at the direct service of the Count-King. When a mysterious creature starts to stalk and attack the various Vistani's vardos, she needs to stop it, and asks for the help of the adventurers.)*

### **Arik Lorensk**

*(Adult Human Awakened Skeleton Rogue 5, CN)*

Arik was the Blood o' the Vine innkeeper in the times of Strahd the First. When he died, his body was turned into a skeleton servant and stayed in that state for centuries, until he was awakened by Strahd XI and subsequently freed by Sergei. Nowadays, he disguises himself as a jolly travelling wine merchant and tries to make money to support his descendants. Occasionally, he works as a messenger for Sergei.

*(Adventure Hook: While travelling, the adventurers meet Arik on the road, and he offers them a sum to escort him. During the travel, they notice that Arik never eats with them.)*

### **Arrigal Zarovan**

*(Adult Zarovan Vistani Blooded Human Rogue 7, LE)*

Arabelle's Uncle Arrigal poses as a friendly and naive merchant, but in truth, he is one of the most efficient agents in the Order of the Red Cloak.

*(Adventure Hook: The adventurers are in trouble, and their recently made friend Arrigal seems to be the only one willing or able to help them. They only need to do him a small favour...)*

### **Dame Ashlyn Telekova**

*(Adult Female Human Paladin of Andaral 6, LG)*

A member of the Order of the Raven, the knightly order sworn to the Church of Andaral, Ashlyn is renowned for her unwavering dedication to protecting people from evil. She wears the King Barov Medal of Honour, the highest Barovian civilian merit decoration.

*(Adventure Hook: When the adventurers meet Ashlyn, she is trying to recover two missing friends. However, there is something that does not seem quite right with her. She is restless, gaunt, thinned like butter spread on too much bread. And she keeps holding her medal like a sort of talisman.)*

### **Astrilax diCorvi**

*(Middle Aged Human Wizard Astrologist 12, LN)*

Professor diCorvi, of Collodian origins, is a docent of Astronomy in Queen Ravenovia Memorial University in Vallaki, and the director of the Midway Haven Observatory. He is a renowned scholar and has

written a lot of books on the arcane properties of stars and planets.

*(Adventure Hook: Professor diCorvi is secretly the head of the order of Celestines, a cabal of scholars trying to find an exact way to divine the future. As such, he is in possession of crucial secret information, and when the Order of the Red Cloak starts to press him too much, he tries to divert it with the help of the adventurers.)*

### **Baba Înecat**

*(Mature Sea Hag Witch 5, CE)*

One of Baba Lysaga's daughters, she lives in the Swamps near Lake Zarovich, and she is pretty deranged and cruel. She is blindly loyal and obedient to her mother, but every other being is a target, including her sister.

*(Adventure Hook: Înecat kidnaps kids from a family tied to the adventurers. She has hidden them in the swamps, but they are magically protected for seven days. Just enough time to go and kill her sister.)*

### **Baba Lysaga**

*(Ancient Hag Witch 11, LE)*

The most powerful hag in Barovia was Strahd the First's midwife. Jealous of Queen Ravenovia, legends say Lysaga poisoned her but was discovered and banished by King Barov IV. She was a Cleric of Hala but was stripped of her divine blessing and turned into a powerful, unique hag. She now resides in Lysaga's Hill, near the town of Berez, in a hut which moves on chicken legs, sometimes helping people, sometimes eating them.

*(Adventure Hook: Baba Lysaga is as mythical as the Devil Strahd, and yet the adventurers might meet a seemingly harmless old woman in the Duskwood and be invited to have dinner in her hut. A hut with strange decorations, looking just like chicken legs.)*

### **Baba Zelenna**

*(Mature Green Hag Witch 7, NE)*

Vain, flickeringly moody, and cunning, Zelenna is the daughter Lysaga is prouder of, and also the one who is less loyal to her mother. Zelenna craves luxury and the best things of life and will use her considerable power to get what she wants.

*(Adventure Hook: The adventurers meet a distressed damsel on the road, allegedly a victim of robbery. Who could refuse to help adorable Lady Zelenna?)*

### **Baron Vargas Vallakovich**

*(Middle Aged Human Fighter 7, LE)*

Strong-built and tall, with black hair and moustache, Vargas Vallakovich is the Burgmaster of Renika, whose grip can go from gentle to vise-like when the situation demands. He appears as a reasonable and well-loved ruler who feeds the paupers, pays for healthcare, and keeps taxes way lower than the average. He punishes harshly only unrepentant criminals.

*(Adventure Hook: The reason Baron Vargas can keep taxes so low is because he pays them in blood and flesh; he regularly has prisoners and kidnapped peasants carried away to Ravenloft to feed the Devil Strahd. One friend of the adventurers was taken by the guards for interrogation and somehow disappeared.)*

### **Morgana Sunbane**

*(Mature Night Hag Alchemist 5, NE)*

This seemingly harmless apothecary living in Vallaki, in the old Bonegrind Mill, is in truth a powerful Night Hag, a fiend native to the Mists themselves. She is a talented crafter of alchemical items, and she is always ready to present new concoctions which can resolve any problems ... for a price.

*(Adventure Hook: Missus Sunbane needs to carry a provision of a lenitive oil—in truth, night oil, a concoction which makes vampires immune to sunlight—to Castle Ravenloft, and her usual Vistani courier deserted her, so she gives a very generous sum to the adventurers to deliver it.)*

### **Lady Chantal Laurent**

*(Adult Human Oracle of Andaral 3, LG)*

Lady Chantal was a lover of Strahd XI. She had a child with him but refused to leave her dhampyr son in his hands and hid from him. After his fall, she was given a pension, and a mansion in Vallaki with some land in her son's name, Renoire Fitzstrahd. She is deemed a charming woman, but with a peculiar way of thinking, which keeps many from taking her seriously.

*(Adventure Hook: Strahd has never given up on the boy, and sends his minions to kidnap him, counting on the fact that nobody will believe Lady Chantal. Unfortunately for him, the adventurers are eyewitnesses.)*

### **Cyrus Balcescu**

*(Old Caliban Bloodbound Servant Rogue 3, CN)*

This old, stinking man, who works as head majordomo at Castle Ravenloft, seems completely harmless, and mostly he is. However, as the most loyal of servants his master ever had, he is also the most knowledgeable of Castle Ravenloft's secrets. He is a century old, thanks to having been bound to his master, the Devil Strahd.

*(Adventure Hook: Every month, at the end of the month, Cyrus goes to the market in Barovia Village and personally oversees the castle refurbishments. That is the only moment the adventurers can infiltrate Castle Ravenloft to investigate missing children.)*

### **Mary "Mad Mary" Barovianka**

*(Adult Human Oracle of Hala 1, NG)*

A former maid at Castle Ravenloft, she left the job after her husband's death. At the same time, she started to develop a weird personality, mumbling weird things about the world of the unseen. She is still a great seamstress, and the doting mother of little Gertrude.

*(Adventure Hook: When Gertrude disappears, Mary rambles to the adventurers about the Devil in the castle.)*

### **Maxwell Bilkon**

*(Old Human Wizard Evoker 18, LG)*

Professor Maxwell Bilkon is a living legend, born under the reign of Strahd the Wise, who was his friend, and was a powerful opponent of Strahd XI. Nowadays, he lives a peaceful life, teaching evocation in Vallaki.

*(Adventure Hook: Maxwell is not naive and has not been fooled by the ruse of Strahd's regeneration; however, he is willing to give Strahd "XII" the benefit of the doubt. He will not take direct action but will be willing to give information and share his vast arcane*

*knowledge, especially if the adventurers approach him bringing a message from his old friend and mentor, Archibald Everlast.)*

### **Lamont Burganet**

*(Middle Aged Human Wizard Abjurer 11, LG)*

Professor Burganet is the teacher of abjuration at Queen Ravenovia Memorial University, and a kind and reserved person.

*(Adventure Hook: Twenty years ago, Burganet was a merciless mercenary arcanist employed by Strahd XI, who tried to outwit the vampiric necromancer and was cursed with endless torment. Freed by the heroes who killed Strahd XI, he was a changed man and rebuilt a life for himself as a humble and kind teacher. But when his wife is kidnapped by a victim of his past misdeed, he needs the players' help to save her, and his own soul.)*

### **Baron Dimitri Petrov**

*(Middle Aged Human Werewolf Fighter 8, LG)*

Pious and brave, Baron Dimitri is a devout follower of Andaral, and a virtuous man, who has fought the recent plague of werewolves on the Svalich Road with firmness and mercy.

*(Adventure Hook: Victory came with a price, and the Baron is now a maledictive Werewolf. Thanks to his uncle, the Arch-Hierophant, Dimitri can keep the curse under control. But to avoid the risk of being outed, Dimitri needs the adventurers' help.)*

### **Baron Devan Buchwold**

*(Middle Aged Human Fighter 7, LN)*

The Baron of Cuzau is a stalwart servant of the state, and he rules fairly and efficiently. He is trying to find a wife, since he is widowed and childless, and his only relative is a childless cousin.

*(Adventure Hook: Baron Devan has just married a removed cousin of the Count-King, and he is paying a handsome reward for the adventurers to go to Vallaki and retrieve his wife-to-be for him, since an armed garrison might attract too much attention.)*





### **Ermelline "Axe Widow" Azanau**

*(Middle Aged Half-Elf Wood Witch 8 NG)*

Ermelline has been nicknamed Axe Widow, because her husband tried to kill her with an axe, and she retaliated with her magic, killing him. She runs the inn, the Rusty Axe, and occasionally uses her magic to help people in need.

*(Adventure Hook: When one of the adventurers was grievously injured near Cuzau, Ermelline saved their life, so when she asks a favour, they can't really refuse.)*

### **Baron Ivan Wachter**

*(Old Human Fighter 8, LN)*

The noble house of Wachter is the most loyal of all Barovia, and lord Ivan is a worthy scion of that name. He fought valiantly against bandits, and in his youth, he led an expedition in defence of Borca against the Falkovnian invasion, in spite of his house's perpetual disgust for the Dilisnyas.

*(Adventure Hook: Recently, Falkovnia and Barovia opened diplomatic relations. Lord Ivan is currently housing the Falkovnian ambassador while an appropriate mansion is being built for him in Barovia City. The ambassador was a Falkovnian officer Ivan captured in battle. The two share a mutual respect, which is the reason the Count-King entrusted him with the duty of assessing the ambassador. When the ambassador disappears and his Talon bodyguard is found dead, Ivan is doubly invested in retrieving him and offers a generous reward to the adventurers.)*

### **Obercommander Klaus von Stahlwolf**

*(Old Human Fighter Tactician 7, LN)*

The Falkovnian ambassador is the typical Falkovnian diplomat: a disgraced military commander, too old, too many times defeated, or otherwise unfit for duty. In this case, he had the unfortunate honour of leading the Falkovnian vanguard defeated by Borcan and Barovian troops. However, he sacrificed himself to allow the majority of his troopers to rejoin the main Falkovnian army, and that got him a measure of respect. Thus, he was destined to diplomatic service only because of his old age.

*(Adventure Hook: Like every Falkovnian commander and diplomat in a foreign land, von Stahlwolf is*

*shadowed by a Talon, which works as both his bodyguard and his overseer. Von Stahlwolf knows that his Talon has orders to kill him in case of disloyalty, but that has never deterred him from pursuing his own goals—those of the Falkovnian Resistance. He secretly contacts the adventurers to distract the Talon as he retrieves important documents.)*

### **Leo Dilisnya**

*(Adult Human Ancient Vampire Slayer 15, NE)*

Once an ambitious scion of House Dilisnya, his great goal was to replace House von Zarovich on the throne. He tried to exterminate them and their supporters at the marriage of Sergei von Zarovich, but was forced to run when Strahd I turned into a vampire. He actually managed to kill Strahd in an ambush, but Strahd II allegedly killed him. In truth, he was turned into a vampire and left to suffer eternal hunger in an adamantite coffin. Freed by adventurers, who he slew in a bloody frenzy, he nowadays lurks in Barovia, trying to find a way to expose the so-called Strahd XII.

*(Adventure Hook: Leo poses as Bramlay apSturkar a Forfarian-born writer. He is the author of a slanderous series of books called "Von Zarovich: A House of Blood and Darkness." Right now, Strahd XII has done nothing against it, but the adventurers are anonymously tipped that apSturkar may be involved in the disappearance of women near Immol, where the writer resides.)*

### **Captain Iagus Piatră**

*(Adult Gravestone Gargoyle Fighter 9, LE)*

Once a faithful member of the Order of the Red Cloak, he was killed in the War of Restoration, the uprising which ended the kingdom of Strahd XI. His body was burned, and the ashes used to polish a gargoyle, which animated with his soul. From that day, Iagus has served Strahd XII with the same unwavering loyalty and brutal efficiency he had offered as a human, enhanced by superior gargoyle abilities.

*(Adventure Hook: The adventurers are told of a strange, flying beast stalking people in the night.)*

**Arch-Hierophant Lucian Petrov**

*(Venerable Human Cloistered Cleric of Andaral 18, LG)*

The head of the Church of Andaral, Lucian is a member of the powerful Petrov family, and his niece is married to the Lord of Renika. He is a humble and devout servant of his god, and he has a good working relationship with the Count-King, but does not trust him. He is one of the most powerful divine spellcasters in Barovia, but his old age has reduced his mobility and eyesight. His death will lead to a complicated succession.

*(Adventure Hook: Lucian had a vision, and wants to hide the Symbol of Ravenkind, the most holy relic of the church, so he entrust it to the adventurers. When the arch-hierophant dies, they become the most wanted.)*

**Sheriff Anton von Zarovich**

*(Adult Zarovichan Dhampyr Fighter 10, LE)*

The Sheriff of Barovia Village and the Commander of the Royal Guard of Ravenloft, Anton is the Lord Commander of the Order of the Red Cloak. He is Strahd's most loyal lieutenant, and also an illegitimate son of Strahd XI.

*(Adventure Hook: The Sheriff approaches the adventurers, offering them a big reward to apprehend a dangerous runaway. She turns out to be a blond girl, who does not appear to be so dangerous.)*

**Arya Kolishova**

*(Young Adult Human Cleric of Ezra 5, LG)*

A passionate young woman with a love for travelling, she usually spends time travelling the roads of Barovia. Kind and generous, she never denies a word of comfort to someone who needs it. She is brave, and she is never afraid to speak her mind about injustice and what she sees as wrong.

*(Adventure Hook: Strahd XII met Arya at one of his "mother's" balls, and from that moment, he could not forget her. He is convinced she is Tatyana's latest reincarnation, and starts to court her. But Arya already has a loved one, a girl named Lilyana. The adventurers help Lilyana when someone tries to kill*

*her, and Arya asks them to discover whoever sent the killers, and why.)*

**Lilith Maryszkas**

*(Adult Human Cleric of Erlin 12, NE)*

The bloodthirsty and cunning leader of the Cult of Erlin in Barovia, Lilith has blood ties with the head of the cult in Gundarak. She poses as a dimwitted waitress in Hoessla. She has built a secret temple below her house and hosts the blasphemous rites of her god monthly.

*(Adventure Hook: The Order of the Red Cloak has infiltrated the Cult of Erlin. Lilith needs to root them out, so she sets up the adventurers to do her dirty work.)*

**Emily "Granny Imix" Invich**

*(Old Bruja Green Hag Cleric of Hala 5/Sorceress 3, NG)*

This smiling old woman is the mother of Lady Invich (Middle Aged Human Aristocrat 5, NG) and she dedicates herself to orphaned children in Invich Manor.

*(Adventure Hook: In her youth, Granny Imix was a vain woman who murdered her own husband, but her love for her daughter turned her to repent and ask for the help of Hala, who turned her into a bruja. But when her old covenant sister comes to exact vengeance, Granny Imix needs the help of the adventurers to save her family, including the orphaned children.)*

**Count Basil von Holt**

*(Human Old Vampire Rogue 7/Sorcerer 7, NE)*

This smiling gentleman is the soft-spoken lord of Berez, and a member of the Count-King's private council. He is the Count-King's first advisor and Royal Chancellor. He is always genial and kind in all of his conversations, and he is always ready to lend his hand to help those in need.

*(Adventure Hook: Basil von Holt is only the last of a line of clones of the original Basil von Holt, himself the clone of Strahd the Devil. Basil is always loyal to the current incarnation of Strahd, and has a unique bond with him: Strahd hears, sees, and remembers anything Basil hears, sees, and remembers, and they*

can switch places every time Strahd wishes so. When Basil is negotiating for the hand of a woman in the name of the Count-King, he finds himself cornered by the adventurers, who want him to answer about the mysterious abductions of women who allegedly refused his proposal. He surrenders without fighting and is held in a room for the night. Next time the adventurers go check on the Count, they find Strahd in it.)

### **Ludmilla von Holt**

*(Adult Zarovichan Dhampyr Cleric of Kanchelsis 7, CE)*

Ludmilla is the illegitimate daughter of Basil von Holt, adopted by a side branch of the family. She owns and runs the Bloodfall Inn in Berez, and appears to be a very competent, if reserved, businesswoman, and a beautiful socialite. Under the inn, there is a very exclusive club in the honour of Kanchelsis the Rake, where the name Bloodfall acquires a more literal meaning. Occasionally, the Beast is honoured too, with some gladiatorial competition. Surprisingly, Ludmilla uses only willing participants as blood donors and gladiatorial opponents, as she knows the benefit of discretion.

*(Adventure Hook: When a client goes out of her way, Ludmilla is forced to eliminate the problem with the help of the adventurers, without revealing too much, of course.)*

### **Count Kolyan Indrirov**

*(Middle Aged Human Aristocrat 5, LN)*

The Burgomaster of Barovia Village is also a member of the Inner Council as Royal Treasurer, and third in order of importance after the Count-King and Count von Holt. He is cunning and ambitious, but also loyal and dependable.

*(Adventure Hook: The winter snows have damaged the streets of Barovia, and the Treasurer needs more funds. Kolyan is going to propose an una tantum contribution from the Vistani. When he is struck without a real cause by an illness which covers his body in boils, he suspects a Vistani curse and pays the adventurers to investigate.)*

### **Lyssa von Zarovich**

*(Adult Human Old Vampire Sorcerer 13, CE)*

The grandchild of Sturm von Zarovich, the youngest brother of Strahd I, she was vampirized by her great uncle and turned into his most innovative arcane researcher. Freed with the death of Strahd III, she lives in clandestinity trying to take her uncle's throne for herself.

*(Adventure Hook: In her latest scheme of conquest, Lyssa struck a pact with the Illithids of Bluetspur, and was shipped a selection of tadpoles for her experiments. The adventurers are tipped about her intentions and must stop her.)*

### **Madame Eva Zarovan**

*(Venerable Zarovan Vistani Blooded Human Cleric of Hala 15, N)*

The Great Raunie of the Zarovan tribe, she is one of the most powerful seers in the known world, able to see centuries in the future. She nowadays spends her time journeying between Vallaki and Barovia Village, where she enjoys the privilege of the bargain her grandmother struck with Strahd VI.

*(Adventure Hook: Her great-grandmother was killed by a vain young thief, whom she cursed to be headless and searching forever for her own head. Eva of course knows where the head is hidden, and to keep the thief from ever getting it back without repenting, she entrusts the clue to the lost head's whereabouts to the adventurers.)*

### **Jaqueline Montarri**

*(Female Human Headstealer Rogue 8, CE)*

One of the richest people in Barovia, the head of the Red Vardo Trading Company is rarely seen in public, always retreating into her manor in Immol. She sponsors, yearly, a great competition of hairdressers, inviting famous theatre actors and actresses, and the most beautiful and influential people in the world.

*(Adventure Hook: Jaqueline is a rare undead creature, who needs to steal living people's heads to preserve her youth and vitality. The yearly hairdressing competition is only a pretext to scout for new heads, and this year, her eyes have settled on one of the adventurers' heads.)*

**Baron Alman Markov***(Adult Human Cavalier of the Lion 8, LG)*

A paragon of honour and virtue, the Baron of Jarvinak was crippled in his youth falling from a horse but was healed by a Vistani raunie. From that moment, he treated the nomad people with the utmost respect, and once he took his father's place as Baron, he protected them with zeal. He is thinking of marrying a Vistani-blooded girl.

*(Adventure Hook: Alman's wife-to-be is abducted, and he offers a reward to whoever manages to save her.)*

**Martina Amalovna***(Young Adult Human Cleric of D'vla 9, CG)*

Martina's life was saved by a vampire, who introduced her to the cult of the Maiden of Night. She teaches things that the majority of Barovians treat as madness, but a small group in Jarvinak seems more open-minded about her message of pacific coexistence.

*(Adventure Hook: Intolerance threatens Martina's nascent community, and the adventurers must stop the mob from lynching Martina.)*

**Elias Bogranov***(Middle Aged Najat Vistani Blooded Human Bard 5, N)*

Elias is the Captain of the Bogranov Vardo, which is a common presence between Jarvinak and Immol, where they are welcomed both as entertainers and as couriers.

*(Adventure Hook: The day of Elias' son Donani's marriage, the wife-to-be, Leila, is kidnapped. The adventurers happen to be on friendly terms with the vardo, and offer their help.)*

**Baron Kirill Olszanik***(Adult Human Bard 7, N)*

Kirill is one of the richest people in Barovia, thanks to Immol being the grainbasket of the County-Kingdom. He is a poet and maintains a court of artists. Every year, during the Harvest Festival, he rewards the best poets and writers with a place in his court.

*(Adventure Hook: This year, someone is killing the artists in the competition, and the baron asks the adventurers to investigate.)*

**Iorweth apLamallan***(Adult Human Gastronome Bard 9, NG)*

Iorweth has transformed culinary art into a form of magic, and his inn, the Bolting Stag, is a school of this unique kind of magic.

*(Adventure Hook: A Kargatane—an agent of the Darkonian Secret Service, the KargATS—Ernst Turagdon (Adult Human Bard 3 LN), is interested in Iorweth's art. The Order of the Red Cloak tips the adventurers in hopes that they manage to foil this attempt to steal Iorweth's secrets for a foreign power.)*

**ORGANISATIONS**

**The Celestines:** This LN organisation is a secret cabal of scholars who are searching for a way to divine the future in an exact manner. They have accumulated a huge treasure in knowledge that they keep safe in a secret vault. The head of the Celestines is Professor Astrilax diCorvi, Ordinary of Astronomy at the Queen Ravenovia Memorial University in Vallaki.

**DREAD POSSIBILITY – THE MADDENING KNOWLEDGE**

Not all knowledge is safe, and some knowledge is dangerous even for the mind which holds it. Some members of the Celestines might be developing a form of madness which makes them paranoid, aggressive, and violence prone.

**The Keeper of the Feather:** This NG organisation is formed mainly of wereravens and ravenkin, small raven-like humanoids, and it is dedicated to fighting the influence of evil and any form of moral corruption. It is lead by a mysterious ravenkin cleric of Andaral called Pyoor Twohundredsummers (Ravenkin Cleric of Andaral 15, NG).



### DREAD POSSIBILITY – WERECROWS

Some wereravens might be corrupted by the forces of darkness and deception. These may transform into werecrows, which are smaller and more aggressive.

**The Order of the Raven:** This LG knightly order is tied to the Church of Andaral. It is tolerated by the state under three conditions: 1) the Order never raises its arms against the Count-King and his direct representatives; 2) the Order defends Barovia against its enemies; 3) the Order respects and enforces the law of the land. The Commander of the Order is Sir Klaus von Zarovich (Adult Human Cavalier of the Land 13, LG).

### DREAD POSSIBILITY – THE CLAW OF THE RAVEN

When the conditions were accepted, the Arch-Hierophant knew who the Count-King was, so he opted for creating a secret faction inside the Order, which dedicates itself to fighting supernatural evil, especially undead: the Dawnslayers. Dame Elizabeta Pirosska (Middle Aged Human Paladin Undead Scourge of Andaral 11, LG) leads the secret branch from its secret headquarters in Krezk.

**The Order of the Red Cloak:** This LN/LE order is the secret service of Barovia, and it works to eliminate threats, both from the inside and from the outside. Its head is the Lord Commander of the Royal Guard, Sheriff Anton von Zarovich.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY – BLOOD SOAKED CLOAKS

The Order's upper echelons might be completely devoted to the Count-King, and are perfectly aware of his nature. They are capable of any action in his service.

## THE DARKLORD: STRAHD VON ZAROVICH

**Middle Aged Human Ancient Vampire (Fighter 5/Necromancer Wizard 19, LE) (292 HP)**

**Size:** Medium

**Speed:** 50 feet, Climb 20 feet

**Initiative:** +11 (+5 in Castle Ravenloft)

**Senses:** Perception +20 (+5 in Castle Ravenloft), Dark Vision 120 feet, Scent

**Armour Class:** 39, Touch 23, Flat Footed 31 (+7 Dex, +4 mage armour, +1 dodge, +12 natural, +5 deflection) (+5 in Castle Ravenloft)

**Space/Reach:** 1 square/1 square

**Combat Maneuver Bonus/Combat Maneuver Defense:** +24/41 (+5 in Castle Ravenloft)

**Str 26 (30), Dex 20 (24), Con -, Int 26 (30), Wis 18 (24), Ch 18 (24)**

**Saving Throws:** Fort +21, Ref +20, Will +22 (+5 in Castle Ravenloft)

**Special Qualities:** curse of the darklord, arcane bond (amulet), life sight, rejuvenation, undead traits, SR 20, channel resistance +13, DR 15/magic and silver, resist cold 10, resist electricity 10, vampire weaknesses, change shape, gaseous form, one with the land, reduced vulnerabilities (unaffected by garlic, mirrors, and holy symbols), improved children of the night (summon worgs, not wolves; summon undead), repelled by the Barovian blood rose.

**Special Attacks:** power over undead, grave touch, blood drain, children of the night, create spawn, dominate (DC 31), energy drain, master of Barovia, lord of the castle (+5 in Castle Ravenloft)

**Melee:** Melee Slam +29 (1d4+21 +3 with arcane strike (swift action) plus energy drain 2, DC 29 (+5 damage, +5 to hit, +5 DC in Castle Ravenloft)

**Melee:** Tergbane +31/+26/+21 (1d8+22+3 with arcane strike (swift action) plus energy drain 2 + 1d6 negative energy + 2d6 unholy damage to Good aligned targets)

**Ranged:** Missile Ray +21

**Skills:** Bluff (+19), Climb (+31), Craft (Alchemy) (+23), Diplomacy (+19), Handle Animal (+16), Intimidate (+24), Knowledge (Arcana) (+23), Knowledge (History) (+23), Knowledge (Local) (+28), Knowledge (Nature) (+23), Knowledge (Nobility) (+15), Knowledge (Religion) (+23), Ride (+20), Spellcraft (+23) and Use Magic Device (+20).

**Feats:** Iron Will, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (longsword), Furious Focus, Cleave, Improved Iron Will, Scribe Scroll, Command Undead, Arcane Strike, Combat Casting, Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Toughness, Undead Master, Craft Rod, Craft Wondrous Item, Forge Ring, Burning Spell, Spell Focus (Necromancy), Bouncing Spell, Extend Spell, Silent Spell, Improved Magic Ability (dominate), Still Spell.

**Arcane School:** Necromancy; **Opposition Schools:** Abjuration, Enchantment

**Known Spells:** DC 20 + spell level

**Strahd knows all spells up level five.**

6 - acid fog, analyze dweomer, antimagic field, banshee blast, circle of death, contagion (greater), contingency, control weather, create undead, death knell aura (greater), eyebite, flesh wall, forceful hand, guards and wards, greater dispel magic, mass suggestion, planar binding, programmed illusion, true seeing, unwilling shield

7- control undead, delayed blast fireball, epidemic, expend, finger of death, forcecage, grasping hand, greater arcane sight, greater scrying, greater teleport, limited wish, plague storm, project image, spell turning, symbol of weakness, wave of exhaustion

8 - bestow curse (greater), clenched fist, clone, create greater undead, death clutch, horrid wilting, irresistible dance, maze, moment of prescience, orb of the void, polymorph any object, soul reaver

9 - curse of fell season, cursed earth, freedom, imprisonment, mage's disjunction, massacre, soul bind, suffocation, wail of the banshee, wish.

### Daily Spells

#### Spell level/Number of spells

0/4 1/6 2/6 3/6 4/6 5/6 6/5 7/5 8/4  
9/4

**Caster Level: 19; Save DC 20 + Spell Level,**

**Property:** Bag of conservation IV, Crest of Von Zarovich brooch (amulet of spell cunning/mighty fists +5/natural armour +5 / nondetection / shielding / detect thoughts / SR 20), crystal ball of true seeing, cloak of resistance +4 / minor displacement / elvenkind, gloves of storing, headband of mental superiority +6, belt of physical might (Str, Dex) +4, mirror of opposition, ring of protection +5, ring of wizardry I-IV, rod of absorption, rod of alertness, rod of metamagic (bouncing), rod of metamagic (sickening), rod of metamagic (reach), rod of metamagic (lingering), rod of metamagic (persistent), rod of metamagic (dazing), rod of metamagic (silent), rod of metamagic (extend), rod of metamagic (quicken), pearls of power (3 x 1st, 2 x 2nd, 1 x 3rd), permanent protective penumbra, Tergbane (+5 unholy negative energy longsword); up to a million gold coins.

**Challenge Rating: 29**

### Background

Strahd von Zarovich was the first-born son of the Count-King of Vallaki, Barov IV, and Queen Ravenovia. As a young boy, he was tutored in magic by his mother, but he soon had to turn to martial practice to complete the liberation of the Balok region from the decadent Terg empire. His mother died giving birth to his brother Sergei, and he always harboured a little resentment for it. King Barov remarried, alienating his older son, and sired a final son, Sturm. After he recovered the Olympia Valley, he dedicated it to his father, building the city of Barovia there, but the old warrior-king never saw it built, dying at the Tergs' hands. Strahd I unleashed a terrible vengeance, but was forced to sell his soul to the fiend Inajira to manage to destroy the last great Terg army in the valley of the Nharov River. Strahd was now the King of a new nation, but he kept the traditional title of Count-King, only now he was Count-King of Barovia. He apparently outsmarted Inajira, who was never able to collect, but when he finally returned to the great castle he built in his mother's memory, Castle Ravenloft, he was bitter and cold. When his brother Sergei introduced him to his betrothed, Tatyana, jealousy burned deep. He bargained with the forces of death, maybe with Erlin,

maybe with Kanchelsis, and they gave him his youth back. The price was his humanity. He killed Sergei and tried to marry Tatyana, but she killed herself trying to run from him. At the same time, Leo Dilisnya tried to assassinate the members of the von Zarovich family and their allies, but failed. Strahd killed hundreds that night after turning into a vampire, and was swallowed by the Mists.

### **Current Sketch**

Strahd is currently living out his thirteenth life, and in this incarnation, he is more attentive to appearances than in the past. He rules Barovia, and yearn to have Tatyana back. The girl reincarnates once every time he regenerates as a different Strahd, and he tries to woo her and marry her. The current incarnation of Strahd has good publicity.

### **Combat**

Strahd has an entire kingdom of minions to fight in his place, and usually prefers to defeat his enemies using his sharp wit, and by turning them against one another. If forced to fight, he is a formidable opponent, both as a spellcaster and as a melee fighter, wielding the legendary Tergbane.

### **Special Abilities:**

**Curse of the Dark Lord:** Strahd is prisoner in a cycle, with Tatyana reincarnating and him trying unsuccessfully to woo her. The way out is simple: let her go. But he has never thought of taking it, not even in his most benevolent incarnations. As a side effect, the bright red rose which blossomed in the place Tatyana died, the Barovian blood rose, is now anathema for Strahd. He can't come within 60 feet of the flower and will not attack it with destructive spells. A house with a bush of these roses in front of the door is safe from the Count-King scrying, and he won't enter such a house.

**I am the Land:** Strahd is aware of any spellcasting happening in Barovia, and he can scry through the eye of any Barovian without a saving throw. He must still use a *scrying* spell or item and must know the target's name. If more than ten Barovians die in the same place, the Count-King knows the location of the corpses. Once a day, Strahd can teleport to any location in Barovia.

**Rejuvenation:** If Strahd is killed, he goes through vampiric regeneration; he is reborn in his coffin in a week, with a slightly different, younger appearance, and a different personality, depending on the circumstances of his death. All effects tied to his life end and every one of his spawn is freed.

**Master of Barovia:** Strahd does not need permission to enter private buildings in Barovia, and can force nature to facilitate his travels in the land, creating bridges and shelters.

**Lord of the Castle:** Strahd knows the name and status of every person who has slept one night in Castle Ravenloft. In the castle, he can teleport, animate objects, and change the room configuration at will.

**Lair:** Castle Ravenloft is the seat of the Count-King of Barovia, and in five centuries it has born witness to countless atrocities. The castle is a 5th rank Sinkhole of Evil, and at Strahd's will, it can bestow the Fear, Awe, Despair, Sleep, and Rage conditions (Will Save DC 29).

**Closing the Borders:** Whenever Strahd wishes to close the borders, a thick fog surrounds Barovia. This fog is a poison; only a creature who does not breathe or who travels underground can pass untouched. Every other creature needs to make a DC 29 Fortitude saving throw every round to be able to keep walking through the 600 feet of thick fog. A failure means the creature starts suffocating. Strahd can keep the border closed for 1 year.

## **DREADFUL ALTERNATIVES**

### **NEW DOMAIN: THE MISTS**

**Granted Powers:** You have a preternatural link with the supernatural Mists that judge and link the world.

**Mist Navigation (Ex):** You add your cleric level to any Survival check rolled for mist-travelling. You can always take 10 to the roll. Once every day, you can choose to automatically succeed on the roll and so reach your destination without mistakes, together with a number of companions equal to your Wisdom modifier.

**Mist Walking (Ex):** At 6th level, you can summon the Mists to travel to a known location in ten minutes. You can summon the Mists twice at 12th level and thrice at 18th level.

**Domain Spells:** 1st—*obscuring mist*, 2nd—*air bubble*, 3rd—*summoning Mists\**, 4th—*solid fog*, 5th—*mind fog*, 6th—*shield from the Mists\**, 7th—*greater teleport*, 8th—*parting the Mists\**, 9th—*imprisonment*.

\*New spells; see below.

## NEW ARCHETYPES

### Gastronome Bard

Gastronome Bards use cooking as the source of their magic.

**Class Skills:** A Gastronome Bard adds Profession (Baker), (Brewer), (Butcher), (Candycrafter), (Cheesemaker), (Cook), (Creambrewer), (Saucebrewer), and (Soup Chef) to her class skill list, and drops the Perform skills. The Gastronome Bard uses Charisma as his ability for these skills.

**Bardic Cooking:** A Gastronome Bard use flavours and smells to convey the effects of bardic music. To use those abilities, the bard must prepare a number of recipes equal to his daily uses of Bardic Music, using the ability Profession (Baker), Profession (Brewer), Profession (Butcher), Profession (Candycrafter), Profession (Cheesemaker), Profession (Cook), Profession (Creambrewer), Profession (Saucebrewer), or Profession (Soup Chef). Allies need to ingest the food or brew to gain the benefit, but the smell can also act as the Distraction or Contersong ability in a 6 metre radius. Any other coercitive effect requires the enemy to ingest the food or the brew, but the Bard can force any enemy able to see or smell her recipe to make a Will save against the result of her roll. With a failure, the creature is then compelled to eat, and automatically is subjected to the appropriate effect. This modifies the Bardic Performance abilities.

**Versatile Cooking:** At 2nd level, a gastronome bard can choose one type of Profession skill. He can use his bonus in that skill in place of his bonus in associated skills. When substituting in this way, the bard uses his total Profession skill bonus, including

class skill bonus, in place of the associated skill's bonus, whether or not she has ranks in that skill or if it is a class skill. At 6th level, and every 4 levels thereafter, the bard can select an additional type of Profession to substitute.

The types of Profession and their associated skills are: Baker (Craft (Alchemy), Disguise), Brewer (Craft (Alchemy), Diplomacy), Butcher (Intimidate, Sleight of Hand), Candycrafter (Bluff, Craft (Sculpture)), Cheesemaker (Knowledge (Nature), Perception), Cook (Handle Animal, Diplomacy), Creambrewer (Diplomacy, Sense Motive), Saucebrewer (Bluff, Diplomacy), and Soup Chef (Craft (Alchemy), Survival). This feature replaces Versatile Performance.

### Woodcutter Ranger

Woodcutter rangers are experts in surviving in the woodlands and are masters in the use of woodcutter's tools as lethal weapons.

**Combat Style:** A Woodcutter Ranger must choose either Thrown Weapons or Two-Handed Weapon, and uses axes and throwing axes.

**Favoured Terrain (Ex):** At 3rd level, the woodcutter ranger must select the forest terrain. The ranger gains a +3 bonus on initiative checks and Acrobatics, Climb, Knowledge (Geography), Perception, Stealth, and Survival skill checks when he is in this terrain. A ranger travelling through his favoured terrain normally leaves no trail and cannot be tracked (though he may leave a trail if he so chooses).

At 8th level and every five levels thereafter, the woodcutter ranger can't select a new favoured terrain, but at each such interval, the skill bonus and initiative bonus increase by +3.

### Wood Witch

Wood Witches are the keepers of ancient magical lore tied to the woods and primal secrets of natural magic.

**Child of the Woods:** A wood witch gains Animal Handling and Survival as class skills, but loses Intimidate and Knowledge (The Planes) as class skills. This alters the witch's class skills.



**Woodlands Patron:** A wood witch must choose the Woodlands patron. This modifies the Witch's Familiar.

**Speak to the Woods:** A wood witch builds a special rapport with a forest. At 1st level, she can select one large forest. Within its area, she gains a +2 bonus on initiative checks, as well as on Heal, Knowledge (Nature), Perception, Stealth, and Survival checks. At 6th level and every 5 witch levels thereafter, this bonus increases by 2. The Witch can also ignore difficult terrain in her forrest. The wood witch can build a rapport with a new forest after 30 days of remaining there; this severs her bond to her previous woodland. This ability replaces the witch's 1st-level hex.

**Arboreal Travel:** At level 6, a wood witch can use the trees of her forest to move instantaneously. Once per day per point of her Intelligence modifier, the witch can use a move action to enter a tree of Medium or larger size and come out of any tree of the forest. This replaces the hex a witch gets at level 6.

### NEW ORACLE CURSE: UNBELIEVABLE

The Oracle has a -5 in all Bluff, Diplomacy and Intimidate checks no matter how honest she is being. Her Divination Spells Spellcasting level increase of 1 and she has no chance of failure even under the Mists influence (normally a bank of the Mists gives a 10% chance to fail in 5 miles radius, 50 % chance to fail in 1 miles radius and 75 % chance to fail in 1000 feet radius.)

At level 5 the Oracle adds her Charisma modifier to her armor class as long as she does not wear medium or heavy armour.

At level 10 the Oracle can cast Communion once a day as a Spell-like ability without any material component.

At level 15 every time the Oracle fails one of the checks she has a penalty for to influence a NPC, the target of the failed check will instead get the Oracle curse penalty to a roll of the Oracle choice (Skill Check, Attack Roll, Saving Throw) for 1 hour per

oracle level unless they pass a Will ST DC equal to 10+ half the Oracle level + the Oracle Charisma modifier.

### NEW SPELLS

**Summoning Mists** (V, S), Conjuration (Cleric 3, Wizard 3, Druid 3)

Casting Time: 10 minutes

Duration: 2 rounds

ST: No

SR: No

This spell summons the Mists, which engulf the spellcaster and every creature in a 30-foot radius around them. The Mists become visible in the three rounds before the casting is complete (so there are 5 rounds of the Mists being present in total) and can be avoided by leaving the radius.

**Shield from the Mist** (V, S, M: a 500 gp black opal) Abjuration (Cleric 6, Druid 6)

Casting Time: 1 full round.

Duration: 1 hour per caster level

ST: No

SR: No

The spellcaster casts this spell on themselves and on a maximum of five other creatures. Each of the people protected by this spell can make a DC 20 Will saving throw when they would be engulfed by the Mists. With a success, the Mists let the target of the spell out.

**Parting the Mists** (V, S) Abjuration (Cleric 8, Druid 8)

Casting Time: 1 action.

Duration: instantaneous

ST: Will negates.

SR: Yes

The Spellcaster can banish a Mist bank and any Mist Subtype creature in a cone of 60 feet. Creatures get a saving throw to negate the effect.

## NEW RACES

### Dhampyr (Ezekian, Nosferatian, Obirian, Vrykolakian, Zarovichan)

Dhampyrs are the descendants of a union between a human vampire and a living human, or born from a parent suffering from vampire bites. In the Mistworld, their offspring with humans are also dhampyrs, as are the offspring of two dhampyrs. Dhampyrs are common in areas "infested" by vampires, like Barovia, Sanguinia, Valachan, and Gundarak. They are also common in Lazendrak. Pale skinned and often red eyed, dhampyrs are frequently distrusted by their fellow humans. However, the fact that they are still living beings, unable to transform other humans and able to control their thirst, has allowed dhampyrs to somewhat integrate into human societies. In Lazendrak, however, they are usually cherished as bridges between the two worlds. Ezekian dhampyrs share as their common ancestor Ezekiel the Wise, the Night King of Lazendrak himself, and Ezekian vampires are less aggressive and more living-friendly than most vampires. They are the majority of Lazendraki dhampyrs. Zarovichan dhampyrs are common in Barovia, and their shared "ancestor" is nobody less than Strahd the Devil himself. Dhampyrs of Gundarak are of the nosferatian line, nosferatu being the most predatory of vampires, needing blood to keep themselves young-looking. Dhampyrs in Sanguinia belong to the obirian line, obiri being the second less aggressive and more living-like vampiric strain. Dhampyrs in Valachan belong to the vrykolakian line, vrykolakas being the least living-like of the vampires. Dhampyrs tend to blend into the society were they live, but in Lazendrak, they have a unique culture based around being able to live both night and day.

#### **Ezekian Dhampyr Racial Traits:**

**Size:** Medium

**Type (Subtype):** Humanoid (Dhampyr)

**Speed:** 30 feet

**Ability Score Adjustments:** +2 Wisdom, +2 Intelligence, -2 Constitution

**Senses:** Darkvision 120 feet

**Sharp Fangs:** Your bite is a natural weapon; you inflict 1d4 damage + your Strength modifier with it.

**Sharp Senses:** Perception is always a class skill for you, and you gain a +4 racial bonus.

**Shrewd Tongue:** You can use your Intelligence modifier in place of your Charisma modifier for Deception, Diplomacy, and Intimidate skill checks.

**Spell Resistance:** 5 + your character level. It does not activate against innocuous spells.

**Undead Healing:** You are healed by negative energy and harmed by positive energy.

**Languages:** You speak Common (Baloki), Lazendraki (Baloki), and Night speech. Bonus Language: Any non secret.

**Favoured Class:** Alchemist

#### **Nosferatian Dhampyr Racial Traits:**

**Size:** Medium

**Type (Subtype):** Humanoid (Dhampyr)

**Speed:** 30 feet

**Ability Score Adjustments:** +2 Strength, +2 Charisma, -2 Intelligence

**Senses:** Darkvision 120 feet

**Sharp Fangs:** Your bite is a natural weapon; you inflict 1d4 damage + your Strength modifier with it.

**Fearful Appearance:** You have +2 to Intimidate checks, and every time you use an Intimidate check to demoralise someone in combat, the shaken condition lasts a number of rounds equal to your Charisma modifier (minimum 1).

**Spell Resistance:** 5 + your character level. It does not activate against innocuous spells.

**Undead Healing:** You are healed by negative energy and harmed by positive energy.

**Languages:** You speak Common (Baloki), Invidian, and Night Speech. Bonus Language: Any non secret.

**Favoured Class:** Fighter

#### **Obirian Dhampyr Racial Traits:**

**Size:** Medium

**Type (Subtype):** Humanoid (Dhampyr)

**Speed:** 40 feet

**Ability Score Adjustments:** +2 Dexterity, +2 Charisma, -2 Constitution

**Senses:** Darkvision 60 feet

**Sharp Fangs:** Your bite is a natural weapon; you inflict 1d4 damage + your Strength modifier with it.

**Escape Master:** You have a +2 bonus to Escape Artist checks, and you lower the DC of any attempt you make by 5. If the DC is reduced to 5 or less, you automatically succeed.

**Spell Resistance:** 5 + your character level. It does not activate against innocuous spells.

**Undead Healing:** You are healed by negative energy and harmed by positive energy.

**Languages:** Common (Baloki), Draconian (Sanguinian), and Nightspeech. Bonus language: Any non secret.

**Favoured Class:** Rogue

#### ***Vrykolakian Dhampyr Racial Traits:***

**Size:** Medium

**Type (Subtype):** Humanoid (Dhampyr)

**Speed:** 30 feet

**Ability Score Adjustments:** +2 Dexterity, +2 Wisdom, -2 Charisma

**Senses:** Darkvision 60 feet, Scent 30 feet

**Sharp Fangs:** Your bite is a natural weapon; you inflict 1d4 damage + your Strength modifier with it.

**Hunt Master:** You have a +4 bonus to Perception checks, and you can use Perception instead of Survival to follow tracks.

**Spell Resistance:** 5 + your character level. It does not activate against innocuous spells.

**Undead Healing:** You are healed by negative energy and harmed by positive energy.

**Languages:** Common (Baloki), Nightspeech, and Valachani. Bonus language: Any non secret.

**Favoured Class:** Ranger

#### ***Zarovichan Dhampyr Racial Traits:***

**Size:** Medium

**Type (Subtype):** Humanoid (Dhampyr)

**Speed:** 30 feet

**Ability Score Adjustments:** +2 Strength, +2 Charisma, -2 Wisdom

**Senses:** Darkvision 60 feet

**Sharp Fangs:** Your bite is a natural weapon; you inflict 1d4 damage + your Strength modifier with it.

**Disguise Master:** You can cast *disguise self* 3 times a day, using your character level as your caster level.

**Spell Resistance:** 5 + your character level. It does not activate against innocuous spells.

**Undead Healing:** You are healed by negative energy and harmed by positive energy.

**Languages:** Common (Baloki) and Nightspeech. Bonus language: Any non secret.

**Favoured Class:** Bard

#### **Gargoyles**

Gargoyles are grotesque humanoids made of stone and flesh, which live in small, familiar clans. Feared for their strength and fierce combat spirit, gargoyles are usually pacific hunters and loyal protectors. In Borca, Darkon, and Barovia, Gargoyles are respected by secular and religious leaders for their great loyalty and skill as wardens. In Falkovnia, they are forced to serve in the army, while in other lands, they are hunted as beasts. Three sub-races of gargoyles exist: gravestone, stonefangs, and stoneward. Gargoyles are often followers of Ezra or Zhakata the Lawgiver.

#### ***Gravestone Gargoyle***

**Size:** Medium

**Type (Subtype):** Monstrous Humanoid

**Speed:** 30 feet, fly 20 feet

**Ability Score Adjustments:** +2 Strength, +2 Wisdom, -2 Charisma

**Senses:** Darkvision 60 feet

**Sharp Claws:** Your claws are natural weapons; you inflict 1d4 damage + your Strength modifier with it.

**Immobility:** When you stay completely still, you are indistinguishable from a stone statue.

**Stone Skin:** +4 natural armour

**Undead Healing:** You are healed by negative energy and harmed by positive energy.

**Languages:** Common (Baloki) and Gargoyle. Bonus language: Any non secret.

**Favoured Class:** Cleric

### **Stonefangs Gargoyles**

**Size:** Medium

**Type (Subtype):** Monstrous Humanoid

**Speed:** 30 feet, fly 20 feet

**Ability Score Adjustments:** +2 Dexterity, +2 Wisdom, -2 Intelligence

**Senses:** Darkvision 120 feet

**Sharp Claws:** Your claws are natural weapons; you inflict 1d4 damage + your Strength modifier with it.

**Sharp Fangs:** Your bite is a natural weapon; you inflict 1d6 damage + your Strength modifier with it.

**Immobility:** When you stay completely, still you are indistinguishable from a stone statue.

**Stone Skin:** +4 natural armour

**Languages:** Common (Baloki) and Gargoyle. Bonus language: Any non secret.

**Favoured Class:** Ranger

### **Stoneward Gargoyles**

**Size:** Medium

**Type (Subtype):** Monstrous Humanoid

**Speed:** 20 feet, fly 20 feet

**Ability Score Adjustments:** +2 Constitution, +2 Wisdom, -2 Charisma

**Senses:** Darkvision 60 feet

**Sharp Claws:** Your claws are natural weapons; you inflict 1d4 damage + your Strength modifier with it.

**Stone Resistance:** When a stoneward gargoyle takes the full-defence action, their Armour Class increases by 6.

**Immobility:** When you stay completely still, you are indistinguishable from a stone statue.

**Stone Skin:** +4 natural armour

**Stone Spikes:** Your CMD against bull rush, grapple, push maneuvers increases by 4.

**Languages:** Common (Baloki) and Gargoyle. Bonus language: Any non secret.

**Favoured Class:** Fighter

### **Ravenkin**

Ravenkin are small, flying, raven-shaped humanoids. They are native to Barovia, and are devoted to the Church of Andaral.

#### **Ravenkin**

**Size:** Small

**Type:** Monstrous Humanoid

**Speed:** 10 feet, fly 60 feet

**Ability Score Adjustments:** +2 Dexterity, +2 Charisma, -2 Strength

**Drill Peck:** A ravenkin peck is a natural attack which inflicts 1d4 damage + your Strength modifier.

**Eyepeck:** Ravenkin can execute the dirty trick maneuver with their peck, but can only dazzle their opponent for 1 round.

**Gossipper:** Ravenkin have a +4 bonus to Diplomacy to gather information.

**Keen Eyes:** +4 Perception

**Ravenkin Magic (Sp):** Ravenkin can talk with ravens for 10 minutes a day.

**Languages:** Common (Baloki)

**Favoured Class:** Sorcerer



## NEW TEMPLATES

### **Blood Bonded Servant**

Acquired Template; it can be applied to any living Animal, Giant, Humanoid, or Monstrous Humanoid.

Blood bonded servants are created by vampires by feeding their blood to living servants.

**Blood bonded servants are identical to the base creature, except for:**

**Ageless:** As long they get their monthly vampire blood, blood bonded servants will not age.

**Ability Score Adjustments:** +2 Constitution

**Senses:** Darkvision 30 feet

**Call the Master:** A blood bonded servant can summon their master once a day with a standard action.

**CR:** +1

### **Headstealer**

Acquired Template; it can be applied to any living Giant, Humanoid, or Monstrous Humanoid.

**Headstealers keep all the statistics of the base creature, except for:**

**Type:** Undead

### **Undead Traits**

**Resist:** Sonic 10

**Spell Resistance:** equal to their Hit Dice +3

**Channel Resistance:** +3

### **True Sight**

**Head Stealing:** If a headstealer beheads a creature of its original type, it can steal the head. A headstealer becomes temporarily a living creature and can use the mental ability, any magical ability and prepared spells, skills, and knowledge of the victim. The stolen head loses 1 point of Charisma every day. If the Charisma becomes 0, the head turns into a skull and falls from the headstealer's neck.

**Create Spawn:** If a headstealer puts one of their stolen heads on the neck of one of their victims, the victim reanimates as a headstealer under their

control. If the headstealer puts their original head on their neck, they return to life.

## NEW MONSTERS

### **Werecrows**

Werecrows are corrupted wereravens.

**They have the same traits of wereravens, save for:**

**Size:** Small

Werecrows have no humanoid shape.

They have +2 Dexterity and -2 Strength.

### **Wereraven**

Wereravens are lycanthropes which fuse giant ravens and human beings. They are medium humanoids.

## NEW MAGICAL ITEMS

### **King Barov Medal of Honour**

**Cursed Item:** Whoever wears this gold medal must pass a DC 24 Will saving throw or become a focus for the scary spell of the Count-King. They also develop a violent paranoia. It also gives a bonus if 2 to any saving throw. (CL 12, Wondrous Item. To be created, the caster needs the spell bestow curse and 15,000 gp.)

### **Scroll of Inajira**

**Artefact:** This scroll can be used as a spellbook, and allows you to prepare an extra spell for each spell level you can cast. However, it is the prison of the fiend Inajira, and using it too much might allow the fiend to possess someone. (Only the fire of the Symbol of Ravenkind can burn the Scroll.)

### **Holy Symbol of Ravenkind**

**Artefact:** The Symbol can be used only by a LG cleric of Andaral. The Symbol allows the wielder to destroy any undead with less than 20 HD. (Only the blood of seven clerics of Andaral and an unholy blade of Erlin can destroy the Symbol.)



# Excerpts from: "The Register of Monsters"

BY STANTON F. FINK

"There was Plato, too" — continued his majesty, modestly declining the snuff-box and the compliment — "there was Plato, too, for whom I, at one time, felt all the affection of a friend. You knew, Plato, Bon-Bon? — ah! no, I beg a thousand pardons. He met me at Athens, one day, in the Parthenon, and told me he was distressed for an idea. I bade him write down that 'ο νους εστιν[[εστιν]] αυγος.' He said that he would do so, and went home, while I stepped over to the Pyramids. But my conscience smote me for the lie, and hastening back to Athens, I arrived behind the philosopher's chair as he was inditing the 'αυγος.' Giving the gamma a fillip with my finger I turned it upside down. So the sentence now reads 'ο νους εστιν[[εστιν]] αυλος,' and is, you perceive, the fundamental doctrine of his metaphysics."

*Edgar Allen Poe, "Bon-Bon"*





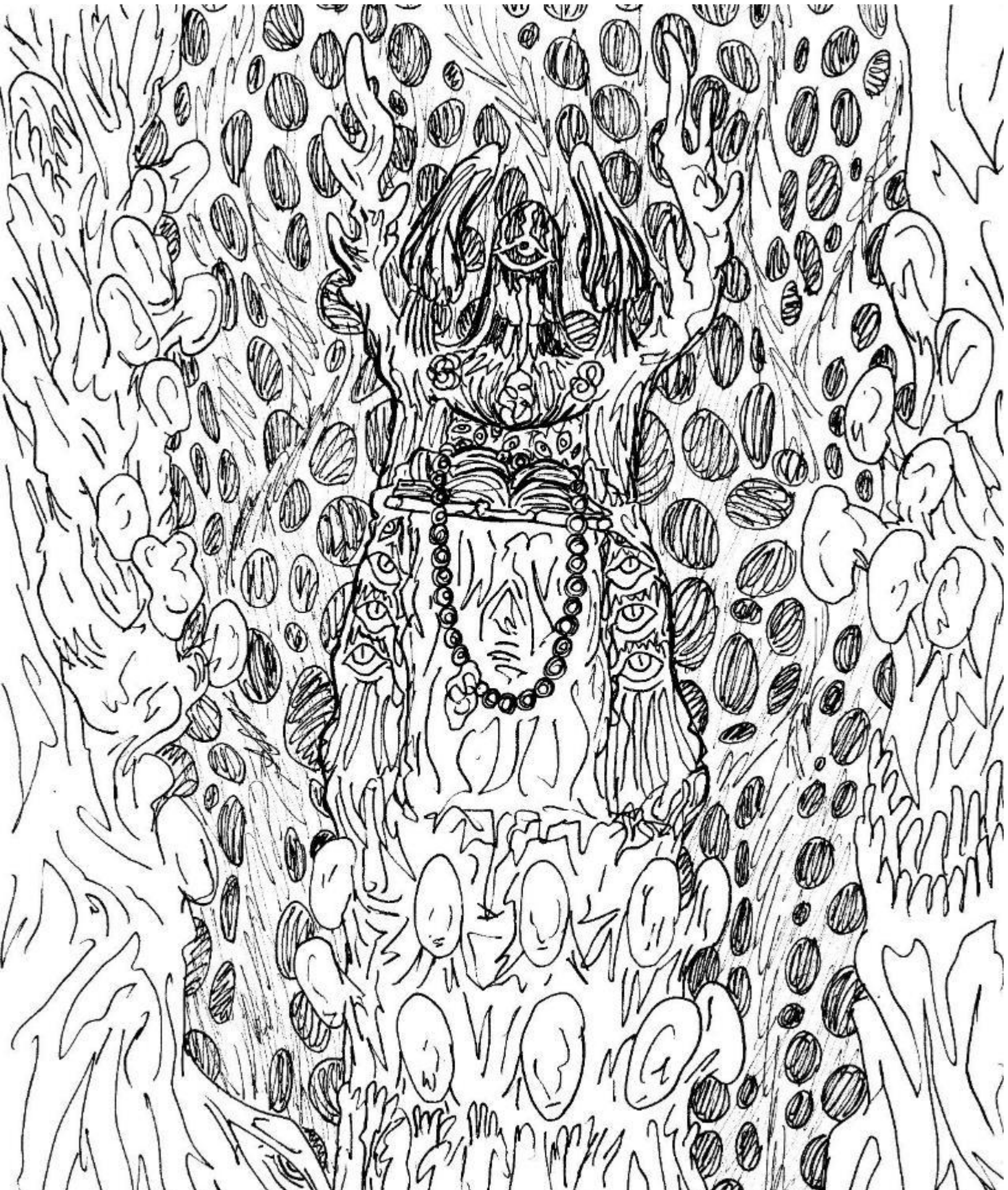
# SIGHING BISHOP ACEDIO

The Sighing Bishop of the Ten Abominations is a demon lord of sorrow and lethargy, originally born from the first souls of those damned through inaction or defense of the status quo.

Acedio's purpose within the Ten is the topic of intense gossip; it is assumed he serves as an advisor to his peers. This much is true, though, exactly what he advises about remains unknown. Other demon lords outside of the Ten often seek the Deacon of Rot, too, but, again, for unknown purposes. Despite this, and despite his leaving his moldy fingerprints everywhere in Abyssal politics, most demon lords despise Acedio, as his involvement is seen as a harbinger of bad luck. Because the Sighing Bishop is devoted to stasis, many Abyssal powers mistakenly assume Acedio is devoted to Law. This confusion has made an enemy out of Alvarez the Purging Duke, though the other members of the Ten, Amentia and Desperatia especially, always stand ready to defend Acedio from interference or assault. Contrary to what Alvarez assumes, the devils and other lawful fiends have no fondness for Acedio, as, the Deacon of Rot encourages the breakdown of society and the subversion of law through inaction. That Acedio has slain hundreds of baatezu with his aura of venomous melancholy is another important factor in the devils' antipathy.

Acedio's true form is that of a tall humanoid clothed in robes woven of fungus, his cowed head being revealed as a mushroom bursting through its veil. To put others at ease, he often assumes the form of a humanoid child, of any race, clad in pajamas. In all of his disguises, Acedio speaks in a lilting, yet droning, voice very reminiscent of a lullaby. Acedio has numerous mortal minions under his influence, but has never bothered to establish any official cult. Instead, Acedio controls his mortal minions individually, speaking to them through dreams in order to "ask favors of (his) friends." In certain circumstances of great importance, the Deacon of Rot often possesses a mortal follower directly to complete a task. Acedio's mortal children all carry a rosary in imitation of their lord's Rosary of Stasis, and all of them reek of fungal rot no matter how clean they may be.







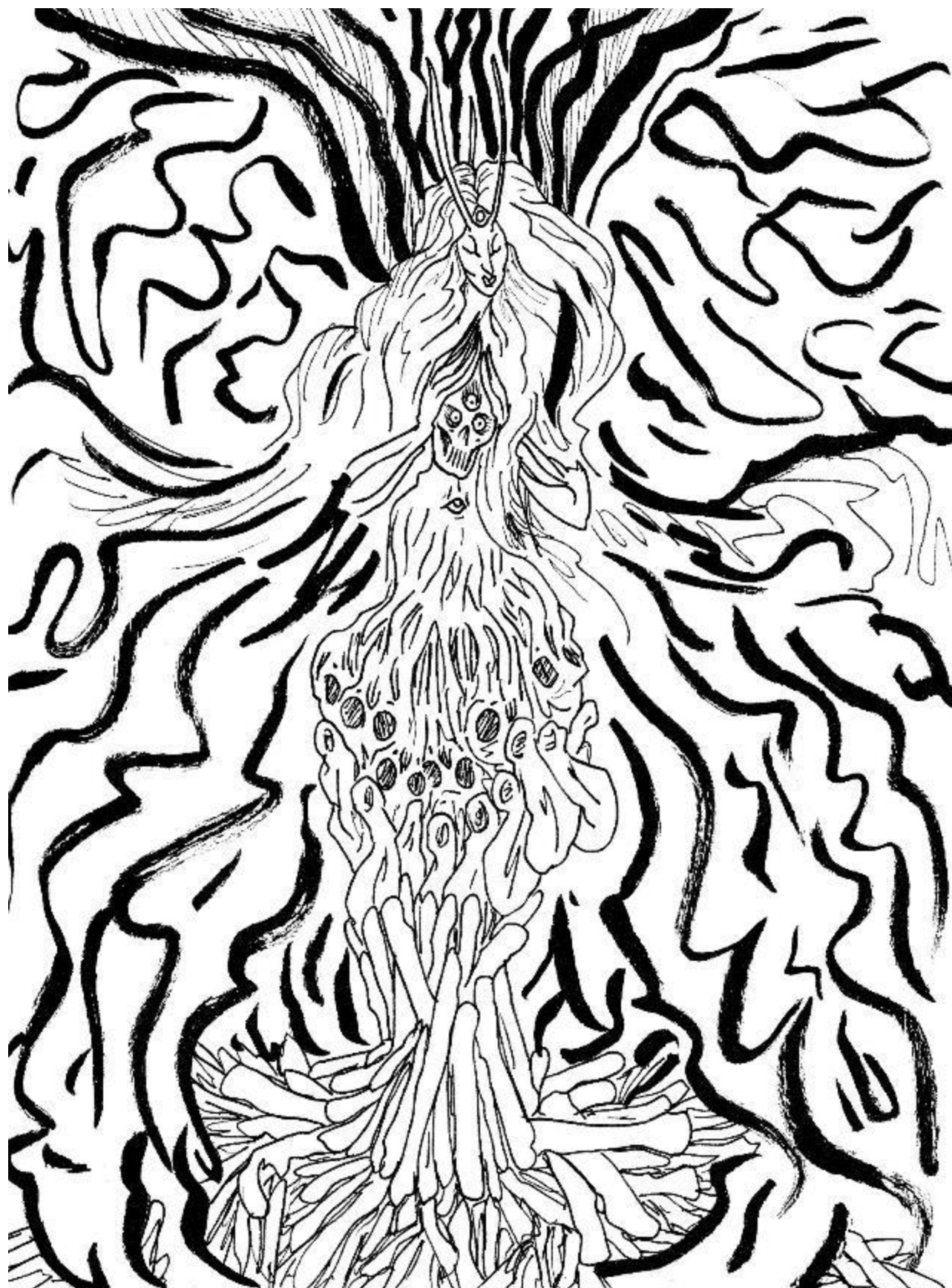
# AGAPA BABILNERIATH

Agapa Babilneriath, Prince of The Golden Cocoon, is a minor demon lord who brings enlightenment through the study of forbidden sorcery and mutating the body to achieve spiritual release. He appears very similar to his cultists' depictions of him, either as a comely humanoid, usually an elf or a human, emerging from a cocoon, or as a monstrous, anthropomorphic cocoon.

The Children of the Golden Cocoon usually establish hermitages where they can study and prepare for their demonic apotheoses without interference. Other followers disguise themselves as traveling healers or tinkerers so that they can spread their lord's blessings across the land, creating horrific outbreaks of mutagenic diseases.

Sometimes, the Prince of The Golden Cocoon will send forth his envoys, the babilneriath demons, to make his influence more forcefully known.

Other demon lords regard Agapa Babilneriath as a babbling fop, as his constant yammerings about ascension and “harmonious transformation” are seen as monotonously annoying. But, because the Prince's schemes bring power to the Abyss, especially after pulling an entire world into the Abyss through a “monster plague,” most other demon lords take great pains to leave him and his envoys alone as a courtesy.





# AGARICORPIO

A dangerous hybrid of fungus and scorpion native to the Forest of Poisoned Dreams in Shedaklah. Its venom is debilitating, but its fungal protrusions are delicious if cooked thoroughly.





# ALPHAVIRUS

The virusbeast Alphavirus is the eldest, if not the most powerful, of the various scions of the disease deity, Megalovirus. Alphavirus is a charming, witty creature possessed of both horrific arcane power and a literally infectious personality. Those who know of it know that it seeks to supplant its sire even as it establishes mystery cults and crime rings in Megalovirus' name. It is assumed that it is because Alphavirus is an arrogant, insanely treacherous schemer. While this is true, the real truth is because Alphavirus is actually a prematurely activated backup copy of its lord, and is merely executing its failsafe programming as per its creator's nonsensical orders.

The virusbeast is described as a ring of eyes, tentacles and inverted, exposed internal organs mounted on a long tail, as if a naga were turned into a mindflayer, then turned inside out. The creature's voice, however, is regarded as its most awful feature, as, when it speaks, it's as if one is being spoken to by a chorus of flutes or a choir of angels, as if the wind on the fields and the birds all know your name. With its terrible voice, Alphavirus can enter a victim's mind to imprison them from the inside out. Of course, being deaf is little defense, as the horror can always insert a tentacle directly into a being's brain and manually reprogram them. It has little regard for the undead due to its own limited understanding of necromancy and the poor state of most undeads' nervous systems.

Alphavirus brags about being immortal. In a way, it is, as in addition to being able to detach organs to grow new minions, it can also detach organs to clone itself in case taming new recruits goes awry or other "incidents" occur. And even if an adversary manages to be thorough enough to destroy its detachment, Alphavirus can still restore its physical form by leeching off the lifeforces of its legions of charmed minions.

Allegedly, its latest scheme to usurp its parent, letting it, Megalovirus, and Iovirus become trapped in an artifact called the Chuangguan, or "Bug Box."



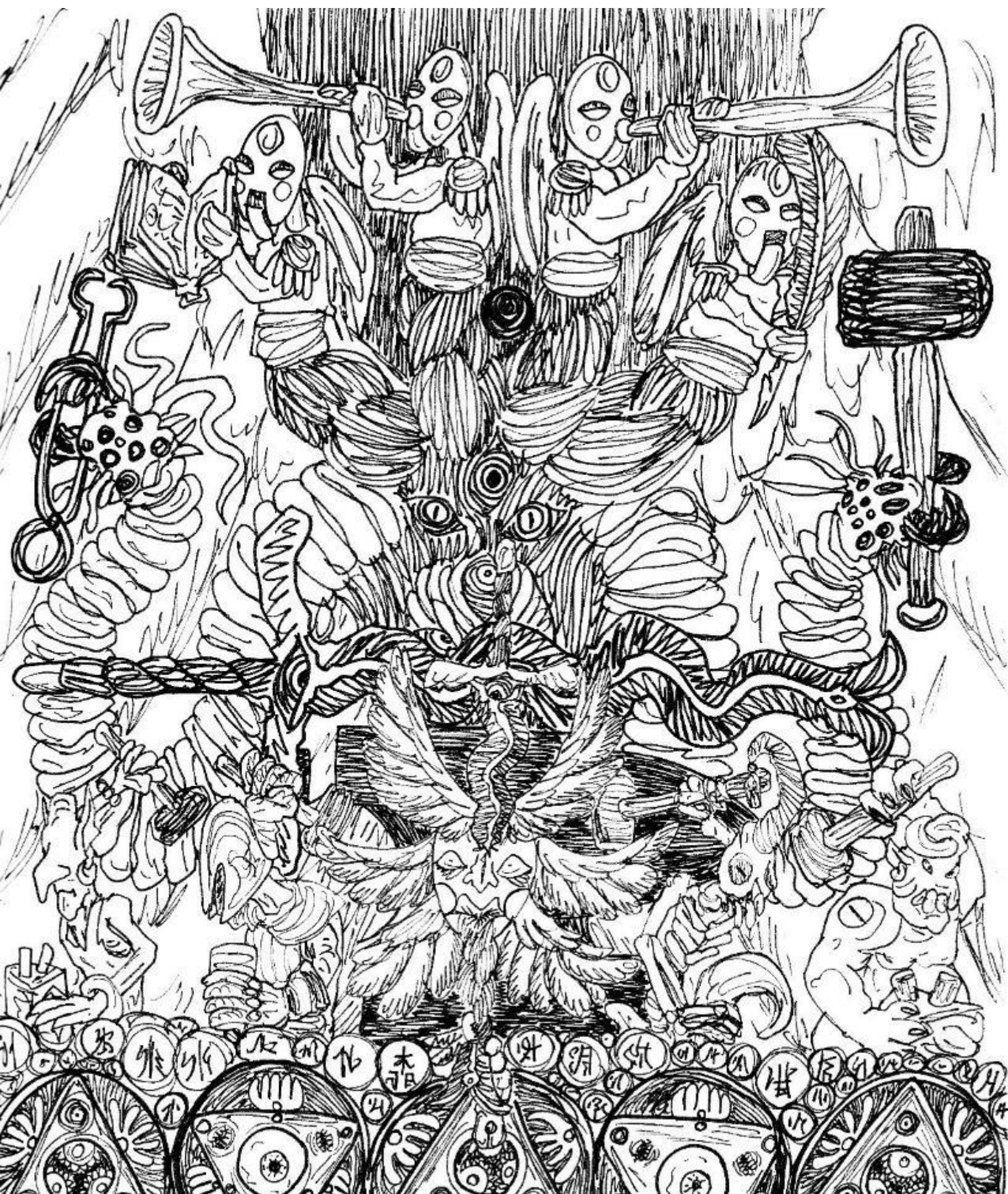
# BELEAGUERED ARTIST AMENTIA

The Beleaguered Artist is the founder of the Ten Abominations, and claims dominion over all who have been driven mad by inspiration. Amentia would lead his organization directly, but he delegates that task to Superbio so he can focus on his own myriad schemes and projects, which range from meting out revenge, requiring a delicate touch and worlds-spanning catastrophes, to putting out a line of chintzy mugs. While Superbio is the leader of the Ten, the others are fully aware they are not allowed to challenge Amentia without permission. With the exception of Iram, due to his nature, none of the other Abominations deign to protest or complain whenever he calls upon them to participate in his machinations.

Amentia manages his plots from the Thousand Tower, an immense, tree-like building in the Abyssal layer known as the Graveyard of Dreams, a sprawling necropolis of tombs where people's hopes go when they give up on them. Amentia periodically sends some of his lackeys down into the sepulchers to search for inspiration. Most never return, as the depressing gloom of the Graveyard rots away the will (and bodies) of any living being more complex than a manes. Those few who return are usually punished for their inadequate findings, either by being worked to death in one of their master's sweatshops, or recycled into an art project. Amentia's demon minions fall into three camps: his personal creations; sniveling, sycophantic slugabeds who vacillate between lounging about in Amentia's museums and panicking over the next disastrous moodswing; and shrieking fanatics who firmly believe that being incorporated into one of Amentia's masterpieces is the ultimate apotheosis.

Technically speaking, all of Amentia's mortal servants are his willing followers, as anyone who accepts Amentia's offer of assistance in their artistic endeavors automatically pledges their soul to him for all eternity. The Lord of the Mad appears to struggling artists, particularly of an arcane bent, and offers them anything they need, be it a mote of insight, funding, or even magical power. Thereafter, Amentia calls upon his mortal servants to spread inspiration, usually societal chaos or dissemination of forbidden lore, across the land, when he is not requiring their direct participation in his schemes. His cultists generally organize themselves either as a hermitage of collaborating equals, or as a studio of apprentices headed by a master. Mortal servants who impress the Beleaguered Artist, or better yet, prove to be irreplaceable cogs, are rewarded with demonic promotion upon their deaths, or transformation into liches. Lackluster flunkies find themselves milling about the Graveyard of Dreams as petitioners or ghosts, lamenting their decisions in life until Amentia is ready to process them into etherium or spare parts.







# THE APOKRYLTAROS

The Greater King of The Deeper Darkness, the Apokryltaros, is a primordial of the waters, and is the sibling of the primordials Liywatan and Numu Hava. Together, they are often referred to as “The Three Oceans,” and are represented by three triangles arranged in an inverted triangle, the Greater King's being the bottom triangle, which is red or black.

In ancient times, the Apokryltaros laired in the Abyssal Ocean and quarreled with the Obyriths, and then, when the Obyriths fell, quarreled with the Tanar'ri. When the Apokryltaros attempted to conquer, or perhaps destroy the Prime Material with its “Rain of Worms,” it was beaten back and defeated by the Gods, either by Shamash, The Sword of The Sun, or Baohan, The Tiger Of The Sky, who impaled the horror with the gigantic “Spear Of Wind,” pinning it to the floor of an Abyssal layer known as “The Land of Ash and Shadows.” The King of Worms has remained trapped ever since. The demons are reluctant to either attack or assist the Apokryltaros, even in its weakened state. The older demon lords remember their wars with it, and fear an attempt at assassination may loosen its bonds. The bitter memories of its incessant attempts at Abyssal dominance make plans of alliance or assistance an unlikely pipedream at best, too. Despite the lack of allies, the Apokryltaros' influence persists due to the King of Worms' legions of spies and servants.

The Apokryltaros possesses many cults, as the King of Worms generously grants its followers immense arcane powers as payment for their devotion. Spontaneous transformation into an undead creature is seen as a sign of the Apokryltaros' favor, as several of its important lieutenants are liches and ghosts, such as Gemathustra, Geso Vamidar, and the Green Empress. The Apokryltaros' cults serve their master by corrupting the societies they infest, and by conjuring monsters and fiends with which to make mischief. Its cultists are told and believe that it is their sacred duty, their holy quest, to return the land to the sea by drowning it in rot. Some honestly believe that filling people's bellies with worms and filling the air with putrefaction is the only path to salvation. Most of the Lord of Rot's children actually don't care, simply taking nourishment in pernicious iniquity.





# AROTRIN

The Arotrin, the Lesser Adversary of the World, was a horrifying monster created in honor of an Abyssal power now remembered only by its title, "The Greater Adversary of The World." A cult of sorcerers attempted to honor their patron by gathering together a menagerie of fell monsters, including the Greater Jade Fiend, the Tesseimera, the Krakenbeast, and the King of the Vaapolisks, and slaughtering the creatures to create an effigy of the Greater Adversary.

It is said that the Arotrin was a distant echo of the Greater Adversary's power. Even so, the Arotrin was a horror in its own right, with a breath that could dissolve metal, a gaze that could rot reality, wounds that bled monsters, and an aura of dread so awful that even the dead rose up to flee its wake.

A circle of eight heroes emerged to do battle with the Arotrin and the cult that created it. When the heroes laid siege to the cult's stronghold, as an act of mercy, the Greater Adversary reached forth from the Abyss to devour its minions before they could be forced to divulge their creation's weaknesses. Even so, the heroes succeeded in tearing out the Arotrin's core, either its eye or its heart, and threw it across the sea where it was buried beneath a mountain. Thus mortally wounding it, the eight heroes eventually cut the Arotrin into a thousand pieces and incinerated it before finally slaying it.

Though defeated and slain, the Lesser Adversary's core remains. Somewhere. If it were to fall into the wrong hands, or far worse, the right hands, who knows what horrors could be unleashed with it?





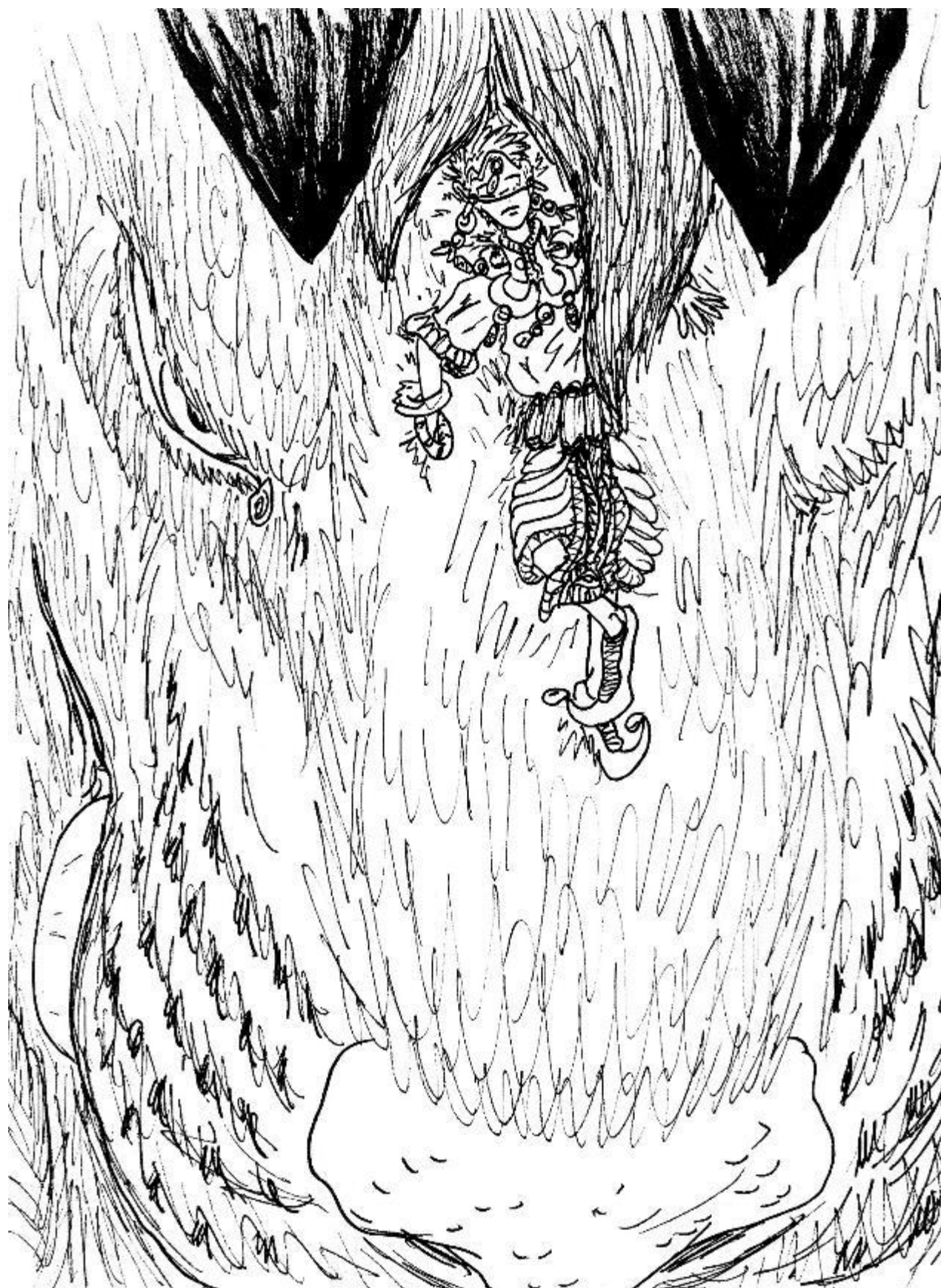


# ATMASURA

Atmasura, the Pearl of Envy, is a deity who emerged from the sundered skull of the dragon primordial, Ashu Kaa, the General in Vermilion.

Just as the Olympians lusted after and desired Ganymede, so did the Gods desire Atmasura. The Pearl regarded the lewd flattery and hungry looks he received from his hosts to be disgusting, but demurely allowed his brother, Geso Kaa, the Vermilion Tiger in Chains, to rebuff them on his behalf.

After the Gods punished Geso Kaa for what they assumed was his heinous breach of hospitality, Atmasura cursed the Gods for their deadly failure to recognize trouble even when it literally knocked on their door, then followed his brother into Samsara.



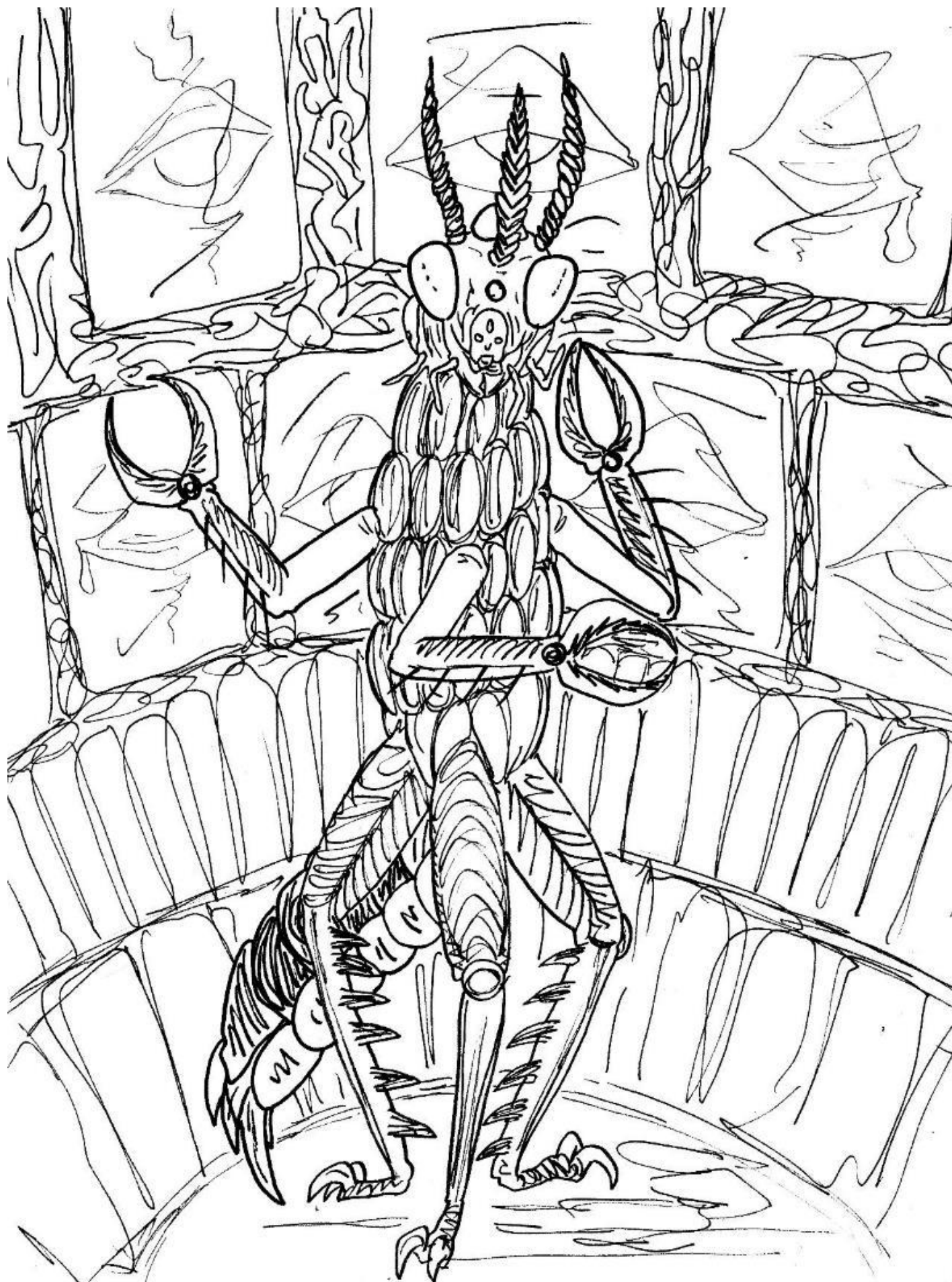
# BABILNERIATH

Babilneriath are a race of demons in service to the minor demon lord Agapa Babilneriath. In its true form, a babilneriath is a three-foot tall insect with three arms, three legs and a triparite head, similar to a dhergoloth, if such a daemon shrunk in the wash. Technically speaking, a babilneriath in its true form is not physically powerful, though it is still quite dangerous due to the mutagenic venom it constantly secretes. With a touch (or worse), a babilneriath can graft a demonic symbiote onto its victim, or infect them with a magical disease that will gradually transform them into a demon.

Babilneriath are accomplished shapeshifters, often planesifting into the Prime Material to masquerade as mystics or healers in order to transform unwitting victims into demons. When these horrors are not wandering about on a mission, they are usually found in their master's realm, "The Cocoon of God," where they meditate in cocoons.

The most terrible power of a babilneriath is its ability to evade destruction by downloading its mind into another, usually a least demon, or, more preferably, a mortal unable to defend themselves against psychic assault. If the possession is allowed to proceed, the new host eventually mutates into a babilneriath, obliterating all traces of the previous persona in the process.







# BEIMUDAN

Beimudan, once the Master of Fortress Invincible, now the Lord of The Wretched Tarn, or even the Wretched Lord, is a demon lord whose fortunes fell when he ran afoul of Amentia.

Long ago, an ambitious nalfeshnee became an ambitious balor when the creature was able to build the only stable structure in Spirac to last more than a year. In doing so, the demon caused the mountain he built his rock hut upon to detach from Spirac, transforming it into a new layer. The demon, who would call himself "Beimudan, the Humble Peony," would grow his hut into a castle, and then hollow the entire mountain into a vast fortress. "Fortress Invincible," he called it, filling it with demonic troops and tons of munitions and weaponry, enough to level whole worlds if Beimudan chose to. Beimudan sought to improve his stronghold, eventually seeking assistance from Amentia to achieve this. Beimudan hoped to alter his fortress from being an immobile building into a flying contraption similar to what was done to the Demonwing. Ever the perfectionist, Beimudan bickered with Amentia through the whole project, criticizing Amentia's plans, making last minute changes, then demanding unfeasible alterations. Eventually, Amentia became so frustrated with this exasperating ordeal that he created an explosion, whether simply through loss of his temper or igniting a powder magazine out of spite, that would level the fortress, and create the Wretched Tarn in its place.

Beimudan survived the destruction of his layer, and is currently in exile, often as a guest of Grazz't in the Argent Palace, or scheming in Gehenna, or scrounging for treasure in Pandemonium. That the Wretched Lord continues to exist while Amentia has never bothered to assassinate or even remind the former of his enmity has led Abyssal gossips to suggest Amentia destroying Fortress Invincible was actually a part of one of his many schemes, and that Beimudan was spared because he was either a patsy or a willing conspirator. Anyone repeating this claim within earshot of Beimudan risks getting bisected by his Wanmodao, or Ten-Thousand Devils Cleaver Halberd.

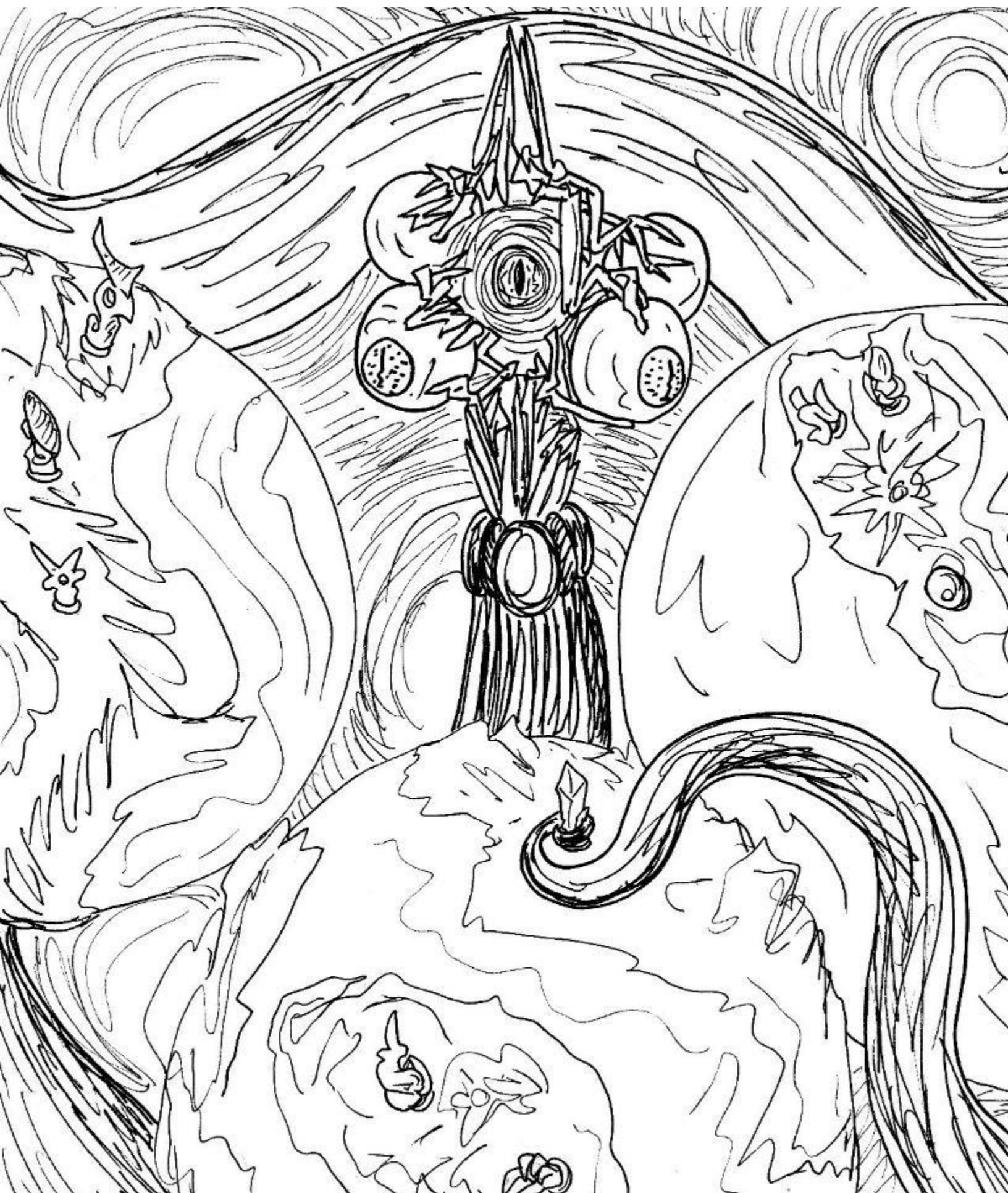




# BETAVIRUS

Betavirus is a virusbeast descended from the disease deity, Megalovirus. Betavirus is a patient schemer who assists its elder sibling Alphavirus in the latter's plots and cults. Betavirus prefers to work with Alphavirus over either Iovirus or Omegavirus, claiming that Iovirus is an intolerably stodgy boor, and Omegavirus being a monomaniacal prick. In truth, Betavirus dreams of becoming a god itself, and usurping all of its elders' power, thinking that the best way to camouflage this plan would be with Alphavirus' theatrical bombast. Alphavirus, however, is aware of Betavirus' perfidy, but officially ignores it, as the elder virusbeast regards its lesser as being adorably entertaining.

Betavirus is a squeamish coward at heart, viewing the very concept of physically assaulting mortals and other organic lifeforms with the same sort of disgusted terror an ermine-clad matriarch holds when faced with the prospect of having to manually exterminate vermin personally. Betavirus much prefers to either hide behind Alphavirus, or hide behind mobs of feyirs in a manner similar to how a little girl would petition her elder brother's defense when assailed by a cockroach. Having said this, Betavirus is still quite dangerous, as its worlds-spanning gaze can easily bore holes through minds, bone, and steel if distilled into a glower, and it can squish a hardy warrior with its tail if forced to in the same way a little girl can crush a waterbug beneath the sole of her maryjanes if her brother is preoccupied.





# BIOPHOBIA 1

The being designated as “Biophobia 1” is a sentient severed appendage of a sentient universe in or beyond the Far Realm. Biophobia 1 appears to be a vaguely humanoid-shaped stack of metallic beads sitting atop a large, serpentine tail. The arm-like appendages end in long, prehensile, leaf-like blades.

Biophobia 1 is a weird and malevolent creature who apparently has taken up murder as a hobby. It either stalks and slays sentient beings after deciding on a theme, or manipulates a designated patsy into committing murder. Unlike most other serial killers, Biophobia 1 has little interest in taking trophies or utilizing its victims' bodies or possessions beyond using them as bait for more victims. While Biophobia 1 loves combat, if only because a rambunctious victim is far more entertaining than a passive victim, and is demonstratively immortal, it often flees a fight if its victim cannot be overcome at that time, usually by squeezing through a crack.



# BIOPHOBIA 2

The being designated as “Biophobia 2” is a sentient severed appendage of a sentient universe in or beyond the Far Realm. Biophobia 2 is a small creature that combines features of rodents and insects into a ball. It has a waddling gait, as if it struggles to keep itself from being thrust into the air due to insufficient gravity. Few see this form as Biophobia 2 both shrouds itself with illusions and folds reality around itself.

Biophobia 2 appears to be an extremely intelligent being as it constructs convoluted plots to cause suffering and madness with its illusions. Why it does so, beyond the presumption of malice, is unknown.

Great caution should be exercised if one is planning to encounter Biophobia 2 directly, as the venom of its stinger has both mutagenic and necromantic properties.



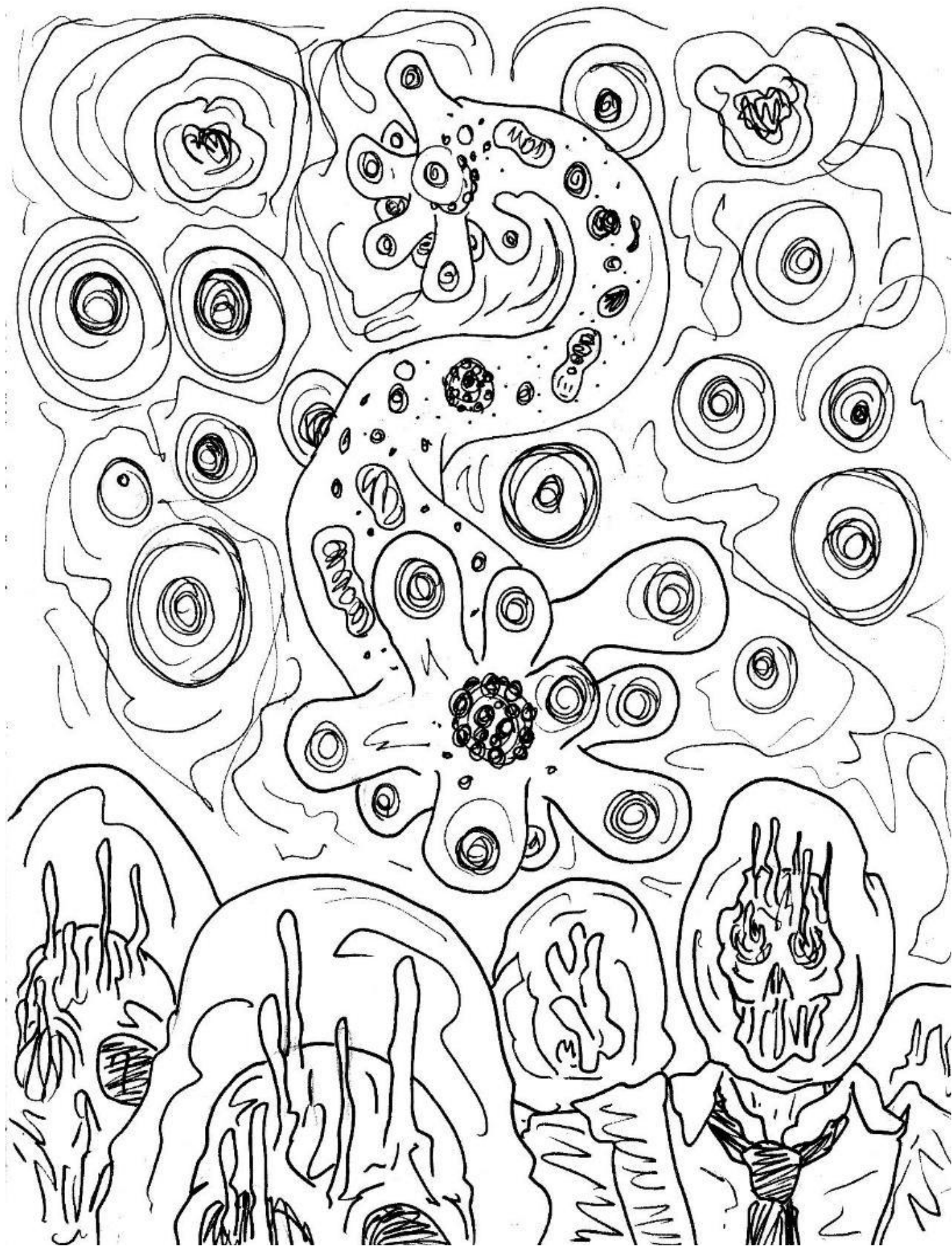


## BIOPHOBIA 3

The being designated as “Biophobia 3” is a probably sentient severed appendage of a sentient universe in or beyond the Far Realm. Biophobia 3 is a long, ectoplasmic “twist” that remains embedded in the Border Ethereal. Structures within the “twist” superficially resemble the organelles and vacuoles of protozoa. These structures accumulate at either end of the “twist,” and bud off into bubbles of ectoplasm.

Biophobia 3 may or may not be sentient, but appears to be focused entirely on infecting Prime Material organisms with its ectoplasmic essence. The ectoplasmic bubbles it secretes enter the physical world and attach themselves to an organic organism. Such infected beings either succumb to a ravaging madness similar to the aggression stages of rabies, a wasting disease characterized by lethargy and a bleeding rash, or a violent combination of the two. Such infectees, unless exorcized, attempt to carry out Biophobia 3's nonsensical bidding as they waste away, eventually dying after five to eight days.







# BIOPHOBIA 4

The being designated as “Biophobia 4” is a sentient severed appendage of a sentient universe in or beyond the Far Realm. Biophobia 4 appears to be an elongated humanoid made of slimy, rubbery tentacles. One end appears to be head-shaped and has at least four eye-like organs. If it so desires, it can wind its tentacles tighter to appear as a specific species of humanoid or even mimic a specific individual. Such disguises are clever, but are flawed, as, when disguised, Biophobia 4 will have an unnaturally shiny appearance, as if made of vinyl, or neoprene.

Biophobia 4 is probably the most benign of all of the known Biophobias, if only because it does not actively directly attack Prime Material organisms. Having said that, Biophobia is an extremely powerful and very malevolent individual, duping or even mentally controlling others to form mystery cults with no apparent focus of worship, and secret societies and crime rings with no obvious goals. In addition to its ability to disguise itself via knot art, Biophobia 4 cloaks itself in layers of illusion. Adversaries astute enough to pierce Biophobia 4's deceptions must be forewarned that the creature has an archmage's mastery of evocation magicks.







## BIOPHOBIA 5

The being designated as “Biophobia 5” is a barely sentient severed appendage of a sentient universe in or beyond the Far Realm. Biophobia 5 is a five-hundred foot long “worm” that was deliberately summoned by the minor demon lord, Viscount Phongo, in a bid for power over his rival. The anteriormost end is a head-like cluster of feelers and boulder-sized blisters filled with caustic ectoplasm. Whenever Biophobia 5 feels aggressive, one of its feelers develops into a one-hundred to two-hundred-foot long claw.

After laying waste to the Fen of Eternal Flames, Biophobia 5 has since randomly appeared elsewhere in the Abyss (or sometimes Pandemonium) to wreak destruction for a day or two before planeshifting to a different layer to cause havoc. Most demons who know of Biophobia 5 regard it similarly to how humans regard tropical storms, i.e., as a dreadful menace that will, gods willing, stay far away.

Some demonologists and other sages specializing in fiends note that there is some sort rhyme and reason to the pattern of Biophobia 5's appearances and attacks, but what exactly requires further study. Most other sages dismiss attempts to study the horror, likening it to masochistic nonsense. Quite a few of these sages expressing interest or attempts to study Biophobia 5 have been attacked or murdered by superstitious fiends who fear drawing the horror's attention. To complicate matters, lots of substantial rumors abound about Asmodeus having passed an unofficial decree to kidnap, interrogate and murder anyone trying to study Biophobia 5 without expressing interest in collecting the bounty he has placed upon it.



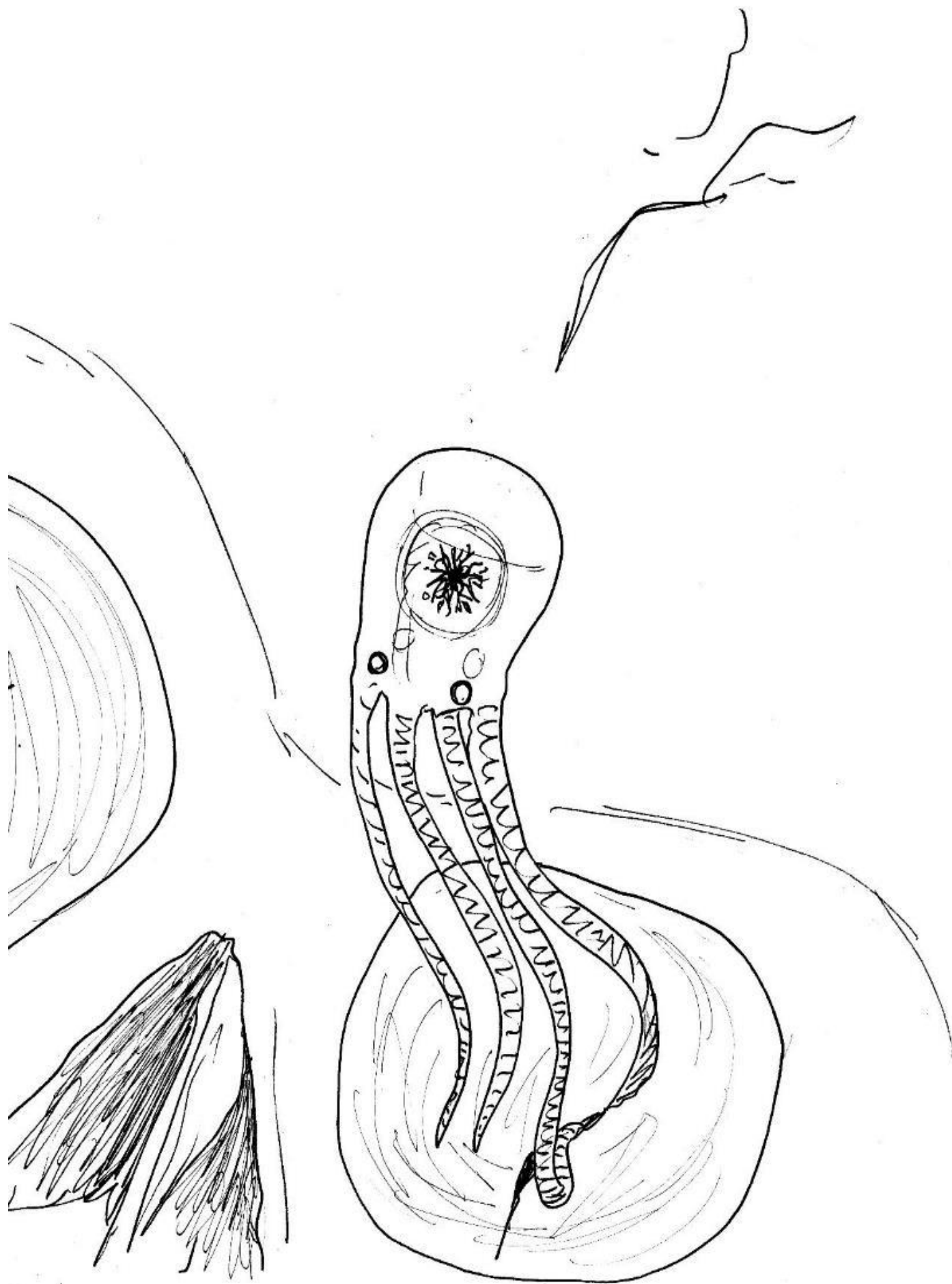


# CHIVIRUS

Chivirus is a tiny virusbeast that resembles an enormous Irukandji jellyfish about the size of a human eyeball. It's been suggested that the horror was born of nightmares about Irukandji jellyfish. Like its mortal counterparts, Chivirus possesses a "touch of death," in that anyone lashed by its tentacles is wracked with torturously paralytic agony that can cause cardiac arrest, similar to the symptoms of Irukandji disease. Unlike most virusbeasts, Chivirus is only inconvenienced by sunlight, rather than horribly injured. If exposed to direct sunlight or ultraviolet light, Chivirus is shunted into the Border Ethereal, where it remains trapped until twelve hours later. Chivirus relies on this in order to surprise and murder adventurers who mistakenly think they've successfully exorcised it.

Chivirus is, at heart, a mischievous voyeur who delights in tormenting those whom it spies upon. More powerful virusbeasts, such as Alphavirus and Iovirus, call upon Chivirus to do their bidding, usually reconnaissance or murder. Chivirus takes immense joy in the latter task.







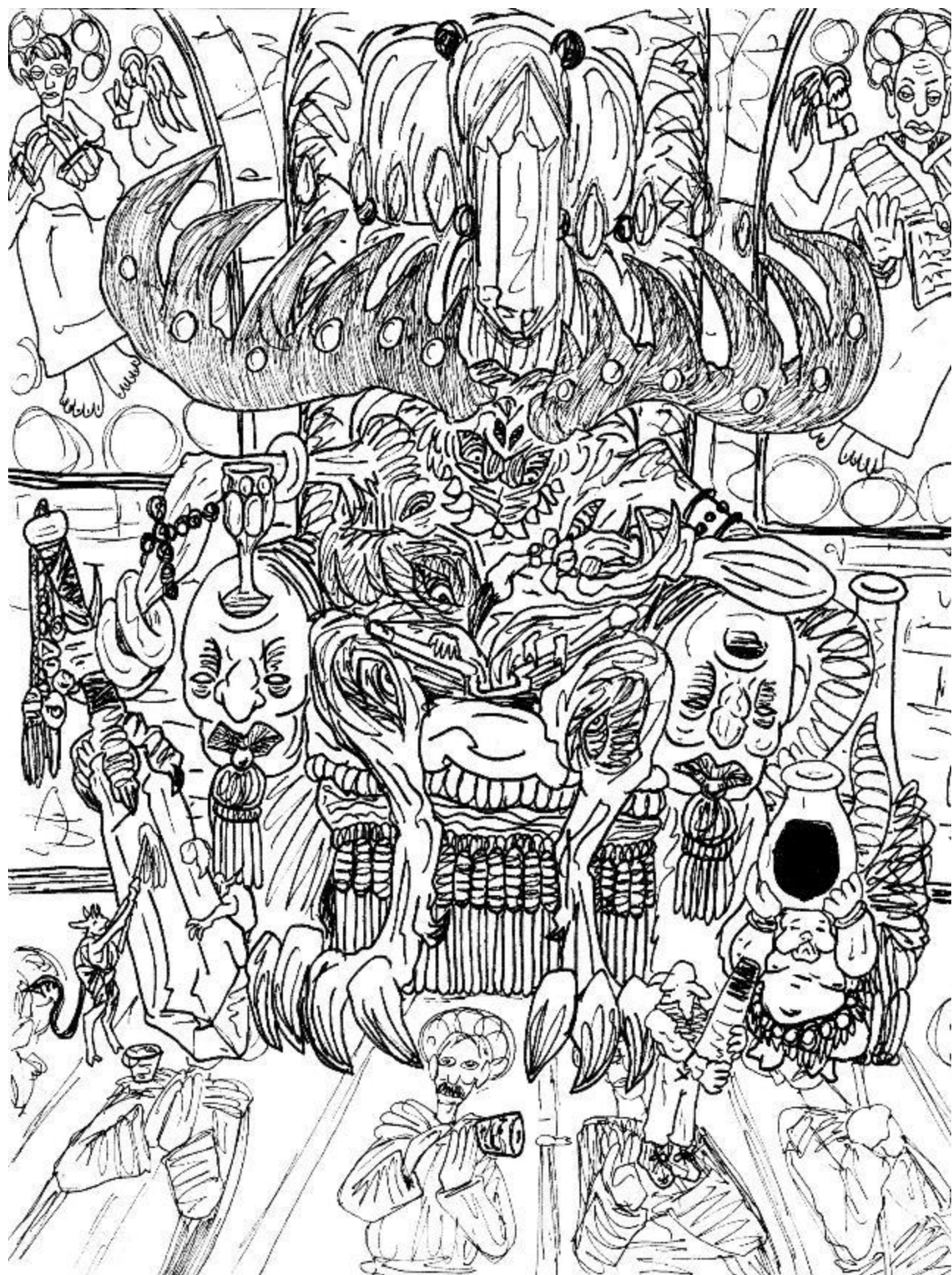
# SCHEMING TREASURER

## CUPIDITAS

The Scheming Treasurer of the Ten Abominations funds the group's various schemes and plots. It is a transactional relationship, as Cupiditas is officially paying off the debt he incurred when Amentia and Superbio gifted him the gemstone "The Rubric of The Universe." That the other Abominations, aside from Iram, compensate him for interacting with them is an added bonus. Of the various fiends who grasp the characters of the Beleaguered Artist and the Emperor of Emperors, it's reasonably assumed that Cupiditas' precious Rubric is a poison pill in addition to a bribe, undoubtedly designed to assassinate Cupiditas via an explosion in case of betrayal. Those fiends who grasp the Scheming Treasurer's character, however, suggest that, should Cupiditas betray the other Abominations, he would simply forfeit his favorite bauble, a fate far worse than being blown to smithereens.

Everything Cupiditas does is one of many steps in his grand master plan to become the wealthiest being in the Universe. Everything he does on behalf of another is a favor owed. Hypothetically, one could convince the Scheming Treasurer to betray the other Abominations, but there are few things in the Universe that would be worth more than the Rubric and Cupiditas' own life combined. Possibly the entire liquidated hoard of Mammon or Bahamut on a leash, but good luck with obtaining either.

All relationships with Cupiditas are transactional, especially with his mortal followers. Most are greedy for coin or desperate to escape squalor, and Cupiditas approaches them with an offer. In return to pledging their souls to him, the Scheming Treasurer compensates them with appropriate riches, disguised as "good fortune," as they work his will in the Prime Material Plane. As petitioners, Cupiditas' minions are treated fairly well, if only because Cupiditas believes in keeping his possessions in mint condition. He keeps his petitioners in containers until he has a task or busy work to assign them, or has an opportunity to consume, trade or sell them.





# CURSE OF ALOKISTOCARE

A trilobite-like minion of the Apokryltaros. The Curse of Alokistocare is an evil spirit that wanders about in the Border Ethereal, spying on mortals or stealing people's souls as per its assignments.





# CUUNIES

Cuunies is a worm-like spirit that devours its hosts from the inside out. Figuratively, at first, as it eats its host's memories, numbs its host's personality, and slowly ruins all motor functions. Eventually, this progresses to a literal sense when the possession causes organ failure and inexplicable desiccation. Upon the death of the host, Cuunies leaves to find a new host while the corpse promptly crumbles into desiccated frass.



# DENTALION

Dentalion are a species of undead demon created from the regurgitated teeth and bone fragments of Gulo the Glutton's many, many victims (many of whom were, and technically still are, his servants). Gulo named them in honor of his rival, Dantalion, and uses them as instant lackeys. Dentalions follow whatever orders Gulo or some other designated person gives them to the letter, though they will do it in the most wantonly violent way possible unless physically stopped or given orders that explicitly disallow it.

In between orders, dentalions will mill about, looking for fights while “chewing.”



# THE LAST ANGEL DESPERATIA

The Last Angel of the Ten Abominations is the self-proclaimed sister of the Sighing Bishop. Desperatia entered into our realm through a vision of the future the Obyriths attempted to summon, and remained here when the Obyriths placed a curse upon the vision for not showing them thriving in their hoped-for future. Thus, Desperatia remains, fighting the tyranny of hope.

Desperatia allies herself with Acedio because of the way sorrow left to fester leads to cessation. Amentia appreciates the Last Angel as a wise counsel when he isn't lambasting her for her moroseness. Luxuria loves discussing and plotting destructive romance with Desperatia, while the other Abominations, sans Iram, request Desperatia's assistance when they need an assassination with a delicate touch.

Despite seeking the literal end of everything, Desperatia offers succor to exceptionally horrific demons, recruiting these despicable terrors, like the Messenger of Peace, as her heralds and handmaidens.





# DRASSONAX

Drassonax, the Butcher of Justice, the Brutal Justicar, is a powerful balor prince who seeks out the broken victims of injustice in order to grant them the power to seize the vengeance they cry for. In some cases, he gives his devotees the strength and nerve to face their abusers with a blade in their hands. In other cases, he fills the bodies of his supplicants with so much strength that they literally swell into ravenous monsters, unable to rest until they slake their fill of the heart's blood (and flesh) of those who would prey on the innocent.

Drassonax's atypical purview stems from the lingering regrets of his mortal life. When he lived as a human, Drassonax was a brave, stalwart knight who fell from grace trying to defend the honor of his lover, a witch. Despite his arguing that his lover had much potential for redemption, she was executed anyhow. The knight's soul was so burdened by his failure, together with his cruelly bloody murders of her accusers turned executioners, that he sank into the Abyss. There, the knight's soul stood before the Lords of Woe, begging – no -- demanding that he granted the power (and freedom) to rescue his beloved, wherever she was. So touched by this selfless proposition, the Lords of Woe agreed to Drassonax's proposal, on the condition he abide by their terms. What those terms are, neither Drassonax, nor the masters of the Escarand of Woe have ever elucidated to others.

Since becoming a balor, Drassonax calls to the broken, the beaten, and the damned, asking them if they wish for the strength to set right what others made wrong in their lives. In return for the souls of his supplicants, and those of their prey, Drassonax forbids his children from harming the innocent and others unworthy of their wrath. At best, the Brutal Justicar rescinds his favor, at worst, he personally hunts down his errant child. Often, such fallen children are assigned as targets of interest for his cults of vigilantes.

In dabbling in Abyssal politics, Drassonax became a favorite mercenary and bodyguard of both Amentia and Superbio, both of whom constantly laud the Butcher's service and honor. In his tenure with the Ten Abominations, Drassonax has met Amentia's favorite minion, Estagyunnos. Upon listening to the archmage's own odyssey of tragedies, Drassonax swore to do all within his power to free Estagyunnos from the Towers Three. Estagyunnos, in turn, pledged to do all within his power to assist the balor's search for Drassonax's love.







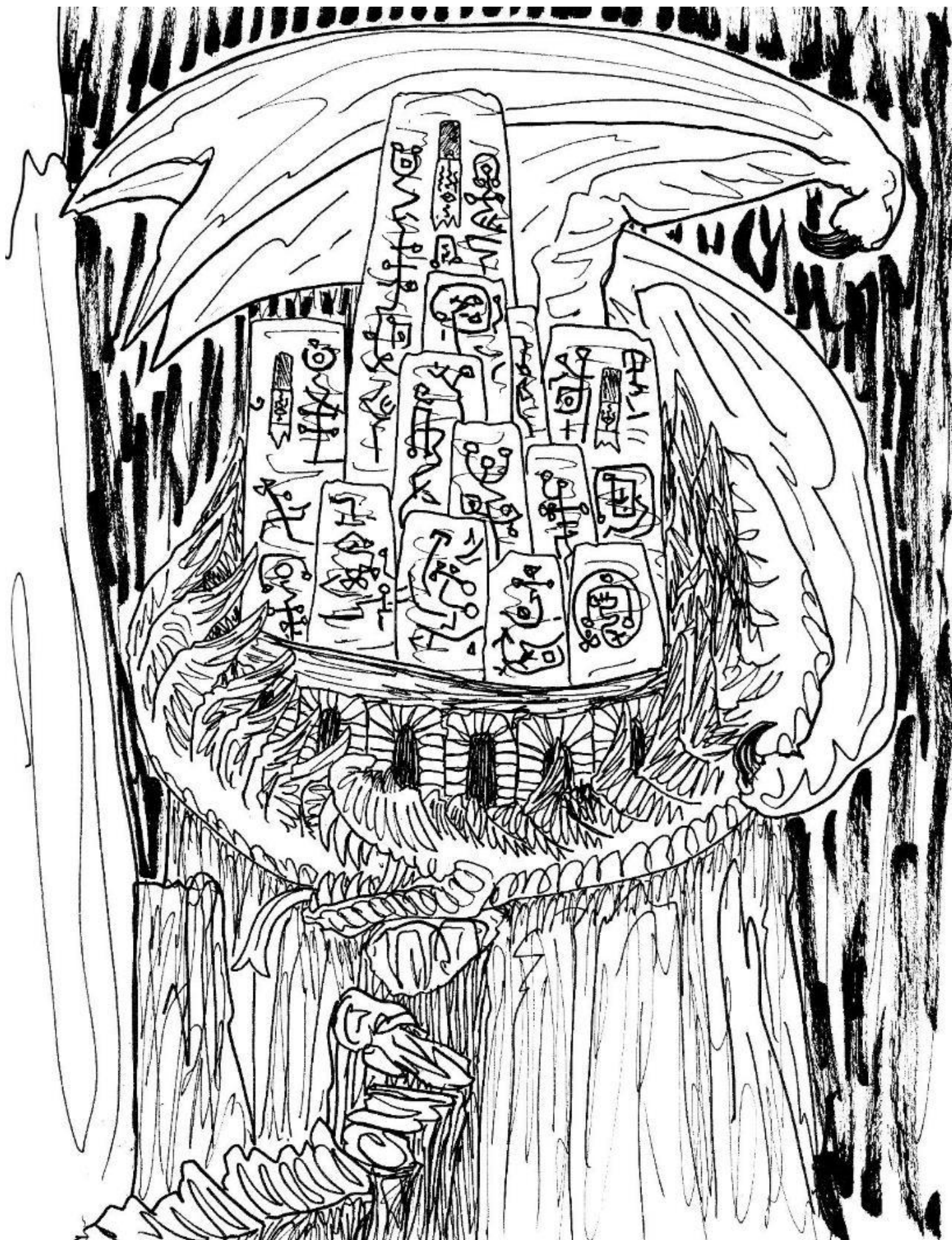
# ESTAGYUNNOS

Amentia's mortal servants labor long and hard at their crafts, struggling mightily so that they may capture their master's eye, then, hopefully, their master's favor. Of those who succeed, most are rewarded with demonic promotion or are transitioned into lichdom. A precious few are personally escorted by the Beleaguered Artist into the Abyss, where their demon prince devotes an entire museum in his Thousand Tower to the exploits and accomplishments of his chosen proteges.

One such protege is Estagyunnos, the so-called "Lord of Art."

Once upon a time, long, long ago, a boy lived in a kingdom that was wracked by a terrible war. As the boy lay dying in the ruins of his home, amidst the corpses of his family, he was visited by two angels, Desperatia and Amentia. Desperatia offered the boy rest to balm his pain, but, the boy, too afraid of the beyond, declined. Amentia prophesied that the boy had the potential to shake the world, and offered to help him achieve this, while warning that he would suffer greatly in the process. The boy, still too afraid of the alternative, accepted Amentia's offer. In return for his body, soul, and name, under Amentia's tutelage, the magician now known as Estagyunnos spent decades, then centuries, mastering magic and art until he finally completed his magnum opus, an enormous painting depicting an entire world, complete with living, moving inhabitants. The Beleaguered Artist assembled a vast audience of gods and devils and demon princes and titans and genie kings to view his favorite student's masterpiece. All were moved to tears at the sight of Estagyunnos' painting, all weeping in glorious awe of such talent. And then Superbio stood up to applaud this Lord of Art, and rewarded the boy -- for all his timeless skill, he was still a child -- by locking him in three towers, hidden inside a secret chamber of the Counting House of Heaven. Superbio made Cupiditas the Lord of Art's gaoler, while he took Estagyunnos' "Mural Of A World" to hang in its own gallery in his Palace of Heaven, where it remains heavily guarded to this day.

Estagyunnos remains in his prison, where he labors upon a secret project he has been *geased* to never speak about. Scholars hired by the Ten Abominations to assist Amentia's student suspect that he has been tasked to create a golem or a siege engine, though, those who gossip too freely have found themselves hounded by Iram. The Lord of Art continues his work, hoping his new friend Drassonax will eventually rescue him before his regret over declining Desperatia's gift overcomes him.





# EUDORIA

Eudoria The Cursed Beast is a fiendish assassin who appears to be a bundle of lovingly combed hair. Sometimes she braids her hair, sometimes she pretties herself up with ribbon and bangles. Fiends in the know, especially her clients, treat the Cursed Beast with the utmost respect and deference due to her skill at her chosen profession. Those who would laugh at her rarely survive to make such a mistake twice, as they quickly learn that her hair both are and conceals thousands of razor-sharp, venomous spines. To add to paranoia, she can disassemble herself into individual strands to evade scrutiny, or insert a strand into a passerby's scalp to commandeer their body for her own ends.

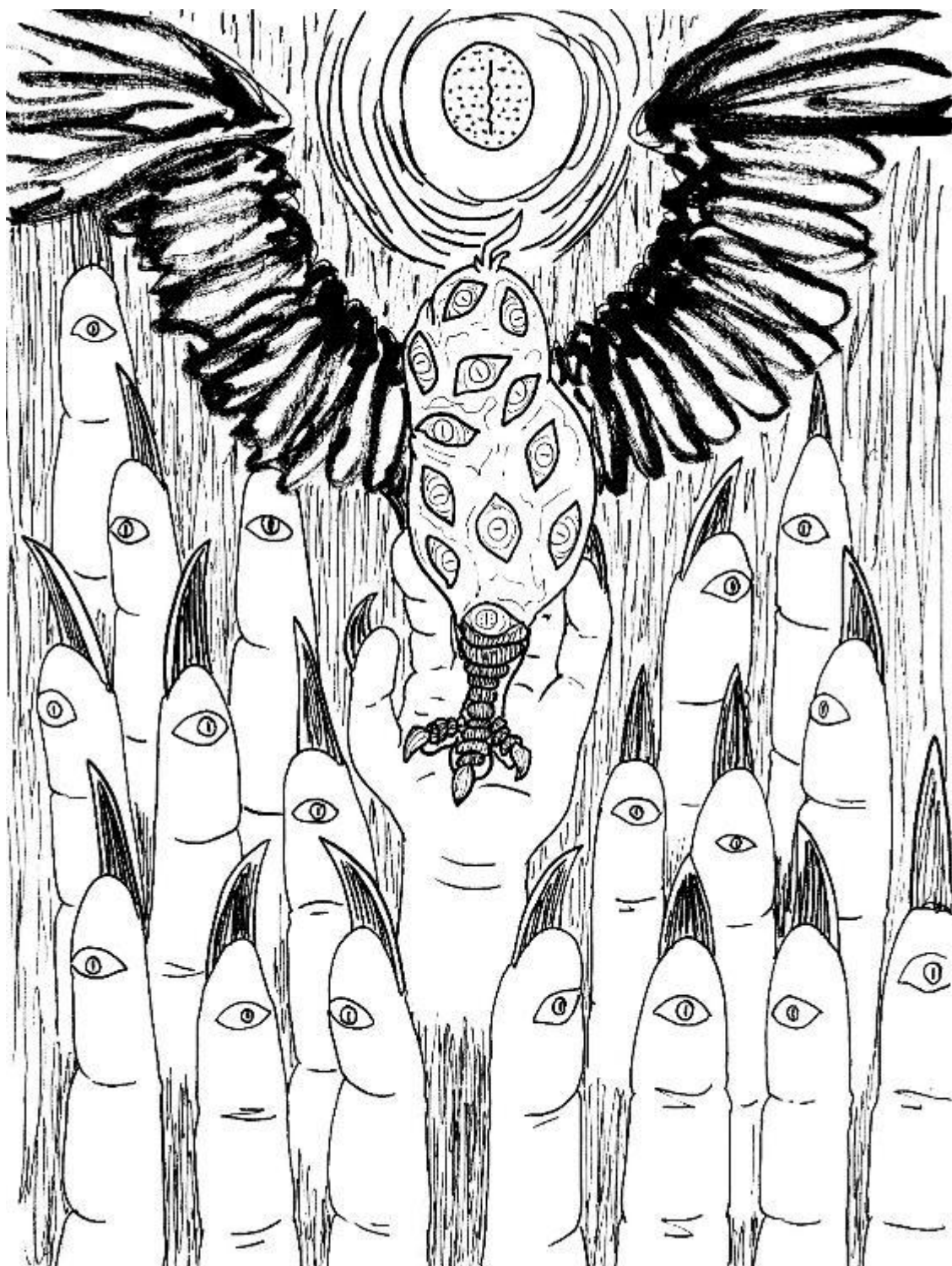






# EVIL EYE

An evil spirit that has the power to bewitch mortals who meet its soul-ensnaring gaze.



# DECEIVING MERCENARY FRAUS

The Deceiving Mercenary of the Ten Abominations is the chief envoy of the Ten, while serving as the chief messenger of the Emperor of Emperors. Much gossip is made about the mysterious origins of Superbio's pumpkin-armored flunky, but nothing can be confirmed, aside from him being persona non grata in all of Baator. When asked directly, Fraus always suggests looking inside of his box of truth that Superbio holds as ransom.

When not managing Superbio's schedule or meeting with others on behalf of the Ten, Fraus likes to wander the planes to cause mischief. Fraus delights in assuming a disguise in order to make deals with unsuspecting mortals and other lesser beings. In a harmless appearing alias, Fraus offers power and or help to the powerless and helpless, provided his beneficiary strictly obeys the exact terms of their agreement. Those who violate the terms, especially those too arrogant to follow rules, generally find themselves undone and their lives forfeit in grimly hilarious fashion. Often, Fraus will spare his victim if they seem especially pitiful or on a whim or even when he needs a new assistant. In such cases, the Deceiving Mercenary always reminds his victim that they are now entirely beholden to him, and that, should he deign to give them a third chance, the string attached will be a hangman's noose.

Because of Fraus' relationship with Superbio, the Deceiving Mercenary deeply empathizes with underdogs, and seeks to insert himself into the lives of suffering innocents as a fairy godfather (or mother). One such favored favorite was a girl whom Fraus elevated into a wise and long-reigning queen, after he convinced the king to adopt her when Fraus had her cruel and abusive family devoured by his nabassu servants.

Fraus' mortal servitors style themselves after their master by being conniving mentors and wise tricksters. The mercenaries of the Deceiving Mercenary are free to do as they please, provided they do not lie about the terms of their bargains with their victims, do not bring unwarranted harm to the innocent, and, most importantly, do not freely volunteer the whole truth if they are not coerced. Such servitors who do not live up to Fraus' expectations find themselves spontaneously dying in hilariously grim situations.







# GARGAARIA

Gargaaria is not an evil spirit per se, but is easily pernicious if not treated with the utmost care and respect if encountered. Gargaaria is a spirit possessed of much necromantic skill, and can be found in locations permeating with death and tragedy. It bears no ill will towards those who don't bother it or who are at least courteous towards it. The living who offend this snail-like being are stricken with a disease-like curse that transforms them into zombies or ghouls, while undead boors find their bodies rotting ahead of schedule at an uncomfortably accelerated rate.



# GEMATHUSTRA

Gemathustra of the Reversed Hand is an undead servant of the Apokryltaros. In life, Gemathustra was a powerful healer who could cure diseases, heal wounds, and even revive the dead with but a touch. But because he was deformed, people assumed he was some ghoulish scavenger or a wicked necromancer. Eventually, he was lynched during a plague, and his murderers then wondered why their suffering did not abate.

The Apokryltaros saw this, and, in its own way, sought to avenge the healer. Mortal minions came to Gemathustra's remains and revived him as an undead spirit. Gemathustra thanked his cohorts by fusing them together as a still sort of living, eternally cackling wall of flesh. Now Gemathustra wanders the night, twisting flesh or reviving the ill as pus-weeping horrors. Sometimes, parents warn their children to never find excuses to be bullies, lest the Reversed Hand come to make them into actual monsters. Sometimes, the Reversed Hand comes to do so even when the children behave.





# GESO KAA

Geso Kaa, the Vermilion Tiger in Chains, is a deity born of the butchered carcass of the dragon primordial, Ashu Kaa, the General in Vermilion. When Ashu Kaa was defeated by the Gods, he was led in chains to the Citadel of Heaven where the Gods humbled him by cleaving off his wings, before chopping off his head.

Because the war that the General in Vermilion waged against Heaven was a long and bitter one, the Gods then sought to further punish Ashu Kaa by chopping up his corpse for a stew. When the Gods split open the primordial's skull, a comely youth, Atmasura, emerged from the pulverized brain matter, like a pearl amongst oyster innards. The Gods bickered between themselves over who would possess this jewel-like boy, and when one grabbed Atmasura's wrist hard enough to make the child cry out in pain, a great beast burst from Ashu Kaa's ruined viscera to rescue his brother from these divine ruffians. The Gods caught Geso Kaa, beat him and shackled him, but freed him when they realized he fought them to defend Atmasura from their own inhospitable greed and lust.

Atmasura was invited to stay as an honored guest, while his brother, Geso Kaa, was tolerated as the Pearl's long shadow.

Ashu Kaa's other child, the primordial and rogue god Cicada Eater, came to the Citadel of Heaven. Cicada Eater claimed he wished to enter as a guest, but Geso Kaa easily divined that his other elder brother sought to avenge their father's humiliating demise. So, the Vermilion Tiger threw Cicada Eater into the Void between Time and Space, hopefully to be lost forever. But the Gods only saw he violated hospitality by being so cruel and rough with a guest, and cursed him to be reincarnated for a hundred lifetimes filled with misfortune.

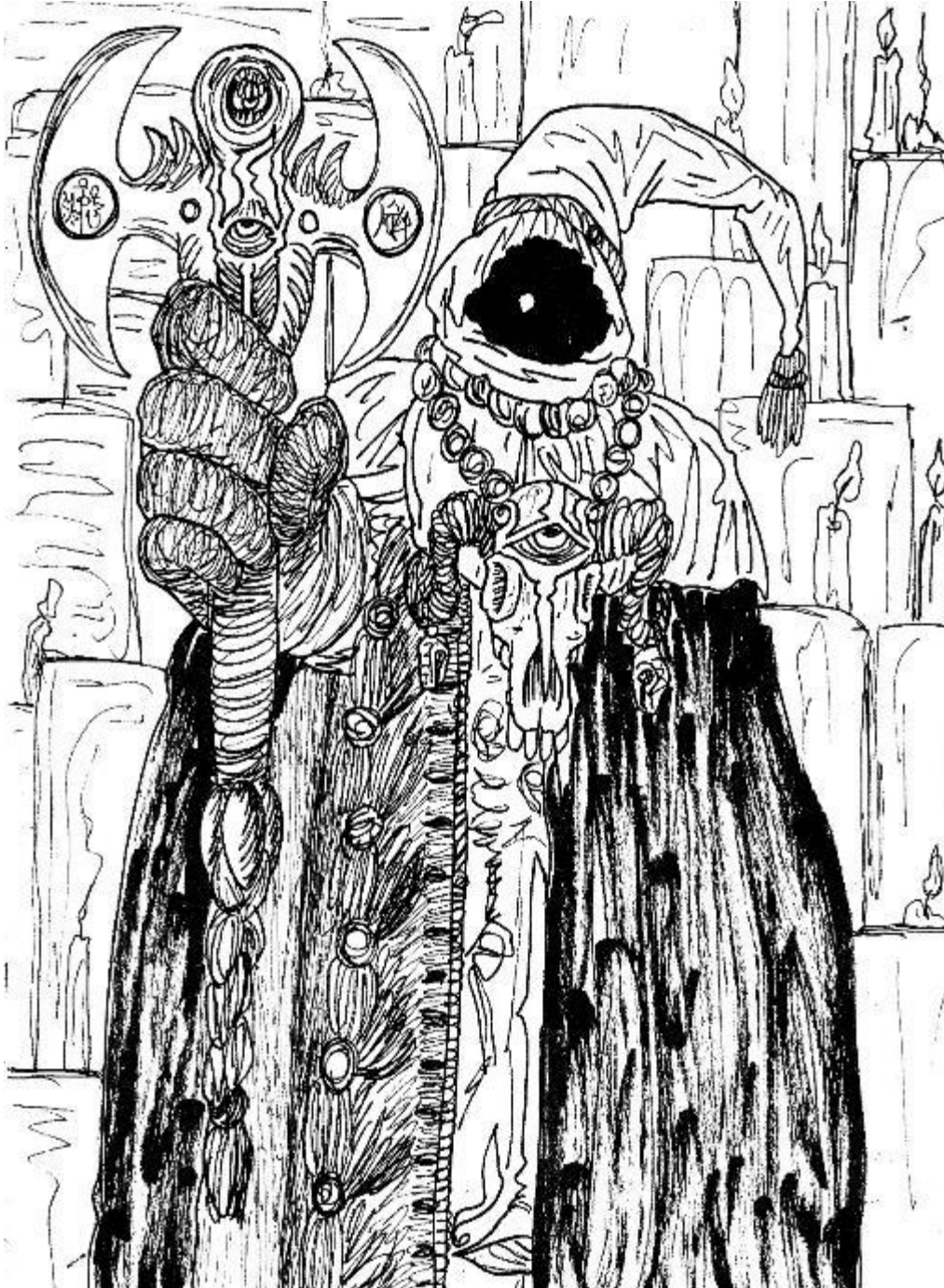






# GESO VAMIDAR

Geso Vamidar is an undead magician in service to the Apokryltaros. In life, Geso Vamidar admits that he was a lost, wandering wastrel who could not find meaning or purpose. He would find meaning and purpose when he was initiated into a cult of the Greater King of the Deeper Darkness, and became that sect's leader through his pious eagerness to spread misery and death creating legions of zombie followers. As a reward for his piety, the Apokryltaros resurrected Geso Vamidar as a lich.



# RAPACIOUS SOMMELIER GULO

The Rapacious Sommelier of the Ten Abominations is a powerful demon prince who, despite being officially “retired” from the Blood War, remains an active presence in Abyssal politics. Superbio convinced Amentia to invite Gulo to join them in the hopes of utilizing Gulo's influences, resources, demon legions, and insidiously powerful pleasure cults. This was one of their best decisions, especially with Gulo then inviting his assistant and lover, Luxuria, to join the Abominations as the group's spymaster.

The God of Gluttons is known throughout the Lower Planes for his appetites, and for the banquets he throws to feed his appetites. Despite being a voracious horror literally born of hunger, Gulo empathizes with those who hunger and are unable to feed it. Thus, Gulo calls upon his minions to abide by sacred hospitality and feed those who hunger. While some of Gulo's cannibal children are gracious hosts who perform charity when not kidnapping people to eat, others are crafty villains who set up soup kitchens to discreetly dispose of leftover victims, or create and recruit legions of tamed ghouls. Both camps of followers please Gulo, if only because he is easily bored of having to deal with mindless predators as his servants.

Travelers in the Abyss naively seek out Candy Mountain in the hopes of pleading with Gulo for hospitality and sanctuary. This is both a wise and profoundly foolish idea, as, while he happily grants succor to those who politely ask him, Gulo's services as a host or guide do not come without a price. Often, Gulo will extract a favor from desperate adventurers who won't realize that the nature of this favor is to be marked to be eaten by their savior at a later date. Sometimes, the price is to join Gulo as his hostage or accept his corruptive gifts. Sometimes, Gulo travels to the Prime Material to test the hospitality of mortals. As a guest in the light, Gulo appears as a handsome, brawny warrior, vaguely human, yet enticingly bestial, with a carnivorous smile. In the dark, Gulo appears as a monstrous ghoul with the mien of a predatory animal. Good hosts are rewarded with good fortune; those who displease him, at best, are devoured.

Because Gulo loves to throw parties to show how skillful he is at mindless debauchery, many demon lords assume that he's a fop, and a has been sleeping on his military laurels. Many such demon lords get badly bitten when their gossip reaches the God of Gluttons' ears. What isn't common gossip is that Gulo is secretly planning an invasion of Avernus, while he seeks to restore his ally and sometimes lover, Shaktari, to her former power. In addition to amassing an enormous, larger than normal, army, Gulo has been searching for the specific demon lords who betrayed the Queen of the Mariliths so that he can sacrifice them to her in a ritual feast. Once these two parts of his plans are completed, coupled with the backing of the other



Abominations, Gulo hopes to lead a charge so cataclysmic, that he would be able to personally break down the gates of Dis.





# HADAARI

Hadaari are a species of greater tanar'ri born from the souls of fanatics whose monomaniacal devotion to their master or their faith or their cause led to countless deaths and untold suffering. Hadaari are prized as minions by true tanar'ri and demon lords, as, once enslaved and bound, a hadaari can be assigned a task and be trusted to never falter. Hadaari are typically ordered to guard a gateway or a room, and have the power to seal any entrance under their protection until slain or ordered to unseal it. Powerful fiends and wizards sometimes bind hadaari to serve as bodyguards, as well.



# HEXACUUNIES

Hexacuunies is a demon sorceress who appears as a scroll in a constant state of raveling and unraveling. Sometimes she can tighten her coils to give herself a more feminine appearance if she so chooses. Those who view her form must take care, as the writing on her pages is in Abyssal, and those foolish enough to attempt to read her script out loud will find themselves speaking Dark Speech.

The Princess of Secrets has amassed a modest but diverse library of both magical texts and texts on magic, the latter of which consist of some of her greatest treasures. Hexacuunies has acquired most of her books through barter, theft, and scavenging; in particular, she stole hundreds of texts while scavenging the libraries of Astaroth after his demise at the hands of the archdevil Gargauth.

Hexacuunies tempts mortal arcanists with access to her library, and often offers to tutor them in the ways of magic, in return for their souls. She keeps these souls in a ledger hidden in the heart of her library, and uses them to barter with other fiends, night hags, and the occasional lich for more books for her collection. Hexacuunies keeps a handwritten index cataloging all of the written materials currently housed in her library from encyclopedias and sentient grimoires to sheafs of scratch paper. This simple journal is her most prized possession, cherished leagues above even her ledger of souls.







# HISUIMA

Hisuima, or jade fiends, are a species of demon that appear to be made of jade. Hisuima are born from the remaining fragments of the so-called Greater Jade Fiend, a warbeast created by the Obyriths that was eventually slain to help birth the Arotrin.

Although technically tanar'ri, hisuima are haughty creatures who hold themselves above other demons. In a way, other demons agree with the hisuima, and have hunted the stony beasts to near extinction for their jade flesh. Hisuima are immortal and can eventually regenerate from even the smallest of fragments. Because of this, artistically inclined demons, nalfeshnee and succubi in particular, commission the hunting of hisuima in order to carve the beasts' carcasses into living sculptures and sentient jewelry that feel pain, especially when polished on a frequent basis.

Some of these living art objects find their way into the Prime Material, where they become "cursed heirlooms" that inspire familial madness or influence people to form murder-themed mystery cults. The hisuima fragments do this not so much to accelerate their own revivals, but rather to entertain themselves during their exile by inspiring lesser beings to destroy themselves via insanity.

Those who would utilize hisuima remnants to create magical objects must be aware that to do so would pose the immense risk of downloading the hisuima's malignant personality into the item in question.



# IOVIRUS

The virusbeast Iovirus is one of the chief children-minions of the disease deity Megalovirus. Iovirus was created by Megalovirus to serve as the chief executor of Megalovirus' will and plans, in contrast to both Alphavirus, a backup copy gone rogue and Omegavirus, a groupie elevated to chief interpreter of Megalovirus' will. Additionally, in contrast to its siblings, Iovirus is a stoic, limiting its emotions to calm agreement when fulfilling its parent's plans or mild disdain when having to deal with mortals.

Iovirus appears to be a ten-foot-tall humanoid with at least five pairs of tentacles in place of arms. Over a dozen leering eyes cover its head and torso. Meeting Iovirus' gaze is extremely dangerous, as it can easily corrode a victim's ability to distinguish between reality and hallucination, leach away a victim's intellect, or even cause a target's head to explode.

When Alphavirus collaborated with a cabal of thirteen magicians to capture Megalovirus in the Chuangguan, Alphavirus advised its conspirators to capture Iovirus, as well. When the Chuangguan and its surviving guardians were captured by the Mists, two of the thirteen released Iovirus to do battle with a devouratrix in Paridon to keep the Chuangguan from falling into the Red Horror's hands. The devouratrix was easily driven off, but Iovirus then escaped into the sewers of Timor to plot its parent's freedom.





# POISONOUS WAR CHIEF IRAM

The Poisonous War Chief of the Ten Abominations is the chief enforcer and assassin of the group. Iram is a creation of Amentia and Superbio, a mannequin given purpose by being filled with Amentia's festering resentment and Superbio's blazing petulance. Iram hates his creator-masters, and the other Abominations; perhaps worst of all, he hates himself. The Poisonous War Chief is filled with others' hate, and is animated by others' anger, leaving him with no room for his own motivations or purpose. This leaves Iram feeling empty and frustrated at his own worth. Those few who know of this have attempted to empathize with him but Iram dislikes being made an object of pity without permission, leading to yet another temper tantrum.

Unbeknownst to others, Iram is aware of Luxuria's distaste for him, and her little plan to replace him with someone she finds more pleasing. Deep down, Iram hopes she will succeed. But he also hopes to one day to be allowed to gut her like the worm she is, too.







# LAO GOEI

The Old Ghost, the so-called “Prisoner of Death,” claims to be the spirit of the very first mortal to die. Whether this is true or not, Lao Goei is, indeed, a very old ghost and is very powerful, due to its long dwelling in the Underworld.

Lao Goei is a professional gossip who has been scheming for thousands of years; and some fiends have an educated guess about what its scheme entails. As a part of its schemes, Lao Goei is summoned by mortal arcanists to exchange information. Wiser, helpful fiends strongly recommend against entangling oneself in Lao Goei's schemes if one knows best about one's own spiritual wellbeing.

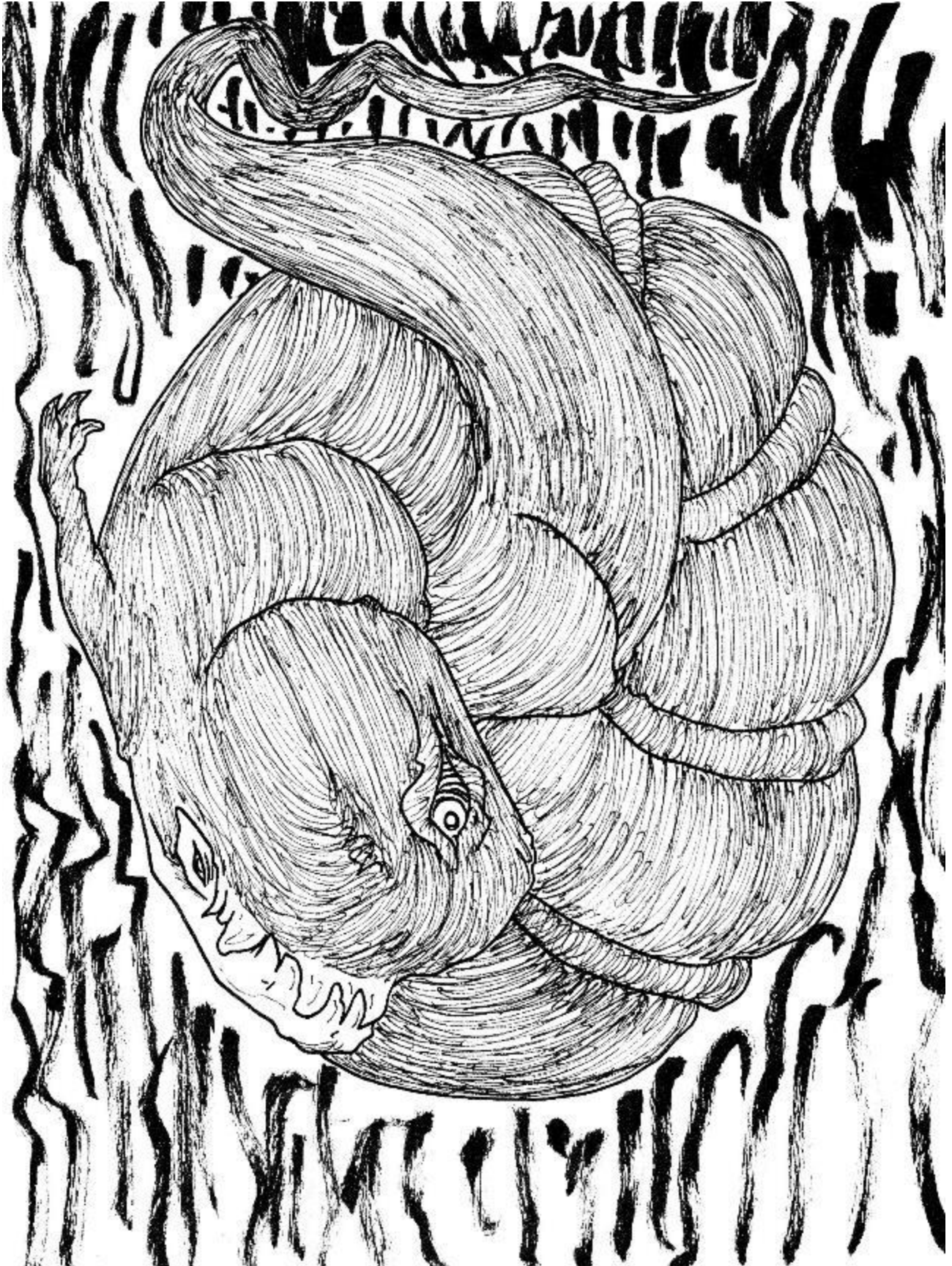


# LIYWATAN

Liywatan, the Ocean's Roar, is a primordial of the ocean. Together with his sister, Numu Hava the Brine Mother, and his other sibling, Apokryltaros the King of Worms, Liywatan was a member of "The Three Oceans," represented by three triangles arranged in an inverted triangle, the Ocean's Roar's being the righthand triangle, which is blue.

The Ocean's Roar came to the land dwellers, demanding they worship him and his siblings as the masters of the land. When the land dwellers balked, Liywatan laid siege to the surface world, and called upon his army of sea monsters to help him terrorize the mortals. The Gods responded by sending legions of celestials to beat back Liywatan's forces. Humiliated, Liywatan returned to the sea with his tail between his tiny legs.







# INSIDIOUS COURTESAN LUXURIA

The Insidious Courtesan of the Ten Abominations is their spymaster. Luxuria was once one of Gulo the Glutton's succubus maids. She had sought to utilize Gulo's power to help her seize the title of "Queen of the Succubi," but that plan was cut short when Gulo ate her as he is normally wont to consummate his love affairs with bite-sized lovers. In her master's stomach, Luxuria mutated when she realized the focus of her desires was not for herself, but to expose everyone to the glory of dissolution through consumption. And since crawling out of her lover's gullet, Luxuria has devoted herself to bringing Gulo more victims.

Luxuria is a people-pleaser at heart, and seeks to assist her fellow Abominations, save for Iram and Malevolentia, to the best of her extensive abilities, whether it is to bring them more victims, relay pertinent information or extra juicy gossip, offer a courtesan's wisdom, or even just a session of ego-stroking. This assistance the Lady of Want freely offers even to mortals she encounters, though, whether this is because she genuinely seeks to lift their spirits or lower their guards so she can make them her next host depends entirely on her mood or current assignments.





# MACALAUQUE

The Macalauque is a peculiar looking spirit that appears to be a chimera of monkey and bottle gourd. Macalauques purport themselves to be minor guardian deities and tend to thickets of wild or abandoned squash vines. Mortals find them infinitely amusing until it is realized how macalauques replicate themselves.





# UNRELENTING TASKMASTER

## MALEVOLENTIA

The Unrelenting Taskmaster of the Ten Abominations is an outcast devil still reeling from the fact that such was her meteoric fall from Diabolic Society that she did not even qualify to become one of the Rabble of Devilkind. The other Abominations use Malevolentia as an assistant to manage their schemes and their minions on their behalf, due to assuming her intimately innate association with Order means she can tidy their schedules for them. As much as the Princess of Stings detests being used as a secretary, she uses her status as her peer's secretary to slowly rebuild her power base.

Except with Amentia. With Amentia, Malevolentia is always sincerely courteous, eager to assist, and is even polite and deferential to the Beleaguered Artist's lackeys, a personality facet unseen even when she served as Princess Glasya's sniveling treasurer and chief accountant. Various underlings gossip this is so because, after she witnessed Amentia destroying Fortress Invincible, Superbio got under her exoskeleton when he whispered that Amentia did that not to sever his relationship with Beimudan, but to personally demonstrate to her what would happen if he caught her trying to manipulate him.

Malevolentia is well aware of Luxuria's rancorous rivalry with her, and Malevolentia does her best to aggravate Luxuria whenever she can. Case in point, Malevolentia takes credit for convincing and advising Gulo to mastermind an invasion of Hell. If Malevolentia can help Gulo successfully overrun Avernus and Dis, she then hopes to convince Gulo to make her his new lover and dispose of Luxuria.



# MANDRAKE

Mandrakes are nightshades of the genus *Mandragora*, and are horseradish-like plants closely related to the petunias of genus *Petunia*. Mandrakes produce lovely blue or indigo flowers that eventually mature into yellow, deliciously tangy fruits that are referred to either as “Satan's testicles” or “genie's eggs.” All parts of the plant beyond the ripe fruit are deadly poisonous, though, its poisons can be, with some effort, modified into analgesics and soporifics.

Because laypeople appear to understand magic more than common sense, herbalists claim mandrakes are sentient, know enough magic to cavort with and command evil spirits, and defend themselves from being unearthed with a life-sundering scream. Apparently, this is easier to process than stating one will go numb and die within the night if one eats a mandrake leaf.





# MEGALOVIRUS

Megalovirus is a gigantic feyir who evolved into a god when it arose from the nightmares of a city inhabited by wicked sorcerers all dying from a plague. Taihu the Pox Tiger attempt to slay it, but, in the process, caused the creature to break apart into the first virusbeasts, thereby evading destruction.

Megalovirus hid itself away, then built itself an empire, of sorts, by budding off legions upon legions of feyirs and different virusbeasts for specific tasks.

Because Megalovirus is not a rational being, it created a virusbeast as a backup copy of itself, designating it “Alphavirus,” and tasked its child with replacing it. To complete this task, Alphavirus conspired with a cabal of thirteen magicians to capture its sire (together with its sibling Iovirus) in an artifact known as the Chuangguan or “Bug Box.” To prevent Alphavirus from becoming another god, the magicians betrayed it, feeding it to the Chuangguan, too.

All according to plan.







# MYSTERIOUS TREE

A spirit that takes the form of a tree covered in talking faces. For a price, the spirit can search for a difficult to find hidden truth on its petitioner's behalf.



# NANWANG

Nanwang, the Southern King, is a powerful evil spirit who manifests as a monstrous, animated pile of pumpkins. Nanwang lives in the Abyssal layer known as “The Kingdom of the South,” a seemingly idyllic, nighttime land of lovely forests and beautiful farmlands, empty of beings other than insects and pumpkins. Demons warn visitors to the Abyss to avoid the Southern Kingdom, as the pumpkins are the King's carnivorous children, and that the insects are bloodthirsty, and filled with mutagenic venom.

Nanwang cultivates a vast network of mystery cults whose members pledge their bodies and souls to the King in return for an unchanging schedule of bountiful harvests. Nanwang's mortal children perform human sacrifices every waxing gibbous moon, and, after beheading their victims, affix jack-o'-lanterns to the corpses' stumps to animate them as zombies to tend their fields for them.

Once a year, on the night of the Harvest Moon, Nanwang's mortal children gather together their best, biggest pumpkins of that year to perform a ritual to summon their King from the Abyss so he can personally inspect their lands to his liking by the light of bonfires fueled by the bodies of that year's spent sacrifices.







# NUMU HAVA

Numu Hava, the Brine Mother, is a primordial of the ocean, being an aspect of saltwater's life-promoting properties. Together with her brother, Liywatan the Ocean's Roar, and her other sibling, Apokryltaros the King of Worms, Numu Hava was a member of "The Three Oceans," represented by three triangles arranged in an inverted triangle, the Brine Mother's being the lefthand triangle, which is green, jade, or turquoise.

Numu Hava attempted to bribe the mortals of the land into worshiping her and her siblings in place of the Gods. She did this first by teaching those mortals who listened to her sermons how to forage for edible sea life, then by granting favored mortals the power to capture delicious fishes from any body of water, even from cups. In her desperation, Numu Hava began spitting pearls and gemstones at the land dwellers to sway them. When the Brine Mother's antics came to the attention of the Gods, they sent a troop of their numbers to smite the Brine Mother upon her armored head and then heave her back into the sea.





# NYAN BAOHAN

Nyan Baohan is an evil spirit that feeds on other beings' pain. It manifests as a giant slug that has mouths instead of eyes.

Nyan Baohan manipulates events to promote suffering and misery in the same way a farmer carefully sows seeds and nurtures crops for food. In particular, the horror has developed a fascination with the pain of mortals when they are infected with lycanthropy. To sate its new interest, Nyan Baohan has begun promoting wererat infestations.

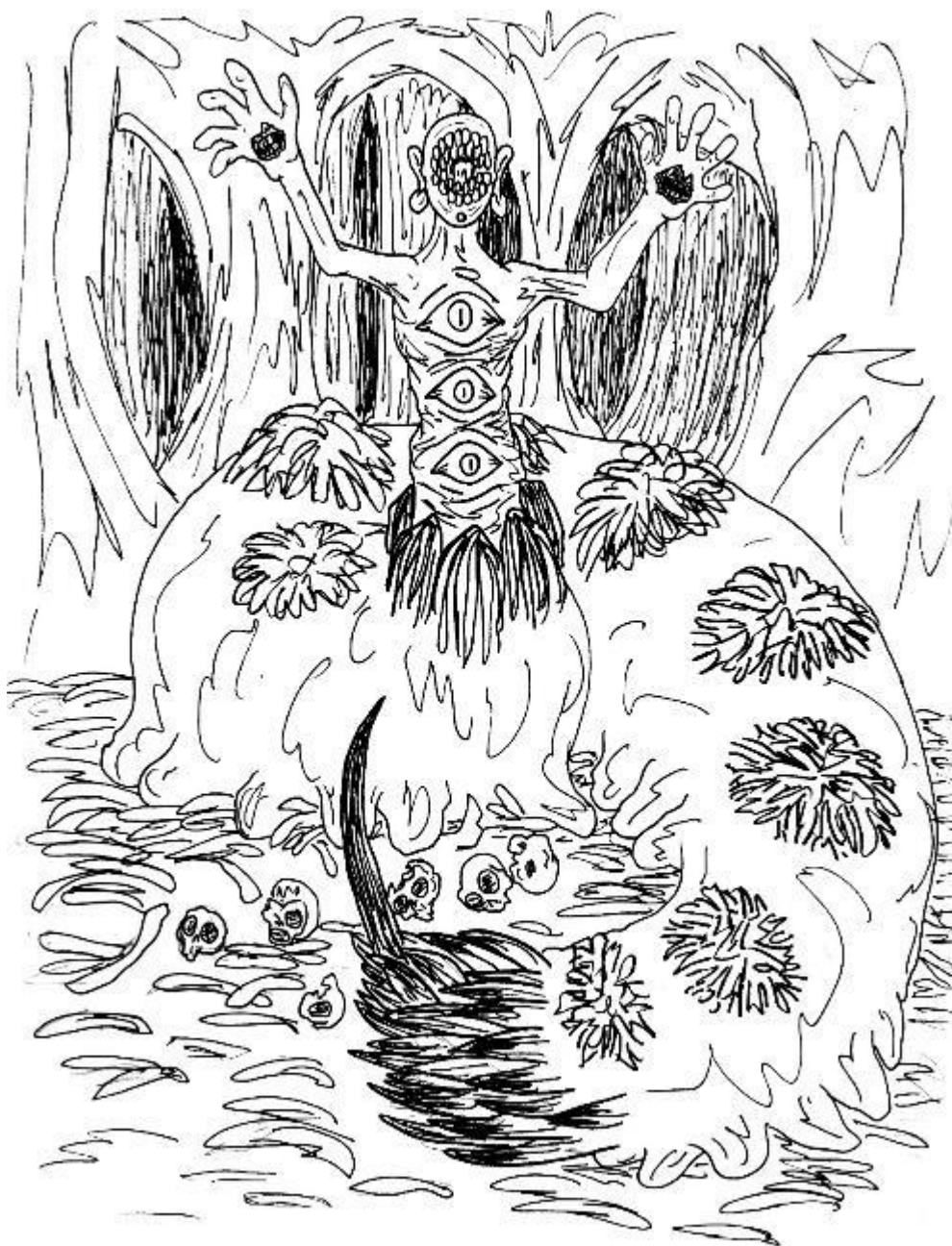




# OMEGAVIRUS

Omegavirus is a powerful virusbeast that fancies itself the final and ultimate child of the disease god, Megalovirus. As proof of its devotion, Omegavirus can channel Megalovirus' divinity in order to cast clerical spells in addition to empowering its own arcane might.

Omegavirus alternates between setting up cults in its parent's name, and devising weird and convoluted plans for the sake of causing mischief and mayhem. Currently, Omegavirus has been tracking the whereabouts of the Cabal of Thirteen in order to find the Chuangguan, the prison of its parents and chief sibling-rivals.



# ŌMUKADE

Ōmukade is an evil spirit that takes the form of a gigantic centipede. The exoskeleton of the ōmukade is almost impervious to all forms of injury, even from the breath and talons of dragons. The slobber of human heroes, however, is a terrible poison to the ōmukade. Apparently, the only way to reliably slay one is for a true hero to lick the sharp edges of his weapon before striking.



# PARAPLASMA

Paraplasma is an evil spirit that takes the form of a beast or a chimera formed of a disembodied brain and nervous tract. When Paraplasma manifests, it is often mistaken for a huge intellect devourer, bigger than an oxcart. Of course, one could easily tell that it wasn't an intellect devourer, or even an intellect glutton, given that Paraplasma manifests with eyes and a tail (derived from the spinal cord).

This spirit behaves in a frenetic manner, viciously attacking with its psychic screeching or lashing about with its electrifying tail, or abandoning its adversaries altogether after being suddenly stricken with boredom. When not manifested, Paraplasma is a cloud of ectoplasmic vapor that causes nauseous anxiety in the living.

This spirit's goals are unknown, though, it appears to be somewhat focused on bedeviling travelers and inhabitants of the Underdark. Ilithids who know of it try not to think about it, lest they draw its violent attention towards them.





# VISCOUNT PHONGO

Viscount Phongo, Master of the Quadruple Damned, is a minor demon lord who once ruled the Abyssal layer known as the Fen of Endless Fire. Viscount Phongo's mortal cultists were sorcerers lusting for power, which their master repeatedly granted, until these sorcerers destroyed themselves with their magic. Upon their demises, these sorcerers were reborn as Abyssal petitioners in the Fen of Endless Fire, where they burned eternally, as Phongo used them as literal playthings (or furniture).

For a long time, Viscount Phongo sought to make a name for himself in Abyssal politics, but lacked the resources to sponsor armies for the Blood War, and lacked the stature to capture the attention of other demon lords and princes. Upon learning about the Biophobias, the Viscount hatched a plan that he hoped would help him seize control of the Abyss. But, lacking the resources to pull this marvelous scheme off, he took a dangerous gamble and prostrated himself before Asmodeus, King of Hell, to sell his scheme (and himself). When Asmodeus agreed to the terms presented, the Viscount was ecstatic. Unfortunately, Phongo did not anticipate how powerful and how powerfully intractable the being who would later be designated "Biophobia 5" would be.

The Fen in ruins, and a stiff bounty still on his head, Viscount Phongo went into and still is in hiding. He has been seen lurking in various other layers, including the Sulfanorum, the Rainless Waste, and the Steeping Isle. Rumors abound about him traveling to the Mansion of the Rake and the Lair of the Beast to proposition Kanchelsis for a new scheme, or petitioning the Lady of Pain for "political asylum." Gossips stupid enough to ask for corroborating details have been, unsurprisingly, horribly dismembered, then thrown into a maze dimension to suffer additionally.





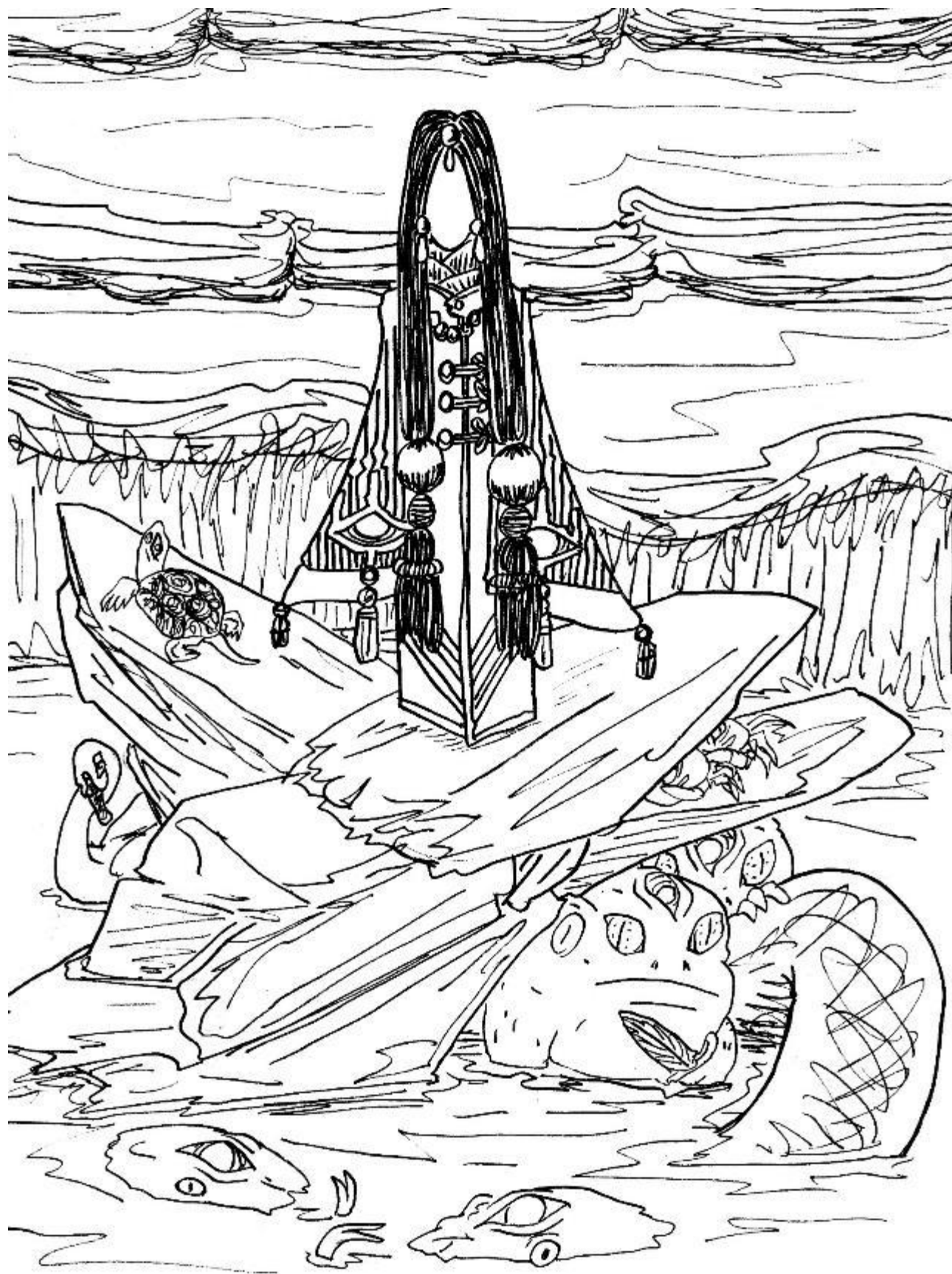


# PRINCESS HUANGYUGU

Princess Huangyugu (officially “Yellow Jade Bones,” or, more insultingly, “yellow croaker poison”) is a demon princess who rules the Yellow Jade Marsh. Her Royal Highness claims to be the mother of all hezrou demons. That she has thousands of hezrou at her command, and that all hezrou everywhere, including those employed by her enemies, deferentially refer to her as “Our Mother” or “Her Majesties,” lend truth to this claim.

In the days after the fall of the Obyriths, there was a tumult of power struggles over who would rule the Abyss. Princess Huangyugu marshaled her forces from the Yellow Jade Marsh and attacked numerous other layers in order to dominate the other, then nascent, tanar'ri lords. Her Royal Highness' fortunes came to an end when a clique of her enemies and rivals petitioned her for an armistice. Upon agreeing to meet whom she assumed to be her new vassals, she was then ritually banished back to her marsh, where she was cursed to remain standing on one of her favorite jade slabs ever since. It is said that only one of three events could free the Princess, the kiss of a true innocent who willingly traveled to the Abyss (and stayed innocent in the process), one of her original enemies forgiving her, or a completely unanimous verdict from all of the Lords of Woe (yea or nay).

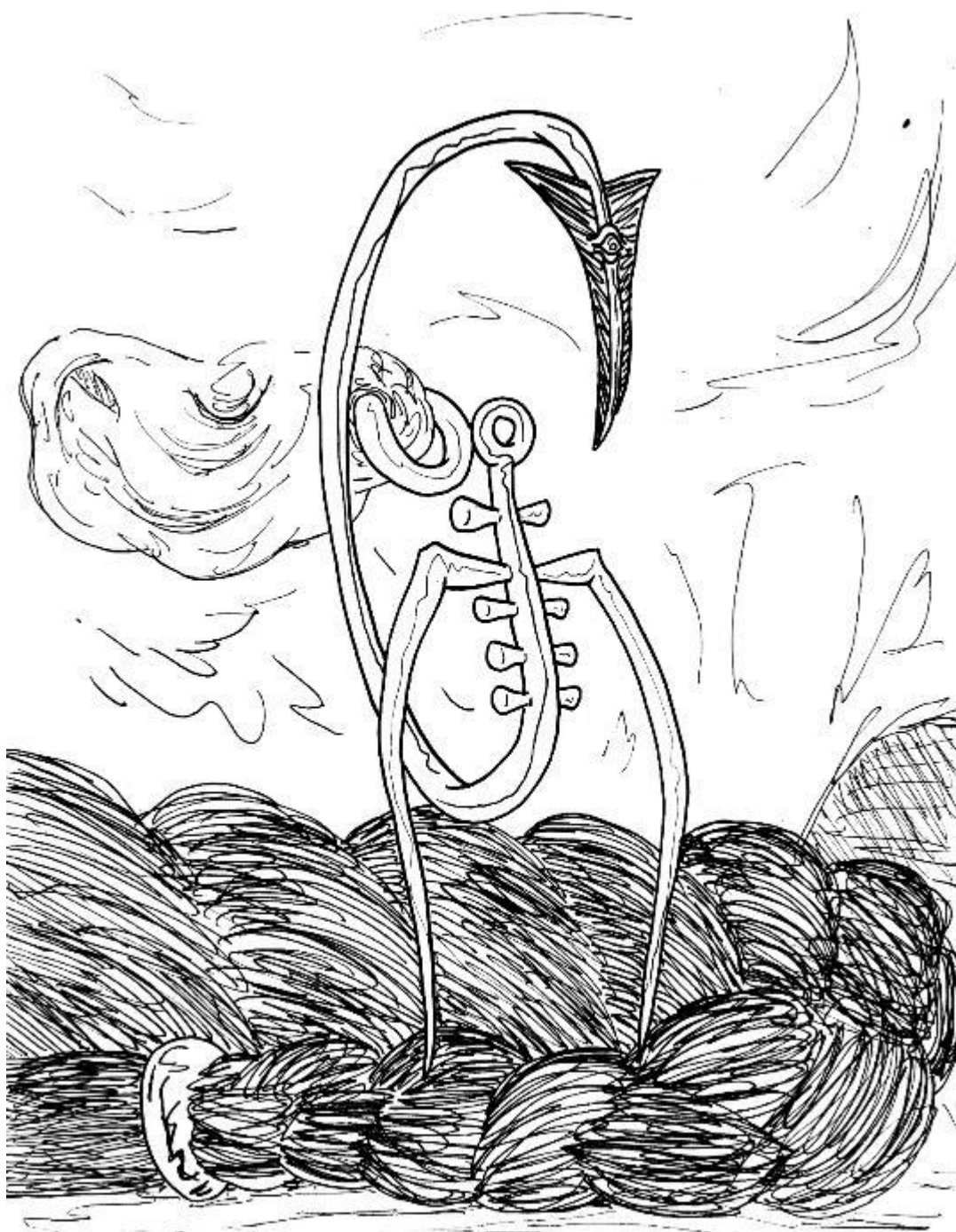
The Yellow Jade Marsh is a vast marsh filled with yellow water and yellow vegetation, and is inhabited by hezrou and countless demonic wildlife. The Marsh sees a steady stream of mortal visitors hoping to steal some of the seemingly infinite numbers of yellow jade stone that crop up everywhere there. Demons outside of that layer who see mortals carrying the Marsh's jade execute such thieves on the spot under the assumption that they've been recruited by the Princess for mischief. In the Marsh, minions of the Princess are quick to apprehend thieves to take them to Her Royal Highness to accept her proposition (under penalty of immediate execution).





# SCORPION OF THE LIGHT

The Scorpion of the Light is a guardian spirit created from a gold trinket. Trespassers and thieves who transgress against the Scorpion's wards are stung, and are cursed to eventually dissolve into a cloud of light unless the Scorpion's master absolves them.





# SCRYING BEAST

An artificial evil spirit created to spy on others. In many cases, the creature was given (and easily fulfilled) orders to stare at a chosen victim to death.



# SHUUNEROS

In life, Shuuneros was a depraved bard who engineered “performance tragedies” in honor of his patron, Amentia, The Beleaguered Artist. Eventually, Amentia rewarded Shuuneros with lichdom, and gave his undead performance tragedian a studio in the Thousand Towers.

Currently, Amentia has largely forgotten that Shuuneros still exists (such a fate commonly befalls many of the Beleaguered Artist's favorite minions). Shuuneros struggles hard to remind his master of his existence while the lich's rivals chuckle behind his back and place bets over, when Amentia finally is forced to remember, whether the lich will be recycled into a big tub of mummy brown paint, or put into deep storage.







# SILVER PLAGUE

The Silver Plague are a race of demons who serve as the handmaidens of the Apokryltaros. They are created when they literally bud off of the Apokryltaros' spilled ichor or shed scales. Each individual appears as a housecat-sized, silver-armored fish with gnashing jaws, and often with bulbous eyes. Each plaguemember can fly through the air as freely as it can swim in liquids. A plaguemember can also assume an ectoplasmic vapor state. The Silver Plague are vicious, nasty little things who attack en masse, tearing and rending or spitting caustic ectoplasm. Most importantly, though, whatever a plaguemember witnesses, so does its progenitor.

Other demons regard the Silver Plague as horrific, horrifically annoying vermin. Upon becoming aware of an infestation, demons will set up magical wards to bar the fishy terrors' presence. As much as they'd wish to, other demons avoid actually harming plaguemembers, as violence against them incites the remaining Silver Plague into increasingly aggressive behavior and, worse yet, runs the risk of marking the offending demon for death at the talons of the Apokryltaros' other minions.





# SPIRIT BEAST GUARDIAN

A spirit that guards a doorway. It wields a sword made of omamori charms. Trespassers and other foes struck by this charm sword find their magical and other supernatural powers sealed until the spirit is appeased or a powerful magician can be found to abjure this curse.





# SPIRIT BEAST WARRIOR

An aggressive spirit who guards a doorway. This spirit relentlessly hunts down trespassers, not stopping until it is abjured or until its designated enemies are rent to pieces.



# “THE SPORE OF HELL”

The so-called “Spore of Hell” is a gigantic sporangium that, contrary to its name, probably originated from one of the Infinite Layers of The Abyss, probably Shedaklah.

The “Spore” is the size of a cow femur. Those who would seek information about the “Spore” are inevitably repeatedly cautioned against touching it without adequate protection: if the “Spore” is allowed to reabsorb enough moisture, it will revive and regrow its toothed haustoria, thereby enabling it to capture and feed on prey once more. Furthermore, if, by some dark miracle, the “Spore of Hell” revives, it is strongly advised to avoid direct contact with its highly carnivorous habitus, as those who confront the growths risk being exposed to the actual spores, a corrosive dust that normally devour any organic matter they touch. Those precious few non-demonic entities who survive encountering the active “Spore” faithfully note that the “Spore” is actually self-aware to the point of being extremely intelligent, and possesses control and influence over those who discover its mutagenic powers.







# SUIHU

Suihu are a race of shapeshifters descended from the eponymous water deity. When interacting with humanoids, a suihu can assume a wolf-eared, humanoid form resembling either a bestial, overly muscular human, or a disturbingly attractive ogre. A suihu's true form is an enormous predatory animal combining features of a wolf, a tiger, and a bear.

Suihu are solitary, though, they sometimes take companions or infect an apprentice to ease their loneliness. Suihu are territorial creatures, establishing large territories near bodies of freshwater, and claiming all sentient beings within their territories as their wards and protectorates. In their human disguises, a suihu will protect and assist their wards in various roles, like a village herbalist, a fisher, a trapper, or a blacksmith, and otherwise treat their lessers as delicate things to nurture. Whether this means treating them like children, pets, or livestock depends entirely on the individual suihu's personality.

As mentioned, suihu are territorial creatures. As much as they crave companionship, they distrust other suihu who do not share their blood. To prevent traumatizing or aggravating their wards, suihu in a territorial dispute will engage in a ritualized fight in their human forms, like a bar fight or a wrestling match, until one yields and flees.

Suihu resume their true forms at night or when swimming. Often, in the latter situation, they find themselves compelled to rescue drowning victims. Despite being large beasts, and appearing as brutish oafs, suihu exercise extreme discretion about what they are. In addition to being hunted for being man-eating monsters, suihu are hunted by wizards who process the former's carcasses into potent magical items, primarily focused around healing or warding off diseases. The suihu's luxurious fur, if flensed off with a blade of bronze or jade, can be made into a cape that protects the wearer from malaria, the evil eye, and rheumatoid arthritis. Word of a poacher is enough to gather the otherwise solitary beasts into warbands of a baker's dozen to find and eat the offender. Suihu do this, partly because they don't appreciate being poached, but mostly to prevent such items from being used, as, if misused, especially the potions and salves of wound healing made from their blood, they can spontaneously transform the user into a rabid suihu. Suihu will also move to stop or limit large-scale threats to the land, such as a lich or a defiler mage, and will ally with druids, woodland fae, werebears, weretigers, or even adventurers and monster hunters in the process (under a false identity with the latter two).



# EMPEROR OF EMPERORS

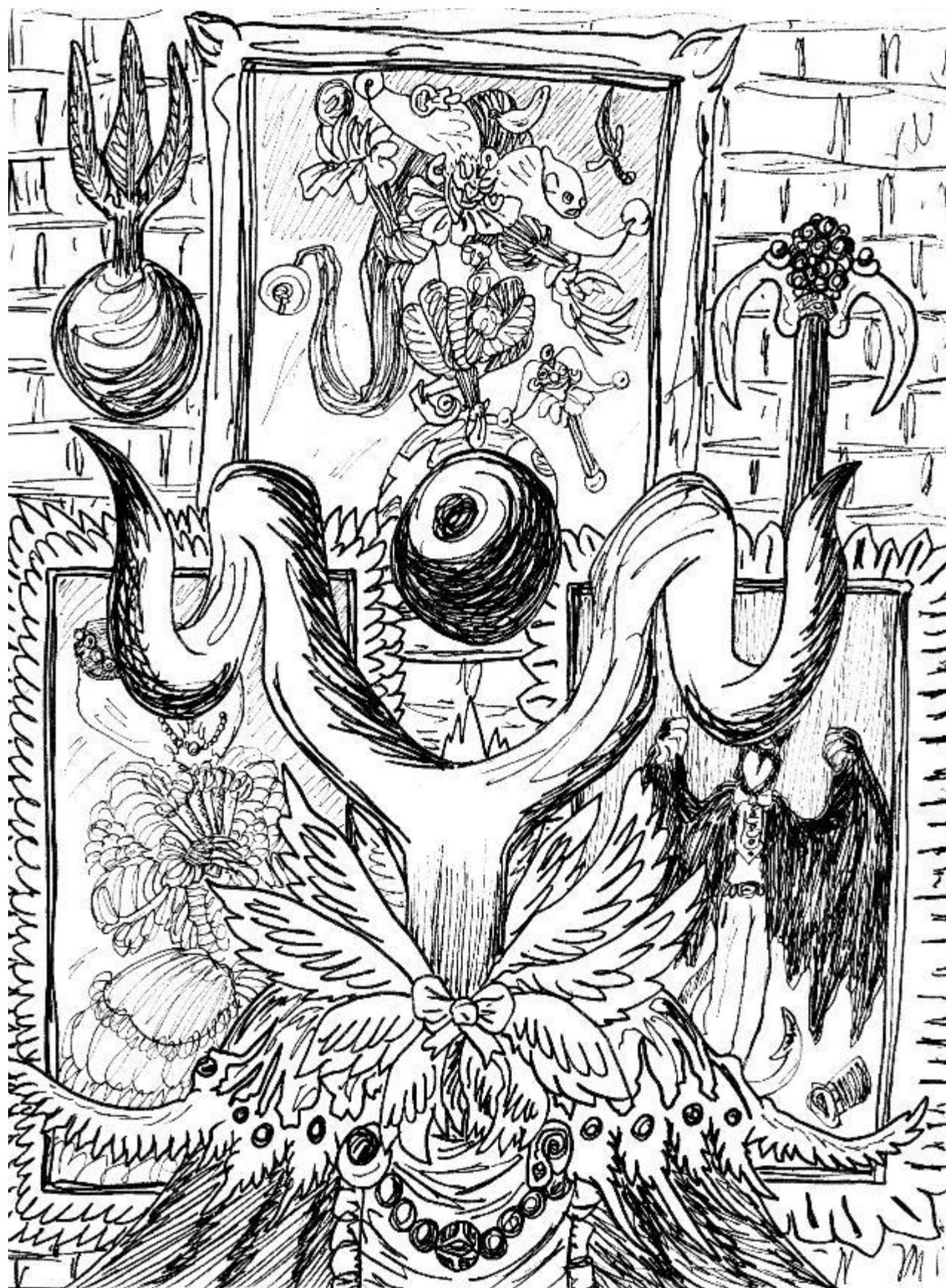
## SUPERBIO

The Emperor of Emperors is the official leader of the Ten Abominations, and is a manipulative schemer who makes all of his peers, in and outside the Abominations, and even his progenitor, dance to his tune, through gossip, blackmail, shouted commands, and whispered suggestions.

Superbio styles himself as the Great Prince of Pride. The Prince of Princes views his peers in and outside of the Abyss as either obstacles to cruelly remove or as resources to utilize. He delights in recruiting powerful beings for his schemes and destroying or consuming them as his plots progress, though, some of his minions he likes enough to postpone their horribly ignominious demises indefinitely. In all of the Emperor of Emperors' dealing, though, he does not break any promises or agreements he makes, not deliberately, at least. Whether or not one survives, though, is not guaranteed unless that clause is explicitly put in. In many cases, many of Superbio's allies and clients are left wishing they didn't put such a clause in. Allegedly, this need to abide by a given agreement stems from Superbio's original betrayal by the Obyriths who promised him rule of all of the Infinite Layers of the Abyss if he could organize their demon hordes and lead them to victory, only to dismiss him out of hand before he was allowed to do as commanded.

When searching for new minions to corrupt, especially among mortals, Superbio often searches for those who were laid low by betrayal, who were stung by the breaking of a promise, whether a paladin abandoned by cowards who lied about being her comrades, or a child denied his reward because his parents were too busy to remember. For these, Superbio makes right what was lost to them, and in return, his new followers mature their gratitude into loyalty, and then fanaticism, as they do the Prince of Princes' bidding. Those who successfully prove the most amusing may be granted their own private suites in their master's Palace of Heaven. Those who fail to do so, well, it's best not to dwell on that.





# TAIHU

Taihu the Pox Tiger is a god of disease. The Pox Tiger searches for sinners and other evil doers and blights them with diseases as punishment for their transgressions. Taihu wanders the Lower Planes, hunting down and eating fiends when not following the orders of his peers.

Taihu is forbidden from striking the innocent with his diseases, and was punished by his peers for the assumption of this transgression when they mistook the antics of Megalovirus for him straying from his duties. When it was discovered that he was responsible for the creation of Megalovirus, the Gods beat Taihu again and charged him with finding and destroying the feyir god. The Pox Tiger has been searching for Megalovirus for centuries, and will handsomely reward anyone who helps him. That he also readily destroys anyone who fails to provide any substantial assistance makes would-be helpers reconsider, however.







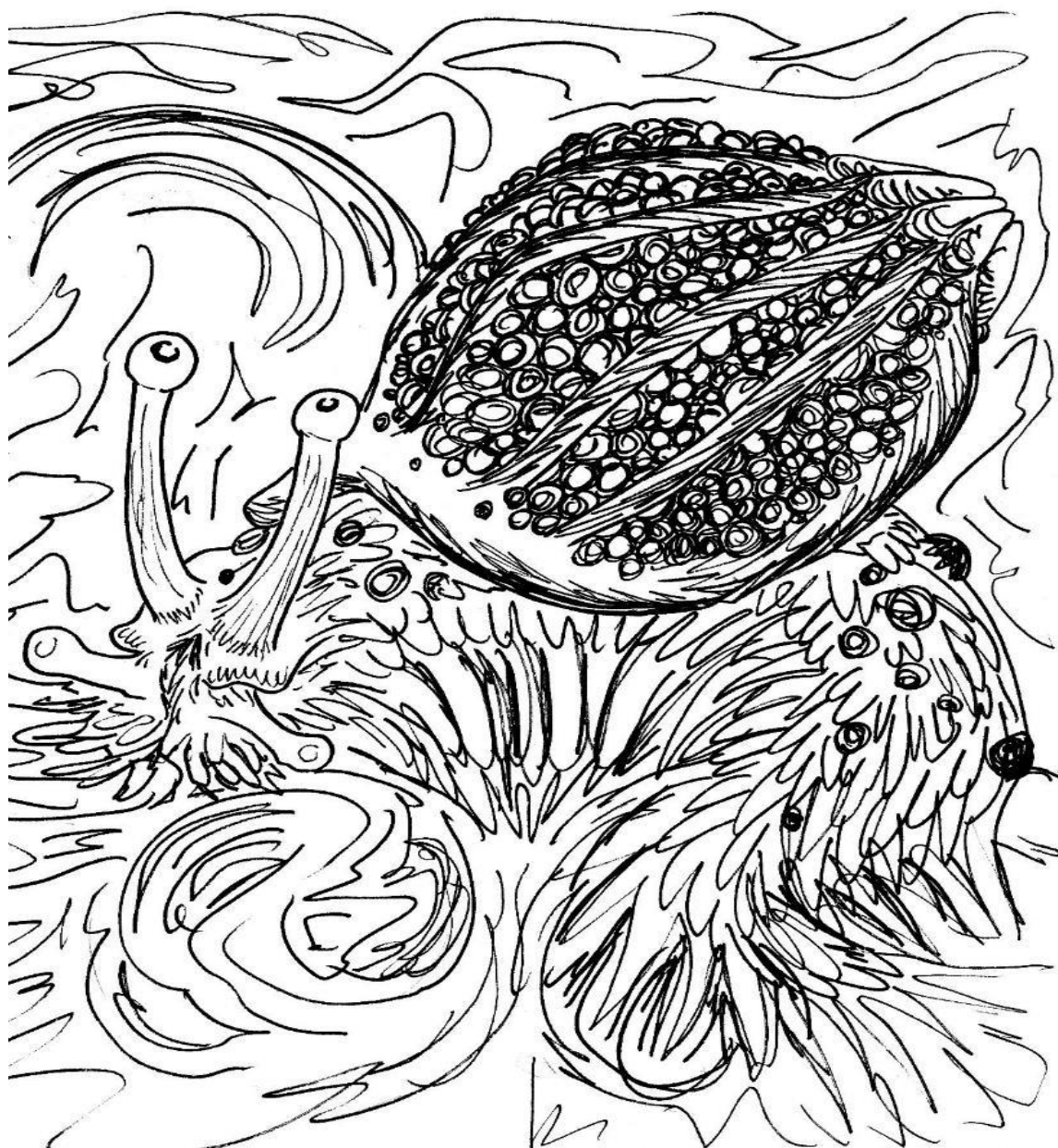
# TARUQUE

Taruque are a species of fiendish worm with a parasitic larval stage. Humans stung by the adults are injected with microscopic eggs. If the newly infected hosts are not cured, they weaken and die within a fortnight, and their corpses withering away as the larval taruque form large, slimy cocoons.



# TELMANARATH

The Telmanarath is an evil spirit of disease that spreads an affliction known as “snailpox.” Snailpox first begins as a feverish malaise, progresses to heavy fatigue, and then a terrifying rash that develops spherical pustules resembling snail eggs, hence the name. If not treated, snailpox is fatal, as the pustules eventually detach from their hosts to hatch into tiny slug-like organisms that then spread the disease to others. Once enough victims have perished, the Telmanarath then manifests as a house-sized snail in order to feed on the corpses.



# THE TEN-HEADED RISHI

The Ten-Headed Rishi, Devadatta, or False Guru is a powerful demon who was once a man. This man sought enlightenment, but confused disdain and arrogance with detachment, so the austerities he performed fed his ego and not his spirituality. Eventually, this man achieved what he thought was enlightenment, causing his body to grow ten extra heads. So terrifying was his mutation that the Gods cast him into the Lower Planes where he has remained.

Because the False Guru claims dominion over insanity through revelation, he has come to blows with Amentia, The Beleaguered Artist, who does not appreciate rival claimants. That the False Guru remains powerful and elusive enough to routinely evade Amentia's wrath frustrates the Beleaguered Artist.







# TESSEIMERA

The Tesseimera is a fiendish being best known for having been slain as a part of the creation of the Arotrin. Aside from this end, little else was known or discussed about it other than cryptic mentions of it “being beyond time's grasp.”



# THRONE DEMON

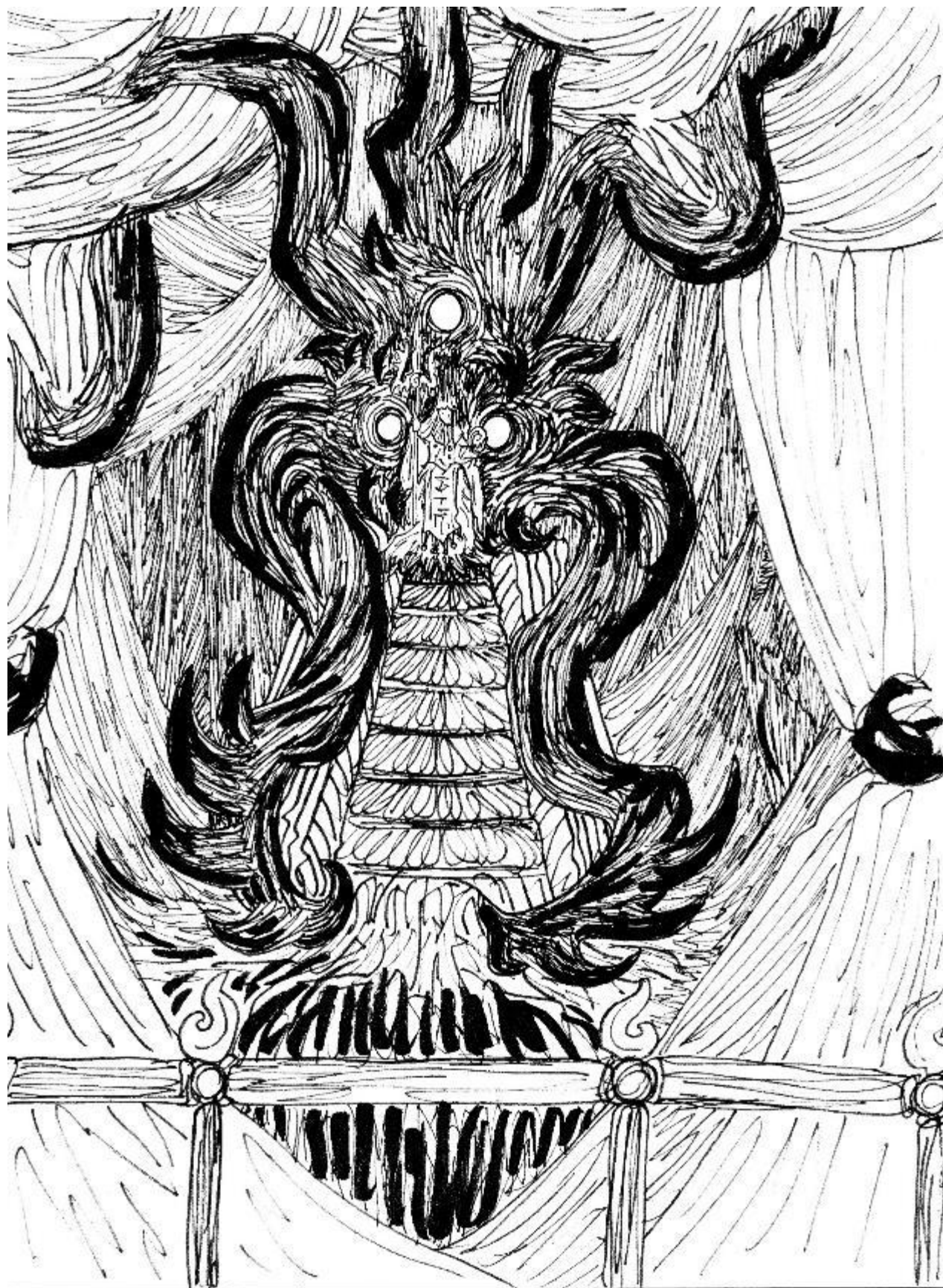
Once upon a time, there was a world where everyone was a magician, and every magician had a staff. Those magicians who wielded the prettiest staffs and possessed the greatest magic ruled over their lessers.

One day, a magician without a staff came and cowed his betters with his magic (in several cases, by turning them into cows). At first, it was thought this sorcerer had no staff, but he soon revealed that he had a throne instead of a staff. The throne magician was a cruel and terrible ruler who ordered everyone about for his own amusement. Those who failed to amuse the throne magician were cruelly slain with his magic.

One day, another magician with no staff came. Only this time, he truly had no staff, but was still quite powerful. With a wave of his hand, this magician with no staff freed the people of the world from the throne magician's thrall.

When the magician with no staff came to the throne magician's castle, he did battle with the tyrant, and eventually perished when he fatally revealed his foe was no magician, nor even a man, but a mannequin brought to life. As the magician with no staff lay dying, he saw the mannequin's throne get up and crawl into a summoned hole, never to be seen again.

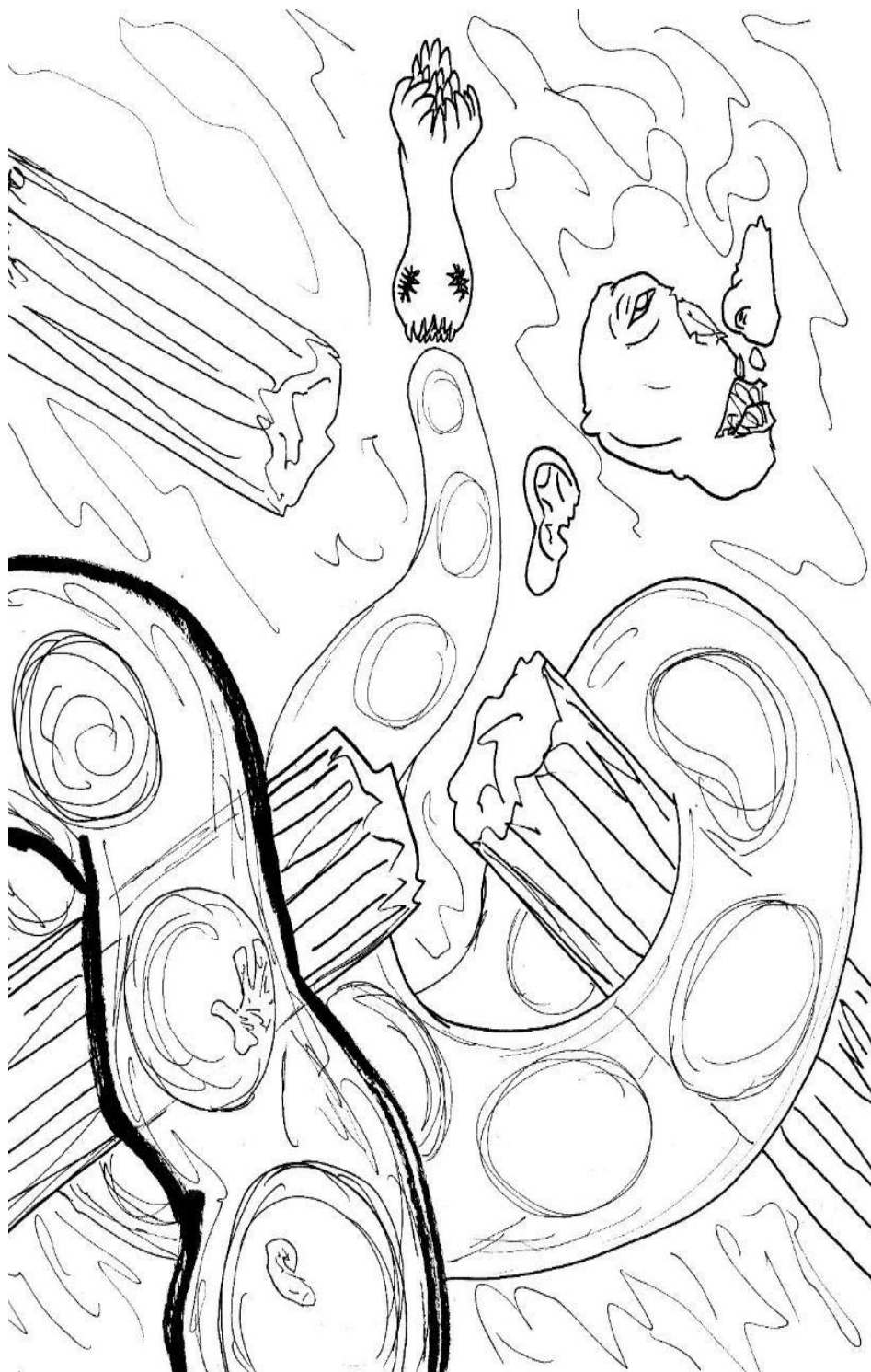






# TIMEWORM

A timeworm is a worm-like organism that exists in and out of the timeflow, hence the name. It creates “chronological anomalies” in order to trap sentient organisms by displacing them out of time. Once this occurs, it then devours its trapped victims at its leisure. Timeworms are notoriously difficult to find, let alone find and exterminate, as they can displace either themselves or their hunters out of time in order to evade capture, or capture and then eat their antagonists.



# VAAPOLISKS

The Vaapolisks are a race of lesser tanar'ri demons descended from a horrible, terrifying primordial cryptically referred to as their “king.” Their “king” met its own end when it was slain to help create the Arotrin, but, in the process, the vaapolisks were born from the remaining spilled ichor and viscera.

A typical vaapolisk is a vaguely arthropod-like fiend with a varying number of legs. Its legs are attached to a rounded head that has a large eyespot. The tail is raised high, and ends in a cluster of funnels that secrete noxious, toxic vapors that smell very much like rose oil, but in a suffocatingly cloying manner (as if one were to drown, headfirst, in a vat of rose oil).

Other tanar'ri generally regard vaapolisks as wretched, annoying vermin, being fit only to be punted into an alkilith or through a gate to another plane. Some, more civilized tanar'ri capture vaapolisks, hang them in fancy ironwrought and goldleaf cages so that, whenever they need to freshen up themselves or a room, they poke their captives with a stick repeatedly until the odor is to their liking. Still other tanar'ri capture vaapolisks and sell their secretions to night hags and arcanists as alchemical reagents or a dangerously potent substitute for rose oil.



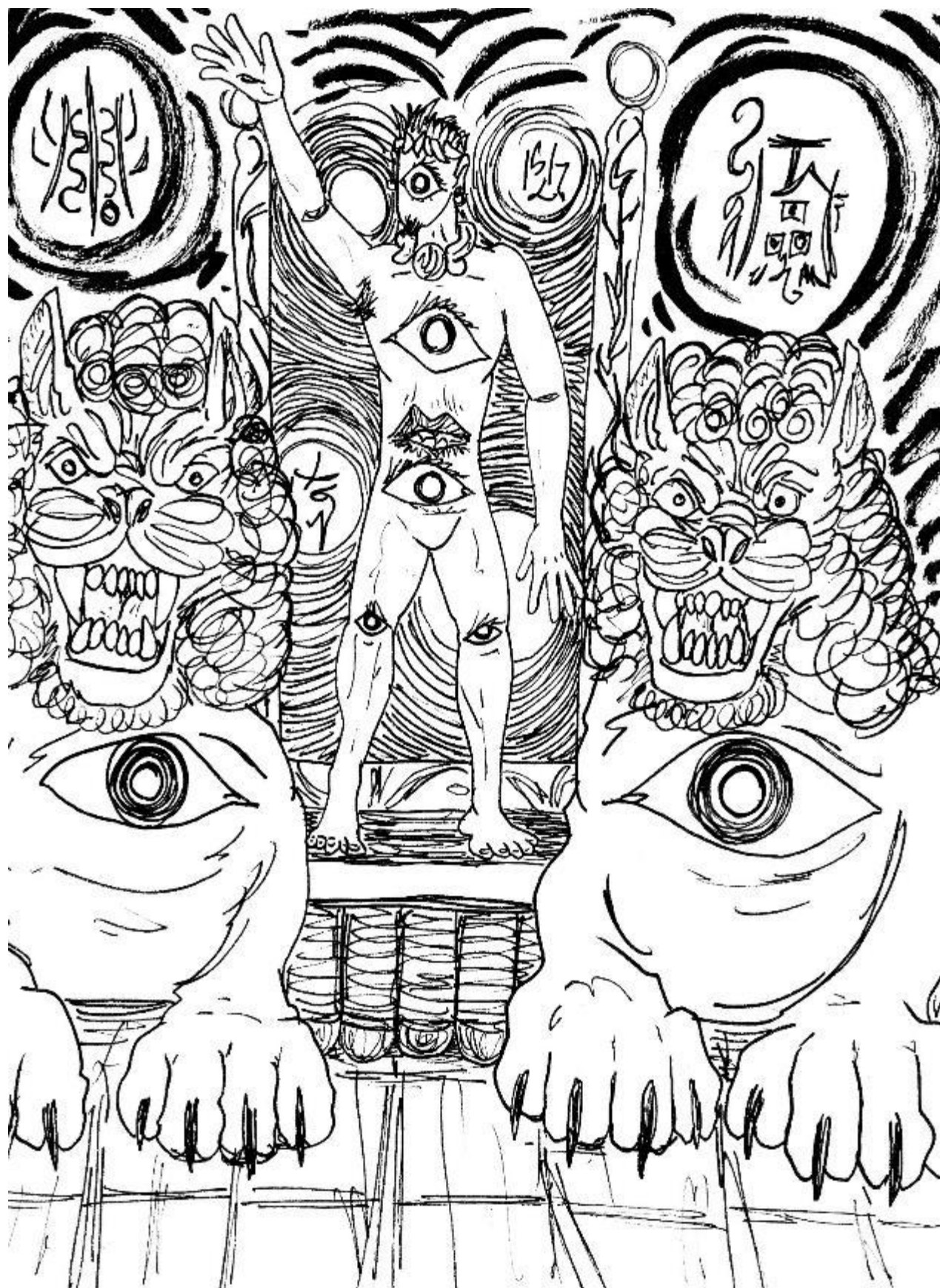


# XARTATAXES

Xartataxes The Babbling Prince is a demon lord of enlightenment through the revelation of forbidden knowledge. Once, Xartataxes was a bard who followed Amentia, The Beleaguered Artist in order to discover profane truths about the Universe. Through his master's assistance, Xartataxes accrued enough knowledge that he became a demon through his own power.

For a time, Amentia held Xartataxes as one of his dearest, most precious lieutenants, holding the Babbling Prince's advice much in the way a human holds gold. Eventually, though, Amentia became uncomfortable in Xartataxes' presence, and came to fear his lieutenant's truth-revealing gaze. This strain in their relationship lead to Amentia shutting Xartataxes in the Tower of Revelations, one of the iron fortresses of Pazunia. Xartataxes has remained there, sitting (or standing) on his Throne of Miracles. The Babbling Prince, ironically, is not aware of the rift in his relationship with his master, as he is too preoccupied with telepathically contacting random mortals in the Prime Material in order to enlighten them. Unfortunately for the Prince's mental pen pals, his contact with them drives them utterly insane, and, if they survive long enough, compels them to ritually summon demons and other fiends.







# XIVIRUS

Xivirus is a virusbeast in service to the God-Feyir, Megalovirus. Xivirus does Megalovirus' bidding by possessing chosen individuals in order to work mischief in its god's name. Outside of a host, Xivirus is a disgusting mass of ectoplasm, with an eye-like nucleus. Possessed hosts appear normal, but drip ectoplasm everywhere they go.









# THE BROKEN COG

BY BRIAN "DOCTOR NECROTIC" RUBINFELD

Cartography by Emma "Ashtagon" Rome  
Special Thanks to Speedwagon, Jeremy16, and KingCorn

*"There are those who fear the realities of progress. Worry not, my students, for you reject such fear. Harness the energies around you, observe the logic of the stars, and help to forge a truly new age. Through guidance, you too will aspire toward heights beyond."*

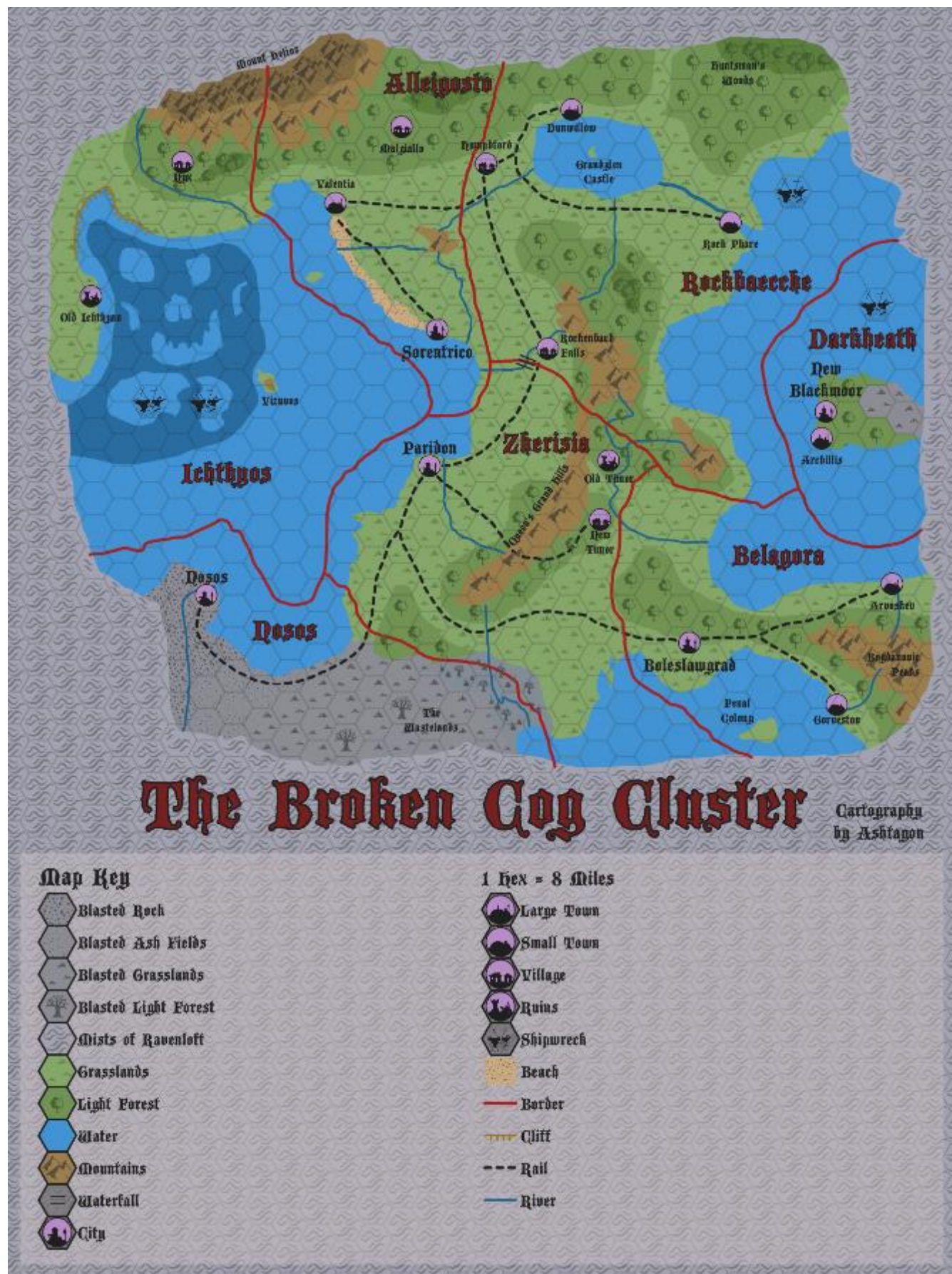
- Professor Igvar Orngul, Metaphysical Engineering studies for Oblask University in Belagora

Welcome to the Cog, a land of prosperity, diversity, progress and innovation. This is the surface level veneer, spoken proudly by the land's citizens. In truth, welcome to a land of escalating strife, petty competition, paranoia, and vindictive regimes. This cluster is a realm of scientific creation, but its focus has turned to enabling the worst impulses and fears of its denizens. A new time of empire clashes only furthers violent division. Old colonies break free, only to ensnare others around them. Time ticks towards oblivion, likely at the hands of equally innovative and fearful mortals. This Broken Cog Cluster refers to a series of connected domains deep within the Demiplane of Dread. Their cultural level has advanced beyond what was previously thought possible, through a rating of "Industrial" (CL 10).

True to its name, the watery bodies breaking apart the lands resemble worn and corroding cogwheels, just a piece of a fracturing machine.

With broken machines come broken dreams and realities... that worst of all cause a cold war to slowly heat up. Alleigosto faces traditionalist zealots losing against an industrial tide. Likewise, through this rapid movement of advancing weapons and defense development, morality and civility slowly dies. Neighboring Ichthyos is a decaying remnant that fails to adapt to changing times, a dark shadow of what Alleigosto could become. Zherisia contends with contradictory claims to a homeland, as well as rampant paranoia building above and below ground. Timor reemerges as a pitiful relic, where chaos is in charge and brutality has usurped any attempt at society. Near it, Belagora embodies technical creation being used alongside law to suppress the public, for their own good of course. Darkheath is too locked in an unwinnable war to contend with its own dying nation. Rockbaecche only contributes to this problem, not out of malice, but from miscommunication. All the while, it faces an epidemic that will likely never get solved, despite miraculous innovations. Nosos is a land of promise, degenerating into a worthless wasteland and a disgusting metropolitan sprawl towards the bay. Its apocalyptic reaches almost act as a harbinger of dark times to come. Horrors born from the hubris and neglect of strange science prowl just beyond city limits. These lands march towards the future as they also march towards doom.





## A TIMELINE OF EVENTS:

-872 BC.	Ichthyos reaches the height of its empire, a mighty theocracy under the watch of the gods. (FALSE HISTORY)
-5 BC.	The Thonian Empire verges on total collapse. Blackmoorian separatists fearing reparations flee to this new land, in hopes of establishing a colony. This would in time become the foundations for Darkheath. (FALSE HISTORY)
158 BC.	The city of Valentia finances a war for Zherisia, offering a loan for them to pay off. This ultimately bankrupts and crashes Valentia, thrusting it into chaos. (FALSE HISTORY)
240 BC.	Alleigosto revolts against the Ichthyan Empire, which proceeds to falter after a lengthy war campaign. (FALSE HISTORY)
241 BC.	A deadly earthquake rips apart Ichthyos, perhaps the gods punishing the people for their hubris. Old Ichthyos splinters between the old town and the newer city. The latter is now a massive island.
357 BC.	The now infamous Dance of Burning Men occurs in Paridon, where an attempted regicide is followed by several men dancing that were set on fire. The public revolts, feeling the nobility have become too decadent (FALSE HISTORY)
573 BC.	The Kingdom of Gorasa declares war on the New Thonian realm of Rockbaecche. The naval focused campaigns end in quick humiliation of Gorasan forces. Many retreat to the province of Belagora to rebuild. (FALSE HISTORY)
685 BC.	Jereko Arcaico is born in Alleigosto's home world in the Prime Material Plane.
696 BC.	Borcan missionaries emerge in Belagora. The Church of Ezra becomes popular, becoming the dominant religion in the land. (FALSE HISTORY)
698 BC.	Fearing irrelevance at the popularity of this new religion, the Primary Council of Belagora slowly co-opts and manipulates this branch of the church. This remains a secret outside of closely connected allies and newly elected council members. (FALSE HISTORY)
721 BC.	The Ichthyan Navy launches a surprise attack on the Gorasan Empire, with the latter prepared following an information leak. The invading navy is sunk. The Council of Belagora is credited with the operation. (FALSE HISTORY)

739 BC.	<p>Old Timor is overrun by abominations known as “Marikith”, who openly emerge to drag the dwindling populace down into the void. This sets off a chain of events that lead to the old city’s collapse. (FALSE HISTORY)</p> <p>Now a Duke, Jereko Arcaico takes over the Division of Historical Preservation within Alleigosto. Under him, several traditionalist figures are appointed in hopes of stalling and sabotaging efforts to further industrialize.</p>
740 BC.	<p>The Grand Conjunction ravages the Demiplane of Dread.</p> <p>Alleigosto forms as an Island of Terror, following the Duke’s heinous crimes against the public and subsequent war against his homeland’s kingdom.</p> <p>Lands beyond Paridon vanish from the domain of Zherisia.</p> <p>The urban overworld of Timor vanishes as much of it is engulfed in a chasm.</p> <p>The chasm that devours Timor is said to unleash a horrible plague that promptly ravages Rockbaecche to the north (FALSE HISTORY)</p>
742 BC.	<p>The survivors of the Timor cataclysm were previously lost in mist, but emerge upon a new plot of land rife with resources. However, the lurking marikith threat still lingers, with denizens all the more ready. Timor rebuilds anew. (FALSE HISTORY)</p> <p>High Priest Obed unleashes a dreadful heresy upon the island of New Ichthyos, awakening cosmic horrors. The gods punish the realm by submerging the landmass below the waves. Any towns other than Old Ichthyan drown from violent waves. (FALSE HISTORY)</p> <p>Commander von Wilholt conspires with foreign forces to send New Rockbaecche into chaos in a bid for power.</p>
743 BC.	<p>Ichthyos becomes an Island of Terror, with connections to the Sea of Sorrows. Before the year’s end, it joins the emerging Broken Cog Cluster with Alleigosto.</p> <p>Rockbaecche becomes a domain within the cluster.</p>
744 BC.	<p>Makreidas Steamship company moves its freight enterprise from Ichthyos to Alleigosto, further crippling the Ichthyan economy.</p>
745 BC.	<p>Belagora joins the cluster, but is cut off by mists and swathes of sea waters.</p> <p>The Gorasan Empire vanishes into the mists, leaving Belagora alone and isolated in a land with no true allies. (FALSE HISTORY)</p>
748 BC.	<p>Cultists of the Ancient Ones wage an attack against Alleigosto, but superior naval forces and fire power defeat the eldritch foe.</p>



754 BC.	Ludendorf Academy of Science opens in the distant domain of Lamordia. Thanks to a relatively stable mistway in Alleigosto, prospective students travel and emerge to take part in their program.
759 BC.	<p>The wider domain of Zherisia resurfaces as part of the Broken Cog Cluster. Included within are the ruins of old Timor as well as the attempt to rebuild.</p> <p>The domain known as Timor is now a sprawling domain known as The Fissure. It connects to multiple domains within the cluster.</p> <p>The Ludendorf Symposium attracts an eccentric Noson scientist on the 5th anniversary of the academy's opening. His experiments attract an aspiring academic attending the academy, who ultimately kills the inventor in his home and claims the creation.</p>
760 BC.	<p>Current Time Frame (as of this article), what transpires below is the near future.</p> <p>An agent serving under the ruling clans of Alleigosto has gone missing after investigating a report in Ichthyos. Military intervention is expected if information cannot be recovered soon.</p> <p>The weapons manufacturing industry of Nosos has been supplying both Rockbaecche and Zherisia ample amounts of supplies, closely anticipating war.</p> <p>Duke Arcaico is assassinated, only to wake up in his manor without any injuries. He assumes the identity of a relative.</p> <p>Cultists of Ichthyos plot revenge through their dark and eldritch connections. The anniversary of their previous attempt draws close.</p>

## ALLEIGOSTO

*"Where the world advances with you." - A phrase posted on a sign outside of Sorentrico*

### THE LORD AND THE LAW.

Alleigosto is an aristocratic republic, overseen by appointed clan representatives. All of these members of the ruling council hail from noble upbringing or great wealth and are chosen once every 6 years. Aspiring rulership can only serve 2 terms in one lifetime. Such a method of rulership is a departure from a hereditary monarchy that existed under a century prior. Among the ruling

representatives is the surly and deeply technophobic Duke Jeriko Arcaico, patriarch of Clan Arcaico. His presence within the current council formation is that of a stubborn and crotchety critic, doing all he can to impede ordinances, projects and other points of governance. His garnered base of support leans exceedingly traditionalist, also taking part in voicing their disdain for new developments, especially in his 8th year of rulership. In the Duke's view, many of these new pushes and movements cause the proud land of Alleigosto to abandon senses of identity, tradition, morality, empathy, duty, and compassion. His message fears a future that is cold, sterile and devoid of deeper purpose. While his insight has changed the course of legislation and order, he does often have trouble swaying his fellow councilmen.

The rest of the governing order is composed of other important families of Alleigosto. The oldest ruling clan within the city of Sorentrico is House Vaerizocchi. Their public image far exceeds Clan Arcaico, in part due to them interacting more with the general public to begin with. Their claim to fame occurred 30 years ago, where they exposed a plot on behalf of a treasonous clan involved in Rockbaecche's ongoing problems. House Zaritelli was once prosperous, before being involved in the Rockbaecche scandal decades back, leading to majority humiliation and exile. Those who stayed behind did all in their power to clear their name, to little avail. House Benegiallo was a victim of the Rockbaecche plague spilling over onto foreign soil, which had become a foodborne contagion. The tainted meat claimed countless lives. The patriarch, Sir Lucio Benegiallo, assembled teams to help treat or purge the illness wherever possible. Ultimately, he was the reason why it wiped out much of the house. Curiously, none slain by this plague became undead. However, those who were slain by it could never be resurrected. The fall of this noble house is the reason why their rural home has been renamed to Malgiallo. Other houses of lesser significance or controversy take part in the ruling order, such as House Romonelli, House Vespuccia, House Aurelianno, and House Marilinev. The last house is a rather mysterious addition, joined by a clan elder who retired to Malgiallo some time ago.

## THE DARKLORD.

Duke Jereko Arcaico - LE Human Fighter 12. A leader for a time that no longer needs him. The Arcaico House helped to turn a coastal land into a thriving land of trade and prosperity. However, the house remained heavily conservative and extremely methodical in their approach. By their decree, none were to break from the means that worked towards this success. As such, stagnation ran rampant across the lands and morale decreased as neighbors advanced. Nonetheless, his clan was among the founders that helped to raise Alleigosto City from a

small point on a map into the bustling hub of industry beloved today. The consequences of such a society stuck with this leader essentially since his birth in 685 BC. Unlike his family, he grew attached to stories of commoner plights and took to a position in office to rectify such problems. While being groomed for a position of political leadership, he never lost his duty for justice. However, when combined with the ultra-traditionalist values of his family, it became corrupted into a deeply technophobic outlook. Scandals followed young, such as vandalizing or sabotaging devices, in one instance leading to the closure of a factory. The only instance of him being caught also resulted in 3 kegs of gunpowder exploding. Only Jereko was injured from this, keeping him from an easy getaway.. His prompt arrest would have earned him a criminal record, had his family not stepped in with an ultimatum; end this destructive behavior or be disowned. Years passed with no incident, but his infamy kept him unpopular. After a prior term within the council, he quickly grew dissatisfied over inept bureaucracy, casual disdain for much of the population and lavish decadence that came with the arrival of new technologies. This became apparent as outside merchants attempted to sell off innovations and works of artifice from their lands in hopes of spurring new movements within their land. Jereko, recently declared duke over the land, took great offense to those who would "spoil the culture of his land". The contraband was confiscated and campaigns were meant to strike fear against foreigners. This didn't deter the altruistic intentions of outsiders, as they saw Alleigosto as a land succumbing to close-minded tyranny. This didn't deter Jereko either, who turned towards using military force to keep influences away.

The Kingdom of Francheschio demanded that Duke Arcaico cease this immediately or face intervention from the kingdom. In the months to follow, Jereko demanded that anyone partaking in deviation from cultural norms and technical prowess be "removed" immediately. This resulted in terrible crimes against civilians and subsequent war against his own lands.

Many thousands were put to the blade, as the kingdom failed to stop the corrupted regime in time. As forces did eventually tear through the ranks of the technologically inferior genocidal madman, Arcaico panicked. War against the mad tyrant was turning against him. Nobles, alongside trained military, stormed the Villa of the Duke. As they got to his private chambers, the duke threatened them with an antique dagger slashing his throat. The deed was done, as he attempted suicide. The Mists intervened, as he found his coastal duchy gazing upon a new and victorious enemy. A new domain formed as the Grand Conjunction ceased in 740 BC.

Not only have outside cultures made their presence, they've built up incredible devices and creations that go against all things the Duke believes in. The history he knew was erased, but the shame continues to haunt him. He was no longer sole Duke, but part of a cooperative order of noble representatives. This isn't his only curse, his claims are constantly debunked by those outside of his influence and his actions are undone by the rampant marches of progress, locking him in an eternally losing war. But, he'll always see himself as the start of a New Empire and an ever living one at that. For all of his curses, he is effectively immortal. Only antique weaponry belonging to his clan can kill him, all of which he stores in secretive and protected vaults. This does bring another minor curse. The scar caused by the gash upon his throat will never heal. He claims to have survived a deadly attack, but will always conceal the shameful truth. Whether in Villa Arcaico at the edge of the city or one of his many rebel supported bases, the disgruntled duke still plans for his eventual revolution to succeed. The Duke has other abilities, he can disrupt any technological devices or weapons he can see for a short period of time. Upon being disrupted, they will not function for up to 1 minute. However, doing this is extremely taxing upon him, temporarily draining his Constitution by 1 point per use. These removed points are returned after 24 hours. Such an ability is saved for dire circumstances. He also owns

an enchanted rapier that glows in the presence of any technology above a Cultural Level 8 (Chivalric).

## THE LAND

The heart of commerce within the central bay of the Ichthyan Sea. Alleigostons consider themselves those blessed by the privileges of an emerging tourism industry, as well as a majority positive press over the land's numerous wonders. For wealthy travelers, the beaches and nearby businesses prove especially enticing. For the more intellectual, The Institute of Innovations marvels the mind with the genius craftsmanship of students and staff alike. The public consciousness is that the capital has proved that more urbane lands are the centers for prosperity, progress and productivity. For the rest of the Alleigostons, perhaps the opposite is true. While not as drained and limping as neighboring Ichthys or as stretched thin as Rockbaecche, city life has been a tax on vital resources and the distribution of new wonderworks.

Unsurprisingly, the population is mostly concentrated within Sorentrico, the central hub for this land. Smaller cities, such as Valentia, still contain a sizable population. But their role is largely reduced, acting as a sort of gateway before reaching Sorentrico proper. Valentia remains a major proponent of Alleigoston financial stability. 2 centuries ago (roughly 558 BC), it underwent not just economic reform, but revolution. The banks of Valentia lent finances to Paridon in their seemingly endless feud against Timor. Ultimately, the war dragged on and loans could be paid. The coastal city was thrown into chaos as their loan taker defaulted. Uproar turned into violence and the city quite literally burned. Those who survived the onslaught proposed new systems to ensure that this would never happen again. Merchant lords were replaced by olden nobility, but new forms of banking, credit and finances were installed. Likewise, mobility options were given to common folk to give them an edge against merchants. In the ages to follow, this cold and methodical city was given new life. While



not as much of a popular stop for wealthy patrons, much of the sprawling streets and glistening lights offer a quieter and more romantic getaway. However, becoming a fallback for Sorentrico has its consequences. Many crooked, corrupt and scheming personalities have fled to the city. They've dug their heels in, gaining their own little enterprises to make the domain rely on. These confidence men, smugglers, and more are indeed the Alleigoston machine; but few are aware of the corruption embedding itself deeper and deeper. And those who do have a choice, do they risk another age of turbulence or turn a blind eye?

Much of the land beyond Sorentrico is unremarkable at first glance. Sloping mountains and rolling hills separate this land from the remote Ichthyos. That doesn't mean the countryside is barren of innovation or causes, but that the urban infrastructure is a primary focus instead. Weather ranges from dry and hotter seasons to cooler and damper seasons. However, as one travels more east, the more temperate weather is observed. The settlement of Malgiallo is perhaps large enough to be considered a viable farming town. Its purpose is to help keep the wider city alive, while having just enough surplus to care for its own. Some remote villages exist beyond that, doing similar to a degree or just enduring steep taxes while staying stable. The further one gets away from the coastal cities and closer to the mountains, the less pleasant the terrain is to cross. However, views upon Mt. Helios are no less breathtaking. The climate does radically cool down as one goes north, curiously. The mountainside feels not unlike the southern portion of the cluster. Any territories become much more frontier and less organized as well, many are barely incorporated into wider Alleigoston society.

## CLOSING THE BORDERS

When closing the borders for Alleigosto, Duke Arcaico wills a royal army to act as a makeshift customs blockade. All those seeking to leave from the land must consort with them. More than likely,

they will find something at fault and bring you in for questioning. Those who attempt to revolt will face 8d6 soldiers bearing down on them until they surrender. Joining them are experimental automatons, many of which brand new weapons. Any resistance will warrant imprisonment until they are granted a trial.

## THE FOLK

Descendents of the Grand Imperium, a once mighty empire originating from another world. The empire went by numerous other names based on different worlds and cultures: Thonia, Arcanalis, Thristarea, Romelius, and more. No matter the true name, the land thrived together. From the south, a new culture arose to challenge the mighty empire. By -340 BC, it had faced massive decline and was open to attack. The empire had grown decadent and more concerned with fighting itself than building back up. The capital was due north of where Sorentrico was today, now a set of preserved ruins. Despite this collapse, the people endured as new tribes arose with new cultures all their own. The Alleigostons were closest to the Grand Imperium and proudly carry it within their roots.

The Alleigostons are a passionate people driven by values of a determined work ethic, faith and an acceptance of eventual mortality. To work and pray is to commune with the divine. Religion has dramatically shifted over the centuries from folk religions and the prior belief of the Grand Imperium to that of The Church of Ezra, with a lesser influence of Paridon's Divinity of Mankind. The Church of Ezra caught on in 696 BC, after monks from Borca were welcomed into the recently reformed Alleigosto. Over the years, a monastery was established well off the coast of Valentia. Due to many cultural similarities, the public is not just familiar with Borca but claim many blood ties to it. Some historians suspect that ancient Borcans helped to sack their old capital, while others suggest they arrived to help rebuild. Some suspect the descendents of Malus Scelerus to be at fault, due to the assailants having

similar roots. Duke Arcaico is familiar with Borca, as well as their Barovian rivals, but is rather disinterested in contending with Ivan or Ivana directly. Such duties have been displaced to other republic leadership. Rather, he'd use his forces to root out and banish any Borcan troublemakers, fearing abroad mischief and intrigue.

Alleigostons are distinct from much of this cluster. Their skin carries more of a tan hue than the eastern and southern borders of the cog, varying in lightness. Due to similar genetic roots, they share this commonality with Ichthyans. Clothing within this land varies on class, occupation and time of year. Oftentimes, clothing tends to be more practical to fit a certain station. Commoner men and women tend towards the slightly drab, with folkish patterns and clan related aesthetics sown into their wear, especially towards the fringes. The women in particular add a draping cloth or garment to an otherwise plain ensemble. Wealthier and aristocratic members of Alleigosto will incorporate far more color and have far nicer coats and additional accessories upon them. Their garb tends to be more in line with trends found in Rockbaecche or Zherisia among the upper classes, due to more accessible travel options.

Between Valentia and Sorentrico, the general population is well over 500,000. Altogether, likely over that by margins. The makeup of Alleigosto is predominantly human, making up 85% of the population. Dwarves have allegedly migrated from the northern mountainous ranges, helping to add to the industrious nature of Sorentrico and beyond. They are said to make up merely 10% of the domain's population at most. Their presence is seen as majority positive, treating them as a valuable asset more than true denizens of Alleigosto or beyond. Despite this, dwarves are treated with a base degree of respect, even if they still feel like outsiders. Such graces granted to them are rarely too genuine. Other demihumans are sparsely seen, collectively making up 5% of the domain's racial populations.

## Points of Interest

Alleigosto's Sorentrico is the effective capital city, surpassing neighboring domains in terms of design, engineering, general elegance, and much more. The main fixture of the city lies within the Lorco District, the Institution of Innovations. It is a collegiate program that rivals Oblask University in terms of quality and training. The student culture and beyond have helped to foster a deep appreciation for arts and hobbies, especially through interactive activities. Their Creative Summit draws in massive crowds, to great financial success. The Institution is perhaps best known for research into automatons, seemingly intelligent beings forged through iron and animated through raw technological prowess. This Division of Automaton Research has been the source of skepticism and discomfort from even the most die-hard supporters of artifice and futuristic thought. Early results prove promising, but there's an uncanniness to the thinking machines. This caught the attention of an infamous figure of Lamordia, Emil Ballenboch, leading to a splintered evolution of "Machine Men", or automatons and clockwork knights with more distinctly human-like thought processes and bodily language. Finally, in an effort to combat the blights of Rockbaecche, a new school has been founded for physician's sciences. House Vaerizocchi have been the primary patrons behind this philanthropic pursuit.

Beyond the urban center of Alleigosto, the countryside offers much in the way of visitation. While much of the rural backdrop has suffered from constant strain and parasitic exporting, some offer many in the way of services. Malgiallo is an idyllic pastoral town on the hillside. Its lush lands and calm winds make it not just perfect for farming, but a general nice break from the bustling city. An emerging tourism industry among the gentry has popularized vineyards within the town. Towards the edge of Malgiallo, there is a farmstead partially converted into a tavern and rest stop for the weary. Operated by Clan Rimpinzarsi, travelers can expect a

proper home-cooked meal and a comfortable rest. Overall, the atmosphere is quaint, charming and quiet. The clan warns against travel at night, offering the tavern as safe shelter. Further to the west and north, the Alleigoston side of Mt. Helios is far less active than Ichthyos as a whole, with strange rumors surfacing from their neighbor. One investigation, funded by Clan Arcaico, uncovered contraband weapons that were being shuttled to the land of Lamordia. The perpetrators were quickly arrested and the goods were confiscated. The foreign dialect of the criminals lent them to the city of Nosos.

### ENCOUNTERS

- ❖ *Flora/Fauna.* rats, carnivorous plants, predatory birds
- ❖ *Human Horrors.* bandits, rioters
- ❖ *Native Horrors.* automatons, clockwork knights<sup>1</sup>, machine-men, oozes, wights, ancient dead
- ❖ *Other Horrors.* skeletal rats, harpies, werewolves, carrionettes (very rare), flesh golems (very rare), animated statues

### DREAD POSSIBILITIES

Many of the houses are shrouded in dark mystery. As is, House Arcaico has been marred by accusations of supporting terrorism. This is in fact completely true. Duke Jereko funds anti-industrial extremists to launch attacks. But, House Arcaico is far from the only suspicious clan. House Vaerizocchi's publicity and public reputation are immaculate, especially from bringing other houses down for wrongdoing. In truth, it's for show and spectacle. The clan is deeply involved with a sinister cabal known as The Death Merchants, who conspire with ancient dead operating literally underneath Sorentrico's city infrastructure. While technomancy is a large part of

the Vaerizocchi practice, necromancy and hybrid dark arts are a specialty. The physician's school is just another venue for esoteric experiments. Likewise, the family exploits the tragedy of the Gran Sorentrico Warehouse. The infamous warehouse was the stage for a mass bombing carried out by terrorists. The impact was so devastating, the souls of victims were bound to the machinery inside. The Vaerizochis have bent and twisted the souls for their dark masters.

The Death Merchants do more than demand tribute from one of the ruling clans. In fact, the clans fear that these mummies are the actual movers behind political changes and stability in the region. And thus, the clan and several others are just puppets. Even for the Vaerizochis, this reality hasn't fully set in. The only clan beyond most of their grasp is Clan Arcaico, due to the obtuse and paranoid nature of Duke Jereko Arcaico. As long as he isn't aware of them, their insidious plots continue. Each member of this secret society is of aristocratic origin, usually from a clan whose influence waned or fell long ago. Their interest in new technologies is mostly a means of pacifying the public while they play with law. Likewise, finding new ways to weaponize their environment and bring about old borders, powers, and empires once again. When war does break out, it will be started by their hands.

It's perhaps no coincidence that Clan Marilinev and Clan Rimpinzarsi emerged from the Mystaran nations of Karameikos and Thyatis respectively. Clan Marilinev was once a leading house of Traladaran nobles in the city now known as Specularum. A failed uprising led to most of the family being brutally purged. Clan Rimpinzarsi likewise has a history of causing Thyatians problems. Prior to fleeing from Thyatis, the family sold cannibalistic goods on the black market in Thyatis City. At risk of discovery, they moved to Karameikos to try again. Once an

<sup>1</sup> For quick substitute, consider Clockwork Swordsman from Savage Coast Monstrous Appendix



informant arrived at Duke Stefan's palace, the clan was soon forced to face off against the Ducal Guard and other allies... in which the clan revealed their lycanthropic boons. Most survived, but were chased off once again as mists enveloped them. Their current farm and tavern serves as a secret haven to indulge both their cannibalism and lycanthropy. Piyter Marilinev acts as an advisor and counsel to the Rimpinzarsi family, while mysteriously being immune to lycanthropy. He acts as the brains of their operations. Prior to Elder Marilinev's emergence from the mists, the Clan was held in suspicion as the tainted meat plague affected all others in the area except them. None who consumed their meat products fell ill either. The elder helped to clear this up, by showing how much cleaner their practices were to prevent illness. All of this was a series of lies based on preparatory knowledge he knew from his own clan.

Malgiallo holds worse secrets than cannibal werewolves. Its name may have been changed in response to the Blight, but it holds a much deeper truth. The name is treated as a reminder to stay diligent in dealings with "trade stock". Many arrive at a scenic countryside filled with quirky rural homes. To a degree, that is true. It is here where a lot of cattle, meats, leather and more are supplied to the main city of Alleigosto. The place, due to its many slaughterhouses, reeks of death. This death was compounded by the blight at one point, causing many to continuously vomit until painfully perishing. This stench never fully left, with market day smelling especially vile from the slaughtering. State mandated air and gas masks have been issued to residents, with allowances for visitors as well. The foul decay stretches deeper, quite literally. A cult of fallen druids have inhabited the town since shortly after the outbreak. All of them remain allies of Duke Arcaico, but have shifted goals into promoting entropy and putrescence. This "Necrotic Circle" has performed profane rites on former blight zones, as well as the castaway carcasses from slaughter houses, causing a deathly sewage to coalesce into an

entity they call "The Crawling Agony". This unliving mass of bile and cobbled corpses acts as their incarnate god. Despite being made of more animal parts than human parts, the entity is exceedingly intelligent, but often hungers for more flesh to expand. The cult mainly operates out of and underneath the abandoned Elos Farmstead towards the mountains. The name is suspiciously similar to the Darklord of Ichthyos.

## BELAGORA

*"All are equal, when they open their mind to us." - A decree of the Council of Seven*

## THE LORD AND THE LAW.

The Council of Seven remains an ever mysterious force of order within Belagora. No one understands who has previously served and who serves now, save for little change in their policies during a regime shift. What has been known is that new officials do get elected to join the rulership. However, they are never seen again, only heard through proxies, edicts, and written word. Curiously, few seem to care about this, as they are informed that those who finish their term within the council move to a nearby land to live a humble lifestyle. And by all means, the former members have been spotted after returning to public life. Many are shaken by their experiences with the cruel underbelly of politics, but remain calm and composed.

One might wonder how such a strange organization operates. Most of this is handled through proxy agents and various contracted organizations that help to see their agendas through. As such, the council has garnered an image that could be considered insidious. One such means of enforcement is a volunteer militia known as the Vessel of Justice. Many are fervent devotees akin to the zealots of a church. Their resolve is seemingly absolute, to the point of seeming somewhat

disturbing. Still, this street level organization helps to promote safety and security.

## THE DARKLORD

The Council of Seven, LE Amalgam of Shadow Entities. At some point, this collective entity was once a group of people, called to represent their people in times of glory and times of strife alike. Their names have been lost to time, but especially them. What is known or remembered is of their homeland, coincidentally known as Belagora. This small developing nation was once part of a mighty kingdom of Kievindgaard. As this power began to ascend in glory, so did the appointed Royal Council of Belagora. This once small community was gaining prominence following a mighty battle against the Hulegar, a rival nation seeking to overtake the emerging kingdom. And with more and more leaders emerging from this now iconic heritage site, it soon became the capital. Populations swell in a short time frame. And thus Belagora went from being the eponymous small mountain community to a massive state. A council was formed and was entrusted with a grand purpose, bringing a struggling nation at a crossroads into a new age of prosperity. While this council often kept to themselves, it was a protective measure to ensure that vital information never got to the wrong hands or crisis didn't lean into panic. Still, public plights were overheard and action was soon taken to address them. The seven slots for councilship rotated over the years, to ensure a diverse array of thought and perspective overseeing not just Belagora, but all of the kingdom. This coincided with an emerging philosophy of "Thankless Altruism", where those brought onto this board were to act without compensation and return to their own life after enriching others. This eventually evolved into new leaders becoming more anonymous and distant, with proxies taking care of their requests. When it became apparent that the council now operated in distant shadows, the public grew uncomfortable and came to realize that society was

outgrowing a need for them. As the calls for a new era arose, the council reacted accordingly.

They used their powers to not only help the land as before, but silently suppress those who were critical of their shadow government. Tensions grew, as suspicions arose towards the government over disappearances and abrupt silencing. The current council believed that transitioning to a new system would risk destabilizing the countless years of work that made a struggling kingdom turn into a mighty empire. To curtail this, suppression worsened as citizens deemed "seditious" were to be captured and re-educated. Civil unrest broke into rioting, before the public learned the consequences of brainwashing programs. Nearly mindless devoted soldiers began to start the streets, slaying all who didn't immediately back down. Rebel and innocent were butchered alike, as their assailants were former friends and family turned into mind zombies.

Mists washed over the city in conflict, especially the Council chambers. In horror, the shadowy cabal of seven watched as their features faded and they melded within the darkness itself. And worst of all, it seemed like their very minds melded together as well. Their sense of self was as gone as their emotions, replaced with their thankless altruism corrupted and twisted. They were phantasmal shades, only occasionally cursed to recall all that they've lost. However, these shades can rewrite memories, alter thought processes and possess numerous means of telepathic ability. Despite being a fusion of shadowy creatures, the darklord is not undead. Likewise, their psychic abilities do not mark them as a true psionic creature.

## THE LAND

Boleslawgrad is the effective capital of Belagora, a central hub for culture in a land more concerned with whirring gears. One of the crowning achievements is the University of Oblask, a hallmark in education. Its focus is on preparing the thinkers of tomorrow to question and guide society for the better. Past

academia, Belagorans consider themselves trendsetters and social engineers in regards to societal advancement. If they popularize a concept, the nearby lands are sure to adopt them. This mindset of new styles and visions is often seen without the varied architecture seen throughout Boleslawgrad alone. Different eras are reflected throughout the streets as past and present collide with speculation over the future. The circular nature of the city often breaks sectors down into wards, with the governing being within the middle. While Belagora is a land of new ideas, such a method of organization feels oddly quaint and classical. Curiously, the closer one gets to the governing ward in the center, the more sleek and hyper modernized the buildings often get. Despite the visual marvels and boundless light, the city does not exude warmth. In fact, it is not only in a colder climate, but the local cultures are only superficially welcoming. The massive structures, crowds, and snobbery becomes too much from those ill used to urban environments.

Arvoskev lies beyond the cold and overbearing metropolis. It acts as the central bread basket for not just Belagora, but even poorer lands of Rockbaecche (out of a grim desperation) as well as Ichthyos. To a degree, even Nosos reluctantly falls back on Belagora, as Arvoskev is far enough away from the Noson wastelands to be poisoned by it. This remains true, for now. Despite being far more rural than its more built up cousin, education remains an important aspect of life within Arvoskev. While they lack the same resources as their capital, many work within their means in hopes of one day spreading their education. Above all, this focuses on the brilliant but “paradoxically ignorant” neighboring domains. Despite their coffers, libraries and educational venues not being as robust as Boleslawgrad, Arvoskev provides in other ways. As the fertile breadbasket, the Broken Cog is heavily dependent on the small city’s revolutionary agricultural techniques. The most beneficial involves methods of keeping the soil renewed and fresh between harvests and carefully organized rotations

of crops. Near this emerging town is another village, known as Gorvestov. At first glance, nothing is remotely unusual about this village bordering the mountains. In truth, it’s home to a correctional facility known for harsh punishments against its inmates. The settlement itself is more of a military installation where families of the guards and other correctional staff are permitted to live. Gorvestov is operated with sleek efficiency and has little in the way of ambience or distinct character.

Off the main shore to the south lies an island kept well out of the public eye. Little is known about this place, save for prisoners being shipped out to this place permanently. Some suspect that executions are held here, while others think it’s some manner of work camp that ferries goods back to the mainland. All that is known is that the island is linked to Belagora’s elaborate prison system. Accessing the island is perilous on most sides, with jagged rocky shorelines penetrating the majority of the shallow waters. Only one lone pier juts out to greet new inmates and scheduled wardens. Information has leaked that parts of the island are designated based on prisoner classification. The deepest and darkest parts of the island are said to hold the most danger that the domain has to offer.

## CLOSING THE BORDERS

Citizens are compelled to stop the escapees at any cost. The more armed and battle ready the possessed victim, the more likely that they’ll try to strike the target down. Should that not prove enough, the council of seven can employ a psychic frequency anywhere in the domain that slowly damages the targets’ minds. Damage can permanently injure the target’s brain or cause one of many anomalous and disturbing effects. However, this is taxing and causes the darklord to fall into a torpor to recover. This slumber may take up to days, depending on how much energy they inflict.



## THE FOLK

The people of Belagora see themselves as a pinnacle of enlightenment. As pretentious as they seem to the rest of the cluster, they value insight and knowledge as the foundational blocks of their society. From a young age, residents are expected to seek scholarly pursuits in ultimate favor of a particular specialization. However, these students are likewise expected to be proficient in all other things around them. While agrarian roots are maintained within various traditions, especially in Arvoskev, Belagora has gradually expanded to expect a degree of generalization as well. To fulfill a sense of perfectionism and self-improvement, both have been melded together to a degree. The need to always compete with other domains has placed immense pressure on the civilians, always encouraged to portray themselves as strong, capable, intellectual and more; a powerful balance of brawn and brain. Those who cannot heed the pressure often snap and are confined to the care center in

Majority of the native Belagorans do not deeply resemble the rest of the populace, which is something the people consider effects of colonization under the lands. The Belagorans consider themselves the original populace of the lands, followed by Alleigostons and the descendants of Rockbaecche, known to some as Thonians. Their lighter tone is more in line with being distant from the cluster's warmer regions. Belagorans are a hardy folk built for an often frigid climate. Many consider them to be an Other, due to their facial features often differing from the Thonian and Alleigoston descended peoples. Old scrolls detail distrust and mistreatment over the emerging culture, singling them out until their gifts and boons could not be ignored. This has harbored a deep sense of both resentment for the cluster and a furthered sense of nationalistic pride. Combined with a deep love of academia, a new philosophy has emerged to keep the balance of the Broken Cog's sprawl. This often

involves condescension and chastisement to those around them, through a sort of exceptionalist ideology. As their ideological allies to the east of them have mysteriously vanished into the mists, they are currently alone.

Not all of the folk were born into Belagoran ways of life. Several recent additions are Noson expats fed up with the wasteful policies and practices of their original home. The Boleslawgrad Department of Sanitation was founded by those who fled their western home, in hopes of ensuring a cleaner landscape within the capital city. While many of the manufactured parts are expensive imports from Alleigosto and Rockbaecche, the end results have improved the quality of life within Belagora and subsequent neighbors like Zherisia. This has seen a healthier glow of sorts to the populace, seemingly more physically capable than those afflicted by maladies and pollution in nearby territories. This, combined with focus on health treatments, has resulted in much envy from said lands. Overall, the population reaches around 400,000 between the domain's various cities and towns... and extra territories. Humans make up 70% of the domain, with 12% dwarves, 8% halflings, 6% elves, and 4% other.

## POINTS OF INTEREST

The University of Oblask rivals that of the Institute of Innovation in terms of excellence. While the Alleigoston school tends to favor engineering and more labor intensive science, Oblask favors intellectual discourse, philosophy, and analysis of the mind; while still offering opportunities for those focused on athletics, law enforcement, assembly, engineering, or other venues that favor a hands on approach. Rivalries have emerged where the students refer to each other as "Hard Helmets" and "Speaker Boxes" respectively. This spawns from the more athletic and engineering focused butting heads with the more analytical and psychological among the student body. As such, the more industrial and hardy Institute students consider the Oblask

collegiate life to be pretentious and vapid. Some consider them to be frail and ill-suited to the harsh world around them. For reasons unbeknownst to them, they'd be wrong in many ways. Part of that involves one of its founders, Doctor Selus Koreliu, who was once a professor within Il-Aluk University. Dr. Koreliu was removed due to harsh treatment of the students. Ultimately, this would be his saving grace, as The Grim Harvest ruined the mighty Darkonese city in the years to follow. His insight into matters around Belagora is deeply cutting and unnerving. The university, while not a prestigious school of engineering, has made a breakthrough in terms of automaton crafting.

Many of the Belagoran powers-that-be are not so quick to give up on a problematic citizen. As such, reeducation is true education. All good citizens are given a chance to learn from what the state deems a mistake, lest they be cast out or be removed. While order within Belagora is handled by the lingering and watching shadows that float throughout the domain, there are only so many of them at a time. By the decree of the Council of Seven, it is committed to a means of bringing the disgraced and harmful back into a society, a chance at redemption. Most patients do face incredible success and find themselves ready to help the wider world, but some arrive so broken that they must spend their days within hospital wards of the facility. These patients rarely see the wider world ever again. Despite such horrific situations, the wider range of Gorvestov is quite tranquil with little in the way of trouble.

Bogdanovic Peaks is a sprawling vast hillside leading into an even more frigid mountainside. Legends speak of the Zmaj, a dreadful dragon. None have proven this rumor to be fact, but its tale often keeps people from exploring too deeply. Within the forests surrounding Bogdanovic is a chilling spirit known as Grandfather Frost. It is said that if you are in the woods and hear a raspy old voice, it is best to be

humble and do not insult him. Should this occur, one may survive the harshest winter. Those who do not heed the warning are found frozen solid. While he is frightful, he is not alone. Some escaped patients of Gorvestov's rehabilitation center are rumored to be dwelling within the tunnels and caverns within this mountain.

## ENCOUNTERS

- ❖ *Flora/Fauna. bears, elk, wild cat*
- ❖ *Mundane Horrors. madmen, brainwashed slave soldiers*
- ❖ *Native Horrors. shadows, psionic horrors, nosferatu, malignant intelligence, Grandfather Frost*
- ❖ *Other Horrors. Doppelgangers (very rare), the puppeteer parasites*

## DREAD POSSIBILITIES

The Belanovich Farmstead is the secret ground zero for an alien invasion. Aberrant horrors called Puppeteer Parasites<sup>2</sup> have emerged from the fissure in Zherisia. These creatures resemble emaciated hairless apes with leech-like heads and arms ending in scythe-like claws. While they can control living subjects, they prefer inhabiting fresh corpses. It's rumored that the abominations slithered from the sea of Ichthyos, finding connective tunnels created by the Fissure's network growing like an unchecked tumor. It's also possible that they crawled from deep in the Noson wastelands, hailing from realms far more alien than the nearby mechanized metropolis can fathom. So far, the parasite has failed to infest foods that have been shipped out and has resorted to using live hosts as proxies until easier solutions can be found. Over time, the creatures have moved unabated into Arvoskev and seek to overtake the community there.

<sup>2</sup> Stats provided in another article

The infamous Penal Colony Island is a secret hidden in plain sight. While on the surface, it's a means of controlling and curtailing the undesirable, there's a more hidden purpose. As part of a joint venture with Rockbaecche to keep the peace, prisoners are sent to contend with what might be the origins of the crimson blight. However, the undead within here fear the light, unlike the Rockbeacche walking dead. Most of the tasks required of the prisoners are either labor for the benefit of greater Belagora or to research new ways into fighting the living dead horde. So far, it has been discovered that almost any source of bright light fends them off. This has been exploited through an especially morbid facility known as the "Ossuary", where the dead are burned down to bone and the choking dust almost poisons its workers. The "Submerged Sanctum" is an unearthed site that may bring clues about the roots of the horrors that roam the island. Manuscripts in an ancient tongue detail dark rituals taking place further west, in current Nosos, where spirit callers would commune with a fell entity of entropy, malignance and despair. These unholy communions were an attempt to pacify the being, lest its wrath be incurred upon the lands. In the depths of this dungeon lies a sepulcher dedicated to this heinous creature, a swirling amorphous mass filled with eyes and maws.

The infamous Belagoran Rehabilitation Center is an unnerving symbol of the land, its walls block out much of the public. While the propaganda throughout the city and the building's exterior promote the wellness and care of those in their grasp, reality paints a different picture. In truth, in order to bring someone under the leashing law of the land, one must break their mind and remold it. And barring them? Breaking the victims far beyond the threshold of madness. Classes and individual therapy range in "compassion", often coupled by how cooperative and forthcoming a "student" is with learning. Many of the laboratory examinations remain horrifying, with classes being used to explain and break down matters. One popular modern

technique involves a new invention, Electrified Zoetrope or "Electrope". This wondrous device is based on blueprints stolen from Nosos. The moving pictures displayed range from the unsettling to the heinous, to better explain what is "wrong" in such a society. When the student sees their errors and proves that they're cured, the nightmarish pictures end. Attempting to bluff through their procedures often fails, as the staff uses various means of technical and arcane measures to ensure that the subject is a truthful and forthcoming citizen. Only the Darklords are aware that this facility is the very same from their prime material home. The depravities unleashed here were part of the reason for their corruption and fall to The Mists.

The Council of Seven are not without their own secrets. Many citizens within Boleslawgrad are not actually living beings, but facsimiles crafted to help survey the public. These shells are either handmade or simply hollowed out bodies devoid of mind or soul. The former is made of ancient alchemy and occult knowledge that predates the original kingdom. The latter? Somehow more grim. When an official is elected to "replace" a council member, they are in truth brought before the current council. The shadowy horror proceeds to drain every living facet of the electee, especially their mind. The remaining husk is then infused with magic as well as their consciousness and acts as a kind of mobile extension. Those who prove either too problematic or too risky within the rehabilitation center are likewise "given an audience" with the council and experience the same fate. The pulsing psychic power unleashed by the darklord has affected the wider domain too. While there are rumors of the machine-men in Alleigosto, Oblask students and staff are perfecting something which detractors call "Malignant Intelligence", a sort of artificial presence built through engineering, but reinforced through something else. The strange frequencies and energies rippling throughout the domain is what truly allowed it to live. The agendas of these presences that inhabit machine shells are enigmatic



and alien. Their secret is held within the university for now.

## DARKHEATH

*"Outsiders, stay back! Beyond here is a war zone!" - One of many warnings attached to buoys at the domain's border*

*Notice the Reader: This area is a distraught war zone. Do not visit. My own interactions with this land caused some of my research to be destroyed amidst the ever present violence that plagues this land. As such, what I have available is all I can provide on Darkheath.<sup>3</sup>*

Upon the wider stage, Darkheath is not a major contender. Their exports of Blackmoorian devices and innovations have bolstered the ongoing Cold War. Deep down, they hold a level of resentment towards Rockbaecche, due to their alleged Thonian roots. However, the Rockbaecchers do not respect or acknowledge the sovereignty of Blackmoor. Newer generations have never even heard of it. This pitiful land is little more than a relic of some archaic civilization long since doomed to failure. Whatever happened to this original land of Blackmoor is largely unknown. More than likely, it has fallen without its remote colony being any the wiser.

## THE LORD AND THE LAW

The Royal Governor Reginald Higgins III and his military advisors make up the provisional government of Darkheath. Emergency powers have been activated, granting privileges that endow the current government with absolute authority. A promise has been upheld that these measures will end once the emergency is over. However, part of these conditions involve the unconditional surrender

and dissolution of Rockbaecche's current government. Another key component to the removal of this order is the complete and thorough extermination of the beastmen. It is unknown if this means just on Blackmoorian territory or throughout the entire region. Thankfully, there are few beastmen who have escaped beyond Darkheath's borders thanks to the vigilance and might of the royal navy.

## THE DARKLORD

[Redacted]

## THE LAND

At some point, the lands were lush and green, with sweeping hills in the center trailing to sloped valleys and scrubby outlands. As combat technologies advanced, so did their consequences upon the land. Hills were blasted apart as fields rotted under the influence of toxic materials. Scrub lands died and slowly ashen glorified deserts. Waterways fill with blood and pollution alike, seemingly never clean again. Cities are falling into disrepair, either from a lack of functional population or violent campaigns emerging near neighborhoods.

## CLOSING THE BORDERS

[Redacted]

## THE FOLK

They are damned to suffer the follies and horrors of war. The population numbers alone are unhealthy/on the verge of collapse. The sheer amount of conscripted civilians slain over the years have surpassed the threshold of recoverable and into the realm of mitigating further damage. Exact numbers are currently lost and unlikely to be

<sup>3</sup> For more information on Darkheath, please consult Threshold the Mystara Magazine [Issue #30](#) and [Issue #31](#) for more information.

accurate anyway. All that remains are attempts to keep a somewhat functioning society. Readiness is an absolute for survival, where the locals are prepared to either hide or fight. While training is not beyond basics, it has proven enough to repel invaders for a time. There is little joy to these Blackmoor descendants as a pervasive gloom hangs over their heads like a macabre fog cloud. As such, this tends to reflect in rather dour artwork with little in a message for hope. Despite this, the public is shockingly motivated to improve their situation by any means. While depression commonly takes hold of and destroys victims, most have maintained enough composure to assist ongoing campaigns and drives however possible, short of being recruited to fight front lines.

The denizens themselves are well worn, often sickly looking. Many compare them to Rockbaecchers due to various similar ethnic features and skin tones, possibly hinting at a shared distant lineage. Others do this due to the ravaging effects of the outbreak taking its toll on Rockbaecche's populace. The average Darkheather is often pale in complexion, clad in whatever garb has endured the endless streams of violence. Practicality has overridden aesthetics, including for the remaining rich populations. As such, aesthetics are seen as quaint by neighbors, not too unlike that of Mordentshire in many ways. Tycoons and the mercantile wealthy who haven't fled have instead taken up careers in military positions of power, if not within politics. Everyone else tries to keep up the tasks and duties they upheld before the war accelerated into its current wretched state. All of this is an effort to uphold the Blackmoorian values that citizens so deeply care for. But, this is not universal. Some have pursued more selfish or maniacal paths. Mad scientists were Blackmoorian colonists who sought answers to either end the war or escape to something better. This resulted in horrors like the Herald of Thanatos reawakening for a time to new forms of technological based undead rising from the grave.

## Points of Interest

This domain is too hostile to provide too much outside interest. The closest points to this lie within the two primary cities on the western coastline. Archilis is a slight corruption of the original territory of Archlis within Blackmoor proper. Its primary purpose was in the way of coastal trade as well as related affairs. With embargos and endless combat, many of the ports have closed or fallen in on themselves. Yet, a few shipping companies remain. Makreidas Steam of Alleigosto has since bought up lands for unspecified but seemingly nefarious use. As fishing vessels have come under attack from more than seafaring beastmen, enemy Thonian ships, or pirates; the local nautical industry around Archilis has further languished. Total economic collapse is liable to happen soon without aid either from the government or through other sources. Imports are rarely brought into Archilis anymore, but firearms and other weapons are an exception. Exports often amount to the strange magitech of eccentric tinkerers, usually weapons. The public is distrustful of these and shudders at the thought of having to sell such terrors. But, such times have called for drastic action.

New Blackmoor was envisioned as the capital of a new colonial empire. This did not come to pass. Still, New Blackmoor boasts hardy and impressive architecture, well withstanding years of neglect, carnage and strife. While half of the Commerce District has burned down and left to rot, the remainder has been a somewhat profitable and engaging merchant square. The Brim Highland remains an elevated part of New Blackmoor where the wealthiest live, and now often isolate themselves. The Halls of the High Ministry remain as pristine and glowing as it did when built over a century ago. Within this place of supreme authority, the various high ministers of various divisions plot where to take the colony next. One of the most active divisions is the Ministry of Public Communications, which focuses on devising

propaganda to keep morale high while ensuring that panic is suppressed however possible. The Ministry of Intelligent Eyes blend a mixture of technomancy and traditional divination for not just widespread surveillance but also intelligence gathering beyond city boundaries. The Ministry of Naval Engagements is led by the ambitious war hero, Fleet Admiral Holden, to oversee all means of protection on the seas.

Anything moving past No Man's Land is definitive hostile territory overtaken by the Beastmen and other evils. One such lost site is the Chantry of Khoronus, a once revered temple and monastery by priests devoted to the eponymous Immortal. Much of the grounds remain, despite being abandoned in official capacity and deconsecrated by a group of brave priests sent to recover sacred artifacts. These efforts were bolstered by one of the last civilized places before no man's land, Ixion's Temple. While these Immortals are said to disagree on much, desperate times warrant cooperation. The clerics of Ixion have done their part to bolster military operations by acting as combat chaplains, as well as providing field hospitals where needed following arduous battles. Near this temple is The Lost Herald, one of the last surviving shells of the Heralds of Thanatos. Such beings were undeath-powered automatons meant to spread Entropy by means necessary. Rather than crumble upon defeat, it simply became inert.

## ENCOUNTERS

- ❖ *Flora/Fauna.* deer, fox, squirrel, deciduous region flora
- ❖ *Native Horrors.* beastmen, phantasms, automatons, grey philosophers, ghosts, skeletons, oozes, ash goblins, blighted dead<sup>4</sup>
- ❖ *Other Horrors.* machine-men, deep ones (very rare), hags, drakes

<sup>4</sup> Undead created through technological means, especially from weaponry

## DREAD POSSIBILITIES

Much of what I learned of Darkheath came not from here, but from a traveling troupe known as The Carnival. Specifically, there is a beastman by the name of "Big Nasty John" that fled from Darkheath and ended up where he is now. His tale matches so many others, beastmen of Blackmoor driven mad by some revelation of past lives, of past motivations, all of which clash with their current desires to conquer and bring glory to the Immortal known as "Hel"<sup>5</sup>. These mad beastmen get muddled and confused by these conflicting stories of life playing out in their heads. Visions of other possibilities haunt them or even shape them. Ultimately, they succumb to a deep numbness or overpowering delusions. Their own kind does not feel sympathy for this, despite fearing that the same problem may one day overtake them as well. Mad Beastmen are usually used as cannon fodder and live bait, while some do their best to seek a cure for the ailment. However, their brutish nature strains their minds as they do their best within seized compounds and invaded laboratories. The experiments end in tragic failure.

Beastmen are not the only troublemakers that cause problems for Darkheath. Pirates and brigands are common sights along the Eastern Ichthyan Sea, especially with naval powers of neighboring Rockbaecche faring poorly in recent years. These criminals have become adept at intercepting naval trade routes that aren't properly guarded or even manned. Beyond that, even Thonian vessels have somehow emerged from the mists to harass the Darkheathers, causing a long ceasefire to return to an endless war. Many of these vessels are privateers granted a letter of marque in an effort to get the "Blackmoorian traitors" to surrender to Thonia. Thankfully, the brilliant strategizing from Fleet Admiral Stefan P. Holden of the Blackmoorian Royal Navy has given the hostile nation a proper match on

<sup>5</sup> See also: *TSR 1054 The Hollow World Campaign Set* for more on beastmen



the waves. More than likely, these ships are not actually captured Thonians but weavings of the Dark Powers to keep the domain occupied. As for the bandits on the seas? It is unknown if these are just opportunists from nearby domains or something else. What is known is that the waves of Ichthyos have slowly brought troubles to Darkheath. The foul Deep Ones and their mutant eldritch ilk have emerged from the water to torment vessels at sea. Some have been overtaken and sunk, with survivors returning dreadfully maniacal from the ordeal.

The various departments within the provisional government are among the few to understand how bad the situation throughout the domain is. The Ministry of Public Communications do all in their war to keep the public from realizing that the war is not only losing, but is likely already lost. The Ministry of Intelligent Eyes has realized that the beastmen seem to be appearing from the mists whenever another one dies, as if the supply is endless. The Ministry of Naval Engagements know that they can't fend off the beastmen while they're busy contending with Thonians, but continue to send letters to on-land armies to prepare for their arrival nonetheless. The Ministry of Ultra Science is perhaps the most secretive division, pouring drying funds into all sorts of mad creations. Mad scientists and arcanists research horrific new means of turning the tides through dark occult artifacts, twisted technologies and all around inhumane forms of experimentation. The few knowing leaders of other divisions are sickened by their existence, but reluctantly let them carry on for now.

## ICHTHYOS

*"Through the waves, we shall return. Through the depths, we shall become strong again." - From an Ichthyan holy text*

## THE LORD AND THE LAW

Ichthyos remains, as it did once before, a theocracy. However, the waves have shifted and the governing laws reflect this. Gone are the days of great gods and mighty heroes, but temples dedicated to foreboding demons and dreadful things of endless aeons. The High Priest Obed Elos is a miserly and elderly man, overseeing operations within the church and what remains of the state. Due to being reluctant to invest much of the family fortune, the lands face severe poverty. Piety and faith help bolster morale against pitiful living conditions and ever present squalor. Under High Priest Obed Elos and his clergy, divine rites and holy law are practiced within the lowly village. All those who visit are not only distrusted, but rebuked if it is helped. Otherwise, they are lured to stay and used as sacrifices in the night.

Remnants and hold outs of old religious values and old politics can be found. Many have sympathetic nostalgia for old emperors, chancellors, and the like. And like with politics, many cling to their old faith. Very few will openly speak of the prior deities within earshot, but some carry old icons and have makeshift shrines in hidden places. The only domain dwellers who will openly preach of the old faith are found beyond Old Ichthyan, such as the isolated cult compound of Nyx.

## THE DARKLORD

Obed Elos, CE Deep One Spawn Cleric 7. A shrewd merchant, with famed exports in fisheries, oil and countless goods. It was his clan that helped bring a small fishing town into a modern age. Industry, expansive trade routes and more proved to not be enough for the man. Obed Elos is now a man of ambition, dogma, and deep pride. For countless

ages, his homeland has gone from a gem of a mighty empire to a forgotten shell that has gradually faded further into obscurity and destitution. It had occurred to him, the Gods had failed his people, they grew too distant and the people yearned for change. He approached the high priest of the holy temple, Thriamveftikós. What he was met with was consternation and chastisement, over his audacity for criticizing the divine. The wider empire needed a spark of innovation, a breath of new life. Stagnation was destroying a center of culture and prosperity. Things began to shift when the Elos Fishery Company invested in a metallic diving suit, allowing further exploration in the seas than thought possible. A sponge diving guild under his control one day unearthed an artifact for some strange oceanic cult that overwhelmed Elos with obsession. As Obed continued to age, he turned towards a legacy. Fearful of entrusting his empire to younger generations he held in doubt, he sought means of immortality. This strange artifact was thought to hold such secrets. This led to the discovery of a religious order that revered a distant god of the oceans and its distant compatriots. In exchange for human sacrifice, the strange old gods would bestow life and power.

A business partner, Zodak, became wise to the strange activity of his fellow magnate. Following much investigation, Obed captured the businessman and used magicks sampled from artifacts to brainwash him. But, Elos' knowledge of the arcane was flawed, only succeeding in driving him insane. Zodak was ousted, doomed into being a drunken hermit with some moments of clarity. In time, Elos' plans were enacted after a downturn and constant awful weather. The public was ready to oust him too, but after the desperate obliged, results were found. Bounties and fortunes were had, but an ultimatum was given. Future generations were to breed with the spawn of this deep god and one day return to the sea. While a sizable cult emerged to take the town, many rebelled. Thus, a civil war broke out for the future and sanity of the land. Elos conducted one last ritual, sacrificing rebels in real time, as they were

being fought back. Instead of his boon of becoming a holy icon of his new god, the town was taken by Mists.

While he looks like a human, he is actually one of the deep spawn. However, he is magically prevented from entering the water. Due to the adaptive gills on his body, he can endure air for an extended time. However, most creatures like him would eventually perish without water. In his case, he lives in constant pain. While he does not need to breathe, he suffers a choking like sensation anyway. His speech is gravely and garbled accordingly. This is attributed by the townsfolk as inhaling of too much "choking shale" from the closed mine, as well as fumes from the oil spilled about. While still capable as a priest, he is physically frail and sickly. Even during his own speeches, he is known to launch into violent coughing fits. For now, none conspire to slay or replace him, despite coming across as weakened.

## THE LAND

The lands of Ichthyos are anomalous compared to much of the cluster. While Alleigosto shares some traits to a minor degree, the climate of the domain is greatly at odds with neighbors. Dry and hot summers, even by the shoreline, contrast with cool and damp winters. Despite not being densely populated, it proves ideal for agriculture and has thus retained a niche despite a deeply negative reputation. A shadow and a sliver of its former self, Ichthyos lies as little more than a rural backwater along more major coastal trade routes. Much of the land mass isn't overly inhabited. Those who fled further towards the plains or the mountains have mostly evaded the curse that has befallen the coastal Ichthyan village. The village itself was once special, a bustling town on its way to being a city in its own right. Curses and calamity have reduced it in scope.

Old Ichthyan itself was once a hotbed for various nautical industries. From mines to whaling to much more; the land was as profitable as it is still currently polluted. The Choking Shale was once a mineshaft

considered near divine for turning up all means of lucrative ore veins, but has since dried up of any real quality or content. Likewise, the oil plants and fisheries have either been too badly poisoned by things gone awry or seemingly devoid of any life. Moving further into residential areas, even the village center has been stripped of much life by an ongoing economic collapse. In spite of this, natural beauty flourishes. The fields and slopes beyond the village carry a distinct color not witnessed throughout the rest of the cluster. Likewise, as a season draws to a close, there is a distinct calm in the winds, with a warm dryness that is almost pleasant to experience.

In truth, the greater domain lies within the Ichthyan Sea. This accursed place has seen many chunks of land consumed by the dark waters below. False History tells of a horrible war with the Gods of Old for betraying them to the Eldritch Ones. This is in fact partially true. Unlike with the Darklord's own history, this took place in the domain's past by centuries. The shady and decrepit town of Ichthyan is all that really remains of civilization above the waves. Anything further inland amounts to refugees fleeing the disaster or the remaining non-deep mutants trying to fend for themselves. As one furthers beyond the rocky cliffs and shores, the lands become increasingly more jagged as crags and steep slopes begin to dominate. Isolated villages and tribes may emerge in this somewhat less ideal setting, but they are no less disturbed than Old Ichthyan.

## CLOSING THE BORDERS

Elos can only close borders if the traveler in question is on the water. However, he can still cause waves to crash onto the land to impede if the target is along the shoreline. Any target on the water is subject to dangerous tides and weather. Likewise, sea monsters will target them.

## THE FOLK

Most of them are uncanny, grotesque, just wrong. The Ichthyans are a seemingly humble but unnerving people. They prefer to keep to themselves, isolate from the greater world, and watch as the world passes them by. A common Alleigoston joke against Duke Arcaico is that he was too backwards and ugly for even Ichthyos. However, the Duke is fully human, unlike most of the residents from this moribund land. Fears of dark pacts and shadowy things in the ocean are not unfounded, as their effects have changed the survivors of the town. The residents are now hybrid spawn of Deep Ones.

For those who either pass as human or are fully human, their complexion and general features aren't unlike the Alleigostons. They too typically have a more tanned or olive-like tone to their skin, but are more balanced by often callused features from often hard lives. Even the comparatively wealthier of this sad land are worn down by the region's harshness. Fashion is more dour than their neighbors, often due to lack of imported dyes or overall strong trade. Folk style dress is common overall. Cloth garments are popular as headwear for both men and women alike, rather than more elaborate hats. Among the few wealthier parts of Ichthyos, employing ornate hairstyles are typically more important than their Alleigoston cousins. Many of these patterns mirror aspects of traditional styles seen in days of the imperium or even before. Cloaks and vests are more popular with men, as dresses over gowns and blouses are favored by women.

Not all who live here are foul creatures. The human population that lives on the outlands of Ichthyos fare a little better, even if they tend towards survivalism and isolationism. The village of Nyx is one such place, which has retained its dedication to the old ways. However, they lack the technological awareness of Ichthyos and are seen as barbarians, in a land that's already frowned upon. The Nyxians are all zealous worshipers of the true Gods, but favor those of death



and the underworld. They abhor the seas, seeing it as contaminated with an alien evil. As such, they have fled as far inland as possible. Other defectors, beyond Nyx, have even moved out towards the domain's misty borders to the north and west. Some have fled east, keeping as many Ichthyan traditions as possible while otherwise assimilating to Alleigoston ideals. The total population is unknown, not likely over 10,000 if even that high, 20,000 if generous. The majority of the domain's populace are actually deep one hybrids or full deep ones. Humanity has been relegated to a minority and is usually found beyond Old Ichthyan or the surrounding zones. If one counts all of the nautical horrors within the domain, the population would easily exceed the millions.

### Points of Interest

Old Ichthyan Village is the central point of the domain. Makreidas Steam Company was originally founded here, the major source of steamships within the Broken Cog. In one particularly daring move, House Fiertlenno and Alleigosto Channel Company bought out Meikridas Ship Manufacturing, further robbing Ichthyos of money. Subsidiaries still produce for the land on the Domain's border. Giorgios, the son of the namesake owner, was one of the few not cursed and happily obliged the buyers. Trade is now rare along these parts, save for some fishing and oil sales, due to the remote nature of the village. Furthermore, often hostile waters towards this part of the sea greatly deter visitors, if the locals don't do that themselves. However, land-based travel is mostly safe, should commerce still be on one's mind. Due to the unusual climate within the region, it has proved invaluable in crop based sales. Despite being seen as backwards, the Ichthyans have still taken to industrial methods of farming.

Off the shore of Ichthyos is the Sunken Skull Archipelago, a deeply cursed watery depths associated with malicious hubris and a fight against The Gods. Ruins litter the chasms and bottom floors of this aquatic divide. However, only a fool would dive down to them. Those who aren't crushed by

gradual levels of water pressure are doomed to be pulled to the lowest pockets to drown. By what exactly is unknown, but many suspect all manner of horrors dwell within the wreckage down below. The one island above the water with the domain is Vizuvos, which is considered a territory within Alleigoston jurisdiction, despite its Ichthyan past. At one point it was a wealthy tourism site before the calamity occurred, now it's a research station and archeological zone. It also borders on the disturbing deep waters of Ichthyos. Likewise, those who wish to sail beyond to the Sea of Sorrows must contend with this grim sea first.

Mt. Helios remains a tried and true heritage site for the Ichthyans, from a time when they were subservient to the Gods. While it remains an important facet of the local culture, it is now treated with great fear. A mountain temple along the Pass of Helios has since been overtaken by avian-like monsters called harpies. The harpies pass a superficial resemblance to hideous human women from their chest to their heads. Often, they will unleash heinous screeches upon those who dare enter their new lair. Priests who manage to evade them and seek to commune with the gods will be greeted by emptiness. Ichthyos is a place long forsaken. Deeper within the mountain lies an evil one-eyed giant simply known as The Cyclops. In ages past, it yearned to destroy Ichthyos for aiding the Gods in sealing it away. As the chains of the divine weakened, it emerged to see its enemy destroyed and mostly submerged. Now it bids its time, preparing petty machinations should Ichthyos rise again. Other dark spirits haunt the mountains, such as the sinister fey known as satyrs. These creatures with goat-like features often indulge in their free time, until an outsider arrives. Often they will invite them to their decadent festivities and leisure, resulting in them luring the victim away. They allegedly know a one-way mistway to the Shadow Rift, where victims are often taken if they don't outright vanish. Other strange things near the mountains are the wild horses, overseen and

protected by centaurs. These xenophobic spirit creatures are deeply violent towards any being that tries to get near their horses. If pursued, they will magically vanish into the mist.

Strange things still occur and visitors often go missing. Old Man Zadak still exists, meandering around town in a stupor haze. However, should one agree to feed his alcoholism, he'll ramble tall tales about deep gods, half-demon horrors and diabolical rituals. The locals are quick to inform that the poor hermit is crazed, but his skill as a fisher is unmatched. Thus, he lives in the town rather than being committed to some facility. He too is cursed, much like the Darklord. He too is immortal, forever stuck upon the wretched fisher community. Even if slain, he shall return much like the Darklord. Thus, Elos makes sure that Zadak remains out of the way or seen as little more than a nuisance by all. Beyond this quirky character, the whole town is full of suspicious and strange folk. Milos the Innkeeper is a strange sort, very bookish and quick to make snide comments against outsiders. Despite being well read and educated, he is just as xenophobic and distant towards non-locals as the rest of the population. His "Seafarer's Inn" is one of the few hospitable places for outsiders at night. "Delenia's" is a local pub, run by the wife of a deceased wealthy fisherman. With the money bestowed upon her, this establishment was built around her home. It has since become a place for locals to ease their woes. Curiously, only the locals like the drinks and food served here. To everyone else, it tastes absolutely horrible, with an equally unbearable smell. They say it comes from a land of mystery, "The Reefs of Death" or the waters deep beyond the fading residence.

## ENCOUNTERS

- ❖ *Flora/Fauna.* giant fish, goats, jackals, tropical plants, vampiric shrub (vampiric rose), horses
- ❖ *Human Horrors.* death cultists
- ❖ *Native Horrors.* deep ones, deep one hybrids, dread harpies, dread centaurs, The Kraken, The Cyclops, temple guardian

- ❖ *Other Horrors.* jackalweres (very rare), grey philosophers, satyrs, ghosts, animated statues

## DREAD POSSIBILITIES

The people of Ichthyos believe that the most decadent and wealthy fled their lands as decay and retribution took hold. The new settled home? Alleigosto. As such, the devout cultists serving under Elos pray for the eldritch terrors of the depths to strike at Alleigosto with the ruthless force of several hurricanes. Horrible things from beneath the waves have begun to awaken; The Ichthyan Serpent, The Kraken, Fell Elementals, and more. These wretched beasts shall answer the prayers of the mad cultists and unleash brutal revenge over this hated foe. Some suspect that the serpent that has emerged in the lake off of Dunwillow in Rockbaecche is related to the deep horror of Ichthyos.

Much of the horror within this domain lies within the Sunken Skull Archipelago. The submerged ruins are indeed the end result of the wrath of gods, just not as the lore of the domain says. Still, the submerged land chunks are the source of cosmic terror. Locals fear creatures of the Elder Horrors that their ancestors made a bargain with. The result of this bargain was an agreement in a sort of marriage. Every year, the villagers would offer one of their own to court the things of the deep. By some twist of dark magic, an abomination known as The Kraken was born deep below the waves. Most other victims sired the Deep One hybrids. These foul pacts resulted in the forces of the divine breaking the lands apart with a deadly earthquake and submerging the vast majority of it within the Ichthyan Sea. Within the crumbled cities and drowned fields, many of these deep horrors lie either trapped or on the prowl. This is not the end of the evils that lurk within the sunken land masses. Sometimes, basic physics distorts as eldritch power takes over. It is not uncommon for a ship along the Ichthyan Sea to be abruptly pulled under so rapidly, the compartments and chambers of the ship aren't flooded. Somehow, victims are pulled

below the sea into pockets of what seems to be air. What are they greeted with? Broken masses of land adorned with heretical fetishes, poles and other structures devoted to heinous, profane and alien deities. And worse, the croaking and guttural calls of creatures far beyond the humanoid. This is the vulgar realm of the Deep Ones and their foul Eldritch Gods.

## NOSOS

*"As long as you find your own means, ambition will prosper." - A Noson proverb*

*NOTICE TO READER: In a fight with horrible things beyond the relative safety of Nosos, several works were dropped and I could not retrieve them. Escape was paramount, lest the wretched mutated things consume me.*

## THE LORD AND THE LAW

Law has degenerated in the years since Malus Sceleris usurped the rule of this industrial powerhouse. Roving gangs, protection rackets, and mob rule has overtaken the streets. The majority of these groups pay fealty to guild companies known as "corporations" turned merchant-princes. Among the peasantry and below, they are called "Company Barons", who primarily preside over lands neighboring their private headquarters. Beyond the city of Nosos lie various villages succumbing to decay and collapse, living off of inhospitable wastelands and atrocious remnants of nature. Appointed representatives of various company guilds have taken up the mantle of law within these outland settlements and colonies. To be deployed out that far is considered a deep punishment, one often considered lethal. His top appointed company baron is Lord Mordicai Fenton, Foreman of the Scissa Sunt Mining Company. Due to the prominence of coal and oil within Noson markets, Fenton is easily the most powerful of the barons with the most effective influence and sway. As such, Fenton's manor rivals that of Sceleris'.

This is not to say that other of these company barons do not hold sway, but coal is very much king. Brandon Trask is the baron of the fisheries, especially in the field of whale oil. Prior to Nosos being free of Grandglennish control through Rockbaecche, Nosos was the top supplier of whale oil to the colony. While his house's primary wares are sliding into the antiquated, his family's history of occult practices have resulted in the oil having unusual properties at times. So far, Fenton cannot compete with this. Patricia and Harold Florelius are a rare example of married leaders. Baroness Patricia and Baron Harold are indeed in a loving relationship, but they hold no pretense that part of this is in making each other more powerful as a result. The Florelies command the weaponry markets in and around Nosos, beckoning those with a penchant for violence to one of their showrooms. Their union came from the Georgius clan's control of metal piping and the Floralian clan's control of demolitions. Firearms and large gun trade is well controlled and measured within the cluster by the clan and their agents. It's still prolific, but all products made within the cluster are certified and observed by them.

What regulation there is exists to better the economic structure and power centers of the region. Greenery is forbidden on company owned soil, which makes up the majority of the domain. To do so regardless incurs a hefty fine as well as painfully increased taxation. For the elite of Nosos city and beyond, these taxes are negotiable, thus permitting them their own private gardens isolated from the stench of the domain.. Likewise, premium services such as fresh air and clean water filtered from Noson machinery requires a subscription fee not unlike one subscribing to a weekly or monthly periodical.

## THE DARKLORD.

Malus Sceleris, LE Human Fighter 1. A man against nature at all costs, shackling himself with the deepest depths of mechanization and industrialization. All of this stems from his own origins. The child of a widower, his father was deeply



neglectful as his interests were more in partaking in druidic rituals than parenting. As Malus grew, so did his deep resentment. As he came of mature age, he hatched a vengeful scheme through poison and plague. It was then his father approached him, apologetic over his years of mistreatment. Ultimately, Malus' hatred won over and he performed his murderous betrayal, cursing nature and all the pain it caused him. As Mists claimed Malus, he found himself in an urban landscape where nature was purged as much as possible. Surely, this was an escape from his suffering caused by druids?

Initially, he does not seem very impressive. He is physically meeker and mentally weaker than many of the plutocratic overlords of Nosos, allowing many to underestimate him greatly. He isn't even the wealthiest denizen of his own domain, not that he cares that deeply. However, looks are quite deceiving. His touch is deadly and wrought with heinous disease and poison. At his current age, he should be nearing fifty years old, but instead looks quite youthful, at least a decade or two younger. He brags about strong noble heritage and powerful blood coursing through him as a means of covering this up.

For someone so vehemently against nature, he is cursed to feel its struggle all the same. The ironic hex upon him is that he feels the emotional pain of wild beasts and plants alike. And thus, he tries to banish any greenery and animals from his awareness as heavily as possible. Those with nearly as much power as him do not care about these orders, thus causing him more suffering. Try as he may, it is hard to suppress this empathic connection. Still, he manages to hide it under his cold, calculating and otherwise diplomatic persona. His public demeanor is that of a suave but ruthless businessman, one who can feign interest in the public's plights while worsening them behind closed doors.

## THE LAND

Built up, filthy, amoral, artificial, and technocratic. For the grand Sophisticates of the Elite, Nosos is a market haven where any creation can be made and any idea can find an investment. For all else? Detritus, decay, decadence, despair. Of all the lands within the Broken Cog cluster, this one is perhaps the most overtly cruel. While many suffer the problems of an industrializing society, this one revels in them. Very little here is natural at all. To make up for this, a synthetic world has been devised. Fabrics and textiles are cobbled from whatever strange substances have been concocted, as well as whatever mysterious creations have been forged by arcane scientists and other distant personnel. As one might expect, the byproducts of these synthetic fibers and other goods bring about further devastation to an already dead environment. And for the land, it means more choking filth.

The outer limits prove more horrifying than the weavings of pipes and machinery that make up the city. Numerous zones are more blighted than the walking atrocities in Rockbaecche. The notorious wastelands are the byproducts of not just run-off and pollution, but Noson weaponry tests upon their own soil. One apparent place of this is the Scorched Woodlands, a place that looks more like a cemetery than a true forest. Petrified charcoal trees jut from the ground like sickly needles piercing through dead ground. The smoldering blackness stretched well east of urban zones, with the darkened husks lining enough space to block out vision past a point. Closer towards the sea, dirt and dust give way to sludge and mucky water as grim colors emerge with deep malevolence. This Incandescent Marsh proves unnerving, as an unnatural warmth blankets the land just as much as the horrid glow. The dreadful goo that fills the swamps has resulted in warped and gnarled plants, as well as disgusting mutant wildlife. The few madmen willing to spend time within the dismal swamps report vivid hallucinations of impossible colors. Those who dare to still stay

whither away into grey dust, as color seemingly fades away from. According to “acclaimed” history, the wastelands weren’t just the result of industrial disaster, but a territorial war between the fading Alleigoston Empire and the Grandglennish Empire, ending in an explosive stalemate as both began to collapse into their current states.

## CLOSING THE BORDERS

Putrid trash and refuse spring up to blockade the escapee. Climbing it proves treacherous, as slicing shards dig into the victim. Likewise, the vile stench carries sickening pollutants and ailment spreading filth. Those attempting to sail find their boat caught up in mounds of floating garbage instead. Those who make it to the wastelands are greeted by tar like sludge and the decay of a dying nature.

## THE FOLK

Called “Cured Rockbaecchers” by particularly antagonistic neighboring domains, some degree of this holds true. The average Noson is perhaps more sickly than the non-infected population of said rival domain. The people are withered and poisoned by rampant pollution, widespread poverty, and heinously abusive work conditions. Deeply afflicted Nosons could be mistaken for Rockbaecche undead at a quick glance. Such conditions have been criticized heavily by a Dr. Herman K. Wilder of Paridon, who wrote an expose to share the blight of the Nosons. He has since been targeted by merchant baron hired assassins. He remains outspoken of the “poisonous slavery” that fills the streets and how the elite are merely an “anthropomorphism of the garbage that harms the residents”. Despite these conditions, Nosos is shockingly cosmopolitan, at face value. Humans make up at least 80% of the population, but other races have some presence as well. Exact numbers have not yet been collected. Much like with Zherisia, the population pushes into the millions.

Most of the denizens are caught between working abhorrent conditions or painfully passing away in the streets. Sometimes the two intermingle. These uphold the mighty industries that the wider cluster reluctantly needs for much infrastructure. Nosons also know steel and coal like few others, making them a commodity in the realms of construction, heating, and much more. Many are all too happy to accept assignments abroad, whether in trade or assisting in Noson related services. Those higher up a metaphysical ladder are more likely to have luxuries that amount to a more normal life; whether these be forbidden plants, seclusion away from the rampant pollution, or all sorts of decadent distractions to keep them occupied from a life of misery. It’s only the Company Barons who get the most out of life, those who hold sway over the very rules themselves... as vague, contradictory, and self-serving as they may be. For those who have the means, this is a haven where one can still build in peace. Petty morality will not restrain them, as Nosos welcomes their imagination and ingenuity. It’s perhaps for this reason why it sports a number of unrestrained tinkerers and arcanists. As such, Nosons tend to sneer at the petty moralism thrown at them by Belagorans, especially in response to so-called enlightened virtues.

## POINTS OF INTEREST

Leaders of a cynical industry, P. & H. Holiday Munitions have become rather notorious as one of the leading exporters in Nosos. Their primary stock for sale lies within weapons manufacturing, especially advanced firearms. Recent contracts have allowed them to experiment with making large projectile rounds for elaborate ship guns and cannons. P & H have been nicknamed “merchants of death” by neighboring domains, a point that is heavily ironic to a few hidden Alleigostons. This doesn’t deter them at all, but invites curious arms dealers and purchasers to various satellite locations, including within the least disgusting parts of Nosos. These private emporiums showcase the best of what

they have to offer, including demonstration rooms deep within the warehouses.

The Scissa Sunt company is one of the few active operations within the so-called “Wastelands” and that’s perhaps for good reason. Much of the natural world surrounding the mines has been violated beyond the point of recovery. Likewise, with dwindling useful resources, towns dried up and villages disappeared. All that is left are work colonies overseen by Foreman Fenton with near slavery like conditions. Expandable work forces have helped to bring an impossible mass of expensive goods for a plethora of uses. While coal is the primary force of Fenton’s company, they aren’t shy about overstepping through use of steel, oils, and other assets typically associated with other clans and their guilds.

Pelsjager and Sons is perhaps one of the few businesses in existence made to help the populace. Markus Pelsjager launched the company nearly two years ago to help keep the vermin problems more manageable. Few in his family see much free time, as their services have consistently been called into action. Their methods have been described as unorthodox, using a wide array of alchemical admixtures to lure out the lowly things. Sometimes, their methods prove lethal, but they prefer to trap living creatures. Their reasoning is to have live bait for other ventures, but few dare to ask them what that might be. The clan itself is quite curious too, as they’ve been known to be in one place at one moment but seemingly vanish in the next instant leaving little trace behind. Due to their usefulness, few question the quirks of the “Phantom Trappers House” as it has been called. Rumors about them have still emerged, whether they’re fully alive, whether or not they’re secretly wererats, or some other insidious dark truth that lurks beyond customer sight.

## ENCOUNTERS

- ❖ *Flora/Fauna. mutant plants, fungaloids, vermin*
- ❖ *Native Horrors. dread oozes, ghosts, ghouls, plague zombies, wererats*
- ❖ *Other Horrors. carrion stalkers, cosmic horrors*

## DREAD POSSIBILITIES

The urbanized island off-shoot territory known as “Iron City” has gone quiet. Tales of a terrible thief known as “Garret” began to circulate before strange mists enclosed around the whole region. Curiously, Iron City still does reappear off the coast of Nosos, but this is relatively rare and usually for just a few days. Some have counted up to 7 points in the year at most, but usually up to 3. Garret’s troubles range from the crawling dead horrors in the Bay Quarter or his haunted past within the Hallenberch Cradle. Ever since his fateful encounter in the Skylin Family Estate, he has been nothing less than a doomed soul. The family’s funerary business roots had a secret side that involved alchemy and undeath. Garret’s one last gig resulted in their concoction being released onto a ship sent to the penal colony of Belagora... So they say. But in reality, he purposely afflicted the original Skylin clan, before the Mists took him away. As for Hallenberch Cradle, this abandoned orphanage has seen many different uses; a field hospital in a brutal war, an asylum for the mentally insane, and a temporary holding chamber for political prisoners. All of this contributes to a malignant and deeply haunted atmosphere.

Horrors from beyond the stars have slowly manifested upon the wastelands. Prisoners from Nosos, dubbed by officials as “D-class” or Disposable, have been sent to fight the maddening things. Even Belagoran prisoners have been moved from the off-shore island to help combat this threat. None who’ve been deployed have returned and it’s resulting in the numbers of incarcerated plummeting. Those who remain are fearful, sensing that deployment to the wasteland is just another execution sentence. A



creature previously seen in Falkovnia, known as “The Green Maiden” has made the journey from the domain and through Lamordia into a new dominion in need of her efforts. This creature, an eldritch abomination pulled from the planes beyond, brings extra-dimensional corruption upon an already tainted region. Animals and plants previously harmed by toxins and strange radiation are worsened by the entity’s malignant influence. While traces of her power linger in Falkovnia, her essence is far more horrid within Nosos’ outer limits. The wasteland creatures have become heinous monsters of eldritch proportions.

While the Broken Cog is no stranger to conflicts and complications with places of learning, Nosos is perhaps a surprising example. The recently established Ludendorf Academy of Science held the attention of one Noson resident, with rather disastrous long-term consequences. Dr. Beauregard de Blauche is an expatriate of Dementlieu who found himself at home in Nosos, uninhibited for his tinkering desires. His encounters with the wasteland scarred his brain, but inspired a wondrous device he called “The Dread Possibility Engine”. The device attaches to a user’s head through fastening straps. When the doctor came to a symposium in Ludendorf Academy, a student named Dieter van Drachenfels was enthralled by the machine. Agreeing to be an understudy for de Blauche, the two traveled back to Nosos. This obsession led to an altercation and the death of de Blauche, causing the student to panic. Von Drachenfels scoured for the rest of de Blauche’s notes before preparing to flee back to Lamordia..

Duke Arcaico is the cause of much intrigue and mayhem within his home land, but he has quickly come to abhor Nosos far more than Alleigosto. Tactics often employ swayed druids to wreak nature’s havoc and enact wrathful retribution upon any wayward industrialist. However, within Nosos, suppression of nature is one of the few concrete aspects of an otherwise loose law. And thus, he has turned to some of the extreme revolutionary

mindsets within Belagora. Radicalized idealogues extracted from Oblask University have been used as plants to sow discord within the working class peoples of Nosos.

## ROCKBAECCHÉ

*“All who break curfew without prior authorization are considered either seditious or infected.” - legal decree of the regent*

## THE LORD AND THE LAW

The Law is simple, absolute martial law. The land is on lockdown, following a mysterious plague outbreak. As such, the Lord Regent and his word is absolute. Curfews are often enforced at various intervals, especially as certain city districts and provinces prove worse than others. Little currently happens as the regent’s forces are on the watch for any cause of this tragedy or those who seek to disrupt order. Only those within positions of power that are in direct support of the regent have a concept of what’s happening. They’re far too busy enjoying the privileges that come with being uncontested. A common joke directed at Rockbaecche says that the only thing that the government loves more than self-sabotage is imperialism, which they also sabotage. This stands true in a rather blunt and nation obsessed culture, paired with a superiority complex. Even weighed down by the blight, the ego of the ruling system cannot be stopped, as propaganda is funneled out endlessly. Many are quick to blame Zherisia and Alleigosto to a lesser degree for their ongoing woes. Some instances see the offshore land of Darkheath as a threat, albeit one that is too consumed by its own problems.

In theory, law is absolute here. In reality, the law is overburdened and overtaxed. Supply lines are stretched thin, defense forces dwindle over time, and methods of contending with the infected break down as chain command weakens. The law favors

those with power who can still find means of conducting business and pulling favors. Those who cannot theoretically help the nation rebuild are left to languish in the plague or its aftermath. This resentment has only furthered more chaotic interests, making it harder to reign in crime, especially outside of cities. One instance of this is the Iron Prowlers gang of Alleigosto, who have since fallen sway to the blight. Despite being undead horrors, unique circumstances preserved their intellect, making them both cunning hunters of the living while still being a brilliant villainous syndicate. Their leader, Paolo, has retained more than enough of his brains. If anything, access to strange new magics has made him even more nefarious.

## THE DARKLORD

Regent Commander Nicholas Von Wilholt. LE Human Fighter 15. Von Wilholt was a man with squandered potential, wasted by squabbling nobles, bureaucratic paperwork, and the soul sapping horrors of war. A man now beyond his youth, he desired something more, something worthy. He saw an empire stagnating into an entropic freefall. While the civilians were far from destitute, boredom caused discontent and chaos. In the end, a new renaissance could have emerged in reaction to this calm but bland time. Von Wilholt put an end to such speculation, driven by his disdain of decadence and falling motivation. His solution was fabricated conflict, reaching out to a nearby island in the empire contending with an outbreak of something called "Crimson Blights". The supernatural disease infested crops and tainted water, with horrific results if not treated quickly enough. Even on the Prime Material, the Alleigostons were known to meddle in foreign affairs. For Clan Zaritelli, this changed them from legitimate medicinal work to a criminal underground.. Before they were exposed by Clan Vaerizocchi, the samples were secretly delivered and experimented on within hidden laboratories. Upon the time to unleash it, the commander and his closest allies made preparations to not only seize

power in crisis, but assure their own safety. The blights ravaged the capital city in a short time, overwhelming transport and trade in the days to come. Blood gushed from the pores of the infected before bodies dropped to the ground with a period of rapid rot, all tainting and painting the cobblestone ground beneath them.

The worst was to follow, the plague's second phase. In an instant, the rot ceased as a mockery of life filled the red corpses. They became ravenous undead that moaned and roamed across the streets. Seeing things grew out of control and fearing his death from the blight or by his own men, he fled to finish his goals. The royal Grandglen family fled to their vacation retreat just south of Dunwillow, in hopes that the relative isolation would save them. They were grateful to discover that one last ship arrived, with a few safe soldiers and Commander Von Wilholt. However, with the treatment serum in hand, he unleashed one more vial of the plague samples before fleeing back to the castle's dock. The royal family was dead, with him taking over as regent! Success! As he made a break for the shoreline, hacking down zombie-like creatures and keeping to the shadows, the vision of his ferryman changed. Mists surrounded him. Looking back at the boatman, he saw not flesh but a skull cloaked in a robe. The Mist Ferryman welcomed him to his new prison. He fled the ship and swam to shore, only to be greeted by a corruption of the city he knew. For a few months, he was barely aware something was wrong. Serving as Regent Commander, he took rule until a successor could be named. However, he knew that everything was off, he'd be caught in time and the doom he started might never stop.

As Darklord, Von Wilholt has some level of control over undead created through the plague. Curiously, he can even control if an infected victim is afflicted at all. Still, he cannot focus on more than a few people at a time. Likewise, any attempts for him to get involved with a cure cause said cure to instantly fail or go wrong. As long as he remains in power,

there will be no recovery for finances, health, stability and much more. He knows that this fragment of a greater empire is bound for collapse under his rule. However, he'll see if he can't take as many other powers down as he can. This change from total control to a mutually assured destruction clause has sparked fear and doubt among ranks.

## THE LAND

Dunwillow would have been a flourishing head of state at one point, but the plague has reduced it to a series of quarantine zones. Officers frequently patrol streets to enforce strict curfews and lockdowns, antagonizing citizens in the best case scenario. Some use it as a chance to offload pent up aggression. Much of the aggression is used to brutally murder infected, as they are usually considered mindless undead. Off the coast of Dunwillow is the abandoned royal castle. While not an official military installation or seat of power, the Grandglen Royal Clan used the castle as a sort of vacation retreat. During the Crimson Blight, it became the site of their last stand before their tragic demise.

How do the lands beyond Dunwillow fare? Not especially well, but have held out more than their capital. Rockenbach Falls is a community only somewhat shaken by the capital's outbreak. The state's concern is more so about their desire to revolt and join Zherisia than concerns about the plague damaging this community too. Little can be claimed by this land, save for an alleged duel of fate between the famed Darkonese detective, Alanik Ray, against some villainous Rockbaeccher foe known as Professor Julian Casimir. Or rather, a Vistani woman who has taken a liking to this town claims that this day will soon come. Rock Phare is a small community, centered around a lighthouse that in theory offers protection. The lighthouse keeper has been unseen by the public for countless years. Some suspect he's deeply eccentric, while others fear that the true keeper is dead and the building is haunted. Regardless of the truth, this small town seems shockingly unaffected from a land that is one water

body away from absolute disaster. Rock Phare's primary industry is fishing, with several fisheries and processing plants around the town. Another booming industry is whaling, especially for whale oil. A growing church reveres the whale oil as a sacred liquid for all means of strange and esoteric rituals. A nearby naval base operates just outside of the town, acting as a buffer against Darkheath. Humphord has only one claim to its fame, which is the first modern rail station of the broken cog (even beating out Zherisia). Humphord Station marks the lonely town as a mere rest stop on the way to greater destinations. Its operations have been transformed into "as truly needed" by decree of the regent's orders. However, security stretched too thin has resulted in hooligans and thugs trying their luck at hijacking locomotives for their own nefarious or absurd ends. Fortunately, they lack the knowledge to make proper use. Some cars and engines have become places for squatting among these sinister gangs though.

Villages and hamlets that weren't eradicated by the blight have either sealed themselves in or have tried to welcome any aid they can receive. Many have been reduced in size, becoming insular and self-reliant as a means for survival. While it's possible that noteworthy small communities exist, they are not cooperative with outsiders until fear of the blight subsides. If that wasn't enough, the Fissure of Old Timor has spread up north like a malignant tumor ravaging flesh, muscle and bone in its way. Small communities have been outright devoured as temporary gaps in the earth form to swallow buildings and grab stragglers. In the dead of night, whole populations have vanished with little trace left.

## CLOSING THE BORDERS

Plagued dead arise from the mists to mob and overwhelm those who try to escape. Even if they do escape, they risk infection and joining the corpse horde.



## THE FOLK

Worn out, cynical, tired, sickly; this is how one describes the Rockbaeccher. Despite being next to Alleigosto, the people are far paler despite such close proximity. These neighbors mock them as ill people allergic to the sun, but this isn't quite true, even without the outbreak. Not everyone in this domain is pallid and devoid of life, but worry and wear can be seen upon everyone's face. With the meager existence people are allowed to have, people quickly go where they need to be and are quick to simply stay there for as long as time permits.

Despite the cataclysm that brought society to near halt, the Rockbaecchers are masters of transportation, to both much acclaim and deep detriment. On one hand, new measures have allowed for the healthy to better distance themselves from deep quarantine zones or further push away blight zones from a public at risk. However, those who prove particularly diabolical can exploit the systems in play to further outbreaks and undeath with a few discreet ploys. Transitory technology has inspired nearby domains to innovate, in an endless struggle to maintain relevance. Still, Rockbaecche maintains the pinnacle of locomotive transit, with the most stations, trains, and other facets. However, Zherisia proves to be a large rival, igniting a sort of railway war between both companies and national institutions within the two domains. This has in turn led to acts of sabotage, espionage and vandalism that surpasses the terrorism of Alleigosto; the most notorious of these incidents being a runaway coal mine train in 758 BC that exploded upon crashing into a freight depot outside of Humphord. This incident was written off as a tragic accident, but the prior foreman of the Humphord Storage Company suspected violent foul play.

## Points of Interest

Humphord is indeed a paragon of industry for the world of locomotion. The Grand Terminal acts as a

major hub, following Dunwillow's deep lag behind from a lack of proper funding. Likewise, being the epidemic ground zero proved further damning. Regardless, the terminal is an ornate cathedral for the art of movement. Artistic installations along the roof signify intricate travel patterns, as if it were spiders crawling along elaborate webs. The current owner, Grandglen Rail Engineering, officially branched off from the government to become a private enterprise in the previous year, 759 BC. Many of its employees frequent the Hammered Stake, a tavern with a general locomotive theme. Its location next to the terminal has proved lucrative, in spite of current struggles.

The massive lake body beyond Dunwillow is filled with mystery and wonder. Early in the morning, strange fog banks roll in before dissipating by the afternoon. The fish always seem plumper here for reasons unknown too. Fishermen are reluctant to travel too deeply, haunted by ghost stories and monstrous tales surrounding the lake. These are often brushed off as superstition if spoken about openly. But deep down, the public fears such things deeply. Fishermen avoid the center, well content with finding lucrative catches like the popular "grinner pikes" and "sun basking trout". Fishing trade has all but dried up around Dunwillow proper, but has since moved to Rock Phare.

Rock Phare remains the primary point of the regional naval power. The nearby base has HMS Spear Hurler currently in dry dock. An explosive weapon detonated below her hull while sailing close towards Darkheath waters. Like the base itself, the ship is off limits to civilians or other personnel not granted clearance. Beyond the base, the nearby town is quite remote and closed off from the rest of the domain. The Folk are by far insular and shy, even towards other Grandglennish. One project that has brought attention is building a new lighthouse. While the old derelict still stands, few are brave enough to confront it. The replacement has had countless setbacks however, stalling the construction. Some

suspect foul play, while the more superstitious blame the accursed old lighthouse that still stands as a grim obelisk.

## ENCOUNTERS

- ❖ *Flora/Fauna.* vermin, fungi, glowing moss
- ❖ *Mundane Horrors.* guardsmen, criminals, black magic cultists, witches
- ❖ *Native Horrors.* crimson blighted dead/infectious zombies, mutants, giant/mutant animals, the Rockbaecche Serpent
- ❖ *Other Horrors.* marikith, automatons, fanggen<sup>6</sup>, ghosts

## DREAD POSSIBILITIES

Rock Phare has accumulated a ship graveyard just beyond the shoreline. This is no mistake, as the lighthouse continues to see use after the keeper's death. All who have tried to take over the lighthouse, or overtake it rather, have been scared off or have died in the process. Getting to the lighthouse requires villagers to take a ride across the river. Normally, this is no issue, but the docks officially went out of business after the lighthouse keeper passed away. The remaining boats are in dubious shape and most would prefer avoiding the abandoned lighthouse altogether. Anyone foolish enough to visit the resting place of the old keeper, Richard Cleersky, is held in contempt and fear.

The terrors of Timor haven't just spread to Rockbaecche, but use it as an anchor to push into Alleigosto and Belagora. Marikith are a rare sight for the already shaken Rockbaecchers, but have become a reality all the same. Due to the anomalous properties of the Fissure, gaping maws in the ground can randomly appear between Zherisia and Rockbaecche, before the subterranean menaces are unleashed. This itself has caught the attention of

<sup>6</sup> Treat as Dryad, but is chaotic evil or chaotic neutral and large sized.

mad occultists who seek to seize power in the already unstable dominion.

Ever since the Grandglen family died mysteriously, a strange serpentine creature has emerged from the massive lake that surrounds the castle. This grim creature relentlessly prowls around the now haunted property. Anyone foolhardy enough to trowel the lonesome body of water is first met by sudden banks of fog hovering over the calm waters. Soon, ripples and bubbles follow as it's all too apparent something watches and lurks. The beast will emerge within an hour or so of travel, at first to harass and then to genuinely assault the craft. Its interest is in warding interlopers away from the old castle for some reason. No one has been able to discern why.

## ZHERISIA

*"Even in this age of turbulence, there is none greater than a Zherisian!" - propaganda from Paridon*

*NOTICE TO READER: I regret to inform you that one of my suitcases full of notes has been seized by the authorities of Paridon. They claim that I was harboring material previously found in a spy ring bust. After weeks of an arduous trial, I was deemed an unwitting asset and was forced to aid in an investigation. With this concluding act and several spies from Rockbaecche rooted out, I have been freed to my pursuits and declared otherwise innocent. However, many of those notes could not be retrieved. Ironically, many are secrets that have been published through other information brokers. Perhaps that is why I truly got in trouble.*

## THE LORD AND THE LAW

Order within Paridon is handled via an aristocratic republic. Society and order tends to favor those who have and directly contribute versus those who cannot. Laws reflect this and are far more condemning of the poor that roam the streets. Actions have been made to pacify the public, in fear of revolt. Events have transpired following the Grand Conjunction and subsequent loss of greater Zherisian lands. During this time, much of the city council was lost to the mists and emergency measures were taken, in an effort to ensure stability and quell ongoing riots. Seats for such positions are held every five years, in which someone of noble heritage of at least twenty one years of age can be elected.

## THE DARKLORD

[REDACTED]

## THE LAND

Much like with Alleigosto, a central coastal city is fueled by the supply efforts of rural pastures and small village communities. However, unlike this other rival, Zherisia has long since mastered it. Even during the “great disappearance” in 740 BC, the city of Paridon only proved to be incredibly resourceful and recovered in the many years to follow. Upon 759 BC, the “unveiling” occurred and the wider landscape was revealed to the Zherisians. This included lands connecting to what is left of Timor. To the shock of all Paridoners, the swathing reaches beyond seemed to have been frozen in time. People thought lost were magically preserved in stasis for twenty years. This in turn led to mass confusion amidst the government, as well as turmoil between families who thought loved ones were gone. Chaos and discord ruled once again until 760 BC., where measures were once again placed to help the masses make sense of this grand anomaly.

## CLOSING THE BORDERS

[REDACTED]

## THE FOLK

Often dressed humble and dour, the people are too busy with their own lives to share too much with the public. A general sense of unease and pressure hangs over the average civilian, at times to the point of paranoia. While not to the degree of Nosos and Belagora, the often lack of sun marks the average Zherisian as quite pale. Part of this is from the “pea soup fog” that often permeates the area, especially within Paridon. While market day may see some socialization, the average resident prefers to seem busy rather than open themselves up to a stranger. Some may be friendly enough to point out a customs building or other center that can help an outsider. But even then, many prove reluctant to do just that.

A recent religious movement known as the “Rejuvenating Guidance” has been gaining gradual traction. Its purpose is to promote olden traditions and ideals, while keeping them relevant in contemporary society. According to believers within the movement, Paridon was being strangled by mists for its sins. The Guidance scolds decadence, lack of morality and industrial over-reliance for the follies of Paridon. This movement is declared reactionary by much of the public and decried as a delusional call to a dead past. This hasn’t stopped a new wave of traditionalists to reflect in terms of romanticism instead of hard and cold rationalism. Poets, novels, and other creatives have joined in with the effort to evoke a deep sense of nostalgia and awe, but also tales of cautionary and allegorical horror. This has in turn created far less extreme off-shoots that seek to simply free one from the oppressive machinery of modern life, but hold no pretense about the past being better.

The people themselves have not just endured widespread social pressure and paranoia, but now a sense of deep confusion that risks society itself. In



760, the unspeakable occurred. The lands around Paridon thought last returned, with the city dwellers reunited with people who didn't age for two decades. The ramifications, legal and social, have already been shattering. Council members seek lost positions, businessmen wish to reestablish what has been replaced, families must come to terms with older relatives now younger than them. Even then, this is something not spoken in public, save the outcries of a certain zealous movement. The average denizen would rather portray a play of normalcy, where nothing actually changed anywhere.

### Points of Interest

The most alarming feature along the Zherisian landscape is what is colloquially known as "The Fissure". Officially, it retains its prior name of "Old Timor". This grotesque gaping wound upon the earth looks like something erupting from the soil and tearing its way out. The end result is a massive pit with spider-like arms also trailing deep underground. What became the Domain of Timor has since become a Pocket Domain, one that moves along the Fissure and even into other neighboring domains in the cluster. The Hive Queen has since used operatives to seize new artifacts and forms of magic to further her reach.

Within the district of Shadewell lies an enterprising force for protection against the supernatural. The medium of Wilbury Street, Muriel McDunnogh, has been billed as a Spiritualist Extraordinaire. She is more than she lets on, having a deep interest in fighting paranormal terrors that stalk the streets in the night. However, she will not elaborate upon this to curious onlookers. Some say she is aware of the missing Dr. Rudolph van Richten, but she too is tight lipped on this. For the public, she will offer services of seances, teaching in the esoteric, and general spiritual advising. Her appearances within Paridon have become sparser in recent years, as the shadows of worry have become more visible upon her.

Greater Zherisia is often ignored, as the public still isn't used to its abrupt return. Still, many wealthy families and iconic personalities live beyond the city. One such family is the Whistlebridge family, major exporters of produce throughout the cluster. Years after a deadly house fire that claimed most of the family, it would seem the survivors rebuilt their clan and pushed forward.

The infamous fissure is a vile mark upon the land, but Timor is not dead. New Timor stands as a testament to such endurance. This city is by no means successful, but deeply destitute and bleak. Architecture resembles a shanty town more than the proud city from which it took its name. Residents of Timor have always had a broken relationship with Zherisia, but recent days have soured further. The Guidance movement has worsened this, as Timorians would rather blame all of Zherisia for their fate. They see a colony that corrupted their queen and started the downward spiral that resulted in the deadly quake. Some suspect that the Paridoner mage hired by the princess of Old Timor was part of a conspiracy to destabilize and destroy the region. With no leadership or military, New Timor must endure its reign under crime lords and other horrors. Those on top are more than happy to do business with seedier parts of the larger nation though.

### Encounters

- ❖ *Flora/Fauna.* foxes, deer, rats, birds, carnivorous swamp plants, horses
- ❖ *Mundane Horrors.* wildmen, occultists
- ❖ *Native Horrors.* ghost hounds, ghosts, dread doppelgangers, psychic vampires
- ❖ *Other Horrors.* marikith, jackalweres

## DREAD POSSIBILITIES

Within Zherisia's countryside lies stories of "The Big Black Hound", an ill-omen of death. Often, the beast is seen within cemeteries during a bright moonlit night. More often than not, the phantasmal dog will stay upon its resting place. But, should it move in your direction, you are cursed. Such marked souls are doomed to befall a grim tragedy, with the hound occasionally within eyesight. As the doom get closer, the hound will be visible more frequently. Few are aware of how to break such a curse or if the hound is even at fault. Likewise, few will pay mind to this tale, marking it as an old folk legend. Other ghostly animals have been spotted throughout Zherisia, especially upon pet cemetery grounds or places of sentimental value. It is unknown if these carry a similar agenda to the Big Black Hound or not.

An exhibition within the grand museum of Paridon has left curators and visitors with a deep foreboding. A gem enclosed by a beetle-like structure has been moved from a special showcase and down into the storage vaults within the basement. The reason for this? Jeremy Hodgeson was the victim of the artifact's curse. The Glimmering Beetle Gem was a wondrous treasure found in some seemingly unknown and remote tomb in Har'Akir's sweeping sands. However, there was more to this ornate cut jewel. Infused within was a dread power, only activated if it ever left its place of slumber. A vicious blight was unleashed upon the explorers who left the tomb with their prize, including Hodgeson. The man began to waste away in his manor in the days since he returned, donating his finding to the museum. His bowels turned on him, his breathing grew hoarse, his complexion faded to a deathly pale. Within 1 week, he was gone. Even stranger, his faithful hound companion fell ill in a similar manner. An hour after his owner passed, the dog left loose a mournful howl and died much the same.

The Hercule Express was one final act of goodwill between Ichthyos and Zherisia, but such things were

not destined to last. Its last living passenger was a revolutionary anarchist named "Malachi Cross", a name that carried infamy within Paridon's streets as "The Barmy Bomber". In earlier life, Cross was an engineer who grew disgruntled by how countless foremen and bosses mistreated those below them. Every time he spoke up, he was fired or arrested. This turned him toward revenge. His final campaign in his terror war? The Hercule Express. The Express ran late that night, adding one extra shift to those otherwise stranded at the station. Cross snuck on with his explosives, security too preoccupied and tired to notice. By the time they caught on, Cross had gingerly snuck explosives throughout the cars. The officers trailed him to the caboose, but there was one problem, the bomb fuses were too short and they went off before Cross could leap out. Everything went up in flames just as the train was about to leave Paridon proper. None caught in the wreck survived, including the now Darklord. The train was reborn in fire and fury as the Hell Coal Express, a grim pocket domain doomed to ferry passengers to a burning grave. At a late hour, the train will arrive to those who missed the last call. The carriage will look slightly singed, but otherwise passable. Over time, smoke will rise as embers spark. Only when it's too late will the victim see the lethal inferno before them as the blazing locomotive soars like a fireball. And all the while? The fiery ghost of the mad anarchist will cackle. Until his wrathful spirit is exorcized, the ghost train will burn into the night.

The lifting "death fog" brought possibility and greater chance of survival back to Paridon. However, it revealed so much tragedy as well. The Fissure is a hideous blight that is somewhat of a mistway that takes travelers to the domain of Altum Timorem. This domain acts much as Timor has after the Grand Conjunction, but has since expanded to much of the cluster. Things do not bode well for the world above either. The soil is rarely pleasant and the resulting crops are almost as bland as Ghastria's, assuming they don't mysteriously spoil. The Easterman family is one exception, but many suspect they made a pact

with some fell being in exchange for not just lush lands, but seemingly sinful deliciousness. A diabolic wavering flame can be seen in the eyes of the family, evoking the tales of Ol' Flickerflame, the killer specter of Paridon. Another clan marked by woe in Greater Zherisia is Whistlebridge. Their farmstead is actually quite dead and so are all within it. At the end of every week, they are forced to re-enact the deadly storm that slew them all. Lightning set flame to their winery, which spread and consumed the nearby home. Those who fled into the fading rain were greeted by another bolt, as even livestock were charred by the rogue beam of energy. These bleak shades of former humans are none the wiser, still producing the best wine in the domain.

## MISTWAYS AND DARKER TRAVELS

None the wiser, few realize that Mt. Helios acts as two different Mistways, both mostly reliable and capable of two-way travel. The first is The Light Struck Timber Road, a dirt road lined with fallen trees and seemingly unhealed scorch marks from stormy weather. This follows a valley on the eastern side of the mountain. The passage leads a wanderer into the domain of Odiare, towards the southern border of the domain. The second is the Forsaken Crag. Despite being a reliable path where a wanderer need not fear getting lost in the mists, the path itself is quite perilous. Uneven roadways give way to thin passes along cliff sides and unreliable surfaces one must scale. This mistway cuts through the central heart of the mountain, bordering on the domain of Ichthyos. Should one prevail, they'll find themselves in the frigid cold of Lamordia. Ever chilling Lamordia has another access point through the waters by New Timor. While this city is deeply hostile towards anyone along its borders, chartering a ride on the docks allows one to sail towards the coastline of Lamordia. Going from Paridon is semi-stable, but returning is exceedingly risky. Many curious academics and explorers have ultimately been lost when eager to share their discoveries with Zherisian

peers. Some aren't even lucky enough to make it to the docks, as bandits, madmen and lurking horrors are quick to claim them during their journey.

Deep within the wastelands of expanded Nosos, incomprehensible horrors sway to and fro at angles that defy logic. Many of these dread things did not originate here, but found a mistway to the darkest fears of the unknown. Deep within the wastelands, reality warps as the tainted dirt turns an unearthly red. In truth, this is a passage to the lost Core domain of Bluetspur. However, its reliability is dubious coming from Bluetspur. Fortunately, none can go to Bluetspur from the Charred Mindscape mistway. Those crossing from Bluetspur are not wholly misfortune if they fail to cross the mistway. Instead of becoming lost in the mist, they often find themselves back where they started. However, an unfortunate soul looking to escape the alien horror may still find themselves forever engulfed by mists.

Most confusingly is a unique mistway that is activated through the wonders of engineering, the locomotive. An underground tunnel has been erected as a means of cutting down on pedestrian traffic within Paridon, to some level of success, as fears over The Fissure somewhat subsided. The aptly named Paridon Underground has a sinister secret beyond the Hive Queen; it's possible at random that a line can connect with the station stop of Mithras Court. It is not known if one can use the same path back to Paridon. The Underground doesn't just connect to Mithras Court, but also to the greatly modified pocket domain of Deep Timor, formerly just Timor. Despite growing in size, it does not always manifest mistways around the cluster. This underground realm of nightmares connects most of the Broken Cog, united by a fear of the Marikiths. These new mistways often manifest at convenient times or at random, but they are all temporary.

The high seas have their connections as well, but often rather dangerous ones at that. Going to Ichthyos from the Sea of Sorrows, the path is unreliable and liable for trouble. However, returning



to the Sea of Sorrows is a bit more reliable as a mistway. It is not guaranteed and careless travel will result in getting lost. This doesn't stop the darker waters beyond from having choppy waves and often stormy weather. A ship traversing to and from such shores is in for a rough voyage. As such, the southwestern outskirts of Ichthyos is rife with ship graveyards.

And thus concludes your voyage across the Cog. Wonders beyond imagination cloud horrors beyond comprehension. A future of innovation will likely give way to a future of instability and turmoil. What



terrors hold beyond a time of unparalleled darkness are uncertain. Some fear that the growing conflicts between domains will explode into something massive. And what comes from that? None can say. Some fear clouds of radiance, endless waves of killing machines, the wrath of ancient evils colliding with the devastation of modern technologies, and so much more.



# PUPPETEER PARASITE

(AS IT WAS MEANT TO BE)

BY BRIAN "DOCTOR NECROTIC" RUBINFELD

This is a monster based on something I wrote several years ago for a campaign called "Bloodied Wyvern Peaks", a more space-horror tinged homage to "Expedition to Barrier Peaks". One of the creatures broke free of the ship and infested a local village. This campaign was originally for D&D 5th Edition, but I wanted to "update" it back to the version I prefer the most. Curiously, Wizards of the Coast used the name of this monster for something different in their reboot of Spelljammer. Beyond the name, they have nothing in common. (But, a little credit would be nice!)

While this creature was not originally meant for Ravenloft, it can work all the same. Part of its roots were actually from said setting, particularly the Dungeon Magazine adventure "Horror's Harvest", and its Bodysnatcher-like plotline. The rest came from various works of horror, including the video game I quote below.

*"They ARE amongst us! I knew they would come after me... Knew their devices... Their depraved methods! Creatures wearing human skin as we wear clothes - to cover their hideousness from our eyes!"*

- Maximilian Roivas, Eternal Darkness Sanity's Requiem (2002)

## PUPPETEER PARASITE

**CLIMATE/TERRAIN:** Extraplanar (Demiplane of Dread)

**FREQUENCY:** Very Rare

**ORGANIZATION:** Solitary

**ACTIVITY CYCLE:** Diurnal

**DIET:** Nil

**INTELLIGENCE:** Exceptional (15-16)

**ALIGNMENT:** Neutral Evil

**TREASURE:** Nil (Whatever is on possessed victim)

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**NO. APPEARING:** Solo (1) or Small Pack (2 - 4)

**ARMOR CLASS:** 5

**MOVEMENT:** 12, Br 8

**HIT DICE:** 4 + 2

**THACO:** 16

**NO. OF ATTACKS:** 2

**DAMAGE/ATTACK:** 1d4+1/1d4+1

**SPECIAL ATTACKS:** Digging Claws

**SPECIAL DEFENSES:** Hit by +1 magic weapon, Stealth

**MAGIC RESISTANCE:** 20%

**SIZE:** S (2' long)

**MORALE:** 13 - 14 (elite)

**XP VALUE:** 1,200

This grotesque and beastly thing is a maddening sight to behold. Its body is almost simian, if hairless, emaciated, slimy, and leathery-looking. Its head carries a similar ichor-like coating, but is long and tube-like. It ends in a mouth not unlike that of a leech or an eel, with beady little eyes dotting the top. Its front paw-like appendages are tipped with razor sharp, scythe-like claws. It stands at roughly 2 feet tall and can slink around on its strange appendages. Due to a hunched stature, these creatures often look shorter than they are. Like a rodent, the parasite can compress its body to move between various surfaces



with ease. This includes victims' bodies.

The puppeteer parasite tries to lunge at a potential host. Upon striking with both of its claws, it will proceed in trying to dig into the spinal column of the host, dealing an additional 1 - 10 damage. If the target is dropped to 0 hit points, the creature immediately merges into the host and hijacks the body. However, if the creature does not drop the target, but succeeds in burrowing into it for more than 2 rounds, it automatically hijacks the host body, while the host's mind is completely aware. Players under attack by a puppeteer may use their strength to try to throw the creature off. Creatures overtaken by the puppeteer parasite must be slain and the parasite extracted before they can be resurrected. However, there is an added 15% chance of failure when trying to revive a host body. Attempting to magically purge the parasite will kill the host. When not holding a body, they can move silently 75% of the time and can hide in their surroundings 60% of the time. Likewise, they can leap up to their land speed. While puppeting a body, a parasite can mimic various functions that the victim could do in life. If it is able to tap into enough of the victim's mind, it can attempt to replicate various abilities, including combat training. If the body puppet sustains enough damage, the puppeteer will burst from it, inducing shock and horror in victims who witness the display. (If using the Ravenloft campaign setting, appropriate saving throws would come into play.)

Puppeteer parasites exist within a collective hive mind. Their motivations are inherently alien to mortal races on the Prime Material, save for a desire to assimilate any knowledge they can gather from hosts. They are no mere data collectors, as their extended presence has led to subversion and breakdown of the social structures their hosts once belonged to. Intricate manipulation, seeding paranoia to play victims against each other, twisted games of intrigue to create widespread dysfunction and more all fit into their dark games. Due to strong observational skills and intelligence, they are capable of blending into their host's environment, as long as they can gauge local values, customs, and everyday life from various resources. Barring that, they are capable of grasping information from the host body

via several hours of deep meditation. The length of this semi-conscious state is determined by the host creature's intelligence. Creatures of ingenious intelligence may require 24 hours or more of meditation. The puppeteers are deeply narcissistic and have a superiority complex, thus it is hard to offer them anything they cannot obtain in other ways. Likewise, they view themselves as a superiorly adaptable life form, viewing all others as meat to borrow for various tasks. It is uncommon for the puppeteers to cooperate with other races, save for those they cannot assimilate and which could prove valuable in other ways. Many extraplanar creatures are oddly resistant to their attempts.

These creatures have no true ecology of their own. They are pests that risk draining a society of all its resources before collapsing it. And from there, they will seek out a new target to ruin. Their interest is more in what they can collect in the process, while keeping those around them none the wiser. Beyond their disturbing methods of skulking in the shadows and manipulating the masses around them, their means of creation is even far more distressing. Their kind was once well versed in a sort of biomanancy, fleshcrafting. After their ancient civilization fell, this knowledge faded. However, knowledge on how to create more of them persisted. When enough puppeteers gather together, they may sample biomass from various host bodies to build a new puppeteer. Following this, they may conduct a ritual that takes 8 - 24 hours which promptly brings new life to the creature. Despite the strangeness of this ritual, these creatures are not undead.

### ADDENDUM: THE DEMIPLANE OF DREAD

How such a horrid beast can claw its way into the lands of the Mists is largely unknown. The few scholars who have found Bluetspur and survived claim that the vile parasite has its roots here. However, since Bluetspur has vanished from the Core, those who postulated such things are declared mad and most of them have been confined to various mental treatment centers.

By strange circumstance, several of them emerged around the sunken nation of Ichthyos as the mists cleared. The community of Arveskov has been

devastated by these creatures as they moved from the Ichthyan Sea over to Belagora. They were brought over by the trade ship of Andrei Borkarvsky, while seeking to import Ichthyan fish to the Belagoran side of the sea.

It is said that within the ruins that surround the far reaches of Hazlan, these things lurk listlessly and eagerly await new hosts. They have been somehow entombed deep within forgotten temples and tombs. Others escaped into the Nightmare Lands prior to its removal from the Core.



# Ardaghy

BY IAN FORDAM

I came to the village of Ardaghy, determined to save it from invaders. I came armed only with my sling, knife, and fiddle, which was a shame, given what was due to happen shortly to my fiddle.

I grew up in Caorann at the edge of the forest. I am no stranger to the woods, but I had never ventured so far in before. My journey would have been days shorter if I had simply cut through the forest and trusted myself to happen upon the northernmost branch of the Greater Dorlach River, but the truth of the matter is that I didn't entirely trust myself. Ardaghy is not supposed to be far from the Phantasmal Forest, and I had no interest in stumbling into that trackless wood. So I went the long way, following the edge of the forest south from Caorann until I reached the Dorlach. From there I followed it first east and then north again. Apart from some blisters, for the most part it was a pleasant journey. Perhaps the Guardians' claim to have pacified the eastern forest has more merit than I have always suspected.

I did worry some that I would arrive too late. Then again, I reassured myself the Ardaghans had sent their messenger via the same roundabout route, so probably the danger was not yet severe. However, my worries were harder to dismiss the closer I drew to where Ardaghy was supposed to be. The trees grew taller; the canopy, thicker; and the birds fell quiet at moments which felt odd to me. I will admit that my nervousness was mounting when I came upon the first farm at the outskirts of the village. Keep in mind that I have traveled upon the midlands plains and seen many farms there. This Ardaghan farm felt small and crammed into the narrow space

which had been cleared among the trees. However, it was clearly well maintained, and I saw no signs of violence.

Even so, I was far more reassured when the farmer emerged from his house to welcome me. He introduced himself as Collum Moore and invited me to join his family for the midday meal. I got the impression that he had been expecting my arrival, although he did not directly say so. I accepted his invitation. Although I still had travel rations, I wanted to be friendly.

Collum Moore gave the impression of being a large man. In truth, he had only a medium frame but a muscular build. When he told me that he and his wife—gone six years now, may she rest in Belenus' radiance—had founded this farm, I could believe it. He looked like someone who could cut an entire farm from the forest. Also, his impression of burliness was enhanced by the mighty beard he had grown. Red-brown curls cascaded thickly from his jaw halfway down his chest. His beard was unkempt but clean.

"This is my son Brody," Collum said. "He's a clever boy. Can fix damn near anything. Keeps this place running better than I could on my own. And his sister, Kara. She's always been a blessing and a half, but she's been no end of help since her mother passed. She's got a way with the animals, and besides that she keeps me and the boy from growing too uncivilized."

The young man, Brody, smirked tolerantly at this assertion. He struck me as the sort of person who did just fine keeping himself civilized, but he wasn't



going to interrupt his father's patter. The least civilized thing about him was the stubble of several days upon his face, but I could see why he let it grow. He had a child's face, and the stubble provided much-needed evidence of maturity.

His sister had very similar features, but of course women are judged much more tolerantly for appearing innocent. Her eyes, though, were not as guileless as her face. She watched me carefully. Not quite suspiciously but something akin. I didn't know whether that meant she knew why I had come to Ardaghy.

\* \* \*

The Moores had started eating before my arrival, but Collum filled the time with idle commentary while I finished. When my stew bowl was empty and I had sopped the last of the broth with my final bite of bread, Collum remarked, "We don't get many visitors to Ardaghy. What brings you our way?"

Reflexively I lowered my voice, even though I highly doubted that any Guardians lurked within earshot. "I understand you have a laerti problem. I have come to help."

Collum nodded. Kara continued to watch me. Brody looked me up and down. I'm not any brawnier than he is, and I wasn't carrying any visible weapons more formidable than a sling and a knife. "How were you hoping to help?" he asked. His tone was entirely pleasant, but there was a challenge contained within.

I had a polite and uninformative reply ready. However, before I could make it, Collum said, "Brody, shush. Let him talk with Mayor Lorcan about that. Why don't I take him into town proper? You don't need my help to fix that goat fence. Kara, would you kindly clean our bowls?"

"Yes, Papa," Kara said, and, "Yes, Papa," Brody echoed.

I reslung my sack over my shoulder, and Collum led me out of the house. On the way out I glanced back and noticed both children still appraising me. Brody looked suspicious. Kara looked, well, much less young. I think that was the moment I first realized that she was actually a woman grown.

To be clear, Ardaghy is not a town but a village. Its heart is a stockaded area around the oldest and most important buildings, which include the mayor's house, the chapel of Belenus, the smithy, and the distillery. I can't imagine that you haven't heard of Ardaghan whiskey, but if you haven't, then you should have.

The gates to Ardaghy stood open, which surprised me some. Then again it was broad daylight, even with the surrounding trees casting plenty of shade over the village. I wondered if maybe the lizards never attacked during the day, which would certainly be convenient for getting necessary work done. On the other hand, a trio of young men and a single young woman were working on repairing the stockade. They were doing something with leather loops to pull individual logs more tightly together. Their efforts were overseen by an older man with an expression of patient resignation.

Clearly the overseer was aware of our presence. As we drew near, he remarked, "I need to remember that they will get better at this. They just need to struggle through it a few more times."

"Can't you just show them how it's done?"

"I haven't got the strength any more, Collum, and you know it. You should have brought your boy. He's good at these things."

"That's why he doesn't need the practice. Besides, he's fixing my goat fence."

"So I'd better not complain if I want any more of that cheese, then, eh? Very well. Who's this with you?"

"This is Donagh Tierney from Caorann. He's come to help us with out little situation. Donagh, this is Lorcan Tulley. He's the mayor of Ardaghy."

I recognized his name from the message requesting help. "A pleasure to make your acquaintance, Lord Mayor."

"Just 'Mayor' will do, or better yet, 'Lorcan'. I still get peat under my fingernails on a daily basis. Welcome to Ardaghy, Master Tierney."

"I won't deny you a courtesy that you've offered me. 'Donagh' will serve."

Collum cleared his throat. "Perhaps I am impertinent, but I must admit to being no less curious than my son. May I ask how you intend to aid us?"

I grinned and unslung the oiled leather sack from my back. He and his children had studied it when I first arrived at their farm, of course, but I hadn't revealed its contents. I reached for the thick laces which held the mouth closed.

"Well, Collum, let me show—"

And I throttled my words before anything more dangerous could pass my lips. A middle-aged woman had just emerged from the Chapel of Belenus. Not merely a woman, but a priestess, and given the village's size, there wouldn't be many priestesses serving there. Doubtless this was the Presiding Mother of Ardaghy, beelining straight for me and the heretical contents of my sack. I took minimal reassurance that neither Lorcan nor Collum appeared concerned as she drew near.

"Is this the Songbird?" she asked.

Correction was far, far too close to confession. "Um," I said.

Lorcan said, "Woodlark. Yes."

"Ah. Good. Welcome to Ardaghy. I am Mother Lara. I assume this is your instrument, then?"

Clearly I was caught. Perhaps honesty would encourage her toward lenience. "Yes. My fiddle."

"Wonderful. And you are?"

"Donagh Tierney of Caorann."

"May the blessings of Belenus warm your upturned face. The journey was not too arduous, I trust?"

"No," I said. And then, because I was at an utter loss for words which were not thoroughly banal, I added, "Not at all."

There was an awkward moment, broken by Mother Lara's sigh. "Donagh, child. You do not need to be afraid of me. Truly. I have served Ardaghy for nearly twenty years now. If the Guardians come to our village, the only question is how long it will take before they accuse me of some heresy. I will make no such accusations myself."

Lorcan's mouth twisted wryly. "The only other question is whether they accuse me before or after Mother Lara. Although we have ourselves a problem here, we don't want the Guardians of Morals involved. Which is why we sent a message to the Woodlarks, hoping that you actually existed. Collum, why don't you head home? We don't want you to hear anything further incriminating just in case you ever have to talk to the Guardians."

\* \* \*

Lorcan Tulley, Mother Lara, and I retired to the chapel to discuss the situation with more privacy. Having this discussion inside a Chapel of Belenus with the Presiding Mother in attendance made me highly uncomfortable. Please understand that I do, in fact, worship Belenus. I don't just perform the motions. I truly revere Him in my heart. However, I am also a Woodlark, one of the keepers of the original faith as it had been practiced before its corruption by the Knight-Protector.

"So, how does this work?" Lorcan asked, gesturing vaguely at the sack containing my fiddle. I still hadn't

revealed it. My earlier willingness to do so felt dangerously foolish.

I explained, "There is a ritual. From the days before the wars. Not so much a ritual. A *celebration*. Given the size of Ardaghy, from what I've seen, it will need to involve at least half the community. Singing and dancing. Yes. Both. And I will play my fiddle."

Both Lorcan and Mother Lara looked a little shaken.

Mother Lara admitted as much. "I had suspected that activities banned by the Edicts would be required. Even so, it is a shock to hear."

"Think of it as singing a hymn to Belenus. You're singing with your whole body, and I'll be singing with my instrument as well."

"Still. I don't suppose the singing is actually a hymn, is it?"

"No. Not one currently accepted as sacred, anyway. It used to be."

Mother Lara sighed. Lorcan used the opportunity to shift the subject slightly. "And this celebration? It will help defend us from the laerti?"

Here was where the thistle grew prickly. "It will hide everything inside the stockade from the eyes of evil. That's from the opening line of the song. *Oh Lord Belenus, Mighty Sun, blind the eyes of evil when they fall upon us*. And in my experience it works. It should hide you from these laerti and Banemaw and even the Knight-Protector herself." I drew a breath. "As long as you're inside the stockade."

Lorcan and Mother Lara just stared at me.

"I did not realize that so much of your village was outside of the walls," I stammered. "Even if everyone participates, I don't think we have the numbers to protect so much open territory. It helps to have boundaries. Even a low wall around the outskirts would have been enough. Would have helped, anyway."

The two Ardaghans exchanged glances.

"Is there nothing we can do?" Mother Lara asked. There was a sharpness to her voice. I suspect the same sharpness emerged when the children of the village misbehaved. I do know that I automatically straightened up when I heard it.

"Yes, there is. We can perform the ritual, and if the laerti attack again, the villagers can retreat inside the stockade."

I expected objections about the farms outside the stockade being left defenseless. Instead, Lorcan said, "Well, Donagh, that's the other snag in the stitchery. The laerti have never attacked the village. They've only attacked us when we're in the swamp."

"In... the swamp." Where the village had no claim upon which to hang the ritual.

"Yes. You see, we have trouble with the laerti once per generation. More or less. When their numbers grow large enough, they become aggressive. They start to attack us. If we don't do anything to deter them, they attack us more and more often until they threaten to destroy the village."

"And that's when you have to call in the Guardians."

"That's when we have to call in the Guardians," Mother Lara confirmed. "The Guardians cut down the laerti... but when they're done, they scour the village for heresy."

"We would rather not have to deal with the Guardians," Lorcan said. "Their view of heresy is uncomfortably broad. So, when the laerti first attacked our people, we decided to pursue alternative approaches while we still had time."

"Which is why we contacted you."

I said, "I see. Listen. I still believe we should perform the ritual, assuming you think that at least half of the village would be willing. Make no mistake. The Guardians of Morals would consider this heresy, and few people may be willing to commit it. We should be prepared for the possibility."



Mother Lara snorted. She murmured to Lorcan, "Can you see Mila Heyne dancing?"

Without humor, he replied, "No. I cannot."

At least Lorcan recognized the gravity of my proposal. Those who refused to join might call the rest of us out to the Guardians. If they did, I could flee into the woods. Everyone who lived in the village, however? Undoubtedly they could not, or if they tried, many of them would not survive.

Lorcan asked, "How long will the ritual last?"

"Until the change of seasons. So, until midsummer. And I can always renew the ritual after that. In fact, if we perform it at the change of seasons, the effect should be even stronger, especially if you can have boundary stones in place at the time. That's not a wall, but it should still help."

"Is there any reason that we shouldn't perform the ritual before midsummer, and then perform it again then? Or would it be better to wait?"

"Well, it *is* considered heresy. Every performance is a risk."

"But beyond that? If there isn't any reason to avoid performing the ritual, then, well, Lara, let's talk to the people who we believe will be discreet. See if we can't convince half the town to cooperate in this crazy scheme."

\* \* \*

Ardaghy was too small to support an inn. Lorcan sent me back to the Moore farmstead to request a place to spend the night. As incentive I carried the promise of reimbursement, but I'm not convinced that was necessary. Like most people I've met, Collum Moore took the duties of a host seriously. Without complaint he fed me again and sent Brody to tidy up the loft in the barn for me. Winter had long departed, so I had no objection to sleeping so far from a fire. Straw and blankets would keep me warm enough.

For a brief moment I was left standing outside while I waited for Brody to ready the loft. I thought Collum and Kara were both inside the farmhouse, until I turned and discovered that she was not. She stood on the front porch, leaning against one of the pillars with her arms crossed. She wore a white apron over her cream-colored dress. The apron was stained with something she had spilled. Unlike most women, she was not wearing a bonnet. She was, however, studying me again. I tried not to return the favor. Once I had realized that she was older than she first appeared, I had been unable to stop myself from noticing the attractive scatter of freckles across her cheeks.

For her part, I don't know that she observed anything that she particularly liked. When she saw me notice her, she grunted softly and then frowned.

"I don't know what to think of you," she announced, and then she turned to reenter the house.

\* \* \*

I had very little to do the next day while Lorcan and Mother Lara made their rounds among the villagers, trying to talk them into our plan. I wandered around the stockade, but the heart of Ardaghy is only so large. I then wandered around the forest nearby. I stumbled across three farms, cut from the forest like Collum's had been. They were farther from the river, but there was no need for irrigation. Because the ground to the north of Ardaghy grew boggy, there was water aplenty. I nearly lost a boot. I did end up with two boots full of muck. I was glad that I had left my fiddle in the loft of Moore's barn, hidden beneath a bale of hay. I was even more glad that I had not tried to cut through the eastern wood to reach Ardaghy. Even if I'd missed the Phantasmal Forest, I would have gotten caught in the muck.

The first two farmers were clearly suspicious of me, and I did not linger long. The third, however, called me over.

"Are you the outsider I've heard about?" he asked.

"I'm not an outsider," I replied. "I come from Caorann."

The farmer shrugged and grinned. "From where we stand, that's still outside."

He did not say anything about my mission, but clearly Lorcan or Mother Lara had spoken with him. He did not bother asking any further questions before he sent me on his way.

Fortunately the Moores owned a tin tub, so I was able to take a bath. Brody and Kara sat on the front porch while I did so. I could not hear anything they said, but I could hear them laughing. I got the impression that Brody was chaperoning his sister, making certain she did not pester the stranger in the bath tub. I was grateful for that, because taking advantage of your host's daughter is not the best way to repay his hospitality.

The bath went quickly. Scrubbing my boots took longer, and then I had to set them out by the hearth to dry. Kara came in to make supper, and she laughed at my poor sodden boots.

"Drying's going to take a while," she told me. "Hope you don't mind wandering barefoot."

"I don't mind," I told her, and fortunately I was not lying.

We ate supper. We went to the chapel. We got back to the farmhouse after dark. The dark, looming trees unsettled me, but I wasn't used to them. However, Collum and his children carried themselves alertly, so I didn't feel badly about my nervousness. We all knew there were laerti around somewhere, and we weren't going to assume they hadn't left the bog.

When I climbed into the loft, I pulled out my fiddle and tuned it. I wanted to play, but that felt like too great a risk. I put it away again and went to sleep.

\* \* \*

I woke up an hour or two before dawn. You learn to do that when you follow the original path of Belenus. Or when you live on a farm, either way.

By the time I clambered down from the loft, Kara Moore had prepared breakfast for us all, porridge with berries. The porridge was pleasantly filling, and the berries were a type I had never encountered before. Kara called them *fraughans*, and she gave me an extra spoonful after I praised their taste.

Collum and Brody had already performed many of the farm chores which needed to be done early in the day, and so after breakfast we walked to the stockade. We knew we would arrive before dawn, so there was no need to hurry.

I was relieved to see that a significant number of villagers had already gathered inside the stockade. Neither Lorcan nor Mother Lara had reassured me that they had spoken with most of the villagers, at least those whom they suspected would support their gambit. However, even if they had, that was no guarantee of how many would actually risk performing heresy in front of their neighbors.

Mother Lara spotted me. She approached with a mug of tea, still steaming in the pre-dawn air. "May the rays of blessed Belenus fall upon your face," she greeted. "Tea?"

"No, thank you. I need my hands free." I set my sack gently to the ground and knelt to start unlacing it.

"Do we have enough people?"

"We have enough to try. If the magic fails to take hold, then we'll know that we did not. The efficacy of the ritual depends upon how many people are present and how tightly knit the community is."

"We are a small community," Mother Lara said. "We all know each other well." She seemed to be trying to convince herself more than me.

"Then success is likely. As I said, we certainly have enough to try." As I spoke, another family arrived through the front gates. They had brought their

three children with them. That was good. The enthusiasm of children seems to help the magic gain strength.

While the stockade walls and the surrounding trees blocked all view of the horizon, I could tell that dawn had nearly arrived. I withdrew my fiddle and bow. I stood straight, and I lifted the fiddle and bow for all to see. The crowd, which had not been loud to begin with, fell silent.

“Form a circle around me,” I said. “I will sing. Please sing along. You do not need to sing loudly or well. Just, please sing. Dance as I dance or else as the spirit moves you. This is a sacred rite. Sing and dance with joy and with faith.”

I looked around at the crowd, which had started to awkwardly shuffle into a circle. As I made eye contact, enough people nodded at me that I felt reassured. They would do as I asked, and then it would be easier for others to follow them.

I held the fiddle to my chin, and I raised the bow to the strings.

Five Guardians of Morals walked through the gate.

\* \* \*

Well. I had been caught red-handed, holding a heretical instrument. If I was really unlucky, then the Guardians had heard my exhortation to dance. If so, then there was no saving me, and I didn’t hold much hope for any of the villagers either. However, if that was the case then there was also no stopping it, and so best to proceed as if it were not. Time for the most foolhardy bluff of my life.

I started to play.

The Guardians did not raise their weapons.

I started to sing.

*Oh Lord Belenus, Mighty Sun, give strength to the arms of those who war against evil.*

You know the hymn. It’s one of the Knight-Protector’s favorites. It’s martial enough to be part of the canon.

Fortunately for me, the people of Ardaghy also knew the hymn. Mother Lara joined in immediately. Other villagers joined her. Others did not.

We were all very careful not to dance or even sway, although I will admit my legs felt terribly unsteady.

As I have said, the dawnlight was blocked by the stockade walls. Even so, I could see that the leader of the Guardians smirked. Although she was a woman marching into middle age, she was almost completely unlike Mother Lara. Whereas the priestess was soft with the ease of someone whose flock kept her fed and housed, the Guardian had been hardened by her years of wearing heavy armor and wielding a heavy sword. I knew who she was, of course. We Woodlarks make a point of knowing our foes. She was Zofia Malone. She was not reputed to be lenient.

Her smirk was terrifying. My voice snagged mid-note, but fortunately I am a better fiddler than a singer. I kept playing, making the notes as bold as I could. I had been to Srath once when a platoon of Guardians had performed an intricate march, ostensibly to entertain the Srathans, truthfully to intimidate them. How was that march not dancing?

Not the question to ask. Not now. Not ever.

*—and raise your bright banner high!*

Much to my surprise I realized that I had reached the end of the hymn when I was already halfway through the final line. I listened to myself and half the village belt out the second half, and then we were done. I saluted toward the sun, just as if my bow were a saber.

Silence settled over the village. We were all waiting to learn our fate.

Zofia Malone did not force us to wait long. She laughed mirthlessly. “That was sweetly played,” she



declared. At the moment I was certain that I would end of my life tongueless yet screaming in the Knight-Protector's dungeons. She launched in my direction, moving not quickly but implacably. At a gesture her lieutenant followed. He was a blond-haired, muscular young man who could have been any of a number of the Guardians.

She drew to a halt in front of me. "You are fortunate indeed that I witnessed you singing a hymn. Unfortunately you are not a priestess. You should not be leading worship, and you certainly should not be playing a *fiddle*." She spat out that last word. She held out her hand.

Reluctantly I handed her my fiddle.

She gestured again, and her lieutenant took hold of my bow.

I wonder if she expected me to charge her or struggle to stop her or else try to flee. If so, I disappointed her. I merely watched.

She smashed my fiddle against the ground. Her lieutenant bent my bow against the ground until it snapped.

\* \* \*

My fiddle was priceless. Not many people build or repair musical instruments now that the Knight-Protector has declared them heretical. I had inherited mine from my grandfather, and it shattered my heart to see the ruins of the instrument that had been his.

Zofia Malone called out to the assembled villagers, "Which one of you is Mila Heyne?"

Nobody answered.

"Not here? Good. I am heartened to learn that one among you has not been drawn into heresy. You. Kian. Run home and fetch your mother."

She spoke this last to a sandy-haired young man who had arrived with the five Guardians. He nodded and turned to run out the front gate.

Zofia Malone returned her attention to the rest of the villagers. "I understand you have a lizard problem."

I must acknowledge Mother Lara's courage. Officially the Guardians answer to the Church, but it doesn't work that way in practice. Nonetheless Mother Lara stepped up to Zofia and her lieutenant, and she declared, "Yes. We do. The laerti have begun attacking us again."

Zofia Malone nodded. This was the answer she had expected. "If I recall the records correctly, it has been sixteen years or so since the last laerti incursion. The survivors have had plenty of time to spawn."

"You will help us, then?"

"No," Zofia Malone said.

The gathered villagers had not dared to speak, not even to talk quietly among themselves, but even so they went suddenly still.

"Not until all of you present have atoned for this morning's heresy," she continued, sweeping her steely gaze around the village. It came to rest upon me. "You especially."

\* \* \*

I had never been flogged before. Yes, I had been beaten by my father upon occasion, including once when I really, truly, emphatically deserved it. However, there is a gross difference between being struck by someone who wants you to learn and someone who wants you to hurt.

The young lieutenant did the honors, and he took evident pleasure in doing so. Zofia Malone stood by, alternately staring at my suffering and staring into the sky. She took no apparent satisfaction, but showed no hint of regret. I became convinced that

she stared at the sky for a sign from Belenus that her mercilessness had finally earned his approval. However, that might have been nothing more than a delusion spurred by the pain.

Lorcan Tulley was whipped next, and then Mother Lara. After that, the Ardaghans were dismissed. The point had been made.

Enough about that.

The Moores claimed that I was a distant cousin visiting from a not-too-nearby village who had gotten himself into a spot of trouble at home. I don't know that the Guardians believed this claim, but they let it pass. Collum and Brody supported me between them as we walked back to their farm. Kara ran ahead. When the rest of us reached the farmhouse, she had already prepared Brody's bed with fresh cloths for me. I was grateful for their consideration. I could not have climbed into the barn loft safely.

I spent some time partially conscious at best. I know that another one of the Woodlarks could have sung a song of healing for me, but I had not mastered that chanson. Not that I had the focus to sing it properly regardless. I would just have to heal the old-fashioned way.

I spent much of the day half-conscious from the pain. I drifted in and out of sleep, and it mattered very little which side of that line I happened to stand at any given moment. At one point I realized that Brody and Kara were arguing. I concluded that Brody found it inappropriate for Kara to be left alone with me, even as helpless as I was.

Apparently Brody won the argument, because he crouched on the floor beside the bed where I lay. He said, "I'm going to put some salve on those wounds. I will try to be gentle, but there will probably be pain."

There was indeed pain, stinging pain, but even without his announcement I could tell he strove to spare me the worst of it. Besides, the stinging was

followed by numbness, and after that I could sleep more soundly.

I awakened mid-morning the next day. Collum was on the far side of the room, sharpening tools with a whetstone. At first I thought he wasn't paying any attention to me, but then without looking my way he asked, "Feeling any better?"

"Yes. Magic salve?"

"Mother Lara had some sent over. Just to warn you, though, I'm not sure there is any more where that came from."

"Hope she saved some for herself. And Mayor Lorcan."

"I'm sure she did. You're sturdier than them, even if it doesn't feel so at the moment."

Maybe the salve still worked its wonders. Even if not, I still slept more easily than I had. Through most of the day, in fact.

Kara fed me soup for dinner. I asked her about my fiddle.

"We wanted to bring the pieces back. So you could... give them a burial. Or something. But the Guardians seem to be watching them, so we didn't dare. As far as I know, they're still in the middle of the village."

"Oh. I suppose that doesn't matter. It's already broken anyway."

That said, the thought of my shattered fiddle nagged at me, both awake and dreaming. The next day Collum helped me to the heart of the village. I needed less help than we pretended, but Collum and I agreed that we did not want the Guardians to notice my salve-enhanced healing and decide to re-punish me. The first thing I noticed as we approached the stockade were the two Guardians patrolling the parapets. The second thing I noticed was that there were fewer people within the stockade than there had been when I first came to Ardaghy, even though there was just as much activity on the outskirts.

I remarked upon the Guardians to Collum.

"Mm hm," he grunted. "Two upon the walls at all times, day and night. Three when their captain is up there with them."

"Makes it easier to know where they are."

"Mm hm," Collum agreed.

"Has anybody bothered mentioning to them that the laerti haven't attacked the stockade yet?"

"Don't believe so."

As Kara had said, the pieces of my fiddle still littered the ground at the center of the stockade. The few Ardaghans nearby gave them a wide berth. Collum directed me to them, but then kept a respectful distance. I stared disconsolately at the ruins of my grandfather's heirloom.

Zofia Malone's approach was quiet but not entirely silent. Besides, I was expecting her, so I did not startle when she drew to a stop beside me.

She said, "You should be relieved to be free of that temptation."

"I should be," I agreed.

"You don't seem eager to convince me that you are penitent." She sounded vaguely, if bitterly, amused.

"I have heard that some Guardians can detect lies. I feel I will do better earning your trust with the truth."

"You do possess some wisdom, at least." She pointed to the fiddle. "That, however, was monstrously foolish. What if you had drawn the attention of Banemaw with your heresy?"

I had grave doubts that the dreaded dragon of the Theospine mountains would fly halfway across the land just because I had played my fiddle. While I could believe that Banemaw was drawn to evil, Zofia Malone and I disagreed on what was evil.

"I... have no answer to that."

"You should. Think hard on it. Very hard. You endangered the village, and the mayor and the Presiding Mother—who should both have known better—allowed you to do so. That's why I had you all flogged. I could have dragged you back to Touraine instead, you know."

"I know."

"Fortunately for you, the Knight-Protector grants me some leeway in judging the punishment for heresy. You do not seem malicious, boy. Merely dangerous in your foolishness." By way of emphasis Zofia Malone gestured to the fiddle pieces.

I asked, "May I take the remnants?"

"You'll never fix that fiddle."

"I know. I just want to give it a proper burning."

She eyed me dubiously. "That sounds suspiciously close to being pagan."

"What if I ask Mother Lara if I can use the sacred fire?"

"That—that would be acceptable."

I come from Caorann, which is one of half a dozen communities in the province large enough to be called a town. It is also large enough that the Knight-Protector and her Guardians visit regularly, part of their vigilance to rid the province of heresy. Therefore I have seen first-hand that some Guardians are perfectly happy to conjure an accusation from empty air. Fortunately Zofia Malone did not appear to be one of them.

Inside the circular building of the chapel I found Mother Lara. Formally, I asked whether I could use the sacred fire to burn my fiddle. She agreed. With Zofia Malone present we dared not say anything more to each other than that.

Shortly afterward I fed my grandfather's fiddle to the flames, and that was worse than being flogged.



On the way back to the Moore farmstead, Collum said to me, "Well. Now that's taken care of, I assume you'll be heading home, then?"

I shook my head. "I am here to help with your laerti problem, and I haven't done so yet. I need to address that, even if only to bring a meaningful report back to the senior Woodlarks who assigned me this task."

Collum harrumphed. "You're a brave man."

"I've been told I'm a fool often enough that I'm starting to believe it."

"Well. We are grateful for your brand of foolishness."

Speaking of foolishness: As we drew near to the Moore farmstead, we saw that neither Kara nor Brody were performing the daily work of the farm. Instead, they were on the front porch of the house, conversing with the blond-haired Guardian who had flogged me. You can learn a lot from simply watching how people hold their bodies when they talk, and you can learn even more if you can hear the tone of their voices, even if you can't hear the words. Especially when there is laughter.

The Guardian was being charming.

The Moore children were eating it up like fraughans and sweet cream. As when I was laid out, I got the impression that Brody was struggling to play chaperone and that Kara was struggling to evade him.

In retrospect I find it reassuring that Collum and I each reached out a hand to restrain the other at the exact same moment.

"They're pretending," I whispered. "Of course they're pretending."

"Wouldn't do to offend a Guardian," Collum replied.

Even so, I could not shake the image of Kara *willingly* drawing the Guardian to her. While she was more than pretty enough and pleasant enough for me to contemplate a dalliance, I won't pretend to any emotional attachment to her. I don't even think that

I was outraged because this pretty, pleasant young woman gave the impression of being more attracted to this Guardian than to me, although I probably do suffer from excessive pride when it comes to my appeal to women. No, what outraged me was the notion that this otherwise *sensible* young woman might be attracted to the bastard who had flogged me, even after she had helped to patch me back up.

"Maybe we'd best take a moment to calm ourselves," Collum muttered, and I got the impression he was talking as much to himself as to me.

We made our way to the front porch, me leaning on Collum more than I actually needed to. The guilty look that Brody slung me gave evidence that he, at least, understood why I might be angry to find him chattering with the enemy. Kara gave no such look but instead said, "Oh! Papa! I'd like you to meet Youen Quaid."

Youen Quaid grinned and held out his forearm to Collum just as if he didn't possess the authority to have us either imprisoned or killed.

Collum clasped his forearm. "A pleasure, my lord," he said, because he had no desire to be either imprisoned or killed. "Collum Moore."

"I'm no lord," Quaid said with insincere modesty. That was true, but only the most reckless person addresses a Guardian of Morals otherwise. "And who's this?"

"Donagh Tierney," I said. Quaid offered his forearm to me, and like Collum, I accepted. He recognized me, of course. He leaned in and said, "Sorry about the flogging, Donny. No offense meant."

"I understand why you did it," I said.

"Well. Always a pleasure talking with god-fearing citizens. And with you too, Donny. Brody, keep an eye out on this one. He'll be no end of trouble if you let him, but I'm certain you can keep him on the straight and narrow."

"Of course, my lord."

"Youen. Call me Youen. But I'd best be moving on. Heresy can hide in the shadows nearest the brightness, and it is my sacred task to root it out. Good day."

We chorused our farewells back at him, and he turned to leave.

He paused long enough to cast a glance over his shoulder at the Moore children. His face was so expressionless that I knew it was a mask.

Then he shifted his gaze to me.

"Straight and narrow," he threatened. "Straight and narrow."

\* \* \*

Collum Moore pulled his children indoors to lecture them, presumably about either failing to do their work or the dangers of letting a Guardian see too much. I sat in the shade of the front porch and contemplated the curiosities of Belenus' beneficence. Sunlight is holy, of course, but sometimes a bit of shade is downright pleasant.

While I waited, I spotted one of the neighbors running along the riverpath toward the farm. He spotted me on the porch and held up a hand in greeting. Although he was sharply out of breath when he reached the porch, he managed to gasp, "Is Collum home? It's happened again."

"What has happened?"

"The laerti attacked. They killed Carson Dugan."

"Where? Outside the stockade, I assume."

"Yes. In the peat bog."

That's how I found myself in the peat bog three hours later.

\* \* \*

First a group of us met at another farmhouse, far from the stockade. A dozen villagers were present, mostly comprised of the village elders. Not present was Mila Heyne, the elder who had summoned the Guardians at the same time that the others had called upon the Woodlarks. Also not present were Mayor Tulley and Mother Lara, whom the elders deemed too visible to attend this particular gathering.

"Are you certain I should be here?" I asked.

One of the elders—I never did learn her name—narrowed her eyes at me. "You came here to protect us from the laerti, yes? Then protect us from the laerti."

"I did, and I intend to."

Three Ardaghans—Ethan and Zoe Hanrahan and her father, the aforementioned Carson Dugan—had gone to the bog to cut peat. Apparently peat is an essential part of what gives flavor to their whiskey, which sounds dubious to me, but what do I know? I'm a Woodlark, not a distiller. Regardless. They had gone to cut peat, and they had been attacked by two laerti. Fortunately the peat-cutters came prepared with farming implements which could serve equally well as weapons: a pitchfork, a threshing flail, and an ordinary (but very solid) club. Unfortunately, none of the Ardaghans were as well versed in their weaponry as the laerti were in their teeth and claws. Although they managed to drive off their attackers, Carson Dugan was mortally wounded. They dragged him back to the village on their peat-sledge. He died along the way.

Zoe Hanrahan and her husband Ethan were two of the non-elders present. Ethan had married into the Dugan family, and he clearly felt that his role was to shut up except when needed to agree with his wife. Zoe, on the other hand, had been born into a family of distillers. Not only had she just lost her father, but her family's traditional livelihood was endangered. She practically trembled where she stood, not out of weakness, but from the struggle to restrain her fury.

"We need to track these laerti to their lair and slaughter them all," she hissed.

Someone else pointed out, "We don't even know how many laerti there are. For all we know, they outnumber us twenty to one."

So vast a difference seemed unlikely, but the point was valid.

"That's why the Guardians are here, isn't it?" a third person said. He mumbled, as if hesitant to speak an unpopular opinion out loud. "They've got the swords and the protection of Belenus. What does this songbird have to offer except a broken fiddle?"

I was encouraged to see a number of people bristle at that. They knew that my fiddle had been irreplaceable and lost in my attempt to aid their village.

"I am a fair tracker," I offered. "Take me to the place where you were attacked, and I will attempt to follow the trail back to the laerti den. Once I have seen how many there are, you can make a more informed decision."

There followed some discussion about whether an outsider should be shown the Dugans' secret peat bog, but it was pointed out to Zoe Hanrahan that her family's secret peat bog wasn't really all that secret. Reluctantly, she acquiesced to the idea of showing me to the place where her father died.

Ethan Hanrahan decided it was time to speak up. "I'll show him," he said. "You should tend to your father. He needs to be properly prepared for burial."

Zoe started to bristle.

"Perhaps you both should come?" I suggested quickly. "Strength in numbers. Four of us would be even better." I still had a few tricks available to me, and my best one required myself and three others.

Zoe inhaled, gearing up to argue further, but Ethan gave her a sideways glance which was somehow

both stern and gentle. "How about Brody and Kara?" he asked. "If Collum can spare them for the day?"

I realized that I had been deceived by the aging effects of the Hanrahans' grief and the youthful appearance of the Moores. They were close enough in age to be friends. I knew that if Zoe was willing—and Collum, for that matter—then I would be delighted to have their company.

"They have helped in the distillery before," Zoe acknowledged. It may have been irrelevant, but it was enough for Zoe to convince herself.

Clearly Collum was concerned for his children, but he also agreed.

"You will do your best to keep them from harm?" he asked me, quietly.

"Of course," I promised him.

\* \* \*

In the end Zoe refused to be displaced by her husband. I worried that she would be too eager for some form of revenge, but it was obvious that she would not be talked out of showing the way. Her husband seemed to agree with me, but in the end he agreed (if reluctantly) to stay behind.

All four of us carried sharpened farming implements. I had borrowed a pair of Brody's boots, which were slightly too small but nonetheless more waterproof than mine.

When the solid ground transitioned to less-solid ground, I called for a brief halt. "Something you should know," I said. "If I call for you to claim something, please do so. Find a tree or a rock. The larger, the better, but it has to be something concrete and near at hand. Also importantly, what you claim should form a triangle with me at the center. Do you understand what I mean by that?"

"Yes," Brody replied. "But why?" He was not doubting me; he was curious.



"Because we want to declare a community. A community of four of us. It does not have to be large, but it must be properly bounded."

Not long afterward we reached the Dugans' secret peat bog. To me, it did not look any different from the bog we had trudged through to get there, but Zoe reassured me that it was. Something to do with a particular wildflower which grows only in that area. (I don't know. I'm just a Woodlark, not a distiller.)

Immediately I started looking for traces of the laerti. In a way, it was easy. Carson Dugan's blood had not yet been washed from a particular pair of slender trees. Zoe crouched down at the place where her father had received his mortal wound, and she closed her eyes. For the first time, her anger seemed to recede, but I knew that it equally likely had gone deeper without lessening.

The area close to the bloodied trees was useless to me, all churned by combat and its aftermath, so I started searching in a circle some ten feet around. I had thought that the muddy ground would hold tracks well, but I had not accounted for the ground water, which obscured (if not obliterated) most of the traces I was seeking. I am, in fact, a fair tracker in my familiar forest, but I grew increasingly concerned that I would have to admit defeat here. In addition to the complication of the ground water, the vegetation was widely dispersed, making it easier to move between without disturbing. Belatedly I realized that of course the laerti would be adept at moving stealthily through their home territory.

I had asked the Moores to stand guard. Kara did so, holding her spear at the ready and scanning the area attentively. Brody did not, but instead busied himself with inspecting the bog inside of the circle that I had defined for myself to search.

"Zoe, what is this?" he asked.

I turned to see him holding up something that looked like a deflated bladder, dripping with bog water.

Zoe lifted her head and squinted at the bladder. "I don't know."

"Have you seen such things before?"

"Yes. When cutting peat."

"Any chance that it's the skin of a laerti egg?"

Kara cried a warning.

\* \* \*

At the time I assumed Kara was warning us about the laerti, because the laerti emerged at the same moment. You have probably never seen a laerti, but suffice to say that they are lizard people, armed with teeth and protected by scales. Yet they were not mere beasts. They wore jewelry constructed from bones and beads.

"Stake claims!" I cried.

Zoe grasped one of the trees immediately in front of her. "I claim this tree!"

Brody reached for the nearest solid piece of landscape at hand. "I claim this root!"

Kara exclaimed, "I claim this bog." She might have doomed us thereby except that the Dugans had, in fact, laid claim to their secret peat bog.

I started to sing. *Oh Lord Belenus, Mighty Sun, blind the eyes of evil when they fall upon us.* As I finished the first line of the hymn, I felt the chanson settle upon the area which we had claimed. It was an oddly shaped area, in part because of the vagueness of Kara's claim, in part because I wasn't actually in the center of the three anchors. I lurched closer to the center, and the chanson settled more firmly around us.

I closed my eyes and focused upon the hymn. Its magic was still fragile until I finished the third verse, and I could not afford any distractions, particularly of the toothy, scaly sort. I deliberately ignored the

splashing and hissing and even a very human cry of pain.

I finished the third verse. I started the first verse again, because the spell last longer and stronger with repetition. Even so, I opened my eyes, and it was good thing that I had waited until I had finished the third verse, because I faltered.

Youen Quaid stood in the center of the triangle defined by Kara, Zoe, and Brody. His sword was drawn, and he moved toward the laerti who surrounded us.

“Don’t!” I cried.

Youen twisted his head to glare at me.

“You’ll break the spell!” I explained.

“I must aid my companion!” Youen Quaid snarled, pointing to one of the other Guardians of Morals. His companion was outside the defined sanctuary, and the laerti dismembered him even as Youen and I shouted at each other.

“He’s beyond help,” I whispered. “Please don’t break the spell.”

The Knight-Protector herself demonstrates the favor of Belenus through certain martial gifts. Rumors—ones which I happen to believe—insist that some of her closest knights, the Most Moral, do as well. Perhaps Zofia Malone has ascended high enough to share those gifts, but I doubt that Youen Quaid has done so. He evaluated the odds of fighting off the four—no, five—laerti who surrounded us, even with the aid of a quartet of poorly-armed villagers. He decided not to violate the sanctuary.

I resumed singing, repeating all three verses of the chanson. I dared not close my eyes. I watched Youen and my companions watching the final grisly moments of the other Guardian, and then I watched them watch the five laerti circling the peat bog, looking for us, thus far unsuccessfully.

When I paused my singing for a moment, Youen demanded, “What in the darkest pits of Donn are you singing?”

“A hymn to Belenus,” I replied coldly. I will confess my bitterness that my chanson had saved the man who had flogged me.

“No hymn that I know,” he growled.

“Doubtless that is true. It is a hymn nonetheless, and it would have no effect if I did not believe in the might of the Radiant Lord.”

He did not reply to that, so I sang the three verses again. Three verses thrice-sung were as strong as I could make the ward, given that I performed with voice alone.

When I fell silent again, Brody said to Youen, “Please don’t kill us.”

Youen turned his attention to Brody, but his expression softened from the glower he had focused upon me.

“Lady Zofia will judge,” he said.

The five laerti continued to circle the warded area. They made growls and gawps which sounded alternately angry and sad. They reminded me of Zoe.

I suggested, “Brody, why don’t you tell Sir Youen what you found?”

“Laerti eggs,” he said. He held up the skin. “The laerti haven’t been attacking us just to attack us, I think. They’ve been attacking us to defend their nest.”

“They know we’re here somewhere,” Kara said. “They aren’t going away. What should we do?”

“How long does your spell last?” Youen asked me.

“Perhaps an hour. Unless someone walks outside the boundary.”

“So I could kill the lizards from here?”

"Well, no. If you attack, that breaks the ward for all of us."

"Then the rest of you had better prepare to defend yourselves. If we wait until two of them circle close together, I can kill one of them immediately and another very shortly thereafter. But that means you all have to keep yourselves from dying until I can get to the next one."

Kara asked, "Is there any way we could, say, *not* kill them?" When Youen and Zoe turned angry faces toward her, she amended, "If they really are just defending their eggs... well, you can understand that, can't you?"

"What if we just run?" Brody asked.

Reluctantly Zoe admitted, "They didn't chase us when we ran off the first time."

Youen snorted. "And what about all of the other times?"

"What other times? There was the first time, and then there was this morning. This morning they hurt Papa before we had a chance to run."

Youen grunted. "Hurt them first. That's a grand idea. Are you lot ready?"

"No, don't—"

Youen had not overestimated himself, or at least not much. He killed the nearest laerti with a single strike, and moments later he gravely wounded a second laerti within reach. Fortunately Kara had not released her spear. She thrust it into the shoulder of the nearest laerti, and when it lunged for her, the spear kept it a terrifying but safe distance away. Zoe pulled her pitchfork from the hillock where she had set it, and she positioned it in time for a fourth laerti to decide not to hurl itself upon the tines. I still held the hand axe which I had borrowed, but I stood in the center of the formerly-warded area. That meant I wasn't in a good position to aid Brody against the fifth laerti. His flail glanced off of the armor of its scales, and it slashed at him with its foreclaws.

Youen hurled himself in between Brody and the laerti. Given the partially-submerged terrain it was a clumsy advance, and it ended with Youen tripping forward onto his knees. However, it was still enough to knock the laerti backwards. With his longsword held out to keep the laerti at bay, Youen dragged himself back to his feet.

"Run!" Brody shouted. "Get out of here!"

I'm not sure whether he meant us or the laerti, but both factions scattered. I saw both Zoe and Kara's opponents wheel away. Zoe and Kara and I bolted immediately. Brody and Youen followed.

"Go, go!" Brody called. "We're coming!"

I don't know how long we ran—not long, and we certainly weren't back to fully solid ground yet—before Kara paused. It was all the excuse that I needed, so I paused too.

"Brody," Kara whispered. "We've run too fast."

She turned back, and I followed, but we didn't have to go far before we caught a glimpse of Brody and Youen. They clearly thought we were far ahead.

Brody looked up at Youen with that innocent face. "Thank you," he said.

Earlier I had mistaken Brody as playing chaperone for Kara. In that moment I realized that I had gotten the situation backwards.

Youen took Brody's face in his hands and leaned forward to kiss him soundly. Brody did nothing to lean away. In fact, he placed his hands over Youen's.

Kara stifled something that was caught between a gasp and a chuckle.

It was a very long kiss.

"We should leave," I said as softly as I possibly could.

She nodded, but it was already too late. Youen had just released Brody, who stepped back and smiled at him. I had just a moment to notice Brody's torn



cheek and the happiness upon his face before he spotted us out of the corner of his eye.

"Oh," he said, very softly.

Youen wheeled, his expression growing angry. He sputtered something violently incoherent.

I held up my hands in a gesture of peace. I had completely forgotten the hand axe which I still clutched, but I think my intention was clear.

"Perhaps we can make a bargain?" I proposed. "If you don't tell Lady Zofia about my hymn, we won't tell her about your own indiscretion?"

Youen gaped for a moment while various emotions fought over his face.

"But it's a Heresy Against the Family," he said. It came out as a confession.

I shrugged. "So I've heard, but really that doesn't matter to me."

\* \* \*

By that agreement I escaped another flogging and possible imprisonment. Youen escaped being expelled from the Guardians of Morals. As much as I would have liked Youen to endure what I had, I could not risk Brody suffering the same punishment. In addition, Kara thanked me for protecting her brother. Several times. Collum must have realized, but fortunately he seemed to tolerate his daughter's decision.

Given the tale that we had told the Guardians, I did not dare leave Ardagh before the Guardians did. They stayed another five days while everybody in the village debated whether to attempt to slaughter all of the laerti or to find a way to make peace with them. Zoe Hanrahan and most of the surviving Guardians favored the path of slaughter, but Zofia Malone was more cautious. Perhaps she noted that we had not yet discovered how many laerti belonged to the tribe.

The morning of the day before the Guardians left, a messenger arrived at the Moore farmstead, bearing a request from Mother Lara that I visit the chapel. Of course I went to the heart of the village, only to discover Mother Lara waiting for me at the stockade gate.

"She's waiting for you inside," she said.

No candles were lit. The only light source inside the chapel was the sacred fire, and even that burned low. However, sunlight falling through the glass windows—even in Ardagh, there were glass windows—kept the chapel pleasantly shady rather than uncomfortably dark.

Zofia Malone knelt before the sacred fire. As I approached, she turned her face upward to look at me. Sunlight from one of the windows fell across her face, and I could see the creases of age. She was no less intimidating for that.

"We leave tomorrow," she told me. "I shall return with reinforcements."

I nodded.

She said, "I should drag you back to Touraine, you know. I do not know what you are doing here, but I'm certain that Lady Elena's torturers could convince you to tell them. Yet Youen insists that you are harmless. He says I should leave you be."

"Selfishly, I hope you heed his wisdom."

"I trust you will be gone from Ardagh when I return."

"Then I shall."

"I should imprison you. Or even kill you. Yet instead I show mercy. Mercy! Leave. Now. Before I rectify my mistake."

\* \* \*

When Brody learned that the Guardians were leaving, he was both relieved and heartbroken.

While I do not object to his general inclinations, I would have preferred that his affections not actually fix upon someone who had tortured me. I may not have hidden my impatience well.

Brody told me, "Just because he's a Guardian doesn't mean he's evil."

I replied, "Just because he saved you doesn't mean he's good."

\* \* \*

I departed the day after the Guardians did. I did not follow the roundabout path that I had taken to reach

Ardaghy. Instead I cut northwest through the forest, hoping to reach Caorann faster because of this shortcut. While I lack this particular talent, I know other Woodlarks who possess the ability to speak with the beasts of the forest and field. Perhaps they can broker a truce between Ardaghans and the laerti before the Guardians return.

I know that the Knight-Protector favors peace at the point of her sword, but I prefer the thought of peace based upon understanding, not fear. I do not care if that opinion is heresy.



# Beneath the Eye of Belenus

## Sites, Factions, and People of the Shadowlands

BY ADAM "SPEEDWAGON" EL AKKAD AND IAN FORDAM

### AN OVERVIEW OF THE SHADOWLANDS

The Shadowlands are a unique cluster among those discovered in the Mists thus far. Most domains in a cluster are unified by geography or history or cultural similarity. Instead, the Shadowlands are even more tightly bound, unified by their links to a single family, in particular a single person: **Kateri Shadowborn**, a paladin of the Order of the Circle of Belenus.

When a great evil arose and a southern empire invaded the kingdom to the north, Kateri Shadowborn was among those paladins at the forefront of the kingdom's defense. Her military prowess was crucial, and so were her strength and cleverness under capture. Equally important, though, was her mercy. She turned one of her foes into an ally, and that new ally provided crucial information. The southern empire was under the control of a terrible fiend, which had corrupted the grand caliph and his loyal defenders and advisors. When Kateri Shadowborn finally confronted the grand caliph, she did not merely clash with him hand-to-hand. She banished the evil which had possessed him.

Yet all was not won. Three of the fiend's servants survived the end of the war, and they summoned the

fiend back to the Great Kingdom. They bound it to a sword, afterward known as **Ebonbane**. Even bound, the fiend was mighty. It transformed the Dark Triad into ghouls, and it planned its revenge upon Kateri Shadowborn.

A year later, Kateri Shadowborn's ally arrived on her doorstep with Ebonbane in hand. The ally had been killed and reanimated by the fiend, who now used the ally's undead shell to attack his detested foe.

Indeed, although Kateri Shadowborn fell in combat, Ebonbane's victory was incomplete. By her faith and her will, Kateri Shadowborn bound the fiend to the manor where it killed her. In its struggles to escape, Ebonbane tore the manor free from its realm, and the Dark Powers drew the manor—along with Ebonbane and the ghost of Kateri Shadowborn—into the Mists.

Fifteen years later, Kateri Shadowborn's strength had begun to fade against Ebonbane's terrible power. Fortunately, her son **Alexi** was drawn to Shadowborn Manor. Upon breaking the sword Ebonbane and releasing the fiend, Alexi discovered that he possessed the ability to imprison the fiend within himself. He did so, and for years Ebonbane was sufficiently constrained by his living jailor.

In 747BC the Shadowlands Cluster was formed. In addition to Shadowborn Manor, the cluster coalesced with two other domains. The first was



**Nidala**, which had formed around **Elena Faith-Hold**. She had been a trusted friend of Kateri Shadowborn and served as a Knight of the Circle alongside her. The second was **Avonleigh**, where the necromancer **Morgoroth the Black** has trapped **Aurora Shadowborn**, Kateri's niece, in suspended animation. Although both Elena Faith-Hold and Morgoroth damned themselves, they likely came to the Dark Powers' notice because of Ebonbane's demonic attentions to the Shadowborn family.

However, in addition to the merging of the three domains, another curious shift has occurred since 747BC. Morgoroth, the Darklord of Avonleigh, was the first to notice that his awareness of much of the land surrounding his manor had grown indistinct. Shortly afterward, Ebonbane became aware of new territory within metaphysical reach of Shadowborn Manor. The **Phantasmal Forest** had detached from Avonleigh. It became a domain without a specific Darklord, subject to the manipulations of both Ebonbane and Morgoroth. For decades Ebonbane had extended its tendrils across worlds in search of traces of its hated foe Kateri Shadowborn, and wherever it found them, it attempted to corrupt them and draw them into the Mists. With the Phantasmal Forest largely freed from Morgoroth's control, those corrupted traces found their home within its malleable borders. Morgoroth did not immediately act, but instead he began observing the new forces in the lands which had once been his.

## MISSION STATEMENT

This article has its roots in "Secrets of the Phantasmal Forest" from *Quoth the Raven* Issue 30. Even after writing that article, Speedwagon had further thoughts upon the Shadowlands Cluster, and before long he recruited Ian Fordam for the project using a particularly devious snare: asking for his opinion.

This article does not intend to be a standalone gazetteer for the Shadowlands. It is plenty long enough without repeating history and other details

which can be gleaned from canon sources. (See "References" below.) Nor does it repeat information from *The Book of Shadows*, which expands the lore about the Shadowlands considerably. However, just because the authors don't say much about The Knights of the Shadows or The Pack does not mean those factions are not present or are not important.

Instead, this article focuses upon three areas. First, it details new sites of interest and factions for the Shadowlands, including relevant NPCs. Second, it attempts to provide more cohesive interactions among the domains of the Cluster, now that they have been joined in the Mists. Third, to help establish a context for the expansion, this article opens with a timeline and some cultural notes.

## REFERENCES

The foundations of the Shadowlands are taken from their canon sources: *Darklords*, *Islands of Terror*, "Bane of the Shadowborn" (from *Dungeon Magazine*, Issue 31), *A Light in the Belfry*, *Ravenloft Campaign Setting*, *Ravenloft Dungeon Master's Guide*, and the novel *Shadowborn*.

The Shadowlands Cluster was further developed in *The Book of Shadows*, both in the framing fiction and the article "The Red Wolf". Furthermore, the article "Theokos" from *The Book of Sorrows* introduced another NPC important to the Shadowlands.

John Mangrum's notes regarding the Shadowlands (captured at [https://www.fraternityofshadows.com/wiki/Category:The\\_Shadowlands](https://www.fraternityofshadows.com/wiki/Category:The_Shadowlands)) helped shape the authors' vision of this Cluster.

Certain locations in this article were derived from GonzoRon's "Twilight's Children" campaign, as documented at *The Mistway* (themistway.com). In particular, his modified map of the Shadowlands may be found at that site.

Many dates in this article's timeline were taken from John W. Mangrum's annotated timeline, available at the Fraternity of Shadows web site.

## TIMELINE

### A NOTE ON THE TIMELINE

According to John W. Mangrum's revised, annotated, and (in this case significantly) totally unofficial Ravenloft timeline, Elena Faith-Hold was born in 567BC, and Kateri Shadowborn was born in 585BC. That's a gap of eighteen years. While *Islands of Terror* asserts only that Elena and Kateri were companions in the fight against evil, this article assumes that the two knights are of similar age and shared their young adulthood together.

On a related note, *Islands of Terror* describes Elena as being in her late forties, but since the *Ravenloft Campaign Setting* fixes the creation of Nidala in 615BC, clearly she is well older than that, regardless of her apparent age. This article assumes that Elena Faith-Hold has aged *very slowly* since she was granted Nidala. By 760BC she appears to be in her late forties, although she remains amazingly fit for apparent middle age. Nidalans take her great longevity as a sign of Belenus' favor.

Date (BC)	Event
<b>The Foundations</b>	
526BC	The Great Kingdom and the Order of the Circle are founded.
≈567BC	The birth of Elena Faith-hold (per JWM timeline).
≈584BC	The birth of Elena Faith-hold (per this article).
≈585BC	The birth of Kateri Shadowborn.
≈600BC	Kateri Shadowborn (@15) is knighted.
≈600BC	Elena Faith-hold (@16) is knighted.
<b>The Heretical Wars</b>	
606BC	Grand Caliph Muhdar ab Sang is possessed by the fiend Lussimar.
606BC	The Grand Caliph's army attacks Letour and Sanschay, launching the Heretical Wars.
608BC	The birth of Alexi Shadowborn, who is given to Victoria and Vincent Shadowborn to raise.
609BC	Kateri Shadowborn (@24) captures Lysander Greylocks at the Sined Pass. She frees him from Lussimar's influence. He retires to Forenoon Abbey, although he provides guidance to Kateri Shadowborn regarding the war against the Southern Empire.
610BC	The Heretical Wars end with Lussimar's defeat and dismissal. Muhdar ab Sang dies by suicide.

	<b>The Fall of the Shadowborn</b>
611BC	The three remaining Ahltrian summon Lussimar, binding him to a sword. Lussimar, now known as Ebonbane, kills and reanimates them. Ebonbane and the Ahltrian seek out Forenoon Abbey, where they kill all of the monks. Lysander Greylocks is reanimated under Ebonbane's control.
611BC	Ebonbane kills Kateri Shadowborn (@26) and destroys her sword Corona.
611BC	Shadowborn Manor is drawn into the Mists.
612BC	The birth of Ferran Shadowborn.
612BC	Elena Faith-hold (@28) launches her War of Evil.
614BC	Elena Faith-hold (@30) concludes the first phase of the War of Evil as thousands are forcibly converted to the faith of Belenus. She immediately turns her attention to the neutral and even good-aligned non-believers, particularly the Southern Empire.
615BC	Elena Faith-hold (@31) is drawn into the Mists, and Nidala forms shortly thereafter.
626BC	Alexi, Ferran, and Lysander Greylocks are drawn to Forenoon Abbey and then to Shadowborn Manor. Alexi destroys Lysander in an act of mercy. Alexi releases Kateri's spirit and unbinds Lussimar from the sword Ebonbane, binding the fiend to himself instead.
≈630BC	Ferran Shadowborn joins the Order of the Circle.
631BC	Alexi Shadowborn founds the Knights of the Shadows.
	<b>The Last of the Shadowborn</b>
632BC	Theokos begins construction of the lightning engines.
≈635BC	Ferran Shadowborn becomes the leader of the Order of the Circle.
635BC	Theokos completes the lightning engines and concocts the first Umbral Draught.
635BC	The town of Cuxrath is destroyed by Banemaw.
≈637BC	Ferran Shadowborn becomes King of the Great Kingdom.
638BC	Presiding Mother Darcey Gillingham is imprisoned and hung as a heretic.
640BC	The necromancer Morgoroth the Black plane shifts through an enchanted mirror into the Great Kingdom. Ferran Shadowborn believes Morgoroth's claim that he seeks redemption for his evil acts. Morgoroth and Aurora Shadowborn crush madly on each other but never speak of it.
645BC	Morgoroth finally confesses his love to Aurora, who has subsequently ascended within the Church of Belenus and taken a vow of chastity. He mistakes her regret for disdain.
646BC	Sir Lambert follows Morgoroth to the Great Kingdom. Morgoroth succumbs to the darkness. He kills Lambert and kidnaps Aurora Shadowborn. Ferran and then the whole of the Circle ride to rescue her. However, Aurora's would-be rescuers are all slaughtered by Morgoroth.
646BC	Avonleigh is drawn into the Mists.
646BC	Morgoroth attempts to escape Ravenloft. It goes poorly for him.



	<b>Pacification and Expansion</b>
650BC	Banemaw destroys Srath, which is subsequently rebuilt.
653BC	The Twinmoon Sanctuary is founded.
660BC	Banemaw destroys Cu Clannagh, which is subsequently rebuilt.
666BC	The Vistani first arrive in Avonleigh. Many are killed. One is imprisoned and tortured. Perhaps some secrets are told.
676BC	An aging Alexi Shadowborn strikes a bargain with Morgoroth, who creates a crystal coffin to sustain his life.
680BC	Elena Faith-hold declares the eastern half of Nidala pacified. After this peak, the Army of Nidala declines in size and prestige.
684BC	Maybe the east isn't fully pacified after all, but Elena feels she can't send in the army without making her a liar. The Woodsmen are formed to handle such issues quietly.
692BC	The Vistani first arrive in Nidala.
	<b>The Early 700s</b>
705BC	The town of Answig is destroyed by Banemaw.
710BC	Construction begins on the Tower of Glory.
711BC	Banemaw destroys Srath (again). It is subsequently rebuilt.
715BC	The Tower of Glory is complete.
718BC	Banemaw destroys Cu Clannagh (again). It is subsequently rebuilt.
723BC	Elena Faith-hold and her Guardians of Morals raid Banemaw's lair, drive him off, and return with his horde.
729BC	The Shining Youth are formed, which eventually leads to an exciting new generation of radicalized Guardians of Morals.
732BC	The town of Glenmurrion is destroyed by Banemaw.
732BC	The Tower of Glory becomes a Rank 2 Sinkhole of Evil.
740BC	The Great Upheaval.
740BC	The perpetual lightning storm over the Faith Hold falters, and it does not resume for nearly a year.
741BC	Banemaw destroys the Denneshaw Monastery. Stephen Muldowney arrives at and joins the Heddrington Monastery.
743BC	The Hall of Shields is founded in the Theospine Mountains.
745BC	The events of <i>A Light in the Belfry</i> occur.

	Unification
747BC	The Shadowlands Cluster forms.
748BC	Five scouts are sent into western Nidala. Only Lachlan Garvey returns.
748BC	Orillon is founded.
749BC	By this time Elena Faith-hold has noticed the Phantasmal Forest encroaching upon Nidala's border. She begins ramping up the Army of Nidala again.
749BC	Duskpine Front and Vinrac are both founded in western Nidala.
749BC	Morgoroth and Gondegal strike a bargain.
751BC	Gondegal becomes leader of the Knights of the Shadows.
752BC	Construction of Duskpine Front is completed.
752BC	Mewen's Camp is established in Avonleigh.
752BC	Durvoskar subjugates the local goblin population. "The Mudhold" is founded.
753BC	Pernstow Keep is reoccupied and refurbished. The hamlet of Banbar is founded as well.
753BC	Almerry Keep is reoccupied and refurbished. The hamlet of Drya is founded as well.
754BC	The army of Nidala first encounters goblins on the western slope of the Theospines.
754BC	The elf Bemarthalis (lover of Lazdrelle Melator) is slain by Pellil Vaemin. The Twinmoon Sanctuary becomes aware of a vampiric threat beyond their borders. Lazdrelle and her brother Volranduil form the Moonshadows.
756BC	Stephen Muldowney becomes abbot of the Denneshaw Monastery.
757BC	The formation of the Bearers of the Endless Torch.
758BC	The River Finn floods, threatening Vinrac. Goblin sabotage is suspected.
	Now
760BC	Now.

## THE BELENITE FAITH

Deity	Status	Portfolio	Alignment
Arawn	Lesser	Life, Death	NE
Belenus	Greater	Sun, Light, Heat	NG
Brigit	Lesser	Moon	NG
Morrigan	Lesser	Battle, War	CE

### The Belenite Pantheon (Henotheistic)

Belenus is best known across the multiverse as a member of the Celtic pantheon, within which he is an intermediate Power of healing, fire, and the sun.

However, in the Belenite faith, Belenus is worshipped as the superior (and frequently only) deity in the pantheon.

### History of the Faith

In the centuries before the formation of the Great Kingdom of Avonleigh, the deities of the Celtic pantheon were worshiped much as they are elsewhere across the multiverse. Eventually, the Great Kingdom encountered the followers of a monotheistic faith. However, unlike what happened in some worlds, the two faiths combined on fairly equal terms, neither one fully subsuming the other. Instead, although the other Celtic gods were still

recognized, Belenus emerged as the foremost god in a new henotheistic Belenite faith. (Why Belenus? Most likely because of symbolic similarities to the monotheistic faith's nameless deity.) Although many of the old traditions remained, increasingly they were viewed as part of the faith's "pagan" past.

This focus upon Belenus was accompanied by an expansion of divine portfolios to include aspects of civilization as well as the natural world. Belenus had long been a deity of fire and the sun, but now he became known as a god of rulership as well. Similarly, the portfolio of Brigit, a goddess of the moon and nature, grew to encompass poetry and smithing. Meanwhile, places of worship shifted from natural groves to circular, domed buildings. The High Mother supplanted the Archdruid.

In 526BC, thirteen smaller kingdoms unified to form the Great Kingdom of Avonleigh under the auspices of the Church of Belenus. As a sign of the harmony between church and state, the Order of the Circle was founded as well. The Circle was comprised of thirteen nobles, one from each of the Great Kingdom's provinces, who were not only knights but also sacred to Belenus. Significantly, nobody in the immediate royal family was invited to join the Circle. Instead that honor fell to a cadet branch, the Shadowborn family, who had been given stewardship of the Province of Avonleigh when the royal family had been granted the Great Kingdom as a whole. By distributing civic power thus, the Church laid the groundwork for a stable kingdom whose rulers and subjects might live according to the light of Belenus' guidance.

As the decades passed, the lesser deities lost further regard, but in their place saints were joined to the spiritual realm. These saints were exceptionally virtuous people, who dedicated their lives to or became martyrs for their faith. Many saints were Knights of the Circle who died in battle against evil (such as Saint Nathan), but others were members of the Church proper (Saint Ruaidri, for example). Some

were holy hermits or even more outwardly ordinary people (in particular, Saint Fedelmid).

## THE FAITH IN NIDALA

Everybody in Nidala worships Belenus, of course. They would not dare do otherwise.

The Belenite faith has grown more exclusionary, declaring that the worship of any other deity is heresy. All "pagan" traditions have been outlawed, even those in honor of Belenus. Most of the saints are now excluded, although some few are still acknowledged. Indeed, despite her professed lack of spiritual authority, Elena Faith-Hold now refers to Kateri Shadowborn as a saint.

(Coincidentally, back in the Great Kingdom of Avonleigh, Kateri Shadowborn has indeed been sainted by the Church of Belenus. Even through the Mists, prayers offered to Kateri give her strength to resist Ebonbane, and she passes that strength on to her son Alexi.)

Admittedly, though, there are heretics who also worship other gods such as Brigit and Arawn. Even more shocking, though, are those people who worship Belenus according to "the old ways" and not as Elena Faith-Hold decrees.

## SACRED TEXTS OF BELENUS

The two primary sacred texts of the Belenite faith are ***The Book of Radiance*** and ***The Libram of Belenus***. The former was written shortly after the transition to henotheism, and all of the gods are very much present in the tales within. The latter was written significantly later, but before the formation of the Great Kingdom. Although it takes much of its material from *The Book of Radiance*, all passages dedicated to other gods have been excised. The gods are still present in the background of stories of Belenus, but they have been greatly diminished. In place of the lost stories are new commandments and parables and pious tales of the earliest saints.

The *Book of Radiance* and *The Libram of Belenus* are both considered divinely inspired. In fact, the *Libram*



is sometimes considered the verbatim word of Belenus. (Never mind the alterations which Elena Faith-Hold has demanded since the formation of her domain.) However, they are not the only writings of import to the Church.

The volumes collectively known as *The Oracles of Sunlight* receive their title from its discussion of divination via shadows (umbramancy) or, if necessary, via flame (pyromancy). However, they are primarily the collected commentary upon and annotations of the sacred texts. They also contain the effective bylaws of the Church of Belenus, including a description of its hierarchy and the stipulations for advancement. In addition to these primary topics, there are many other digressions as well. Unlike the sacred texts, the Oracles are intended for perusal and use strictly within the Church.

#### DREAD POSSIBILITY — BORN OF SUN AND SHADOW

*The Oracles of Sunlight* are said to contain something of a prophecy. According to what has been transcribed of the texts, it predicts the coming of a member of a clan born in shadows. Elena has interpreted this to mean that a new member of the Shadowborn bloodline she idolizes is somewhere in Nidala. She must find this new scion and train them in the true ways of Belenus, so she and they can fight against Evil together.

In truth, there is no newly found or newly born member of the Shadowborn bloodline in Nidala. The prophecy refers either to Aurora Shadowborn or to the roaming ghost of Ferran Shadowborn. Elena has very limited knowledge of either clan member, however.

Similarly, *The Chronicles* are the Church's own history of itself. Its oldest pages were written centuries ago, even before Belenus rose to supreme prominence. By tradition, it includes an extensive lineage of each High Mother who has served the

Church. These giant books are meticulously preserved, copied, and updated with each generation. It is incredibly dry reading. Like *The Oracles*, *The Chronicles* are considered an internal Church document.

Finally, *The Book of Prayings* is a significantly abridged version of *The Libram of Belenus* intended for the common masses. In theory, every faithful Belenite household is supposed to have a copy of the Book. While this goal has never been fully achieved, nonetheless the Book has been widely distributed among the faithful. It is very common to find passages from *The Book of Prayings* in the homes of Nidalans, generally carved into the front door or stitched into a round tapestry.

However, every one of the texts described above has been altered according to Elena Faith-Hold's many decrees. In particular, she insists that a new edition of *The Book of Prayings* is released every ten years or so.

#### THE AFTERLIFE

The faithful go to the Eternal Dawn to bask forever in Belenus' radiance.

Sinners and heretics go to the darkest pits of Donn. Originally Donn was a god of the dead in the pre-Belenite faith. As the other gods diminished in prominence, however, Donn was forgotten and the dark afterworld which he ruled became known by his name, similar to what occurred with Hades and his own dark afterworld.

While the official doctrine of the Church of Belenus identifies no particular ruler of Donn, it does recognize the existence of certain inhabitants. Most infamous is *The Eclipse in Shadow*. Most people of the Great Kingdom believe that Grand Caliph Muhdar ab Sang turned the Southern Empire to the worship of the Eclipse in Shadow, which is how the Heretical Wars earned their name.

## ARCHITECTURE

Churches and chapels dedicated to Belenus are almost always domed and circular in construction, imitating the shape of the sun (called "the Eye of Belenus"). Pews are arranged in concentric rings, facing inward. At the heart of each church is a sacred fire, which must be ignited using the light of the sun. (Every church has a lens used to focus the sunlight.) If the sacred fire is allowed to go out, then woe to the junior priestess who fell short in her duties.

Worse yet, if the sacred fire extinguishes itself, that is considered an ill omen indeed.

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS MAGIC

If magic is not being used for the good of the Church, then clearly it must be black magic. Spellcasters in Nidala are given the choice of serving the Church or imprisonment and likely execution. Crucially, spellcasters are never allowed to work together without a number of Guardians of Morals to keep them in line.

## A COMPARISON OF THEOCRACIES

- ❖ G'Henna, Pharazia, and Nidala are the three foremost theocracies in canon Ravenloft. Particularly since G'Henna and Pharazia both received attention in *Quoth the Raven* Issue 30, an examination of Nidala warrants a consideration of the differences among the three domains.
- ❖ G'Henna has been shaped according to Lord Petrovna's desires. Nidala has been shaped according to Elena Faith-Hold's fears.
- ❖ G'Hennans adore the Prophet of Zhakata and fear the Beast-God. Nidalans adore Belenus and fear the Knight-Protector.
- ❖ Yagno Petrovna holds pervasive (if sometimes subtle) rein over the Church of Zhakata, just as Elena Faith-Hold exerts tremendous control over the Church of Belenus (even though she pretends otherwise). On the other hand, Diamabel in his perpetual distraction steers the Confessors of Pharazia less than they steer him.
- ❖ The Church of Zhakata and the Confessors inflict much of the harm which lands so heavily upon the people of their respective lands. The Church of Belenus may be a tool of Elena Faith-hold, yet its priestesses are also victims.
- ❖ Over a century and a half, the restrictions imposed by Elena's Decrees of Faith have settled into a largely predictable pattern. However, they do vary depending upon what potential heresy has most recently incensed her, and she frequently changes what she claims *The Libram of Belenus* says to try to close loopholes for sin. In their variability the Decrees fall closer to the circumstantially-imposed Laws imposed by the Confessors of Pharazia than the extensively codified Laws of Zhakata. In all three cases, though, the punishment for violations will vary depending upon the particular Guardian, Confessor, or judge tasked with that duty.

Oh, and:

- ❖ The Nidalan Inquisition is distinct from the Tepestani Inquisition in part because it's concerned with the morality of the people, not the amorality of the fey.

## CULTURAL NOTES

### CHURCH AND STATE

Officially speaking, Nidala remains a province of the Great Kingdom, and Elena Faith-Hold merely occupies the temporary role of Knight-Protector. The Knight-Protector serves the High Mother of the Church of Belenus and the King of the Great Kingdom of Avonleigh, neither of whom happens to be in Nidala at the moment. While of course the Knight-Protector pays great heed to the words of the Presiding Mother of the Church in Nidala, she is nonetheless empowered to lead the civic government as she feels necessary.

The unofficial but widely-recognized real truth of the matter is that Elena Faith-Hold also directs the Church of Belenus in Nidala. Ever since Presiding Mother Darcey Gillingham met her fate in the dungeons of the Faith Hold, the Church has been careful to avoid contradicting anything which Elena Faith-Hold decrees.

### LANGUAGES

The people of the Shadowborn Cluster speak a language commonly called Nidalan. However, it is actually the common tongue spoken in the Great Kingdom. The original Nidalan tongue is a separate, linguistically unrelated language now called True Nidalan. True Nidalan has fewer than a thousand speakers, but the names of many people and places have True Nidalan roots.

True Nidalan has 18 base letters, here represented by a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, l, m, n, o, p, r, s, t, and u. The vowels may also be elongated, as indicated by an acute accent (á, etc.). Moreover, certain consonants have an alternate pronunciation commonly written with a following *h*.

**Authors' Note:** This orthography for True Nidalan is based upon a painfully simplified version of Irish. It ignores differences among the three most prominent dialects. It ignores broad and slender consonants. It ignores eclipsis. It ignores differing pronunciations depending upon position within a word. Please don't use these hints as a guide for the pronunciation of actual Irish.

Letter(s)	Sound	Example
ae	<i>ae in fae</i>	Maeve
ao	<i>ee in heel</i>	Aoife
bh	<i>v in van</i>	Siobhan
c	<i>k in kick</i>	Ciara
ch	<i>ch in loch</i>	Echlin
dh	silent	Odhran
gh	silent	Donagh
ghy	<i>hee in heel</i>	Ardaghy
ia	<i>ia in via</i>	Iasgair
mh	<i>w in water</i>	Niamh
s	<i>s in saw</i>	Saorla
se	<i>sh in shine</i>	Sean
si	<i>sh in shine</i>	Siobhan
th	<i>h in hole</i>	Cathal
ua	<i>ua in lua</i>	Uathach

Also used in Nidala is a language known as the Holy Tongue (or the Holy Script when written). *The Libram of Belenus* was written in the Holy Tongue, as are many sections of *The Oracles of Sunlight*. However, the language has little use elsewhere. For the most part, the only people who learn the Holy Tongue are priestesses and monks of the Belenite faith.



## TITLES

The Great Kingdom of Avonleigh was ruled by a king (or queen) whose children were princes (or princesses). The kingdom was divided into thirteen provinces, each ruled by the lord or lady of a noble family. People (almost always nobles) who displayed appropriate martial valor were knighted, earning the official title *Sir* or *Dame*. Knights of the Order of the Circle, however, were often addressed as "Lady" or "Lord" instead of "Dame" or "Sir".

In Nidala, every one of the Guardians of Morals is considered to be a knight and therefore should be addressed as "Sir" or "Dame". Even the Knight-Protector insists that she is properly addressed as "Dame Elena", although she grudgingly allows herself to be called "Lady Elena Faith-Hold of Nidala" upon formal occasions. (There is nobody else of her family present to hold that title, after all.)

A limited noble class still exists within Nidala, comprised of those few noble families from the Great Kingdom who have not died off since Elena Faith-Hold became the Knight-Protector. The heads of each family are addressed as "Lord" or "Lady". However, in modern Nidala these titles are meaningless formalities, conveying no effective authority outside the walls of the family's estate.

Finally, the mayors of Touraine and the larger towns of Nidala are sometimes addressed as "Lord" or "Lady", particularly in a formal context, and they are sometimes addressed as "Mayor". On the other hand, the mayors of smaller towns and villages are never called "Lord" or "Lady", and some of them resist the formal title of "Mayor" as well.

## WHO'S DOOMED

This section contains descriptions of the most important non-player characters in the Shadowborn Cluster, including the Darklords. It does not repeat detailed background information presented in canon or netbook sources (which are listed above and

within each NPC entry) or from Mistipedia at the Fraternity of Shadows web site. Instead it focuses upon current sketches for the NPCs in an attempt to define a more unified Cluster. Backgrounds are presented only where revised or expanded.

## ALEXI SHADOWBORN

See the novel *Shadowborn* for more details.

### Background

Alexi's biological mother, Kateri, had a Heretical War to fight, and so Alexi was adopted by Victoria and Vincent Shadowborn. In time he became a knight and was expected to ascend to the Order of the Circle. Indeed, he nearly did, but an eclipse during his Ascension was taken as an ill omen, and he was passed over. However, he soon learned of his true calling: He was drawn into the Domains of Dread to confront Ebonbane, the fiend who had slain his biological mother. At the conclusion of that confrontation, Alexi learned that he was a so-called Lodestone Paladin. When the fiend Ebonbane was freed from the sword which had imprisoned it, Alexi was able to capture the fiend within his mortal shell.

For decades, wanderers in the Mists drawn to Shadowborn Manor were welcomed by Alexi Shadowborn, who would guide them through the process of gathering elemental keys to rebind Ebonbane and allow them to depart. When Ebonbane's strength was ascendant, the rebinding was still a deadly struggle. However, when Alexi's strength was ascendant, a visit to Shadowborn Manor could be almost pleasant. Early in this period, in the year 631BC, Alexi recruited a visiting group of adventurers to form the Knights of the Shadows to aid him in his task. Meanwhile, Alexi's nature as a Lodestone Paladin enabled him to sustain himself by drawing vitality from Ebonbane. Although his duty was a lonely one, Alexi remained dedicated.

However, eventually Alexi's strength began to wane. He had lived a full lifespan, after all. From the visiting Knights of the Shadows he learned of the wizard Morgoroth and his demesne Tergeron Manor, which

was nearby in some metaphysical way. In particular, a giomorgo Knight with a dash of the Sight dreamed of a woman asleep in a crystal coffin within Tergeron Manor. Despite many misgivings, the Knights approached Morgoroth and struck a bargain with him. Under Morgoroth's tutelage, the Knights crafted a crystal coffin to keep Alexi alive but in suspended animation. (The coffin was also designed as another layer of imprisonment for Ebonbane, but its efficacy has not yet been tested.) Moreover, Morgoroth agreed to create elemental keys every year to bind Ebonbane more securely within the coffin.

#### Current Sketch

Alexi lies in his crystal coffin, alive but suspended. In the spiritual realm he still struggles to contain Ebonbane. Fortunately, he is aided by the ghost of his biological mother Kateri and the Morgoroth-crafted elemental keys, which the Knights of the Shadows bring every year.

However, Alexi also interacts with the outside world. He dreams, and in an odd resonance between the two crystal coffins, his dreams reach his sister Aurora, and hers reach him. Over the years they have learned to interpret each others' communications. Alexi knows what happened to Aurora, and she knows what happened to him. This knowledge has only added to Alexi's misgivings about trusting Morgoroth, but no better alternative has presented itself.

#### AURORA SHADOWBORN

See *A Light in the Belfry* for more details.

#### Current Sketch

Like her brother Alexi, Aurora Shadowborn exists in suspended animation within a crystal coffin of Morgoroth's design. Unlike Alexi, she is an involuntary prisoner. Because of her contact with her brother and his contact with the Knights of the Shadows, Aurora now understands better what Morgoroth has done to her. Her love for him has not

survived her anger. However, her anger is not blind. If Morgoroth were to discover a path away from evil, she would encourage him, not thwart him out of spite.

#### BANEMAW (DRAGON)

See *Ravenloft Campaign Setting* for more details.

#### Current Sketch

Banemaw is the dragon that occasionally swoops down from its lair in the Theospine Mountains to terrorize Nidala. Common wisdom holds that the dragon is a fell creature spawned in the darkest pits of Donn, and it is drawn to heresy. Accounts differ greatly upon its appearance, apart from the facts that Banemaw is a dragon and Banemaw is terrifying.

Never mind that Banemaw is also fictitious.

In 723BC, Elena Faith-Hold led her Guardians of Morals upon an expedition into a gorge in the Theospine Mountains now known as Banemaw's Rend. Apparently the battle was ferocious, but Elena Faith-Hold's forces emerged victorious. They claimed the dragon's hoard, which they distributed among the larger towns and villages of Nidala. More importantly, they also returned with the dragon's right claw, which Elena had severed with her bastard sword Caitlyn. The claw hangs in a place of honor high in the great hall of the Faith Hold... too high, in fact, for observers to inspect it closely.

#### The Necessity of Fiction

Over the years, various possibilities for Banemaw have been floated on the Fraternity of Shadows forum. For example, some have proposed that Banemaw is actually a boogeyman or that Banemaw has become real, created from the Mists.

The authors of this article believe that Banemaw must remain fully fictitious. The central evil in Nidala is Elena Faith-Hold, and the Dark Powers would ensure that it remains so.

## EBONBANE

See *Darklords* and the novel *Shadowborn* for more details.

### Current Sketch

With the formation of the Shadowlands Cluster and the separation of the Phantasmal Forest from Avonleigh, Ebonbane has been reinvigorated. After decades of relative blindness, cut off from the Great Kingdom, it can finally discern events outside the walls of Shadowborn Manor. It recognizes Kateri's companion, the fallen paladin Elena Faith-Hold, and it desperately wants to add her as the crown jewel in his dark necklace of pearls. Similarly, it despises the necromancer near its woods for creating more chains to bind him and for guarding another one of Kateri's bloodline. Every year it relishes in causing pain and suffering to each and every Knight of the Shadows who journeys into its domain.

On some level, Ebonbane realizes that it is wasting its time, either with finding more pearls for its necklace or in trying to tempt Alexi Shadowborn into evil. Ebonbane recognizes that it is failing in its goal to return to the Abyss and reclaim its demon lord status. Moreover, Ebonbane also fears that, for all it has done to hurt this one paladin, it has failed to leave any lasting legacy, whereas the ideals of Kateri and her family have been taken up by others. All of these notions infuriate the fiend, and more importantly, cause it fear. Faced with that fear, it is only a matter of time until the former demon lord overplays its hand or grows secure enough in its arrogance to compensate for its innate fear. When that happens, its doom will be close at hand.

## ELENA FAITH-HOLD

See *Islands of Terror* p.6-17 and the *Ravenloft Campaign Setting* p.157-159.

The Knight-Protector of Nidala.

### Current Sketch

Elena Faith-Hold has been the Knight-Protector of Nidala for over a century. While she has aged, she has aged very slowly. She takes this longevity as a

sign of Belenus' favor. Also, because the Dark Powers have restored (a form of) the granted abilities which she enjoyed when she was a paladin of Belenus, she now assumes that the loss of her original powers was a test which she clearly passed.

(Note that while Elena Faith-Hold is deluded, she is not stupid. Over the years a number of her foes have underestimated her by conflating the two. And certainly nobody should underestimate how widely feared she is by the people of Nidala.)

Secure in her righteousness, Elena now imposes her version of the Belenite faith upon everyone in her domain, including herself. When she was a girl, the Nidalan flavor of the Belenite faith was known for its relative opulence, and at the time Elena adored it. However, she has subsequently come to believe that austerity is a superior form of worship, even though she sometimes misses the pomp of the services of her youth.

Most Nidalans would be eager for any means to evade Elena Faith-Hold's merciless scrutiny. The people of Caorann have a ritual which appears to shield the village, but because the ritual involves song and dance it is risky to perform. Lady Mayor Uathach of Iasgair may have some quieter means of drawing attention away from her village. The same applies for those who remain at the Denneshaw Monastery. However, most Nidalans have had the most luck with the approach practiced in Sgorrlag: Keep your head down and try not to commit heresy.

Elena commands three organizations which aid her in the enforcement of her divine vision upon the land. First, she is the head of the **Guardians of Morals**, which she created to stand in for the Order of the Circle from the Great Kingdom. Second, she commands the **Army of Nidala**. Third, Elena's **Woodsmen** provide enforcement from the shadows. These three organizations compete with each other, but ultimately they all answer to Elena.

Similarly, she is aware of the existence of rebel groups which resist her authority. She knows of The



Pack and the Knights of the Shadows. She has been hearing rumors of the Woodlarks as well. Given the opportunity, she will crush all such organizations.

Elena fought Ebonbane and its forces in the Heretical Wars, and she still considers it the most formidable foe she has ever faced. In fact, she believes that the encroaching Phantasmal Forest and Avonleigh (she does not recognize any difference between the two) are Ebonbane's doing, and she will resist that evil with her full might, especially if she ever learns that Ebonbane has entrapped the spirit of her beloved Kateri Shadowborn.

Elena believes that Theokos was sent by Belenus to serve as her faithful advisor, rewarding her for passing a great test of faith. She trusts him more than anyone else in her entire long history, except of course for Kateri Shadowborn.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS (ELENA'S PERSPECTIVE)

Morgoroth has reached out to Elena, occasionally sending her an enchanted mirror via courier. (Perhaps Gondegal himself delivered the first mirror, but if so, then clearly Elena did not recognize him.) Through these mirrors, Morgoroth has attempted to warn Elena of the rising evil in the Phantasmal Forest. Elena, of course, already knows this. However, she is fascinated by this wizard who claims to know what has happened to the rest of the Great Kingdom since Elena was tested by Belenus.

Theokos actively seeks and destroys these mirrors, of course.

### FERRAN SHADOWBORN

See *A Light in the Belfry* for more details.

#### Current Sketch

Following his death, Ferran now creeps around as a first magnitude ghost, though one that is not specifically bound to Avonleigh. Due to his former

status as King of the Great Kingdom, he can roam wherever the Great Kingdom's lands extend, but for decades the domain of Avonleigh was simply the only one available to roam in. When Nidala conjoined with Avonleigh, Ferran went to survey that newfound land. He was dismayed at what he saw of the Knight-Protector's realm.

Due to his unnatural mobility, Ferran is not encountered in any single location, instead preferring to go wherever he believes he can do the most good. Sometimes that means eavesdropping on the plans of Guardians of Morals and informing the townsfolk through dream visitation. Sometimes it means drifting through the rocky crags of the Theospine Mountains. Sometimes it means quietly passing through the lightless woods of Avonleigh, keeping an eye out for the dreaded Ahltrian ghouls.

Ferran feels, for all intents and purposes, purposeless, and wants to refine his irregular and erratic acts of good into something more organized and useful. However, he also knows that he must keep a very low profile to avoid Morgoroth. To that end, he's been curious about formally engaging with the Knights of the Shadows who visit Morgoroth once a year, though he worries that they will mistake him for a hostile undead and strike him down (and perhaps even jeopardize their current working agreement with Morgoroth, though Ferran knows not what purpose this serves).

### KATERI SHADOWBORN

See *Darklords* and the novel *Shadowborn* for more details.

#### Current Sketch

Kateri Shadowborn endures as a ghost within Shadowborn Manor. For that domain's first fifteen years, Kateri's faith imprisoned Ebonbane. When her son Alexi came to the manor and confronted the fiend, she was nearly destroyed, but she has subsequently regained strength. Now Alexi himself has become Ebonbane's primary prison, with a Morgoroth-created crystal coffin as a fallback. Even so, Kateri continues to lend her faith and strength to

the task. She clearly takes pride in her son's long success against Ebonbane.

### LUSSIMAR (FIEND)

See the novel *Shadowborn* for more details.

The true name of the loumara known as Ebonbane in the Shadowlands. It is also known as **The Eclipse in Shadow** in the Great Kingdom and **Kusuf ab Ruwh**, "The Eclipse of the Soul", in the Southern Empire.

### MORGOROTH THE BLACK

See *A Light in the Belfry* for more details.

While most infamous for his skills as a necromancer, Morgoroth's magical studies extend beyond that category. He has worked as well with mirror magic and travel between the planes.

#### Current Sketch

Following the events of *A Light in the Belfry*, Morgoroth has regained enough strength to pull together shards of glass into a golem, which he can occupy. Using that bit of physicality, he creates the crystal elemental keys which are used to rebind Ebonbane every year. In addition, Morgoroth has taken up his time with crafting magical items (usually related to necromancy) and cursed traps, both to pass the time and to increase the defenses of Tergeron Manor.

Within the walls of his manor, Morgoroth sulks, seethes, and laments what he has lost. In his worst moods, he even dissociates from the world around him completely, roused only by intrusions into his land by armed Nidalans, Ahltrian ghouls, and other outsiders (such as adventurers).

For the most part Morgoroth is calm, but he is quick to anger. His worst wrath comes down on men who are loved deeply. He does not like intruders, but he will at least assess their value before deciding how to handle them. Still, the vast majority of intruders end up as rank and file undead. He is not affably evil, nor does he gloat about the crimes he's committed. Those acts were only necessary for his own plans to

come to fruition. When being social, which is very rarely if at all, he tends to be fairly to the point on matters. In his time of isolation he has come to hate those who have freedom. When he is willing to talk in more than brief threats he tends to lament unrequited love and being a star-crossed lover longing for warmth he'll never have.

Morgoroth's grasp of the Demiplane is minimal—he believes that the Mists that have settled around Avonleigh, which then gave way to the Phantasmal Forest, are the work of a powerful fiend, perhaps the very same said to be responsible for the Heretical Wars. This assumption has only been furthered by his negotiations with Gondegal and the Knights of the Shadows in securing his aid, for the Knights have claimed that the fiend is interested in Aurora Shadowborn. He understands the full scope of control he has over his domain as well as the threats that encroach upon it, and has been observing the shifts in the Phantasmal Forest that he believes to now be shared between himself and that fiend.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS (MORGOROTH'S PERSPECTIVE)

Through repeated interactions with Gondegal, Morgoroth had learned somewhat of Elena Faith-Hold, the Knight-Protector of Nidala. The name was familiar to the wizard, as he had studied the recent history of the Great Kingdom while serving as advisor to King Ferran Shadowborn. (An uninformed advisor is usually a useless one, after all.) Intrigued that this infamous figure, and one connected to the Shadowborn family no less, was across the border from him, Morgoroth desired to speak with her; perhaps insight from a "fellow prisoner" of the fiend would give the wizard a better idea of how to thwart the demon. Failing that, learning more about Alexi Shadowborn and the broader Shadowborn family from a first-hand perspective might prove useful to him, even if only in the most minor sense of passing the time.



The communication between the two takes place through specially-enchanted mirror shards that Morgoroth provides to Gondegal. Gondegal then takes this bundle of mirror shards to other agents of the Knights of the Shadows (such as Tudig Tanguy) who then pass it on a very discreet network until it arrives at the Faith-Hold.

The two Darklords have spoken only minimally so far. Initially, Morgoroth was able to inform Elena of the history of the Great Kingdom of Avonleigh from her disappearance in 615 BC to his own disappearance in 646 BC. Not only did this give Elena a reminder of her dearly-missed homeland, it also facilitated future conversations. In exchange, Elena was able to answer Morgoroth's questions regarding the Shadowborn, specifically giving the wizard a first-hand (if quite flattering) account of Kateri Shadowborn and her exploits in the Heretical Wars, along with some acknowledgment of Alexi Shadowborn and details of his life and origins.

Should they continue to speak, the two Darklords may end up forming an unlikely friendship. Both Elena Faith-Hold and Morgoroth are lonely individuals who fail to understand people. Additionally, Morgoroth may give Elena a slightly greater idea of the true Evil that binds them (as far as Morgoroth understands it), thus better directing Elena's desire to finally fight Evil against something that truly fits the criteria. Elena may (unknowingly) provide Morgoroth a mirror to look into: the wizard's realization of his own self-delusion may be accelerated by speaking to the legendarily self-deluded Elena.

There is someone who heavily disapproves of this relationship: Theokos. The fiend is unsure of Morgoroth's intentions and general character—the wizard seems to possess a similar 'aura of evil' as Elena, yet he comports himself in a more neutral manner than expected. What Theokos mildly fears is the possibility that this "Morgoroth" may either replace the fiend as Elena's confidant; what Theokos deeply fears is that Morgoroth's discussions with Elena may gradually soften the Knight-Protector's character and undo the fouling of her morality that Theokos has worked so hard to foster. Theokos is beginning to wonder how viable it would be to send an elite contingent of Woodsmen or even Knights of the Most Moral (ones who might be willing to go behind Elena's back) into Avonleigh to slay his perceived competition. While Theokos would certainly receive short-term gain from this, the devil does not know how the demon in the Phantasmal Forest would react to the wizard's disappearance...

## THEOKOS

See the *Book of Sorrows*, p.79.

Elena Faith-Hold's loyal advisor. He has stood at her side ever since she first arrived in the domain of Nidala.

Lussimar's intrusion into the Southern Empire and the Great Kingdom did not go unnoticed by the Masters of the Nine Hells, nor did its binding into the blade Ebonbane. When both Lussimar and the paladin who had plagued it abruptly vanished from the world of the Great Kingdom, most of the Masters assumed that the loupura and the paladin had

achieved mutual destruction. Only one master baatezu followed the threads and discovered that both loupura and paladin had been drawn into a demiplane within the Ethereal, where the paladin appeared to have imprisoned the loupura. This same baatezu also discovered that another paladin from the same world—more curiously yet, a fallen paladin—was drawn into the same demiplane immediately thereafter. (What are four years on the diabolical timescale?) Sensing the possibility of snaring a being of great potential for evil, this master baatezu sent one of its gelugon servitors along the fallen paladin's trail. This gelugon, now feigning



humanity and calling itself Theokos, encourages her worst excesses to keep her on the dark path.

Like all baatezu, Theokos has a good understanding of how most of the multiverse works. He is not aware of how the Domains of Dread work, however. He is gravely concerned that he has been cut off from the Nine Hells and his master, but he is also unable to depart the domain of Nidala, not even to enter the Phantasmal Forest. (Theokos is not a Darklord, but he is inextricably bound to one.) His limited mobility has constrained his ability to learn about his new environs, and that infuriates him.

Theokos is aware of Lussimar's existence and sometimes presence, and he is spitefully grateful that this enemy appears to be similarly locked away.

Above all else, Theokos will act to prevent anyone from steering Elena Faith-Hold back toward the path of light.

## SITES OF INTEREST — AVONLEIGH

### AUNTIE JOYCE'S HOUSE

An invisible house. It belongs to a bruja by the name of Auntie Joyce.

Here Auntie Joyce lives a simple, Spartan life. A small bed with an itchy-looking quilt occupies the far side of the one-story home. The kitchen stands close to the door, with a fireplace (but mysteriously no chimney) hosting a small cauldron. On the kitchen table are a small diary in which Auntie Joyce writes to keep her melancholy at bay, and also paper and quill pens to occasionally send letters to her sister Coletta in the east. Shelves hold jars full of reagents acquired from the rest of Avonleigh's woods.

#### Joyce (bruja)

The resident bruja and older sister of Sister Coletta of the Hospice of the Healing Ray. Auntie Joyce keeps in touch with her sister through infrequent animal couriers sent to her location, but otherwise she trusts Coletta to handle herself. Auntie Joyce tries to

act unlike the typically morose and melancholy bruja, but this is not always easy for her. Auntie Joyce prefers to be left alone to gather reagents from Shrappcroft Marsh.

Auntie Joyce gathers these reagents for two purposes. First, she needs to keep the wards on her house (like the invisibility one) strong enough to evade Morgoroth's detection. Second, she simply enjoys being in front of the cauldron, brewing up potions and charms. It reminds her of the good parts of the long-ago days when she and Coletta and their eldest sister were a coven. Unfortunately, it reminds her of the bad parts, too.

Despite her preference for solitude, she has had her services petitioned by the elves of Twinmoon Sanctuary in keeping their settlement cloaked from detection by outsiders.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — CHECKERED FATE

All brujas are destined/doomed to know when and how they are going to die. However, sometimes such images can be up to interpretation. In the case of Auntie Joyce, she sees herself being burnt alive within her cottage and struck down by a powerful figure, cloaked in a murky miasma and surrounded by shadows. Is Auntie Joyce being killed by a now-corporeal Morgoroth and his shadowy specters?

Or is she being killed by Elena Faith-Hold or one of her Most Moral Guardians, having freshly imbibed the Umbral Draught? Or is her killer a unique creature of Ebonbane, perhaps even the fiend himself? Whoever it is, their involvement in her death may indicate a drastic change in the course of the Shadowlands.

According to some legends (see *Van Richten's Monster Hunter's Compendium*, Volume III, p.225), at least, the good-aligned hags known as brujas originated in Nidala. However, neither Auntie Joyce nor Sister Coletta are saying.

## DEVONSHIRE

Devonshire was a small village built close to the pond and a nearby mine (see “Ailnoth’s Doom” below). Unlike their neighbors in Wyndham, the folk of Devonshire were far too poor to have the means to move to greener pastures after Morgoroth arrived. The night that Morgoroth abandoned his path to atonement, the undead spirits under his control were unleashed in full force. The folk of Devonshire were their victims.

### Ailnoth’s Doom

A small, abandoned mine located on a small hill (the size of a barrow mound) between Devonshire Pond, the King’s Highway, and Schrapcroft Marsh. Phase spiders and more prowl its depths. Ailnoth was the proprietor of this mine, and he didn’t mind Morgoroth’s presence (which made him an oddity). When phase spiders infested Ailnoth’s mine, Ailnoth tried to petition the Circle for aid. However, they were busy with other matters and could not respond immediately. Foolishly, Ailnoth tried to arm his workers and led the charge against the spiders. This folly earned the mine its name.

The phase spiders of Ailnoth’s Doom create a special “spectral silk” that has caught the eye of Auntie Joyce. A few ideas on what those properties might be are listed below:

- ❖ Objects or structures reinforced with phase spider silk could be more stable when transitioning between the Material and Ethereal Planes, making them resistant to damage from such transitions. Phase spider silk could be used to create wards or barriers that prevent creatures from phasing in or out of a specific area.
- ❖ Phase spider silk could conduct magical energies between the Material and Ethereal Planes, enhancing the effectiveness of spells or rituals involving planar magic.
- ❖ Traps or snares made from phase spider silk could ensnare creatures as they phase in or out of the Ethereal Plane.
- ❖ Objects infused with phase spider silk could emit a faint glow that is visible on the Ethereal Plane, serving as beacons or markers for travelers navigating between dimensions.
- ❖ Musical instruments crafted with strings made from phase spider silk produce otherworldly melodies that resonate across the planes, affecting creatures on both the Material and Ethereal Planes.

### Ailnoth O’Brallaghan (mine owner)

Former owner of the mines nearest to Devonshire. He died during an ill-fated attempt to drive out the overgrown and supernatural spiders from his property. His remains can be found in the deepest part of the mines, and his spirit remains as a geist. Since his death, he has developed a crippling arachnophobia and still holds out hope for rescue. Ailnoth does not know that he is dead, and he will react poorly to the revelation. A compassionate party might ease him through his grief without harm, but otherwise he is likely to lash out. His ethereal touch causes victims to experience the same suffocation that killed him, rendering them helpless until they pass out.

### The Cursed Well

At the heart of the village, the cursed well lies still and silent, its waters reflecting the dimmed stars of Avonleigh’s sky above. When within 10 feet of the well, one can see a “flashback” to the final moments of Devonshire as citizens ran screaming from the damned souls that came to snuff out the living. The well is cursed due to a mother putting her infant daughter into the water-bucket and sending it down the well, in the vain hope that she (the mother) could survive to retrieve her daughter. Once the “flashback” ends, one can hear the desperate wailing of the child at the bottom of the well and acquire the compulsion to climb into the well and bring her out.







## Devonshire Pond

Devonshire Pond is a fetid bog filled with algae, rotting logs, and foul-smelling scum. It bubbles with strange gasses at all times, and camping near it is quite dangerous, as the gas is frequently toxic to breathe. The native frogs have developed an immunity to the noxious gases, but they have subsequently become incredibly poisonous themselves.

## The Weeping Willow

Standing at the edge of the village square, this ancient weeping willow is a solitary sentinel, its drooping branches casting long shadows over the crumbling ruins below. Those who approach the tree are said to hear the sound of soft sobbing carried on the wind.

## The O'Brallaghan Smithy

Tucked away in a forgotten corner of the village, the abandoned smithy is a relic of Devonshire's former industry and craftsmanship. Its forge lies cold and silent, its bellows rusted and its anvils cracked. Tools and implements lie scattered about, their once-bright surfaces dulled by the passage of time.

Despite its dilapidated state, the smithy retains an air of quiet dignity, its walls bearing silent witness to the toil and labor that once filled its halls. It can be a safe place to take refuge in, if one manages to haggle with the last lingering member of the O'Brallaghan family—they would like someone to journey to Ailnoth's Doom and finish what Ailnoth couldn't.

## Lydia O'Brallaghan (ghost)

The main blacksmith of the O'Brallaghan Smithy, and aunt of Ailnoth O'Brallaghan. Though she is undead, she believes that she might be able to gain closure and move on if she knew the full fate of her nephew, and is willing to request this of any who take up refuge in her shop while in Devonshire.

## Glait's Plot

A small, decrepit church and graveyard with a crypt located on the side of the King's Highway, far from Tergeron Manor and leading into the Mists. It was once dedicated to St. Glait, but Glait's sainthood has been as forgotten as the site itself. The dome is cracked, the interior has gone moldy, and the sacred fire is long extinguished. The church is dedicated to Belenus, but also secretly contains relics and information relating to Brigit and other gods of the Great Kingdom, as well as a copy of the *Libram of Belenus* untouched by Elena Faith-Hold's censorship. Gondegal suspects that the church holds more than it lets on, but he hasn't had the time to fully investigate it. The graveyard is infested with shadows (the monster type). The crypt also serves as the resting place for Pellil Vaemin.

## Pellil Vaemin (Sithican vampire)

An elf vampiress hailing from Sithicus, Pellil Vaemin was once a member of the arcane caste, secretly practicing magic while Nuitari hung in the sky with her fellows. When the domain began to collapse due to Lord Soth's apathy in 747BC, Pellil Vaemin and her apprentice decided to flee, hoping that with the land's instability, the Mists would lead them back to the homeland of all Sithican elves. Instead they were set upon by a Mist Horror. Despite slaying the thing, Pellil Vaemin's apprentice was mortally wounded, and she found herself close to death. She then used the knowledge from her studies to drain the remaining remnants of life from her apprentice, and thus she became a vampire.

The Mists deposited her in the woods of Avonleigh near Glait's Plot, where she subsisted on woodland creatures. She nearly starved before encountering and then draining an elf (Bemarthalis of the Twinmoon Sanctuary) roaming the woods of Avonleigh. Since then, she has periodically fed, either on careless demihumans or on the few humans (such as members of the Pack or other rebels or even soldiers of the Army of Nidala) who have crossed into Avonleigh's woods. She has two elven vampire

spawn (one of whom was once Bemarthalis) and four shadows under her control, and they all reside within the crypts near Glait's Plot.

Due to the homeworlds of Avonleigh and Sithicus being remarkably different, Pellil Vaemin and the inhabitants of the Twinmoon Sanctuary cannot understand one another; neither group knows both Nidalan and Sithican. Because of this, the sibilant speech of Sithican elves unsettles the elves of Twinmoon Sanctuary even more than the predatory creature would already unsettle them; to the latter, the hissing of the former sounds unnatural and wrong, regardless of whether they can or cannot understand it. Elves simply don't *do* that. Pellil has learned to use this as a scare tactic when hunting.

### KING'S HIGHWAY

The remnants of the King's Highway bisect Avonleigh, running east-west through the center of the domain. This road is still traversable, though its cobbles have shifted through the years and bristling weeds poke through the cracks. The highway is faster than the forested trails, but it is hardly any safer, as it is patrolled by the wraiths of the Last Circle and other undead forces of the ghostly wizard Morgoroth.

### MEWEN'S CAMP

A fortified campsite of the Army of Nidala, stationed at the frontier of Nidala and Avonleigh, bordering the King's Highway. The commander is a senior officer of the Nidalan Army by the name of Arath Mewen. Being posted here is publicly seen as being honored by the Knight-Protector (as she wants her best men to keep back the tide of evil coming from the Phantasmal Forest) and privately as a death sentence and a marker of disgrace. When there's upheaval in the Knight-Protector's circles which can't be handled by execution, reassignment to a site far from Touraine usually blunts any previously-held ambitions and crumbles one's status. The dangers of Avonleigh ensure that most newcomers to the camp don't survive long.

### Arath Mewen (Captain of Mewen's Camp)

The captain of Mewen's Camp. Though he's in charge of the farthest outpost of the Knight-Protector in all of the Shadowlands and is aware of his post's poor reputation, Mewen does not see that as an excuse to slack on the job. This attitude has put him at loggerheads with Constark Grall of Duskpine Front, but the two must grudgingly work together to inform and supply one another when the other needs aid. In a profession and post where soldiers die young, Mewen is elderly, and his experience renders him a credible threat to the Knights of the Shadows and the Pack.

Despite all of this, Mewen cannot deny that on some level he fears the wizard of Tergeron Manor more than anything else in Avonleigh. He is grateful that he has never yet had to gaze upon the visage of the dreaded Morgoroth the Black. Even the Ahltrian, as unusually well organized as they are, do not evoke the same dread in his heart as the thought of this single man armed with fell magics.

### THE OLD FENS

The Old Fens are one of the oldest wetlands within the Great Kingdom. Long before Morgoroth's arrival, they were believed to be the home of various ancient tribes. As evidence of that belief, when Morgoroth settled in the woods of Avonleigh and summoned his spectral defenders, his necromancy also caused the animation of the (unexpectedly well-preserved) corpses of the ancient tribesfolk. Will-O-Wisps also swarm the waters of the marsh.

### THE PACK'S CAMP

Though the Pack wander throughout the Shadowlands, this location has proven close enough to Nidala to launch raids and safe enough from the horrors within Avonleigh and the Phantasmal Forest. Thus, it serves as a good place to return to, even if Irvyne and Nadia Wolfe are hesitant to have anything close to a well-known base, especially one so close to Mewen's Camp. Enchanted lanterns keep them

safe from detection, as they emit no smoke to be seen from afar.

### RIVER AVALON

The River Avalon cuts through Avonleigh, flowing outward from Wyndham Lake. Significant portions of the river's water drains into the Old Fens, which have been present in Avonleigh since the prehistory of the Great Kingdom of Avonleigh. The River Avalon continues southward, where it diverts its flow again into Shrappcroft Marsh, before trailing southward at a much slower pace. Before Avonleigh was conjoined with western Nidala, the River Avalon flowed into the Mists. Since then it has connected to the major river that descends from the Theospine Mountains, now also called the River Avalon.

### THE ROTTING ORCHARD

An orchard of fruit-bearing trees that stood in the woods of Avonleigh until Morgoroth arrived. With his presence and the subsequent flight of many of

the old inhabitants, the orchard has been abandoned, its fruits and the boughs of its trees twisted by the necrotic energy found here.

Three plants stand out in Avonleigh: the bloodrose, the fearweed, and the "bane sorrel" lilac. Bloodroses are an extremely rare type of gorgeous deep-red rose that drinks blood instead of water to survive. While it can be found elsewhere, it is most common in Avonleigh. Some are said to have grown large enough to have become sentient and mobile, and they have started actively hunting humanoids in Nidala. Such rumors have yet to be confirmed. The fearweed feeds on carrion and is thus in a mutualistic relationship with the bloodroses. Finally, there is the "bane sorrel", a rare type of lilac that can be used to create sleeping potions and effects which mimic suspended animation.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — ANTI-AHLTRIAN ALLERGEN

From a mixture of herbs from this location, coupled with the soil and water from Shrappcroft Marsh, one can synthesize a concoction that is highly effective against the Ahltrian. The concoction can be rubbed onto weapons as an ointment to enhance attacks against Ebonbane's ghoulish minions. Auntie Joyce was the first to discover this mixture and is willing to share this information with others, so long as they do her a favor regarding a certain spider infestation in a southern mine.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — A ROSE WITH MANY THORNS

In 644BC, a necromancer of mediocre skill attempted to covertly take Morgoroth's life and claim Tergeron Manor and the surrounding spectral woods for his own. Morgoroth quickly dealt with the nuisance and, having considered the minor matter resolved, neglected to mention this to Ferran or the Circle. (Such was the importance of the opponent in Morgoroth's eyes.) However, the senior mage made sure to bury the corpse and ward it from any attempt to return from the dead as an undead creature. He buried the corpse between Tergeron Manor and that quaint little orchard not too far from Wyndham. He placed an enchanted "bane sorrel" lilac on top of the grave and moved on to other matters.

In the wake of the Great Upheaval, that plant was disturbed from its spot, having been suffocated by encroaching bloodroses from the now-Rotting Orchard. Somehow those bloodroses, having sprouted atop a necromancer's grave, evolved into a corpse flower and no longer possesses the usual blood-drinking requirement of a bloodrose. This corpse flower typically wanders the wooded area in which it was spawned, with a preference for the Rotting Orchard. The elven vampiress Pellil Vaemin occasionally 'baits' the corpse flower towards other parts of the domain, so as to distract attention from herself. She must do this very carefully due to the black thumb that all elven vampires possess.



## SHRAPPCROFT MARSH

Unlike the Old Fens, Shrappcroft Marsh is relatively mundane. There is an abundance of wildlife to be found in the marsh, along with many rare herbs and reagents prized by alchemists and spellcasters alike.

## TERGERON MANOR

Along the King's Highway, at the center of the domain, stands Tergeron Manor, as foreboding and decrepit as any crypt. Tergeron Manor is a large, magically created estate complete with a temple, a bell tower, and a large residential area. It is surrounded by a tall, iron fence that, although rusted, is still strong.

Beyond those corroded iron gates it waits, a sprawling and opulent estate long since claimed by ruin and the surrounding forest. The belfry atop the western wing transfixes travelers, for it shines always with a beacon of brilliant white light. This light sends a shiver down the spines of onlookers, for it is not comforting at all, but cold and strangely sorrowful—a glow of mourning, not hope.

### Lambert (outlander paladin)

A paladin originating from the same world as Morgoroth the Black. Years after Morgoroth escaped to the world of the Great Kingdom, Sir Lambert managed to follow him, hoping to bring him to justice for the many travesties he had committed upon their former world. Unfortunately, Morgoroth reverted to his treacherous ways and killed Lambert. When Ferran Shadowborn came to Morgoroth's manor to talk peacefully, he found Lambert's reanimated corpse in his way. However, Ferran proved the victor, and Sir Lambert was destroyed a second time.

Sir Lambert spends his recurring unlife in the Topiary of Tergeron Manor. Occasionally, if Morgoroth is feeling particularly spiteful and morose in his confinement, the wizard will animate Lambert's remains and have him perform tasks within Tergeron Manor. He prefers menial tasks like re-arranging

furniture or removing dust from certain places that have no significance (as the furniture will be moved back or the dust will re-accumulate). However, these tasks are meant to be Sisyphean in nature for Lambert to suffer and Morgoroth to enjoy the control he has over the paladin.

## TWINMOON SANCTUARY

Twinmoon Sanctuary Population: 150
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Once, various provinces of the Great Kingdom were home to demihumans such as elves and gnomes. With Elena's rise to power and the ensuing War of Evil, they were considered inferior because they did not worship Elena's idea of Belenus, as well as other perceived innate moral failings. These demihumans were either killed outright or forcibly relocated from their homes. At first they were moved to the west of Nidala, before being forced even further into the western woods.

The elves and gnomes fled through the Great Kingdom towards Avonleigh. However, there they faced hardship from the undead that haunt the woods, and so they created their own sanctuary in Avonleigh's north. Thanks to the few experienced adventurers among them (mages, druids, bards, and rangers), they were able to create a sanctuary through the use of *Leomund's Tiny Hut* and other abjuration wards, cast every day in the same location.

They lived for decades in silent, secluded peace, until the Great Upheaval brought Avonleigh and Nidala back together. Now those elves and gnomes have quite the bone to pick with Elena Faith-Hold, and they are willing to join with any group willing to oppose her (so long as they're not undead). All they need is to reach out, but they have grown quite comfortable in their seclusion and worry that any outsiders they encounter will bring doom to their doorstep. The settlement is known as the "Twinmoon" sanctuary due to the worship of Brigit and the two moons of the Shadowlands (Alyn and Zyla) by the inhabitants.

### **Celphina Loudriver (Moonshadow)**

The great-granddaughter of Loudon Loudriver, and a member of the Moonshadows. She wishes the elders, especially her great-grandfather, wouldn't flatly reject her ideas so quickly. Like the other Moonshadows, she believes the best defense is a good offense, and she is ready to throw her magical Molotov cocktails through the windows of Tergeron Manor.

### **Lazdrelle Melator (Moonshadow)**

A ranger and twin sister of Volranduil. Due to the death of her lover, Bemarthalis, at the hands of an elven vampiress, she decided that Twinmoon Sanctuary could either stay in the shadows and slowly rot into obscurity or else step out and reclaim the light by force and return it to the Shadowlands. She convinced her brother to join her and created the Moonshadows. Also, due to the death of her lover and her close bond with her brother, Lazdrelle suffers from acute abandonment issues, which can be seen with her unwillingness to let her community be abandoned by the world.

### **Leresh Luckbeam (citizen of Twinmoon Sanctuary)**

A gnome druid who stubbornly refuses to let small things like "the land being inherently blighted" stop her from cultivating a good garden. Leresh had always been the adventurous type and felt confined by the small surroundings of Twinmoon Sanctuary. One day, she boldly snuck out from the sanctuary and went exploring the woods of Avonleigh, happening upon Wyndham and Wyndham Lake. After some hurried investigation of the settlement (having been especially off-put by the derelict windmills, despite not having encountered anything there), she found the perfect place to try her luck at gardening. To her credit as a druid, she succeeded, and now she takes trips every week to her garden to harvest food and magical reagents that allow Twinmoon Sanctuary to continue thriving. Her example of disobedience is what inspired the Moonshadows of today, though she is unaffiliated.

She's heard of an orchard somewhere in Avonleigh, but is too afraid to visit it without accompaniment, and while she agrees with the Moonshadows on principle, she thinks they're far too green to serve as adequate protection.

### **Loudon Loudriver (elder of Twinmoon Sanctuary)**

One of the elders of Twinmoon Sanctuary, and very close to the end of his lifespan. Loudon worries greatly for the future of the settlement, as the recent (in his ancient eyes) conjunction of Avonleigh and Nidala has led to a greater risk of discovery by outsiders—outsiders like Elena and her bigoted followers, who would be willing to see them all burnt on the spot if it meant the land could be cleared for a chapel to Belenus. Relations between him and the rest of his family have been strained over this, with his grandchildren and great-grandchildren questioning his wisdom. Despite all this, he loves everyone in the settlement. He just wishes they weren't as stubborn as dwarves!

### **Narthal Vor'thos (sorcerer of Twinmoon Sanctuary)**

An elf sorcerer, widely considered to be one of the most important people in Twinmoon Sanctuary, perhaps on par with the elders. The reason is simple: Narthal maintains the many magical barriers and enchantments that keep Twinmoon Sanctuary so hidden, every single day. Narthal feels a significant amount of pressure regarding this task, and his hair has begun to prematurely silver (which is unheard of in elves, especially in one as relatively young as him).

Narthal is otherwise quite socially awkward, which is a shame, as he has had a romantic interest in Lazdrelle Melator for a very long time, but has been too scared to act on it. He wonders if by joining the Moonshadows, he might be able to impress her, but then he immediately wonders how he would be able to balance an obligation that takes him outside of the sanctuary with his current one, which requires him to be inside the sanctuary at all times. The only time Narthal has ever ventured outside was under the guard of Lazdrelle and her brother Volranduil, on the

business of petitioning Auntie Joyce for aid in further cloaking the sanctuary after both attacks from the elven vampiress and the increased activity of the Nidalans on the border.

### **Peleron Solthol (elder of Twinmoon Sanctuary)**

One of the elders of Twinmoon Sanctuary. Once a proud believer in the entire pantheon of the Great Kingdom, over the years the middle-aged elf has seen the evolution of Belenus' faith, to his mind for the worse, culminating in the War of Evil. Though the sanctuary is consecrated to Brigit and meant to reflect the twin moons of the Shadowlands, Peleron Solthol still worships Belenus in his own small ways, perhaps as a marker of resistance to the new direction the faith has found itself going in. This is a fact that would disturb his fellow elders were they ever to recognize it. Of the elders, Peleron is the most willing to adapt to new circumstances; it was his idea to petition the bruja south of the sanctuary for aid.

### **Volranduil Melator (Moonshadow)**

Brother of Lazdrelle and a druid. He and his sister formed the Moonshadows, and (alongside Celphina Loudriver) they are the most outspoken about ending the isolationist streak of Twinmoon Sanctuary. He suffers from depression that ranges from mild to severe, depending on the day. He loves cultivating marigold flowers, and he likes talking and learning more about horticulture from Leresh Luckbeam, which has made for an odd but wholesome friendship.

## **WYNDHAM**

Wyndham was a village built close to the lake. When Morgoroth's presence led to the birth of the Phantasmal Forest, the denizens of Wyndham moved en masse to greener pastures. (They were slightly closer to Tergeron Manor than the folk of Devonshire, and on average they had better means to move than their poorer southern neighbors.) The ruins of Wyndham are not haunted but merely (mostly) abandoned. Sometimes, there isn't a

werewolf behind every bush or a vampire in every coffin.

### **Leresh's Little Garden**

Hidden away behind a crumbling stone wall, this secret enchanted garden is a clandestine sanctuary of beauty and tranquility amidst the ruins of Wyndham. Flowers of somber colors bloom profusely, filling the air with a strangely sour scent. Stone pathways wind their way throughout the small garden, leading to a hidden alcove where one can find a treasure chest. The chest is, of course, a mimic, but a domesticated one—any who fall for the mimic's trap are not eaten, but simply restrained by the creature's adhesive until the garden's caretaker (a gnome by the name of Leresh Luckbeam) arrives. Leresh created this garden upon having explored the ruins of Wyndham due to a lack of space in Twinmoon Sanctuary. The garden's sole purpose is to harvest both food and magical reagents for the sanctuary. Leresh has heard of a magical orchard somewhere in Avonleigh, but is too afraid to visit it without accompaniment, and no one in the sanctuary feels like venturing that far.

### **The Morley Family Mills**

At the edge of Wyndham, close to the shoreline of the lake, there stands a network of windmills and silos, overlooking a proud farm. The haunted mills stand as a grim sentinel overlooking the waters of the lake. Their weathered sails creak and groan in the wind, casting eerie shadows across the abandoned landscape. Inside, the mills are a maze of rotting timbers and rusting machinery, their once-bustling halls now silent and empty.

The Morley family were once a rich family that lived in Wyndham for generations, accruing both wealth and land. With their family farm and the generational wealth they possessed, they created a large network of windmills and silos on the outskirts of Wyndham bordering the lake, as well as owning their own family heirlooms (which they stored in their family crypt). When Morgoroth created Tergeron Manor



(and inadvertently created the Phantasmal Forest), the family and their farmhands were initially reluctant to leave, but the mass exodus of others gave them their motivation: With no one to sell crops to, what was the purpose in staying? Bitter and dispossessed, they and their farmhands left the land with nothing but the savings they accrued and their belongings of value on their backs. They hoped that if the wizard ever left, they might be able to reclaim their ancestral land, but that was never to be.

### **The Kerleroux Pier**

At the edge of Wyndham (not too far from the Morley Mills), a medium sized pier stretches out into the murky and toxic waters of the lake, its weathered boards creaking softly in the breeze. Once a bustling hub of activity where fishermen brought in their daily catches and travelers embarked on journeys across the water, the pier now stands silent and empty, its wooden planks worn and warped by the passage of time. Despite its dilapidated state, the pier remains a haunting reminder of the village's former glory, its ghostly silhouette reflected in the still waters below.

The pier was owned by the Kerleroux family, who were the most profitable fishermen on Wyndham Lake and held a virtual monopoly on fishmongering prices. They left Wyndham as soon as Morgoroth established his manorial estate, leaving behind family heirlooms and forgotten stashes of coin in their hasty retreat.

### **The Reeve's House**

This manor now stands as a decrepit shell of its former glory. Its once-large halls are now choked with cobwebs, its windows shattered and its walls scarred by specters. Various legal and civil administrative documents can still be found within the offices and bedrooms of the manor, which can shed light on the true history of the Great Kingdom prior to Avonleigh's formation. Careful investigation can reveal old documents that detail both the finances used to fund Elena's campaign and the logistics of it, as well as archived letters between the

reeve and other nobles of the Great Kingdom during the Heretical Wars and even the years before then. These pieces of true, unedited history might be of great value to rebels against Elena's rule, as blackmail against Elena, or as reminders of nostalgia to Morgoroth in his more wistful moods.

### **Guirec Kerleroux (harbormaster of Wyndham)**

A well-known fisherman and "harbormaster" of his day. Guirec Kerleroux and his family were the most profitable fishermen on Wyndham Lake, holding a virtual monopoly on the fishmongering prices. As soon as Morgoroth moved to Avonleigh, he fled alongside the majority of his family. His adolescent son, Loic Kerleroux, decided to return to Wyndham five years later to retrieve forgotten family heirlooms and secret stashes of gold his father kept in the dock house near the water.

### **Loic Kerleroux (ghost haunting Wyndham)**

Son of Guirec Kerleroux and a ghost occupying the Kerleroux Piers of Wyndham Lake. He was slain and rose again, but he still can't find the family gold. He hopes that by finding it, he'll be able to finally rest. Loic has also seen Leresh Luckbeam skulking about Wyndham and suspects that her garden is to feed more than just herself, but he has no one to share this information with.

## **WYNDHAM LAKE**

Wyndham Lake is the other major body of water in Avonleigh, just as disgusting and filthy as Devonshire Pond but not host to the same noxious gasses. The lake is a watering hole for local wildlife.

## **SITES OF INTEREST – NIDALA**

### **ALMERRY KEEP**

A border castle meant to protect Nidala's east, back when it was a part of the Great Kingdom. Today the keep has been repurposed to stand watch against the encroaching Phantasmal Forest, as well as serve as a training ground and military academy for new

soldiers of Elena. (The Faith-Hold's courtyards aren't big enough.) Attached to Almerry Keep is a small feudal hamlet known as Drya.

Almerry Keep was one of the oldest standing fortresses in the Great Kingdom. It was known for being one of the last hold-outs against an invading force in the early years of the Great Kingdom's formation. Sometimes, on moonless nights, the men who serve the guard claim to hear clashing swords and the screams of dying men. No man stands guard on nights of the double new moon.

#### **Walter Denhardt (former officer of the Falkovnian Army)**

A former Falkovnian military officer and aspiring member of the Knights of the Shadows. In Falkovnia, the officers Drakov judges most disreputable are pushed to distant villages and backwater hamlets. Those officers consist of a mixture of petty tyrants lacking any initiative, leadership, or competency, as well as steadfast leaders who lack the Drakov-approved streak of cruelty endemic to the military. Walter Denhardt stood squarely among the latter.

Walter was a minor functionary for a stadtfuhrer ruling over a small village between Aerie and Morfenzi, which bordered a military work camp full of enslaved demihumans. In his heart of hearts, Walter knew that his position and what he did was wrong, so he had developed the practice of undermining his stadtfuhrer in subtle ways through his minor status in logistics (for logistics are always important, especially in a state so enamored with war as Falkovnia). So when the Shadow Insurrection arrived to liberate the workers, it did not take much convincing from Gondegal for Walter to abandon his post.

Today Walter uses his prior military experience, limited as it is, to better train aspiring members of the Knights of the Shadows. He sees in Elena Faith-Hold's tyrannical theocracy many reminders of his homeland. More importantly, Walter uses his understanding of and expertise in logistics to more

efficiently guide the operations of the Knights of the Shadows and other affiliated rebel groups. Walter does this through his position in the Army of Nidala, being stationed under Peterne le Guevel (see the "Guardians of Morals") at Almerry Keep. Gondegal keeps Walter around not only for the man's experience but also as a living sign of hope for any oppressed peoples (like those of Falkovnia and Nidala) to one day break free from the yoke of tyranny and to show the potential of repentance and atonement.

#### **Answig**

Answig (Village, Ruined)  
Former Population: 450

Destroyed in 705BC. No survivors. Elena destroyed it because of its perceived failure to follow the edicts of Belenus. The ruins of the town are populated by ghosts, but they are only hostile to Nidalans who follow Elena's teachings. To the PCs, Answig is a ruin but not necessarily a dangerous one. Some of the ghosts may be willing to speak to the PCs.

Answig was also known for a striking tor, upon which the Answig Church of Belenus was built. Said church building was also known for its association with "pagan" gods such as Arawn and Lugh, which was likely why the terrible dragon Banemaw burnt the church to cinders.

#### **DREAD POSSIBILITY — PIECEMEAL ANNEXATION**

As the Phantasmal Forest slowly encroaches upon the borders of Nidala, Ebonbane grows impatient. The ideal for the fiend would be to corrupt both Elena Faith-Hold and Morgoroth the Black, adding their holdings to his oily pearl necklace. This has not yet occurred, frustrating the demon lord.

However, its elite Ahltrian minion-leaders have proposed a different approach: instead of taking all of Nidala and Avonleigh at once, why not steadily chip away at each domain in a piecemeal fashion? Of the borders of Nidala, the ruins of Answig have been

arbitrarily determined to be a suitable testing ground for this project of turning parts of Elena's land into pseudodomains within the Phantasmal Forest.

### **Minda Denholm (ghost of Answig)**

The ghost of the Presiding Mother of the Church of Belenus in Answig. She stays within the charred ruins of her chapel, going about her daily routine, though she much prefers talking about any other deity than Belenus.

If the "Piecemeal Annexation" Dread Possibility is in play, then Minda Denholm is quite concerned with the recent sightings of creatures moving about in the strange woods to the north, where the Mists once were. But who would care about the plight of the dead?

### **ARDAGHY**

Ardaghy (Village) Population: 500
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A village in far eastern Nidala, where the forest floor grows marshy. The heart of the village is a stockaded area around the oldest and most important buildings, including the mayor's house, the chapel of Belenus, the smithy and the distillery. The stockade is maintained by the young men and women of the village. Some of the maintainers display more enthusiasm than others, but they are never allowed to neglect the stockade too badly. Several homes have been built around the heart of the village, mostly farms in cleared areas, which would feel cramped and ridiculous to people from the Nidalan plains.

Ardaghy benefits from the lumber trade and, to a lesser extent, from the fur trade as well. Farming mostly supports the locals. Ardaghy is known to the rest of Nidala largely because of its excellent peat-bog whiskey, which Elena Faith-Hold has not yet declared evil.

Because Ardaghy is well off the beaten path, it is vulnerable to outside threats. In particular, every twenty years or so it must fend off a tribe of lizardfolk invaders. Typically the Ardaghans have to call upon the Guardians of Morals, who drive back the lizardfolk upon the edge of their blades, but the downside to calling upon the Guardians of Morals is that the Guardians of Morals show up. Although Ardaghy has never been razed, typically a handful of prominent townspeople are accused of heresy and dragged off to the Faith Hold.

The Ardaghans call the lizardfolk *laerti*, after legends of the lizardfolk of the deserts of the Southern Empire from their home realm. However, these lizardfolk are not actually laerti.

### **Brody Moore (farmer's son)**

A citizen of Ardaghy. Son of Collum, brother to Kara. He is not a brawny fellow, but he works hard. He is a tinkerer, and he's good at repairing things.

### **Carson Dugan (distiller)**

The head of the Dugan family of Ardaghy. He owns a distillery which produces a particularly well-regarded whiskey. His eldest child is Zoe Hanrahan.

### **Collum Moore (farmer)**

A citizen of Ardaghy. A widower. Father to Kara and Brody.

### **Ethan Hanrahan (distiller)**

Married to Zoe Hanrahan. Compared to his wife, he is more stone and less fire. He knows when to be quiet.

### **Kara Moore (farmer's daughter)**

A citizen of Ardaghy. Daughter of Collum Moore, sister to Brody.

### **Kian Heyne**

A young man of Ardaghy. Mila is his biological grandmother, but because his biological mother met an unfortunate end when he was very young, Mila



raised him as her son. Kian doesn't always agree with her, but he knows better than to disobey.

#### **Lara Guire (Presiding Mother of Ardaghy)**

The Presiding Mother of the Church of Belenus in Ardaghy. She has been in Ardaghy for nearly twenty years, and her fervor for teaching the *The Book of Radiance* the "right" way (that is, as Elena Faith-Hold has decreed) has diminished in favor of doing what is right for her congregation. She knows that she has become a heretic, but her fear of being caught is less than her satisfaction in seeing the community prosper.

#### **Lorcan Tulley (mayor of Ardaghy)**

The current mayor of Ardaghy. He knows that he is supposed to be the Knight-Protector's eyes and ears in his village, and he takes this duty seriously... which is to say, he takes very seriously the need to be discrete in what he reports in order to avoid bringing attention to the village.

#### **Mila Heyne (elder of Ardaghy)**

One of the village elders of Ardaghy. One of the more conservative citizens of the village. Convinced of her own righteousness. Kian is her obedient son.

#### **Zoe Hanrahan (distiller)**

The eldest child of Carson Dugan, which means that she is the heir to the Dugan distillery. Married to Ethan Hanrahan. She has a fierce temper, which makes her husband's solidity an important balance.

#### **BANBAR**

Banbar (Hamlet) Population: 105
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A hamlet near Pernstow Keep.

#### **BANEMAW'S REND**

A suspected lair of the great dragon Banemaw, raided by Elena and her knights in 723BC. This was a great victory for Elena, as she was able to seize the dragon's hoard and give it to the major cities of

Nidala as recompense for Banemaw's actions. Elena was also able to claim the dragon's right claw, and she paraded around each city with it as a trophy.

From 723BC and until roughly 748, the Rend was guarded by knights of the Guardians of Morals, under the pretense that the dragon's lair was still befouled with his arcane taint and was thus a hazard to others. Thus it was too dangerous to let anyone not part of the military structure head inside. Once the Phantasmal Forest was finally accepted by Elena as a problem circa 749BC, she relieved those knights of their guard duty, and now the Rend stands open and unguarded.

The supposed trophy is, of course, an elaborate hoax, made possible through the use of skinned laerti hides, pig carcasses, bear bones, obsidian flint, and light transmutation magic.

#### **DREAD POSSIBILITY — RAIDING THE REND**

Adventurous Nidalans or greedy and/or skeptical foreigners may decide to scout out the Rend for remnants of Banemaw's hoard, or proof that the dragon does or does not exist. They ought to be careful: With Theokos' aid, Elena has made sure to leave traps, mundane and magical, within the lair to confuse would-be intruders and give the impression of a dragon. Chief among said traps being a defective, airborne strain of the Umbral Draught that causes intense hallucinations and even more blood loss than usual.

#### **THE BOAR'S DEN**

A well-known hunting lodge in Nidala's eastern woods, at the edge of Lake Keld. The main hunter and his cronies are wereboars. (See "The Hunters of the Boar's Den".) Everyone else is either decent company or else Elena's Woodsmen.

#### **Echlin Gormáin (Innkeeper)**

Co-owner of the Boar's Den with his wife Siobhán.

**Siobhán Gormáin (Innkeeper)**

Co-owner of the Boar's Den with her husband Echlin.

**Bogie Downs**

See "Olerick's Colloquial Guides Presents... Sacred Sites and Legendary Landmarks" from *Quoth the Raven* Issue 28, p.120- 121.

The site of the Sinner Stones known as the Goad Stones, which have been known to wander.

**CAORANN**

Caorann (Small Town) Population: 1000
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See The Mistway.

A town at the western edge of the eastern forest of Nidala. It is one of the most isolated towns, not because of its distance from Touraine, but because of its distance from any river or road.

Every autumn the people of Caorann celebrate a harvest festival, complete with song and dance. These activities have been forbidden by Elena Faith-Hold, of course, but the townspeople have developed a ritual (featuring song and dance, naturally) which they believe temporarily wards them from Elena's attention. (They may even be correct.) A group calling themselves the Woodlarks have started spreading knowledge of this ritual to other nearby towns.

**CU CLANNAGH**

Cu Clannagh (Large Town) Population: 2250
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See The Mistway.

A town along the River Dorchach, deep within the eastern forest of Nidala. Because of its easy access to trees for wood and the river for transportation, it is an important source of lumber for Touraine.

The town has been fortified with a wooden palisade. Elena Faith-Hold cannot bear the thought of an undefended town, feeling that it reflects poorly upon her. The people of Cu Clannagh are proud of their

palisade, some because it is constructed from local timber, and some because they believe their hearty fortification has kept Banemaw from attacking their town in the years since 718BC. (Never mind that Cu Clannagh had a palisade in 718BC, and it did nothing to fend off Banemaw.)

Apart from the military outposts, Cu Clannagh may be the best-armed settlement in Nidala, not because of any looming threat, but because so many of its citizens are lumberers and hunters. The tools of those trades adapt very readily to weapons.

Cu Clannagh is also known for its hunting dogs, which are said to be able to sniff out evil. They can't, in general, although they excel at discerning lycanthropes regardless of their guise. Also, their keen sense of smell means that they can be trained to detect invisible and camouflaged creatures as well. These dogs have curly gray-black fur. Although they generally possess a gentle disposition, their great size makes them exceptionally dangerous when riled.

Given these traits, many parties outside of Nidala would be interested in owning a hunting dog of Cu Clannagh. However, much like the horses of Nova Vaasa, most Nidalans consider their hunting dogs too valuable to sell.

**Charlotte Lawlor (Mayor of Cu Clannagh)**

The mayor of Cu Clannagh. The Lawlor family once ruled the town, but their influence has waned over the decades, and their continued nobility is open to debate. Charlotte Lawlor is addressed as Lady Lawlor because she is mayor, not because she is noble. She retains her position because she is generally considered a good mayor, which is to say that the town is prosperous and rarely draws the attention of the Guardians of Morals.

## CUXRATH

Cuxrath (Village, Ruined)  
Former Population: 675

Destroyed in 635BC by the great dragon Banemaw. In fact, Cuxrath was the first settlement ever destroyed by Banemaw. In truth, Cuxrath was the testing site of something much more sinister.

## DETTESHAW MONASTERY

A former monastery along the Lesser Dorlach past Srath. Was destroyed by Banemaw in 741BC after its monks were revealed as heretics (e.g. disagreed with Elena). In particular, they insisted on celebrating the holy days of gods other than Belenus.

## DRYA

Drya (Hamlet)  
Population: 105

A medieval hamlet near Almerry Keep.

## DUSKPIKE FRONT

The main military outpost in western Nidala. It periodically receives supplies from the east, but is otherwise supplied by the village of Vinrac. Standing on the border of Avonleigh, it is the main relay point between the Faith-Hold and Mewen's Camp, which was established across the border.

Duskpine Front deals not only with goblins, but also with whatever threats emerge from the Phantasmal Forest that either avoided Mewen's Camp or overcame it. Those threats can range from the mundane (rebels against Elena) to the magical (the undead, whether sent by Morgoroth or Ebonbane).

### Constark Grall (Captain of Duskpine Front)

The main leader and captain of Duskpine Front, and one of the most stressed individuals in Nidala. Since the creation of Duskpine Front, Constark has found great pleasure in lording over his own slice of Nidala, barren as it is. Elena Stranglehold is far away from the western woods, and that allows for Constark to be the highest authority, all while petitioning the Faith Hold for more resources to fight against Evil. At

least, that was how things were before the goblins menaced his outpost and the village of Vinrac.

Constark then discovered to his horror that the problem was much larger than mere goblins. He increased his petitions for aid and resources from the Faith Hold, but they have been increasingly ignored. (Elena has become annoyed with these requests and thinks it might be best for those of Duskpine Front to "work with what they have, not what they wish they had". If Belenus truly chose them for this mission, then they would succeed regardless of the circumstances.)

Nowadays, Constark must thread the needle between managing Duskpine Front's intended mission of standing watch against Avonleigh and the Phantasmal Forest, protecting Vinrac from goblin incursions, and then offering whatever limited information to Durvoskar about Banemaw and the dragon's lair that he knows.

## FAITH HOLD

Elena Faith-Hold's stronghold atop Mount Malcredo, overlooking the city of Touraine.

A perpetual storm hovers over the Faith Hold, its lightning continuously striking the tallest tower of the stronghold. According to legend, this storm is a visible symbol of the way Elena Faith-Hold draws the attention of evil to herself so that it does not attack the innocent and the helpless. According to rumor, the lightning powers certain engines which were built into the Faith Hold.

### Urien (chief torturer)

See Session 20 of Gonzoron's campaign journals.

The chief torturer of Elena Faith-Hold. He is greatly feared all across Nidala. Curiously, though, whenever Urien is healed by a priestly blessing, his personality changes briefly, and he becomes willing to aid others in escaping from the Faith Hold.



## FAR WATCH

These overgrown ruins mark the original farthest-explored edges of the Misty Border of Nidala, when the domain was an Island of Terror. Ten wooden posts, enchanted by Theokos to rot very slowly, were left behind by scouts in their early exploration of the west of Nidala, as part of their mission tasked by Theokos while the Knight-Protector tamed the eastern woods. The site remained abandoned (as was everything west of the Theospines) until the formation of the Shadowlands Cluster in 747BC. Five new scouts were sent to survey the western woods in 748BC, with the intended goal of using the camp as a staging ground for further exploration into the strange Phantasmal Forest that appeared alongside what was once the Misty Border. Of course, only one—Iarlaith Linehan—returned.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — MOVING THE (GOAL)POSTS

The wooden posts are enchanted with powerful conjuration magic, courtesy of Theokos. The posts act as a teleportation circle, allowing the fiend to quickly move from his tower to the western woods, in case he believes his phylactery is in jeopardy. Theokos initially meant for the connection to be one-way, from his tower to the woods. However, a cunning mage could find a way to reverse-engineer the circle and could even ensure that more than just one person can be brought along. An entire raiding party of heroic rebels, with enough preparation, could claim the Tower of Glory for themselves, and from there prepare to take the Faith-Hold.

## GLENMURRON

Glenmurrion (Settlement)  
Population: 14

See The Mistway. In particular, according to Session 18 of Gonzoron's campaign journal, Glenmurrion is a ruin in 736BC.

A town in the southeastern portion of Nidala. It lies well south of the River Dorlach.

In 732BC Glenmurrion was destroyed by the dragon Banemaw. Reconstruction has started, but the town has not reached anything like its prior glory.

The bones of Saint Ruaidri were buried in the hills near Glenmurrion. She is known for defeating a terrible knoggelvi, after which she expired with the praise of Belenus still upon her lips. The site of her burial has been a popular pilgrimage site for several hundred years, and in fact pilgrimage is the primary reason why Glenmurrion is being rebuilt.

## THE GREY MOUND

In the northern edge of Nidala is a small burial mound that sticks out against the slopes of the western Theospine Mountains. Not a mortal soul in western Nidala, nor in eastern Nidala, knows of this location, though they could easily discover it should they explore the west more thoroughly than has been done in years past. Two imposing iron doors seal off the interior of the burial mound from the rest of the world, with a foreboding image of a massive dragon carved onto the gates.

Within, one can see various tombs that belonged to the ancient tribes that would one day become the Great Kingdom of Avonleigh. This was a gathering-place of some sort, with various inscriptions and crude paintings made with residue honoring the gods of the Pre-Belenite pantheon decorating the walls. None of the deceased within the burial mound are in any state of preservation or reanimation—not a single skeleton or mummy can or will rise up to jumpscare the PCs.

On the walls of the far side of the crypt, there appears to be one filled with nothing but tallies. If one counts the chalk tallies in full, they would see that it's easily in the thousands. The tallies correspond to each and every person killed in Nidala either by Elena's direct hands or through the oppressive regime she's created. If PCs stare at the

wall, there are no new updates. If they look away, it will immediately have new tallies added to it.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — THE SENESCHAL'S SECRET

Though this location existed since the arrival of Nidala in the Mists (most definitely created by the Dark Powers from whole cloth), it was only discovered in 679BC. Sensing the pacification of eastern Nidala was imminent, Theokos journeyed to the western slopes of the Theospines to better survey the land and determine whether the west could be put to some use. While traveling, he discovered the crypt.

Viewing the remote nature of the location as useful, Theokos has planted his fiendish phylactery here. For decades, the location sat undisturbed, and Theokos was assured of his phylactery's safety, all while making sure that Elena remained focused on her perpetual war against Evil and never found it necessary to pay heed to the untamed wilds of her realm. All of this was fine until the Shadowlands cluster formed in 747BC. The Phantasmal Forest quickly surrounded nearly half of Nidala, and the Ahltrian began to poke and prod at forgotten locales.

Now Theokos is deeply concerned that his once-safe phylactery vault may be in jeopardy due to the Ahltrian ghouls. He cannot risk having any native Nidalans investigate. He also believes he must be by Elena's side now more than ever, lest she be influenced by anyone that isn't him. So he's waiting for gullible outsiders to task with ensuring the safety of this "secret holy crypt" and, once those dupes have confirmed that all is well (or better yet, defended it from the Ahltrian), he'll summarily betray them and have them executed. The PCs, if they survive, will have the chance to both destroy Theokos' phylactery and to learn about Elena Faith-Hold's true origins and how the domain came to be.

### THE HALL OF SHIELDS

See the Undead Sea Scrolls 2002, p.129.

An observatory belonging to the secret group known as the Celestines.

### HEDRINGTON MONASTERY

The Hedrington Monastery is located in the southern Theospine Mountains, along the small river which eventually feeds into Lake Amenta. Its abbot is Stephen Muldowney.

The Old Ways are secretly still practiced at Hedrington. A un-Elenathized copy of The Book of Radiance exists within the monastery grounds.

### HOSPICE OF THE HEALING RAY

A hospice operated *very discretely* by Halan witches under the guidance of Sister Coletta.

#### Coletta (Halan witch)

The leader of the Hospice of the Healing Ray in Nidala. Secretly a bruja. Younger sister to Auntie Joyce.

Sister Coletta never lets her *change self* lapse while she is awake, and she appears as a wizened old woman. However, she does not realize that she regains her normal appearance when she sleeps, and enough of the witches of her hospice have seen her true form to recognize her as a bruja. They keep her secret well, not least because they know she would be very angry if she knew that they knew. Their silence stems from both kindness and fear.

Among the witches of the hospice, Sister Coletta has a reputation for a sour attitude but a generous heart. (She'll heal you, but she'll complain about whatever foolishness you did to get hurt.) Although her anger is terrible, her forgiveness is vast. Except, it seems, for herself.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — TWO-THIRDS OF A COVEN

Auntie Joyce and Sister Coletta were not originally brujas. Along with their older sister (whose name they never speak), they were born as ordinary-seeming human girls. Only as they reached adolescence did their hag nature reveal itself. The older sister became a worshiper of the Morrigan, goddess of war and fate, and she drew Joyce and Coletta into a coven with her. Much evil was committed in the Morrigan's name, at least until a Knight of the Order of the Circle tracked them down. The Knight destroyed the older sister, and Joyce and Coletta fled.

The truth of matter is that neither Joyce nor Coletta had been dedicated to the Morrigan; they were simply afraid of their sister. They disavowed what they had done and prayed to Belenus for forgiveness. Belenus appears to have given them an opportunity to atone.

### IASGAIR

Iasgair (Small Town)  
Population: 1000

See The Mistway. According to Session 18 of Gonzoron's campaign journal, the Fisherman's Wharf is a small inn in Iasgair. It is operated by a fellow named Ian Hansen, who should be commended for his fine taste in names. Tim Flanagan runs the stables. However, the journal is set during 736BC, so matters may have changed subsequently.

A fishing village on the shore of Lake Amenta.

Iasgair is led by a rather exotically willowy woman. She's not young, and she's clearly wise, but she's certainly nothing like elderly. In fact, she's one of the shadow fey living in exile. It's one of those unspoken matters, but very widely known in the village. Not least because a third of the village is descended from her...

### Uathach (mayor of Iasgair)

The mayor of Iasgair, and she has been since 635BC. Her true age is impossible to pinpoint. Her skin is utterly unwrinkled, yet it has the ethereal translucence of the aged. Her hair, which she habitually wears in a waist-length braid, changes color with the seasons: the palest blond in the spring and summer, strawberry blond in the autumn, and silver throughout the winter. She is beautiful. She is protective of her town. She is not particularly kind.

Secretly a muryan from the Shadow Rift, Uathach does not speak of her reasons for leaving, but careful observers might notice that she is fascinated by tales of love gone wrong. Although she calls herself a widow, she never speaks of her spouse. She certainly has no compunction against taking lovers as she pleases.

Many citizens of Iasgair are descended from Uathach. Nobody in town discusses this, particularly not with strangers, nor do they speak of her apparent agelessness. Oddly, neither Elena nor her Guardians of Morals seem to notice anything unusual. Uathach is well-warded.

### LAKE AMENTA

The largest lake in Nidala. It stands at the southern end of the Theospine Mountains. The village of Iasgair sits upon the shores of Lake Amenta.

### LAKE KELD

The second-largest lake in Nidala. It lies south of the branch of the River Dorlach which wends past Cu Clannagh. It has no obvious connection to the Dorlach, so it is believed to be a fed by a spring sacred to the moon goddess Brigit.

### LAKE MORCAŃA

A lake in the eastern foothills of Mount Malcredo and south of the city of Touraine. While no rivers enter or leave the lake, it is fed by and feeds any number of small streams, irrigating the surrounding lands.



## STAIRS OF BELENUS

According to Nidalan legend, the proper astronomical confluence between the moons Alyn and Zyla (and likely other factors) will trigger the appearance of The Stairs of Belenus over Lake Morcana. Anyone who dares may step upon this fiery staircase without being burnt. However, if one's faith in Belenus is not sufficiently pure, then the stairway will vanish beneath one's feet, leaving the aspirant to fall into Lake Morcana and drown. However, anyone of sufficient faith to ascend the full flight of Stairs is said to be admitted into Belenus' divine presence.

## MAGAUHAN MONASTERY

The oldest monastery in Nidala, built in the foothills of the Theospine Mountains almost exactly due west of Mount Malcredo. The complex is large enough that its inhabitants speak of "The Greater Magauran" and "The Lesser Magauran", with the Lesser being smaller, higher on the slope, and actually more important. However, there is only one monastery, led by Abbot Robert Muldowney.

## MOUNT MALCREDO

A solitary mountain east of the Theospine range. The Faith Hold stands high upon its slopes, while the city of Touraine rests at its eastern foot.

## OLD KING'S GLADE

A small glade in the southwestern woods of Nidala, about one hundred feet in diameter. At the center of the glade is a statue of King Christopher, who once ruled the Great Kingdom of Avonleigh. Beneath the statue's shadow (which faces the same direction regardless of time of day) is a death knight. She remains motionless and inert unless someone gets within thirty feet of the king's statue; if someone does, the knight begins to speak, asking where Elena Faith-Hold is and whether they can summon her. If anyone refuses or explains that they can't or won't for whatever reason, the knight ignores them unless prompted again. However, if someone indulges the death knight and states that they will aid it in finding Elena Faith-Hold, the knight will speak on why it must

duel her to the death and task them with bringing Elena Faith-Hold to her location. Upon a refusal, the death knight will turn hostile. In that case, the best defense is fleeing the glade. The death knight cannot move more than sixty feet away from the statue at any time.

In life, the death knight was Dame Evangeline Stubbe, a knight of King Christopher's guard. When King Christopher finally attempted to blunt the excesses of Elena Faith-Hold during her War of Evil, the paladin came back to Avonleigh to confront the king in person. Evangeline Stubbe was one of the guards on duty the night she arrived. Elena and Christopher argued vehemently, and when Elena moved in a threatening manner, Evangeline Stubbe was the only guard brave enough to interpose herself. In turn Elena found the interposition threatening, and moments later Evangeline Stubbe was bleeding out on the floor of the king's audience chamber. Despite Elena's insistence that she had every right as a Knight of the Circle to defend herself (which King Christopher, being thoroughly cowed, did not protest), Belenus appears to have disagreed. That was the night that Elena Faith-Hold ceased to be a paladin.

## DREAD POSSIBILITY — DISASTER THRESHOLD

The proximity of the Death Knight's Glade to the rebels known as the Pack is not a coincidence. Irvyne and Nadia Wolfe were the first to stumble upon this site, and they quickly realized how dangerous such a powerful undead was. They were quite thankful that she was still bound to the glade, which they suspected was due to the statue that she could not lay a hand against. They forbade any members of the Pack from approaching the site for their own safety, due to how quickly the death knight could turn hostile.

However, when you bring together rebels just as the Pack has, you will doubtlessly find someone who believes they know better than the leaders or who is

willing to resort to more extreme methods. Someone might realize that the statue is what binds the death knight, and if that statue is gone, then maybe the death knight can wander Nidala, furiously searching for the Knight-Protector. Many would suffer if this were the case (for a death knight's rampage is on par with that of a dragon), but on the other hand Elena might die.

### ONEIRE

Oneire (Hamlet)  
Population: 120

See "Olerick's Colloquial Guides Presents... Sacred Sites and Legendary Landmarks" from *Quoth the Raven* Issue 28, p.120- 121.

A hamlet in southeastern Nidala best known for its proximity to the Sinner Stones known as Oddar's Tarn.

#### "Papa" Darry (Herbalist)

The local herbalist. His salves act as half-strength potions of *healing*.

### ORILLON

Orillon  
Population: 250

A scattered village of Darkonians and outcast Nidalans, who have settled near the Via Corona Mistway.

Vistani have also found this area worth frequenting, as they face much greater danger from Elena's knights anywhere else in Nidala. The Vistani visit Orillon perhaps once a season, staying for a week at most before moving on. Orillon's proximity to the Via Corona Mistway means that Elena Faith-Hold prefers to ignore the village, as it is far closer to the sinful world outside of Nidala than she would prefer to acknowledge. Additionally, the remote location of Orillon means that any commitment to patrolling it is logistically much more intensive and time-consuming. Coupled with the Darkonian population

of the village already rousing suspicion amongst the Guardians of Morals, the Vistani find Orillon to be much more 'hospitable' than anywhere else in Nidala. For as many Guardians that want to investigate the weird immigrants, there are just as many who wish to leave said peoples alone, quarantining them and only acting if they ever decide to spread into Cu Clannagh or somewhere else.

With the slow increase in new arrivals, Elena has wanted to create some sort of checkpoint, whether a small keep, a wooden outpost, or something else, to keep an eye out for heathens (and more importantly, to keep the rest of the world out of Nidala). However, Elena also believes that if forced to choose between splitting her focus on the new arrivals here and the encroaching Phantasmal Forest and its immediately apparent Evil, she'd rather focus on the latter. However, if those new arrivals decide to start changing the area enough with their heretical cultural values, then the Knight-Protector will take the time out of her busy schedule to pay Orillon a visit and thoroughly evaluate the extent of its heresy.

### PERNSTOW KEEP

A garrison of loyal soldiers of the Knight-Protector, typically involved with patrolling the eastern woodlands of Nidala. Attached to the keep's walls is a small hamlet known as Banbar. A fair number of the soldiers are young men hailing from Srath.

#### Elsadamor Floch (Captain of Pernstow Keep)

The captain of the Army in Nidala in charge of Pernstow Keep, and older sister of Sindry Floch. She is half-elven, which is a rarity in Nidala. She appreciates that she has been stationed near the eastern woods, as she is an avid outdoorswoman and has a strong fear of wide open spaces, like the plains in which Touraine and Srath and other villages can be found.

Elsadamor hails from Caorann, and she knows of the Woodlarks. Though she serves in the Army of Nidala,

she is more loyal to her hometown than she is to the domain of Nidala as a whole. As such, she would rather not see Caorann investigated for heresy. For that matter, she is grateful to Belenus every day that she does not hear word of Caorann being attacked by Banemaw.

### RICOCHET

Ricochet (Hamlet) Population: 130
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A hamlet in the area associated with the Tower of Glory and therefore nominally under the rule of Theokos. It was founded by refugees from the Province of Dulac who had been driven from their homes during the Heretical Wars.

### RIVER DORLACH

See The Mistway.

The most important river in Nidala. The Dorlach flows east from the Theospine Mountains, and it branches multiple times before it reaches the Mists. At its first major branch, the Dorlach splits into the Lesser Dorlach (to the north) and the Greater Dorlach (to the east).

### RIVER FINN

See The Mistway.

A river which runs westward from the Theospine Mountains into the Phantasmal Forest. It forks into the West Finn and East Finn before running into the Mists.

### RIVER MOURNE

See The Mistway.

A river which runs northeast from the northern Theospine Mountains until it flows into the Mists.

### RUSHINVER

Rushinver (Small Town) Population: 1000
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A small town not far inside the boundary of the eastern forest, built at the fork where the northern branch of the Greater Dorlach splits off from the

eastern branch. Although its citizens engage in some logging and hunting, the town exists largely to be a waypoint between the forest and the plains.

The owners of The Fayre Repose (good lodging, excellent food, moderate price) maintain that their inn is the finest in all of Nidala. They may even be right. Those who wish to make do with less may seek out the Spawning Salmon (common lodging, common food, low price).

The Rushinverans believe that they are far enough from Touraine and the Theospine Mountains to be safe from the wrath of either Elena Faith-Hold or Banemaw. They are wrong, of course. Their mayor is himself a spy for the Knight-Protector.

### Ava Breen (inn-maid in Rushinver)

A young woman who works at the Fayre Repose, the best inn in Rushinver. She's known for being quiet but hardworking, which is not a bad combination in her employers' opinion.

Less positively, Ava is secretly a Darkonian who slipped through the Via Corona. She is a low-level wizard who decided to escape her cruel mistress. Unfortunately, Ava was caught by a last curse just before she reached the Mistway, and that curse twisted her familiar—a frog—into a vampyre frog. The familiar now needs a small amount of blood to drink each night. Fortunately, Ava works at an inn where a great many people pass through. Most of them don't even notice that they've been pierced by the frog's barbed-wire tongue.

Ava feels guilty about letting her familiar feed, but then again she's happy for the vitality that it shares with her when it does. In the meantime, while she wrestles with her conscience, she uses *change self* and *friends* to help herself fit in, and she hopes that the Guardians of Morals don't notice her little magics.



### The Doomfrog of Rushinver (doomfrog)

The vampyre frog familiar of Ava Breen. Nobody actually calls it the Doomfrog, *but they should*.

### Gerard Rush (mayor of Rushinver)

The mayor of Rushinver. (His family has inherited the mayorship for generations now. You can tell by his surname.) He is faithful to Elena Faith-Hold and her version of the faith of Belenus. Although Gerard Rush is initially a jovial man, he can be quite easy to offend. And offending him is dangerous.

### Jamie Finn (rivermaster of Rushinver)

If Rushinver had a harbor, then Jamie Finn would be its harbormaster, but it doesn't, so "rivermaster" is a more appropriate description. He oversees all of the traffic through Rushinver, whether it's by river or by land. As authorized by Mayor Rush and the town's council of elders, Jamie Finn sees that everybody pays a toll for passage. It is not a high toll, but many people pass through, so the money adds up. If anybody protests having to pay, Jamie Finn's brawny assistants are usually close at hand to help persuade cooperation as needed.

Jamie Finn is tall and lanky, which makes him look like he should be clumsy, but really he's not. He wears a wide-brimmed straw hat on sunny days and rainy days alike.

### Molly Finn (citizen of Rushinver)

Jamie Finn's wife. She is just a housewife, you know. Although she is often seen along the river as well, particularly when her husband has business elsewhere. Jamie Finn's brawny assistants listen readily to Molly Finn.

Molly Finn disagrees with many of the pro-Elena policies of Mayor Rush, but she's good at not letting him know that.

## SGORRLAG

Sgorrlag (Small Town)  
Population: 1000

See The Mistway.

A mining town in the Theospine Mountains.

The people of Sgorrlag are very serious-minded, focused upon their work and their families. This attitude makes them perfect subjects for Elena Faith-Hold. The Sgorrlaggans may not be as enthusiastic in their faith as the Knight-Protector would wish, but they are excellent at playing along.

## SINNER STONES

See "Olerick's Colloquial Guides Presents... Sacred Sites and Legendary Landmarks" from *Quoth the Raven* Issue 28, p.120- 121.

The Nidalan landscape is dotted with megalithic monuments to the pagan past. Many of them have colorful names, including the following:

- ❖ Stange Acre
- ❖ Scorn Hill
- ❖ Cripplet Rocks
- ❖ Witherstane Ridge
- ❖ Merry Maidens
- ❖ Drunk Dancers
- ❖ Skurling Devils
- ❖ Goad Stones
- ❖ Oddar's Tarn

While all of the sinner stones are now considered fell places, Oddar's Tarn is particularly ill-reputed. According to legend, it was once the lair of an ogre, and even now will o'wisps and black dogs frequent the area.

## SLEMINVER

The ruins of a very old settlement built near the mouth of the River Avalon that flows into the western woods, much like the River Finn near it. Sleinver was once a mining town, similar to Sgorrlag, with the added benefit of using the river to create efficient watermills. It boasted some of the purest water sources from the Theospines.

Unfortunately a mudslide in 616BC killed over half of the town's inhabitants, forcing the rest to move on

towards the eastern half of Nidala (with many resettling in Sgorrlag). The remains of the village, half-buried under mud and stone, can still be found and explored. Nothing lives there. No, truly—much like Wyndham, sometimes there isn't a vampire in every coffin.

## SRATH

<p>Srath (Large Town) Population: 2250</p>
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See The Mistway.

A town along the River Dorlach. The surrounding farmland yields food for much of Nidala, which is one reason that it is prosperous. However, with its central location, Srath also serves as a trading hub for Touraine and the rest of the land. Farmers often bring their crops here to sell, minimizing the distance they have to travel and the tariffs they have to pay. As a result, the city bustles with activity every harvest. Auctions are held and imported goods such as farm implements and luxury items are sold. For the farmers of the land, Srath is the most important city they know.

For Elena Faith-Hold, Srath is useful but expendable. Ultimately, the final reason for Srath's prosperity is because it no longer resists Elena Faith-Hold's domineering approach to religion. Srath was burnt twice in the early years of Nidala, and even though nobody alive remembers the burning firsthand, they are still a well-known (and much-feared) reminder that Srathans should behave.

## THEG THEKRO

<p>Theg Thekro (Hamlet) Population: 225 (90% goblins, 8% norkers, 1% bugbears, 1% varags)</p>
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Referred to as "the Mudhold" by the Nidalans due to the filth and squalor of the settlement. The goblins are led (subjugated) by a fog giant who lives within the caverns of the southern Theospine Mountains. The goblins harass Vinrac for supplies to bring back to their giant master.

## Crelk (goblin)

The goblin in charge of rallying the other goblins against the humans in western Nidala. Crelk is adept at riding wolves and other large creatures that goblins tend to associate themselves with, like worgs, but there has been a steep decline in wolves and worgs since the early days of Nidala. Crelk has instead made do with giant rats, and while this might not seem intimidating compared to giant wolves, the goblins have found themselves immune to diseases that the giant rats carry, thus harrying the humans for far longer than a usual raid's consequences would last.

## Derd Phel (goblin chief)

The chief of the goblins of Theg Thekro, and in a competition with Constark Grall and Narthal Vor'thos on who is more stressed. Derd lived a simple life until Durvoskar arrived, and greatly wishes to return to this simple life. Derd fears the humans and the possibility of a raid on Theg Thekro, but he fears it much less than the possibility that Durvoskar will kill him and replace him with another goblin (or decide to stop being lazy and rule directly). Prior to things going south, Derd was the closest thing the goblins had to an artist, with his usage of mud, chalk, animal feed, bat droppings, and other natural elements adorning the various caves and chambers of Theg Thekro in a way that indicated the purpose of each room and the history of the goblins in the Theospines.

## Durvoskar (fallen cloud giant)

Durvoskar was once a cloud giant of a high status within the Ordning, who was fond of wagers that used the lives of smallfolk as betting material (such as wagering that one could make a woman fall in love with a select man or that they could make a king abdicate his throne). Unlike most cloud giants, Durvoskar held a special enmity for the smallfolk that bordered on obsession and puzzled his fellows; it was not gauche to manipulate lesser creatures, but it was gauche to be so thoroughly invested in the

lives of such smallfolk beyond the purposes of a game. In such wagers a cloud giant would use anything at their disposal to win, such as magic and messengers. The only rule for such contests was that the creatures being manipulated could not catch on to what was going on; as soon as they did, the wager was lost.

Durvoskar had wagered his rank within the Ordning with his sister on whether or not he could tempt a paladin into breaking his oath to the crown. Try as he might, through means magical and mundane, Durvoskar failed to tempt the knight, and his sister won the wager. Durvoskar was an ungracious and arrogant loser, which was already unbecoming of his status within cloud giant society, and he only descended further in rank. Infuriated, Durvoskar dared to murder his sister and frame the smallfolk for it, hoping that by avenging this deception he would not only regain his prior status, but add his sister's extravagant wealth to his own. Durvoskar never received the chance. His plot was discovered (by smallfolk allied with the cloud giants, no less), and his clan, thus informed, was thoroughly disgusted with the depths of depravity that his greed and envy had led him towards. The clan patriarch, unwilling to execute Durvoskar, instead banished him, summoning mists and fog from the ethereal to spirit away the wayward giant. Durvoskar arrived in the western woods of Nidala in December of 751BC, having degenerated into a fog giant.

Today, Durvoskar rules unhappily from within his lair in the Theospines. Upset at having nothing more to rule over than mere goblinoids (goblins and norkers, with the occasional bugbear and varag), which he sees as less than vermin, Durvoskar desires nothing more than to rebuild his vast collection of wealth and to regain his status in the Ordning. Unfortunately for Durvoskar, the wealth that he seeks is not abundant in Nidala: grand works of art, wondrous jewelry, and beautiful sculptures are either banned for heresy, under strict regulation, or not sufficiently part of Nidalan culture to be found in excess. However, Durvoskar has heard rumors of a dragon in Nidala,

and he knows that dragons tend to have large hoards of treasure. Though it's not exactly what he's looking for, Durvoskar still wants to claim the dragon's hoard as his own. To that end, Durvoskar has needed to find contacts amongst the smallfolk (those who are not "vermin" like the goblinoids), and he has found one (un)willing participant in Constark Grall of Duskpine Front.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — SHE WHO FIGHTS WITH MONSTERS

Durvoskar, though he hates the smallfolk and has only developed the barest minimum of a sense of caution regarding them after his sentencing to the Mists, is intrigued by Elena Faith-Hold. She seems to be the champion of the smallfolk of this land, yet she is so greatly feared by those whom she champions. She and her best knights have battled the dragon Banemaw and survived, which is a remarkable feat in and of itself. If this Elena Faith-Hold can face dragons, then she can face giants, but she is a small one all the same. Extra caution is warranted, but Durvoskar is certain of victory—the goal is to win without losing too many resources or health, but victory is not in doubt. If it were the dragon, then victory would be much more uncertain, and trickery would be much more necessary.

In an actual confrontation between the two, taking place either within the Mudhold or outside of it, Durvoskar would very quickly learn just why Elena is so feared. If Elena herself is pushed into using the Umbral Draught to gain the advantage (though she may very well not need it), Durvoskar would also quickly realize that she, through her actions, is the dragon Banemaw. Upon knowing this, Durvoskar's sanity would begin to fray, and the giant would know fear unlike any other. He would most likely either try to go out fighting or, less likely, grovel and beg for mercy. Durvoskar may perhaps beg to serve as an enforcer of hers, if his pride and sanity are so badly broken. Elena, being Elena, wouldn't show him, nor his goblinoid servitors, any quarter.



## THEOSPINE MOUNTAINS

A mountain range which runs north and south across Nidala, dividing it into its civilized eastern and wild western halves.

## TOURAINE

Touraine (Large City) Population: 20,200
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The capital city of Nidala. Home to approximately 20,000 of Nidala's 30,000 inhabitants. Touraine was built at the eastern foot of Mount Malcredo, and the Faith Hold looms overhead.

- ❖ One noteworthy district of Touraine is the neighborhood known as **The Glassworks**. Because the Church of Belenus places high value upon allowing sunlight into its churches and chapels, the demand for glass (both stained and unstained) is high. Just as crucial, though, is the need for lenses to focus sunlight well enough to start the sacred fire at the heart of each place of worship.
- ❖ Touraine also has districts for blacksmiths and tanners, both of which are crucial for supporting the Guardians of Morals and the Army of Nidala. Many of the blacksmiths in particular resent that they are not as highly respected as the glassblowers.
- ❖ At the center of **the Plaza of Saints** is a statue of Lady Kateri Shadowborn, depicted seated astride her warhorse and bearing Corona. Statues of other members of the Shadowborn family—Victoria, Vincent, Cassandra, Justin, and Ferran—decorate the corners. (The statue of Ferran Shadowborn is entirely based upon the sculptor's imagination, since the actual Ferran was still a toddler when Elena Faith-Hold was drawn into the Mists.) Other Shadowborns have statues in between. Any sort of dedication to Alexi Shadowborn is conspicuously absent. (Elena always resented Alexi for receiving too much of his mother's attention, regardless of how little he actually received.) These esteemed members of the Shadowborn family are all held

in high reverence. Kateri herself has been declared a saint, not by Church decree but by Elena Faith-Hold's. The people of Touraine are all a little embarrassed by the Knight-Protector's hero-worship of the Shadowborns, but they aren't going to actually say anything about that to her.

- ❖ The Plaza of Saints stands where **The Barracks** meets **The Cathedral District**. The Army of Nidala is based in the Barracks. The heart of the Cathedral District is, of course, the **Cathedral of Nidala**, but the nearby **House of Her Grace** (where the Presiding Mother of Nidala resides) is also impressive. However, of equal importance is a building which bridges the two districts. Directly behind the statue of Kateri Shadowborn stands **The Renewed Redoubt**, the headquarters of the Guardians of Morals.
- ❖ The **District of the Dispossessed** is where most refugees who come to Touraine reside. Lord Mayor Odhran Hartigan owns many of the buildings in this district, although this fact is not commonly known.
- ❖ At the other end of the economic spectrum, **The Hill** is where the few remaining noble families live. The district is not a literal hill, but the slope of Mount Malcredo, rising toward the Faith Hold. In particular, the noble manors have access to the various streams which flow into Touraine before the unwashed masses pollute the waters. Instead the nobles get the opportunity to pollute the waters first.
- ❖ The three largest streams flowing down Mount Malcredo are channeled into a single waterway just inside the walls of Touraine. The waterway feeds **The Public Fountain**, where citizens may fill a bucket of reasonably clean water for only a single silver flare. City guards are posted to ensure that everyone pays, but some of them are sufficiently kind-hearted to accept copper instead of silver.
- ❖ **Little Srath** is the name given to the market area of Touraine, primarily because of Srath's reputation as a market town. Truth be told, this

area's inhabitants and workers are no more likely to be of Srathan descent than anywhere else. While Little Srath is best known as a food market, any manner of crafts and goods may be purchased there.

### **Eoghan Dillon (Tepestani immigrant)**

A Tepestani immigrant and worshipper of Belenus—not as he is worshipped in the Belenite faith, but as he is worshipped among the Tepestani Pantheon. A friend of Wyan of Viktal, Eoghan had heard of Nidala's worship of Belenus and was curious to see how the Nidalans handled problems of witchcraft and heresy within their land. As of now, he's been equally surprised by the similarities and innovations of the faith of Belenus here (such as the "inspired use of glassworks to channel the light of Belenus in his churches") as he has been equally unsettled by the vastness of differences between one form of Belenus worship to another and how they manifest. In sum, he has concluded that the methods of the Knight-Protector have achieved unignorable results. He hopes to gain an audience with the Knight-Protector before returning to Tepest, his notebook full of ideas on how the Tepestani Inquisition can more thoroughly and efficiently address the problems of witchcraft and the fey.

Eoghan's had some trouble learning the local language, for as similar as it sounds to Tepestani, it is remarkably different (much like Sanguine and Balok). Thus, his accent draws attention to him, which he's been able to mitigate in the city by claiming to be from a thorp or hamlet that the other, larger settlements know little to nothing about (sometimes Eoghan names a real place, other times he makes it up whole-cloth). The differences between Tepestani and Nidalan culture outweigh the few similarities the two have, and have only made him more careful to not draw further undue attention towards himself.

### **Iarlaith Linehan (former scout of the Army of Nidala)**

Iarlaith was part of the same scouting mission as Lachlan Garvey, and saw the latter being ripped apart by the ghouls. He lives in a small home in Touraine, hoping that by staying in the Faith Hold's shadow that he'll never have to see those things again. Unfortunately for him, he keeps getting secret visits from the Woodsmen, asking about more details on the ghouls, making Iarlaith think that they're getting bolder...

### **Odhran Hartigan (mayor of Touraine)**

The Lord Mayor of Touraine and thus head of the Council of Mayors. Utterly loyal to Elena Faith-Hold, not because he has any particularly strong feelings toward her, but because he has very strong feelings toward staying in power.

Odhran owns properties throughout the city, typically in the poorer parts where refugees settle.

### **TOWER OF GLORY**

The Tower of Glory is Theokos' private residence, away from the Faith Hold. It was named by Elena as a testament to the glorious friendship between her and her most faithful seneschal. It is a rank 2 Sinkhole of Evil. Attached to the Tower of Glory is a small hamlet known as Ricochet. The people of Ricochet are Dulaçese refugees from the Heretical Wars, who founded Ricochet as a safe haven under the grace of the ruling Faith-Hold family when their own province of Dulac (and its provincial capital of Letour) was under siege by the Southern Empire.

Unknown to most save Theokos and his assistant Beres Aiken, the beautifully-sculpted gargoyles of the Tower are not sculpted at all. They are summoned minions of the fiend, meant to keep his Tower (and his work) safe when he isn't there.

### **Beres Aiken (Seneschal of the Tower of Glory)**

Theokos' seneschal, and the main resident of the Tower of Glory. Years ago, Beres Aiken was not fully

blind, but his cataracts had degraded enough that he could barely see. Despite this, he still wished to rise in the priesthood (as far as a man could rise, anyway) and to serve Belenus in his own, humble manner. Working as an assistant to the scribes, Beres began to slowly regain his sight, though others became increasingly unsettled as his quiet character became much more aggressive and cruel. At the same time he also became more charismatic by virtue of his "miraculous blessing" from Belenus. Intrigued by the miracle unfolding before him, Theokos took interest in the man, and requested that the young priest serve as a seneschal and handler of other matters that the former could not attend to. Elena Faith-Hold agreed to this, and Beres Aiken began his new life as a resident of the Tower of Glory.

The truth of Theokos' interest is this: Theokos, desiring to spend more time personally corrupting Elena's morality, while also desiring time to engage in fiendish experiments to improve the odds of said corruption, needed an assistant with greater loyalty to him than to Elena and her vision. Thus, Theokos granted Beres sight in exchange for gaining a chokehold on his soul. Tasked with creating an even more destructively potent and corrupt version of the Umbral Draught while Theokos stays in close contact with Elena Faith-Hold, Beres' risky forays into conjuration, transmutation, and enchantment magic, through the use of live subjects, has turned the Tower into a rank 2 Sinkhole of Evil. It's even better to Beres that the accent and language barrier between the Dulaçese refugees of Ricochet and the rest of Nidala prevent any credible attempt at investigating the Tower. Additionally, Beres Aiken has created a compendium of heresies, taught to him by Theokos, meant to further subvert Elena's mission and demoralize her of her goal to rid the world of heresy.

Though Beres is no longer a youth, he is deeply devoted to Theokos.

## Via CORONA

A two-way Mistway, connecting the Mistlands in northeastern Darkon to eastern Nidala. It is moderately reliable.

A particularly pretty blue flower grows at either end of the Via Corona. It is called *oculi caeli* by the Darkonians and *sùilean nan speur* by the Nidalans. (In the Great Kingdom, *sùilean nan speur* was the part of the Faith-Hold family crest, although Elena now forces herself to dismiss such natural symbols as too pagan.) The Via Corona activates only when these flowers open to sunshine after a rain.

## VINRAC

Vinrac (Hamlet) Population: 110
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A recently settled village, meant to house the families of soldiers operating in the western woods (in outposts like Duskpine Front or Mewen's Camp). The villagers face frequent raids from the goblins in the mountains, whom they believe to be servants of Banemaw (who must himself be a servant of the Eclipse- in-Shadow).

Vinrac exists near old elven ruins. In the case of these ruins, while they'd normally be destroyed or ignored, the people of Vinrac actually think of them as semi-defensive fortifications. The ruins are dedicated to the god Silvanus, which gives them a magical power that has still gone unnoticed by the Nidalans (the flora and fauna and general nature within 100 feet of the ruins is not only beautiful, but also responds to the needs of those who settle near them).

### Hern Drezen (innkeeper)

The innkeeper of Vinrac's Westwood Tavern. Hern Drezen is sworn enemies with Teagan Gerty of the Church, viewing her as following the word of Elena Stranglehold a bit too closely for his liking. At least Hern has made good friends with Tudig Tanguy, with whom he frequently shares gossip and rumors.



### **Teagan Gerty (Presiding Mother of Vinrac)**

The Presiding Mother of the Church of Belenus in Vinrac. Teagan believes that, as the only spiritual authority for miles around, she must provide discipline and a strong example. Unfortunately for Teagan, she sees firsthand that the farther away they are from the Faith Hold, the more willing the soldiers and their families are to commit “little heresies” to ensure easy living and smooth operating on a day-to-day basis. This has only been compounded by the goblin menace in the mountains and Constark Grall’s stifling command over Duskpine Front and Vinrac. She is the sworn enemy of Hern Drezen of the Westwood Tavern, viewing the establishment as a catalyst for sin.

### **Tudig Tanguy (Knight of the Shadows)**

A spy of the Knight of the Shadows in Vinrac. Tudig would have loved to be with his fellows in the Phantasmal Forest, battling Evil and making the sacred-yet-dreaded pilgrimage to Shadowborn Manor once a year to keep such Evil contained. However, his social skills were found to be too good to be wasted on the battlefield (or so he tells himself when drinking away his anxieties), and he was instead assigned to serve as a spy. In his time at Vinrac, Tudig has come to suspect some unseen link between Constark Grall and the menace of the Mudhold, though he can’t figure out what it is. Infrequently during the year, Tudig must discreetly (very discreetly) rendez-vous with Gondegal at the border between Nidala and Avonleigh, to pass on “important missives and packages” to “agents in eastern Nidala”. Tudig’s social skills tell him that Gondegal isn’t saying exactly what he means, but he trusts his leader to do what is best for their mission.

### **THE WYRM’S PATH**

Formally set-up in 749BC, Elena has created this military checkpoint to control access to any locale west of the Theospines. This need for control was due to her suspicions that rebels like the Pack and unaffiliated groups of bandits were fleeing her reach.

The Wyrms’ Path has only increased in importance with the encroaching Phantasmal Forest and need for a vigilant frontier against it (as seen with Duskpine Front and Vinrac above). Despite this, the Theospines contain many passageways that Elena doesn’t know about or control—the Wyrms’ Path is simply the largest and most well-known pass through the mountains.

### **Sindry Floch (Captain of the Wyrms' Path)**

The captain in charge of guarding and monitoring the Wyrms’ Path, and younger half-elven sister of Elsadamor Floch. Though she understands and respects the purpose of the Guardians of Morals in Nidala, Sindry is a proud member of the Army of Nidala and resents the Guardians’ relative importance by comparison. Despite this resentment, she has a strong admiration for the natural beauty of the Theospine Mountains, and occasionally paints in her spare time.

Like Elsadamor, Sindry grew up in Caorann and knows its secret. While she remains more loyal to her hometown than to Elena Faith-Hold and the Army of Nidala, her position near the Phantasmal Forest has given her a certain appreciation for the role that the Knight-Protector and her army play in defending Nidala.

## **FACTIONS, CABALS, AND SECRET SOCIETIES**

### **THE AHLTRIAN**

Originally, the Ahltrian were the elite servants of the Grand Caliph of the Southern Empire. After Grand Caliph Muhdar ab Sang was possessed by the fiend Lussimar, the Ahltrian became Lussimar’s band of assassins. Most of these Ahltrian were killed over the course of the Heretical Wars, but three of the survivors (known as **The Dark Triad**) summoned Lussimar and bound it to the sword Ebonbane. Despite its imprisonment, Lussimar slaughtered the Dark Triad and reanimated them as ghouls.

Since the deaths of the Dark Triad and into modern times, the Ahltrian are those ghouls reanimated by (and fanatically loyal to) Ebonbane. They are led by a new Dark Triad. Even beyond these leaders, a number of unique ghouls have acquired the *recalled abilities* salient ability, which allows them to retain knowledge of who they are (including all relevant skills) despite their reanimation.

#### *The Public Face*

As far as most Nidalans know, the Ahltrian are packs of ravenous, disorganized ghouls that don't have a name to call themselves. Some, like Iarlaith Linehan, know better.

#### *The Hidden Face*

The Ahltrian, despite being ghouls, are semi-organized into packs that do Ebonbane's bidding. To facilitate this, Ebonbane has recreated the Dark Triad organizational structure that returned him to the material world, with one elite ghoulish lord overseeing the corruption of Nidala, one overseeing the corruption of Avonleigh, and one to keep all the packs in line and worshipping the glory of Ebonbane within Forenoon Abbey. The elite ghoulish lords are recognizable not only by their combat prowess and horrendous evil, but also for their new names and titles, given to them in Abyssal by the fiend.

Each elite ghoulish lord has their own unique minions, whether they be native ghouls with unique salient abilities, souls that perished within the Phantasmal Forest and were corrupted by Ebonbane, or even those worthy enough of being possessed by lounara-type demons. Beneath those favored minions of the Dark Triad are the regular (but still highly deadly) ghoulish packs that scavenge the forest in search of food, led by the ghouls among them.

When not engaging in some fell task, the ghouls either turn on one another (ghoulish pack politics are highly treacherous) or hibernate. Although Ebonbane encourages infighting as a way to weed out the weak, it does not want its force to be

needlessly crippled in the event of needing to muster its strength against the other forces that surround him.

See also "The Piecemeal Annexation" Dread Possibility under the settlement of Answig.

#### *Allies and Enemies*

The Ahltrian serve Ebonbane. They have no need of other allies, and so everyone else is an enemy or at best a tool.

#### **Ablac "The Knightbane" (second generation Dark Triad fighter)**

Lord Ablac is the ghoulish lord in charge of leading the Ahltrian against the many security forces of Nidala, in the hopes of his dark master one day claiming Nidala as the crown jewel in his collection of pearls. Otherwise, he tasks Sterglem Chev with patrolling their master's Phantasmal Forest and Lachlan Garvey with heading the vanguard scouting force. His salient abilities are "assume form", "berserk", "rend", "stench of evil", "disfiguring bite" and "recalled abilities (fighter, 8th level)".

#### **Izlik "The Spellbane" (second generation Dark Triad spellcaster)**

Lady Izlik is the ghoulish lord tasked with destroying the wizard Morgoroth and acquiring Aurora Shadowborn for their master. The ghoulish lord is reluctant to admit that she is afraid of Morgoroth and his necromantic prowess, but Ebonbane is increasingly frustrated with her lack of progress in destroying or corrupting Avonleigh. Her salient abilities are "assume form", "recalled abilities (spellcasting, up to 5th level, warlock, 9th level)" and "memory drain".

#### **Jezlod "The Lightbane" (second generation Dark Triad cleric)**

Lady Jezlod is the ghoulish lord tasked with keeping all of the packs that roam the Phantasmal Forest in line with Ebonbane's goals. Frequent "sermons" are held by Lady Jezlod. Attendance is compulsory. These sermons consist of a mix of veneration of Ebonbane

and chanting of curses and dark tidings upon Kateri Shadowborn, her bloodline, and everyone and everything that she has ever known and loved. Lady Jezlod is possessed by a minor loup-garou-type demon (a dybukk) and encourages her “flock” to leave “sacred” and “artistic” depictions of their shared master and its exploits when journeying within and beyond the borders of the Phantasmal Forest. She has the “stench of evil”, “assume form”, “disease”, “recalled abilities (cleric, 5th level)”, and “flaying touch” salient abilities. She uses the latter to ‘discipline’ certain ghouls for insufficient loyalty, but not so insufficient as to warrant execution.

#### **Farog Diamondsmasher (unique ghoul)**

A dwarf barbarian from an Outlander world of unknown origin, now a ghoul of Ebonbane. What was supposed to be a simple adventure hunting owlbears in the forest changed when the Mists rolled in and the forest grew trackless and dark. His ranger and druid friends were killed by the swarm of ghouls that fell upon them before the ghoul pack was destroyed themselves. This left Farog alone at the gates of Shadowborn Manor, where he decided to enter in search of shelter. He was immediately skewered by the many animated swords of the manor, though his damage resistances as a barbarian and the amount of time it took for him to fully die impressed Ebonbane. He now serves as the last line of defense of Shadowborn Manor, only brought out by Ebonbane if the fiend is at true risk of being permanently destroyed. He has the “gain strength”, “berserk” and “recalled abilities (barbarian, 12th level)” salient abilities (VRGttWD).

#### **Gothod (unique ghoul)**

Gothod serves as the muscle behind Lady Jezlod, ensuring that any rowdy or insufficiently loyal ghouls are killed. He also acts in the defense of Forenoon Abbey, which is their master’s favorite “pearl” in the Phantasmal Forest. Compared to most ghouls, he looks like a bloated corpse, and he wields a crudely-made greataxe, confiscated from fallen adventurers decades prior. His appearance also suggests that he

is from the Nordlands, perhaps originating from the pseudodomain in the Phantasmal Forest known as Thorkell’s Landing. His salient abilities are “rend”, “disease”, “stench of evil”, “keen scent” and “swallow whole” (VRGttWD).

#### **Khazul (unique ghoul)**

A great-ghul-turned-ghoul of the Southern Empire with some innate magical talent. Khazul lurked within the desert sands of that land and had heard of the damage caused by the Heretical Wars being rumored to be due to some great evil entity. Intrigued, Khazul tried to learn more of the fiend, which drew Ebonbane’s attention. Khazul was drawn into the Phantasmal Forest by his lonesome, and he immediately declared to the woods around him that he sought to serve the “Arch-Prince of the Unforgiven” (Khazul knew how well flattery of powerful beings could take someone).

Khazul has since served as a subordinate to Lady Izlik in her task to eliminate Morgoroth, though progress has been miniscule. Khazul hopes to take Lady Izlik’s position and use his own innate abilities against the master of Tergeron Manor. Having lived his life as a great ghul, Khazul was expecting that the great evil of the Southern Empire would augment his capabilities to be on par with a ghul lord. Instead, the transition to undeath has led to the loss of his innate spellcasting abilities. He was forced to relearn spellcasting under the sadistic “tutelage” of Lady Izlik, just so he can mimic the innate abilities he possessed in life. He resents this arrangement immensely and regrets his choice of servitude enough that he would be willing to leak useful information to any who may be poised to destroy Lady Izlik or grant Khazul some measure of freedom from Ebonbane’s yoke. His salient abilities are “drink fluids”, “memory drain”, and “assume form” (VRGttWD).

#### **Lachlan Garvey (unique ghoul)**

One of the five scouts for the Army of Nidala sent into the Phantasmal Forest in 748BC. He is useful for



his ability to lead ghouls past the Army of Nidala's own scouts and into the Theospines, where they either feast on the goblins found there or (if the "Piecemeal Annexation" Dread Possibility is in play) continue towards the ruins of Answig. He has the "keen scent" and "impart hunger" salient abilities.

### **Maddy Sutton (unique ghoul)**

A ghoul made from the corpse of a famous and heroic bard who was interred in Brimstadt. She was disturbed by Ebonbane's minions in 626BC. Her salient abilities are "lure victims", "assume form", "disease", "burrowing", and "recalled abilities (6th level bard)" (VRGttWD).

Maddy Sutton interested Ebonbane for the unique circumstances of her death. She was quite the accomplished adventurer in her lifetime (which preceded the Heretical Wars) and was said to have died facing a horde of ghouls in combat. She was quite well-known for her pipes of haunting, which bought her time to help save a village beset by the undead horde, as well as her corpse slayer shortsword. Ebonbane was both interested in acquiring these items (while it had nothing to fear from them, its ghoulish minions could be stymied by such weapons) and in desecrating the grave in an ironic fashion.

Today Maddy serves as a spy in the far reaches of Nidala, traveling small thorps and hamlets (not marked on most maps) and eavesdropping on potential movements of Elena Faith-Hold, sustaining herself all the while on the unsuspecting villagers. Sometimes she will use her bardic talents to draw attention to a certain village, leading to a visit from Banemaw. She still wields her magic items which, if she is killed, could be useful tools against the Ahltrian for any would-be heroes.

### **Rog (unique ghoul)**

Rog is an otherwise mundane ghoul, save for his "burrowing" salient ability giving him a burrowing speed of 60 feet.

Interestingly, Rog has found a strange, gray mound near the abandoned beacon at the north of the Theospines. Rog hopes that there are some preserved corpses within the suspected burial mound to eat. He may end up finding something else that would greatly please his dark master and earn him a "promotion" to ghost-status at minimum.

### **Sean Henchy (unique ghoul)**

A former member of Irvyne Wolfe's band of rebels known as The Pack. Sean rages against the fact that The Pack "abandoned" him to die so they could save other, less-experienced members of the rebellion. His salient abilities are "disease", "lure victims", and "burrowing".

### **DREAD POSSIBILITY — KIDNAPPING**

Sean Henchy believes that the best way to both get revenge on Irvyne Wolfe and to please his new master is to kidnap Irvyne's child (Kateri Wolfe) and bring her to Shadowborn Manor as part of a sacrificial feast.

*A note to DMs: Do be very careful with anything involving the harm of children, especially cannibalistic ghouls and unholy child-sacrifice. In fact, if you're not comfortable with this Dread Possibility, Sean Henchy might be focusing his rage specifically on the other members of the Pack that he believed left him behind, instead of focusing exclusively on the family of Irvyne Wolfe. Or you may ignore it entirely, of course.*

### **Sterglem Chev (unique ghoul)**

A Knight of the Shadows who died during the annual pilgrimage to Shadowborn Manor. Sterglem Chev was a native of Karg in Darkon, who swore to protect the streets of Lower Karg from the monstrous predations of the Wizard-King's Kargat. He grew to spent time at the latter's Knight of the Shadows safehouse. In life, he suspected that his friend hid some important knowledge or artifact relevant to their annual pilgrimage but did not want to know the

details, in case of such knowledge falling into the hands of the enemy.

As a ghou, though Stergelm still possesses his martial prowess, it is his knowledge of this potential secret that interests Ebonbane, perhaps enough for him to send Ahltrian into this “Darkon” to discover its truth. Stergelm Chev otherwise patrols the Phantasmal Forest alongside his own pack of ghouls, ensuring that none of Ebonbane’s pearls have been stolen from their master (or worse, destroyed). He has the “recalled abilities (Blackguard/fallen paladin, 7th level)” and “disease” salient abilities (VRGttWD), along with being “blessed” by Ebonbane with possession by a minor loumara (a guecubu).

### DREAD POSSIBILITY — MISTWAY SABOTAGE

Ebonbane’s purpose behind instilling a guecubu into this former Knight of the Shadows goes beyond mere reward. The fiend believes that, enveloped in the reality wrinkle of even a minor fiend, its minion Stergelm Chev may be able to traverse those strange Mists. Stergelm Chev’s mission is twofold: First, to ransack the headquarters of the Knights of the Shadows in that strange land called “Darkon”. Second, to find that strange thing called a “Mistway” and destroy it from the Darkonian end, preventing the Knights’ annual pilgrimage from even reaching Nidala, let alone the Phantasmal Forest.

Of course, Ebonbane must still deal with the possibility of the Vistani arriving in the Phantasmal Forest with the Knights of the Shadows in tow, but the fiend believes that they can be swarmed by ghou packs quickly enough. The fiend had observed their strange Mist-walking abilities while the Phantasmal Forest was still growing, but it does not understand their significance beyond this. Ebonbane doesn’t care that it wouldn’t be able to access the rest of the Dread Realms—all it needs are the Shadowlands, and then it believes it can easily tear through the metaphysics of the Demiplane and return to the Prime Material of the Great Kingdom of Avonleigh,

or the Abyss, whichever is more vulnerable to Ebonbane’s glorious return to power.

### ARMY OF NIDALA

Just as the King of Avonleigh was the rightful head of the Army of the Great Kingdom of Avonleigh, the Knight-Protector stands at the head of the Army of Nidala. Also, much like the knights of the Order of the Circle commanded the Army of Avonleigh during the Heretical Wars and the War of Evil, the Guardians of Morals now command the Army of Nidala.

In the early days of the province’s separation by the Mists, the Army of Nidala was crucial in subduing the dangers of the eastern lands. However, now that the eastern lands have been pacified, the army has diminished, both in terms of numbers and importance. For generations the army was reduced to little more than the city guard for Touraine and for the larger towns. However, with the recent expansion of the Phantasmal Forest, the army has been regaining strength as Elena Faith-Hold deploys its soldiers into the lands west of the Thesopine Mountains.

#### *The Public Face*

Service in the army is considered a good career for citizens of Touraine. (Refugees from smaller towns need not apply.) It may not be as glorious as joining the Guardians of Morals, but it’s also not nearly as dangerous.

#### *The Hidden Face*

Small detachments of the army are often posted to the larger towns to serve as their civic guard. These detachments often develop goals of their own, independent of their official orders, especially if no Guardian of Morals is posted to oversee them.

#### *Allies and Enemies*

Officially speaking, the Guardians of Morals command the Army of Nidala. However, the army

has its own hierarchy, and much of the time that hierarchy is allowed to perform the daily work of organizing its soldiers.

### BEARERS OF THE ENDLESS TORCH

A group of zealous Belenus worshippers based in the slums of Touraine. They developed their own interpretation of Elena's Belenite doctrine and now believe their faith to be even more "pure" than that of the Knight-Protector herself.

Sometimes when you have extremists like Elena in charge, extremists can try to out-extreme one another.

#### *The Public Face*

By virtue of being a heresy, there is no public face to the Bearers of the Endless Torch. As far as the vast majority of Nidalans know, no such group exists. And if it does, it must be put down.

#### *The Hidden Face*

The Bearers of the Endless Torch hold a strongly agrarian vision of society, desiring to return to the pastoral utopia of the countryside. They thus resent the Knight-Protector's interest in the city of Touraine, believing the so-called "jewel" of Nidalan society to be nothing more than where the most sin accumulates, especially the sin of greed. Their goal is to commit mass arson in the city of Touraine, hoping that the city will be damaged beyond recovery and that the rest of the population will live in the countryside, returning to a "better and simpler and more pure way of life".

Their focus on Touraine is more than just because of the city's size: the cult's focus is to punish those in power and to tear down the old order that has forced many into poverty, especially the crippling racketeering and extortionist measures enacted by Lord-Mayor Odhran Hartigan. Under this direction the cult believes that those who control the land, and the wealth that the land gives, are to blame for the people's misfortune. They (usually referring to the Lord-Mayors or regular mayors) are the ones who

take their crops, leaving them to struggle or even starve in the worst winters; they are the ones who tax their hard earned coin, leaving them penniless. Belenus would reward the Bearers for correcting this injustice.

No matter what strategy is employed to attract followers, all Bearers follow a similar ritual to be initiated as acolytes of the Endless Torch. To become an acolyte, one must burn away their old life to begin a new one. They must toss anything that they had owned into a burning fire. Keepsakes, toys, houses, and animals are all used as kindling to the fire. A priest then takes a brand bearing the mark of the Endless Torch (intentionally made to be very similar to that of Belenus, due to the cult descending from the Nidalan interpretation of Belenus) and heats it in this fire. The brand is then pressed onto the acolyte's body, forever symbolizing their devotion to the Endless Torch. Most take the brand somewhere on their arms, legs, or chest. There are some who are so taken by the fire that they choose to jump into the fire to cleanse them of their corruption. Most who do this end up dying from their wounds. Thankfully for those who brand themselves in conspicuous places, the people of Touraine especially are no stranger to corporal punishment, and most won't notice a particular brand on someone's head not being the "artistic" style of the clergy meting out punishment.

"With any wound that bleeds and is overflowing with pus, it needs to be cleansed. We apply a hot coal or heated needle to clean and seal the flesh. It is this process that we must apply to the world. It is filled with corruption that leaks from the cities and its people. They spread out and everything they touch becomes disfigured. We are given the sacred task of purifying them, purifying the world with our cleansing Endless Torch. It is only from the Endless Torch that we will burn away the filth, and from the ashes have a pure world to live in once again."



### *Allies and Enemies*

The Bearers of the Endless Torch possess no allies. To them, everyone not in their group is, in some way or for some reason, an enemy. If not immediately, then eventually.

#### **Levi Geary (recruiter for the Endless Torch heresy)**

The main recruiter of the Endless Torch heresy. He typically hangs around the District of the Dispossessed in Touraine, and usually goes after the families most recently displaced by Banemaw's predations. Such people make for the most passionate recruits.

#### **Nadia Cormick (leader of the Endless Torch heresy)**

At an early age, Nadia and her family had their home in Glenmurrin destroyed by Banemaw in 732BC. With nowhere else to go, they relocated to Touraine, ending up in the District of the Dispossessed. Wanting to join the newly-made organization of the Shining Youth as a way to vent her anger at losing her home, Nadia presented herself to the barracks within the city. The more she participated in the Shining Youth, however, the more dissatisfied she grew. Far more focus was placed on certain ideas of Belenus and of living a 'holy life' than the reality of poverty allowed, coupled with almost little to no mention of strategies on how to handle the dragon. (Banemaw had long since been treated as an inevitability on par with a natural disaster.) Having become disillusioned with the reigning interpretation of Belenus, Nadia increasingly put less and less effort into her participation in the Shining Youth. She was ultimately discharged (neither honorably nor dishonorably) and so returned to the slums of Touraine that she had fled in the first place. In response to the squalor around her, she began to formulate a new idea of Belenus, which she shared with her fellows in the district that she grew close to. Eventually, slowly, she formed her own secret society, composed of those usually forgotten.

When not leading her heretics in Touraine, Nadia is usually at her 'normal' profession—maintaining the bathhouses in Touraine.

### **THE CHURCH OF BELENUS**

The Church of Belenus was the matron church of the Great Kingdom of Avonleigh. The High Mother led the faith, assisted by her bishops. The Church was a decidedly matriarchal organization, although men were allowed to fill some of the lower positions. Those who felt called to a more solitary religious life could join an abbey, whether a convent for women or a monastery for men. In particular, the highest position which a male could attain within the church hierarchy was to become the abbot of a monastery. (Officially, anyway. In a tradition established by Saint Jodor, the Master Scribe of the Church is formally declared to be on loan from his monastery.)

Elena Faith-Hold still purports to serve the Church of Belenus, but she has perverted its teachings and its structure. Although Elena Faith-Hold calls herself by the slightly modest title of Knight-Protector, she nonetheless holds the highest civil authority in the land. In addition, while she nominally answers to the Presiding Mother of the Church, every Nidalan knows that she also holds religious authority as well. In 638BC Presiding Mother Darcey Gillingham confronted the Knight-Protector directly about these changes. She was imprisoned and hung for her dissent. Her lesson has not been forgotten by any subsequent Presiding Mother.

As the example of Aurora Shadowborn indicates, The High Mother of the Church of Belenus of the Great Kingdom of Avonleigh is required to be celibate and chaste. Certainly Elena Faith-Hold insists that the Presiding Mother be so. Lower-ranking clergy are similarly restricted.

#### *The Public Face*

The Church of Belenus is the single most important organization within all of the Shadowlands. Without the Church, the entire land will descend into lawlessness and sin.

### *The Hidden Face*

Not everybody within the Church is content with the direction in which the Knight-Protector has guided the faith.

### *Allies and Enemies*

#### **Cora Gowan (Presiding Mother of Nidala)**

The current Presiding Mother of the Church of Belenus in Nidala. She was elevated to her position at an usually young age, a fact which flattered her tremendously until she realized that she was chosen because inexperience made her malleable. Since her elevation she has been Elena Faith-Hold's obedient (if sometimes reluctant) puppet. However, she has recently been plagued by dreams in which the Apostate Mother studies her with a stern disapproval.

#### **Darcey Gillingham (Presiding Mother of Nidala)**

A Presiding Mother of the Church of Belenus in the early years after Nidala formed. She noticed and objected to some of the changes to the *Libram of Belenus* introduced by Elena Faith-Hold. Darcey Gillingham confronted the Knight-Protector, expecting to have a rational discussion about the direction of the faith. Instead, Elena had the Presiding Mother imprisoned and subsequently hung under the pretense of heresy.

Ever since her death, Darcey Gillingham has been known as the **Apostate Mother**. This term is considered an insult by those who are faithful to Elena Faith-Hold's version of the Church, but it is considered a badge of honor by those who resist the Knight-Protector.

#### **Fedelmid (saint)**

A saint of the Church of Belenus. A very ordinary farmer who ran afoul of a wayward knight. When the knight expressed his intention to slaughter Fedelmid's entire family and burn his farm, Fedelmid faced him down with nothing but an aged hoe and declared, "Wretched though I am, I am nonetheless

a more noble knight than you, for I know that women and children are to be defended." The knight killed him, of course, and fulfilled his stated intentions, but for the rest of his shortened life food could not pass his lips without turning to hot ash.

#### **Glait (saint)**

The namesake of the chapel referred to as Glait's Plot. He was one of the first people from the northern provinces of the Great Kingdom to convert to the Belenite Faith, and he was sainted for his attempt to convert others in the north. Truthfully, his efforts did not attract many of his kinsmen to follow his example, and so he eventually left the northern provinces to preach in the central and southern provinces, where his words were less likely to be met with aggression. After his death a church was built and dedicated to him on the King's Highway.

#### **Jodor (saint)**

Patron saint of knowledge and libraries. Jodor was the first appointed Master-Scribe of the Church, as well as the first male to reach the rank of abbot in the church's history. His services as Master-Scribe were on loan from one of the earliest monasteries founded. In the early days of the church's founding, the first library of Belenus was set afire by unbelievers. Saint Jodor selflessly went into the flames to retrieve the library's copy of the *Book of Radiance*, and he emerged with the Book unscathed.

#### **Nathan (saint)**

A saint of the Church of Belenus whose festival is celebrated during the first week of every spring in Nidala. He is the patron saint of knights, whose most common miracle is an unexpected victory on the battlefield or the tournament grounds.

#### **Robert Muldowney (abbot)**

The abbot of the Magauran Monastery. A man of strict and sincere faith. He does not understand why his brother Stephen ran away. However, he is certain

that Stephen has succumbed to the ways of sin, which saddens him greatly.

### **Ruaidri (saint)**

A saint of the Church of Belenus. A priestess of the Church of Belenus who died driving a knoggelvi away from the village of Glenmurrin.

### **Stephen Muldowney (abbot)**

The abbot of the Hedrington Monastery. Like his older brother Robert, Stephen is a man of sincere faith, but unlike his brother, his faith is broad in scope.

After his parents died, Stephen joined the Magauran Monastery to be with his brother. The monastic life agreed with him; life with his authoritarian brother did not. He fled to the Denneshaw Monastery instead, where he found a much happier home. Once he had proven himself to the abbot at Denneshaw, he was inducted into the mysteries of the unedited *Book of Radiance*.

This heresy must have drawn the attention of the dragon Banemaw. Fortunately Stephen and several other young monks were away fishing on the Dorlach on the night that the dragon destroyed Denneshaw. They returned the next day to find Denneshaw in smoking ruins. Again Stephen fled, guiding the other young men to the Hedrington Monastery, where they were taken in.

Fifteen years later, Stephen Muldowney was appointed abbot at Hedrington. Along with a few trusted others, he had continued his secret practice of worshiping as the unedited *Book of Radiance* prescribed, and finally his new position gave him authority to broaden the old faith to a wider circle. Not wishing Hedrington to suffer as Denneshaw had, he regularly casts spells of protection to obscure the monastery from those who would harm it. His wards are strongest when both Alyn and Zyla are in the sky.

## **THE GUARDIANS OF MORALS**

Enforcers in the service of Elena Faith-Hold. They are supposed to number "twelve-score" in number, but the actual count of Guardians is always well below that.

The Guardians of Morals were formed as Elena Faith-Hold's equivalent to the Order of the Circle. The Knight-Protector claims that the Guardians are those Nidalans most faithful to the proper worship of Belenus, although truly the Guardians are those Nidalans most faithful to the Knight-Protector.

In the Great Kingdom there were many knights who were not members of the Order of the Circle or even the Army of Avonleigh, although the King of Avonleigh could call upon them for service at any time. Not so in Nidala. All Guardians are knights, and only Guardians are knights.

### *The Public Face*

While the identities of all Guardians of Morals are not widely known, neither are they kept secret.

### *The Hidden Face*

At the heart of the Guardians are the Most Moral, the inner circle of twelve knights whom Elena Faith-Hold most trusts. These knights share some of the blessings which Belenus has bestowed upon the Knight-Protector. (That is to say, they are anti-paladins.) Perhaps more importantly, the Most Moral know the secret of Banemaw.

Also worth noting: Spellcasters who agree to serve the Church are under the control of (but emphatically not a part of) the Guardians of Morals. Such spellcasters are regularly brought before Elena Faith-Hold to be inspected for any signs of heresy. At all times they are accompanied by a Guardian and are never allowed to congregate with other spellcasters.



### *Allies and Enemies*

The Guardians of Morals are first and foremost loyal to and trusted by Elena Faith-Hold. They also command the Army of Nidala. Although the Guardians are officially subservient to the Church of Belenus, nobody in Nidala believes that particular fiction. The Guardians are universally feared for the authority which Elena Faith-Hold has bestowed upon them. Many people respect them, and many people would willingly join their ranks, but they are universally feared nonetheless.

Although the Woodsmen also report directly to the Knight-Protector and therefore are allied with the Guardians, in truth the two groups distrust each other. Many of the Guardians do not understand why Elena needs her cabal of shadowy spies and thugs. Other Guardians, on the other hand, do.

#### **Balaj ab Dihyah (Guardian of Morals)**

An expatriate Pharazia who ended up in Nidala when the Road of a Thousand Secrets drifted badly. In Pharazia he was nothing more than a caravan guard, but in Nidala he has ascended to the Guardians of Morals. He is lauded for converting to the worship of Belenus. (From Balaj ab Dihyah's perspective, Elena Faith-Hold's view of Belenus is close enough to his own understanding of the Lawgiver that the conversion is easy to feign.)

Also known as "The Southern Knight" due to the misimpression that he came from the Southern Empire of Nidala's home realm, his actual name is Balaj ibn Dihyah, and he is perpetually irritated by the Nidalan insistence upon mangling his name.

#### **Merrig of the Grey Pelt (Most Moral)**

One of the Most Moral of the Guardians of Morals. He is not a native Nidalan, although he does not talk about the land of his origin. He wishes that Elena would invoke Banemaw more often because he enjoys committing unfettered violence.

Merrig received his nickname because of the grey wolf pelt which he wears around his shoulders. He explains it as the pelt of a ferocious creature which nearly killed him, which is true enough as far as it goes. What he doesn't mention is that the wolf was his lycanthropic older brother. Nor does he reveal that he is also a natural werewolf, although Elena and most of the Most Moral are aware. Fortunately for Nidala, Merrig's form of lycanthropy is transmitted only by lineage, not by wounds.

#### **Pádraig McElroy (Most Moral)**

Pádraig McElroy was one of the first of Elena Faith-Hold's Most Moral, and of that first group, he is the only one to have survived the intervening decades. Like Elena Faith-Hold, his aging has been significantly slowed. Although he appears to be an old man, he remains as physically fit as a man in his twenties.

Pádraig McElroy respects Elena, but he does not feel strongly enough about her to fall victim to her skewed *detect evil* ability. Instead, his zeal is reserved for Belenus.

Unique among the Most Moral, Pádraig McElroy remembers all that he does under the influence of the Umbral Draught. And he approves.

The McElroys were one of the old noble families of Nidala. However, Pádraig abandoned his family when he joined the Guardians of Morals, and the line has subsequently died off.

#### **Peterne le Guevel (Guardian of Morals)**

The knight of the Guardians of Morals in charge of Almerry Keep. Originating from the province of Dulac, Peterne stands out amongst the Nidalans for his unique sense of taste, both in cuisine and in fashion, as well as his willingness to teach Dulaçese techniques of swordsmanship to the recruits training at his installation. Soldiers from Almerry Keep have been noted to be a slight measure more efficient and better-trained than usual, so Elena allows for the diversity in training method and practice to continue for now.

### **Youen Quaid (Guardian of Morals)**

One of the Guardians of Morals. Currently serving as lieutenant to Zofia Malone. Blonde and burly. Something of a medieval dudebro.

### **Zofia Malone (Guardian of Morals)**

One of the Guardians of Morals. Although a skilled warrior, Zofia is in her middle thirties, which means she's in danger of losing her physical edge. She strives to earn Belenus' favor (much as Elena Faith-Hold has), all in the hope that the god will stop her from aging (again, much as Elena Faith-Hold has).

Although Zofia serves Elena Faith-Hold willingly, her true devotion is to Belenus. She feels a mild resentment toward Elena Faith-Hold for the advantages which Belenus grants her, but she is not enough of a hypocrite to deny that she wants the same advantages for herself. As such, her resentment is only mild and does not trigger Elena's "detect evil" ability.

## **HUNTERS OF THE BOAR'S DEN**

### *The Public Face*

A group of accomplished hunters that frequent a hunting lodge by Lake Keld. Led by the surly and wrathful hunter known as Waroc Trwyth, the hunters are begrudgingly tolerated by the rest of the inhabitants of the eastern half of Nidala.

### *The Hidden Face*

Most of the hunters of the Boar's Den hunting lodge are wereboars, afflicted with maledictive lycanthropy. Though some (in particular Waroc Trwyth and his closest companions) have learned to revel in their newfound state, the remainder of the hunters resent their status and their obedience to Waroc and his cronies. With their newfound curse, the hunters target the likes of roadside or riverside merchants and travelers that "won't be missed" (according to Waroc) and have recently turned their snouts to the immigrant non-Nidalan and outcast Nidalan population of the village of Orillon, viewing

them as perfect targets. Even better to the hunters that Vistani frequent the area surrounding Orillon more than anywhere else in Nidala; perhaps with a bit of physical extortion and kidnapping, the Vistani might be able to remove the curse?

### *Allies and Enemies*

The hunters are tentative allies of the Woodsmen, so long as they do not overstep their boundaries with where they hunt and how excessively they do so. Otherwise, the hunters can feed the Woodsmen information about the happenings of the eastern woods of Nidala, while the Woodsmen can point the hunters in the direction of "good game" (read: enemies of the domain) in more ways than one. None of the hunters, regardless of how they feel about their curse, want the predatory gaze of the Knight-Protector upon them, and they are willing to abide by this informal agreement with the Woodsmen if it means they slip beneath her notice. The hunters receive whiskey from Ardaghy in exchange for not causing havoc there, while the hunters avoid Cu Clannagh because the dogs there can sniff out their identities as werebeasts. For the reasons stated above, they are a growing threat to the village of Orillon.

### **Tin Trwyth (son of a hunter)**

The deceased son of Waroc. His birth was not a smooth one, as his mother died of blood loss. For this and for Tin's perceived 'weakness', his father Waroc frequently beat Tin and forced the child to act as a servant to Waroc and his companions when they went hunting in the eastern woods. Though Tin was accidentally killed by his father, his ghost remains tethered to the sacred spring of Brigit. He knows that so long as his father refuses to repent, they shall both remain cursed. Despite all the trauma Waroc has caused Tin, Waroc is the only father Tin has ever known, and in his heart of hearts, Tin wishes that things could have been better between the three of them (his mother, whom he never knew, included).

### Waroc Trwyth (hunter)

The self-proclaimed best hunter of the Boar's Den hunting lodge (truly the most ill-tempered and brutish) and secretly a maledictive wereboar.

Even before becoming a wereboar, Waroc was already a surly and wrathful character. Denied entry into the Army of Nidala due to his lazy eye, Waroc drank profusely and vented his impotent rage on his son Tin, whom he also blamed for the death of his mother (Waroc's wife) in childbirth. One of Waroc's few joys in life was the thrill of the hunt, especially of big and dangerous game like boars, which had grown increasingly rare in the pacified eastern woods. Upon one twin-full-moon night, Waroc, his son, and Waroc's companions managed to track a wild boar to a forgotten shrine of Brigit near a spring that feeds Lake Keld. For the first time, Waroc's son Tin argued against his father and said that they should give up the boar hunt, for if any blood were to be shed on Brigit's sacred ground, they may very well be cursed. Disgusted, Waroc struck his son, accidentally sending his son hard to the ground. The frail boy's head smashed into a rock, killing him instantly. For a moment, everyone was silent, as if waiting for the curse to take effect.

Seeing that nothing immediately happened, Waroc didn't see any harm in continuing the hunt, ultimately killing the boar right as it hid behind a stone statue of Brigit. As Waroc went to collect the corpse so its pelt could be skinned and its head could be mounted, he saw a beautiful golden comb being held by the statue. Thinking only of how many golden blades he could get for pawning it off, he broke off the hand of the statue that held the comb. In that moment, Waroc and all of his companions immediately fell to their knees in agony. Their bodies morphed into physiques that reflected the swine that they were to their fellow men and the swine that they hunted for sport. That is, they became wereboars, with Waroc Trwyth gaining venomous bristles along his body to reflect his toxic nature.

Waroc Trwyth and his hunters are vulnerable to both silver and cold-forged iron. Holly berries are their chemical bane, and they find the scent of holly leaves repulsive.

### THE KNIGHTS OF THE SHADOWS

The Knights of the Shadows are the second incarnation of the Order of the Circle, which was founded by Alexi Shadowborn. Unlike the original Order of the Circle, which existed only upon the world of the Great Kingdom, the Knights of the Shadows exist only within the Domains of Dread.

Some time after 626BC, a band of adventurers was drawn to Shadowborn Manor. They had been trapped in the Land of Mists long enough to know to expect wickedness and conflict. They were caught off-guard by their amiable host, a man who called himself Alexi. This Alexi not only seemed to be a good person, but he also understood their wary acceptance of his hospitality. As trust grew, he told tales of his home world and the Order of the Circle, and he spoke as well of the great and terrible evil that had afflicted his home. Eventually he explained to his guests that he was a Lodestone Paladin, and he held within himself that evil, holding it at bay with mere faith and force of will. The adventurers vowed to help him contain this evil. When Alexi declared them to be the new Order of the Circle, they declined that name. Instead they called themselves the Knights of the Shadows, referencing both the Shadowborn name and the necessity of staying obscured from the destructive forces at work in the Land of Mists. Shadows, like so much else, are made from both light and darkness.

At some point the Knights came into contact with Morgoroth. Alexi's strength was fading, and he knew that he could not contain Ebonbane beyond his own death. Morgoroth created a crystal coffin (very similar to the one which, at the time unknown to Alexi, imprisons his half-sister Aurora) to hold Alexi in stasis. He also creates certain "elemental keys" which renew the strength of the enchantments upon the crystal coffin. Every year the leader of the Knights



braves the haunts of Avonleigh to meet with Morgoroth and receive the elemental keys, and every year a group of four Knights carries the elemental keys into Shadowborn Manor to rebind Ebonbane to Alexi within the coffin.

In time, the purpose of the Knights of the Shadows has expanded. Each Knight must have suffered some great loss, and they must fight for some great cause. Yet every year the Knights gather to ensure that Ebonbane remains trapped within Alexi Shadowborn. Their original mission has never been forgotten.

#### *The Public Face*

The existence of the Knights of the Shadows is a widespread rumor, particularly in domains where the Knights frequently operate. Although most Knights attempt to keep their individual identities secret, some—most notably Gondegal—have gained notoriety regardless.

#### *The Hidden Face*

As mentioned above, most Knights try to keep their identities hidden.

#### *Allies and Enemies*

Each Knight of the Shadows has their own slate of allies and enemies, depending upon the cause for which they fight. The Knights as a whole are fundamentally opposed to Ebonbane, and they are allied with Alexi Shadowborn and, ironically enough, with Morgoroth. If they ever discover a way to permanently unmake Ebonbane, they might find themselves with other unlikely allies as well.

#### **Halafarin Lonshadow (Knight of the Shadows)**

The nephew of Baron Iomar Lonshadow, who rules the city of Neblus in Darkon. Halafarin has aided the Knights of the Shadows through his family connections. He funds their activities and provides them with a manorial estate on the outskirts of Neblus, close to the Via Corona Mistway, that serves as a safehouse. It is here that fragments of both

Kateri's holy avenger Corona and the fiendish sword-prison of Ebonbane are kept securely and secretly guarded.

As a Knight of the Shadows, Halafarin has found his cause to be taking up arms against "Death", with his dream being of uniting the various enemies of "Death" such as the Fourth Sect of Ezra, the Eternal Order, the funding of the Wizard-King, and any other interested actors, in order to wage a sort of crusade on Necropolis.

#### **THE LAST CIRCLE**

The incorporeal undead remains of the final generation of the original Knights of the Circle, raised into undeath by Morgoroth. The five are all wraiths, riding upon spectral steeds. Despite their undead state, they are all still recognizable as the knights that they were in life.

#### *The Public Face*

The Knights of the Last Circle inhabit the domain of Avonleigh, but they are very rarely seen by anyone in that domain. The only times that Morgoroth ever requires their aid are when:

- ❖ A pack of Ahltrian-ghouls arrives somewhere in his land, and he has already closed the border to keep out a larger back-up force.
- ❖ There are Vistani or half-Vistani within his land.
- ❖ More than one paladin approaches his manor (and it's not the day Gondegal comes to visit); therefore it must be a force sent to destroy him or take Aurora from him.
- ❖ There is a force of hostile humanoid combatants (more than or equal to thirteen to be specific).
- ❖ Some other powerful creature, undead or not, has arrived.

Otherwise, the Last Circle is functionally inert, much like Pieter van Riese's ghost-crew onboard *The Relentless*.

### *The Hidden Face*

Though they are all incorporeal undead, and thus bound to Morgoroth's will, some among the Last Circle (especially Sara Trwyn) struggle more furiously against their bonds than others. Additionally, though they are wraiths now, traces of their former selves can be found in some of their idle actions (when not directly controlled by Morgoroth) or in their newfound combat abilities.

### *Allies and Enemies*

The Last Circle are bound to Morgoroth's will, though they despise their bondage to the necromancer. As his elite (and seldom-used) enforcers, they are enemies of any Ahltrian that dare step foot in Avonleigh, as well as of any living or unliving creature that Morgoroth has detected and deemed a threat, no matter how long they've been in Avonleigh.

### **Anton de Araso (Knight of the Last Circle)**

A Knight of the Circle, originally from the city of Sanschay. In life, despite the passionate reputation of his province, he was known for his more introverted and quiet demeanor. This was not the case when he was with his horse, for he truly loved his horse and was the closest to his steed of all of the Last Circle. He is thus much more reliant upon his spectral steed (given to all of the Last Circle by Morgoroth) than the rest of his undead fellows. If he's not puppeteered by Morgoroth for long enough and left to his own devices, he'll treat any living thing that isn't a humanoid like it's his horse. Tragically, this means he pets them and thus drains them of life.

### **Bertram Alden (Knight of the Last Circle)**

A Knight of the Circle who hailed from Hammerlin. On the very few occasions the Circle was invited to Morgoroth's estate, Bertram absolutely loved the food there. The use of unseen servants to deliver food made meals even more charming. His gourmet tendencies are reflected in his salient ability to suck in other incorporeal spirits (of lesser strength) and convert them into hit points for his now-incorporeal

self. A shame that the Ahltrian make for such a poor meal. Otherwise, Bertram was an adequate Knight whose combat abilities were surprisingly good despite his portliness, with his abilities having saved his life on a few occasions (though he does not like being reminded of this). Bertram tended to attack Evil first and ask questions never, and he also tended not to do well at more delicate diplomatic matters.

### **Enya MacDarcy (Knight of the Last Circle)**

Due to the misery caused by the War of Evil, Enya MacDarcy of Nidala felt like she had the most to prove of the Circle. The reputation of both the province of Nidala and its inhabitants had turned sour in the years since the War of Evil ended, and Enya wanted to provide such a positive example of Nidala to others that it would wash away the disgrace that Elena had brought to their province's name. However, she had to thread the fine line of being passionate but not too passionate, of being zealous about the cause but not too zealous.

As part of her efforts to rehabilitate the name and reputation of Nidala, Enya MacDarcy did her best to be social with her lower-ranking fellows and fellow knights. This is reflected in her undeath with the incorporeal dead near her landing their unworldly attacks more often and resisting attempted spell effects more easily.

### **Poncelet Polnareff (Knight of the Last Circle)**

A Knight of the Circle from Letour. He was one of the most skilled duelists of his day, despite using a rapier instead of the usual longsword or lance. Although the Dulaçese tended to be eccentric compared to the rest of the Great Kingdom, Poncelet's rapier still qualified as part of the knightly arts. In addition he was known for his etiquette and polite manners both on and off the battlefield, which contrasted with his more ribald sense of humor. He was also an excellent judge of character and an insightful soul, having always been able to tell when someone is hiding some inner darkness or other flaw (or the opposite). In undeath, Morgoroth has forged him a spectral

rapier that can increase or decrease its reach with each kill that he makes.

### **Sara Twynam (Knight of the Last Circle)**

A Knight of the Circle. Though she was always willing to fight Evil wherever it reared its ugly head, Sara had the more unconventional interest of trying to learn why people fell into Evil's clutches, having always been dissatisfied with simplistic answers. To that end, she vouched for a more rehabilitative approach (unless it was a truly unrepentant Evil) in dealing with such matters, compared to her contemporaries who smote Evil and returned home to celebrate. Thanks to this willingness to engage with Evil-doers, Sara was the last person to try and speak to Morgoroth before his damnation to the Mists. Because of this, she can serve as a valuable source of information to anyone who wishes to better understand the background and motives of Avonleigh's master.

On occasion, Sara can temporarily break the mental control Morgoroth has established over the wraiths and can journey beyond the bounds of Tergeron Manor and the King's Highway they are usually bound to. This only lasts 1-2 hours at most before she is forcibly reincorporated and reforms at her post, alongside the other wraiths, but this has allowed her to silently observe (lest she accidentally startle or harm them) the various humanoids that have taken refuge in the woods of Avonleigh, or those that simply pass through them. She dares not travel into the Phantasmal Forest without Morgoroth's supervision— without the necromancer's control over her soul, she fears she would become a pawn of the great evil lurking in those lightless woods.

## **MOONSHADOWS**

### *The Public Face*

The name given to the few demihumans of Twinmoon Sanctuary that argue for greater interaction with the outside world. Though they are very limited in number (fewer than 10), they are highly outspoken on matters regarding the future of the sanctuary. The recent attacks by a suspected

elven vampiress in Avonleigh has made the interventionist message of the Moonshadows much more popular in recent times, causing a schism in the community.

### *The Hidden Face*

Most of the inhabitants of the Twinmoon Sanctuary see Elena Faith-Hold as a land-thief who forced their people to the fringes of the land and desecrated the old ways of faith. Some among the Moonshadows have heard of the Knights of the Shadows and the Pack, and they believe that a union with those groups against Elena would bring light back into the Shadowlands. However, these same Moonshadows are also deeply hostile to Morgoroth, and believe that the necromancer's black magic is responsible for the darkness that ails the land, including the fell vampiric creature that now plagues their community. The Moonshadows know nothing of the more subtle metaphysics at play within the Demiplane of Dread, and they thus do not see Elena Faith-Hold as anything more than a mortal tyrant. Unless informed otherwise by the likes of the Knights of the Shadows, anything involving the Mists or supernatural control over the land, is much more likely to be blamed upon Morgoroth.

### *Allies and Enemies*

Though the Moonshadows rankle the elders of Twinmoon Sanctuary, they are still members of the community and can expect safe harbor at any point. The Moonshadows would love to find allies in the woods nearest to Nidala and Avonleigh (and even in the Phantasmal Forest, if possible) and proudly declare themselves enemies of the Knight-Protector and Morgoroth the Black. However, at the moment the elven vampiress that has been harassing Twinmoon Sanctuary is their number one most pressing enemy.

## **THE SHINING YOUTH**

Nidalan boys and girls can join the Shining Youth to receive military and religious training. They earn badges for their accomplishments.



### DREAD POSSIBILITY — THE CHILDREN'S CRUSADE

Some highly charismatic member of the Shining Youth might think the best way to praise Belenus and accomplish the Knight-Protector's goals is to march a group of pious youths into the Phantasmal Forest to confront the evil lurking within. Unless someone stops them, such a venture is likely to end as tragically as the so-called Children's Crusade of our own world.

#### *The Public Face*

The Shining Youth provides a fantastic opportunity for Nidalan boys and girls to receive useful training and make useful contacts. Especially in Touraine's District of the Dispossessed, joining the Shining Youth is seen as a good way to reach a higher social stratum.

#### *The Hidden Face*

The Shining Youth exists to indoctrinate the next generation of soldiers and Guardians of Morals. This fact isn't so much hidden as simply not discussed.

#### **Bradley Swail (Shining Youth)**

Bradley's first epiphany came when he was five years old, when his mother took him to the church in Cu Clannagh. They went to pray for the soul of his dead father. As he knelt by the altar, Bradley saw the sunlight streaming through the beautiful stained glass windows in front of him. He saw a winged being descend from the clouds and appear in front of him. The being claimed to be the voice of Belenus, and it told young Bradley that he was destined for great things — things that no one else in the world was capable of. Then the being gave him a brief glimpse of the glory of the Eternal Dawn. When Bradley came to, his mother told him that he had suffered a seizure. He knew she had not seen the vision, but that was all right. He would see for her. Since that day, Bradley has been possessed by an intense religious fervor and zeal to serve Belenus and his

Church uncontested by anyone else save the Knight-Protector.

When Bradley became a part of the Shining Youth, he wasted no time establishing dominance amongst his peers and whipping them into the same sense of devotion that he possessed. Now only fifteen years old, Bradley wonders when his destiny will be fulfilled. As the Knight-Protector focuses her gaze on the Evil encroaching on Nidala, Bradley has begun to consider an idea but knows not when the right time would be. Regardless, one day Bradley will have his time. When that day comes, Belenus and the world will remember his noble deeds, just as the voice of Belenus promised in his boyhood vision years ago.

### THE WOODLARKS

The Woodlarks are a group of bards who travel among the eastern villages far from Touraine, spreading the old teachings of Belenus. Crucially, they know magic which appears to ward villages from Elena's attention. The first Woodlarks came from Caorann, but the organization has now spread beyond that single town.

#### *The Public Face*

As heretics, the Woodlarks must remain hidden and so have no public face. Nonetheless, certain people know of them and may even know how to contact them.

#### *The Hidden Face*

The Woodlarks have developed a simple language based upon birdsong. They use this language to identify each other.

#### *Allies and Enemies*

The Woodlarks are one of the factions most likely to ally themselves with other rebel factions such as The Pack in the west.

### Berheth Gwernig (Woodlark)

A bard from Caorann. She claims to have a touch of elven blood. (She even may be right, although it might be fey blood instead.) One of the Woodlarks. Her preferred instrument is the flute. She is a mentor to Donagh Tierney.

### Donagh Tierney (Woodlark)

A bard from Caorann. One of the Woodlarks. He plays the fiddle, although he also has a fine tenor singing voice. Behreth Gwernig is his mentor.

## THE WOODSMEN

Not everyone loyal to Elena Faith-Hold belongs to the Guardians of Morals. Those of her followers who are not associated with the Church of Belenus are known as her **Woodsmen**, largely because they serve as her scouts and spies in the forest and plains in the eastern half of Nidala.

#### *The Public Face*

Elena's woodsmen are not an official, public organization. Nonetheless, everybody in Nidala knows that they exist and that they answer directly to the Knight-Protector.

#### *The Hidden Face*

The Woodsmen do nearly everything that Elena Faith-Hold wishes done which should remain unseen by the light of day. Of course, this truth is actually poorly hidden.

Woodsmen have no particular uniform by which they may be identified. Many of them are fond of long cloaks with hoods that can be raised to completely obscure the face, but that's true of many other Nidalans as well. Cloaks are good for added warmth and keeping off the rain. Instead, Woodsmen use secret gestures and pass phrases to identify themselves to each other.

#### *Allies and Enemies*

The Woodsmen understand that Elena is not right because she is right. She is right because she has the strength to insist that she is right. They respect her for this strength.

Alongside the Guardians of Morals and the Army of Nidala, the Woodsmen are the third major group in the service of Elena Faith-Hold. Officially all three groups cooperate, but of course there are tensions among them.

For everybody else, the Woodsmen must be considered an enemy. It's usually bad news if you are confronted by a Guardian, but if someone reveals himself as a Woodsman to you, then you *know* you are in trouble.

### Asaldur Walker (Woodsman)

If you know about the Woodsmen and want to contact them, look for Asaldur Walker at the Boar's Den. He will be the ranger in the back corner with his feet up on the table, apparently drinking for free. He won't admit to any connection to the Woodsmen, or even that the Woodsmen exist, but if you tell him something, then the Woodsmen will hear.

### Hugh (Woodsman)

Asaldur Walker's right-hand man. No last name necessary. Particularly skilled with the throwing axe.

### Inganno (Woodsman)

Not actually human but a skulk. One of the Woodsmen. He makes himself useful as a scout and an assassin.

Inganno has a talent for languages and accents, and he speaks Nidalan like a native. However, while Inganno appears human, he does not appear at all Nidalan. He is widely considered to be an Outlander, but he never speaks of his past. For that matter he rarely speaks of the future, preferring to live very much in the present.

**Myles Vessey (Woodsmen)**

Nobody knows how the Woodsmen are structured, if they are structured at all. Even so, Myles Vessey seems to be one of the high-up men.

In addition to many others, Myles was responsible for recruiting Inganno, Taulard, and Taulus to the Woodsmen. He does not mind that they aren't human. They do what Elena needs done, and that's what matters.

**Tadhg (Woodsmen)**

Asaldur Walker's other right-hand man. Not as skilled with the axe as Hugh, but you still don't want him sent after you.

**Taulard (Woodsmen)**

One of the Woodsmen. He and his brother Taulus claim to be half-giants, and their nearly eight-foot height is convincing evidence.

Taulard lacks most of his right arm, the aftermath of an encounter with one of the Guardians of Morals. Unknown at the time to either Taulard or the Guardian, this encounter was witnessed by one of the Woodsmen. The Woodsman saved Taulard from drowning in the river where he was bleeding out, and then recruited him. As a result of coming so near to death, Taulard both fears deep water and hates the Guardians.

**Taulus (Woodsmen)**

One of the Woodsmen. He and his brother Taulard claim to be half-giants, and in support of that claim they do stand nearly eight feet tall.

Taulus is the younger brother, but particularly since Taulard's maiming, Taulus has grown very protective of his brother.

**2ND EDITION KITS****THE MOST MORAL (GENERAL KIT)****Description:**

The Most Moral is an atypical kit. It is not applied by training and experience, but instead it is applied by the will of Elena Faith-Hold. (It may also be revoked by her will.) Also unusually, it stacks with other kits rather than replacing them.

Once assigned this kit, the Most Moral subsequently advances as a paladin. They do not lose any of the levels which they have already earned, but they will require more experience points to advance to the next level.

If one of the Most Moral were to be stripped of this kit, they would then lose all benefits. In addition, they lose all experience points gained since they became Most Moral.

**Requirements:**

The only true requirement is that Elena Faith-Hold declares someone to be one of the Most Moral. However, her standards are high. She only allows thirteen Most Moral at any given time, and she must believe that each of the thirteen truly exemplifies a pious adherence to the tenets of Belenus (as she defines them).

Of course, given that the Most Moral ultimately gain their abilities at the whim of the Dark Powers, it is entirely possible that someone else might spontaneously manifest the special benefits of this kit. Bradley Swail, perhaps.

Note that this kit does not require any actual belief in Belenus.



**Special Benefits:**

The Most Moral gain the benefits of a number of paladin-like granted abilities:

- ❖ *punish the lie* (at will)
- ❖ +2 bonus to all saving throws
- ❖ slowed aging
- ❖ *inflict wounds* (inflict 2hp/level/day; may be channeled through a weapon)
- ❖ *cause disease* (1/week/5 levels)
- ❖ aura of protection from heresy (10' radius)
- ❖ turn heretics
- ❖ *dispel magic* when wielding a holy sword
- ❖ call for warhorse
- ❖ cast priest spells, starting at 9th level

The *punish the lie* ability is similar to the *detect lie* spell. When the Most Moral concentrates to activate this ability, it inflicts 1hp damage upon anyone who tells a lie within earshot of the Most Moral. As with *detect lie*, partial truths and evasions are not detected and cause no harm. Note that the Most Moral are themselves immune to *punish the lie*, even when used by Elena Faith-Hold herself. Other factors, including the *undetectable lie* spell, may also thwart this ability.

The *aura of protection from heresy* is similar to the *protection from evil 10'* spell, except that instead of applying to evil creatures, it applies to any creature with a divine connection to a deity other than Belenus. Not only does this include priests and paladins of outlander gods, but also anyone who gains spells from the worship of other deities of the Celtic pantheon.

The ability to "turn" heretics (where "heretics" are defined as above) is handled similar to a traditional cleric's ability to turn undead. If the Most Moral's turning roll is successful vs. the heretics' level or hit dice, then the heretic must make a wisdom check. Those who fail are driven to flee the reflected glory of Belenus for 2d6 rounds. Those who succeed merely cannot approach the Most Moral for the same duration. (Note that a result of "Dispel" is

equivalent to "Turn". Heretics are never turned to dust.)

The *dispel magic* ability is latent but effectively useless for any of the Most Moral except Elena Faith-Hold. Her bastard sword Caitlin is the only known weapon to qualify as a "holy sword" in this context.

Technically speaking, the Most Moral may call for a warhorse, but the Most Moral have learned from experience that the only creatures which respond are shadow unicorns. Not only do the shadow unicorns refuse to serve as mounts, but Elena's own mount kills them upon sight.

Finally, note that Elena Faith-Hold has additional abilities which the Most Moral do not possess. She is the Darklord, after all.

**Special Hindrances:**

None among the Most Moral can cast healing magic except on themselves. Of course, most of the Most Moral don't see why that might be a hindrance.

**WOODLARK KIT (BARD)****Description:**

The Woodlark is a bard kit. It may only be taken at character creation.

**Requirements:**

Woodlarks must be dedicated to the Celtic pantheon as a whole. They may follow the "old ways" of the henotheistic Belenite faith (which hold Belenus to be the paramount deity of the pantheon) or else a pantheistic version (which does not). In particular, those who are faithful to Elena Faith-Hold's skewed version of the Belenite faith are not eligible.

In addition to the usual prerequisites for a bard (dexterity 12, intelligence 13, charisma 15), a Woodlark must have wisdom 12 or greater in order to cast spells.

**Special Benefits:**

Woodlarks cast cleric spells instead of wizard spells, although they use the same advancement as non-Woodlark bards. Woodlarks may gain bonus spells for high wisdom.

Woodlarks have major access to the animal, healing, plant, protection, and weather spheres. They have minor access to the divination and elemental spheres.

Woodlarks have access to the Rogue, Warrior, Priest, and General non-weapon proficiency groups. In addition, Woodlarks have developed a prayer-song which blocks the *punish the lie* ability of the Most Moral. If sung to one's self, it deflects punish the lie undetectably. If sung out loud, it disrupts the ability among all who can hear the song. (Of course, allowing the Most Moral to hear one sing an unapproved prayer-song has its own risks.)

**Special Hindrances:**

As mentioned above, Woodlarks do not learn to cast wizard spells. As a consequence, if a Woodlark ceases to meet the requirements for this kit, not only do they lose the ability to cast cleric spells, they fail to gain the ability to cast wizard spells.

Unlike standard bards, Woodlarks do not have access to the Wizard non-weapon proficiency group.

**WOODSMAN KIT (FIGHTER/THIEF)****Description:**

The woodsman kit is available to both fighters and thieves. While it reflects the training which Elena's Woodsmen generally receive, it may be used for any "Ranger Lite".

**Requirements:**

A woodsman must have minimum strength 12, dexterity 12, and constitution 12.

Note that one need not be one of Elena's Woodsmen to take the woodsman kit, nor is every Woodsman a woodsman.

**Special Benefits:**

Woodsmen may specialize in a ranged weapon for only 1 weapon proficiency slot.

Woodsmen automatically gain the Hunting and Tracking non-weapon proficiencies. The Survival non-weapon proficiency costs them only 1 slot per environment.

**Special Hindrances:**

A woodsman must be proficient in at least one ranged weapon.

**NEW MAGIC ITEMS****THE UMBRAL DRAUGHT**

The lightning engines in the Faith Hold are used to fuel an alchemical process overseen by Theokos. The end result of this process is poured into an enchanted chalice. When Elena Faith-Hold decides that yet another village needs to be purged of heresy, she and the twelve Most Moral of the Guardians drink the brew from the chalice and ride out into the night.

The potion has the following effects:

- ❖ It allows the imbiber (and a significant additional mass, including her weaponry, plate armor, and mount) to transform into a shadow, which allows rapid travel across the entirety of the land.
- ❖ It surrounds the imbiber with a murky miasma which cuts vision, including nightsight and infravision, in half. (People under the influence of the Umbral Draught are unaffected.) This miasma also acts as a *blur* spell.
- ❖ Within several inches of the imbiber, the miasma thickens into a black halo which has the effect of a *fire shield*.

- ❖ It renders everyone within shouting distance of the imbibor confused and highly subject to suggestion. As Elena and the Most Moral attack the heretical village, they cry, "Banemaw! It's the dragon! Banemaw is attacking!" Even though nobody actually sees a dragon, any survivors are actually convinced that they did.
- ❖ Upon expiration, the potion consumes half of the imbibor's maximum hit points. Flesh tightens and splits. Blood seeps through the skin. Elena and the Most Moral always insist that these wounds were caused in combat with Banemaw.
- ❖ Finally, nearly all of those who imbibe the umbral draught find themselves unable to remember the details of what they do under its influence. (Elena and Pádraig McElroy are the sole exceptions.) However, this fragmentation of memory is not enough to avoid culpability, particularly for anyone who ever drinks a second draught. Instead, it is just enough to haunt anyone with a lingering shade of conscience.

## HOW TO PERMANENTLY UNMAKE EBOBANE

Ebonbane is perhaps the most evil force within the Shadowlands Cluster. It was the being that instigated the Heretical Wars. As such, the suffering of the Shadowborn family and the Great Kingdom of Avonleigh can be attributed, either directly or indirectly, to it. Similarly, the loss of her companion Kateri Shadowborn may have precipitated Elena Faith-Hold's fall from grace. While Morgoroth the Black became a Darklord without any influence from Ebonbane, nonetheless he sees Ebonbane as an antagonist as well. After all, the fiend's obsession with all things relating to Kateri Shadowborn means that it would also be interested in claiming Aurora Shadowborn.

Because of this dynamic, serious consideration must be given to how any climactic resolution to the various story threads might be resolved in a campaign based within the Shadowlands. Presented here is one potential path to permanently ending the menace of Ebonbane, meant as the grand finale to a long- running campaign:

### STEP ONE: A THRICE-FORGED SWORD

#### The Remaking of Corona:

According to the *Darklords* supplement, Kateri Shadowborn's *holy avenger* was destroyed in her final fight with Ebonbane. However, according the novel *Shadowborn*, her sword was not destroyed. This article assumes that *Darklords* was correct, if only because the authors think "thrice-forged sword" sounds cooler than "twice-forged sword".

In their early pilgrimages, the Knights of the Shadows were able to find the shattered fragments of both Kateri Shadowborn's *holy avenger* Corona and Ebonbane's original sword-prison. Both of these fragments have been kept in a secret safehouse on the outskirts of Neblus in Darkon. Corona, a blade that had been broken by Ebonbane when it first slew Kateri, was then reforged for Kateri's son Alexi. It must now be forged for a third time, this time incorporating elements of Ebonbane's original sword-prison.

Fortunately, to reforge the blade, the skills of any master blacksmith that can be found in the Dread Realms will suffice.

### STEP TWO: PHANTASMAL ENCHANTMENT

The spectral matter that comprises the incorporeal undead is akin to the essence of a loupmara-type demon like Ebonbane. Ferran Shadowborn, having felt purposeless since his undeath, now has found one: He must volunteer to be bound to the blade, so that it may strike unerringly at Ebonbane's essence and leave not a trace of the fiend's soul behind.



### STEP THREE: THE LIFE-ESSENCE OF THE SHADOWBORN

Aurora, thanks to her preservation in Morgoroth's crystal coffin, is the last easily-accessible living Shadowborn in the Shadowlands. Although Alexi Shadowborn is also still alive within his crystal coffin, it is much easier to reach Aurora than it would be to reach Alexi (and if Alexi is reached, then Ebonbane would know much sooner of plans to destroy it). With Aurora's consent, a drop of her blood must be given to the blade so that it may be empowered.

By doing so, the blade has the metaphysical "scent" of any and all living Shadowborn family members. Therefore, no matter how many times or how much Ebonbane may use the shifting nature of the Phantasmal Forest to obscure the location of Shadowborn Manor, or even to try and flee by frequently shifting the manor's location within the ever-twisting landscape, the thrice-forged sword will always know where Alexi is. The blade may also track Aurora to return to her position as well.

Of course, Aurora's awakening is most readily accomplished with the help of Morgoroth, which may necessitate the necromancer straying from the path of darkness. Such atonement (not redemption, but atonement) is nearly unheard-of among Darklords, but perhaps some vestige of actual love for Aurora remains within him.

Alternatively, Aurora may have to give more than simply a drop of her blood. The blade may require her life as well. If DMs choose this, consider the drama in convincing Morgoroth to finally give up the woman he loved for good. Consider as well Aurora's feelings; were she to return to the Great Kingdom alive, she would be a woman more than a century behind in a land that has moved on from her absence.

Should Aurora find herself released and alive, whether returned to the Great Kingdom or still within the Land of Mists, she may well be the last living Shadowborn (or very nearly so; Alexi has aged).

Would she seek to continue her line? Would she seek to champion goodness like Kateri and so many of her ancestors? Or... both, perhaps?

### STEP FOUR: FREEZING THE PHANTASMAL FOREST

Morgoroth, having helped create the Phantasmal Forest, now finally exercises his own will over it. By concentrating on the forest as if he is closing the borders to his own domain, Morgoroth can "freeze" the forest in place. In particular, he can "freeze" the location of Shadowborn Manor, preventing Ebonbane from perpetually shifting the location of the Phantasmal Forest's center away from invaders.

### STEP FIVE: THE FINAL FOUR KEYS

The original four elemental keys are used to bind Ebonbane every year, but these must be made from elements found only in the Phantasmal Forest. To destroy Ebonbane fully, heroes must use his "pearls" against him, and certain pearls contain the elements needed to create the Final Four that will permanently unmake the fiend.

Similar to the way that *Curse of Strahd* has its fated items, fated allies, and Tarokka deck readings to aid replayability, the final four elemental keys are given multiple locations. The locations of the keys are drawn from "Secrets of the Phantasmal Forest" from *Quoth the Raven* Issue 30.

The Final Four Keys are:

- ❖ Fire: The demonic fire used to forge and sharpen the future vessel of Ebonbane himself.

The key can be found in the following locations:

- ✚ Sulenet Manor
- ✚ The Forge of Fury and the Broken Hill Mineshaft
- ✚ The Starlight Home Orphanage

- ❖ Water: The pure unholy water used to temper the great power of Ebonbane's soul emanating from the blade.

The key can be found in the following locations:

- ✚ The Lexmerry Academy
- ✚ Thorkell's Landing
- ✚ White Willow Hospital

- ❖ Earth: The otherworldly metal used to contain Ebonbane's powerful spirit within the blade.

The key can be found in the following locations:

- ✚ The Sunrise Monastery
- ✚ The Brimstadt Nightshade Graves
- ✚ The Grand Mausoleum of the Caliph

- ❖ Air: The spectral winds that howled through the underworld, forcibly dragging Ebonbane back into the mortal coil.

The key can be found in the following locations:

- ✚ The Spire of Howling Hatred
- ✚ Sorrow's Watch Outpost
- ✚ Forenoon Abbey

## STEP SIX: ENTER SHADOWBORN MANOR

See "Bane of the Shadowborn" from *Dungeon Magazine* #31 for a detailed key of Shadowborn Manor.

Here Ebonbane will be at its most desperate. It will not hesitate to use any creatures bound to its will, any powers it has not yet deployed. Meanwhile, the party must traverse the manor, apply the final four elemental keys, and then plunge the blade of the thrice-forged sword into the lid of Alexi's crystal coffin.

## STEP SEVEN: DESTROY EBONBANE

Once the blade has been plunged into the crystal coffin, it will bypass the glass of the coffin and the flesh of Alexi Shadowborn. Ebonbane's incorporeal essence will be completely destroyed. However, Ferran Shadowborn, who was bound to the blade, will be destroyed as well. The souls of Alexi and his mother Kateri will finally be freed from the confines of Shadowborn Manor. The Phantasmal Forest will crumble apart, the demilords of the acquired

pseudodomains being relinquished as well. The oily pool containing Ebonbane's pearls has been set ablaze, and the pearls can finally melt.

There are optional steps that can be added to one's campaign. For instance, perhaps the true name of Ebonbane must be etched onto the blade in order for it to strike true. How would the PCs and their NPC allies discover such a monumental secret? Alternatively, the blade might need further consecration from Belenus, in which case a site like the Dolmens would be appropriate—so long as such consecration doesn't immediately exorcise Ferran Shadowborn's ghost. Finally, if some of the steps seem redundant or unnecessary, of course DMs are free to remove them.

Finally, one must not forget that the PCs may not necessarily be alone in their endeavor to unmake the fiend. The Knights of the Shadows and the various rebel groups within Nidala (from the Pack to the Woodlarks and others) can provide valuable support in navigating the Phantasmal Forest. Additionally, the evil forces of Ebonbane may have most of their attention occupied by Elena Faith-Hold, marching at the head of the Guardians of Morals and the Army of Nidala. Finally she has found a great evil to fight against! Ebonbane's own interest in her as the "crown jewel" in its collection of "pearls" may very well distract the fiend and drain its resources enough for a covert group of elite operatives like the PCs and their allies to gather the materials necessary to bring about its final doom.

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may not read his articles prior to publication, but she very patiently listens to him natter on.

Finally, the Lady Fordam would like all readers to know that Morgoroth, Morgoth, and Meredoth are very clearly brothers, regardless of what Ravenloft canon might say.





# Of Larks and Men

BY IAN FORDAM

## OVERVIEW

The domain of **Nidala** is ruled with a gauntleted fist by its Knight-Protector, **Elena Faith-hold**. However, despite her unforgiving rule, a number of factions vie for power, either under her authority or in resistance to it. The faction calling itself **The Woodlarks** strives to protect Nidalans from Elena's oppression and to spread an older, kinder worship of Belenus; the Woodlarks are introduced in the article "Beneath the Eye of Belenus". In addition, the faction known as **The Woodsmen** is expanded upon in that same article, although the Woodsmen were first mentioned in the *Islands of Terror* supplement. Much as **The Pack** are the steady foes of the **Army of Nidala** in the west, the Woodlarks often seek to thwart the Woodsmen in the east.

And everyone must watch out for the **Guardians of Morals**, particularly the **Most Moral** among them.

## BACKGROUND

**Samuel Lawlor** is one of the Most Moral, which is to say that he has earned the trust of Elena Faith-hold, the Knight-Protector of Nidala. This trust is entirely misplaced. Samuel Lawlor is a charming and persuasive psychopath, which has served him well in his climb up the ladder of authority. Only one rung remains above him, and he intends to take it. He feels no animosity (or much of anything else) toward Elena. He merely feels that she's squandering her

position. Someone unfettered by her ridiculous belief in Belenus—such as, say, *him*—would do a much better job of ruling Nidala.

Despite this conviction, Lawlor has considerable respect for Elena and the political power which she commands. He is also wary of Elena's advisor **Theokos**, assuming (largely incorrectly) that Elena's supernatural powers stem from Theokos' wizardry. He knows that any frontal assault on Elena's authority will bring many enemies down upon him: Elena, Theokos, most of the rest of the Guardians, the Army of Nidala, and the Woodsmen. Clearly usurpation must be a more subtle thing.

However, Lawlor does have his resources: First, a handful of Guardians who are more loyal to him than to Elena. Second, a Darkonian wizard who has been forced to serve the Guardians as his alternative to execution. Third—and most crucially—his knowledge of the **Umbral Draught**. Lawlor hopes to use the Umbral Draught to overpower the Knight-Protector... and blame it on the dragon **Banemaw**.

Getting caught stealing the Umbral Draught would be fatally dangerous. Fortunately, though, Lawlor has enemies he can frame. **Kevin Donlan**, for example. Donlan is one of Elena's Woodsmen, who do not answer to the Guardians (not even the Most Moral). Donlan has been a chronic thorn in Lawlor's side over the years, and Lawlor would be delighted to be rid of him.

However, Lawlor must still be careful. Elena Faith-hold believes that all faithful worshipers of Belenus

should work in unity toward their common goal, and she grows incensed whenever she learns of infighting among her people. Particularly within the upper ranks, eliminating one of your enemies doesn't accomplish much if Elena discovers that you are behind it.

Just before the adventure begins, Lawlor makes his move. His loyal Guardians, **Lemmy Roche** and **Joseph Fagan**, ambush Kevin Donlan on the road between Rushinver and the Tower of Glory. They intend to kill him and hide his corpse so that he cannot protest his innocence once framed. Meanwhile, back at the Faith Hold, Lawlor's captive wizard **Sparax Gordian** casts *change self* upon Lawlor, bestowing Donlan's appearance upon him. In this guise, Lawlor invades the secret chambers of the Faith Hold to steal the Umbral Draught. He is accompanied by Sparax, whose magic remains useful for suppressing Theokos' magical wards.

Lawlor's half of the mission is successful; he fills a flask with Umbral Draught. Unfortunately for Lawlor, though, Lemmy and Joseph are less successful. Although they wound Donlan badly, he manages to escape. Donlan flees to the standing stones called **Oddar's Tarn**, which the Guardians are afraid to enter after dark. Lemmy argues that Donlan will die from his wounds. Joseph argues that if Donlan shows his face in Touraine, the Knight-Protector will have his hide for the theft anyway. Eventually they agree to head eastward for the next stage of Lawlor's plan.

## ARRIVING IN NIDALA

The party may arrive in Nidala via any of the usual means. However, if the DM has no other plan at hand, they can make use of **Tasaria** and **Zindelo**, a pair of Vistani who are willing to take passengers through the Mists for a price. (See the Non-Player Characters section, below, for more details.) Tas and Zin are unusually willing to be social with *giorgios*, so they might be encountered in any given tavern, playing music for silver. They might also be encountered whenever the party needs to flee a domain in haste. (Such coincidences happen to them unusually often, although neither Tas nor Zin have

noticed.)

So. The party hires Tas and Zin to guide them through the Mists. All goes well until the Mists darken around them. Tas and Zin mutter ominously to each other and then warn the party to prepare their weapons. Mist horrors begin to manifest. Zin encourages the horses to gallop at full speed as he attempts to steer them away from the worst of the attack. Several mist horrors cling to the side of the vardo for the party to fight off. Once the initial attack subsides, the Mists do not lighten, and Tas and Zin mutter some more. Finally Tas approaches the party and explains, "We have drawn the attention of the entities within the Mists. It will be safest for you if we drop you off at the next quiet point. From there Zin and I can ride off in an unexpected direction, and we can lead them away from you." The truth of the matter is that something about the party—whatever may suit the DM's whim—has drawn unwanted attention. The party will be safer away from the Mists, and Tas and Zin will be safer away from the party. If hard pressed, Tas will even offer a refund.

Another chase and fight scene later, the Mists open into a plain. At night. In a drizzling rain. Despite the partial cloud cover, two slivers of moon are visible in the sky, both looking cold and miserable. Tas and Zin encourage the party to disembark with a barrage of hasty but amiable farewells.

As the vardo pulls away from the party, Tas leans over the side to speak her final words to the party. "Two moons," she says, pointing. "You're in Nidala. Watch out for the Knight-Protector and her people. Pretend to like her sun god, and you'll be fine."

"Belenus!" Zin calls over his shoulder.

"Yes. Pretend to like Belenus, and you will be fine."

With that, the Vistani depart into a sudden but brief bank of Mist, leaving the party behind in Nidala.

## IN A FIELD, AT NIGHT, IN THE DRIZZLE

The party has been left in a field at night in the drizzle with only the vaguest notion where they are. However, PCs with nightvision or infravision will readily notice a horse nearby. Even without enhanced

vision, attentive PCs may hear the horse making horse-sounds or the jangle of a loose buckle.

Investigation reveals a high-quality riding horse, fully geared up, and only a bit of searching nearby reveals the horse's semi-conscious rider, sprawled on the muddy ground among the grasses.

Kevin Donlan has been gravely wounded by Lemmy Roche and Joseph Fagan, and then he injured himself further by trying to ride, first for the dubious protection of Oddar's Tarn and then, once his assailants had vanished, for help. If the party does not act to aid him then he will probably bleed out by morning. However, even non-magical healing will stabilize him enough for his natural rugged constitution to keep him alive.

Once Donlan regains full consciousness, he will happily answer many of the party's questions. There is much he will leave out, and many questions he will refuse to answer. However, because the Most Moral are supposed to be able to discern lies (and they consider lying to the Most Moral to be a very dire sin indeed), Donlan—like most Nidalans—prefers evasion or refusal to outright lying.

Kevin Donlan recognized Lemmy Roche and Joseph Fagan, and he knows that they are allied with his enemy Samuel Lawlor. While he hid within the questionable protection of Oddar's Tarn, he overheard Joseph insisting that it did not matter if Donlan survived because if he rode back to Touraine he would still be blamed for "the theft" of "the potion". Donlan knows nothing of a theft or a potion. Regardless, although he believes that Lady Elena would believe his innocence, he has no confidence that the Guardians of Morals would allow him to get close enough for her to hear his plea.

Donlan can explain about the Knight-Protector and her Guardians of Morals. If the party pushes further, he will also explain about the Army of Nidala and the Church of Belenus. However, he will say nothing of the Woodsmen, and he will refuse to describe his own prominent position in the Knight-Protector's regard. "Lady Elena would listen to me," he insists, without explanation.

However, Donlan does not intend to approach Lady

Elena immediately. He also heard Joseph say, "We head east, then?" and Lemmy agreed. While there is plenty of Nidala to the east, Donlan suspects that Lemmy and Joseph are headed to the Lawlor estate in the town of Cu Clannagh. (And he is right.) He just needs someone to keep him alive while he heads east to gather support and thwart whatever plan Samuel Lawlor has.

Donlan will attempt to convince the party to aid him. If the PCs appears heroic in nature, he will appeal to their sense of justice. If he gauges that they are motivated by greed, he will offer a considerable sum of money. If they strike him as ambitious, he will promise them positions of influence in Nidala. Note that he honestly does intend to fulfill any promises which he makes.

Of course, PCs are ornery creatures, and their behavior is difficult to predict. They might not aid the dying man in the field at night in the drizzle, which may be cause for a Powers Check. Once he has been healed, they still might not agree to help him, in which case he goes on his way without their help.

Fortunately there are any number of other adventures which can occur in Nidala, and eventually the PCs might still get caught up in a confrontation between Elena Faith-hold and an umbral Samuel Lawlor.

## ONEIRE

One of the first stops that the party may make is the hamlet of **Oneire**, which stands not far from Oddar's Tarn. It has approximately 120 inhabitants, most of whom are farmers. Foodstuffs and agricultural implements are readily available here.

However, the primary reason to stop by Oneire is to visit "**Papa**" **Darry**, the local herbalist. Papa Darry concocts a salve which acts as a half-strength *potion of healing*. He will attempt to sell doses of this salve for half the usual price of a *potion of healing* (or perhaps more, if the DM wishes to emphasize the relative rarity of magic in Ravenloft). However, Kevin Donlan may pull Papa Darry aside for a quiet word, at which point the price of salves will drop to the low, low price of "here, please help yourself to several



jars, just for goodwill".

Kevin Donlan will chat with various Oneirans, hoping to learn more about why Fagan and Roche attacked him. Although he learns little about that, he does make a startling discovery: Seven days have passed which he cannot account for. He concludes that Oddar's Tarn must have skewed his sense of time. (Or, perhaps worse, it actually skewed time, although Donlan hesitates to say something so ridiculous out loud.) Even if he doesn't mention this lost time to the PCs, he might nonetheless remark that his enemies have a bigger lead than he had originally thought.

On the other hand, if the party already has the supplies they may need, they may also skip Oneire without any particular consequence.

Note that before reaching Rushinver, Kevin Donlan shaves his beard and mustache. He has been a Woodsman long enough to recognize a good time to change one's appearance.

## RUSHINVER

Most people who journey through the eastern forest of Nidala follow one of the branches of the River Dorchach. Nearly all of the significant settlements in the forest have been built upon its shores, so hunters and lumberers are the only people who have much incentive to do otherwise.

The town of Rushinver stands at the place where the River Dorchach exits the eastern forest. It serves primarily as a waypoint between the forest and the plains, but it's a really convenient waypoint. Since the PCs are not seeking to conduct trade, they will not need to pay any tariffs. They will be allowed to pass through town for a mere pair of coppers each.

Unfortunately for Kevin Donlan, Joseph Fagan and Lemmy Roche have already passed through Rushinver, discretely spreading the word that the Knight-Protector is seeking the traitor Kevin Donlan. (They don't know for certain that she is, but they are doing what Samuel Lawlor told them. And, incidentally, they do happen to be right. A squad of Guardians is only a few days behind the party.) However, they have only spoken to two small groups

in town. The first is the squad of Guardians stationed in Rushinver. Fortunately for Donlan, he is not well-known, particularly not by sight. (He is a Woodsman, after all.) His physical description—blue-eyed, sandy-haired, with a mustache and beard—also matches half the men of Nidala. By shaving his facial hair and giving a false name and pretending to be a hireling for the party, he can evade immediate detection.

The second group which Fagan and Roche notified was a particular group of thugs who have proven useful to them in the past. These thugs habitually hang around the riverfront, halfway hoping for stevedore work and halfway hoping for an idle afternoon. Lemmy Roche and Joseph Fagan paid them to keep an eye out for Donlan, and out of respect for the coin they were given (and because they enjoy a good brawl), they are willing to keep both a watchful eye and ready fists. They have a distinct advantage over the Guardians: They know who Donlan is from his previous visits to Rushinver. If the party is with Donlan, then the sometimes-stevedores may rethink their plans. If Donlan is alone, he kills the stevedores, but not without being reinjured himself.

Either way, Mayor Gerard Rush stops by the inn where Donlan is staying. Something like the following conversation ensues: "Welcome back to Rushinver, Mister Donlan." "Thank you, Mayor." "I hear there was an altercation down at the docks this afternoon." "I have heard the same." "Apparently my town has three new widows." "I imagine it would." "I don't want trouble, Mister Donlan." "No, you don't." Even so, Donlan gives Rush a handful of coins to give to the three widows, and Rush leaves.

Mayor Rush is in an awkward position, caught between the Guardians and the Woodsmen. To maintain his position he needs to evade the wrath of both factions, a goal which he usually accomplishes by pleading ignorance in situations where he can plausibly do so. Both factions know that he does this, but he is too usefully malleable to be worth removing. In the current situation, Mayor Rush will wait until the day after Donlan and the party leave, and then he will inform the local Guardians that he has heard word of Donlan's presence.

Despite these obstacles, Kevin Donlan will attempt to excuse himself for several hours so that he can contact the local Woodsmen and learn what they know about the situation with Fagan and Roche.

Unfortunately for Donlan, the local Woodsmen don't know anything more than he does.

## ON THE SHORE OF LAKE KELD

After leaving Rushinver, the party makes good time. The path along the River Dorlach is well-maintained, which helps.

Late in the afternoon—but well before sunset—the River Dorlach passes by a large lake. On the stretch of land between river and lake, someone has built a long hunting lodge. The lake is **Lake Keld**. The lodge is **The Boar's Den**. Kevin Donlan absolutely insists upon stopping. Because the food is excellent, he insists, but he is only minimally concerned if the PCs don't believe him.

Having reached the Boar's Den, Kevin Donlan no longer needs the party. Nonetheless, he will gladly continue in their company all the way to Cu Clannagh. He might even consider some of the PCs for membership among the Woodsmen. Equally likely, particularly if the party is of a heroic bent, he might consider them expendable dupes.

Half of the Boar's Den is taken up with rooms for rent, and the other half is the common area. The food actually is excellent. The whiskey (which comes from the village of Ardaghy) is also excellent, but expensive. The beer is good and more moderately priced. One end of the common area is reserved for axe-throwing, a popular sport during the winter. The rooms come in two varieties, moderate and cheap (but less so for foreigners). The moderately-priced rooms are kept clean, while the cheap rooms typically smell like the lair of a wild animal.

## FACTIONS IN THE BOAR'S DEN

There are four groups of people in the Boar's Den:

### *Echlin and Siobhán Gormáin and the Staff*

**Echlin** and **Siobhán Gormáin** own the Boar's Den. A

staff of three others helps them run the place.

The staff do their best to remain unnoticed by the guests. However, they would rather offend foreigners than risk incurring the wrath of either Waroc Trwyth or Asaldur Walker. The PCs might find them standoffish at best and outright rude at worst. However, the regulars will not permit foreigners to harass Echlin, Siobhán, or any of the staff.

### *Waroc Trwyth and the Hunters*

**Waroc Trwyth** is the leader of a band of hunters who occupy the lodge between hunts. Trwyth and his men are brutish people, loudly scornful of city-folk and foreigners alike.

Secretly, Trwyth and his band of hunters are maledictive wereboars. The staff do not know this, although they are certain there is something darkly wrong with their guests. Asaldur Walker knows damn well what they are and how to kill them, and he has made certain they know it. Waroc Trwyth fears very few people, but Asaldur Walker is one of them.

On the other hand, Trwyth and his hunters consider foreigners to be fair game. At the lodge, they will treat foreigners rudely, but not rudely enough to cause a violent incident. Instead they will wait until foreigners depart the Boar's Den, and then they will go a-hunting in their bestial forms.

### *Asaldur Walker and the Woodsmen*

**Asaldur Walker** is one of Elena's Woodsmen. Everyone knows this, and nobody dares to say so.

Kevin Donlan greets Walker as if he were an old friend, whom he has encountered unexpectedly. Truthfully, Donlan fully expected to encounter Walker here, and his claims of friendship ring a little hollow given his obvious deference to Walker.

However, Asaldur Walker is not the only Woodsman in residence. **Hugh** and **Tadhg** (no surnames ever given) belong to the silent and strong school of henchmen. They never say much, but they never have to. They simply nod along with whatever Asaldur Walker says. Besides, Hugh *always* wins the axe-throwing contest, which speaks volumes for his skill with that weapon.

Finally, a Woodsman named **Inganno** is close at hand. Inganno is a skulk, capable of changing his coloration to blend into the background unnoticed. He prefers not to stay inside the Boar's Den, where there are too many people for even the most talented skulk to remain unnoticed. However, once the party leaves, Inganno is certain to follow them.

### ***Behreth Gwernig***

Because the Boar's Den sometimes serves as an ordinary inn, it is also visited by miscellaneous others, including a woman who does her best to remain unobtrusive. She's even better at it than the staff.

The woman is **Behreth Gwernig**, a high-ranking member of the Woodlarks. In their attempt to expand beyond the village of Caorann, the Woodlarks have been keeping an eye out upon Rushinver, Cu Clannagh, and other villages of the eastern forest.

If Behreth Gwernig gleans that the PCs are good-natured people, ignorant of Kevin Donlan's true nature, she will do her best to catch one of the PCs apart from the others. If she can, then she will pass along a warning: "Kevin Donlan is not to be trusted. He serves the Knight-Protector, doing under darkness what she cannot do beneath the Eye of Belenus."

## **ENCOUNTERS AND AFTERMATH**

The party's visit to the Boar's Den is one of the two most crucial scenes in this adventure. Much can happen here, including twists with the potential to derail the anticipated progression. (Which is fine. That happens sometimes.)

Kevin Donlan might lose the party's trust, either because of how he reacts to Asaldur Walker or because of Behreth Gwernig's warnings. Even if so, they might still be convinced that Samuel Lawlor—whatever his plan may be—is a graver threat than Kevin Donlan. The DM should work to keep Samuel Lawlor in the party's minds, for example, by having Asaldur Walker ask them about their connections to Lawlor. Even though the PCs have no meaningful answers, the fact that Asaldur Walker is concerned should leave the PCs concerned as well.

For that matter, the PCs might deliberately ally themselves with the Woodsmen, based only upon the little bit which the Woodsmen are willing to let them learn. In that case, not only does the adventure continue along anticipated paths, but the party is set up for a moral quandary down the line. (Which is also fine. That, too, happens sometimes.)

On the other hand, the party might throw in with Behreth Gwernig and the Woodlarks. From the discussion among Walker, Donlan, and the PCs, Behreth Gwernig almost certainly hears enough to convince her that something interesting (and not in any good sense) is happening. She will investigate for herself, and she will welcome the party's aid in her investigations.

Remember that the Woodsmen have no animosity toward the party, not unless they publicly ally themselves with either the Guardians or the Woodlarks. Otherwise, whether the party proceeds in Donlan's company or not, the Woodsmen will probably let them be.

Even if the party does not continue the journey to Cu Clannagh, Nidala offers other challenges to keep PCs occupied. As one example, Waroc Trwyth and his wereboar companions will likely harry the party wherever they venture. Without PC intervention, Samuel Lawlor eventually consumes his Umbral Draught and rampages through eastern Nidala. Lawlor would eventually be brought down by Elena Faith-hold and her Guardians of Morals, but more lives will be saved if the party responds to the threat earlier.

## **ON THE TRAIL**

The eastern half of Nidala has been pacified. That's what Elena Faith-hold has decreed, and there is considerable basis to her claim. Most of the "wandering monsters" which the party might encounter are Nidalan traders, trappers, and woodcutters, none of whom are looking for a fight. Even bandits are in very short supply in eastern Nidala.

However, depending on how the encounter at the Boar's Den went, the party might be beset by



wereboars. These are Waroc Trwyth and his hunters, of course, seeking either easy targets or petty revenge. If the attack goes against Trwyth and his hunters, they have no compunction against fleeing. On the other hand, if the party and/or Kevin Donlan have proven sufficiently imposing, then the wereboars will avoid them altogether. They are brutes, but they are not stupid brutes.

As an alternative, the party might be beset by a flock of stirges. Even the pacified eastern forest still has to deal with the occasional "pest" monsters. A small tribe of lizardfolk are another possibility, although those are usually found closer to the village of Ardaghy.

Following the meeting at the Boar's Den, the skulk Inganno will almost certainly be stalking the party. Kevin Donlan knows this, but he says nothing to the PCs. Fortunately, Inganno's task is to observe and report, not to interfere. Nonetheless, attentive PCs might realize that they are being stalked, which should add to the tension.

## CU CLANNAGH

Unless the adventure has veered in an unexpected direction, eventually the party comes to Cu Clannagh, a large town fortified by a well-maintained wooden palisade. Although the gates stand wide open during daylight hours, they are guarded by armed townfolk. In addition, the guards at each gate are accompanied by a pair of Cu hounds. (Yes, that's what Nidalans call them, even though *cu* is *dog* in True Nidalan. That is, they are actually saying "dog hounds", but that doesn't bother anybody but the pedants.) The Cu hounds will growl ferociously under two conditions: They detect a lycanthrope, or they smell someone that they cannot see. They will also attack upon command, but the guards do not idly risk something as valuable as a Cu hound unless there is a clear and present danger.

### THE MAYOR OF CU CLANNAGH

If the party is still accompanied by Kevin Donlan, he will warn the PCs to keep their heads down in Cu Clannagh. Not because it is an unwelcoming town—

it is not—but because the mayor is **Charlotte Lawlor**, Samuel Lawlor's second cousin. Samuel is officially the head of the family, and as such he owns the family estate. (Family retainers actually run it in Samuel's absence.) However, Charlotte is the Lawlor who remains physically present within and politically in control of the town. Behreth Gwernig can provide similar information. However, neither Donlan nor Gwernig is aware of the deep animosity between Samuel and Charlotte.

If the party does come to Charlotte Lawlor's attention, she will almost certainly have them observed. Depending upon what her informants report, she may wish to speak with the party. On one hand, the PCs might find themselves arrested if Lawlor deems them to be a threat to the peace of her town. On the other hand, if the party is able to discern that she neither likes nor trusts her cousin, they may be able to gain her as an ally. This latter result is less likely if Kevin Donlan remains with the party; she is well-informed enough to recognize him as a Woodsman, and his presence makes her much more cautious. She does not trust the Guardians of Morals, particularly her cousin, but she also does not trust the Woodsmen. On the other hand, she has only heard vague rumors about the Woodlarks, and so Behreth Gwernig's company will not affect her reaction to the party one way or another.

### GLEANNING GOSSIP

From listening to the town gossip, the party can easily learn that Lord Samuel has come back to the family estate. He does so periodically, which makes the townsfolk nervous while he is in residence, but then again he rarely stays long. However, in the five days since Lord Samuel's most recent return, the Lawlor family retainers have been buying more and better food, indicating that he may stay for a longer duration this time. That makes the townsfolk nervous. Although most Cu Clannaghans consider themselves a righteous people, having one of the Most Moral in town is still fraught with danger.

However, there is another rumor, currently less widespread, that should also interest the PCs. Two Guardians of Morals came into town the day before. They had a foreigner with them. Although he seemed

to be their prisoner, they bought whatever he told them to buy. Mostly herbs and, of all unlikely things, glassworks. He placed an order for some weirdly shaped vessels which clearly have no sensible purpose. The foreigner was Sparax Gordian, buying alchemical supplies under careful watch. He will return to the glassworkers to pick up his order in two or three days.

This second rumor is the party's first hint regarding the next stage of Samuel Lawlor's plan. He hopes that Sparax Gordian will be able to replicate the Umbral Draught. Sparax Gordian suspects the task is beyond his limited magical abilities, but his best option is to try. Although he knows little of alchemy, he is using the bit he does know to stall while he figures out more.

### FORMULATING A PLAN

The party has roughly two paths to take regarding Samuel Lawlor. They can confront him, or they can bide their time to try to discern his plans. Unfortunately, if they bide too long, then Sparax Gordian will concoct an inferior form of the Umbral Draught, and Lawlor will confront Elena Faith-hold during her next visit to Cu Clannagh. Such a confrontation would occur on his terms: by surprise, with Lawlor under the influence of the true Umbral Draught, accompanied by a handful of minions under the effects of the Inferior Draught.

The party might seek to infiltrate the Lawlor estate. If they are discovered by one of Lawlor's actual allies, the infiltration will rapidly escape into violence. Keep in mind that the household staff are loyal to Lawlor, if only out of fear. However, there is also the chance that the party might find its way into the cellar where Sparax Gordian is attempting to replicate the Umbral Draught. Gordian is eager for an opportunity to escape Lawlor's grasp, although he does wish to survive the attempt.

However, if the party confronts Lawlor in a timely fashion, then Sparax Gordian will not have had time to prepare a large supply of the Inferior Draught. In this case Lawlor will possess only a single dose of the Inferior Draught, and he will be unaware of its dire side effects. However, either way Lawlor will keep the

supernatural aid of the actual Umbral Draught for himself.

## THE LAWLOR ESTATE

### ALLIES AND ENEMIES

Before the party makes its move against Samuel Lawlor, they may have acquired any number of allies they would wish to survive the attempt:

- ❖ The **Woodsmen** — In addition to Kevin Donlan, Inganno can call upon Asaldur Walker's authority to involve other Woodsmen.
- ❖ The **Woodlarks** — Behreth Gwernig has fewer contacts in Cu Clannagh than Kevin Donlan does, but her contacts have better access to clerical and druidic magic. They aren't likely to stand at the front line (presumably the PCs are better in that role than the Woodlarks), but they will provide healing and other defensive support.
- ❖ **Charlotte Lawlor** — The mayor of Cu Clannagh could bolster the party's fighting strength with a few loyal guardsmen. (But not in uniform. She does not want to show her hand so strongly.)
- ❖ **Sparax Gordian** — When the wizard returns to town to pick up his alchemical vessels, the PCs may find a way to isolate him from his guards and talk. For his part, Sparax Gordian knows how minuscule his long-term odds of survival are. He will be eager to give himself a better choice.

However, Samuel Lawlor has the following forces with which he can defend his estate:

- ❖ **Samuel Lawlor** himself. Not only is he one of the Most Moral (that is, a Belenite paladin), but he will consume the Umbral Draught if he becomes convinced that the party is a real threat.
- ❖ Two **Cu hounds**, trained by Samuel Lawlor before he was exiled to Touraine. They are vicious beasts. They will also be the ones who get fed the Inferior Draught if Lawlor's hand is forced by the party. The Inferior Draught will

make them even more vicious, at least until its duration expires.

- ❖ **Joseph Fagan** and **Lemmy Roche**. Fagan is dedicated to Lawlor. Roche is dedicated to Fagan. They will fight with Lawlor to the end.
- ❖ Four other **Guardians of Morals**. They were stationed in Cu Clannagh, but they are supposed to obey Lawlor since he is among the Most Moral. However, their dedication is not absolute, particularly if Lawlor gets enveloped in a horrifying dark miasma.
- ❖ A dozen **men-at-arms**. Perhaps a third are truly loyal to the Lawlor family, while the remainder might flee if confronted by true opposition.
- ❖ **Sparax Gordian**. He feels no loyalty whatsoever to Samuel Lawlor. He would love to use the chaos as an opportunity to escape. However, before he scarpers he might get in a couple of shots against Lawlor if he believes he can survive such foolishness.

Also worth noting is the squad of Guardians (six in total) coming to Cu Clannagh on the party's heels. If the party does not move with alacrity, then rumors of this squad will catch up to them. Even before the squad arrives, the townspeople grow more wary of doing anything which may be interpreted as heretical, like helping strangers who are not devoted followers of Belenus, for example. (The encroaching squad of Guardians may also be used in Rushinver or elsewhere along the way to urge the party forward.)

By default, this squad of Guardians will side with Samuel Lawlor in any conflict, particularly against Woodsmen or Woodlarks. However, this allegiance is not blind. A sufficiently persuasive spokesperson — especially one who is not a Woodsman or Woodlark— may be able to convince the newly-arrived Guardians that Lawlor is involved in something, as it were, *shady*. The new Guardians are ultimately loyal to Elena Faith-hold and Belenus, not at all to Samuel Lawlor.

## THE INFERIOR DRAUGHT

Sparax Gordian has been tasked with recreating the Umbral Draught, a task which he is utterly incapable

of accomplishing. The best he can do is prepare a diluted version, which maintains some of the power of the undiluted draught.

Gordian's creation—which this article refers to as the Inferior Draught—has the following effects:

- ❖ It surrounds the imbiber with a murky miasma which provides the effects of a blur spell.
- ❖ As with the Umbral Draught, the miasma also acts as a fire shield spell, but this effect is dispelled after one wound.
- ❖ Upon expiration, the potion consumes the 90% of the imbiber's maximum hit points. If the imbiber has suffered any damage at all, they will bleed to death barring medical assistance.
- ❖ The Inferior Draught provides a heady rush for anyone who consumes it. This rush lasts until the potion expires and its deadly side effects kick in.

The benefits are absolutely not worth the risks, but nobody knows this yet.

## FLOOR-PLAN

The Lawlor estate stands slightly apart from Cu Clannagh, and it is not protected by the town's palisade. It has its own protective wall of stone, although this wall is no taller than man-height and is easy enough to scale, even for non-thieves.

There are a number of outbuildings, including a gardener's shack and the stables. There are seven horses currently occupying the stable, which gives the party a count of the Guardians and Most Moral whom they might face.

The manor has a main building and two wings. The north wing is for the family, while the south wing is for guests. The south wing includes a grand hall which also served as dining room and ballroom alike, depending upon where the tables had been moved. It has been unused since Samuel Lawlor's mother passed away ten years ago. The north wing is also partially abandoned. Many of the servants' quarters are still in use, but among the family's rooms, only Samuel Lawlor's suite is actively maintained.



The front hall is dominated by three paintings.

On the far end is a portrait of Muirin Lawlor, who effectively founded the family line when he was granted noble status by the then-King of Nidala. Old Muirin is depicted as paunchy but powerful, with scraggly sideburns and a mighty scowl. His scowl might indicate dissatisfaction with what his descendants have done with his glorious name, but might also show his impatience with the slow work of the portrait painter.

On the right-hand wall is a scene from the Heretical Wars, or perhaps the War of Evil. Either way, Elena Faith-hold is featured front and center, mounted atop a unicorn and bearing her sword Caitlin high. The forces of goodness (identified by their shining armor and many prominent symbols of Belenus) confront the cowering forces of evil (depicted as shadowy subhumans; the whole scene is pervasively, horribly racist).

Opposite this scene is a mural depicting the original destruction of Cu Clannagh by Banemaw, who flies high above the town to exhale fiery death from above. Although the Lawlor family has always insisted that this mural is a cautionary tale, the painter portrays Banemaw as majestic. The fleeing citizens of Cu Clannagh are pitiable, but ultimately no more human than the enemies in the opposite scene.

## CONCLUSION

The forces of evil have been confronted and defeated! Or at least one force of evil has, and that is still a worthy accomplishment.

If the party remains allied with one of the factions—most likely Kevin Donlan and the Woodsmen or else Behreth Gwernig and the Woodlarks—then their allies will strive to reward the party for their help. In addition, they may attempt to recruit the party into their ranks. Hopefully the party has seen enough to be wary of joining the Woodsmen. In the long run, joining the Woodlarks would require far fewer powers checks.

If the party has no allies during the last battle, Mayor Charlotte Lawlor may offer a reward instead. (She sincerely believes that Cu Clannagh is better off without her cousin.) She may also try to entice the party into remaining in Cu Clannagh. As incentives, the town is prosperous and—although she will not say so explicitly—rarely draws the notice of the Knight-Protector.

However, Samuel Lawlor's schemes have virtually guaranteed that Elena Faith-hold will, in fact, pay some attention to Cu Clannagh. Having seen the effects of the potion which Lawlor stole, Kevin Donlan will attempt to return to Touraine to accuse Lawlor and defend his own reputation. He may or may not be killed before he can meet with Elena. She may or may not believe his assertions of innocence regarding the theft. If she does not, then he will certainly be killed. However, even if she does, his life is still not secure. After all, he has caught a glimpse of one of Elena's darkest secrets. She may decide to have him killed...

... along with anyone else who caught a similar glimpse.

However, even if Elena Faith-hold learns that the party has witnessed the effects of the Umbral Draught, including in an inferior form, the PCs' lives are not immediately threatened. Elena is likely to send out scouts from among the Guardians (if not the Most Moral) before she gets directly involved. The PCs should have ample opportunity to learn of their danger before Elena herself strikes. The party might seek sanctuary in Caorann, particularly if they are allied with the Woodlarks. However, the PCs might also find refuge in places like the village of Iasgair or the Hedrington Monastery, which have their own ways of avoiding Elena's fierce gaze. Alternatively, the wilds of western Nidala might offer another kind of obscurity.

## NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

### ASALDUR WALKER (WOODSMAN)

#### 9th level human fighter (woodsman)

str 14, dex 16, con 17, int 12, wis 14, cha 14

hp 99, hd 9d10+27, ac 3, th 12

**weapon proficiencies** (7): bows tight group (2 slots); shortbow specialization (2 slots; +2 to-hit targets in 6-30 foot range; nocked bonus); longsword specialization (2 slots; +1 to-hit, +2 damage, 2 attacks/round); dagger

**non-weapon proficiencies** (6): alertness (WIS+1); blind-fighting (2 slots); bowyer/fletcher (DEX-1); direction sense (WIS+1); hunting (WIS-1, 0 slots); survival (forest, INT, 1 slot); tracking (WIS, 0 slots)

**special:** dexterity 16 (reaction adj. +1, missile attack adj. +1, defensive adj. -2); constitution 17 (+3 hit point adj.)

**equipment:** studded leather armor +2 (AC7 → 5) of protection from normal missiles; shortbow (sf7 → sf6) w/ 20 sheaf arrows (1d8 → +1 to-hit, 1d8); longsword +1 (1d8/1d12, sf5 → +2 to-hit, 1d8+3/1d12+3, sf3); dagger (1d4/1d3, sf2 → sf1)

See "Beneath the Eye of Belenus".

### BEHRETH GWERNIG (WOODLARK)

#### 8th level human bard (woodlark)

str 12, dex 16, con 12, int 14, wis 14, cha 16

hp 36, hd 8d6, ac 6, th 17

**weapon proficiencies** (4): short blades tight group (2 slots); shortbow; sling

**non-weapon proficiencies** (5): local history (0 slots); hunting (WIS-1); musical instrument (flute, DEX-1); singing (CHA); spellcraft (INT-2); tumbling (DEX)

**languages** (4): Nidalan (native); Holy Tongue; Woodlarks' birdsong; (smattering of other languages)

**spells, 1st level** (3+2): cure light wounds; entangle; faerie fire; pass without trace; sanctuary

**spells, 2nd level** entangle (3): heat metal; hold person; speak with animals

**spells, 3rd level** (1): call lightning or dispel magic  
**thieving abilities** (125): climb walls: 50% + 30% → 80%; detect noise: 20% + 30% → 50%; pick pockets: 10% + 20% → 30%; read languages: 5% + 45% → 50%  
**special:** dexterity 16 (reaction adj. +1, missile attack adj. +1, defensive adj. -2); wisdom 14 (2 bonus first-level spells); influence reactions; inspire; counter-song; identify magic items (40%); block *punish the lie*

**equipment:** leather armor (AC8); shortbow (sf7 → sf6) w/ 20 sheaf arrows (1d8 → +1 to-hit, 1d8); shortsword (1d6/1d8, sf3 → 1d6/1d8, sf2); dagger (1d4/1d3, sf2 → 1d4+1/1d3+1, sf0)

See "Beneath the Eye of Belenus".

Like Kevin Donlan, Behreth Gwernig has spent time in Orillon and picked up a smattering of other languages.

### CHARLOTTE LAWLOR (MAYOR OF CU CLANNAGH)

The mayor of Cu Clannagh. Also second cousin to Samuel Lawlor. The two Lawlors actually loathe each other. She has not forgotten that he was deemed unmanageable and sent away in disgrace; to her mind, he is a bad seed that has only rotted further after his dismissal. However, Charlotte and Samuel do their best to hide their loathing from anyone except the other. He does not wish to sully the family name (i.e. his own name) by admitting to private conflicts in public. She does not wish to lose the protection of his unwillingness to air their personal grievances.

Charlotte Lawlor is married, and she has three children. Fortunately for Charlotte, her cousin Samuel thus far sees her family as annoyances and not as potential bargaining chips.

### HUGH (WOODSMAN)

#### 6th level human fighter (woodsman)

str 16, dex 17, con 14, int 9, wis 10, cha 9

hp 48, hd 6d10, ac 2, th 15

**weapon proficiencies** (6): dagger; hand axe specialization (2 slots; +1 to-hit, +2 damage, 3 attacks/2 rounds); longsword; shortbow; two-weapon style specialization (-1 to-hit with primary, -2 to-hit with secondary)

**non-weapon proficiencies** (5): alertness (WIS+1); blind-fighting (2 slots); endurance (2 slots, CON); hunting (0 slots, WIS-1); tracking (0 slots, WIS)

**special:** strength 16 (+1 damage); dexterity 17 (reaction adj. +2, missile attack adj. +2, defensive adj. -3)

**equipment:** chainmail (AC5); shortbow (sf7 → sf5) w/ 20 sheaf arrows (1d8 → +2 to-hit, 1d8); hand axes (x2) (1d6/1d4, sf4 → +3 to-hit, 1d6+3/1d4+3, sf2, 3 attacks/2 rounds); longsword (1d8/1d12, sf5 → 1d8+1/1d12+1, sf3); dagger (1d4/1d3, sf2 → 1d4+1/1d3+1, sf0)

See "Beneath the Eye of Belenus".

### INGANNO (WOODSMAN)

#### 6th level skulk thief

str 10, dex 16, con 11, int 14, wis 11, cha 12

hp 27, hd 6d6, ac 5, th 15

**weapon proficiencies** (3): dagger (with weapon finesse, 2 slots); sling

**non-weapon proficiencies** (4): looting (DEX); observation (INT); set snares (DEX-1); tumbling (DEX)  
**thieving abilities** (210): pick pockets: 15% + 43% → 58%; open locks: 10% + 44% → 54%; find/remove traps: 5% + 44% → 49%; move silently: 100%; hide in shadows: 90%; detect noise: 15% + 44% → 59%; climb walls: 60% + 35% → 95%

**special:** dexterity 16 (reaction adj. +1, missile attack adj. +1, defensive adj. -2); blending (90% unlikely to be noticed when immobile); move with absolute silence (-3 penalty to opponents' surprise rolls); backstab (+4 to-hit, 3x damage); pass with very little trace (tracking checks having 1/5 normal chance of success)

**equipment:** dagger (1d4/1d3, sf2 → 1d4+1/1d3+1, sf1)

See "Beneath the Eye of Belenus".

### JOSEPH FAGAN (GUARDIAN OF MORALS)

#### 6th level human fighter

str 15, dex 12, con 14, int 13, wis 11, cha 12

hp 48, hd 6d10, ac 3, th 15

**weapon proficiencies** (6): blades broad group (3 slots); longsword specialization (+1 to-hit, +2 damage, 3 attacks/2 rounds); crossbows tight group

**non-weapon proficiencies** (5): alertness (WIS+1); gaming (CHA); hunting (WIS-1); riding (horse, WIS+3); running (CON-6)

**equipment:** splint mail (AC4); shield; longsword (1d8/1d12, sf5 → +1 to-hit, 1d8+2/1d12+2, sf5, 3 attacks/2 rounds); dagger (1d4/1d3, sf2); light crossbow (sf7) w/ 10 quarrels (1d4)

A Guardian of Morals loyal to Samuel Lawlor. He has been promised promotion and power, both for himself and for his friend Lemmy Roche.

### KEVIN DONLAN (WOODSMAN)

#### 7th level human fighter (woodsman)

str 12, dex 16, con 15, int 15, wis 12, cha 14

hp 56, hd 7d10+7, ac 4, th 15

**weapon proficiencies** (6): bows tight group (2 slots); blades broad group (3 slots); longsword specialization (+1 to-hit, +2 damage, 2 attacks/round)

**non-weapon proficiencies** (5): alertness (WIS+1); direction sense (WIS+1); endurance (2 slots, CON); hunting (WIS-1, 0 slots); survival (forest, 1 slot); tracking (WIS, 0 slots)

**languages** (4): Nidalan (native); Darkonian; (smattering of other languages)

**special:** dexterity 16 (reaction adj. +1, missile attack adj. +1, defensive adj. -2); constitution 15 (+1 hit point/level)

**equipment:** scale mail (AC6); shortbow (sf7 → sf6) w/ 20 sheaf arrows (1d8 → +1 to-hit, 1d8); longsword (1d8/1d12, sf5 → +1 to-hit, 1d8+2/1d12+2, sf4); dagger (1d4/1d3, sf2 → sf1)

One of Elena's Woodsmen. Unlike most of the Woodsmen, he appears regularly (if unobtrusively) at Elena's court. Most Guardians would not recognize



him; most Woodsmen would. An enemy of Samuel Lawlor.

Although Donlan is a native Nidalan, he has also learned Darkonian from the expatriates in Orillon. He has also picked up a smattering of other languages. Assume that he can communicate brokenly in whatever languages prove useful to the DM.

### LEMMY ROCHE (GUARDIAN OF MORALS)

#### 6th level human fighter

str 18/25, dex 12, con 16, int 8, wis 10, cha 8

hp 60, hd 6d10+12, ac 3, th 15

**weapon proficiencies** (6): blades broad group (3 slots); longsword specialization (+1 to-hit, +2 damage, 3 attacks/2 rounds); crossbows tight group

**non-weapon proficiencies** (5): alertness (WIS+1); endurance (2 slots, CON); riding (horse, WIS+3); running (CON-6)

**special:** strength 18/25 (+1 to-hit, +3 damage); constitution 16 (+2 hit points/level)

**equipment:** splint mail (AC4); shield; longsword (1d8/1d12, sf5 → +1 to-hit, 1d8+2/1d12+2, sf5, 3 attacks/2 rounds); dagger (1d4/1d3, s2); light crossbow (sf7) w/ 10 quarrels (1d4)

A Guardian of Morals loyal to Samuel Lawlor, although largely because he is loyal to his friend Joseph Fagan, who is loyal to Samuel Lawlor. Lemmy Roche does not want advancement so much as he wants to not be left behind. Lemmy Roche is not the brightest bruiser in the bruiser box, but nobody ever said Guardians had to be bright.

### SAMUEL LAWLOR (MOST MORAL)

#### 8th level human fighter (Most Moral)

str 17, dex 14, con 17, int 12, wis 11, cha 15

hp 88, hd 8d10+24, ac 3, th 13

**weapon proficiencies** (6): lances tight group (2 slots); light crossbow; long blades tight group (2 slots); bastard sword specialization (+1 to-hit, +2 damage, 2 attacks/round)

**non-weapon proficiencies** (5): alertness (WIS+1); animal handling (WIS-1); animal training (dogs, WIS);

etiquette (CHA); riding (horse, WIS+3)

**Most Moral kit:** *punish the lie* (at will); +2 bonus to all saving throws; slowed aging; inflict wounds (inflict 16hp/day; may be channeled through a weapon); cause disease (1/week); aura of protection from heresy (10' radius); turn heretics; *dispel magic* when wielding a holy sword; call for warhorse; cast priest spells, starting at 9th level

**special:** strength 17 (+1 to-hit, +1 damage)

**equipment:** splint mail (AC4); shield; bastard sword (one-handed: 1d8/1d12, sf6 → +2 to-hit, 1d8+3/1d12+3, sf6, 2 attacks/round; two-handed 2d4/2d8, sf8 → +2 to-hit, 2d4+3/2d8+3, sf8, 2 attacks/round)

One of the Most Moral. Like a number of the Most Moral, he is a psychopath, which has insulated him from Elena Faith-hold's skewed *detect evil* ability.

Lawlor was born and raised in Cu Clannagh. His family is prominent in that town, prominent enough to cover up a certain amount of trouble, which Lawlor caused before he learned to be more discrete in some of his ways. They sent him to Touraine to join the Army of Nidala, and everybody was surprised when he instead became a Guardian of Morals and eventually joined the Most Moral. He has subsequently inherited the family estate. Although he rarely visits, the estate is maintained by family retainers. The retainers live in terror when he is present and great ease when he is absent.

Lawlor is in his late thirties, but his aging slowed dramatically when he became one of the Most Moral in his early thirties. His hair is dark, just starting to silver at the temples. While his features aren't quite handsome, they are regal, and that's close enough.

### SPARAX GORDIAN (WIZARD)

#### 6th level human wizard

str 11, dex 15, con 12, int 16, wis 12, cha 11

hp 18, hd 6d4, ac 9, th 19

**weapon proficiencies** (2): quarterstaff; dagger

**non-weapon proficiencies** (6): agriculture (INT); alchemy (2 slots, INT-6); herbalism (2 slots, INT-2); spellcraft (INT-2)

**languages** (5): Darkonian (native); Nidalan; Elven;

Lamordian; Mordentish; Falkovnian

**spells, 1st level** (4): detect magic; detect undead; shield; sleep

**spells, 2nd level** (2): fog cloud; levitate; (alternate) detect invisibility

**spells, 3rd level** (2): flame arrow; hold undead

**special:** dexterity 15 (defensive adj. -1)

A Darkonian of Neblus who came through the Via Corona. (But not intentionally. He was trying to pick a bouquet to give to a woman he was wooing.) As a city boy, he thought he would do best in Touraine.

However, along the way he made the mistake of letting the mayor of Rushinver learn of his magical ability. Before long, Gordian was "recruited" by the Guardians. Eventually Samuel Lawlor offered him freedom in exchange for some magical support in a secret endeavor of his. Gordian accepted, but he has long since realized that his "freedom" is being Lawlor's captive rather than Elena's.

Sparax Gordian's language list may be altered as useful to ease communication between him and the PCs.

Before getting dragged into Samuel Lawlor's plot, Sparax Gordian made one attempt to flee the Guardians. His *flame arrow* spell failed to kill the Guardian who was guarding him. He was thoroughly beaten, and the Guardian ripped a page out of his spell book and burned it. Gordian was informed that subsequent escape attempts would result in the loss of more pages and several fingers besides. And if that meant he became useless as a wizard, why, there wouldn't be much reason to keep him alive, then, would there?

## TADHG (WOODSMAN)

**6th level human thug (woodsman)**

str 16, dex 17, con 12, int 10, wis 9, cha 11

hp 39, hd 6d8, ac 4, th 18

**weapon proficiencies** (6): hand axe; short blades tight group (2 slots); shortbow; sling; single-weapon fighting style (-1 bonus to AC)

**non-weapon proficiencies** (4): alertness (WIS); blind-fighting (2 slots); hunting (WIS-1, 0 slots); jumping

(STR); tracking (WIS, 0 slots)

**thug class:** fights as warrior; saves as rogue; priest hit dice; most weapons allowed (no polearms or really large weapons); major armor restriction (studded leather only, no shield); rogue non-weapon proficiency group; slow non-weapon proficiency advancement; constitution bonus; exceptional strength; all thieving abilities except read languages (54 initial, +27/level); backstab; use rogue-specific magic items; cannot be good-aligned

**thieving abilities** (189): pick pockets: 15% + 5% + 12% → 32%; open locks: 10% + 10% + 12% → 32%; find/remove traps: 5% + 12% → 17%; move silently: 10% + 5% + 60% → 75%; hide in shadows: 5% + 5% + 60% → 70%; detect noise: 15% + 23% → 38%; climb walls: 60% + 10% → 70%

**special:** strength 16 (+1 damage); dexterity 17 (reaction adj. +2, missile attack adj. +2, defensive adj. -3)

**equipment:** studded leather (AC8); shortbow (sf7 → sf5) w/ 20 sheaf arrows (1d8 → +2 to-hit, 1d8); shortsword +1 (1d6/1d8, sf3 → 1d6+2/1d8+2, sf1); dagger (1d4/1d3, sf2 → 1d4+1/1d3+1, sf0)

See "Beneath the Eye of Belenus".

## TASARIA (VISTANA)

A Vistani woman, married to Zindelo. Their families were both against the marriage, and when Tasaria and Zindelo eloped anyway, their families banished them. (However, they are emphatically not darklings; they were banished only from their families, not from the Vistani as a whole.) Tasaria and her husband have wandered the demiplane for many years, long enough to bear and raise two children who have since married back into the larger Vistani community. They are now in their empty nest years.

Even after twenty years together, Tasaria and Zindelo are a passionate couple, passionate in love and passionate in anger. They miss their children, which means they are more willing than usual to keep company with *giorgios*, just for the sounds of other people. They can be hired to escort travelers through the Mists, although it is important to note that there

is never any conscious sense of destiny involved. Tasaria and Zindelo do not deliver their customers to a destination for any higher reason than gold. (And company.)

Tasaria has only a tiny slice of the Sight, which she does not recognize as anything more than an occasional unlikely hunch which turns out to be true. She does not particularly trust her hunches, and she certainly does not pretend that she can tell fortunes.

### WAROC TRWYTH (HUNTER)

See "Beneath the Eye of Belenus".

### ZINDELO (VISTANA)

A Vistani man, married to Tasaria. He is the more proficient Mistwalker of the two, but even he cannot always get where he is trying to go. (Just because he doesn't get much hint of destiny's machinations doesn't mean that destiny's machinations don't make use of him.)

Zindelo likes good wine and good beer. However, he very rarely drinks in front of *giorgios*. Even when he does drink, he never drinks much. He is a connoisseur, not a glutton.





# POST APOCALOFT EXPANSION

BY M.T. KELLY

## FLYOVER COUNTRY- THE RED DEATH'S LEFTOVER POCKET DOMAINS

It has been discovered by the residents of what most believe was the United States that it IS in fact possible to travel from coast to coast. As each Event happened and the realm continues to expand, explorers have braved the mists hoping to learn what lies beyond. It has proven to be impossible to recreate the national or international internets but several local internets have sprung up in their place. Even nationwide telephone, telervision, and radio service has proven untenable. Satellites signals have also ceased to be reveived. People have had to fall back to the old mail delivery service as developed by Benjamin Franklin. Through steady correspondence by local governments, people have learned the fate of many places on the map that they lost touch with. Newspapers have made a comeback as people seek to learn the news from all across the continent. Plane, trains, and highway vehicles have successfully made the journeys from coast to coast as the old transportation infrastructure is still very intact, but they have returned with strange stories or have simply vanished without a trace. Interstate commerce has begun again but the information age is over and much of American society has been set back 100 years.

## FORBIDDEN LORE

The Red Death never went completely dormant. It never stopped lending power to dark individuals committing dark acts for dark reasons. It simply was far less powerful in its

actions than it had been. As American society lived through the 20th century, terrible things continued to be done by terrible people which would trigger changes to them by the Red Death. This created several pocket domains that were automatically brought along with New York when the first event happened. Many of these pocket domains were based in small towns which were brought to the new earth realm and have become fictional or mythical on the original planet. There may be more out there that haven't been discovered, yet but the following domains have formed a chain of land across what would be the north American continent beginning at New York and ending in the Rocky Mountains where everything west out the mountains is dominated by Skynet.

New Jersey, Delaware, and Pennsylvania are collections of small domains that hold the state together. One of the New Jersey domains is Camp Crystal Lake. Passing through Ohio will bring travelers near Springwood. As they leave Ohio and enter Indiana, they'll likely find themselves near Travis.

Passing out of Indiana and into northern Illinois gives them the choice to head up to Chicago, where one may travel further north to Detroit, Michigan, or further west near Everett, Wisconsin. Keeping to the west route brings them past Haddonfield and 150 miles further west to Warren county where Smith Grove Sanitarium is located. Travelers then cross into Iowa where they will likely pass near Villisca. Travelling further west into Nebraska will bring them close to Gatlin, and finally crossing into

Colorado will bring them near Boulder which is near the former site of the town of Gunnison.

### HADDONFIELD IL.

Every small town has a secret. Some are scandalous, some are vicious, some are violent, but very few are as ancient, deadly, or disturbing as the secret of Haddonfield Illinois.

### MICHAEL MYERS - THE CURSED KILLER OF SAMHAIN

The story began as follows-

On the night of Halloween 1963, in suburban Illinois town of Haddonfield, six-year-old Michael Audrey Myers brutally stabbed his teenage sister Judith to death with a chef's knife while their parents were out taking their three-year-old sister, Laurie, to their grandparents so they could then come home and take Michael trick-or-treating. Michael waited at home in his clown costume while Judith was on the couch being intimate with her boyfriend. Neither the parents nor the police could find out what caused Michael to do it. He had never been a particularly talkative child, in fact, doctors had been testing him for mental handicaps, but now no one could get him to say a thing. He didn't seem particularly pleased with himself, nor did he seem remorseful or angry. Decades later, a psychologist might have recognized Michael's condition as catatonia or emotional shock, but these terms were unheard of outside psychiatry in 1963. Michael was examined and diagnosed with catatonia and eventually sentenced to Smith Grove Sanitarium in Lancaster county under the care of one Dr. Samuel Loomis.

Dr. Loomis tried valiantly to treat Michael but made precious little progress. For the most part, Michael spent his time staring out the window as he had been found doing before the night he killed his sister. Loomis noticed that Michael's condition was not as crippling as other recorded cases were. Michael ate, drank, cleaned himself,

used the restroom, and noticed when people were talking to or about him. What he never did was respond, not even with hand gestures. There were several violent deaths that occurred around Michael during his time at the sanitarium and Loomis became suspicious of him. A large part of Loomis came to believe Michael Myers was pure evil, but his more rational mind knew such an idea was absurd. He also never saw enough evidence to act on his suspicions. A decision he would come to regret later.

Meanwhile, terrible things continued to happen to the Myers family. Michael's parents died in a car accident and his younger sister, Laurie, placed in the foster care system. She was eventually adopted by a family named Strode.

In 1978, 15 years later, Michael Myers turned 21 and the court ordered he be tried as an adult. Dr. Loomis, with nurse Marion Chambers, were tasked to drive to Smith Grove Sanitarium where Michael was still incarcerated to escort him to a court hearing.

After they saw all the inmates wandering the grounds as they drove up, Loomis exited their car to unlock the main gate, Michael, who had escaped from his cell, jumped onto the roof of the car and attacked Marion, who ran from the vehicle, allowing Michael to steal the car and drive away.

Michael made his way back to Haddonfield, killing a mechanic and stealing his coveralls, then stealing a white mask from a local hardware store. He returned to his childhood home and found it empty and for sale. By singular coincidence, teenager Laurie Strode dropped off a key at the front door of the house because her father is trying to sell it. Michael began stalking her. Laurie notices Michael throughout the day, but her friends Annie Brackett and Lynda Van Der Klok dismissed her concerns. Loomis arrived in Haddonfield and

discovered that Michael had stolen Judith's tombstone from the local cemetery. He met up with the town sheriff, Annie's father, Leigh Brackett, and they began to search for Michael. While they investigated the old Myers house, Loomis described how he realized that Michael was pure evil.

That night, Michael followed Annie and Laurie to their babysitting jobs. Laurie watched Tommy Doyle, while Annie stayed with Lindsey Wallace across the street. Michael spied on Annie and killed the Wallace family dog. Tommy spotted Michael from the windows and thought he was the boogeyman, but Laurie dismissed that. Annie later took Lindsey to the Doyle house for the night so she could pick up her boyfriend. Michael hid in her car and strangled her before slitting her throat. Lynda and her boyfriend Bob arrived at the Wallace house and found it empty. After having sex, Bob went downstairs to get a beer from the kitchen, where Michael pinned him to the wall with a chef's knife. Michael then posed as Bob in a ghost costume and confronted Lynda, who teased him to no effect. Annoyed, she called Laurie to find out what happened to Annie, but Michael strangled her to death with the phone cord while Laurie listened on the other end. Meanwhile, Loomis discovered the stolen car and searched the streets.

Worried by the phone call, Laurie went to the Wallace house and found her friends' bodies with Judith's tombstone in the upstairs bedroom. She ran to the hallway where Michael slashed her arm, causing her to fall over the banister. Dazed and injured, she managed to escape the house with him in pursuit. She made it back to the Doyle house, but realized she has lost the keys to the front door. Tommy let her in and she ordered him and Lindsey to hide. Laurie called for help, only to find the phone is dead. Michael snuck in through the window and

attacked her again, but she stabbed him in the neck with a knitting needle.

Thinking Michael was dead, Laurie staggered upstairs to check on the children, where Michael appeared again. While Tommy and Lindsey hid in the bathroom, Laurie hid in the bedroom closet. Laurie stabbed Michael in the eye with a coat hanger and then in the chest with his own knife, then she sent Tommy and Lindsey to a neighbor's house to call the police, Michael rose again. Seeing the children running from the house, Loomis went to investigate and saw Michael strangling Laurie. She broke free by pulling his mask off, revealing his face. Loomis shot him six times, knocking him off the balcony. When Loomis went to check on the body, he was unsurprised to see that Michael has vanished. He stared off into the distance as Laurie sobbed in terror.

Michael survived his wounds and escaped into the night. Wandering the alleys, he stole a kitchen knife from an elderly couple and killed the teenage girl next door.

Meanwhile, Laurie Strode was taken to Haddonfield Memorial Hospital while Loomis continued his pursuit of Michael, accompanied by Sheriff Leigh Brackett. Loomis mistook teenager Ben Tramer for Michael due to Ben wearing a similar mask, resulting in Ben being hit by a police car and burning to death. The bodies of Annie Brackett, Lynda Van Der Klok, and Bob Simms were discovered by the police at the residence of the Wallaces. Upon learning his daughter has been killed by Michael, Sheriff Brackett blamed Loomis and abandoned the search, leaving Deputy Gary Hunt to take his place.

At the hospital, paramedic Jimmy develops an attraction to Laurie, but head nurse Virginia Alves limited the time he spent with her. After hearing a newsflash revealing Laurie's location, Michael made his way to the hospital, where he



cut the phone lines and disabled all the cars in the parking lot by slashing all the cars' tires so no one could escape and call for help. Wandering the halls in search of Laurie, he killed the security guard, the doctor, paramedic, and several nurses throughout the night. In her hospital room, Laurie dreamt about the time she learned she was adopted, and remembered she once visited a young Michael at the sanitarium. Jimmy and nurse Jill Franco grew increasingly concerned when they discovered that more and more staff had gone missing throughout the night and searched the hospital for Laurie, who was trying to evade Michael. As nurse Jill Franco tried to start the car to drive to the sheriff's department, it failed to start and she saw that all the car's tires in the parking lot had been slashed.

After finding Mrs. Alves dead, strapped to a gurney with an empty IV needle in her arm draining all of her blood out of her body, Jimmy turned to run to go for help but slipped in a pool of her blood and knocked himself unconscious and giving himself a concussion. Meanwhile, police were informed that Michael broke into the local elementary school earlier. Loomis rode with them but his colleague, Marion Chambers, arrived to escort him back to Smith's Grove on the governor's orders and under the enforcement of a US Marshal. On the way, she told him that Laurie was Michael's younger sister; she was put up for adoption after the death of Michael's parents, with the records sealed to protect the family.

Realizing that Michael was after Laurie and being told she was brought to Haddonfield Memorial Hospital, Loomis forced the marshal at gunpoint to drive back to Haddonfield. Jill finally found Laurie, only to be killed by Michael, who then pursued Laurie through the hospital. She managed to escape to the parking lot and hid in a car. Jimmy regained consciousness, went out to the parking lot and tried to start and

drive the car Laurie was in to safety, but passed out again due to the concussion sustained from the slip and fall causing the horn to blare, attracting Michael's attention. Loomis, Marion, and the marshal reached the hospital just in time to save Laurie. Loomis shot Michael until he fell down, seemingly dead. While Marion called the police on the marshal's radio, the marshal tried to check Michael's pulse as Loomis warned him to stay away, knowing he wasn't dead. Michael revived and slit the marshal's throat with a scalpel.

Loomis and Laurie ran into the hospital and hid in an operating room, where Loomis gives Laurie the marshal's gun before being stabbed by Michael. Laurie shot Michael in both eyes, blinding him. As he swung the scalpel around the space violently, the other two filled the room with flammable gas. Loomis ordered Laurie to get out before igniting the gas, immolating himself and Michael in an explosion. Laurie watched as Michael, engulfed in flames, emerged from the fire before finally collapsing. The next morning, she was transferred to another hospital, traumatized but alive.

Then, On October 30, 1988, ten years later, Michael Myers, who has been comatose since since the explosion at Haddonfield Memorial Hospital was being transferred from Ridgemont Federal Sanitarium back to Smith's Grove Sanitarium. During the transfer, when Michael overheard that he had a niece living in Haddonfield, he awakened. killed the ambulance personnel and headed back to his hometown to kill her. Dr. Loomis, who also survived the explosion, learned of Michael's escape and gave chase once again.

Loomis followed Michael to a gas station and diner, where Michael had killed a mechanic for his coveralls, along with a female clerk. Michael escaped in a tow truck, igniting the gas pumps, causing an explosion, destroying Loomis's car

given by Ridgemont in the process, and disabling the phone lines. Loomis continued to pursue Michael on foot, then hitched a ride with a priest in a pick-up truck.

In Haddonfield, Laurie's daughter Jamie Lloyd suffered from nightmares about The Shape, which was one of the names given to Michael Myers by townsfolk who remembered him. Jamie is also bullied at school for being the niece of "the boogeyman." On Halloween night, her foster parents Richard and Darlene went to a party and left their teenage daughter Rachel to babysit, forcing her to cancel a date with her boyfriend Brady. Rachel picked Jamie up after school to buy ice cream and a Halloween costume. Jamie decided on a clown costume when Michael suddenly appeared to steal a new mask. He went after his niece but fled when she screamed in horror.

That night, as Rachel and Jamie were trick-or-treating, Michael broke into the Carruthers' house and killed the family dog. Loomis arrived in Haddonfield and warned the new sheriff, Ben Meeker, that Michael had returned. As they searched for the girls, At the power station Michael threw an electric worker into a transformer, plunging the entire town into darkness. He proceeded to kill most of the town's police force, prompting the locals to form a lynch mob.

Meeker and Loomis found Rachel and Jamie and took them to the sheriff's house, where Brady was having an affair with Meeker's daughter Kelly. They barricaded the premises as Loomis departed to find Michael, who has already snuck into the house. The lynch mob accidentally killed a teenager who they thought was Michael. After Meeker left to respond to the shooting, Michael killed Brady, Kelly, and a deputy as Rachel and Jamie fled to the attic and onto the roof. Rachel lowered Jamie down to

safety but was attacked by Michael, falling to the ground and losing consciousness.

Pursued by Michael, Jamie ran down the street and right into Loomis. They sought shelter at the school, but Michael found them and tossed Loomis through a glass door. He chased Jamie through the school, until she fell down a flight of stairs, Michael prepared to kill her when Rachel reappeared and subdued him with a fire extinguisher. The lynch mob arrived and agreed to help the girls get out of Haddonfield. Along the way they met a lone trooper who told them there was a substation up the road where they'd be safe. Michael, who had been hidden underneath their truck, climbed aboard and killed the men including The driver. Rachel took the wheel, threw Michael off the truck, and rammed the truck into him. Meeker and Loomis arrived with the rest of lynch mob and the state police, while Jamie approached her uncle and touched his hand. As he rose, Meeker and the others shot him until he fell down an abandoned mine.

Afterward, back at the Carruthers' house, Darlene went upstairs to run a bath for Jamie when she was suddenly attacked.

Loomis heard her cries and saw Jamie in her clown costume holding a pair of bloody scissors, reminiscent of when Michael killed his older sister. Rachel, Richard, and Meeker looked on in horror as Loomis sobbed, saying that the evil inside of Michael had infected Jamie. Gratefully, this would prove to be the only time Jamie would demonstrate this kind of behavior.

Meanwhile, Michael Myers managed to crawl out of the mineshaft before dynamite was dropped down the shaft to assure his death. He floated down a river and stumbled upon the shack of an elderly hermit who nursed him back to health. One year later, he awakened killed the hermit and returned to Haddonfield to resume the hunt for his niece, Jamie Lloyd.

Jamie had been admitted to the Haddonfield Children's Clinic after attacking her foster mother. She had been rendered mute due to psychological trauma and exhibited signs of a telepathic link with her uncle. Dr. Samuel Loomis learned of this connection and wanted to use it to defeat Michael for good. Meanwhile, Michael killed Jamie's foster sister Rachel and began stalking her friend, Tina Williams. Jamie sensed whenever her loved ones were in danger, triggering episodes of convulsions that disturbed those around her.

After unknowingly encountering Michael posing as her boyfriend that he killed, Tina attended a Halloween party at the Tower Farm with her friends, Sam and Spitz. Sensing that Michael was following them, Jamie (having partially regained her ability to speak) escaped the clinic with her stuttering friend, Billy Hill, to warn Tina of the danger. As Spitz and Sam had sex in a barn, Michael impaled the former with a pitchfork and decapitated the latter with a scythe, and also killed two bumbling deputies Loomis had entrusted to protect Tina. Jamie and Billy found Tina as Michael tried to run them down with a car. Tina ultimately sacrificed herself to save Jamie. With nothing left to lose, Jamie agreed to help Loomis stop Michael once and for all.

Loomis and Meeker created a set up at the abandoned Myers house to lure Michael back to his childhood home. The police received a call saying Michael had broken into the clinic, prompting Meeker and most of the officers to leave; however, this call was merely a diversion. Michael appeared and killed the remaining officers. Loomis tried to reason with him, but Michael slashed him and threw him over the stair banister. He pursued Jamie throughout the house and up to the attic, where she found the bodies of Rachel, her dog Max, and Tina's boyfriend. As Michael raised his knife to stab her, Jamie addressed him as "Uncle," causing him to pause. He agreed to remove his mask and

let Jamie see his face, shedding a brief tear. However, when Jamie touched his face he went into a fit of rage and chased her again. Loomis reappeared and used Jamie as live bait to lure Michael into a trap. He shot Michael with a tranquilizer gun and beat him unconscious with a wooden plank before suffering a stroke and collapsing on top of him.

Meeker and the police returned and took Michael into custody. He was locked in a cell at the police station until he could be transferred to a maximum security facility for the rest of his life. As Jamie prepared to return to the clinic, a mysterious man in black, who had been quietly observing all day, arrived and shot up the station. Jamie found the bodies of Meeker and several officers, along with Michael's cell broken open and empty. Realizing he had escaped again, she sobbed in despair.

For six years after the previous events, Michael Myers and his niece Jamie Lloyd were prisoners of the Man in Black and his Druid-like cult. On Halloween Eve, fifteen-year-old Jamie gave birth and escaped with her baby in a stolen pickup truck with Michael in pursuit.

Meanwhile, a now retired Dr. Loomis was visited by his old friend Dr. Terence Wynn, the chief administrator of Smith's Grove Sanitarium, where Michael had been incarcerated as a boy. While Wynn asked Loomis to return to Smith's Grove, they overheard Jamie's plea for help on a local radio station. Michael caught up with Jamie and killed her, only to find that she had hidden her child elsewhere.

In Haddonfield, the old Myers house was then owned by relatives of Laurie Strode's adoptive family: John and Debra Strode, their adult children Kara and Tim, and Kara's six-year-old son Danny, who was tormented by visions of the Man in Black telling him to commit murder, while at the Blankenship boarding house across the street lived Tommy Doyle, the boy Laurie



babysat in 1978, now a recluse obsessed with Michael's motives. He had also heard Jamie's cry for help, and tracked the call down to a bus station and found the baby, whom he named Steven. Tommy crossed paths with Loomis, who visited Debra to warn her. After Loomis left, Michael killed Debra with an axe.

Tommy located Kara and Danny and took them to safety at the boarding house. He told Kara that he believed Michael was under the influence of Thorn, an ancient Druid curse that drove a person to kill their family on Halloween, and that Steven would be his final sacrifice. Tommy then left to meet Loomis at the local harvest festival. Michael electrocuted John Strode in his home then went to the harvest festival and killed radio host Barry Simms, after which he followed Kara's brother Tim, and his girlfriend Beth back to the house.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Blankenship recounted the history of Halloween to Danny, and told Kara she was babysitting Michael the night he killed his sister. The Man in Black beckoned Danny to the Myers house but Kara rescued Danny, discovered the corpses of Tim, Beth, and Debra upstairs, and was pursued by Michael. Upon returning to the boarding house, they discovered the Man in Black to be Dr. Wynn. Cult members burst in and, with the help of Mrs. Blankenship, abducted Kara, Danny, and Steven and took them to Smith's Grove. Kara was locked in a maximum-security ward while the boys were kept in an operating room.

Tommy and Loomis went to the sanitarium where Loomis confronted Wynn, who insinuated that the Smith's Grove staff had been studying evil to learn how to control it. Steven was implied to be the successful result of in vitro fertilization to clone Michael's DNA. Wynn wanted Loomis to join him, as he was the first to observe Michael's power decades earlier.

Loomis refused and was knocked out by another doctor.

Kara awoke on a concrete slab, surrounded by the cult's members, including Mrs. Blankenship, Wynn's secretary Dawn, and other Haddonfield residents. Wynn began a ceremony where Michael would kill Steven as a final sacrifice of innocent blood, after which the curse would pass on to Danny with Kara as his first sacrifice. Kara stalled by appealing to Michael with the revelation that Steven was his biological child. Tommy took Wynn hostage and forced the cult to free Kara and the children. Pursued by Michael, they ran through the sanitarium to a locked gate. Tommy used the power of the ancient runes to stop Michael in his tracks and Loomis helped them escape.

After telling the others he had unfinished business, Loomis found what appeared to be Michael lying on the floor. He removed the mask to reveal Wynn, with whom Michael switched clothes and then escaped. As he seemingly died, Wynn passes on the Thorn symbol, which appeared on Loomis' wrist. Realizing that he was the new cult leader, Loomis screamed in despair while Michael escaped into the night in Wynn's Man in Black outfit. None noticed the mists rising around them.

### HADDONFIELD CURRENTLY

Haddonfield was never the kind of place to change much. It's people change but the architecture and geography stays fairly regular. The Myers house still stands at 707 meridian street and the town is still mostly agrarian and suburban as it always had been.

The only noticeable change is in the night sky. The constellation of the rune of Thorn is there every night.

## FORBIDDEN LORE

### THE DARKLORD

The Darklord of this realm may be one of three

#### 1. Michael Myers

Michael Audrey Myers descent began in 1963, when six-year-old Michael began hearing a voice in his head telling him to kill his older sister. He had never been very talkative so he didn't try to tell anyone. No one knows what it was the voice said to finally drive Michael to stab his sister so violently but the experience clearly damaged young Michael as well as he was found standing completely catatonic on the front yard. This particular look became the only expression that would ever be seen on his face for the rest of his life. He would never show, joy, grief, or anger though his unsettling stare would become famous to all those who would ever survived crossing his path from then on. During his following time at Smith Grove Sanitarium in Lancaster county, The only person to suspect that he was anything other than catatonic was the doctor charged with his care, Samuel Loomis. What Loomis never knew was that Michael's family had descended from a Druidic tribe that had worshiped, or perhaps, lived in fear of a malicious, perhaps even demonic, entity named Thorn. Thorn was said to have spread sickness, destroyed crops, and otherwise brought death so, in order to appease Thorn, one child from each tribe was chosen to be inflicted with the curse of Thorn which forced them, or perhaps enticed them or convinced them, to offer the blood sacrifices of their next of kin on night the ancient Gaelic festival called Samhain (pronounced SAH-win but most Americans and all residents of Haddonfield pronounced Sam-hane) Another thing Loomis didn't know is that his immediate superior at Smith's Grove, Doctor Terence Wynn, was also a descendent of the same Druidic tribe and was

the leader of the modern cult of Thorn and were responsible for placing the curse on Michael. After the murder of his older sister, Michael became what most believed to be a soulless killing machine programmed only to kill almost anyone who crossed his path but he would only do so on certain Halloween nights when planetary alignments caused the constellation of Thorn to appear in the night sky.

He was sometimes captured and imprisoned after a killing spree and many tried to kill him, but the curse of Thorn (or possibly the Neo Red Death) caused him to always regenerate. Unless somehow threatened, Michael would usually only kill after dark on Halloween night. The exceptions to this will be outlined below. He also usually only targeted people between the ages of 14 and 65. He tended to leave the very old and very young unmolested. Any couple or couples having sex, however will immediately gain his attention and he will make a point of killing them unless one of his next of kin presents themselves and draws him off. On those times when he was not captured after Halloween night, he would simply disappear into the landscape and live off the land until the next special Halloween came along.

#### *Michael's Powers*

Michael gains greater and greater strength the more people he kills. He also regenerates any wound he suffers including bullet wounds.

#### *Michael's Rules*

Michaels' kills are always meticulously organized. When he first killed in 1963, he was wearing whole body clown costume suit and mask. Whether he decided this would become the usual attire in which he murder or it was the attire all those cursed by Thorn used is unknown, but whatever the case, Michael would always find a one piece suit, usually mechanic's coveralls taken from an auto

mechanic he would have killed, and a white mask that somehow became popular after his first rampage in 1978. Michael is capable moving completely silently, but can only walk at a very slow pace. He has never been seen to run. He has no fixed method of murder. He will use whatever is at hand and finish the kill as quickly as possible. He will, however, gather as many of his victims corpses as he can collect and build them into elaborate displays. The reasons for this are unknown.

#### *Michael Myers currently*

Michael Myers is now completely beyond anyone's control except maybe Thorn's. He wanders the land, moving from shadow to shadow, killing anyone between the ages of 14 and 65 that he comes across. It's believed he's searching for the baby Steven and the others so that he may finally be free of his curse. Sadly, no one has seen the escapees since night the mists rose. He is the most wanted man in Illinois and there are several bounties on his head, but few bounty hunters have even survived an encounter with him.

#### *Fighting Michael*

Michael is strong enough to crush bones and muscle in one hand and can regenerate any wound except perhaps decapitation. However, he can only move at a slow walk and becomes distracted when his mask is removed. The thing that must be remembered about Michael Myers is that he is still very much alive. Killing him may only guarantee that he returns as something far worse the next time.

### **2.Dr. Terrence Wynn**

Dr. Terrence Wynn was the administrator of Smith Grove Sanitarium and the leader of the Cult of Thorn who laid the curse of Thorn on Michael Myers. He was almost dead the night the mists rose and he is still in poor health.

Some other members of the cult of Thorn also survived that night and they all regrouped to find a way to move forward with their goals. Danny, Kara, Tommy, and Steven vanished after that night as did Michael Myers. The cult has put out a statewide message to all it's members to either find the escapees, Michael, or a new prospect to take Michael's place.

### **3.Thorn**

The entity known as Thorn may be trapped in Michael's body and The Neo Red Death may be tormenting it with it's own captivity. It would be an interesting thing to learn which entity is stronger in this way.

## **THE REALM**

Haddonfield is still a small town but this realm reaches to include a good part of the state of Illinois. Smith Grove Sanitarium is 150 miles away in Lancaster county and Ridgemont Federal Sanitarium is just as far away. The realms borders are defined by places where Michael Myers has been sited and where the rune of Thorn has been seen. but they have been seen as far east as Watseka and as far west as Oquawka. Young people all over the state have been posting the Thorn rune in all kinds of places just for laughs as they often dress up like Michael Myers for the same reason. So many of them don't realize how dangerous this is...for EVERYONE.

## **THE ADVERSARY**

The Adversary is, of course, Dr. Sam Loomis. He also was very old the night the mists rose and has grown no younger since. He scours the state looking for both Michael Myers and the cult of Thorn, determined to put an end to them. Law enforcement all over the state know him and while those who have encountered Michael



Myers or The Cult of Thorn see him as a very valuable ally in their efforts to save lives, but those who consider Michael an urban legend think he's a crackpot who's destroying himself chasing ghosts.

No one knows Michael Myers or the Cult of Thorn better. Loomis was the first psychiatrist assigned to Michael at Smith's Grove. He came to believe that Michael was nothing more than pure evil and committed his best efforts to keeping Michael locked away. He always believed that Smith's Grove lacked the necessary security for a patient as dangerous as Michael and constantly tried to get him transferred to prison or at least a higher. After he learned of Dr. Wynn's Cult of Thorn, He realized that during their years together at the sanitarium, Dr. Wynn must have been quietly countering Loomis's efforts to have Michael transferred to more secure lodgings and was probably teaching him things, like how to drive a car, when no one was there to see. His secondary goal, after destroying Michael is to learn everything he can about the workings of the Cult of Thorn so that there will never again be a Michael Myers.

## BORDER CLOSURE

When the Darklord closes the borders, the mists rise and anyone who enters them sees Michael Myers coming at them from every direction with terrible bladed weapons. If they try to fight instead of run back out of the mists, Michael will grab them with his great strength and cast them back out of the mists

## DREAD POSSIBILITIES

**Michael vs. Thorn** - Is it possible Michael has been fighting Thorn all these years? Is that the reason Michael walks so slowly and doesn't kill the very old or very young. Is Michael constantly battling Thorn for control of his own body? And how would anyone find out if this were true?

**The Mask** - Michael seems to lose focus when his mask is removed and has never actually killed without it. Could the mask be key to Thorn's control of him? If he loses the mask, is he incapable of doing anything but defending himself until he replaces it?

What if he can't replace it?

**Michael Myers' Victims** - With the Neo Red Death in the mix with this world, it's entirely possible that anyone Michael has killed in his many sprees could return as some form of vengeful undead bent on ending Michael for good. It's been known to happen.

**The Curse** - What happens if Michael actually manages to kill all his next of kin or they just die? It's been said that the curse will break, but what does that mean? Is it good for him or bad for him? If he's released, does he live or die?

**Silver Shamrock Novelties factory** - Though this company was originally based in California, there is a secondary location in Illinois and some workers have been heard to say that they have heard the name Thorn passed around the office.





# LITTLE HORRORS 2.0

BY MARK “ROCK OF THE FRATERNITY” BARTELS

*Introduction: In Which the Author Rabbits On About Something.*

The name of the game is Gothic horror.

Actually, the name of the game is Ravenloft, and I assume we are all here for it.

The New York public library apparently defines Gothic horror as *“the battle between humanity and unnatural forces of evil (sometimes man-made, sometimes supernatural) within an oppressive, inescapable and bleak landscape”*.

And as we (presumably) all know, the Demiplane of Dread has plenty of that.

The Demiplane is the stage for a game. It is also something of a shared dream. We all step out of our reality for a little while to strut and act out the roles of heroes and villains here; we add our own creations to it, be they dark or bright. I hope we all know and appreciate that the Demiplane is a richer place for all the people who have come and gone here before us, as well as those who now walk beside us as we saunter into the Mists.

I found something that I certainly thought enriched the Demiplane in *Quoth the Raven* Issue #29's article, 'the Many Ravenlofts', by Jack the Reaper. Jack shared several versions of the Demiplane of Dread that might be, a sample of the variety that may be offered up by the many worlds-interpretation and the boundless capacity of human imagination. Personally, I loved option 23, 'Comicloft'.

Comicloft is described as *“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.”*

Comicloft resonates strongly with me because I feel that even if the name of the game is Gothic horror, that doesn't mean we shouldn't be able to have a laugh. Gothic horror paints a stark landscape of blacks and grays, but it cannot, must not, be unrelieved despair. There must be beauty, there must be joy, to justify our railing against the darkness, and righteous souls that strive to push back against evil. If there is no hope, no matter how hard-fought, then there is no point to venturing out into the dream. That is when it becomes an unrelieved nightmare of *existential* horror, and we hardly need more of those.

My own creation of the Chibiloft comics springs in part from this.

I created the Chibiloft characters and their misadventures to give a more lighthearted look at the Demiplane of Dread. The majority of both the one-page-wonders that first appeared in *Quoth the Raven* Issue #28, and even the narrative that started in Issue #30, are mostly humorous, albeit sometimes in a dark way.

I admit freely that the idea of Chibis running around the Demiplane of Dread is silly. That was the point; I wanted to share a smile, even a laugh. This article, like the comics, is not going to be for everyone.

Some of you will prefer to ignore Chibiloft's existence. Some of you will prefer to see it as a comical presentation of Ravenloft, but not as a reality in and of itself. And yet others will say: “Hey, what if those goobers really *are* Chibis? What's going on, why isn't everything around them HUGE, why aren't



normal-sized people looking down at their feet in stunned surprise?"

What wonderful words 'what if' can be.

And so we come, circuitously, to the article at hand.

The name of the game is Ravenloft; the question of the day is What If. It's the question no one asked, and I'm more than happy to answer it! :)

This article is a silly thing. You could think of it as one of the many reflections in what Jack the Reaper called '*the dark mirror of other realities*'. You know,

that mirror Jack helpfully pointed out is splintered.

Then again, it could be as real as anything in Ravenloft is. It could be out there. You could decide to go there and play in the setting material presented here, if you so choose. (Bring us back some souvenirs if you do!)

If this is not for you, then move along in peace; it is but one more possibility among many, and there are sure to be others you will enjoy.

If this *is* for you, then be welcome. Let's have a laugh in the dark and share a dream.

## MADEGO

'the Little Kingdom', 'the Lands Below'

**Cultural level:** Ranges from Level 0 (Savage) to Level 12 (Information age) depending on the region.

**Ecology:** Full.

**Climate & Terrain:** Madego copies all climates and terrains available in the greater Demiplane of Dread.

**Year Formed:** 644 BC

**Population:** ~555.753

**Races:** Chi-folken, *Genfigenus*, *Pierrobit*

**Languages:** P'Ti\*, all languages spoken in the greater Demiplane of Dread.

**Religions:** Lupta\*, the Spirits\*, the Thousand Gods, the Loa.

**Government:** Decentralized monarchy.

**Rulers:** King Azalin, local regents.

**Darklord:** Wudr.

**Nationality:** Dependent on region.

**Analog:** Sand Kings (*The Outer Limits*), Lilliput and Blefuscu (*Gulliver's Travels*).

Imagine a place. A place below the lands you know and love and dread.

Stand anywhere on the lands of Madego – a word that translates as 'little kingdom' in P'Ti, the ancient lingua franca of its natives – and look up. You will see a sky of stone, partially shrouded by fog and clouds. Those versed in the secret lore of Ravenloft will know that is the bottom of the Core and the other Clusters. In a very literal sense, Madego is *beneath* the rest of the Demiplane of Dread.

Madego's surface area is vast; it is as large as the surface of the Core, the Clusters and major Islands of

Terror, all mashed together and spread out. In other respects, however, the domain is considerably less impressive. The landscape reflects that of the Core, the Clusters and major Islands, but its mountains are only half as tall as those they resemble, its oceans only half as deep, its cities only half as large.

Seven moons orbit Madego. By day and by night they can be seen, passing between the Lands Below and the Lands Above from west to east. Golden Rhe, the Laughing Moon; silver Whe the Crying Moon; black Mor the Silent Moon; green Gai the Living Moon; red Raf the Dead Moon; blue Hae the Moon of Wrath; and pink Bub the Moon of Joy.

Instead of stars and suns set in the sky, Madego has lights set on the bottom of the Lands Above – maybe gemstones, maybe stars after all. By day, they brighten to the point that they illuminate and warm the Lands Below. By night they dim to the diamond chill of stars.

Madego is an absurd place, small when held up against the Lands Above. Its native species are well-suited to it.

## CHI-FOLKEN

**Type:**Fey

**Size:**Tiny (Chi-folken gain a racial bonus +2 to attack rolls, a racial -2 penalty to CMD, can occupy a space of 2-1/2 by 2-1/2 feet; up to four Chi-folken can occupy a single square), and gain a +8 size bonus to Stealth checks.

**Base speed:**30 feet; Swim speed 30 feet.

**Ability score modifier:**-2 Str., +4 Dex., -2 Wis., +2 Cha.

**Languages:**Chi-folken begin play speaking P'Ti. Chi-folken with high Intelligence scores can choose from the following bonus languages: Aquan, Draconic, Sylvan, Terran.

### Racial abilities:

**Feat & Skill racial traits:**Endearing (When a Chi-folken successfully uses Diplomacy to win over an individual, that creature takes a -2 penalty on attempts to resist any Chi-folken's Charisma-based skills for the next 24 hours.)

**Magical racial traits:**Feather on the Wind. (Small as they are, Chi-folken can take falls much better than larger creatures such as, for example, humans. Once a day, a Chi-folken can use *feather fall* as a spell-like ability.)

**Movement racial traits:**Cork on the Water. (Small as they are, Chi-folken are very buoyant.

Chi-folken have a Swim speed of 30 ft., and gain a racial +8 bonus to Swim checks.)

**Offense racial traits:**Butterfingers. (Chi-folken can be surprisingly clumsy; they gain a racial +2 bonus to Strength checks to break objects, and a +2 racial bonus to Combat Maneuver checks to sunder.)

**Senses racial traits:**Low-light vision.

## CHAPTER 1: A STAGE OF CARDBOARD AND GLITTER

### 1.1: An Unintentional Discovery

The origins of the Chi-folken might actually be better, were they wreathed in mystery. Instead, they lie in the laboratory of a wizard called Bernard the Unwise. As his epithet indicates, Bernard was overly fond of experimenting in areas where wiser mages feared to tread. In spite of this, he was not actually a *bad* man; he was just an overly *enthusiastic* man. He was also a man in constant need of money.

When Bernard decided to infuse Fey materials he had acquired into a range of homunculi, he did not do so with the intention of violating the cycles of nature and offending the elder guardians of nature. No; Bernard was hoping to create an exciting new range of children's toys, which he could hopefully sell to fund a planned expedition to ancient, jungle-overgrown ruins.

At first, Bernard was a little disappointed with his creations. They looked cute ... in a doughy sort of way ... but they toddled around and bumped into each other and the glass walls of their cage instead of doing the dances he tried to mentally command them to perform.

Bernard's disappointment faded before shock, then wonder and awe when one of his creations bumped into the glass wall, fell onto its butt and started to cry at the top of its voice. What should have been a magical doll was bleeding and crying, displaying genuine emotion – and before his eyes, the other little creatures toddled over and clumsily tried to comfort the one displaying distress.

Without meaning to, Bernard had brought forth a whole new form of life. It existed independent of his will and possessed genuine emotions, and a capacity for empathy.

All thoughts of the jungle ruins and its time-shrouded secrets now forgotten, Bernard started studying his creations. He created a large area in the cellars beneath his tower, walled on all sides by thick glass, in which he planted various shrubs, both edible and

poisonous, before he transported the doughy little creatures inside.

Over the following days, then weeks, then months, Bernard's creations adapted to their environment. They learned which plants were safe, and which would make them sick or even cause them to die. They learned to huddle together for warmth, and how to weave grasses into crude blankets and robes. They learned about tiredness and hunger, and how to satisfy these. They learned how to move with greater confidence, they started communicating simple concepts in a language of clicks and squeaks – and they learned that Bernard was almost always watching them.

The wizard could tell that they were curious about him; every now and then, the Chi-folken would stop whatever they were doing to look and vocalize at him. It would have been simplicity itself for him to translate the sounds they made, but he was so caught up in his observations that he never did. He filled book after book with notes, delighting in the life that had come unbidden. To be blunt, he ignored his health in the name of his research, and so it came to be that Bernard the Unwise fell ill and had to be taken to a healers' college nearby.

In Bernard's absence, the Chi-folken might have broken out of their enclosure and scattered to the four winds in the world outside. This did not happen. While Bernard was at the healers' hall, drifting in and out of fevered dreams and muttering what sounded like gibberish to his caretakers, his old apprentice Villiam came to take care of his tower.

Where Bernard was overly enthusiastic and perpetually poor, but still a skilled wizard, Villiam was ... perpetually poor. He was *painfully* untalented when it came to magic. He managed to make sure Bernard's wards did not go haywire in their master's absence, and he managed to copy one or two of his old master's weakest spells into his own spellbook while he was tower-sitting, but other than that he found Bernard's belongings to be far beyond him.

Until he thought to go into the basement, anyway.

Seeing the little creatures in their glass box caused Villiam's mouth to fall open with surprise. When he

realized they were truly alive – the early Chi-folken had no sense of danger and no notion of public decency – he smiled the widest smile he ever smiled. He rushed to his home in town and cleared out his basement, then went back to the tower.

To the Chi-folken's shock and surprise, Villiam scooped them up with a long-handled net and crammed them into a sack, after which he went back home. Here, Villiam released them into the empty, subterranean basement and started his plan.

Although the Chi-folken were upset at what had happened to them and confused about the changes to their environment, they warmed up to what came next. Unlike Bernard, Villiam initiated communications with them, and started teaching them things. He taught them about engineering, and fashion, and swordplay, and religion, and magic, and – and everything else that he could think of.

To the Chi-folken's delight, he brought them clothes made of silk and wool that more or less fit them. He brought them cutlery and plates, he brought them doll's houses to sleep in, he brought them foods unlike the berries and leaves they had been forced to subsist on until then. The Chi-folken even discovered – when Villiam insisted there needed to be more of them – that they could reproduce by sculpting mud blended with the blood of at least two existing Chi-folken around a mandrake.

Yes sir, things were clearly looking up! ... And then Villiam started selling them in the town square as children's toys.

## 1.2 THE AGE OF PLAY.

All of Villiam's lessons came down to this: that the Chi-folken should be able to mimic human – or elven, or dwarven, or halfling, or gnomish – behavior and act like the living dolls Bernard had originally intended them to be. His insistence that the Chi-folken should reproduce was due to his desire to sell them to many customers, and thus earn more money.

And earn money, the scoundrel did. “*Villiam's living dolls*” were a smash hit of the fall season, when parents were looking for new toys to help their



offspring while away the long winter months without bothering them too much. Children adored them. In time, their parents also learned to appreciate the little creatures, who could with only a little effort be taught to clean all those little awkward nooks and crannies in a house that would otherwise require them to bruise their knees and bang their heads and elbows.

Of course quite a few Chi-folken died sad deaths, as children of an experimental frame of mind tried to find out what made them go, or because the family pet decided to 'play' with them, but by and large, they did well. Their lives were exhausting, having to keep up with the demands of the giants who kept and fed them, but they lived, they had shelter from the elements, and they generally ate well. Even those who found themselves thrown out of the home as children grew bored with them or because a parent thought them 'creepy' did well; they learned to survive and thrive in the 'wilderness' between and underneath houses, where they hunted the wily cockroach and plump mice.

Villiam did not become as rich as he had hoped. The Chi-folken had no concept of lying, nor did they feel any special loyalty to him. If an owner asked how they reproduced – there were a few – then the Chi-folken told them. Villiam lost the monopoly on his "living dolls" soon enough, and his sales dropped until finally, it was no longer profitable for him to keep, 'breed' and train the Chi-folken. It must be said that although he could have taken his frustration out on the tiny creatures, he did not do so; he just released them from his home and went looking for the next get rich quick-scheme.

All of which amounts to this: the Chi-folken had become a more-or-less accepted quantity in the world in which they came to be. If they were not treated as equals, they were not regularly molested or persecuted. Even the 'feral' Chi-folken were seen as useful, because they hunted pests and cleared out nests of vermin. There were quite a lot of people who liked them and even treated them well.

Which is what makes the next part of the story sad.

### 1.3 THE AGE OF ENVY.

Even as they toiled in the homes of giants or else crept around underneath them, the Chi-folken had developed their own culture. It was not a grand thing of centuries and monuments, like the cultures of dwarves and elves. They focused on shelter, food and good cheer. They focused on *contentment*, on making the best of things.

But there is always the one who is not content.

His name in P'Ti, the click-and-squeak language of his people, was Wudr. He was 'born' and grew up among the feral Chi-folken, looking up at the giants who kept his people in bondage and upon whose scraps his free kindred were forced to feed – or so he saw it.

It must be said that Wudr was a genius among his people. From observation of the giants he grew to hate, he developed ways for them to craft functional tools of glass. He studied mathematics and engineering, lurking in the walls of schools and workshops, and brought great innovation to his people in the fields of construction and calculation. But this was not enough for Wudr. In his mind, the giants were oppressing his people, keeping them small; smaller even than their actual size. He wanted power, the power to shape the world and raise his people up as its masters.

Now as Chi-folken culture developed, they had developed magical and spiritual traditions of their own, but these were different from those of the giants. Their magic depended not on mighty incantations that shook the heavens and the earth, but on stories and remembrance given form. As they had learned the gods lived in the high places and stood above the giants, they felt these beings might not even notice them; so they turned to the spirits who mediated between the heavens and the earth, what in another place and time might be called the *Loa*.

Wudr strove mightily to codify these arts, and so became the first Chi-folken *Dwimmerlaerer*. He truly was a genius of his kind, and his people praised him greatly when he taught them his ways. But still, it was not enough; even the darkest spirits that would heed his call could not – or would not – provide him with

the power he needed to overthrow the giants, who enjoyed the protection of the gods. His people had no stories or remembrance that he could turn to magic that would crush his enemies or enslave them; the Chi-folken had never done such a thing. Ever.

So Wudr forged a new path.

#### 1.4 THE FALL

Wudr was determined that all the world should belong to the Chi-folken. (This in spite of the fact that his definition of the world was a bit ... 'fuzzy', and mostly involved the city in which he had been molded and given life by his people.) The best way to achieve this, to him, was to clear out every giant who could not be subjugated, allowing his people to claim the world. And as he had no means of decisively subjugating anyone, that meant all the giants had to go.

Direct combat was not to be thought of. In spite of the many innovations he had brought to his people, in spite of the prestige he enjoyed for codifying the way of the *Dwimmerlaerer*, Wudr knew that: A) he could not inspire his people to go to war against the giants, and B) even if they did go to war, they would lose and just be trod upon. So he consulted with the darkest spirits that would come to him: *Equus Vecors*, *Rex Sitis*, *Illuviei Vorans*. And he spoke to those among his people who spent most of their time rooting around in the giants' trash, to learn of morbidities.

In short, he studied poisons, and diseases, and creeping rot. All of which, through a blend of magic and science, he distilled into a clear, honey-colored potion that flowed as smoothly and easily as water, and smelled faintly of dying flowers.

If the other Chi-folken had known what Wudr was planning, chances are they would have stopped him by any means necessary. As he had observed, they were not a warlike people. Nor did the 'feral' Chi-folken want to endanger their kin who were still living in the giants' homes, where they could so easily be killed in retaliation if they took up arms. But Wudr had been clever and he had been subtle. No one knew, except for him and the spirits with which he had consulted, and they would not tell; they eagerly

awaited the slaughter to come.

It started with a little cough. Living beings needed water, and water came from the public wells. Public wells, which were scarcely guarded, especially after nightfall. It did not take a lot of Wudr's honey-colored brew to render one well after another toxic. Nor did it take very long for the first, gentle coughing fits to grow stronger. Soon enough, all those who were unable to shake off effects of the toxin were coughing up blood, and the bleeding would not stop unless powerful curative magic was used.

Why, it took no time at all for most of the giants in town to be laid up with the symptoms. The rest found themselves to be barely capable of taking care of all who had succumbed – or disposing of the bodies of those who had already died. Nor did Wudr stop brewing his vileness, just because the first application had been highly successful. He introduced it into the giants' food. He coated needles with it which he then hid in his unwitting enemies' clothes. He even sneaked his way into homes where the adults were all overcome by his creation and directly gave it to their children as candy.

In this, he overplayed his hand; many of those same homes had Chi-folken living in them, the once-treasured toys of children who were now sick and even dying, and some of them saw him about his grim work. First confused, then outraged, they followed Wudr outside – often for the first time in their lives – and tracked him to the burrows where the feral Chi-folken lived. Accusations were made, and answers were demanded of Wudr by his fellows and elders alike.

At first, Wudr denied responsibility, even denied knowledge. But as more and more Chi-folken left the homes where they had danced and performed for the entertainment of the giants, the number of his accusers grew. Finally, the endless badgering - “*What have you done?!*” - drove him to anger, and he spewed his bile before his people. Did they not see that he was their savior, did they not see that he was clearing the land for them? This was their time to take what was owed to them, and it was all thanks to Wudr, so why were they treating him as though he had done something wrong?

Wudr boasted of his achievement, of his unflagging effort. To his shock and rage, his own people looked at him as though he had become hideous. When he tried to talk to them, they raised their voices to drown him out, and what they discussed was ridiculous to the point of hideousness.

'*We must find a way to cure them*', was the consensus. They condemned his effort to elevate the Chi-folken to the rule of the world as *evil*, and himself as insane, one touched too deeply by the spirit *Equus Vecors*! Even though he screamed and thrashed, Wudr was dragged to a deep tunnel and there he was trapped, imprisoned, while his people went forth to undo his work!

It must be said that the feral Chi-folken did not wholly waste the opportunity that Wudr had created for them. Even as their *Dwimmerlaerer* communed with the spirits and consulted their lore, they sent scouts into the giants' homes to bring out the 'domesticated' Chi-folken.

All of them.

By the time the *wimmerlaerer* had found the right prayers and composed the right spells, their tunnels and burrows were thronging with more Chi-folken than they had ever known. As it was in their nature to pool their magical power, this meant the ceremony they conducted was greater than any that had gone before, as many hands took up the *Spirit-drums* and blew the horns that called the attention of the spirits.

The poisoned, dying giants saw the gentle spirit *Bovis Mater* clop through their homes, life radiating from her flanks. They heard the croaking song of *Philosophus Lugens* in the wind, and it cooled their aching brows. A thousand and one spirits, some kind, some merely pragmatic, answered the call of the Chi-folken they cherished, and they brought health and restoration. Even insane *Equus Vecors* galloped through town, reabsorbing the vileness he had helped Wudr to create. For the call had gone out, and at the end of the day even the evil spirits saw themselves as the allies of the Chi-folken.

In the wake of this great act of healing, Wudr was brought forth from his prison. He was presented with

the spirits' mercy and the result of his sin; all the Chi-folken in town, united for the first time since their earliest ancestors had been stolen by Villiam. The sight was awe-inspiring to him, and he felt humbled, hopeful.

Then he knew shock and disbelief. His people were planning not to stand strong against the giants, but to flee their lands completely!

"What you did is wrong," said one elder female, who came to stand before him, her rheumy eyes squinting at his face. "But maybe we can still make something good come of this. We are all together; we can leave now, and the giants will not be able to make more of us if we are gone. We can all travel together into the *true* wilderness, where no giants live, and make our own place."

She reached out and took his hand. "You have done so much good for your people. You can do even more in the future, if you will just give up this hatred, this madness that has taken you. We are a small people, yes, but we need not be a jealous or cruel people. Come with us. Come *back* to us, my son."

Wudr's heart thundered in his chest, and his mind was in turmoil. Before him, he saw two roads. Down one, his people lived in the dark heart of forests and badlands where no giant ever went; there they raised cities of glass under the earth and feasted on the bounty of the wilderness. There ... they hid and congratulated themselves on small, furtive lives instead of seizing power and achieving greatness.

His heart thundered, thundered... and then it beat slow. Murderously slow. It continued to beat slowly as he vomited up the words to a spell he had composed in his prison, drowning the chamber wherein he stood in blackest fog. As his guards squeaked in surprise, he ducked out of their grip, snatched up one of their glass weapons – which he buried in the chest of the female who had tried to bring him back from the brink.

Her blood spurted up to bathe his hands, his face, and it was the first time one of the Chi-folken had slain another of their kind. It was also the first time that a Chi-folken had visited violence on family, for when the elder had named Wudr 'son', she had



meant it literally, for the blood that now stained his hands had gone into his own creation.

There was much confusion, but the black fog was soon dispelled. The gathered Chi-folken wailed with sorrow to see what Wudr had done, but where was the sinner, the murderer? Gone, gone without a trace.

The Chi-folken packed up what they owned and fled civilization for the pristine wilderness they craved, be sure of that. But here their part in this story ends.

Alas for him, the same is not true for Wudr.

## CHAPTER 2: A SMALL LAND

### 2.1 THE BURIED LORD AND THE SHROUDED YEARS

Madego took shape in the Mists in 644 BC. At the time, it was a nigh-perfect copy of the Core that floated above it; every town, every bend of the rivers, every fir needle reproduced with exacting precision ... except smaller. As new Clusters and Islands came to be, Madego grew to incorporate copies of them, which linked up seamlessly to the main landmass.

#### DREAD POSSIBILITY: SET TO SCALE

Every part of Madego resembles part of the Lands Above. If someone from the Lands Above managed to find their way to the Lands Below, they have a unique opportunity to cut down on travel time. When making the transition down to Madego – be it by magic, psionics or mad science – a traveler always appears in an area that corresponds to the one where they started their journey. If they then travel through Madego and make the transition back Above, they will appear in the area that corresponds to where they made the transition Below.

In theory, provided a traveler manages to strike a deal with whoever or whatever occupies a dangerous area in Madego, they might be able to just appear inside the lair of a villain or monster in the Lands Above.

Furthermore, with all the Lands Below being connected into one continental mass, it's possible to bypass the Mists if a traveler wishes to go from the Core to a Cluster or an Island, or vice versa. The main obstacle would be a local demilord deciding to close the borders, obliging a traveler to go around their territory.

All the land was inhabited by Chi-folken, thousands of them; more than had lived in the world where Wudr was molded and 'born'. There was not a 'giant' anywhere to be seen in all the wide sprawl of the domain. Herds of docile *Mippon*, ideal herd animals for the Chi-folken, were everywhere for the hunting and taming. Mandrakes and clay were in plentiful supply, making the future of the Chi-folken secure.

Madego might have been everything Wudr had dreamed of, *if* not for a few 'little flaws'.

In Madego, there is no Gwydion trapped beneath Arak; in his place there was Wudr, trapped in a vast cavern from which he could not escape. There were ample fungi and water there for him to survive, though not thrive; the oxygen they released stank of foulness, the taste of his nourishment disgusted him, and he was somehow unable to scrub away the red stains that marred both his hands and his face.

Wudr still had ample magic at his disposal, and the spirits answered his call as of old – but none would release him from his gaol. When he instead used his arts to look out on the land above him, he was appalled. Not only did the Chi-folken literally live in the shadow of yet more giants, they acted like marionettes! Each Chi-folken in Madego was created in the image of a 'giant' in the Lands Above, and acted *exactly* as that 'giant' did. It was as if their lives and those of the creatures that dwelled all unseen in the high places were fully synchronized by invisible threads, and the Chi-folken danced on them.

Many of the Chi-folken's acts during the Shrouded Years were pointless, even grotesque when performed by them, but in Madego they seemed to spend most of their lives in a dreamlike stupor, heeding the instructions of an unseen puppet-master. They had barely enough self-awareness to

cultivate mandrakes and domesticate Mippon, that they might keep up their numbers. From time to time new Chi-folken would come toddling in from the Mists that surrounded the domain, mumbling about being 'Outlanders' or 'adventurers' and then engage in foolhardy acts that should – and often did – end in their nasty deaths.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY: IN A FUTHOUSE MIRROR REFLECTED

You might elect to have an adventure in Madego during the Shrouded Years, believing it would be easy for adventurers to just pass through. The Chi-folken will continue to act just like the people in the Lands Above, so how are they going to get in your way? Heck, what can they even do to you? They're *tiny*!

Consider this possibility; that when you enter Madego during the Shrouded Years, you will soon see Chi-folken who resemble you, are moving in exactly the same direction, at exactly the same pace. They will react to you as you do to them. If you treat them well, they will do well by you. But if you attack them, they will attack you. They are your own reflections. So what happens if you actually hurt or kill them?

It is up to the DM to decide whether such an act invites a Madness save, whether injuries done to 'your' Chi-folken are inflicted on you as well, or whether you will suddenly find yourself under attack by brutal Giants...

The land was divided in small principalities, ruled by Chi-folken twisted by dark magic or foul supernatural disease, who clung to the station of sovereign lords and ladies with hollow-eyed determination. Wudr knew to the marrow of his bones that they were false, that only he was lord of this land – but he could not reach the surface. He was trapped below to rail at the pointless lives of what should have been his subjects, their unthinking mimicking of the lives of the giants.

### DARKLORD AND DEMILORDS, OH MY!

You may wonder how Madego can have demilords when it already has a Darklord. The answer is simple: to mess with Wudr.

Although Wudr knows that he is the dark heart of the land, no one else in Madego does. Even those who make successful Knowledge (Ravenloft) checks will believe that the Darklord of Barovia is Strahd von Zarovich; that Azalin is the dark heart of Darkon; that Anhktepots' sins gave birth to Har'Akir, Anton Misroi's to Souragne; and so on and so forth. Within their principalities, the demilords of Madego do hold power, and are able to close the borders and everything else.

Within 100 ft. of each of these demilords, their power overwrites Wudr's, preventing him from using the powers that come with his Darklordship. Worse yet, the demilords can sense when he enters their principalities, just as they could sense a Paladin or a fiend...

Time and again, Wudr marshaled what magic power he could to lash out at the surface, seizing control of individuals and forcing them to commit cruel acts and declare his supremacy, or else to practice the magical traditions he had himself helped to codify. Other times he managed to trigger unnatural calamity.

None of it stuck. In the moment, fear and pain would snap the Chi-folken from their stupor, cause them to cry out and run and fight. Those he compelled to study the magic of the spirits did not forget, but they did not pursue it unless forced to.

And once the moment of Wudr's control had passed, it was as if a fog rolled over the minds of his pawns, and they staggered back to their meaningless lives, aping creatures who were completely unaware of their existence.

It seemed to Wudr that he would go mad if things went on this way. It seemed to him that things *could not* continue this way. But continue they did, for the next ninety-six years... and then came the Grand Conjunction.

## 2.2 THE REVELATION OF LUPTA

When the Grand Conjunction struck and all the Demiplane of Dread trembled and shook, so too did Madego in its hidden place. The border Mists rolled across the land as though the tide were rolling in, the lights in the sky of stone faded to darkness as the broken moons rained from the sky in chunks, and the Chi-folken wailed in terror as the earth cracked beneath their feet.

In the place in Madego that reflected G'Henna, the Mists swirled and raged – and an unusual stranger fell through the breach in the Demiplane's planar fabric. Before the eyes of a terrified Chi-folken named Vurik, a giant being appeared, and their eyes met.

Her name was Lupta, and the truth was that she danced on tables in Port d'Elhour for a living. When the Grand Conjunction struck and Souragne quaked, she sought solace in a bottle of whiskey and a pipe of opium she'd pilfered from behind the counter of the inn where she worked. The reason why she of all people appeared in Madego ... maybe it was a whim of the Dark Powers, or maybe there just was none.

All that mattered was that as the walls of Ravenloft's reality buckled, Lupta appeared in the reflection of G'Henna, her head still swimming from the hooch whiskey she had imbibed. There she saw a tiny little creature that looked up at her in fear. To her puzzlement, it unslung a set of drums and started to beat out a rhythm.

In his terror, caused by the violence of the Grand Conjunction, Vurik was free of the compulsion to mimic some being miles upon miles away. All he had to fall back upon in the face of the sudden apparition was what he had with him; a set of authentic Chi-folken *Spirit-drums*. They were one of the things Wudr had been able to force his citizens to create and pass down in families, and the rhythm in question was a prayer of banishment; the diminutive musician was trying to exorcise what he at first thought was a demon.

The music failed to make Lupta disappear. In her drug- and alcohol-induced haze, it instead made her do something else; she lumbered to her feet and started dancing to the rhythm, much to the

befuddlement of the Chi-folken who had first seen her appear.

What inspired Vurik to go from the prayer of exorcism to an evocation of the spirits, we may never know. But he did. Where a human, an elf or a dwarf might have fallen to their knees and clasped their hands together, Vurik beat out the rhythm that was sacred to the great spirit of life and fertility, *Bovis Mater*, beseeching her to come to him and do something about the frightening giant that swayed and took thunderous steps upon the barren sands of G'Henna.

What happened next came as a great surprise to both of them. *Bovis Mater's* mark, the sign of the cow's horns, appeared on Lupta's chest as the feeling of Life welled up inside of her, a rush far greater than that provided by the narcotics she had imbibed. It filled her with strength, with vitality, and was reflected in her dance – and its effects.

Where Lupta's feet struck the barren soil, it cracked and darkened. And green shoots started to bud from the bowels of the earth.

Vurik played for an hour, his hands aching fit to fall from his arms, before other Chi-folken came creeping up. They came because they heard the thunder of Lupta's feet striking the earth, they came because they heard Vurik's frantic drumming, but above all they came because ripples of *calm* were eddying outward from the place where the giant woman danced in the thrall of *Bovis Mater*.

When they saw what was happening, how the land was coming to life – and how the mad chaos of the Grand Conjunction seemed to have no grasp on that place – the Chi-folken reacted. They brought any instruments they had, they improvised others from pieces of stone and deadwood, and they picked up the rhythm that Vurik had been playing, allowing him to fall to the ground in exhaustion. They beat their drums, they blew their horns, they poured all of their fear and hunger and need into the music – and the spirits responded.

The mark of *Equus Vecors* appeared on Lupta's legs, allowing her to leap and twirl and run as lightly as the wind. The sway of her body spread the blessing of life



granted by *Bovis Mater*. The golden windings of *Funis Magicus* were upon her arms, increasing the effect of the spirits' blessings. As Lupta whirled and spun and danced, the land plowed itself and came to life. First grass, then wheat, then shrubs and trees grew from the earth in an ever-widening circle. The madly roiling Mist receded, as though pushed back by an invisible wall.

Inevitably, the priests of Zhakata caught wind of what was happening. They came upon the scene; G'Henna's starving peasants making music as the *Dwimmerlaerer* of old had done to evoke the spirits, and a titanic being with the markings of the spirit-beasts dancing the earth to life.

Old Yagno Petrovna himself was in the lead. He looked at the scene in dead silence, then strode up to an exhausted peasant who was trying to keep up the rhythm, beating on a hollow log. He snatched away the sticks the farmer had been using – then sat down in the dirt and beat out the rhythm himself, tears of joy streaming down his face. (Needless to say, the other clerics of Zhakata hurried to follow his lead, lest they incur the high priest's wrath.)

## 2.2 THE NIGHT OF MUSIC

Maybe the fact that one of Madego's demilords took up the rhythm is why the music spread so far. Maybe it was a gift of the spirits, who had never stopped watching over the Chi-folken – even Chi-folken born of the Mists. Regardless, it spread. It spread all across the domain.

While Lupta danced upon the sands of G'Henna, Chi-folken everywhere looked up, their mortal terror broken, as though they could feel her footsteps reverberating through the bones of their world. They felt emotion well up inside of them; joy, awe, a need to make music. In Madego's version of Castle Ravenloft, Strahd von Zarovich sat down at the great organ and played with more fire than he had ever done before, his vampire brides whirling like mad dervishes while the mark of *Rex Sitis* appeared on their brows. In Castle Avernus, Azalin conjured music from empty air with his magic, his bones vibrating with passion he had nearly forgotten – or never known. His undead slaves heaved and shuffled, then

marched and stomped their feet beneath the sign of *Illuviei Vorans*. Ivana Boritsi and Ivan Dilisnya came together and danced, her crowned with the sign of *Funis Magicus*, him with the mark of *Equus Vecors*.

And so on and so forth. The music spread from demilord to demilord, and from them to the people of their lands. Ordinary people beat drums, put bow to strings, breathed into horns and trumpets, or just banged things together in the rising wave of sound. They made music to the spirits, and the spirits came over them.

The music rippled outward, a wonderful cacophony of life and death in its natural rhythm, pushing back the Mists until they returned to the borders where they belonged. It rose to the heavens, dragged the seven moons back into existence, kindled the lights set in the sky of stone. For a single moment, all the contrasting, conflicting sounds became a perfect harmony, all the Chi-folken and all the spirits working in unison. And then the moment passed.

The spirits drifted back into the unseen, the Chi-folken fell to their knees, lungs working like bellows (those who still had them), arms aching, sweat running down their backs and foreheads (those who still perspired). But their hearts were full.

On the plains of G'Henna, now gloriously verdant, Lupta first sank to her knees, then fell flat on her back. She laughed softly and swept her arms up and down, fanned her legs wide and closed them, as though she were making a snow angel. Instead of snow, she churned the earth, which continued to sprout greenery. The green passed over her, and then there was only a hill that resembled a woman, surrounded by the 'angel'. Lupta was gone, but the effects of her presence would linger – and the 'goddess hill', or *dealul zeiței*, was holy ground for a new religion.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE FATES OF LUPTA

Lupta was deified in large parts of Madego, not unlike Ezra in the Lands Above – though her ethos and mode of worship is rather different. In places she is seen as a spirit, rather than a goddess. In other places, she is seen as a new face on an existing deity, such as Ezra or Zhakata. But what actually happened

to the mortal Lupta after the Grand Conjunction?

Maybe Lupta just went back to Souragne, had a bad hangover, then went on with her life, her stay in Madego nothing but an opium dream to her. Maybe she reappeared where G'Henna should have been, now somewhere in the murky depths of the Shadow Rift. Whether she managed to keep ahead of the Arak or is now divided in a soulless body and a changeling seeking to surpass the limits of dance is anyone's guess. Maybe she reappeared in G'Henna, now an Island of Terror in the Mists. What would befall a woman of Souragne in that twisted theocracy is, again, up to you.

Or maybe she never returned to the Lands Above. Maybe she is sealed inside of Madego, a new *Loa* among the spirits that are already there. Or maybe her fate lies in the Mists, and her true state is as unknown as that of Ezra or any of the other Thousand Gods in Ravenloft.

But maybe it's a bit of Category A and a bit of Category B. What if Lupta returned to her mortal life, but the belief the Chi-folken hold in her is slowly transforming her into a nature-spirit or a *Loa*? What if she is being drawn, thread by thread, into a faerie body that lies gestating in Madego, waiting to be filled with her essence? What if she comes to an adventuring party, looking for help?

## 2.3 THE CURRENT AGE

Madego had weathered the Grand Conjunction surprisingly well, all things considered. But it was no longer a perfect little copy of the Lands Above.

Perhaps the most significant change is this.

When dawn came after the Night of Music, when all the land was calm again, there was a crack in the walls of Wudr's prison. The chamber where he had raged against the unfairness of his punishment for ninety-six wearying years was empty, the fungi scorched to dust.

Madego's true Darklord is at loose in his domain.

One of the most significant differences after this is

that G'Henna was not torn away, only to be replaced by the Shadow Rift. There *is* no Shadow Rift. What there is, is a G'Henna reborn, its lands verdant and fertile. Where Falkovnia is the breadbox of the Core in the Lands Above, G'Henna is now the breadbox of Madego.

After Lupta disappeared, old Yagno Petrovna was adamant that she had been the appearance of Zhakata the Provider, and Zhakata the Devourer has been declared apocryphal. How many people believe him, even inside of G'Henna, is a question you would need to answer yourself. The statues of Zhakata are being re-carved even today to resemble the bounteous giantess who gave life to the land, bringing with her plentiful food and the profit of trade.

Falkovnia is no more – or at least Vlad Drakov and his line are no more. After the night of music, Drakov lashed out at anyone and everyone who even mentioned that magical event, seeking to reaffirm his tyranny and cow his people back into stupefied obedience. His brutality only grew when trade from G'Henna started edging Falkovnia out of the market, increasing his people's discontent.

The surrounding domains no longer had any reason to appease Falkovnia, not when the G'Hennans were ready and willing replace them as the major producer of foodstuffs in the Core with the ascendancy of Zhakata the Provider. When the Treaty of Four Towers petitioned Azalin to coordinate an assault to stamp out the cancer that was Falkovnia once and for all, the Lich-King agreed... and in the end it did not take all that long to wipe Drakov and his wretched sons and Talons off the face of the Core. The common people of Falkovnia celebrated for a solid week when Drakov's head fell to *Madame la Guillotine*. Modern Falkovnia is a pastoral client nation now. Its lord governor on behalf of the Unholy Empire is one Gondegal.

In Madego, King Azalin had different concerns from the Lich-King of the Lands Above, and so there was no Grim Harvest in the Lands Below.

As G'Hennan merchants spread tales of what had happened in their land during the Grand



Conjunction, the Church of Lupta has become a phenomenon in the domain. The Chi-folken there would not have known a human from a nephilim, and assumed that Lupta was a goddess who had come to them in their hour of need. In many places, her worship is edging out the faiths of Ezra and the Lawbringer. In others, it is assumed that the Revelation of Lupta was the advent of the Fifth Sect of Ezra, or that Lupta is one of the Lawgiver's concubines, sent to show his benevolence.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY: CREATED TO SIN, OR THE GREAT UNFAIRNESS

The demilords of Madego were created to be every bit as evil as the creatures they reflect, the false history of the domain paints their history with the same lurid sins... but only Wudr and the demilords who rose to power between 644 BC and 740 BC within established territories truly, physically committed the crimes for which they are punished – and between 644 and 740 BC, they did so in reflection, rather than of their own initiative. All the pre-644 BC demilords came forth from the Mists, fully-formed and believing themselves damned.

The question then becomes whether it is truly fair for them to suffer. Also, now that the wretched compulsion to mimic the inhabitants of the Lands Above is gone, there is also the question whether the demilords might not wish to break free from the patterns that have tormented them since the Mists brought forth Madego.

Certainly a few of the demilords and other luminaries have started acting in ways that are different from the creatures upon whom they are based.

**Victor Mordenheim** is questioning his whole history. Infertility is not an ailment that Chi-folken need to worry about; they create more of their own by blending blood into clay! Why then did he and his beloved Elise never create a child in their own image? Why did he resort to creating Adam? Mordenheim is Mordenheim, a scientific genius. But more and more, Madego's Mordenheim is looking inward, questioning the logic of his downfall. He is

considering drawing a small amount of whatever vitae still courses through his Elise's veins and creating the child they never had...

**Strahd von Zarovich** is growing confused. Chi-folken are not incapable of romantic attraction, but the memories of the insane lust he felt for Tatyana feels like a fever-dream to a Chi-folken. The only way he can interpret it now, after the Grand Conjunction, is a desire to be a part of producing a new Chi-folken with Tatyana. So why did he not sit down with his brother and his sister-in-law and discuss the option? To Chi-folken, such a suggestion would not even cause any raised eyebrows, especially not when Strahd obviously had strong qualities and resources to offer a hypothetical offspring.

**Azalin** knows he could have another son without having to go to extreme measures. He can clone himself any time he wants, can extract and preserve the blood of his clones with ease. After that, he just needs to find a mate with acceptable qualities and mold the clay. So why has he not already done so? Maybe he has. Maybe he is bringing on a virtual army of children, and visitors to Madego will be faced with the rise of the Blood of Zal'honan.

Some changes came more subtly, and even went unnoticed by the Chi-folken.

After the Night of Music, the Chi-folken ceased to be marionettes repeating the actions of the creatures in the Lands Above. Coincidence (more likely the pranks of the Dark Powers) still caused every creature to live in the Lands Above to be *reflected* in the Lands Below, but they no longer mime their actions perfectly. Some events in the Lands Above are still reflected in Madego, but the Chi-folken are free to respond to them in their own way.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY: IN A FRACTURED MIRROR

The Chi-folken are all the same species. There is no such thing as a half-elf Chi-folken or a dwarf Chi-folken, nor do they suffer from caliban births. Although their appearance may resemble such creatures, this is a matter of aesthetics, rather than species. Even physical gender is just a matter of the



parents' aesthetics, rather than a biological function. Romantic attraction can occur between any two (or more) individuals, and is normally rather sweet, albeit sexless.

When two or more Chi-folken come together to blend their blood with clay and sculpt that clay around a mandrake, they decide the form of their child in accordance with their own preferences. During the Shrouded Years, they acted out the ugly sins of racism and sexism. After the Night of Music, racism is fortunately no longer practiced in Madego; the Chi-folken are fully aware that they are all one species. Sexism and discrimination based on sexuality were abandoned overnight.

Instead, petty conflict still occurs based on personal wealth, cultural identity, or indeed because some aesthetic choices made by new parents for their children are not well-received by the community. One can't have it all...

The lands of Madego's Core are now organized in the Unholy Empire. When the sky-lights returned after the Night of Music, Azalin had 'always' been the supreme monarch of the Core-lands, False History and memory rewritten to unite the Chi-folken in one nation. This is not to say that all the old conflicts between the demilords had been erased from memory, but the people believe Azalin is king, and the local demilords are his vassals. On the one hand, this has brought new taxes. On the other, the commoners feel they have a court of high appeal if their local lord becomes too oppressive.

*Dwimmerlaerer* and the worship of the spirits are making inroads everywhere. How could they not, after they saved the domain and every living creature in the land felt them at work? A predilection for constructing new homes and tools out of glass – milky, frosted or stained – rather than wood, metal and stone, is sweeping the domain. Nowadays, Chi-folken settlements can be spotted from a distance, as new buildings glitter and shimmer under the sky-lights and the moons.

## HOW TO USE MADEGO IN A RAVENLOFT GAME

If you enjoy a bit of whimsy, you could use Madego as-is; a domain that reflects all the rest of the Demiplane, but is now subtly – and not so subtly – different. You could create Chi-folken characters and struggle against the darkness of the Demiplane on a much smaller stage. Enjoy the novelty of being able to go from the Core-lands to the deserts of the Amber Wastes without needing to cross Misty borders. Play up the more endearing qualities of a Chi-folken.

Or don't. You could bring Medium-sized creatures into Madego, or bring Chi-folken into the Lands Above, and play out the culture shock and calamity that come from blending the two worlds. You are free to make your own stories, after all, and they can be as comical or as grim as you wish.

Another possible use of Madego is as a deliberate mirror. If you showed the Chi-folken's ability to come together and make their domain better to those who dwell in the Lands Above, they might become objects of envy, or they could be considered to be inspirational. Or there could be another Villiam, biding his time somewhere in the Lands Above, and he will start a scheme to abduct Chi-folken so he can sell them as toys. You could be the hero to stop him, or you could be a villainous accomplice.

As always, it is up to you.

## EPILOGUE: Ain't it CUTE?

The answer is, of course: yes and no.

On the one hand, you have this whole domain full of adorable little goobers, toddling around, tripping over themselves and living their lives as though they were regular people. On the other, this is still the Demiplane of Dread.

Evil *exists* in Madego. Its demilords recall acts of unspeakable evil, even if many of them now question why they would have done such irrational things – and in some cases are honestly baffled as to *how* they did them – and old habits and convictions die hard. Even if the Chi-folken are no longer absolute

beholden to repeat the acts of the people in the Lands Above, there is still wickedness, selfishness, nihilism. Supernatural horror still lurks in the shadows.

In other words, there is opportunity for you to be a hero here. I hope you'll enjoy it.

## DM'S APPENDIX

### NEW FEAT: OPEN SOUL

*You are more receptive to the spirit world.*

**Benefit:** You can be ridden by one more spirit than your Size would normally allow for. For instance, a Medium-sized creature with this feat could contain three spirits if subjected to the *Dwimmerlaerer* ability *Saddle the Mount*. Creatures with this feat are very much appreciated by *Dwimmerlaerer* as companions.

**Downside:** You are unfortunately also more receptive to malicious spirits; when incorporeal entities like ghosts or shadow demons try to possess you, you take a -2 penalty to your saves to repel them.

### NEW MAGIC: LAND-BASED POWERS

If a fiend successfully engages in a Power Ritual in Madego, they can gain the *Dread Puppeteer*-power. Within its reality wrinkle, a fiend with this land-based power can affect a total of six creatures per day. If those creatures fail a Will save against a DC of 10 + the fiend's Charisma modifier and its Hit Dice, the fiend can control their body for a duration of 10 minutes. If they succeed on the Will save, the creature is immune to further uses of *Dread Puppeteer* by that same fiend for the rest of the day.

The body of a creature controlled by *Dread Puppeteer* moves exclusively in accordance with the will of the fiend, but the mind remains active – though impotent. While the fiend controls their body, it can command it to speak, move, attack or defend, using any physical feats and skills at its disposal.

As the mind remains inviolate, a creature with the

ability to cast spells or do other things without gesturing or speaking still has the ability to fight back.

### NEW MAGIC: DOMINO MASK

3.000 gp.

These masks come in two types: half black and half white, or half yellow and half green.

Besides functioning as a regular mask, something to obscure your identity, each mask has three useful powers.

The black/white mask grants you the ability to use *darkness* and *light* once a day each, separately or in conjunction. If used separately, they function as the normal spells, as though cast by a 3rd-level spellcaster. If used in conjunction, the black half spreads darkness as normal, and the white half emits an eerie, corpse-like glow that can be seen in the dark. This sight grants the wearer a +3 bonus to Intimidate checks. This effect lasts for 3 rounds.

The yellow/green mask grants you the ability to use *entangle* and *soften earth and stone* once a day, separately or in conjunction. If used separately, they function as the normal spells, as though cast by a 3rd-level spellcaster. If used in conjunction, the mask covers your body in a layer of what appears to be pliable gold. This layer grants you a +3 natural armor bonus, which may stack with any natural armor bonuses you already have. This effect lasts for 3 rounds.

*Creation requirements:*

*Craft wondrous item; caster level 3<sup>rd</sup>; darkness and light, or entangle and soften earth and stone. 1.500 gp.*

### NEW PRESTIGE CLASS : DWIMMERLAERER

Although the Chi-folken have other spellcasters, they feel drawn to the way of the *Dwimmerlaerer*. A scholar, a teacher, a Voodan, an artist, the *Dwimmerlaerer* is all these things and more to the Chi-folken. A *Dwimmerlaerer* spends a lifetime gathering and sharing lore through storytelling, through music and dance, and intercedes with the spirits who intercede between the Chi-folken and the gods in their high places.

Stories and music are everything to the *Dwimmerlaerer*; a source of power, an offering to the spirits they evoke, a purpose in life. Some of them spend a lifetime on the road like bards, others spend their lives poring over the contents of great libraries, yet others spend their time in communion with the spirits. In time, powerful *Dwimmerlaerer* may add to the ranks of the spirits, or even join them themselves, to continue their quest for story for eternity.

**Hit Dice:** d8

**Prerequisites:**

**Species:** Chi-folken or *Pierrobit*

**alignment:** CE, CG, CN, N, NE or NG

**Skills:** Knowledge (history) 5 ranks, Knowledge (nature) 5 ranks, Perform (dance) or Perform (percussion instruments) or Perform (wind instruments) 5 ranks.

**Feats:** Allied Spellcaster (*Advanced Player's Guide*, p.150), Prodigy (*Ultimate Magic*, p.154)

**Class feature:** One of Bardic knowledge, Implements (*Occult Adventures*, p.47-48)

LVL	Base Atk.	Fort.	Ref.	Will	Special	Magic
						0 1 <sup>st</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> 3 <sup>rd</sup> 4 <sup>th</sup> 5 <sup>th</sup> 6 <sup>th</sup> 7 <sup>th</sup> 8 <sup>th</sup> 9 <sup>th</sup>
1	+ 0	+ 0	+ 0	+ 1	<i>The Ocean becomes the Drop</i>	4 2
2	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1	Spirit-drums	5 3 0
3	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1	+ 2	<i>Inversion</i>	5 3 1 0
4	+ 2	+ 1	+ 1	+ 2	Pass on the Beat	6 3 2 1 0
5	+ 2	+ 2	+ 2	+ 3	Saddle the Mount	6 3 3 2 1 0
6	+ 3	+ 2	+ 2	+ 3	<i>Pass the Candle</i>	6 3 3 3 2 1 0
7	+ 3	+ 2	+ 2	+ 4	Walk with Me	6 4 3 3 3 2 1 0
8	+ 4	+ 3	+ 3	+ 4	<i>Fling a Light</i>	6 4 4 3 3 3 2 1 0
9	+ 4	+ 3	+ 3	+ 5	The Counsel of Spirits	6 5 4 4 4 4 3 2 1 0
10	+ 5	+ 3	+ 3	+ 5	<i>The Drop becomes the Ocean</i>	6 5 5 4 4 4 4 3 2 1

**Class skills:** Appraise, Craft, Diplomacy, Knowledge (arcana), Knowledge (history), Knowledge (local), Knowledge (nature), Knowledge (religion), Perception, Perform, Profession, Sense motive, Spellcraft

**Skill ranks at each level:** 2 + Int. modifier.

### Class features

**Weapon and Armor proficiency:** The *Dwimmerlaerer* is proficient with all simple weapons, and with light armor. They do not gain proficiency with any kind of shield.

*The Ocean becomes the Drop (Su):* A *Dwimmerlaerer* can distill their daily complement of spells from

stories. Starting from 1<sup>st</sup> level, the *Dwimmerlaerer* can compose spells by reviewing their storehouse of lore, not unlike the way a Cleric can gain spells by praying to their patron. A *Dwimmerlaerer* must either have access to written lore (books, stone tablets, scrolls, tattoos, etc.) or else spend time with other creatures, listening to and telling stories. The distilling process takes an hour every day, and the *Dwimmerlaerer* must choose and prepare their spells ahead of time like a Wizard. A *Dwimmerlaerer* may distill spells from any class list, so long as they are of the schools of Divination, Enchantment and/or Illusion.

In order to prepare a spell, the *Dwimmerlaerer* must



have an Intelligence score equal to at least 10 + the spell level. The Difficulty Class for a saving throw against a *Dwimmerlaerer's* spell is 10 + the spell level + the *Dwimmerlaerer's* Charisma modifier. The receives bonus spells if they have a high Charisma score (see Table 1-3, *Core Rulebook*, p.17).

If multiple classes grant access to the same spell, the *Dwimmerlaerer* may choose the lowest-level version of the spell.

*Spirit-Drums (Su)*: Starting from 2<sup>nd</sup> level, the *Dwimmerlaerer* may commune with the spirits when distilling their spells. By performing the beats and rhythm specific to one spirit, they can call that spirit to them and offer to be 'ridden' for the day. Being 'ridden' provides no stat or skill bonuses, but allows the to distill spells from an additional School of magic and study Domain spells – both the school and the Domain must be drawn from those particular to the spirit. The *Dwimmerlaerer* does not gain additional Domain spell slots.

The *Dwimmerlaerer's* alignment must be within 2 steps of that of the spirit they invite to 'ride' them, and there is always some small physical sign of the spirit's presence. Someone ridden by the spirit-form of Lupta might find small flowers growing in their hair; someone ridden by *Rex Sitis* might find themselves wearing a tiara of moonstones; someone ridden by *Bovis Mater* might find they suddenly have a cow's tail, and so on and so forth. A spirit's sign can change from 'ride' to 'ride', but never provides a bonus in and of itself.

*Inversion (Su)*: Starting from 3<sup>rd</sup> level, a *Dwimmerlaerer* learns to use the power of the Spirit-Drums to drive out, rather than summon creatures. A *Dwimmerlaerer* must make a Knowledge check to identify the creature they wish to drive out; if their check is successful, they must next make a Perform check. If the target creature fails a Will save against the result of the Perform check, the targeted creature must react as though it were an undead creature that has been Rebuked by an Evil or Neutral Cleric.

*Pass on the Beat (Ex)*: Starting at 4<sup>th</sup> level, a *Dwimmerlaerer* can grant other musicians the ability

to keep up a performance they themselves started. Anytime a class ability requires the *Dwimmerlaerer* to make a Perform check and keep up the performance to ensure a process keeps going, another musician allied with or at least friendly to the *Dwimmerlaerer* can start a performance of their own. If the result of the other performer is higher than or equal to that of the *Dwimmerlaerer*, their performance can maintain the effect even if the *Dwimmerlaerer* is unable to continue playing.

*Saddle the Mount (Su)*: Starting from 5<sup>th</sup> level, as a full-round action, a *Dwimmerlaerer* may draw spirits into the world to work their own will. A *Dwimmerlaerer* may be either the 'operator' or a 'mount', but not both at the same time. 'Operator' and 'mount' must be determined before *Saddle the Mount* is initiated, and the 'mount' must either be willing or at the very least not hostile towards the 'operator'.

The operator must make a Perform check, using a percussion or wind instrument, against a DC of 20. The mount must make a Perform (dance) check against a DC of 20. If both are successful, the mind of the mount falls into deep slumber and is barely aware of what is happening, as the spirit enters their body and dominates them. The mount essentially becomes an NPC under the control of the DM, but is typically allied to the operator (unless the *Dwimmerlaerer* has somehow made an enemy of the very spirit they are calling down) and any allies of the operator in the area. The spirit will act on its own will, doing what it believes is best or simply what it desires, though they do normally have the well-being of the *Dwimmerlaerer* in mind. It is wise to select the proper spirit for an occasion. (Calling on *Rex Sitis* when dying of thirst in the desert is not a good idea, for instance.)

The spirit can use all the abilities of its 'mount', as well as cast any spell from its Domains and Subdomains at will. A spirit 'riding' a mortal form can grant it one of the following boons for the duration of its stay: a natural armor bonus of +6; Speed bonus of 20 feet; a +4 bonus to any one ability; Fast healing 5; the ability to enter and leave the Near Ethereal as a move action.

It is possible for a creature to be ridden by more than one spirit, but the capacity is related to the size of the creature's body. A Fine creature can carry 0 spirits; a Diminutive or Tiny creature can carry 1 spirit; a Small or Medium creature can carry two spirits; a Large or Huge creature can carry three spirits; a Gargantuan or Colossal creature can carry four spirits. If a creature is ridden by more than one spirit, it can receive more than one boon; these boons do not stack.

The effect of *Saddle the Mount* lasts only as long as the 'operator' can keep up the music, unless they can use the effect of *Pass on the Beat*.

*Pass the Candle (Ex)*: Starting from 6<sup>th</sup> level, a *Dwimmerlaerer* can not only record and share knowledge, but aid in better understanding. If an individual close to the *Dwimmerlaerer* fails a Knowledge check, the *Dwimmerlaerer* can grant them a re-roll with a bonus equal to the *Dwimmerlaerer's* level in the prestige class. A creature can only benefit from the benefit of *Pass the Candle* once a day.

*Walk with Me (Su)*: By 7<sup>th</sup> level, the *Dwimmerlaerer's* rapport with the spirits has become truly profound, and the spirits watch over them at all times. Designate an element: air, earth, fire or water if you are Good- or Neutral-aligned; blood, grave, mist or pyre if you are Evil- or Neutral-aligned. This choice can not be changed once it has been made. You gain a permanent bond with a Medium-sized elemental of that element. The elemental can travel with you openly or it can hide in your shadow as though your shadow were a *portable hole*; if slain it returns to existence in a week's time, emerging from your shadow. The elemental communicates with you telepathically and is Friendly towards you so long as you treat it well, and assists and protects you to the best of its ability, but will not travel out of your sight unless hiding in your shadow.

*Fling a Light (Su)*: The preservation of knowledge for future generations is one of a *Dwimmerlaerer's* most important duties, and it is a duty that transcends time and space. Once a day, starting from 8<sup>th</sup> level, a *Dwimmerlaerer* may designate a piece of knowledge as so critical that it *must* be preserved and passed on.

It could be the location of a secret door or buried treasure; it could be the blueprint for a revolutionary new invention; it could be a scout's report on enemy troop movements; it could even be the prepwork for a new spell.

Once the piece of knowledge has been designated for use by *Fling a Light*, the *Dwimmerlaerer* must designate an individual to receive that knowledge. The knowledge travels on the wind at a speed of 150 ft. per round. It can only be received by a waking mind, but will wait if the target creature is asleep. As long as the target is on the same plane as the *Dwimmerlaerer*, the knowledge will reach them, but it evaporates into the aether if the target or the *Dwimmerlaerer* travels to a different plane before it reaches the target, or if it comes up against closed domain borders.

*The Counsel of Spirits (Su)*: Once a day, when encountering incorporeal spirits, be they undead, living or something else, a *Dwimmerlaerer* of the 9<sup>th</sup> level can solicit or compel them to offer knowledge. If the entity is willing, it will communicate truthfully answer one question for every two levels in the *Dwimmerlaerer* prestige class. Is the entity is unwilling, the *Dwimmerlaerer* and the entity must roll opposed Will saves; if the *Dwimmerlaerer* is victorious, the entity truthfully answers one question for every three levels in the *Dwimmerlaerer* prestige class. Activating *the Counsel of Spirits* is a full-round action and fails if the *Dwimmerlaerer* is interrupted at all. Once *the Counsel of Spirits* has been activated, the spirit may not take any hostile action against the *Dwimmerlaerer*, but it is free to do so once all questions have been answered.

*The Drop becomes the Ocean (Su)*: At 10<sup>th</sup> level, the *Dwimmerlaerer* becomes such a master of story and spirit that they can take the final step into legend, or guide others along the path. Using *the Drop becomes the Ocean* requires a successful Knowledge (history) check and a successful Perform check, both against a DC of 50, for one creature or subject. A *Dwimmerlaerer* can enlist the help of others to manage the high DC.

If the *Dwimmerlaerer* is successful, the subject of the checks becomes linked to the spirit world and will

eventually become a full spirit themselves. (Work out the new spirit's statistics with your DM beforehand.) The subject will transition fully upon the moment of death, or if a sufficiently large number of people recognize them as a new spirit. This transition can not be stopped by such effects as *Soul bind* or *Trap the soul*, nor can spirits be readily restrained or harmed by any power less than another spirit or a deity.

While a creature that makes the change is no longer available as a PC or NPC, they can still be a great resource and an ally to players – a spirit raised to its new estate is usually grateful to those who helped it and may be more forthcoming and easier to call upon – and this class feature offers an 'out' for those who fear what may come – or not come – after death.

## NEW MONSTERS

### Ewigkind

*Mosquitoes dance in the candlelight, their annoying whine stabbing at your ears – and then suddenly, they fall silent as they draw in closer. For a moment, they merge into a mass of bubbling muck – then the mass resolves itself into a single Chi-folken with red-shimmering eyes. Around your ankles, the other Chi-folken start to growl...*

**CR:** Same as the base creature +2

**AL:** Any Evil, but predominantly Lawful Evil.

**Type:** The creature's type changes to undead (augmented). Do not recalculate class Hit Dice, BAB, or saves.

**Senses:** An *Ewigkind* gains Darkvision 60 ft.

**Hit Dice:** Class Hit Dice are unaffected. As undead, *Ewigkinder* use their Charisma modifier to determine bonus hit points instead of Constitution.

**Defensive abilities:** *Ewigkinder* gain channel resistance +4, SR 10, DR 10/magic and glass, and resistance to cold and electricity 10, in addition to all the defensive abilities granted by the undead type. An *Ewigkind* also gains fast healing 5/round. If reduced to 0 hit points in combat, an *Ewigkind*

resolves into mud as per its *Schlammform* ability until its fast healing restores it to positive hit points; it is helpless until that time, but will meld into soft earth or clay as normal.

#### Weaknesses:

**Chromatic allergen:** *Ewigkinder* display a strong allergic reaction to the colours green and yellow when combined, and prefer not to enter enclosed areas decorated in both of these colors, nor to approach creatures who wear them or are painted with them. If they wish to do so in spite of their aversion, they must pass a Will save against a DC of 10 + their own HD + their own Charisma modifier, or else recoil and flee as though they had been turned.

**Chemical allergen:** *Ewigkinder* cannot tolerate the scent of garlic or wild roses, and will not enter an area laced with it. Similarly, they recoil from strongly presented holy symbols; these do not do the creature any actual harm, but merely force it to stay at least 5 feet away from the offending item, and they cannot make touch or melee attacks against the one wielding them. Holding an *Ewigkind* at bay requires a standard action every round. Sunlight is a lethal bane to *Ewigkinder*; the first round of exposure to sunlight staggers them; the second consecutive round destroys them unless they manage to escape or shield themselves against the light.

**Glass allergen:** Driving a glass stake through a helpless *Ewigkind's* heart renders the monster dormant; it will not be able to rise until the stake is removed. To truly destroy the creature, however, its head must be severed from the neck and molten glass poured down the throat into the body cavity. When killed in this manner, the *Ewigkind's* body immediately falls apart into glowing flakes, which blow away on an unnatural wind.

**Allergen immunities:** Unlike other types of vampire, *Ewigkinder* can freely enter a private home or dwelling, but may not attack any creatures they encounter inside unless those creatures attack them first. Typically, they use their swarm form to provoke violence before attacking indoors. Outside of dwellings, *Ewigkinder* can attack freely. As creatures with a natural Swim speed, *Ewigkinder* are not



susceptible to negative effects from running water, and can freely cross it whenever they wish. Although they are not reflected in mirroring surfaces, *Ewigkinder* are not repulsed by them. They are, however, keenly aware that being revealed by mirrors is bad for their health.

**Speed:** Increase the base creature's speed by 10 ft.

**Melee:** The *Ewigkind* gains a slam attack, which deals 1d4 damage + the *Ewigkind*'s Strength modifier, plus 1d4 Constitution damage on a successful hit. The slam (but no other natural attack) is treated as a magic weapon for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction.

#### Special attacks:

**Bloat the Belly (Su):** An *Ewigkind* can suck blood from a grappled or otherwise helpless victim by extending a proboscis tongue and stinging its victim. If the *Ewigkind* establishes or maintains a pin, it can drain blood, dealing 1d4 points of Constitution damage per round. The *Ewigkind* heals 5 hit points or gains 5 temporary hit points (up to a maximum number equal to its normal full hit points) each round it drains blood.

An *Ewigkind* can sustain itself for a full day and night on an amount of blood drained by dealing 4 points of Constitution damage, and can store sufficient blood in its belly for nine days and nights. However, an *Ewigkind* grows lethargic, in effect becoming staggered in spite of its undead state if it stores sufficient blood for more than two nights at a time. An *Ewigkind* that fills its belly to full capacity will typically crawl home and enter into a deep sleep until it is hungry again.

**Create Spawn (Su):** Two *Ewigkinder* working together can create spawn out of a Chi-folken with at least 5 Hit Dice. In order to change the victim, the two *Ewigkinder* must grapple it and take turns draining the victim's blood until death and injecting it with fresh blood from their own bellies. Chi-folken with less than 5 Hit Dice can not be turned and would simply die from the process. The Chi-folken rises from death as an *Ewigkind* in 1d4 days.

As a limitation, *Ewigkinder* have no supernatural

control over their spawn. They are well-advised to seduce a potential spawn well before making arrangements with a fellow *Ewigkind* to affect the dreadful transformation.

**Change Shape (Su):** An *Ewigkind* can assume the following forms as a move action:

**Flügelmesser:** An *Ewigkind* can assume the form of a stirge.

**Schlammform:** An *Ewigkind* can transform into a volume of liquid clay. In this form, the vampire can meld into soft earth or clay as though casting *Meld into Stone* and 'swim' through the earth. Their movement is reduced to 10 ft. per round, but they can maintain the form indefinitely. In *Schlammform*, the *Ewigkind* can not speak or attack.

**The Whining:** An *Ewigkind* can assume the form of a mosquito swarm.

**Shadowless (Ex):** An *Ewigkind* casts neither shadow nor reflection in any of its forms.

**Spider Climb (Ex):** An *Ewigkind* can climb sheer surfaces as though under the effect of a *spider climb* spell.

**Ability scores:** Str +4, Dex +6, Wis +4, Cha +6. As an undead creature, the *Ewigkind* has no Constitution score.

**Skills:** *Ewigkinder* gain a +8 racial bonus to Acrobatics, Climb, Knowledge (history), Knowledge (nature), Knowledge (religion), Stealth and Swim checks. They are good at getting around in all terrains, and gain an unnatural insight into various subjects, but are not as supernaturally alert nor socially gifted as other types of vampire; they have to work on this aspect for themselves.

**Feats:** *Ewigkinder* who qualify for these feats gain Acrobatic, Athletic, Dodge, Mobility, Nimble Moves, Stealthy and Weapon Finesse as bonus feats. If they do not qualify for any of these feats at creation but later manage to meet the prerequisites, they gain access to the feat(s) in question.

The *Ewigkind*, plural *Ewigkinder*, is a strain of vampire unique to the Chi-folken. Only a Chi-folken

can become *Ewigkind*. To most living Chi-folken, *Ewigkinder* are pathetic and revolting creatures, forever dependent on the blood of others as though they were still unshaped clay in need of molding. Rather than being feared, they are held in disdain and disgust by their preferred prey, who will hunt them with cold contempt if their nature is revealed.

### GENFIGENUS (CR ½)

*There is a rustling in the corner. Were you not Pierrobit, you would suspect it to be a mouse. But to you, a mouse would be the equivalent of a dog. You glance over, but see nothing. You turn back to your dressing table, in search of your missing nail scissors – another rustling! You turn, faster, and see your scissors being dragged into a crack in the wall by ... You blink, rub your eyes, but they are still there. Tiny, tiny little men. Their stench suddenly strikes your nostrils, making you sneeze, causing your eyes to tear up.*

#### NE Fine humanoid (human)

**Initiative** +7; **Senses** Perception -1

#### Defense

**AC** 11

**hp** 8 (1d8-3+3)

**Fort.** +0, **Ref.** +7, **Will** +0

#### Offense

Speed: 20 ft.

Melee: +4 spear 1d4, +4 bite 1

Space 2,5; Reach 1 ft.

Special attacks: Blinding stench

#### Statistics

Str. 1, Dex. 18, Con. 4, Int. 6, Wis. 8, Cha. 12

Base Atk. +0; CMB -5; CMD 9

Feats: Toughness, Weapon finesse

Skills: Craft (weapons) +3, Stealth +12

#### Ecology

Environment: Temperate forests and plains

Organization: Tribe (4 - 100)

Treasure: None

**Blinding stench:** *Genfigenus* do not bathe unless they need to swim or it rains on them, and even make a point of rubbing their skin with foul substances to discourage predators from eating them. Over time, they develop a stench so bad that it can bring tears to the eyes of a non-*Genfigenus*. At the start of the

round, any non-*Genfigenus* within 10 ft. of a *Genfigenus* that has not been scrubbed clean must make a Fortitude save against a DC of 11, or is blinded by their own tears for one round. If there are multiple *Genfigenus* within the area, the creature must roll a Fortitude save for each individual.

Savage and vicious, the *Genfigenus* are perfect little mannequins, fine-sized replicas of humans. They firmly believe that the domain is rightfully theirs, and the Chi-folken and other intelligent beings are either intruders or meat. Unfortunately – for them – they are less impressive than they believe, and the odds of them overthrowing the larger creatures are dismal at best. Only on rare and unfortunate occasions do they manage to do significant damage to their larger neighbors, for instance by stealing and despoiling food supplies or ambushing lone targets. Most other times, they either go unnoticed or are treated as weird pests. It is not uncommon for Chi-folken to set down poison expecting to kill vermin, only to find the twisted corpses of *Genfigerus* in the morning.

*Genfigenus* live in tribes, which are composed of only males or only females and compete with all other tribes they meet for resources, be it through outright battle or setting traps. Male and female tribes only meet in semi-peace twice a year; once in spring for reproductive purposes, and once in autumn when young boys who have been weaned need to be kicked out. Their lives are consumed by violence and greed, with the biggest bullies ruling tribes, and tribes either hunting or scheming to rob Chi-folken or *Pierrobit* they encounter in 'their' territory. Where civilization is concerned, they live in the Stone Age and disdain the idea of adopting the technologies of the Chi-folken.

Insofar as they have a spiritual tradition, the *Genfigenus* worship the 'Forgotten One', a quasi-demonic entity whose face and name are hidden, and who commits his wicked deeds from the shadows. They practice acts of blood sacrifice to honor this dread entity, offering up the weakest member of the tribe or preferably members of other tribes, then consume the roasted meat of the sacrifice as a symbolic sharing of food with their evil deity.

### DREAD POSSIBILITY: THE LITTLEST THINGS

Although they claim they always lived in Madego, the existence of *Genfigerus* was first recorded *after* 740 BC. The possibility exists that they only came into creation after this date, as either a symbol for the Chi-folken's own lives relative to larger humanoids, or else as another act of mockery against Wudr. The legend of the 'Forgotten One' accurately describes the effects of his Darklord's Curse.

### MIPPON (CR2)

*The creatures look like very small, tan, fuzzy llamas. Llamas with hairless, rat-like tails trailing behind them. As you approach, they look up from their meal – stone-grown lichen – and twitch their ears as though contemplating the need to run. Then they bend back to their food.*

#### N Tiny animal

**Initiative** +2; **Senses** Low-light vision; scent; Perception +5

#### Defense

**AC** 14 (+2 Dex., +2 size)

**hp** 14 (2d8+2); regeneration 1 (acid or fire)

**Fort.** +4, **Ref.** +5, **Will** +0

#### Offense

Speed: 40 ft.

Melee: +1 headbutt 1d3; +3 hoof 1d2; +3 tail slap 1d3

Space 2,5; Reach 1 ft.

Special abilities: Discard, Regeneration

#### Statistics

Str. 4, Dex. 14, Con. 12, Int. 2, Wis. 10, Cha. 10

Base Atk. -1; CMB +-1; CMD 11 (15 vs. trip)

Feats: Weapon Finesse

Skills: Perception +5

#### Ecology

Environment: forests, jungles, mountains, temperate plains, swamps

Organization: herd (3 – 100)

Treasure: none

**Regeneration (Ex):** A Mippon slowly regenerates any injuries that are not immediately lethal, so long as it gets the time to do so and the injuries are not caused by fire or acid. This means a single Mippon is a renewable resource where the Chi-folken's meat industry is concerned, and even a small herd can feed a whole village.

**Discard (Ex):** A pressured Mippon that is not willing to fight can use a drastic measure to get rid of pursuers; it can choose to break off one of its own limbs – a leg or a tail – and sacrifice it to give itself a chance to run away. Discarding a limb is an act that costs a Mippon a quarter of its maximum hit points, but is still a survivable injury, provided its pursuer is satisfied with the single limb.

In Madego, the docile *Mippon* fills an ecological niche that would otherwise be taken by horses and deer – and sheep. The Chi-folken have domesticated many of them, but wild herds still casually trot across the domain. They will eat anything vegetable or fungoid that is not actively fighting back or poisonous, and will eat carrion if they can find it, but they do not hunt. On the rare occasion that they fight and kill a predator, though, they will happily eat its corpse.

In captivity, Mippon are mounts, draft animals, a source of wool – their shaggy fur can be shaved every spring – dairy, a handy garbage disposal for anything organic, and even a source of meat. Thanks to the Mippon's regenerative abilities, a specimen can provide meat for its whole lifetime, as long as it is harvested with care and allowed to recover.

Mippon prefer running away from danger over fighting, but if they do fight, they prefer to do so by turning their back on an enemy, then lash it with their tails and kick at it with their hind legs.

### PIERROBIT (CR3)

*What at first appeared to be just another Chi-folken leers at you, its mouth stretching impossibly wide, baring fangs. Then its form blurs, and before you stands a tiny image of a demon, its batwings unfurling, barbed tail lashing. The next moment, it has become the perfect image of an Arak Shee. It*



*blurs again, and the creature has become a Goblin. Before you can act, it stabs at you with its spear, cackling with savage glee.*

**Chaotic Evil Outsider (Chaotic subtype, Evil subtype)**

**Initiative** +2; **Senses** Darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +7

**Defense**

**AC** 16 (+2 Dex., +2 natural armor, +2 size)

**hp** 32 (4d10)

**Fort.** +6, **Ref.** +4, **Will** +7

**Offense**

Speed: 30 ft.; fly 40 ft. (good)

Melee: +4 bite 1d3+1; +4 claw 1d3+1; +5 rapier 1d3+2/x4; +4 tail sting 1d2+1 + poison (Fort. DC 10 or 1d4 Dexterity damage);

Space 10; Reach 5 ft.

Special abilities: detect fear, favorite part

Spell-like abilities:

At will – *comprehend languages, disguise self, fabricate disguise, gaseous form, haunting mists, silent image, summon weapon*

6/day – *alter self, eagle's splendor, minor image, snapdragon fireworks* (DC 15)

3/day – *major image, monstrous physique I, undead anatomy I*

**Statistics**

Str. 12, Dex. 14, Con. 10, Int. 14, Wis. 12, Cha. 18

Base Atk. +3; CMB +4; CMD 16

Feats: Deceitful, Persuasive

Skills: Bluff +12, Diplomacy +6, Disguise +12, Fly +10, Intimidate +12, Linguistics +8, Perception +7, Perform (act) +10, Stealth +13

Languages: Abyssal\*, Infernal, P'Ti, any three domain or racial languages.

**Ecology**

Environment: any

Organization: solitary, pair, acting troupe (4 - 12)

Treasure: +1 rapier

**Detect Fear:** If a *Pierrobit* is within 10 ft. of a creature that has failed a Fear or Horror check in the past, the *Pierrobit* is immediately aware of the exact nature of the details of what caused the other creature to have to make the save. They can then use their abilities of transformation and disguise to mimic those details, granting themselves a +4 circumstance bonus on

attempts to frighten the target creature.

**Favorite Part:** A *Pierrobit* may play many parts in life, but will gradually develop a favorite role, an identity it enjoys portraying above all others. This could be a monster, or it could be a Chi-folken. Regardless which it is, once a *Pierrobit* has established a favorite part, it can assume that form as an immediate action without having to use its spell-like abilities. While in its favorite part, the *Pierrobit* gains a +4 bonus to saves against spells or other effects meant to detect its true nature or alignment, or to read its thoughts.

Madego resembles the Lands Above, but is not the same – and never has been the same. It does not have an indigenous population of Arak, no ravaging tribes of Goblins; what it has are the *Pierrobit*, diminutive fiends who delight in sowing fear and confusion almost as much as they do in acting. During the Shrouded Years, the *Pierrobit* were the reflections of the nameless Legions of the Night, assuming the forms of monsters in the Lands Above as slavishly as the Chi-folken acted out the roles of larger humanoids, disguising themselves as whatever creature was needed on the spot. Even if they were puppets no less than the Chi-folken, their dark hearts delighted in fear and bloodshed.

Now that Madego no longer exists in lockstep with the Lands Above, the *Pierrobit* are as free to act out their own desires as are the creatures they love to terrorize and dismay. This has caused some *Pierrobit* to go from acting out the roles of monsters to challenging the stage, seeking fame and acclaim or reveling in reactions to transgressive performances. Others continue in the roles of monsters, indulging every wicked urge their hearts might feel while pretending to be any number of horrid creatures. A very few *Pierrobit* break away from the acting life, seeking a different destiny. It is these specimens who are most likely to drift away from the Evil alignment, but it would take a *lot* to lure them away from the path of Chaos.

Regardless their decision on a course in life, many *Pierrobit* have taken up the worship of Lupta, believing she freed them just as she did the Chi-folken, and because they also enjoy the many celebrations her church offers the faithful. Some of

the great pageants and performances that have been adopted by the church and celebrated throughout Madego by Chi-folken were actually suggested by *Pierrobit*, who delight in the chance to act out their devotion on stage.

*Pierrobit* are usually too disorganized to spin complex plans and lead armies of creatures, but can be found

willing to act as lieutenants or spies for those who have impressed them with plans of vision – or just high entertainment value. The easiest way to persuade a *Pierrobit* not to hurt you is to flatter its vanity and praise its acting; the easiest way to turn one into an enemy for life is to mock or insult its performance.

## NEW RELIGIONS

### LUPTA

*The Dancer, the Fifth, Matron of the Revels, the Provider, Spirit-Mother, the Unfettered*

**Symbol:** A stylized brown woman, asleep in a green, angel-shaped outline

**Alignment:** Chaotic Neutral

**Portfolio:** The earth, dance, farming, fertility, magic, music, spirits

**Worshippers:** Chi-folken, Bards, Druids, *Dwimmerlaerer*, *Pierrobit*, Voodan

**Cleric alignments:** Chaotic Evil, Chaotic Good, Chaotic Neutral

**Domains:** Earth, Healing, Magic, Plant, Repose

**Subdomains:** Ancestors, Arcane, Caves, Decay, Divine, Growth, Medicine, Psychopomp, Restoration, Resurrection, Rites, Souls

**Favored weapon:** Scythe

Lupta the goddess is the deification of Lupta the human dancer, who was – by sheerest chance or the whim of the Dark Powers – in the right place at the right time to free the Chi-folken from a life as willess puppets. Whether she actually became a goddess – or a spirit – and grants the prayers directed her way by her enthusiastic worshipers, or that it is the spirits or even the Dark Powers acting in her name, that is a question for theologians and philosophers.

The Chi-folken see in Lupta everything they want from a deity; she may be incomprehensible, but she is not a distant being looking down from on high, she is a vital force that lives in the earth underfoot, helps bring life forth and receives the dead. The Chi-folken believe Lupta gives birth to the many spirits and nurtures all creatures without distinction, and they love her for giving them food, as well as healing Madego in cooperation with the spirits. They honor her through riotous parties, where they sing and dance, feast and drink. Lupta's church is light on dogma, but rich in celebrations.

In this aspect, the *Pierrobit* worship Lupta as 'Matron of the Revels'. They believe the goddess freed them no less than she did the Chi-folken, and they enjoy the option to revel and perform at will, rather than at the beck and call of unseen puppet-masters.

Even burial ceremonies, where wrapped bodies are lowered into the earth or "Lupta's embrace", are occasions not of mourning, but celebration of the lives that have ended, as well as the afterlives about to begin.

If Lupta is not a goddess who constantly shelters her faithful from all the evils in the world, she is still the goddess who brings forth the good foods of the earth and gives the souls of the slain a safe shelter. Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are considered to be signs that the goddess is angry for some reason, and are occasion for her faithful to hold (slightly) more solemn ceremonies in an effort to appease her.

Lupta's worship as a goddess is strongest in G'Henna and the regions directly bordering it; Darkon, Falkovnia and Tepest. In the nations of the Four Towers, Lupta is seen as the Fifth Manifestation of Ezra, and there are Anchorites hoping to manifest a new version of the *Shield of Ezra* any day now. In G'Henna, she is considered to be the manifestation of Zhakata the Provider.

In Souragne, Valachan and Verbrek, Lupta is seen more as one of the spirits than a goddess, but she is a popular one.

Priests of Lupta normally wear robes of yellow and green, symbolizing the wheat as it sprouts from the earth and ripens over the course of the year. Only *Ewigkinder* wear variant robes of green and brown, claiming greater kinship with the goddess's holy symbol, but actually seeking to avoid triggering their own chromatic allergen.

#### **Lupta (Spirit version)**

A spirit of fertility and farming, the spirit version of Lupta is honored by farmers, herbalists and gardeners, as well as all who survive by the yield of the acres. The spirit Lupta is portrayed as a Chi-folken with skin all the colors of the rich earth, and hair all the colors of wheat, shifting from green to gold. Her images and symbols are placed where plants are being grown, and her believers bring her flower wreaths and spring water in sacrifice.

Although Lupta is considered to be generous, the Chi-folken still make sure to regularly honor and appease her, lest she lose interest in them and direct her attention to the wild forests, or even grow wroth.

**Alignment:**Chaotic Neutral

**Schools:**Abjuration, Conjunction, Transmutation

**Domains:**Earth, Healing, Plant

**Subdomains:**Caves, Decay, Growth, Medicine, Restoration

### **WAY OF THE SPIRITS**

Not unlike the people of Souragne, the Chi-folken used to believe the gods were too exalted, too distant to be interested in them. They called upon the spirits, intermediaries who would be easily recognizable as *Loa*. Listed below is a bare handful of the Spirits recognized and worshiped by the Chi-folken both for the power they allow them to wield, and for the important work they do in the world.

There could be Spirits shaped like any beast in the world, as well as ancestors and miraculous beings from the histories of the Chi-folken.

#### **BE'IN-DA**

The spirit of imagination likes to play tricks on her fellow spirits and mortals alike. She assumes many innocent guises, leading people into situations where they must use their creativity to escape and overcome, rather than brute force. At her worst she

is a source of fear and confusion, but she also teaches people the value of creativity and clear thought. Artists and craftsfolk frequently offer up a prayer to her, as do dreamers who wish to expand their minds – or protect themselves from nightmares.

When Be'in-Da is depicted, she bears a startling resemblance to an Arak Sith with platinum blonde hair and a mischievous smile. Among those familiar with the Arak, this does raise some uncomfortable questions.

**Alignment:**Chaotic Good

**Schools:**Divination, Enchantment, Illusion

**Domains:**Artifice, Luck, Trickery

**Subdomains:**Curse, Deception, Espionage, Fate, Industry, Trap



## BOVIS MATER

Where Lupta is the goddess (or the spirit) of fertility and the afterlife, the cow-shaped *Bovis Mater* is the spirit of Life itself. She placidly clops through all lands where life exists and helps it to thrive to the best of its ability. In her positive aspect, she gives rise to plants and helpful animals like the *Mippon*; in her negative aspect, she is also the one who brings forth the predators that stalk Chi-folken, and the sicknesses that gather in the sweat of *Equus Vecors*.

**Alignment:**Neutral Good

**Schools:**Abjuration, Conjunction, Transmutation

**Domains:**Animal, Healing, Plant

**Subdomains:**Feather, Fur, Growth, Medicine

## EQUUS VECORS

The great horse-spirit *Equus Vecors* gallops aimlessly and endlessly through the swamps of the world and the fever-dreams of its inhabitants. Its sweat carries the germs of every disease known to man or Chi-folken, and its breath brings madness and delusion. In spite of its dangerous nature, the Chi-folken still honor the spirit; it is also a patron of unbridled passion, which the Chi-folken invoke when they dance and evoke the other spirits. (They also hope to persuade it to carry its dubious 'blessings' of disease and insanity away from them.)

**Alignment:**Chaotic Evil

**Schools:**Illusion, Necromancy, Transmutation

**Domains:**Chaos, Death, Madness

**Subdomains:**Insanity, Nightmare, Plague, Revelry, Riot, Whimsy

## FUNIS MAGICUS

The golden-scaled serpent *Funis Magicus* is the spirit of magic, coiling forever around and around the branches of *Grossvaterbaum*, scattering inspiration and half-formed spells down on mortals like shed scales. *Funis Magicus* does not take sides with regards to law and chaos, good and evil, but it does favor the Chi-folken *Dwimmerlaerer* over other spellcasters, for the way they invest all their culture and bodies into magic.

**Alignment:**Neutral

**Schools:**Conjunction, Divination, Evocation

**Domains:**Knowledge, Magic, Scalykind

**Subdomains:**Alchemy, Arcane, Divine, Education, Memory, Rites, Thought, Venom

## GRIGRIA

Where *Bovis Mater* is the spirit of Life and Lupta is the spirit of Fertility, Grigria is the spirit of desire. Emerald-eyed Grigria he manifests as a beautiful woman with green hair from the hips up, and as an jade-scaled serpent from the waist down. Her hair constantly coils and writhes as though it were composed of snakes. Grigria kindles the desire for children in the Chi-folken, encouraging them to find a mate and blend their blood. She is more likely to be called upon by cattle-farmers, who are aware how creatures other than Chi-folken reproduce, than she is by Chi-folken themselves; the kind of passion she encourages is somewhat alien to them.

**Alignment:**Chaotic Neutral

**Schools:**Enchantment, Evocation, Transmutation

**Domains:**Chaos, Charm, Fire

**Subdomains:**Arson, Captivation, Love, Lust, Revelry, Smoke, Whimsy

## GROSSVATERBAUM

The tree-shaped spirit of time grows from the depths of Lupta's earth and rises into the skies where the more distant gods dwell. It draws on the waters of the world and lets the wind whisper in its branches. It gives both *Philosophus Lugens* and *Funis Magicus* a place to be, and its roots clasp the world, providing structure and safety. In times gone by, *Grossvaterbaum* was king of the spirits, but the passage of time has bent his bough and he spends much of his time dreaming. With the rise of Lupta's worship, *Grossvaterbaum* seems content to slip into obscurity, content that his work is done.

**Alignment:**Lawful Good

**Schools:**Abjuration, Enchantment, Transmutation

**Domains:**Community, Good, Protection

**Subdomains:**Cooperation, Defense, Friendship, Home, Purity, Redemption, Solitude

## ILLUVIEI VORANS

*Illuviei Vorans* is the devourer of all things unclean. It is the worm that gnaws at buried corpses and the jackal that feasts on the unburied dead. It is the spirit of rot and decay, of vermin and scavengers. It is the tooth of time that gnaws at the world. As foul as it is, it is also a spirit of wisdom; when it devours the physical remains of the dead, it also devours their memories, releasing the soul to go into the afterlife of Lupta unencumbered. It is a popular spirit with those who dabble in Necromancy, as it can always find a fresh body and sets limits to the power of the undead by feasting on them.

**Alignment:**Neutral Evil

**Schools:**Conjuration, Divination, Necromancy

**Domains:**Death, Knowledge, Vermin

**Subdomains:**Espionage, Memory, Psychopomp, Undead

## PHILOSOPHUS LUGENS

In the branches of *Grossvaterbaum* sits *Philosophus Lugens*, the great bird-spirit. Its form is that of a great raven; its hoarse voice is a warning of danger and an invocation of protection. Where *Funis Magicus* is the spirit of magic, *Philosophus Lugens* is the spirit of forethought and contemplation, drawing wisdom from *Grossvaterbaum* and his observations of the world. In its positive aspect, the great raven is a teacher of wisdom and caution; in its negative aspect, it is a spirit of detachment and inaction.

**Alignment:**Lawful Neutral

**Schools:**Abjuration, Divination, Illusion

**Domains:**Air, Knowledge, Law

**Subdomains:**Education, Judgement, Legislation, Memory, Thought, Wind

## REX SITIS

In its negative aspect, *Rex Sitis* is a spirit of unending hunger and thirst. It manifests as a great bat, all the night's darkness caught in the folds of its wings, its head crowned with the moons. *Rex Sitis* endlessly hungers for more; more food, more power, more comfort, and as such it is often honored by the *Ewigkinder*. However, in its positive aspect, *Rex Sitis*

is a patron of ambition and infrastructure; in order to get more, there has to be a steady production and movement of goods. As such, *Rex Sitis* also sponsors civic order and trade, and merchants and rulers often call on its favor before a big challenge.

**Alignment:**Lawful Evil

**Schools:**Conjuration, Enchantment, Illusion

**Domains:**Air, Darkness, Law

**Subdomains:**Cloud, Legislation, Moon, Night, Tyranny, Wind

## THE THOUSAND GODS AND THE LOA

All deities and *Loa* that are known in the Lands Above are known in Madego, but the worship of the gods has never been particularly strong – not nearly strong as faith in the *Loa* and the spirits.

## WHO'S DOOMED

### COMTE DREYFUSS

**Chaotic Evil Chi-Folken Ewigkind Aristocrat 6**

**CR 8**

**Size:** Tiny

**Init.:** +1; **Senses** Darkvision 60 ft.; low-light vision; Perception +1

**Defence** AC 19 (+7 Dex., +2 natural)

**hp** 84; channel resistance +4, SR 10, DR 10/magic and glass, resistance to cold and electricity 10; undead traits; fast healing 5

**Fort** +2, **Ref** +9, **Will** +6

**Offense**

**Speed** 40 ft., swim 40 ft.

**Melee** +10 greatsword 1d8+4/19-20/x2; +12 rapier 1d3+5/18-20/x2; unarmed strike 1+4/x2

**Statistics** Str 18, Dex 24, Con –, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 22

**Base atk** +4; **CMB** +8; **CMD** +25

**Special attacks** Bloat the Belly, Blood Drain, Create Spawn, Slam

**Feats** Acrobatic, Athletic, Dodge, Improved unarmed strike, Mobility, Nimble moves, Skill focus (Perform [dance]), Stealthy, Weapon finesse, Weapon focus (greatsword)

**Skills** Acrobatics +15, Bluff +15, Climb +12, Diplomacy +12, Knowledge (history) +8, Knowledge (nature) +8, Knowledge (religion) +8, Linguistics +9, Perform (dance) +18, Ride +16, Sense motive +7, Stealth +23, Swim +12

**Traits** Affable, Fencer

**Special abilities** Butterfingers; Change Shape; Cork on the Water; Endearing; *Ewigkind* weaknesses; Feather on the Wind; Shadowless; Spiderclimb

**Languages** P'Ti\*, Abyssal, Balok, Darkonese, Mordentish, Souragnien, Vaasi

**Signature equipment** +1 Greatsword, +2 ruby amulet of natural armor, +1 rapier, signet ring, silver unholy amulet (Lupta)

The vampire now known as *Comte* Dreyfuss was born in Dementlieu sometime during the Shrouded Years, but he was still a mortal when the Night of Music arrived. In the new era of freedom, he traveled the Core-lands with abandon, taking great pleasure in the chance to act of his own free will. He even fell in love with a beautiful woman while visiting Barovia – and here his tragedy began.

Although Dreyfuss truly adored this woman, she had also caught the eye of Strahd von Zarovich, and Dreyfuss had spent most of his family fortune on his journey across Madego. No matter how much he pleaded with the object of his affection, he was no match for Strahd's social skills – or the depths of his wallet.

Dumped by the first and only woman he had ever loved, Dreyfuss returned to his empty estate in Dementlieu. He studied the subject of vampirism extensively and initiated contact with two *Ewigkinder* himself, offering them his friendship and the freedom of his *château* if they would give him immortality. The *Ewigkinder* complied, and Dreyfuss was transformed into an undead creature of the night.

While the change has done much to grant the *Comte* fresh vitality – he is very much the 'silver fox', but no longer feels the weight of his years weigh upon him – he was dismayed to discover the change did not

automatically give him the advanced persuasive skills Strahd had demonstrated. He was also a bit miffed when the change did not immediately make him rich, obliging him to start up and manage various business enterprises with the money he had left – various unsuccessful business enterprises. His commercial strategies are as out of date as is his wardrobe. Already, the *Ewigkinder* who first turned him have abandoned his estate in disgust, as his fortunes continue to fluctuate and the *Comte* barely manages to cling to his current level of wealth.

Today, the *Comte* is a well-known figure at evening parties and performances. People may laugh at the old-fashioned operatic tuxedos and cloaks he favors, but no one can deny he wears them well. Dreyfuss does not distinguish between street theater, stage magic and the fine opera, which has caused unkind whispers that he has a tin ear and a commoner's tastes. In a way, this is true; the *Comte* just wants sensation and novelty, he does not care about 'high' or 'low' art. He is famous for his dancing prowess, and loves whirling about the dance floor with lovely women in his arms. Why, he loves dancing enough that it might almost make him forget he is constantly on the prowl for a new lover who might make him forget the one that got away. He hasn't had any luck yet, but there have been some very exciting near misses.

In combat, the Count is brutal, but vastly favors the use of the sword and if need be his fists over supernatural attacks. With the greatsword, he hacks and chops at enemies like a berserker; with the rapier, he is elegant and precise. It all depends on just what he is in the mood for; indulging in his bloodlust or displaying his superior upbringing.

## PEDROLIŃA

**Tiny Chaotic Neutral Outsider (Chaotic subtype, Evil subtype) Bard 3**

**CR:** 6

**Initiative** +2; **Senses** Darkvision 60 ft.; **Perception** +7

**Defense**

**AC** 17 (+2 Dex., +2 natural armor, +2 size, +1 deflection)

**hp** 47

**Fort.** +6, **Ref.** +7, **Will** +10



**Offense****Speed** 30 ft.; fly 40 ft. (good)**Melee** +6 bite 1d3+1; +6 claw 1d3+1; +8 rapier 1d3+3/x4; +6 tail sting 1d2+1 + poison (Fort. DC 10 or 1d4 Dexterity damage);**Space** 2-1/2; Reach 1 ft.**Special abilities** Bardic knowledge, bardic performance, cantrips, countersong, detect fear, distraction, fascinate +1, favorite part, inspire competence +2, inspire courage +1, versatile performance (Perform [act]), well-versed**Spell-like abilities:**Caster level: 6<sup>th</sup>. Save DC 14 + spell level.At will – *comprehend languages, disguise self, fabricate disguise, gaseous form, haunting mists, silent image, summon weapon*6/day – *alter self, eagle's splendor, minor image, snapdragon fireworks* (DC 15)3/day – *major image, monstrous physique I, undead anatomy I***Spells/day: 4**Caster level: 3<sup>rd</sup>. Save DC 14 + spell level.**Spells known:**1 – *Aspect of the nightingale, cure light wounds, disguise self, fabricate disguise*0 – *Detect magic, flare, ghost sound, open/close, scrivener's chant, summon instrument***Statistics**

Str. 12, Dex. 14, Con. 10, Int. 14, Wis. 12, Cha. 18

**Base Atk.** +5; **CMB** +6; **CMD** 18**Feats** Deceitful, Persuasive, Skill focus (Perform [act])**Skills** Bluff +12, Diplomacy +12, Disguise +12, Fly +10, Intimidate +12, Knowledge (arcana) +7, Knowledge (planes) +7, Knowledge (Ravenloft) + 6, Linguistics +8, Perception +7, Perform (act) +15, Perform (comedy) + 10, Perform (string instruments) + 12, Spellcraft +8, Stealth +13

Languages: Abyssal\*, Darkonese, Infernal, Mordentish, P'Ti, Vaasi

**Phylactery:** Pedrolina's phylactery is her masterwork lute. She rarely if ever leaves it out of her sight, and is obsessive about taking good care of it. Her

obsession has advanced to the point that she carries it with her even if performing parts that would not normally have such an item with them; people and creatures familiar with her can recognize her by this signature item.

**Favorite Part:** Even when she was still slaved to the actions of monsters in the Lands Above, Pedrolina favored the forms of elegant and beautiful creatures over ugly brutes. Now that she is free, she has created for herself the identity of a beautiful Chi-folken actress with the aesthetic appearance of a silver-hair half-elf. This actress, Pedrolina Pierrot, is known for traveling widely and performing wherever the whim takes her.

**Signature equipment:** +2 rapier, masterwork lute, ring of protection +1, spell component pouch, studded leather armor, holy symbol of Lupta, Domino mask (black/white)

Pedrolina is a *Pierrobit* who remembers being spawned in the heaving depths of the Abyss, but may have been born out of the Mists at the creation of Madego. She is uncertain which it is, although she has started to study the nature of the Demiplane of Dread ever since the Night of Music freed her of her chains. And they *were* chains to her; time and again her mind would struggle to break free of roles imposed on her, *ugly, repulsive* rules, only for her to sink back into the misty haze that filled her mind.

When the Grand Conjunction struck and Lupta danced upon the plains of G'Henna, Pedrolina's mind was jolted from the haze as though she had been doused with water from the icy gulfs of the Nocturnal Sea.

The first few decades since then were a non-stop journey of delight and exploration for the *Pierrobit*. She felt free to indulge the vanity she was never allowed to before, moving among the Chi-folken in the most beautiful guises she could assume, and she developed a career as an actress, a comedienne, a musician. Pedrolina started drifting away from the desire to do evil due to the way her audience adored her... and then one day she witnessed a Bard whose company she had enjoyed try to leave Madego after having angered Wudr.

Pedrolina did not know Wudr, would not have remembered meeting him if she had, but she was shocked to her core when she saw her friend dwindle to nothing. Faintly, she heard his scream on the breeze – then nothing. None of her spells could tell her what had happened to him, and her unnatural senses only told her that in front of her, between herself and the Mists, there lay the Unknown.

**Current sketch:** Pedrolina still performs, but no longer travels as widely. Most of the time, she stays in Karina, where she teaches classes at the *College d'Art*. During her downtime, she studies weighty tomes of arcane lore and corresponds with scholars across the Core-lands. Although she completely ineligible to join their number, she even has a few contacts in the Fraternity of Shadows, and she keeps in touch with several other *Pierrobit* – the unreformed kind. Pedrolina has amassed quite the library, and is always on the lookout for more. Truth be told, Pedrolina is afraid of the evil that she senses lurking in the shadows, unseen and unknown. Apart from no longer having an interest in visiting true malice on the people around her, she is simply too absorbed with her art, her teaching and her studies to be invested in making anyone else's day worse.

**Combat:** To Pedrolina, discretion is the better part of valor. If threatened, she uses her bardic abilities to distract and confuse her enemies so she can run somewhere she can call for help. She is fairly famous and well-respected among the Chi-folken of Karina, and any attacker would have their job cut out for them trying to convince people she should be killed. In addition, she is well-thought of by her fellow *Pierrobit*, and she frequently entertains house guests who would also be willing to come to her aid. If truly pressed, Pedrolina will use *Monstrous anatomy* or *Undead anatomy* to assume a more formidable form before engaging in combat.

**Lair:** Pedrolina's home in Karina is a pleasant, modern, two-storey building with a small dance studio on the ground floor, where she can practice her art. The first floor contains her bedroom, bathroom and wardrobe, but the rest of the space is taken up by books. Some of these volumes are quite rare and valuable, but word has gotten around the

local underworld after the corpses of the last few thieves to try stealing from Pedrolina were found in the city's sewers in an ... unmentionable condition. Nowadays, only the truly desperate or foolish would try to intrude on the famous actress's privacy.

### WUDR (DARKLORD OF MADEGO)

*You pass a Chi-folken on the path. His boots are worn and stained with dust, as is the faded leather cloak around his shoulders. The longbow and quiver slung over his shoulder look well-cared for and well-used, however, and there is something in his dark eyes that gives you pause. Looking closer, you notice the red blotches on his face are not sunburn or odd birthmarks, but stains of some sort. Perhaps the fellow has been quaffing meekulbrau?*

*You pass each other in silence, and you start to quicken your step when suddenly, he reaches out and grabs you by the arm. "I have read your book," he says, his eyes boring into yours. "It was interesting – but you got one thing wrong. Listen to me..."*

*An hour later you wonder why you hurried home with such unseemly haste. The path was clear and everything was fine, after all. You had a quiet walk home. You even had a useful thought; you need to review the treatise you wrote last year, there's a point in want of correction.*

**Neutral Evil Chi-Folken Occultist 3 / Ranger 2 / Dwimmerlaerer 6**

**CR 13**

**Size:** Tiny

**Init.:** +; **Senses** low-light vision; Perception +4

**Defence** AC 16 (+4 Dex., +2 size)

**hp** 68

**Fort** +8, **Ref** +10, **Will** +7

### Offense

**Speed** 30 feet; swim 30 feet.

**Ranged** +15 longbow 1d6 + poison (Belladonna, DC 14)

**Statistics** Str 8, Dex 18, Con 10, Int 18, Wis 8, Cha 16

**Base atk** +9; **CMB** +8; **CMD** 20

**Special attacks** Puppeteer, Tilt the Board

**Feats** Allied spellcaster, Empower spell, Extend spell,

Far shot, Iron will, Point blank shot, Prodigy

**Skills** Craft (alchemy) +14, Craft (glass) +12, Handle animal +8, Knowledge (arcana) +13, Knowledge (engineering) +14, Knowledge (history) +17, Knowledge (nature) +11, Knowledge (religion) +8, Linguistics +9, Perception +4, Perform (percussion instruments) +16, Stealth +20, Survival +4, Swim +12, Use magic device +9

**Traits** Clan artisan (+2 to *Craft [glass] checks; already factored in*), Freedom fighter (*Wudr gains a +1 trait bonus on attack and damage rolls against slavers or any creature holding someone against their will*)

**Special abilities** 1<sup>st</sup> Favored enemy (Humanoid [human]), butterfingers, Closing the Borders, cork on the water, Darklord's Curse, endearing, feather on the wind, focus powers, implements (Divination, Enchantment, Necromancy), *inversion*, knacks, magic item skill, mental focus, *ocean becomes the drop, pass the candle*, pass on the beat, saddle the mount, Sinkhole of Evil, slow aging, spirit-drums, track, wild empathy, *Ystadh Rhith*

**Languages** P'Ti\*, Balok, Darkonese, Draconic, Mordentish, Sylvan, Terran, Vaasi

#### Occultist spells/day: 4

Caster level 3<sup>rd</sup>. Save DC 14 + spell level.

**Typically studied:** *inflict light wounds, murderous command, psychic reading, sleep*

#### Dwimmerlaerer spells/day: 6 / 4 / 4 / 4 / 3 / 1

Caster level 6<sup>th</sup>. Save DC 13 + spell level.

#### Typically studied:

5 – *Greater invisibility* (Extended)

4 – *Cure serious wounds* (Empowered), *phantasmal killer, stonesskin*

3 – *Arcane sight, cure moderate wounds* (Empowered), *fearsome duplicate, protection from energy* (Extended)

2 – *Blood transcription, cure moderate wounds, invisibility, shield* (Extended)

1 – *Auditory hallucination, cure light wounds, disguise self, minor image*

0 – *Detect magic, detect poison, ghost sound, haunted fey aspect, resistance, sift*

This spell selection presupposes that Wudr is being

'ridden' by his favorite patron, *Bovis Mater.*, and has selected the school of Abjuration and the Healing Domain.

**Signature equipment:** Alchemist's kit, antivenom x 3, arrows of venom, bag of holding II, bedroll, divination implement (book), efficient quiver, Enchantment implement (portable drum), +2 longbow, Necromancy implement (coin), spell component pouch, tent

**Puppeteer (Su):** When he is able to look into the eyes of another living or undead creature, be it in person or through a magical sensor, Wudr can provoke an opposed Will save. If he rolls higher than the other creature, Wudr can make it perform actions and speak by telepathic commands for one hour. While he is in control of a creature, Wudr can make it use all of its class and racial abilities, even those he would not be able to himself, and has access to their memories.

Wudr can only control one creature at a time. Once the control fades, the creature has no memory of what happened while it was being puppeteered.

**Tilt the Board:** Once a day, Wudr can trigger a localized natural calamity: earthquakes, hurricanes, wildfires, flash floods and the like. Triggering the effect takes a full-round action and functions within a 100-ft. radius, centered on Wudr. Wudr can elect to trigger the effect while remotely viewing an area through magic.

Although this is a powerful ability, it is not one Wudr uses frequently as it draws the attention of the demilords, and they can try to suppress it by engaging Wudr in an opposed Will save and defeating him. Of course the demilords have to know they can do this, but more than one has already beaten Wudr in such a contest of wills, and he's afraid they will share the knowledge.

**Slow aging (Su):** Wudr's aging process has slowed down to a crawl since he first arrived in Madego, but he does age. This is a point of concern to him, as he can already see the first precursors of middle age creeping up on him; threads of silver in the hair at his temples, crow's feet at the corners of his eyes, and



his right knee has started to hurt in damp weather. The Darklord is seriously considering lichdom or even consenting to let two *Ewigkinder* turn him for the chance to keep influencing Madego and its people.

### Current Sketch

Wudr's past is well-known, and his sins gave rise to the birth of Madego. His present is inglorious and endlessly frustrating to him. He passes through the communities of the Chi-folken like a shadow, his attempts to stir them to pride and greatness forgotten as quickly as his face. The results of his actions – the creation of new glass tools and art, scrolls containing important lore, even corpses when his frustration grows too great – come as disturbing surprises to those he would ennoble and guide. The only ones who consistently recognize his existence are the spirits, the demilords, and the foul *genfigenus*.

More than anything, Wudr wishes to be known, to be part of a community of like-minded individuals and guide them to glory. Recently, he has taken up correspondence; people have no trouble remembering things he wrote, even if his name slips from their mind within an hour. He has started writing to individuals who he considers to be paragons of his species. Regrettably, these are almost all among the wickedest people Madego has to offer. Regrettably for Wudr, it is very difficult even for those who enjoy his letters and would like to work with him to write *back*.

### Combat

Wudr prefers to arm himself with Abjuration- and Illusion-spells, stacking the board against his enemies as much as he can before he strikes. *Greater invisibility* and *stoneskin* are two of his go-to spells. Even so armed, he prefers to attack from ambush, from a distance, using his longbow and poison arrows; he has no delusions about his ability to win a melee fight. If a battle comes to melee range, Wudr flees as quickly as he can and tries to keep out of his enemy's sight for an hour, relying on his Darklord's Curse to steal the memory of his existence out of their minds.

### Close the Borders

When Wudr closes the borders, creatures who try to depart Madego by walking into the Mists or through a portal find themselves shrinking by half their height with every step, until they either return into the domain or shrink to the point that they enter the subatomic level. Even creatures who return do not instantly regain their full size, but instead grow by 10% of their original full height every day until they return to normal.

### Darklord's Curse

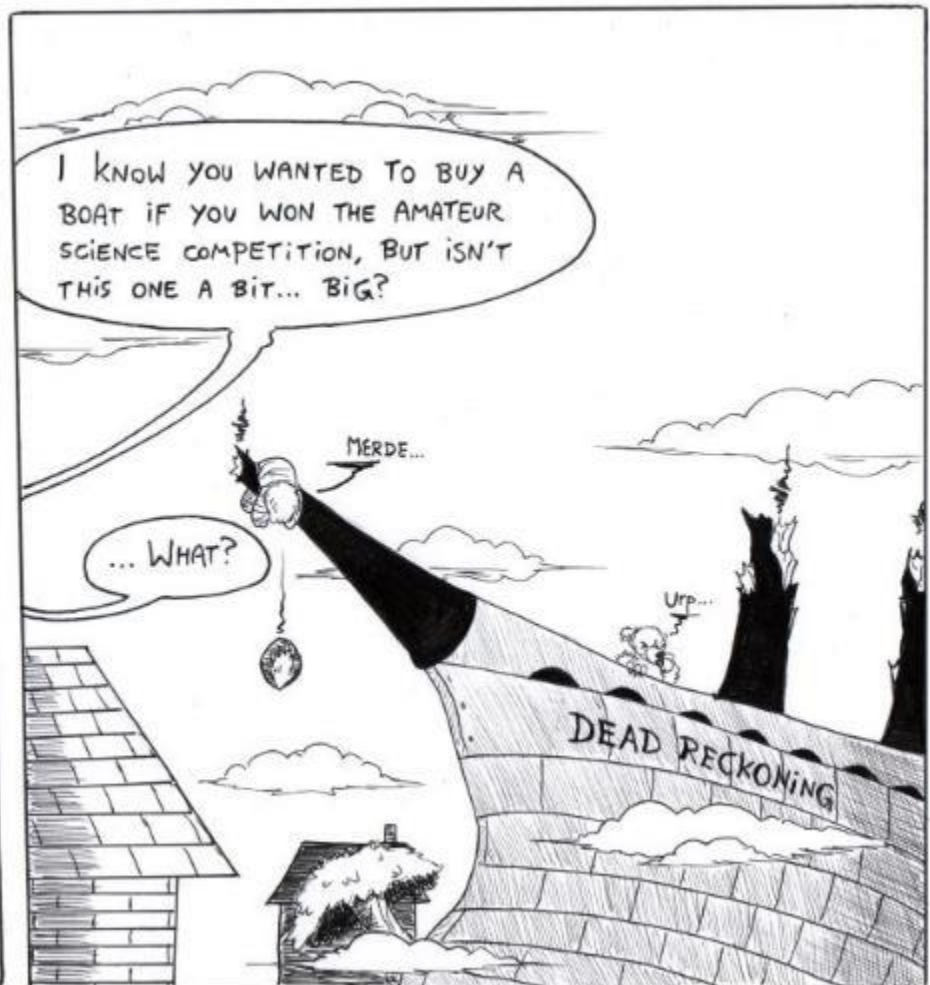
Once, Wudr was admired and respected by his fellow Chi-folken. Once, everyone knew his name. During the Shrouded Years, no one in Madego even knew that he existed. Now, even though he is free to wander his domain for the first time in ninety-six years, he remains unknown. He is not invisible and he can strike up a conversation with anyone he wants, but people forget his face, his name, his very existence an hour after they saw him last – except for the demilords, and they only know him as an irritating presence in their lands to stamp out. While this is convenient when he schemes evil deeds, it is also endlessly frustrating to the Darklord, who sometimes latches onto people with unseemly fervor and tries to force them to stay with him. To date, this has only ended in tears.

### Lair

Wudr would not be able to hold onto a real house; people would forget he lived there within an hour, which would get awkward quickly when real estate salesmen tried to give tours in his home, or taxmen would come pounding on his door to demand he pay for his property again and again and again.

Most of the time, Wudr lives out of a tent, which he sets up at the edge of Chi-folken towns and cities. On the occasion that he entertains, he can use his powers as a Darklord to make it look like a grand estate that he calls *Ystadh Rhith*, and that he can maintain indefinitely so long as he remains inside. *Ystadh Rhith* appears to be a grandiose, three-storey manor of marble, sandstone and ebony, but it is only quasi-real. Small details change from moment to moment, and a Will save (DC 14) is enough to

disbelieve its reality – which can be awkward if it happens while someone is on the third storey. For those who do not disbelieve, the estate is pleasant enough so long as they keep Wudr sweet; *phantasmal servants* that appear as liveried servants fulfill every wish, and the illusory food and drink are delicious – though one might starve to death eating it for too long.





The fraternity  
of  
Shadows

THANK YOU, DEAR SCHOLAR OF DREAD!

DO NOT FORGET TO LEAVE FEEDBACK  
TO THE AUTHORS!

(BUT DO ACCEPT THEIR FOOD OR DRINK, WE NEVER KNOW...)