

# Quoth the Raven



Written about Freaks, for  
Freaks, by Freaks

# Expect the Unexpected!

## Be Prepared

Welcome to the eighth instalment in the hideous abomination known as Quoth the Raven. Like all good things, an issue of Quoth the Raven takes time to make. Unfortunately for our readers and our contributors, that amount of time can vary without warning. We like to pride ourselves on our quality product, though as some of our more professional readers have pointed out in the past, our editing work often leaves much to be desired. I'd like to take a moment to tell our readers that in the last few months there have been a lot of changes.

Many of the members of the Fraternity have experienced difficulties in our jobs, our career pursuits and some of us have had complications with our health. We have tried to devote our free time to working on the netzine, though in all the hustle and bustle of daily life, the netbook was often forgotten. In my own case, I have spent the last few months in a particularly difficult period of Teachers College. Naturally, this netzine was a secondary priority, and I focused my efforts upon teaching. Unfortunately, having failed my last evaluations. I have little show for my work except a big student debt and a shaken confidence. Funny how sometimes you forget the things that make you happy, just when you need them the most.

Life is like that, though. Its full of twists and turns and the funny reversals you never expected. Of course, if you're in Ravenloft, you probably won't be laughing. When a player character enters the mists, he readies himself for the terrors that await. Silver swords are buckled beside vials of holy water, while a wooden stake is held in white clenched knuckles. Everyone expects the classic monsters; the lycanthropes, the golems, the vampires; but no one is quite ready for the unnameable things, the creatures that can't be studied and written up in a Van Richten's Guide.

There are many things in the land of mists that could be called monsters, from undying corpses to shape changing cannibals. These fiends are deadly predators, to be feared and avoided by all. Yet as frightening as these beings may be, they are far more bizarre monsters lurking in the dark corners of the demiplane of dread.

In the shadows they slither, hidden from prying eyes. Formless, mindless; they are freaks amongst monsters, insanity made flesh. Cruel waste products of science, horrible flukes of magic or even the tragic mistakes of nature; they are the anathema of all life. Few dare seek the truth behind these *things*, for to gaze upon these mutations is to peer into the mouth of madness. All the worse is the fate of the ignorant, torn asunder by gnashing teeth, flayed alive by whipping tendrils or simply dissolved in protoplasmic jelly. Read now of aberrations and learn to expect the unexpected.

ScS.

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## Credits

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# Skin

## An Original Story

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"Can you feel that?"

Laurie Weathermay-Foxgrove rubbed her eyes. Ever since she'd set foot in Horace Lyncroft's country estate, she'd felt a strange buzzing in her head. It was not debilitating, or particularly uncomfortable, but the strong-willed woman couldn't seem to ignore it. Neither could her sister.

"Like a humming in your head?" replied Gennifer.

Laurie nodded. "I thought I was just getting a headache."

The two had been in the waiting room for only a few minutes, yet they felt uneasy. Lyncroft was a writer of moderate fame, specializing in tales of horror and madness. His books were filled with ancient monsters from before time as well as the poor souls who encountered them and invariably lost their minds. Laurie never developed a taste for his macabre style, but Gennifer was quite fond of his stories. Indeed, a copy of Lyncroft's *The Thing from Beyond* was buried in her traveling pack.

Clearly, the author had done well for himself. His estate was nestled in the woodlands outside of Maykle. While not grandiose, the manor had nobility to it. Large wrought-iron gates surrounded the small manor house and gargoyles adorned the rooftops. Clearly, Lyncroft appreciated his solitude. Still, when they'd asked his odd servant if they could speak to him, the man did not turn them away. And so they waited in this well-furnished room until he summoned them.

Laurie stared at one of the portraits in the room. It was of a married couple, wearing clothing from a few decades past. But the woman seemed slightly unusual. She was tall and strong, her jet black hair long and wild, quite unlike the traditional Darkonian norm.

"Who is she, do you think?" inquired Laurie.

The studious Gennifer studied the picture. He looked at the woman with scrutiny, before speaking her mind. "She looks Barovian. Odd, considering the typical Darkonian reaction to them."

"Horace's mother, maybe?"

"Indeed," came a deep voice. The twin doors opened to reveal a scarecrow thin man in a stylish brown suit. Though well dressed, he appeared sickly; his hair was wild and unkempt, hanging in dark clumps around his head, partially obscuring his baggy bloodshot eyes. "My mother was Mirsada Petrov, a minor noble from Immol. She met my father when he was traveling abroad. His mercantile endeavors are the reason I live as comfortably as I do." The speaker offered his hand to Gennifer. "Horace Lyncroft, at your service. You must be Gennifer, yes?" The young woman nodded, shaking his hand. "I recently came into possession of your Arsenal. Quite an interesting read, I must say."

Gennifer bowed in appreciation. "Thank you. From accomplished writer such as yourself..."

Horace shook the compliment away. "I write only the horrors of my own imagination. It is the two of you who do truly inspiring work, helping those who would do battle against real monsters."

Laurie, never one for compliments, finally spoke up. "Well, that's actually why we're here, Mr. Lyncroft."

"Horace. Please."

"All right then, Horace. As you already know, we are acquaintances with Toret Johann Severin. As are you."

Horace nodded. "Indeed. After reading your Arsenal, I'm beginning to wonder if there is anyone he doesn't know."

Laurie paced as she spoke. "Simply put, we need a man of your experience."

Horace sat himself in a plush chair and rang a little bell. "You've come a long way from Mordentshire to find me."

Gennifer continued for Laurie. "The truth is, we've been in Darkon for the past few weeks, investigating a series of unusual disappearances. We are convinced that the creature responsible for these disappearances is not human at all."

Though an inexperienced eye would have missed it, Laurie noticed Horace's skin begin to pale. His mouth hung agape for a moment, but before he could reply, the double-doors opened again.

Into the room strode a short man carrying a tray of drinks. He was dressed in a simple cotton shirt and trousers, though he carried himself proudly. Still, it was his face that truly caught the eye. His head was large and round, and the well-traveled twins realized quickly that he was not a short man at all, but rather, a tall dwarf. Like most dwarves he possessed a beard, if only a trim steel-grey lock, barely hanging below his chin. Yet unlike any other dwarf the twins has seen before, his head was completely shaved save a long topknot.

Horace spoke up. "Ladies, allow me to introduce Kurnyn Lorestone, an old friend of mine."

Laurie nodded. "Yes, he showed us in."

Gennifer waved away Laurie's curtness. "It's a pleasure, Mr. Lorestone."

The dwarf nodded, and then sat down himself. "Manners 'n muscle, eh?"

Gennifer shot him a curious look, and he continued. "You're the polite one, and your sis there is the strong arm, yeah? You're books and she's brawn."

Gennifer smiled. "I suppose that's one way to look at it."

"Gennifer here is a student of the mystic arts," interrupted Horace.

"Like I said," grunted the dwarf.

Laurie sighed loudly. "Pleasantries aside, we have a matter of some importance to discuss."

Horace chimed in. "Well, I'm afraid you may have made the journey for nothing. I'm not exactly versed in monster-hunting. All my beasts come from a pen and a twisted imagination borne of sleepless nights. But I do wish you luck in your hunt."

Laurie didn't even let him finish. "The thing we are hunting is an Illithid."

Kurnyn shot a glance over to Lyncroft. The Darkonian writer stammered for a moment. "How... how can you be sure?"

"Then it's true," said Gennifer, "You've been there. Bluetspur."

Lyncroft's eyes grew glassy. "Yes... yes, it's true. Gods, I'd do anything to wipe my time there from my memory. It was nine years ago and in truth, it haunts me still."

"How did you escape? What did you find there?" Gennifer stopped herself. "I'm sorry." She apologized, "It's just that we know so little about it. Mostly just rumors. But to meet someone who actually went there..."

"It was no mere visit... no pleasant vacation. It was the worst time of my life. I was a prisoner of the foul things that lurk in Mount Makab for weeks, weeks that felt like an eternity. To this day, I do not know how I arrived there. The night before, I was overwhelmed with hideous nightmares that shook me to my very soul. When I awoke, I was on a blasted wasteland of red rock, with a lightening-filled sky. These... these things slithered out of the crags. Like a squid, but like a man as well. Hideous and alien and utterly, utterly devoid of conscience; they flooded my mind with images that you cannot imagine, not to say what they did with my body..."

"Horace..." whispered Kurnyn.

"No, Kurnyn. Horace waved his friend's concern away. "If this truly is a beast of Bluetspur, and they mean to hunt it, they have to understand." He turned to the twins, "The illithid are beyond your abilities to fight. They have vast mental powers and can shrug off most magic. The tentacles surrounding its mouth are designed to bore into a man's head and rip out the brain. You don't stand a chance against them."

Laurie huffed at the suggestion. "*You* survived."

Horace fixed his dark eyes on Laurie's. "I survived because of Kurnyn, here. He is an outlander. He spent his life perfecting the art of hunting mind flayers, part of a cadre of warriors called..."

"Caradhakers." Grunted the dwarf, "They didn't come here to hear my life story."

Horace nodded. "The point is, he was a prisoner in Bluetspur as well. And when he escaped, he took me with him."

"Wouldn't do no good to get off the island, and have no idea where I was or how to get by. Needed a local." added Kurnyn.

"We staggered into a fogbank... I know trusting the mists is dangerous, but anywhere would have been an improvement. Bluetspur is a land even the damned will not tread. And if one of its spawn has come to this place, it cannot bode well. It could be an outcast, or part of a greater force. Perhaps it's a scout, the forerunner of an invasion..."

"That is what we need to discover." interrupted Gennifer. "Clearly, we've come to the right man."

At that point, Horace rose. "I'm afraid you're mistaken. You want someone who has never faced these... horrors. Someone who doesn't understand how much is at stake if you cross them."

"They need our help, Horace." The dwarf clenched his fist, ready for action. "Gods, does nothing in you cry out for vengeance?"

Horace spun to face his friend. "Vengeance would serve only to finish what the mind flayers started. My sole concern now is survival."

With a sudden move, Laurie pulled a book out of Gennifer's pack and thrust it at Horace. The lurid cover of *The Thing from Beyond* stared into his face. "Then why write these? Why fill the hearts and minds of readers with the same nightmares you've been having for years? If you're so damnably concerned with self-preservation, you should've

sealed yourself up in this dank place and hidden from the world. Instead, you put your name on works that scream out what you know. These are not merely fictions, these are warnings. You have pointed us in the right direction, Mr. Lyncroft. Now, I beg you. Tell us how to destroy this thing.”

A pained silence fell across the room. Horace stood frozen in thought, rubbing his temples. He looked at the Weathermay sisters with a mixture of respect, compassion and fear. He seemed unable to speak. Finally, after a stillness that threatened to swallow them all, he nodded.

Kurnyn rose, cracking his knuckles. “How’s about we *show* ya how to destroy this thing instead?”



The strange group stood in the woods near Maykle. Laurie kept her eyes on the shadows, her right hand on her sword, her left on a pistol. Gennifer adjusted her spectacles, fingering through pages of her spell book and notes. Horace leaned on his stout rosewood cane, wiping the sweat from his brow. Kurnyn filled out the group, hefting a powerful, and archaic, axe. He gently stroked his topknot and a near-feral gleam shimmered in his eyes.

“So ya say ya saw the thing?”

Gennifer nodded. “We’ve been tracking it for a few days. We found a body in a Maykle drainpipe. The head had been pulled apart. We went into the drains proper, and caught sight of something briefly.”

Horace glanced this way and that. “Describe what you saw.”

“It was hidden in shadow, mostly,” continued Laurie. “Writhing tentacles where the mouth should be, as you said. But it was shaggy. Hairy.”

“Doesn’t sound like an illithid. They’re smooth and wet, usually dressed in strange robes.” said Horace.

“This thing had hair all over its arms and shoulders, but its torso was smooth... purplish. I know we’re hardly experts on these creatures, but I’ve never heard of anything else having face-tentacles like that. Uncle Rudolph didn’t know much about these Mind Flayers, but he knew that much.” retorted Laurie.

Horace stared out into the lonely woods, saying nothing. Gennifer continues the story. “The thing slithered out of the pipes, and when last we saw it, it was fleeing into this section of the woods.”

Kurnyn turned to his friend, trying to gauge his thoughts. Horace furrowed his brow, looking like an old, stooped willow tree. “An illithid... but with fur over part of its body. It could’ve been wearing some sort of pelt, thought I’ve never seen one wear anything so primitive.”

“Nor I, and I’ve seen all kinds a’ these things.” snorted Kurnyn.

“And it fled into the woods. That opens two questions; first, and most important... why is it here? These beasts are only at home in their warm, underground cities. While Darkon has its share of subterranean dwellings, it is colder than what a typical illithid would enjoy. However, I doubt that would stop them if the mission were important enough. The second question is, what is it exactly? Despite their flair for ornate clothing, mind flayers are fairly uniform in appearance. Large soulless eyes, three fingered hands, purple-hued slimy skin, tall and thin. While I have no answer for the first



question yet, I have a theory as to the second. Very few people know the nature in which illithids reproduce. You see, they...."

Before Horace could finish the sentence, lantern-light bathed the quartet. Though still dusk, it was dark enough that all turned to see who was casting this light. Laurie drew her pistol and Kurnyn readied his axe to throw. Gennifer began silently preparing an incantation and Horace withdrew behind Laurie. A hardy figure closed in, holding a lantern high.

"Hold where you stand!" called the voice.

Horace peered up behind the more combative Weathermay sister. "Varian?"

The figure lowered the lantern, and his face became clear. He was a young, handsome man dressed in the uniform of the local gendarmes. He had a long brown moustache that hung to his chin, and held a drawn short sword at his side.

"Mr. Lyncroft?" he said, "What on earth are you doing out here?"

Horace breathed a sigh of relief. "Gods, man. You scared me half to death. Ladies, let me introduce you to Varian Draycourt, a constable of our good town."

Laurie kept her pistol trained on the man. "You two know each other?"

Horace chuckled, and Kurnyn rubbed his eyes. "Varian was kind enough to bring my friend Kurnyn home after a rather unfortunate round of drinking and bar-fighting. Due to his good nature, Kurnyn awoke in his own room instead of in a cell."

"Only because the fellow Kurnyn pounded had it coming and because he didn't try to take a swing at *me*." Varian nodded to the dwarf. "Still in the fighting mood, eh? I've said it before, and I said it again. You should consider joining the constables."

"Mebbe when I'm ready to retire." chuckled the dwarf. "What in the Nine Hells brings you this far outta town?"

Varian cast a wary eye to the twins, though he clearly couldn't help but admire their beauty. "City business, I'm afraid."

Horace shuffled forward, shaking his hands. "Varian, these are Weathermay twins." The guardsman tugged on his moustache. Clearly, the name meant nothing to him. "They are the protégés of Rudolph Van Richten."

Varian raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Truly? Monster-hunters, then?"

Gennifer blushed slightly at Varian's approving gaze, Laurie rolled her eyes. "We're not delicate flowers, I'll say that much."

"Well, if you've come here, that leads me to assume that the murders are... well, beyond the conventional." said Varian.

The Weathermay's instantly came to attention. "How many have been killed and in what state were the bodies found?"

The guardsman once again looked to Horace for approval, and the author nodded. "Three that we know of," continued Varian "Brains pulled right out their skulls and large pieces of skin missing from the bodies as well."

Gennifer began scribbling down notes as Laurie continued. "Yes. The body we found was the same way. We weren't sure if the skinning was a natural part of the feeding process."

Kurnyn shook his head. "It isn't. No need for it; they feed only on the brain itself. I've never seen them skin their victims, except one time in an 'artistic spectacle.' My men and I were sneaking through the vents of a city named Muthalimhar. We were trying to



instigate a slave revolt, and our contact was in the center of the city. By the time we got to him..."

Varian finally spoke up again. "Um... excuse me..."

Kurnyn paid him no mind. "They were doing exhibition... one of the beasts was slowly pulling off the man's skin as a crowd watched. They seemed to be sharing the experience with the torturer. Then the feeding began... the damned thing linked with the others mentally, while they ...."

"What in sweet Ezra's name are you talking about?" shouted Varian. "Feedings? Slave revolts? What is this thing we're hunting?"

"The greatest evil of them all." muttered Horace.

"My point is, there's no reason why the flayer is pulling off skin." Kurnyn gave a loud snort, indicating he was finished.

"Perhaps we're wrong. Perhaps it isn't an Illithid" suggested Gennifer.

"It might just be." countered Kurnyn. "And if it is, y'betcha I'll track it down."

Laurie chuckled to herself. She didn't have much experience with dwarves, but this one had a style to him. He was clearly a seasoned warrior, but he had some humor to him. She'd always pictured dwarves as dour miners that reeked of mold and dirt. This one was clean, well-kept and even jovial at times. If it were not for his odd hairstyle, he might even pass as short human man, though she doubted he'd want to.

"Well," she said. "We should hunt while we still have the last remnants of sunlight."



Hours later, the quintet sat by a small fire.

"This is a lot of forest to explore." said Horace, his eyes lost in the fire. After a moment, he got up and walked away.

"And we've got nothing to show for it." huffed Laurie. She was beginning to feel useless and bothered, and that always set her off. Normally, she'd retire to a small room she'd set up for practice, and train her sword arm. Out here, she could do little but grow more frustrated. She skulked over to Kurnyn, who sat sharpening his axe.

"Tell me about them." she said as she sat next to him.

"Why?" he said, not looking at her but sharing a hint of a smile.

"I hunt monsters. It's what I do. Vampires, I know. Werebeasts, I know. Gods, I've even studied demons. But I know next to nothing about these Illithids and I am little use hunting something I know nothing about."

"You say you hunt monsters. Why?" inquired the dwarf.

"I want to carry on my Uncle's legacy. And dear Rudolph's." she answered.

"George Weathermay, yes? I've heard of him. He's racked up quite a kill list, if even half the stories are true. Still, your Uncle is not dead. I'm less inclined to believe you're trying to bring honor to an honorable family like yours. So tell me truly, why you seek out the most dangerous things in this world, and risk your life fighting them." The old dwarf looked at her now, his huge brown eyes looking at her with wisdom borne of experience.

Laurie took his whetstone and began sharpening one of her daggers. "Perhaps you don't know me so well, my good dwarf."

Kurnyn let out a loud snort of laughter. Laurie couldn't help but giggle as well. "Been a while since anyone's called me 'good,' girlie." Kurnyn leaned back, cracking his knuckles. "Ya wouldn't know it to look at me, being so handsome as I am, but I'm closing in on my 200th year. I've been around a long time, and I've seen a lot of things. When I was a lad, I saw my family enslaved by Illithids. The damned things swept into my village like a pestilence, with their thralls. That's what you call those what've been placed into their psychic slavery, with no real minds a' their own. That's what my kin became... what I would a' become if a group of Elistraen Drow hadn't set some of us free. Now, I hunt the beasts and free those I can. That's why I do what I do. So why do you? I look at your sister there...." He pointed to Gennifer, who was blushing slightly at Varian's stories and attention. "I see her scars. I see she been a victim of monsters afore. So where are your scars?"

Laurie sighed. "I don't hunt out of personal pan. I admit that. My sister... she was attacked by a werewolf when she was very young. My uncle felt responsible, and it drove him from our family. She fights because she knows in her heart it is the right thing to do." Laurie sighed. "I also know it's what must be done. There is so much evil in the world that threatens to over run the innocent. But it isn't the only reason. In truth, I love the thrill of the hunt. I love the planning, I love the research, and gods, but I love sticking my blade between some monster's ribs. Gen is a sweet lass, loves her books and spells and lore. I'm no fool, but I don't have the same head for it that she does. I love getting my hands dirty."

Kurnyn nodded. "I thought as much. You were so impatient back at the manor house. All you wanted to do was start hunting. I was like that once. But I haven't had cause to hunt a mind flayer in a long time. And I reserve my hatred for them, and them alone."



"...and so it turned out the vampire was just some attention-starved noble-boy?" laughed Varian loudly.

Gennifer giggled. "It's true. He was one of those sad types that thinks the undead are sad and beautiful and proud. You have no idea how many idiots like that I've seen."

"I take it that vampires aren't exactly the way they're presented in those lurid trash novels?" asked Varian.

"Not that I've seen." she replied, then quickly added "Not that I've read those novels."

Suddenly, the snapping of twigs cut all conversations short. All jumped to attention, readying their weapons for whatever was approaching their fire. Out of the shadows, a tall, grim-looking man stepped forward. "I've found something," whispered Horace Lyncroft.

Shortly, the group found themselves outside a small cave, easily overlooked by most passer-bys. A large amount of hanging ivy hid the entrance, but Horace pointed out some boot-prints leading into the mouth.

"Do illithids wear boots?" asked Gennifer?

"Usually. A barefoot print would be human-shaped, but with two toes." answered Kurnyn.

"Well, what makes you sure this is something we need to concern ourselves with?" asked Laurie. Horace said nothing, but moved away the ivy with his cane. The stink of rotting corpses wafted out of the entrance and gagged the onlookers. Gennifer immediately covered her mouth and Varian's eyes went wide.

"We're going in." Varian declared.

"Just a moment..." Horace tried to calm the young constable.

"We have to see what's in there." Varian began to peer in.

"I agree. But we shouldn't go rushing in like a group of beer-sotted fools." Horace looked this way and that. "There could be a trap. If it is the illithid's work, it wouldn't surprise me."

"Agreed." Kurnyn stepped forward. "I'll take point. Not only am I the only one here who can see in the dark, but I know my way with both mind flayers and traps. Lemme scout ahead for a bit, and I'll send for ya once all's clear."

"No," Varian shook his head. "We should all go in together."

Laurie was about to agree, but Kurnyn would hear none of it. "Look. I'm hands-down the most experienced one here. I've been hunting these things longer'n any of you've been alive. We're just wasting time here, and if the thing really is in there, we're givin' it time to ready itself. Now keep your yaps shut and don't come in 'til I tell ya!" And without waiting for any words of protest, the stalwart dwarf crept into the cave.

The four humans waited outside for what seemed like an eternity. They heeded Kurnyn's words and said not a word. Varian seemed about ready to jump out of his own skin, clearly not one to stand idly by while others were at risk. After fifteen minutes of pained silence, the young Darkonian finally spoke up. "That's it. I'm going in."

The others moved to stop Varian, but as he swept the ivy away, he found a gray-bearded dwarf staring back at him. "Impatience will get you killed one day, boy. Watch yourself."

Kurnyn stalked out of the cave mouth. "It's safe, but steel yourselves. It ain't pretty in there, no sir."

The group pushed their way past the hanging foliage and stumbled into a dark cavern.

"Is it alright if I bring a little light to the situation?" Gennifer whispered into Kurnyn's ear.

The dwarf nodded. "I didn't find no one in here. At least it'll keep ya from falling on yer pretty face."

With a few arcane words, Gennifer conjured up a glowing light, focused on the end of a branch. It didn't burn, or produce smoke, but illuminated the area enough that the group could see better. But with what Kurnyn led them to, it was a mixed blessing.

Gennifer turned pale and began to sway. Even Laurie couldn't stifle a shocked gasp. Horace's eyes simply went wide, filling with thoughts he dared not share. Lying on the ground in front of them were three bodies, human or humanoid. It was difficult to be certain, as all of them were completely bereft of skin. It was as if some demented and masterful surgeon had delicately stripped every piece of flesh, leaving a perfectly-intact, gore-ridden corpse in his wake. Blood pooled all across the floor, and the stink could have gagged the most hardened soldier. Gennifer instinctively splashed Holy Water on the bodies. The bodies did not respond, and she let out a relieved sigh.

"This doesn't seem like the work of a mind flayer," said Laurie.

Slowly, deliberately, Kurnyn lifted the head of the nearest body with the flat of his axe blade. He rolled it so the crown was facing his colleagues. The top of the head was ripped apart, and the brain was gone. The dwarf's face was grim. "Make no mistake. An illithid did this."

Horace took a step back. "I think we're all in danger."

Laurie leveled her blade, spinning to see if anything was approaching from behind. This was wrong. All wrong. They'd been led into a small cavern with almost no light and no room to launch arrows or aim properly. Not even room enough to get a good sword swing without risking the others. It was a trap. Every instinct told her that. And they'd been led blindly into it by....

"There's something over here." Kurnyn whispered. He began to move stealthily into the nearby shadows. Again, Laurie's intuition sent out a silent alarm. Something was very, very wrong here. She slowly raised her pistol, pointing it into the darkness.

Gennifer clearly felt the same apprehension. She raised her light-stick aloft, casting its radiance to where Kurnyn could be found. The dwarf had found a length of wire a little past the corpses. His nimble fingers raced along its length, leading to the cave wall. From there, it led up the wall and into the darkness.

Kurnyn began to rise. As he was about to speak, he lost his footing on the blood pool. In a flash, he fell to the earth landing squarely on the trip-wire. It happened so fast that none of them had a chance to respond, none except Varian. The young constable began moving even before Kurnyn hit the ground. He made a short sprint straight back, looking directly above the heads of the party. He covered his face, clearly expecting something.... Something that never happened.

Kurnyn rose, covered in the blood of the innocents. With one hand, he reached over and fingered a section of trip-wire. The section had been cut and tied-off, so as to keep the trapline taught. The dwarf smiled cleverly. "So it was you. I'd had it pegged as one o' the twins."

Varian stammered. "What...I don't know what you..."

Kurnyn pointed to above the party. The trip-wire led to a small ledge, where several boulders had been strung up. If he hadn't disarmed the trap, the group would've been crushed beneath the rockslide. "You're good, whatever you are. I was convinced you were really Varian. Ya look like him, sound like him, move like him. But you ain't him."

Horace crossed his arms, showing off a silver ring on his finger. Kurnyn did the same thing. "See these? They kept you out of our minds. Otherwise, you'd have known Kurnyn and I were expecting an ambush."

Varian simply stared at them, though his expression was not the look of bewilderment shared by the Weathermay twins. His eyes narrowed, though his mouth remained motionless. "I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Enough of these games." snarled Kurnyn. "What in the Nine Hells are you?" With that, he hurled a boot-dagger at Varian's throat. If the twins had any doubts as to the humanity of the Darkonian, they were dismissed when they witnessed his superhuman speed. With supernatural accuracy, Varian batted away the blade. There was a strange sound, like paper ripping, and Varian spoke. "Well...it seems the charade is over."

Varian Draycourt held his hand up, exposing a large gash leading from his palm to his forearm. Yet no blood poured from this wound. Rather, it seemed more like clothing that had torn, and the skin beneath it was purple and slimy. With almost dramatic

deliberateness, he grabbed one bit of slashed skin and began to pull. Faces went from confusion to revulsion as the skin peeled away like a rotten fruit rind. It fell to the floor in large pieces, and the thing beneath it was revealed in all its hideousness.

The beast was as the Weathermay's had described, but mere words were insufficient to capture its grotesqueness. It stood perhaps six feet tall, with dark mauve skin. The head was undeniably that of an illithid, with the tell-tale tentacles and scheming eyes. Laurie could almost swear she could see its brain pulsating beneath its skull... if it even had a skull. But its form fell short of what one would typically expect of a mind flayer. It had shaggy arms and shoulders, though the brown fur was also covered in mucus. The hair crept around its neck and ran down its back, though its chest and legs were smooth and glistening. The beast was broad and muscular, even hunched over. Especially strange were its hands, which sported eight taloned fingers on each hand. They were long and thin, and clearly capable of shredding flesh with a single swipe.

"Sweet Ezra," muttered Gennifer. "It's a Skin Thief."

"Much more," gurgled the beast. "Much more."

Then the world lurched as waves of mental energy poured forth from the Illithid-thing. The twins clutched their heads as they were pummeled with psychic force. Horace also staggered, but did not fall. Kurnyn, however, kept his footing and seemed unaffected. He charged forward, bringing down his axe towards the beast's head. It dodged deftly, though the blade still bit into its shoulder. Greenish blood splattered on the wall, and the two opponents turned to face each other.

"Get behind the thing," Laurie and Gennifer heard the voice of Horace in their heads. "It is less likely to focus its mind blast on you if you are behind it."

The twins did as instructed, surprised by Horace's telepathic abilities. Gennifer let fly a stream of magic missiles into the thing's back, but they had no affect whatsoever. Laurie raised her pistol, clearly intending to scatter its head all across the cave walls. Horace's cane came down hard on her hand, and the shot went unfired. She immediately realized her mistake. In these enclosed caverns, the boom of the gunshot would be deafening, causing more harm than good. The sisters were brave, clearly ready to do battle. However, Horace placed himself in front of them. "Wait. Let Kurnyn handle this."

"Not in this lifetime!" spat Laurie.

Horace would not budge. "This is a fight he needs to fight. Of all of us, he is the only one truly capable of defeating it. Watch, and learn, and pray you never have to face one of these ever again."

Laurie and Gennifer watched as the dwarf and the mind flayer did battle. They had maneuvered into the area where the dead bodies lay. Kurnyn was drenched in sweat, and Laurie could not help but wonder if the old dwarf was up to the challenge. She was unable to tell if the thing was unleashing its psionic powers against him, but if it was, they had no effect. Still, Kurnyn was tiring, and each swing was coming slower and slower. Meanwhile, the thing managed to get several nasty gashes in on his chest and arms.

Finally, the beast grew weary of the fight. With blinding speed, it seized Kurnyn by the throat and lifted him into the air. Kurnyn did not struggle. Instead, he chuckled wickedly as the creature's hand began to burn.

"Hurts, yeah? This stuff on m'body...it ain't sweat. A little trick I learned, training with the disciples of Kairoth of Tu'narath." His voice was choked but confident. "It's a

chemical I can exude from my skin, has a nasty reaction with that stinking slime on your body." The beast dropped him, and he landed steadily. The thing spat out a string of words that neither of the twins understood, but Kurnyn's eyes grew wide.

"You will never lay a hand on these girls!" roared Kurnyn. Horace paled, and he instantly understood what his old friend was about to do. He was about to cry out in protest, but it was too late.

Hands locked around his axe handle, Kurnyn called out a prayer to his ancestors, and swung the blade hard. The blade flew into the ceiling, clipping the wire holding up the boulders. The wire snapped, and the earth rumbled. Laurie pushed past a shocked Horace as Kurnyn turned to face his friends. A look of peace on his face, the noble dwarf was buried under a deluge of stone. Gennifer grabbed her sister and pulled her back, as a eight-fingered hand reached out for her. It too was soon crushed beneath the rock, and all the three humans could do was watch as both ally and enemy were entombed.



"It doesn't make sense." Laurie paced at the stables of the Lyncroft estate. "He could have defeated that thing, whatever it was."

"It was like a Skin Thief." interrupted Gennifer, already in her saddle. She turned to Horace. "They're a race of shape-changers that skin their victims then wear their flesh like a costume, taking on their form."

"My point is, Gennifer, " blustered Laurie. " that Kurnyn could've defeated the thing without killing himself. I was just so damn...."

"Please." Horace Lyncroft seemed more somber than before, if possible. "It's pointless. We'll never know why Kurnyn did what he did. We must simply be grateful he did it. Who can say how many more would have fallen to that creature?"

Gennifer nodded. "I'm sorry for your loss, Horace."

"Thank you." Horace opened the stable doors, allowing the morning sun in. "If you ever have need of me again, please do not hesitate."

And with that, Horace Lyncroft bid farewell to the Weathermay sisters.

Later that afternoon, Horace moved silently through his manor. His cane rapped as he walked, crossing from plush carpet to hard-wood floors. He moved with familiarity into the wine cellar, stopping to admire a particularly fine bottle of Tuika. Then he stared at a small alcove, almost unnoticeable in the musty, cobwebbed cellar. He placed his hand on it and lowered his head for a moment. To a casual observer, it would have appeared as though he was lost in thought. After a few moments like this, the wall slid open, a gust of deep-earth air gushing forward.

"Are they gone?" a voice in the darkness asked.

Horace nodded.

"Do they suspect?" the voice inquired.

Horace shook his head.

The voice in the darkness chuckled. "We missed our calling, old friend. We could've been great actors."

"The option is still there for you. You've still got many years ahead." smiled Horace, gripping the hand of Kurnyn Lorestone. The two friends began a long walk down a secret hallway, filled with strange runes.



"Wish we didn't have to hoodwink them girls." Kurnyn said as he walked.

"It was essential. We wouldn't want to risk their involvement with us. They might have killed the specimen, which would've been disastrous. No, it was for the best. The work they do is as important as ours, and may even lead us in similar paths, but secrecy must be maintained... especially when the enemy can read minds. The fewer that know the truth, the better for everyone involved."

"I know the company line, Horace." snorted the dwarf. " It still sticks in my craw."

The two friends found themselves facing a large oak door, with two locks. The both fished out keys, and turned them simultaneously. The door opened, and in they went.

The room was lit by candle a glowing globe on the ceiling. The walls were covered with a series of bizarre symbols and etchings, and even the most learned of scholars would have had a difficult time guessing their origins. A small stove was nestled in a corner, and a writing desk in another. Lined along the back wall were a series of torture implements, including thumbscrews, razor-sharp wire and even a rack. The true centerpiece of the room was a large table, and strapped onto that table with numerous clamps and bindings was the Illithid-thing. Its wounds had been dressed, and its eyes darted across the room, showing a wicked lucidity.

Horace walked over the thing. "Trying to read my mind, aren't you?" he whispered to it. "Trying to use those fearsome powers of yours, eh? Turn my brain into putty, or burn my skin with whitefire? It won't work. This chamber... I call it a psychic dead zone. It was designed with the help of a fellow called the Thinker, the most powerful psion I've ever met. Needless to say, we were very thorough. Your powers are nullified here, as are my own. Now, I'm not nearly as powerful as you... just a few telepathic tricks I've picked up. But it means I can't get my answers out of you mentally." With that, he turned to Kurnyn, who was approaching with a hot poker. "So, I'll have to rely on good, old-fashioned torture."

Kurnyn brought the poker in very close to the thing's face, its moist skin trying to recoil. "What are you exactly?" Horace demanded. The beast said nothing. "We know you can speak. I'll ask one more time. What are you?" Again, the beast said nothing. With that, Kurnyn took the poker to one of the bound mouth-tentacles and began burning off its tip. The thing screamed in a low, watery gurgle.

"I am a Thozar'Ak! Half-Illithid, and..."

"Half skin thief." Horace interrupted, "I deduced as much. My people are familiar with the process of ceremorphosis. So your host parent was a skin thief? You were born with its shape-changing abilities? Combine that with the ability to psychically discern a victim's entire personality, and you have a perfect spy. Which leads me to my next question: What is your mission?"

"To feast on the brains of human cattle, for my own pleasure" the Thozar'Ak snarled. With that, Horace nodded to Kurnyn. The dwarf smiled with genuine pleasure, and proceeded to burn off the midsection of a mouth-tentacle, leaving a smoking stump on the thing's face.

"Don't make him ask again." Sneered the dwarf.

"I am hunting the Ildi'Thaan!" it screamed.

The phrase lingered in the room like a ghost, and both Kurnyn and Horace were disturbingly still. Horace leaned in close to the illithid.



"What do you know of the Ildi'Thaan?" He whispered.

"The great one... the Over-Mind... it knows. It knows that the slaves of times past escaped and that their descendants live on, marked with strange abilities. We know that they have banded together... that they seek their own lost, ancient texts... to find the power to defeat their former masters. We know their numbers are few... we seek the texts ourselves... we wish to reclaim that which is ours..."

With that, Horace struck the thing with his cane, and it trembled in pain. "We're going to have a long time to get to know each other, Thozar'Ak. Perhaps years. You'll tell us all your secrets, and when I finally decide to kill you, your body will answer many questions. Yes indeed. You are quite a find. Our first half-breed."

The thing's eyes went wide. "More will come. Some are already here. They will find me."

Horace went to his desk, sat down, and dipped his quill in ink. "They didn't find the others," he said with a hint of a smile.

Horace pulled out some papers. "Kurnyn, my friend. Please find some interesting ways to make him scream."

The dwarf nodded. "Any more questions?"

"Not just yet." Horace replied. "I just find the screaming... inspirational."

And beneath the earth of his ancestral home, Horace Lyncroft - author, son of Mirsada Petrov, and proud member of the Ildi'Thaan - put pen to paper. As always, he'd keep his findings hidden in a code only his brethren would be able to decipher, but the warnings would still be there, even to the casual reader. There were dark, evil things in this world, older than time itself.

Horace paused as the thing let loose an agonizing cry.

But they could still be defeated. He looked to his copy of Van Richten's Arsenal at his side. Something within the book seemed to flicker in his memory, the words not fully formed. He decided to leaf through its pages to find the source of the nagging. He found the page, and his fingers took him to the phrase that struck dangerously close.

*One must commit fully to the battle against the legions of the night, or not at all.  
Disturb evil's lair, and it may follow you home.*

# Things that Should Not Be

## Aberrations in Your Campaign

By Stephen "Sc8" Sutton

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### Aberrations in Your Campaign

Amidst the crumbling medieval castles of Ravenloft, there seems to be no place for the aberration. Malformed mutants and gibbering invertebrates are more the style of Lovecraft or Spelljammers than the Demiplane of Dread. Indeed, aberrations such as beholders, mind flayers and gibbering mothers lack the human qualities that make true gothic villains. Yet aberrations can become useful components in a Ravenloft campaign, ranging the whole gamut of random monsters, the chief encounter of an adventure or even the focus of a campaign.

Still, the question before the dungeon master is "why?" Why should a dungeon master risk the decidedly gothic theme of his campaign with the inclusion of an aberration? The answer is the old doppelganger idiom, "Because I felt like a change". The inclusion of aberrations is an excellent way to change the pace of a campaign. Aberrations are so bizarre, so alien, that the typical party would never expect one to leap from the shadows. Rather than bore the gaming group with another army of shambling zombies, the DM unleashes a mountain of writhing tendrils. Naturally, this approach must be used sparingly to maintain the effect. Even still, nothing breaks the humdrum like a carnivorous amoeba with an attitude.

There are several different roles that an aberration can play in a campaign:

**Bug Hunt:** The most obvious role for an abomination is as a rampaging monster. Many aberrations have little purpose other than to devour hapless humans, so they fit this role easily. The players will have to pit their strength and steel against the mutant's might and hopefully destroy the offending monster. In these adventures, the focus is on the hunt. DMs are encouraged to drag the chase out, hopefully luring the players into a terrifying reversal where the hunters become the hunted.

For example, the players might be contracted by a city to destroy a monster that has been preying on the constabulary's night watch. The players engage the creature only for it to flee into the sewers. The players follow into a dark labyrinth of tunnels and discover, to their horror, that it is not one creature that confronts them, but a whole swarm.

**The Bluff:** Nothing can irk a dungeon master more than out of character knowledge, though there's very little to be done to counteract it. How can a good DM forbid a character from investing in silver bullets or holy water, even when it is clear that the character should have no knowledge of werewolves and vampires? Nonetheless, a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing. A clever dungeon master can turn

the knowledge of his players against them and return balance to the game. Aberrations are unusual creatures, even as monsters go, thus they are never expected. A dungeon master could create situations that point to a particularly well known monster as a bluff, only to unleash an aberration. Imagine the chaos and calamity when the PCs close in on what they believe is the lair of a savage vampire, only to be set upon by a ghastly gibbering moulder, immune to all of their preparations.

**The Cure:** Not all abominations are mindless monsters, some were once human. One possible adventure would be the quest to cure an abomination of its affliction. The players might begin the adventure expecting a simple bug hunt, only to make contact with a sympathetic monster. Afterwards, they will have to somehow contain their deformed friend and begin the search for a potential cure. The players might have to confront the creature's creator, or they might have to seek out some exotic means of transmuting the creature back to its original form.

There are a variety of possible story lines; the players might have to seek out a wizard, alchemist, or a Darklord such as Mordenheim or Markov. The players might have to perform some vile services to get the cure they seek. Another possibility is that there is no cure, or it may be that the aberration was never human at all. Such a revelation may prove to be too much for the pitiful mutant, causing it to go mad.

### **Architect of the Abominable**

There are many concerns that the dungeon master must face when incorporating an aberration into his or

her campaign. Aberrations, like all good monsters, must be carefully tailored to the unique setting of an adventure or campaign. A beast-man from Markovia should not be the same as a wizard who's mutated himself in a magical experiment; though they both may be broken ones, the DM designs them differently.

**To be a star, be bizarre:** The old pop star adage works equally well for aberrations. Even if using a creature straight out of the monster manual, the dungeon master needs to develop the monster's appearance. More so than most creatures, an aberration is special because it is so very alien, thus the description of the monster will be the factor that sells it to the players. Indeed, the Dungeon Master should consider mixing and matching the appearance traits of familiar aberrations, to keep his players guessing.

Aberrations allow a dungeon master the opportunity to be creative. Designers of these deformed demons will have no shortage of sources for inspiration. Beyond the volumes and volumes of science fiction available, dungeon masters are encouraged to look to books on biology and zoology for ideas. Amongst some of the more colourful creatures are jellyfish, lampreys and the plethora of mollusc species. Micro-organisms are a rather underused source of inspiration, despite their fierce appearance.

**Freakish but Familiar:** Though an aberration is an alien creature, the best of such creatures are the ones who possess a familiar trait. Gibbering moulder, for example, possess human-like eyes and mouths. Beholders, for all their hideousness, resemble nothing so

strongly as a gigantic head. The contrast between alien features and mundane traits are what separate aberrations from animals and magical beasts.

The most frightening aberrations incorporate elements of humanity, horribly distorted and warped. Indeed, aberrations are so abominable because their very existence mocks the human form. Adding a human feature to an aberration goes a long way towards making it memorable. An aberration that looks like a giant angler fish is only so frightening. It is far more disturbing if the lure of that angler fish looks just like a little child, capable of moving and speaking. Even should your party survive the encounter unscathed, you can bet that they will never look at another NPC without first checking if they are attached by a tendril to some gaping maw.

**Origins:** More so than their counterparts from other settings, aberrations need origins. Ravenloft is not quite as rife with freakish mutants as other settings; aneks and aboleths don't just sprout from the earth. If an aberration is to be included into a Ravenloft campaign, it will need a story, even if the players never have the time to get to the bottom of it. There are many possible origins for an aberration, though the details of the origin should fit the design of the creature.

Many aberrations could be semi-natural creatures. Deep spawn, for example, are more like bizarre animals than anything else. These aberrations are the tragic mistakes of evolution lingering on and on in a world for which they were not meant. These creatures do not require much in the way of a back story, though there should be a reason why their kind is not more common in

the world. Perhaps they are few in number and can scarcely reproduce, or it may be that they are a subterranean race, brought to surface by a recently dug mine shaft.

Other aberrations could be the result of a magical disaster. In the wake of the Requiem, Darkon was bathed in the essences of positive energy, causing the essences of different life forms to filter down into local plant life. Surely this would be a good origin for a plant like monster. Other aberrations could be spawned from explosions of chaotic magical energy, a clone spell that spontaneously mutated, a teleport spell gone horribly awry, or any other arcane accidents.

Finally, mankind might play a direct role in the unholy birth of an abomination. Scientists and alchemists forever tinker with the laws of nature, and from time to time their meddling can have terrible consequences. A mad doctor could potentially graft human parts onto animals, creating a broken one, or an alchemist might birth a gibbering moulder with a failed essence coagulant. These manmade monsters make excellent random encounters, especially when they are close to the laboratories of their mad creators.

## The Making of a Monster

Not all mutants are created equal; a good DM will customize the aberrations to compliment the story. Even an aberration that serves only as a minor encounter could be made memorable with a special adjustment made to the standard aberration statistics.

**Powers:** A frightening appearance is an excellent start, but as soon as your players are done screaming your aberration is going to have to fight.

Aberrations can possess nearly any power imaginable, but it is critical that the powers of an aberration make sense, if only by some twisted logic. A beholder, for example, is special because it is adorned with many bulging eyes. These eyes, therefore, have to be the source of its powers.

Whatever powers an aberration possesses should be reflected in its physical appearance. A creature that can cast *charm* as a spell like ability should have some means of appearing friendly and harmless (that angler fish from the above example, perhaps?), where as a creature capable of casting *web* should have some resemblance to a spider.

The best rule of thumb for designing powers is to keep it simple. If a creature doesn't appear to need a power, then it's probably best to leave it out. If a power does not compliment the creature, then the creature should not possess it. For example, a burrowing subterranean jellyfish should not be given the ability to fire *disintegrate* rays. A better power would be acid secretions or the ability to pass through dirt,

**Weaknesses:** Just as a vampire should be confronted in the day, so too must the aberration be slain with cunning, rather than brute force or lucky critical hits. Aberrations offer players a unique challenge; for though they appear to be invincible titans of corrupted flesh, they possess a hidden flaw. When designing an aberration, the Dungeon Master should consider creating a special weakness to compensate for the lack of reliable information regarding the abomination. Possible weaknesses include a susceptibility to certain materials, a vulnerability to chemicals such as water, or certain forms of energy attacks. Sometimes the bizarre nature of

an aberration can work against it; eye stalks, tentacles and other sensitive areas are convenient targets for called shots.

Weaknesses need not necessarily apply to combat; they might be directed towards the behaviour of the creature. Just like a golem, an aberration might have its own unique zeitberger. Abominations that were once normal creatures could be distracted stunned or enraged by images from their former life. For example, broken one who was once a wizard might become enraged whenever he witnesses an arcane spell being cast.

## A Human Touch

Though definitely disturbing, aberrations lack the human traits that are so critical to a gothic adventure. While typical Ravenloft villains are corrupt beings, damned by their own depravity, aberrations are merely mindless mutations, evil by circumstance alone. To make aberrations fit within the gothic style they must become a reflection of evil within men. This is most easily achieved in cases where the monster is merely a pawn of a greater evil. A hideous mutant created by a foul wizard becomes the inner reflection of its master. The hideous appearance of the freak is the expression of the corrupted soul of its vile creator.

The dungeon master should consider making this connection more than just metaphorical, if only to add some flair to the adventure. The physical appearance of the aberration might be twisted to resemble that of its progenitor. It is entirely possible that exceptionally vain madmen might try to immortalize themselves by remaking life in their own image. Imagine your players delving into the cistern beneath the lair of a mad alchemist, only to be

confronted by an army of half-finished clones of the villain they seek.

Another manner in which an aberration can be incorporated into the gothic atmosphere is to give it human mental traits. Though a hideous abomination, an aberration may feel motivations similar to those of a human. Perhaps the creature was once human, and now seeks to reclaim its lost life, perhaps the mutant absorbed the memories of one of its victims, or alternately it might have developed a psychic bond with its creator. These human thoughts might cause it to haunt certain locations, to stalk certain individuals, or to perform certain routines. In this way, an aberration resembles a dread golem.

### To be a Monster

Aberrations, like most nonhumans, represent a challenge for a dungeon master. While humanoid creatures can be expected to behave in a manner similar to humans, aberrations are wild cards. How does one role-play a shape shifting alien? What are the long term goals of an amoeba? When preparing to introduce an aberration, a dungeon master must prepare answers to many of these questions.

**Behaviour:** Before introducing an aberration, the dungeon master should have a basic frame from the behaviour of the aberration. The dungeon master determine the basic behaviour of the aberration, including how it feeds, how it stalks its prey or defends itself and what it does when it is alone.

The behaviour of the aberration will depend upon its intelligence, its physical abilities and its needs. Creatures that need to feed will need to have a strategy for devouring prey,

including methods of stalking prey or mean of attracting victims. Aberrations that need sleep or are vulnerable to the elements will require lairs, so the DM will have to determine what kind of lair the creature prefers. As well, the dungeon master should determine if the creature has any particular personality quirks.

**Role-playing:** Intelligent abominations will have the added quality of personality. For aberrations that are able to interact with player characters the Dungeon Master should prepare some ideas for the personality of the aberration. Some aberrations will be arrogant and domineering, especially creatures like illithids and beholders. Others will be completely predatory, such as sea spawn masters. Aberrations that were once human may still retain some vestiges of their personality. These mutated remains of humanity may very well have been driven to madness by the transformation, though some resilient minds may survive, in a fashion. Such creatures will most likely be obsessed with curing their deformities or ending their suffering. The player characters might be put in the unusually situation of trying to keep an abomination from killing itself, or trying to convince an enraged mutant that there is no cure for their affliction.

**Dungeon Master Tricks:** When running an aberration, the dungeon master is given a unique series of options. Aberrations are free from the physiological boundaries that can make life difficult for your player characters. The dungeon master should prepare to make use out of these abilities, if only as an emergency plan to counteract an unforeseen combat encounter. For



example, many are unaware that illithids are amphibious. Should the players corner a mind flayer villain, the creature could seek refuge in a nearby body of water, such as a river, well or a sewer. While its pursuers are busy tearing off armour or searing for a boat the mind flayer makes his getaway, or better yet, lies in wait.

Every species of aberration has its own strengths. For example, beholders are aerial creatures, moving by

levitation. Since they have little need for floors the lair of a beholder could be a cavernous hollow, created by their disintegrate ray, with a few ledges cut into the rock far above the reach of human interlopers. Whenever an aberration will play an extensive role in an adventure, the dungeon master should make use of the freakish strengths of the aberration to better challenge the players.



# Malwid's Guide to all things Aberrant

## An Encyclopaedia of the Aberrant

By Coan "Coan" J. Harvey

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*Dear Reader,*

*What you are about to read is a collective work of myself and the Science Departments of the Core's most deserving of Universities, concerning the categorisation and information of some of the more well known fauna we classify as 'aberration'.*

*I was first enlisted to begin my work when my original text 'Botany –the new science of our past' was noticed by the most generous of benefactors, Lady Eleni of Toyalis. Contacting me through the post I was surprised she found my work so intriguing (when my fellow colleagues were so quick to point out its uselessness and notoriety among the fraternities as a sleep inducing read). Regardless it is her patronage that brings my pen to paper and the cause of what I hope to be a useful text among those magically inclined.*

*Listed alphabetically is a varying report of the most unusual of unusual. I say varying due to monetary limits placed upon my research and the differing success I had in locating a creature to examine (sometimes having to make do with simple text and others folk lore). I also list usual habitats and how one will mostly encounter the creature. Hence I shall now proceed to*

*the subject at hand and pray that my next pay cheque will arrive soon, for publishers are a beast more cruel than some of those listed below...*

### Aboleth

Aboleths are most commonly found in the isles of The Nocturnal Sea and occasionally in The Sea of Sorrows. For some reason they avoid the sea borders of Dementlieu with only one recorded instance many years ago, from what I could gather it found its domination and manipulation skills lacking when thrust upon the Dementlieuese, though I could not guess why.

They are almost entirely unheard of in the central core. Though recently a series of underground caverns in Hazlan and Barovia (no doubt remnants of when Bluetspur was a domain border) have yielded a series of underground lakes which are being treated suspiciously after several miners and workers attempted a rebellion to enslave their fellow comrades and draw them further down into the murky depths. As such aboleth activity may be more far reaching then one suspects with rumours of a realm far off in the East where a fishing village is told to worship a 'god of the sea' for good harvests and visitors mysteriously go missing, possibly sacrificed to appease this 'god'.

What sets the Aboleth apart is its habitat of underground lakes and the inherited knowledge that it absorbs from its parents and anything so consumed later in life. This gives the creature a unique advantage in acquiring secrets of the world and on its enemies. It can also enslave others through its 'dominator alpha gland', which emits an aura akin to bat calls that interferes with a brain's subconscious and disrupts the targets distinction between the egos and id. In essence the ego and superego and 'nullified' and the id comes under the control of the aboleth to be manipulated, as it likes. Hence any order given to the subject by its master becomes top priority and it will do whatever it takes to satisfy this desire. Most often this is used to have the aboleth's puppets lure prey to its home.

#### DMs Notes

The aboleth is a perfect example of Lovecraft's unknown horrors from the dark world of underneath. The aboleth presents a variety of options in studying its genesis. It could be a prehistoric creature that time forgot, a visitor from another world or simply some freak of nature that has developed an awareness of itself and those around it.

Obvious uses of an aboleth and where it is most commonly found flaunting its skills are as an unseen schemer or horror from beyond. This could include the aboleth being revered as a god-like creation and worshipped by a cult of 'enlightened' overseers.

#### Athach

This author has heard of several references to creatures matching the athach's description serving as minions and chained horrors for crime lords in

Nova Vaasa and Dementlieu while other gossip puts these creatures as bodyguards for Darkonian wizards. The Hazlani though have rejected this practice, seeing the creatures as 'barbaric' and not suitable for public display. This has not, however, ceased their use as helpful garbage disposal units, often stationed beneath Mulan houses to receive thieves and servants who have ceased being useful.

Once bands of athach roamed free in small family groups in the blasted landscape of Keening and the forests of Tepest, but hunters have begun to take their toll on the creatures and they are now on the verge of extinction. The strongest of their kind are locked in dungeons as guards or used as gladiators in Hazlani arenas while the smartest are taught to be bodyguards or labourers. As of the date of this publication, there are estimated to only be just over 100 of these beasts in their natural habitat.

#### Beholder

Perhaps one of the most debated monsters, in terms of its existence in the Dread Lands, outsiders from other realms have insisted these creatures exist. Indeed the beholder's fantastic nature. I fear that an unfamiliar populace may mislabel the creature and deflate true sightings, causing villages and cities to be caught unprepared for the schemes for which these creatures are infamous. Something of benefit, though, is the knowledge that Beholder society in the Dread Realms is every changing. These aberrations seem incapable of staying in one place for very long for fear of drawing the attention of that kingdom's ruler.

#### DMs Notes

The beholder's fantastical make it far too scarce for a random encounter. However in one's own view its rarity and natural assets would make it all the more deadly if found. To reflect its almost completely unknown presence in Ravenloft any Knowledge (aberration) skill check to recall information about a beholder has a DC increase of +5 to reflect the difficulty in finding any written documentation on its nature.

### Carrion Crawler

In my many travels I have run into the '*ficulency dearthing pelvious*' (Carrion Crawler) species on more occasions than almost any other aberration. This bug like creature is commonly confused with its insect look alike '*maximus centripediat*' or large centipede. Though once in battle this mistake is soon rectified, sometimes with disastrous consequences. In regards to the monster's origins there are some who believe it to be the result of genetic experimentation, the mistakes of the wizard or perhaps worse... the desired end product.

Perhaps it is its need for rotting flesh or the natural evil that permeates the underground caverns they live in, but the crawler is far more common than most others believe. Indeed recent reports from the largest cities of Nova Vaasa mention common discrepancies that could be signs of infestation, no doubt brought about by the plague and poor sanitary conditions in such metropolises. They have also been found in the high magically infested Darkon and wherever dungeons are frequent.

So well developed is their stealth when hunting that I have decided to include my observations on typical attacks as recounted by survivors. The

crawler apparently favours climbing on the ceiling above a party were only the keenest ears can detect the slight skittering sound. When the creature is satisfied its presence is unknown it will attempt to pick off the rear adventurers with its paralysing touch. Their presence can also be foreshadowed by the clicking of their teeth and mandibles which has been known to echo in the passages of underground complexes making their eventual coming all the more foreboding and harder to anticipate in direction.

### DMs Notes

The unintelligent yet cunning animal-like mind of the carrion crawler is perfect for a random encounter, the role of a chained horror or even a less powerful monster summoned by forgotten rituals. The variety of places this creature finds itself in makes the carrion crawler one of the most versatile of aberrations.

### Choker

The realms of grey sometimes alter the nature of an animal's purpose and the Choker an example of one whom has found a comfortable home here. Often it inhabits abandoned ruins near villages where it can lure small human children, who play nearby, into its chambers. Richemulot and Mordent both offer excellent abodes in this case and Chokers are not uncommon to these domains where the conditions are right. Another favourable tactic of the Choker is to use a village's rooftops as a private road to windows, where it can then employ its incredibly long limbs to entertain a child, drawing it closer to them before inevitably snatching them out of the house and leaping from roof to roof before reaching safety.

Some of the more intellectually cunning Chokers pose as halflings in the night causing blame to fall on the halfling population while the Choker robs the town and causes chaos. This charade has caused more than one unfortunate lynching and murder of panicked halflings.

No one really knows why Chokers snatch children from their cradles and playgrounds and very few corpses are ever found. Some theorise Chokers *are* the children, transformed by some diabolical secret known only to those who capture them, if someone were to ever lift a child up and turn to see their face only to behold an unholy half human half Choker their mind could very well panic from recognizing the normal and beyond together. Others believe the Chokers are only following the orders of some master unknown, who desires the children for its own purposes, while even darker thoughts best left undescribed have been proposed as reason.

#### DMs Notes

Chokers by themselves are little more than random encounter material. However by basing a choker at the heart of a string of mysterious child disappearances its existence can cause an interesting investigation. Especially when one begins to think of what the children are being used for. Another plot involving the malicious Chokers is of a band of mysterious halflings who come to town wrapped in desert garb or thick coats. They begin to set up their own thieves guild using their natural skills to make them a terror on the streets, all the while controlled by someone, perhaps a gifted Choker with the capacity for thought, or a Wizard needing particular

spell components. It would take a clever hero to pull apart such a coven of thugs and murderers and challenge the leader.

## Chuul

Found almost exclusively on the isle of Bluetspur the Chuul serve as bodyguards and soldiers for the Illithid population who inhabit the blasted world. What is not widely known however is that the Chuul are the result of Illithid experimentation, a work in progress to perfect biological warfare on a grandeur scale. The exact nature of their creation is steeped in rumour; a few theories stick out as more probable. Some believe that the Chuul are former humans, mutated by their evil masters. Others believe that such beasts are grown in mass produced vats and kept in row upon row of such chambers ready to awaken for an invasion or defence. Perhaps the most horrifying of all, captives and slaves are impregnated or used as stock to breed Chuul before the new monster 'hatches' from its mother. Finally as a note, differing races used in their forced spawning could account for the fact that the Chuul have been known to have different abilities from one another.

Though I have never encountered a Chuul, I have been privy to texts lent to me by the State library and friends in Darkon. These books mention the adaptability of the Chuul as a species. As such I have jotted down a few of the more important adaptations that Illithid minds have no doubt cooked up for a more diverse army:

#### DMs Notes

Chuul mutation, as a result of Illithid interference or perhaps of other unseen masters, the Chuul have become

more adaptive in the Dread Realms. Below is a list of additional abilities that can be added to a Chuul and the relative CR change. When describing the Chuul one should be sure to include the subtle or not so subtle differences that accompany the change.

### Chuul Mutations

**Acid Spit:** The chuul gains a ranged attack (range incr. 15ft) with an attack bonus +8, 1d6+3 acid damage. +1/2 CR

**Poison Claws:** The chuuls claws excrete a deadly poison. DC 14 Primary damage 1d3 Con, Secondary 1d3 Con. +1/2 CR

**Greater Resilience:** The chuul gains +10 hit points. +1/2 CR

**Biological Bomb:** The Chuul may self destruct, killing itself as free action to deal 5d6 acid damage in 10 foot radius. Victims may make a reflex save for half damage. +1 CR

**Chameleon Carapace:** The chuul gains a +10 bonus to Hide checks and a +5 bonus to move silently checks. +1 CR

**Wings:** The chuul possesses insectoid wing, granting it flight, 30ft poor manoeuvrability. +1 CR

**Hardened Carapace:** The chuul's natural armour bonus increases by +1. +1/2 CR

**Spider Gland:** The chuul gains the ability to climb walls at a speed of 15ft, and may cast *Web* 3times each day as cast by a 9<sup>th</sup> level sorcerer as a supernatural ability. +1 CR

**Chemically Enhanced Strength:** The chuuls attacks gain a +2 bonus to damage. +1/2 CR

**Phasing Membrane:** The chuul can shift from Near Ethereal to Material plane as a free action, and

shift back again as a move-equivalent action (or during a move-equivalent action). This ability is otherwise identical with *ethereal jaunt* cast by a 15<sup>th</sup> level sorcerer. +2 CR

## Delver

The Delver is one of the stranger creatures one can encounter and unlike most aberrations is not inherently evil. Often it is neutral in matters with tendencies towards lawfulness. Regardless, however, the Delver is a remarkably rare creature due to a lack of caverns large enough to support its lifestyle in the Core. Though one or two have been linked to travelling within the vast mountains of the Southern Baloks and the hot lands of the Amber Wastes were gold and other precious metals lie undiscovered in the North-Western mountain ranges.

### DMs Notes

When encountered this creature can serve as a source of information to the PCs or on a more controversial note, become a captured creature for an evil wizard's or nobleman's experiments, who sees it as a weapon or a tool for the creation of underground complexes. Upon encountering a Delver it is best not to show any kind of metal or gem that could entice the creature into considering attacking for what it sees as food.

## Destrachan

A rather interesting monster that has come under the label 'aberration' this unusual dungeon-dweller is of above average intelligence and evil to its core. As such most hero's encounter it at



random while looting some vast crypt or find it acting as a minion or pet for some greater power. Such enslavement of this beast is perfect for the protection of castles and dungeons where it can employ its sonic abilities to bore through walls and make shortcuts with remarkable speed. Luckily the destrachan is a rare creature while the few that do exist have usually been summoned by conjurers long since dead. Recent news puts small packs in the Richemulot sewers and even so far as the upper tunnels of distant Paridon –no doubt finding their gifts a superb advantage in the dark miles of tunnels under the cities.

Due to its natural intelligence the beast is more than likely to use its sonic gifts in the most effective and unpredictable manner. It will try to throw its target off balance and win by whatever means possible. One example of this is how an attack in complete darkness lacks any effect upon the creatures and thus it has been known to wait several hours until the advantage of surprise and night is with it. The destrachan also possess the remarkable ability to blast through walls using its sonic call, allowing it to seemingly attack from anywhere then retreat, only to attack from another direction. I have also read about assassins and bounty hunters training such creatures as ‘tracker dogs’ with the use of their natural track advantage and the lack of any hindrance a building might have imposed only to disrupt the targets nerves and knock them out for a live capture.

## Driders

Created in other realms by someone only referenced to as ‘Lolth’ the drider would be expected to be

exceedingly rare. In truth, however, recent experiments on the isle of Markovia and in Hazlan have bred its own driders. The high magical nature of Darkon has mutated some of its own and while I am loath to admit it there are some reports that driders are emerging from the sewers of Paridon with some unknown entity urging them on.

When in battle the Drider often plays on the fears of the party, using traps and pits to separate the group and pick them off one by one. They are cunning, intelligent and very capable – nothing should be put past them.

### DMs Notes

Obviously the drider’s fearsome appearance and ability to climb walls while surrounding an area in web (which has on occasion confused heroes into the assumption of an infestation of spiders or one simple giant spider’s presence) lends itself to random encounters in deserted caverns or dungeons long since abandoned. However it does have the intellect, wisdom and pride to scheme and create a web of lies with the goal of which being to ensnare potential prey and further their influence, thus they can be ‘unseen masters’ in campaigns.

## Ethereal Filcher

Due to the strong binds of the Dread Realms that prevent ethereal travel into other planes, Ethereal Filchers are not native to these lands and any that find themselves trapped here must adapt or die. The creature is found almost exclusively in Darkon where it can find the magic it needs to survive.

### DMs Notes

Due to its very nature of appearing and disappearing, the filcher is at best a random encounter for heroes, being to unpredictable to cage and not cunning enough to plan grand plots. Unconventional usage of the creature is also a must thanks to the more gothic and less 'magical fantasy' flavour of Ravenloft. Examples of what filchers mostly do in these lands include kidnappings and working with thieves guilds where they are rewarded by their keepers and friends with small trinkets. In some cases others have captured filchers or hired them to act as 'strange presents' or assassins with their target being a certain wizard whom has curried their disfavour.

Filchers that have survived become more accustomed to the realm of shadows and grown stronger and more evil due to the taint their constant travel thrusts onto them. As such the filcher can now cast *Blur* and *Darkness* as a 5<sup>th</sup> level sorcerer 3/day. The filcher also has the ability to see through its own darkness without aid.

*Irregularity aura:* Due to its constant nature of moving in and out of reality and its desire for magic, some higher power seems to have warped the filcher's effect on magic when near the area. Perhaps because of its need to feed on magic to survive or some cruel joke or maybe even the next stage of its evolution the ethereal filcher when within 25 ft of any spell cast causes a 25% chance that the spell will miscast and be absorbed by the filcher, actually healing the aberration by 1d2 hp for each level of the spell. Any magical weapon or item within the filcher's 'irregularity area' of 25 ft has a 50% to lose all magical abilities as if affected by an

anti-magic field. The abilities and enchantments fully return when the filcher is killed or out of the 25 ft range. In some rare cases the filcher's aura is so twisted that any spell cast within 15 ft of it (where its aura is strongest) has a 40% chance of altering into a completely different spell of equal or lesser level with the target (if applicable) being chosen by the filcher.

## Ettercap

Found in warm forests and tropical jungles the ettercap inhabits the lands Falkovnia, Sithicus, the wilds of Verbrek and the equator bound Verdurous Lands. Though most forests can hold their own troupes of them. They mostly rely on their natural skills, which resemble that of spiders and thus use their webs and poison bites to good effect before swarming their prey with allies including brethren and the spider companions that often follow them. Ettercaps are territorial creatures and their hunting grounds are often laden with a fair share of traps.

## DM's Notes

Random encounters are common concerning ettercaps, with parties of adventurers accidentally entering their territory and soon having to defend themselves. They have a fearsome appearance and fast reflexes which makes them a prized weapon in dungeons, torture chambers and arenas.

## Gibbering Mouther

One of the more fearsome creatures in existence, not due to its power to slay but from its mere mind-boggling appearance; the mouther is the stuff of nightmares. Perhaps formed by



wizards in the past, the result of a terrible plague or virus or maybe some creature given substance from the fevered nightmares and dream world of the mad.

Mouthers may appear anywhere except areas of extreme cold, where for some reason they fears to go. There have been disturbing stories from several kingdoms of twisted scientists perfecting torture methods in which a victim is slowly becomes a mouter, the trigger for this is apparently some sort of virus though the means of distribution would obviously be well guarded. One shudders to think of what would happen if one of these diseases got loose; with the large crowds in some cities an epidemic could almost be impossible to stop.

#### DMs Notes

This aberration's monstrous appearance and technique for feeding make it worthy of a story telling device and central cause for monster hunts which could very well lead into the hunt for who or what released it.

### Grick

The Grick, by all outsider reports, is found in other lands as an unthinking animal-like creature. It resembles a giant worm with a beaked mouth and four tentacles that are attached to the 'face'. What is not known to these travellers is that the typical Grick is but one of three forms of the creature.

The most common grick earns the name 'Grick' and is found mainly in Darkon, Nova Vaasa and the Western Core, places where tunnels, dungeons and large caves all abound. It is an unintelligent creature and though resilient in absorbing all but the most

powerful blows it is not incredibly strong.

Underground parties sometimes come across them by accident and make the mistake of attacking immediately. What has recently come to light is that if a Grick is left alone and no sudden movements are made to aggravate it, the monster will not attack and is content to leave well enough alone. Some people have even been known to train Gricks as pets and guards. Though an expensive procedure, gricks obey their trainers much like a faithful dog.

### Assassin grick

The second most common form of grick is what some have labelled as the 'assassin grick'. Smaller than the typical Grick, the assassin is one and a half feet in length and very slim in width. Its tentacles are only half a foot in length. Perhaps the strangest of all differences is the creature's skin, which changes colour to reflect its surroundings.

### Assassin grick

	Small-Size Aberration
<b>Hit Dice:</b>	2d8 + 2 (9hp)
<b>Initiative:</b>	+7 (+3 Dex +4 Improved Initiative)
<b>Speed:</b>	40 ft. climb 30 ft
<b>Armour</b>	17
<b>Class:</b>	
<b>Base Attack:</b>	+3/-5
<b>Attack:</b>	Poison bite +0 melee, 4 tentacle rakes +2 melee
<b>Full Attack:</b>	Poison bite +1 melee, 4 tentacle rakes +2 melee
<b>Damage:</b>	Tentacle rake 1d4, bite 1d3+1+poison
<b>Space/Reach:</b>	5ft by 5ft
<b>Special</b>	Chameleon, Damage

<b>Qualities:</b>	Reduction 15/+1, Poison
<b>Saves:</b>	Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +4
<b>Abilities:</b>	Str 12, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 6, Wis 12, Cha 5
<b>Skills:</b>	Climb +12, Hide +10, Listen +6, Move Silently +7, Spot +3
<b>Feats:</b>	Weapon focus (bite)
<b>Environment:</b>	Any
<b>Organization:</b>	Solitary or pair
<b>Challenge Rating:</b>	3
<b>Treasure:</b>	None
<b>Alignment:</b>	Usually neutral evil
<b>Combat:</b>	

Assassin gricks are usually purchased and employed by assassins to eliminate specific individuals by releasing the creature into the targets bedchambers while they sleep. However they have been known to breed outside captivity, favouring underground caverns and dungeons. They are fiercely loyal to their masters having the loyalty to never turn on them once their affection has been won.

**Chameleon:** The scales of a grick change colour to match their surrounding. Assassin gricks gain a +10 bonus to hide checks and may use this ability to hide in plain sight.

**Poison bite:** Fort save (DC 14) initial damage 1d4 Con, secondary damage none. If the save is failed the target is subject to having their throat muscles relaxing as the poison seeps into their system. This eliminates any use of their voice for 1 hour and stops all spells the individual could cast that involve a verbal component.

## Brain grick

The rarest grick is perhaps the most disturbing. The Brain grick may be

a more primal form of the 'Mind Flayer' that evolved at a tangent to its 'cousin'. Or maybe it is a creature from another dimension yet to be discovered. If one is to blunt this grick is best described as a domineering symbiot. It resembles that of a miniaturized version of the traditional Grick save that of its overall colour, being an ash and grey black, and an enlarged brain, which sickly pulsates and protrudes from the frontal skull like a bulbous tumour.

## Brain Grick

	Small-Size Aberration
<b>Hit Dice:</b>	5d8 - 15 (6hp)
<b>Initiative:</b>	+0
<b>Speed:</b>	5 ft.
<b>Armour Class:</b>	20 (+8 size, +2 natural)
<b>Class:</b>	
<b>Base Attack:</b>	+3/-5
<b>Attack:</b>	Leech (see below) +4, bite +0
<b>Damage:</b>	bite 1
<b>Space/Reach:</b>	1 ft by 1 ft
<b>Special Qualities:</b>	Leech, Granted host abilities, skills and qualities, Telepathy with host, Ancestral memories, Spell-like abilities
<b>Saves:</b>	Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +10
<b>Abilities:</b>	Str 2, Dex 10, Con 5, Int 19 Wis 17 Cha 18
<b>Skills:</b>	Bluff +14, Diplomacy +9, Sense Motive +15, Knowledge (any three) +9
<b>Feats:</b>	Skill focus (buff), toughness
<b>Environment:</b>	Any
<b>Organization:</b>	Solitary
<b>Challenge Rating:</b>	5 or host's +2
<b>Treasure:</b>	None

**Alignment:** Usually neutral evil

**Combat:**

The Brain Grick focuses its efforts on attaching itself to a victim. Once attached, the parasite uses that host as a pawn in its schemes.

*Leech:* The Brain grick is a symbiot and thus survives by attaching itself to a Small to Large creature. It usually does this at night while its target host is asleep, performing a full round attack to receive an automatic hit and attachment. In combat it can use its Leech attack ability to attach itself to the base creature with a successful touch attack.

Once attached the brain grick cannot be removed save by a Strength check (DC 25) or cutting it loose (dealing 2d8 damage to the base creature). Leeching however is an almost completely painless procedure due to the grick's ability to secrete a fluid that dulls the attachment area. The base creature must make a successful Spot check (DC 18) to notice the attached grick. Within 2d4 +1 rounds the grick will enter the target through any nearby orifice and begin the process of taking control of the target over several days.

Each day the Brain grick is inside the base creature's body, the victim must make a will save to avoid the grick taking control (DC 15 + 1 for each day the grick has been inside the creature). Removal of the grick once inside require surgery and the grick will most likely use its spell-like powers (below) to ensure the target does not reveal its existence.

After control is established the grick will try to act as much like the base creature to avoid suspicion. The base creature now loses all free will and any

mind affecting spells targeting the base creature instead are automatically directed to the grick (the caster does not even have to be aware of the grick for this to occur) the host also gains the following adjustments:

Str +2, Dex +4, Con + 2

Int, Wis and Cha are replaced with the grick's own

AC +2 (natural)

Immunity to natural diseases

Damage Reduction 10/+1

The grick may use its spell like abilities while inside the host

CR +2

The grick retains all memories of the base creature and can use all spells; abilities etc that host could before being controlled.

*Ancestral Memories:* When the grick leaves, the host retains no knowledge of the grick's presence as if its memory had been wiped. The time spent with the grick is replaced by false memories of the gricks desire. After leaving, the grick retains all of the knowledge of its previous hosts.

*Spell-like abilities:* Wall of Force 1/week, Dominate person 1/day, Suggestion 2/day, Charm person or animal 3/day. All are cast as if by an 11<sup>th</sup> level sorcerer and have a DC of 17

**DM's Notes**

A Brain grick is of course an excellent candidate for an 'unseen master' type scenario as it changes from host to host for various reasons always gaining more and more knowledge. What it could do with this knowledge is unknown, but no doubt unhealthy for the populous that call these lands home.

**Mimic**

A mimic is an odd creature, especially in these realms. Often taking

the guise of common furniture, it takes use of suppositious minds to further its desires. More than one party of adventurers have journeyed into a so-called 'haunted house' to find one, or indeed, a family of mimics inhabiting the rooms and themselves on the main course of a meal.

Because of their close goals of causing fear and luring victims to themselves, mimics and animators often form rather prickly alliances. In such cases they travel together from village to village, feeding on fear and people. Sometimes they settle down in large manors though often the alliance falls apart after several months due to the mimic eating the animator's source of food. In very rare cases an animator chooses its ward as a mimic, developing feelings or respect and comradeship with the aberration. It is when these close relationships are formed that a hero must be doubly careful.

Mordent and Richemulot have by far the most mimics on record with vast numbers of empty houses waiting for a mimic to make its home. They are rare in the Southern Core due to a lack of large furniture owned by the masses and hence are more common in the Western reaches. Though they are of course well known to mimic that of large chests in any variety of dungeons, where they wait for foolish heroes to walk right into their trap.

#### DM's Notes

Interesting uses of Mimics involve false haunted houses, random encounters or shell games when trapped in a wizard's or nobleman's room. This 'game' would no doubt be a trap with a set time limit involving finding the key to escape. This key however resides somewhere in the room with a hidden

mimic. Mistakes could have disastrous consequences with a battle at best eating up time and at worst eating up the hero.

## Mind Flayers

Almost exclusively found on their isle empire of Bluetspur, the Illithids are a fearsome opponent in any scenario. This is not only due to their natural resilience to magic and inherent abilities of the mind but also attributed to their capacity for intelligent thought that can easily rival that of any human. In the world of conspiracy and deception the mindflayers rule almost unopposed.

The lifecycle of a typical mindflayer begins in the brain pool as a tadpole. They spend many years in this state and many do not survive. Later in life their adult masters will provide a human slave and 'implant' the illithid tadpole into that human's ear. The baby illithid will devour all brain matter in its host's head and through a process known as 'ceremorphosis', which transforms the human into a mindflayer. Only humans are chosen to be transformed like this as any other creature creates a lesser being, an abomination in the eyes of all mindflayers.

Illithids live for about 125 years and breed only twice in their life. Being hermaphroditic they have no arguments or disputes as to what gender is better, one is either superior (illithid) or inferior (not an illithid). Anything lesser is worthy to have its brain siphoned out and devoured for food, as these beings are famous for.

In battle mindflayers use their natural talents to the maximum advantage, not the least of which is their powerful 'mind blast' a psionic weapon that incapacitates foes through disrupting their nervous system and making them

easy prey. An illithid can also spend time tearing a party apart through dominating certain members or their allies and taking great delight in making their world fall apart. In their plans which can span decades and usually always involve the expansion of illithid might, mindflayers rarely make mistakes due to their ability to play out different reactions in their minds based on mathematical probability. If they have a weakness it is their ego. More than one inquisition or cult of mindflayers have had their plots foiled by underestimating a group of interfering adventurers.

One wonders though, why have the mindflayer population simply transported themselves to other lands when met with endless failures in their most bold and grandiose schemes. Simply start a fresh somewhere new. The answer must be theorised that they are incapable. This is the first difference I, humble researcher and student of the occult, have noticed. Something keeps them here and I believe I now know what.

Even deeper than the usual illithid tunnels resides a being referred to simply as 'The God Brain'. This conglomerate of brains lies so deep into the earth's crust many mindflayers are unaware of its existence unless 'it' wants them to know -thus the puppeteers have strings of their own it seems. Reaching out with its psychic tendrils, this being has power to reach others far from its location. I myself have linked this creature's influence to seemingly random events around the core as if it manipulates occurrences simply to observe the participants reactions. Whatever goal it works towards is something I am curious to uncover but the unfortunate brevity of this report prevents me from doing so. In any case dear reader let me simply

remark that the description of 'God brain' may be less than adequate to detail what this monster is capable of.

#### DM's Notes

In the larger scheme of things Mindflayers make for excellent unseen masters and puppeteers, controlling things from afar while constructing vast plans to conquer the core and reclaim a lost empire that fell to slave rebellion a millennia ago. They also have an endless supply of bodyguards to carry out more blunt and brutal missions thanks to advanced illithid breeding programs for the 'ultimate soldier'. Thanks to years of toiling away under the blasted landscape of Bluetspur, in their laboratories mindflayers are among the most scientifically advanced cultures in these realms and have developed biological research centuries ahead of their time.

#### Naga

The body and cunning of a snake and the intellect of a human, the naga in all its forms is something any hero faces without the inner fear that they will not survive to see the next day. Typically a naga lives for 35 years and breeds once somewhere between the ages of 20 and 25.

In battle a naga may be a dangerous predator but it is in the safety of its lair that would-be adventurers should be most fearful. Full of minions, traps and armed with a smattering of magical items accumulated over its lifetime, most groups perish well before even encountering the lair's true owner.

#### DM's Notes

In terms of intellect a naga is hard to beat which attributes to their usual calling as 'unseen masters' though through the multiple species that exist



some have been known to be captured and chained for servitude to corrupt guild masters and warlords etc. On the other hand some nagas simply find an abandoned dungeon near an inhabited area and set up a base of operations intent on ruling a village or city, creating a simple yet dangerous monster hunt through trap filled dungeons and monster filled tunnels.

Dark Nagas in particular have altered somewhat due to their ties to darkness and evil ways. Hence they have gained certain powers other heroes may not yet be aware of: The Dark Naga can now *Shadow Jump*, thereby having the ability to travel between shadows as if by means of a *dimension door* spell. The transport must begin and end in an area with some shadow for a total distance of 80 ft. The naga may use this ability 3/day.

They also have the ability to manipulate shadows with the following consequences: 3/day they can cast darkness or mirror image as a free action as a 7<sup>th</sup> level sorcerer.

Any creature slain by a Dark Naga rises 1d4 rounds later as a 'shadow' under the Naga's control. Hence Dark Nagas often have several shadow servants hiding in the darkness waiting for the order to attack.

## Otyugh

A disgusting and grotesque beast that frequents the carrion left over from battles and living not too far from the surface of the land. Otyughs have also been sighted in Falkovnia and Nova Vaasa, where mass graves, pollution and large refuse piles are frequent.

The origins of otyughs are, like most aberrations, unknown. Though it has been theorised they are twisted beings

emerging from the Shadow Rift or the evolved form of some creature trapped underground when a land conjunction occurred only to emerge many years later.

With such a low capacity for thought and its beast like nature, one wonders what use the otyugh provides to the world. The answer is a simple one, it doesn't. Some have occasionally been captured as monsters to be chained to a room with garbage so to hide and kill anyone that would walk by but most often they just inhabit a dungeon or sewer, feeding, mating and dying undisturbed.

## Rust Monster

Usually a rare sight in other realms this creature resembles something akin to a large cockroach and is unfortunately more common than most realize. It seems to thrive in the entropy and decay of these realms. One predicts with the growth of using steel and iron for construction in the Western Core, rust monster infestation is only decades away.

Due to their one and only true need being a supply of ore and the occasional piece of purified metal, one can find a rust monster in most of the largest metropolises of humanity. There they usually live in the sewers or nearby underground ruins. When a rust monster is encountered it is usually alone or with its mate (who they keep for life). They have also been known to be on the leash of another being and taught how to track and serve as mounts for goblin leaders. It has often been noted that no matter how powerful the adventurer a few rust monsters will bring them down to size.

There have also been unconfirmed reports of scientists employed by the Four Towers Alliance creating unnatural

crossbreeds of rust monsters and humans so to combat the Falkovnian threat. Indeed a battalion of soldiers with a rust invoking skin would bolster the Four's offensive and defensive power, dependent on how they were used.

## Skum

Used as bodyguards by Aboleths, skum seek to corrupt isolated villages into the unknown's dark embrace. Not only do skum need these people for working on whatever structure or scheme their master demands, but both human men and women are enslaved for breeding for the goal of perpetuating the skum race.

Skum have become more organised and intelligent through their time in servitude. Some have even escaped when their masters have been defeated by groups of heroes. Often they retreat into obscurity only to later create cults and pagan worship to answer the question within them 'Why do they still exist without their god father?' Skum cults have been linked to cities and villages in Darkon, Dementlieu, Nova Vaasa and many an isle in the dread seas – no real coincidence that all these lands are linked to the ocean. As such, skum have learned the ways of both arcane and divine magic, their power granted by whatever Dark God they pray to or perhaps something even beyond their fevered imaginations.

## Umbur Hulk

Often the monstrous servants of others, the umbur hulk was originally the creation of Mind flayers wishing to make a better servant and miner. They are also enslaved by those wishing to have a trained monster, though the

creature can never truly be tamed, for its very mind is chaotic and untrustworthy. The secret of their creation has been lost to the ages and now they are capable of self-procreation. In terms of location and habitat the umbur hulk is found mostly in areas such as caves, deserts and jungle lands, though hardly ever in an area such as plains, or forests.

Disgusting by appearance and nature, the umbur hulk has been a constant thorn in humanity's side throughout recorded history, turning up in unexpected areas of woods and caves. When one dissects this creature it is blatantly obvious that their muscles are over-developed and that they possess a mismatch of differing animal parts. They possess the brain of a gorilla, the sensory organs of an insect and the anatomy of some cross between the two.

## Will-o'-Wisp

Common in Mordent, the Shadow Rift and various swamplands, the will-o'-wisp are creatures from legends. They seem to delight in luring victims into the bog and a watery death with calls and the illusion of being a lantern in the distance. It has been rumoured in some of the more logical-minded lands that scientists are hunting the wisps and storing them for electrical energy. Strange and fantastical falsities, though they do cause some thought.

No one is quite sure what creates a wisp, though some theories include that they are the twisted souls of those lost in the mists, or that shadow fey who capture prisoners torture them only to release them as will-o'-wisps. A Vistani curse has also been blamed, making those so blamed forced to observe the world but never truly be part of it.

When roaming the swamps random meetings with these fey are uncommon



but by no means rare. Mordentish travellers swear that turning one's coat inside out when seeing a light in the distance wards off the wisps. Some texts written by suppositious authors promote walking in a circle backwards three times before beginning a journey is a remedy to prevent disastrous encounters. In this writers humble opinion such suggestions are as silly as they are varied, though I have seen far too many strange things in my travels to dismiss them out of hand right away.

*And so dear reader my work has been finished. My guide to the strangest of the world's creatures is sent to the*

*presses. However I urge you not to place so much stock in the world of aberrations being categorised completely here. They are the unusual monsters and beasts that are classified 'aberration' simply because they defy more conventional identification. They are the miscellaneous category of this land's fauna and hence I would not be surprised to encounter a completely new and chance creature on my next travel.*

*Where ever you go may your luck be true  
and your legs swift,  
Malwid C. Hardy  
Amateur Botanist and Zoologist*

# Perilous Pursuits

## Shay-Lo! Cultist

By Joseph "Bela" Zettelmaier  
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*The sea storm raged on the cliff-side town of Polton. Windows were locked down, animals were penned in the barns and every living soul was safely huddled indoors... all but one. A single cloaked individual stood at the sea cliffs, strangely still despite the roaring winds blowing off the Sea of Sorrows.*

*Siward had lived in Polton all his long life; he'd seen many odd things in his fifty-six years. Yet something about the stranger on the cliffs troubled him. He was about to blow out his lantern and go to bed when the gnawing guilt set in. Like many in the Martira Bay area, Siward was a devout believer in the Overseer. Leaving some poor soul to die on the reefs below seemed decidedly unseemly. Throwing on his thick cloak, Siward trudged out of his cabin and towards the cliff.*

*"Hey! Hey! Come away from there!" he called to the shrouded man, who seemed not to hear. That was unsurprising, considering the howl of the wind and the crash of the waves. Wiping the downpour from his face, he called again. Still, there was no response.*

*Finally, Siward made it to the man, though he nearly fell in the ever-increasing mud. He grabbed the man by the shoulders, but even still he did not respond. Suddenly, the stranger threw his arms up to the heavens, a gesture accentuated by a blaze of thunder. Siward was knocked to his knees by the deafening roar. He held the stranger's*

*robe to keep himself steady. Finally, the cloaked man spoke, his voice clear despite the downpour.*

*"Look." He said, and waved his hands towards the sea below. Off in the distance, another massive thunderbolt struck the waters. His eyes grew wide at what the lightening revealed. Deep below the sea's surface, Siward's sharp eyes saw something that chilled him to the bone. It looked like a massive spire, jutting up from the very blackest of depths. But it was no tower built by man. It was spiraled and twisted, made of some substance unlike stone or wood. The light shimmered on its surface, like sunlight on a fish's scales.*

*Something about the structure seemed to be pulling at his mind, as if he was being watched... judged by something that found him wanting. Siward felt as if he were on the edge of madness, and what he saw next nearly pushed him over. A massive, awful tentacle slithered across the surface of the spire. Even over the storm, the people of Polton could hear his scream.*

*"Do you see it?" called the cloaked man. Siward didn't respond, still in a state of near-insanity. The stranger grabbed Siward's head and finally the old Darkonian could see the man's face. His skin was wet and slimy with a greenish sheen, his mouth impossibly wide and filled with small fangs. No hair showed on his face, not even eyebrows or eyelashes. But most disturbing were his eyes, huge and pale*

*like those of a fish. The thing bore the shape of a man, but was clearly a man no longer.*

*"Do you see?!" screamed the hideous man-thing. The words assaulted Siward's ears and mind as well. He tasted blood in his mouth, and suspected that his eyes were bleeding.*

*"I SEE! I SEE!" wept Siward, and the stranger pulled him to his feet. With one strong arm he held the old man over the sea. The other hand slid into the folds of his cloak, where he produced a dagger with a bone blade. In one swift motion, he slit Siward's throat and let him fall into the ravenous waves.*

*"Then see no more," whispered the cultist, watching the body fall. He looked back to the sea once again, though this time it did not bless him with a glimpse of the Lost City of the Shay-Lot. He'd never been there himself, but when he and his brethren were worthy, the ancients would summon them. The faithful would shed their human skin and be welcomed by the things that had been here far longer than humankind.*

*The cultist spun back to the mainland and disappeared into the darkness.*

The Shay-Lot are a race lost in obscurity. The few who are aware of the Shay-Lot say they existed in millennia past, when the world held no mortals. It was a time when the Ancients ruled this land, creatures who were neither gods nor demons but quite similar to both. Their kingdom was a massive city that jutted out of the ocean, as the Ancients themselves were creatures of the sea.

The Ancients were struck down by an opposing force, powers of great evil that felt threatened by the Ancient's power. Great storms swept the realms and the City sank below the waves. The

Ancients and their servitors sealed themselves in the city as it crumbled. Hoping to live long enough to reclaim their world, the Ancients placed all within the city into a magical slumber. This hibernation would keep them all alive without food or aging, but they would be unable to wake themselves. They would lie in slumber until some outside creatures rediscovered the city. These outsiders would reawaken long-forgotten magic, and through archaic magic and sacrifice, the Lost City of the Shay-Lot would rise again. For untold ages the Ancients have slept, though now it seems as though their wait is at its end.

A few years ago, a wereray named Hilde Borganov stumbled upon part of the lost city while hunting the depths near Darkon. She uncovered some of the hidden secrets there and was able to decipher some of their runic language. Later, she found a sealed temple, surrounded by statues of hideous, primordial sea creatures. Hilde became obsessed with awakening the creatures within, which she believes are the Shay-Lot themselves. To this end, she ventured to the Darkonian coastal town of Tidemore and infected nearly half the population with lycanthropy. There, she lured the unsuspecting to the town, to be turned either into followers or sacrifices. Borganov's plans were destroyed when a group of wandering adventurers came to Tidemore, defeating Hilde and slaughtering her followers.

A few members of the Cult of the Shay-Lot, however, escaped. Though they lacked a leader, they were possessed with a purpose. They contacted many other sea-dwelling evils, learning their ways and slowly collecting the lore of the Ancients. In the years since, the Cult has rebuilt itself and

expanded its influence. Now virtually every domain touching the sea is home to a cultist. Under the new leadership of the Mordentish wereshark Zebidiah Cain, the Cult seeks out eldritch secrets. They hunt for scholars of the arcane and pour over their collections of lore. Still, the Cult moves slowly and secretly, drawing virtually no attention to itself. The search has been slow but eventful, for the cult has uncovered the rituals that transform a mortal being into a creature of the sea, blessing them with strange powers. Cain considers this a blessing, and hopes that soon the cult will have enough knowledge to raise the Lost City. Should this happen, an evil older than time will wash over the Domains of Dread.

### Shay-Lot Cultist

While there are many members within the cult who are simply thugs or madmen, this Prestige Class applies only to those who have been “blessed” by Zebidiah Cain with a bizarre metamorphosis. The vast majority of cultists are fallen priests, though several wizards and sorcerers fill their ranks as well. Former priests must abandon their deities and devote themselves wholly to the worship of the Ancients. Most other classes either do not qualify, or simply find the cult’s lunatic lifestyle unappealing.

**Hit Dice:** d8

**Requirements:** To become a Shay-Lot Cultist (SIC), a character must meet the following requirements:

**Alignment:** Lawful Evil

**Base Attack:** +2

**Skills:** Knowledge (Arcana) 4 ranks, Knowledge (Religion) 4 ranks, Spellcraft 5 ranks

**Feats:** Endurance, Voice of Wrath

**Spells:** Able to cast 3rd level Arcane or Divine spells

**Special:** The subject must have failed a Madness Check at least once. No one who is remotely sane would undergo this process or give themselves to the Ancients.

Most importantly, the supplicant must have received the Dark Calling, a “gift” from the Ancient Ones. The character will receive a series of nightmares, terrifying visions of the ocean and hideous creatures beneath the waves. When they awake, they will feel a pull to a secret enclave in Mordent. Those who follow that pull will find themselves at the Cult’s lair. There, they are approached by Cain, who will gauge if they have truly been chosen. Those who haven’t, or decide to turn their back on the Cult don’t live long enough to reveal what they found.

#### Class Skills:

The Shay-Lot Cultist’s class skills (and Key ability for each skill) are: Balance (Dex), Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Concentration (Con), Decipher Script (Int), Disguise (Cha), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (Arcana) (Int), Knowledge (Religion) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), Spellcraft (Int), Spot (Wis), Swim (Str).

**Skill Points at each Level:** 3 + Int Modifier

#### Class Features

All of the following are Class Features for the Shay-Lot Cultist prestige class.

**Weapons & Armor Proficiency:** Shay-Lot Cultists are proficient with all

simple weapons and light armor. Cultists prefer to go without armor, as it allows them secrecy on land and swiftness in water.

**Spells and Caster Level:** All Shay-Lot Cultists continue gaining levels in whatever spellcasting class they prior to their conversion. However, they do so at a slower rate (one class level per every two SiC levels). As such, a clerical Cultist would only gain additional spellcasting abilities at every other level.

**First Transformation:** At first level, the Shay-Lot Cultists undergoes the First Transformation. It is a process in which the supplicant's body is infused with the otherworldly energies of the Ancients. The change manifests in several ways: First, the Cultist grows gills along the side of his neck. These gills are easily concealed, but they do allow to Cultist to breathe water as easily as air. The cultist also gains a Swim speed equivalent to their land speed. Finally, the cultist gains Darkvision 60'. If the Cultist already has Darkvision, it increases to 90 feet.

**Second Transformation:** At second level, the transformations become more noticeable. The Cultist's skin begins to secrete an oily substance. While not immediately noticeable, it does give the Cultist the constant scent of the sea and allows the Cultists a +4 Profane Bonus to Escape Artist checks.

The Cultists also grows small claws on their hands, and fangs. This gives them a claw/claw/bite attack of 1d4/1d4/1d6, with the bite attack as a secondary weapon at a -5 penalty to hit. The transformation is now more evident, costing the Cultists 1 point of permanent Cha loss.

**Third Transformation:** At third level, the Cultist swim speed increases by 10 feet. Also, the supplicant no longer suffers penalties for fighting in water. The cultist gains the ability to spew forth a cloud of ink while submerged. This cloud functions like the spell *Obscuring Mist* except that it only functions underwater. The cultist can produce this ink cloud 3 times a day.

The physical changes continue; the cultist's eyes move apart and their skin turns slightly green. As a result, the cultist loses one point of charisma and their Outcast Rating goes up by 1 point.

**Fourth Transformation:** At fourth level, the Cultist has become a truly strange creature. The cultist's Constitution score rises by 2 points permanently. The supplicant can also call forth aquatic creatures to aid them, as though they had cast the spell *Summon Natures Allies III* except that it summons only sea life. The cultist may use this ability twice each day.

The Cultist's eyes have moved to the sides of their head and have turned a shade of pale white. Their skin is now scaly and short fins begin to jut from their backs. The cultist loses another point of Cha and their outcast rating rises another point.

**Fifth Transformation:** At this point, the Cultist has finished the transformation and can no longer be called human. The final metamorphosis requires an entire day in which the Cultist can make no action beyond resting. The cultist's bones become cartilage, their fingers and toes become webbed, their mouth extends to both sides of their head, and all of their body hair falls out. The Cultist's type permanently changes to

Aberration and they are no longer susceptible to spells specifically affecting Humanoids. They gain a +3 natural armor bonus to their AC and the damage from their claws rises to 1D6. The cultist can spew their ink cloud four times each day, and use their *Summon Nature's Allies III* ability a total of three times a day.

In the fifth transformation the cultist of Shay Lot gains the supernatural

ability to channel the mind-warping reality in which the Shay-Lot exists. As a standard action, the cultist may make a gaze attack against any creature within visual range. This attack bombards the target with psychic images of bizarre, otherworldly evil, forcing the victim to make a Horror Save.

Finally, the cultist loses 3 more points of Charisma and gains another 2 points to their Outcast Rating.



## The Shay-Lot Cultist

Level	Attack Bonus	Fort	Ref	Will	Special Ability	Spells per Day
1 <sup>st</sup>	+1	+2	+1	+0	First Transformation	
2 <sup>nd</sup>	+2	+2	+2	+0	Second Transformation	+1 level of existing class
3 <sup>rd</sup>	+3	+3	+2	+1	Third Transformation	
4 <sup>th</sup>	+4	+3	+3	+2	Fourth Transformation	+1 level of existing class
5 <sup>th</sup>	+5	+4	+4	+3	Fifth Transformation	



# The Human Ooze

## Puddle or Predator?

By Tadelin Darkblade

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*"We chased the suspect into the alley, but he had disappeared. PC Hamilton moved in first, being as careful as he could be, but nothing could prepare us for what happen. The puddle... It... It stood up. It stood up and attacked him..."*

*- A first-hand account from a Paridon police constable.*

The origin of the human ooze is widely speculated, and every bard seems to have a different tale. A common thread found in these tales is that many years ago an outlander human committed an unspeakable evil, resulting in a horrific transformation. Though conjecture, this tale is not far from the truth.

Centuries ago, a mad human wizard became obsessed with the creatures commonly called oozes. As he spent more time around the oozes, he began to believe that he had become one of them. The wizard would often wear oozes as if they were clothing, and speak to them as if the creatures were capable of understanding him. In one of his many fits of dementia, the wizard heard the oozes telling him that humanity was nothing more than a food source. He believed their words, and started to prey on humans. Eventually he was run out of every town and village in his land. While no one could prove that he was responsible for the large number of disappearances in the land, he was shunned. By this time, his hunger was

only for humans, and his mind had lost almost all of his previous logic.

After being run off for the last time, he returned to the nearby village, and decided that he would eat his fill. His body had withered away and become frail due to his habits, and he was able to hide easily in the village well. Over the course of the next few days, he would climb out of the well at night, and work his way into a house. The wizard's body had become conditioned to being around oozes, that he was able to move as one. Flowing through cracks under doors, the wizard had moved into house after house, devouring the inhabitants while they slept.

When the villagers finally realized that they were losing their neighbors, the wizard-ooze had already worked through a third of the population. The villagers pleaded for help from and group of would-be heroes that wandered through. A group of such people eventually heeded the cries for help, but the village was almost completely lost by then, as only a handful of families remained. After a long skirmish with the wizard, the warriors managed to trap the wizard-ooze in the well he had been using for a hiding place. Using what magic they could, the party sealed the well, keeping the rapidly degenerating humanoid locked away from the rest of the world, hopefully to wither away to nothingness. Time and wars changed the lands around the well, and few remembered why the well was sealed.

In the year 551 BC, the well was brought into the mists as part of the lands surrounding the city of Paridon. With the change in the aura of the land, the magic sealing the well weakened, and eventually faded away completely. When the well was discovered again, what lay within was not the wizard, but the ooze that he had become. Climbing out of the well, the ooze set about dealing with the most primitive of desires; the need to feed. With a plethora of places to hide and an ample population to pick from, the ooze had found a new feeding ground.

In recent years it has fled Paridon and is rumored to be within the core itself. Some tales claim that it has the ability to replicate itself, and others tell of it having the ability to split in two. As such, no one can be certain where the original ooze is today.

## Human Ooze

	Large Ooze
<b>Hit Dice:</b>	12d10+60 (102 hp)
<b>Initiative:</b>	+4 (Improved Initiative)
<b>Speed:</b>	10 ft (30 ft. when coalesced)
<b>Armour Class:</b>	9 (-1 size)
<b>Base Attack / grapple:</b>	+8/+16
<b>Attack:</b>	+11 slam
<b>Damage:</b>	2d6+4 slam plus poison
<b>Space/Reach:</b>	5 ft by 5 ft
<b>Special Attacks:</b>	Constrict, create spawn, improved grab, poison.
<b>Special Qualities:</b>	Blind sight 60 ft., coalesce, fire immunity, ooze traits, split, vulnerability to cold.
<b>Saves:</b>	Fort +6, Ref +0, Will

	+0
<b>Abilities:</b>	Str 18, Dex 10, Con 21, Int 7, Wis 11, Cha 1
<b>Skills:</b>	Climb +9, Hide +10
<b>Feats:</b>	Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (slam)
<b>Environment:</b>	Any
<b>Organization:</b>	Solitary
<b>Challenge Rating:</b>	8
<b>Treasure:</b>	None
<b>Alignment:</b>	Always neutral
<b>Advancement:</b>	-
<b>Outcast:</b>	-
<b>Rating:</b>	

At first glance, this ooze looks to be little more than a puddle on the ground. Closer inspection reveals that there appears to be fluid flowing within the ooze itself, almost like blood flowing through veins. People who have viewed a human ooze long enough swear that they can see the faces of the ooze's victims flowing within the fluid. Human oozes appear to understand all of the languages they knew in life, though they are incapable of speaking them. While they may not possess the appropriate anatomy for speaking, a human ooze can actually carve words into soft earth or dust to communicate. They have been known to use this ability to communicate with other sentient creatures for mutual gain. In one case, a human ooze convinced a band of kobolds to build a snares for it in exchange for the possessions of the creatures killed.

**Combat:** The human ooze has an appetite that knows no bounds, and will use as many tricks and traps as it can muster to slate its hunger for humans. They possess a distinct hatred for spell

casters, and will target a group's wizards or sorcerers first. The human ooze is adept at lying in wait for prey but also plans ambushes and escape routes.

Strangely enough, this ooze has been found with oozes of other types, living in the territory and sharing prey. With the ooze's ability to immobilize its victims, a common ploy has been to attack and paralyze a group of travelers, and then let the other oozes in the area feast on all but one of the bodies.

When pressed into melee combat, the ooze will use the coalesce ability and strike at any perceived enemies with its slam attack. If losing, the ooze can also make use of the higher movement rate to run away.

**Coalesce (Ex):** A human ooze can form itself into a humanoid shape as a full action. It can maintain this form indefinitely, or until struck by a piercing or slashing weapon. As a free action, it can return to its formless ooze state. While in humanoid shape, the ooze can wield any simple weapon, and its movement rate becomes 30 ft. If forced to split, it will return to the formless ooze state.

**Constrict (Ex):** A human ooze deals automatic slam damage on a successful grapple check. Grappled opponents take a -4 to the Fortitude save

versus poison due to excessive contact.

**Immunity to Fire (Ex):** Human oozes take no damage from fire and fire-based spells, instead being healed for the damage that would otherwise be caused. If this healing brings the ooze back to its starting hit points, the extra healing is gained as temporary hit points.

**Improved Grab (Ex):** To use this ability, the human ooze must hit with its slam attack. It can then start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can constrict.

**Poison (Ex):** Injury, Fortitude DC 21. On a failed save, the target will become paralyzed for 2d4 rounds. If the first save is failed, a second save is required at the end of the initial duration, failure meaning that the individual remains paralyzed for one hour. The save DC is Constitution based.

**Split (Ex):** Slashing and piercing weapons deal no damage to a human ooze. Instead, the creature splits into two identical oozes, each with half the original's hit points (round down). An ooze with 10 hit points or less cannot be further split and dies if reduced to 0 hit points.

**Vulnerability to Cold (Ex):** A human ooze takes an extra 50% damage from any cold-based spell or effect.

# The Hunted

## Original Fan Fiction

David "The Jester" Gibson

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"Same again, sir?"

The traveler waved his hand and the bartender poured another serving of the dark brown liquid into the small glass. The Traveler picked up the glass and swirled the dark drink around, staring at the distorted image of the person inside. The glass held a person whose hair was shaggy and in need of a trim and whose face was rough with stubble. His face had collected dust on the bristles giving him a dusky grey appearance. The traveler tipped back the glass and downed the liquid in a single motion. The warmth in his throat and belly filled him removing the chill from his bones, at least for a while.

There was a crash from the outside shutters that violently shook as a sudden stronger gale rushed past outside. The Traveler jerked at the sound, his hand flying to his side under his cloak. His face scowled and he slowly turned back around setting down the glass again. He motioned his hand for a refill.

The bartender walked back over. There were precious few people in the small tavern that evening. Only the two of them truth be told. The spring storm outside had kept the local regulars at home and outsiders passing through had holed up in the inn down the street for warmth and intoxication. All save the one.

"Are you sure you want another?" The bartender asked. "If you need to be hauled back to where yer sleepin' don't look it me. Got help?"

The Traveler grunted slightly as his glass filled up. "No, I'm alone."

"Alone? No traveling companions?" The bartender asked putting the lid back on the bottle. "Ain't that a bit dangerous? Walkin' about by yourself?"

"Got no one." The Traveler mused staring into his drink again. The person inside the glass stared back, his small dark eyes staring back at their twins. Who was this person in his reflection, the Traveler wondered? That dirty and weary looking figure in the worn cloak and shirt that had been repaired one too many times. The stretched and haggard face that look familiar but refused to be placed.

"Everyone has someone." The Bartender said wiping down the bar with a rough rag.

"Not me." The Traveler said tipping his glass and sipping gently at the liquid. "Not anymore."

The Bartender nodded his acknowledgement. He knew how to talk to people, how to read their unspoken words. He'd have him talking soon enough. He turned and picked up another glass for himself and poured himself a round.

The Traveler shrugged and continued sipping on his drink slowly letting the tingling liquid lay on his tongue before swallowing. Like heated needles jabbing into in his mouth. "Not anymore." He repeated the words softly letting them slide off his lips. Tasting the sentence as if to add realism that was lacking.

The Bartender pointed at the Traveler's hand. It was a rough callused hand that had seen much work and was wrapped tightly with a thick grey bandage. On one finger was a small ring of coiled silver strands woven together inseparably. The Bartender gestured at it. "Unusual. Ya don't strike me as a jewelry person."

The Traveler looked down and spun the ring about his finger with his other hand. "It was... I used to be married."

"What happened?"

"She died."

There was a tap as the Traveler's glass hit the bar. For a moment it hung in the air, the only sound save for the thick wet slow striking the walls. The Bartender nodded again and refilled their glasses. "This one's on the house."

"Thanks." The Traveler said picking up his glass and staring in. "But she's been dead for years."

"Never gets easier though. Hard ta lose a loved one. Hard ta survive."

The Traveler nodded. "Sounds like experience talking."

"I've known loss."

"Strange. She dies and I'm the one who stopped living."

The Bartender nodded and uncorked the bottle pouring himself another round. He set the bottle on the counter and pulled up his stool. "So what happened?"

"You'd just think I was crazy."

The Bartender scratched behind his ear for a second and pointed across the room. "This happened about ten years ago. There was a regular of mine, name of Dyson. Always sat over there by the window while he drank his ale. Never talked much he did. Quiet sort. But he came every day and never caused trouble so I let him be. Then one day he stopped comin'. No one knew what happened, we just figured he moved. Nobody ever sat in Dyson's chair; it was too close to the window. Always complaining about the cold, like it was too drafty. But I never noticed one."

The Traveler nodded. "Don't see what this has to do with me."

"I'm getting there. Shortly after that I redecorated the place and moved that table away from the window. Closer to the fireplace where there's less of a draft. The next mornin' I opened the bar and found the table back where it was. Right up against the window. So I hauled up my sleeves and moved it back to the fire. Next day it were up against the window again. Eventually I gave up haulin' that lump of lumber across the room and just let it sit. Specially after I realized who was moving it. I don't care if no one else want's to sit there. Dyson does and ya respect your regulars."

The Traveler grunted and looked at the empty table by the window. It looked cleaner than other tables, less stained. A fresh unused candle lay in the middle. The window above was white with wet sticky snow. "Still don't quite get your point."

"My point is everyone has their story. And not everyone will think you insane for yours."

The Traveler allowed himself a half-smile. "But my story is less... quaint than yours. And a lot more dangerous. You see I was a farmer to the north. Simple man in a simple village. Hadn't set foot out of there in my life. Even married the girl next door."

"Sounds nice."

"It was. And she was so beautiful. Dark brown hair that was almost black and these soft hands. She had the most perfect fingers. I still remember our wedding." The Traveler

smiled at the memory. It changed his whole face as the time on the road melted away as if it never existed. He was younger than he looked, and far less severe. "One day she was attacked on her way home from the mill. Nothing serious, she tore her dress and bumped her head pretty bad. They found the guy who did it a little while later. Dead. Looked like he had smashed his head open against some rocks. Not much left."

The Bartender moved closer, the wooden stool squeaking against the floor. "Then what happened?"

"Nothing. My wife complained about some headaches for a while but they quickly vanished. She got healthy and her appetite returned. She was eating so much we figured she was with child. We were so happy at the idea of having kids. She wanted to be a mother so badly. Had names picked out and everything. I'm sure she'd been planning that since she was a child herself. But then she started acting strange. Forgetting things, making mistakes. She was an excellent cook and yet she began to regularly burn dinner. And she was so pale and weak all the time. Always complaining about being tired. I thought that was the worst of it, but I was wrong."

The Traveler held up his glass for a refill. The Bartender splashed it full spilling drops on the counter, curious about what the Traveler would say next.

"Then the strangeness really began. She got better but began saying strange things. Talking in languages she didn't know, about places she'd never been. Nothing too obvious, just little slips of the tongue. A reference here or a comment there. It was if she had forgotten who she was and was just pretending."

"So she'd forgotten everything?"

"No, it was more than that. She remembered things. She knew who and where she was and knew who I was. But she didn't act the same. It was the small things. The way she combed her hair or how she walked. She stopped laughing at my jokes. She hardly smiled at all."

"Are you just going to leave me in suspense or ya gonna say what happened to her?"

"Didn't know myself for the longest time." The Traveler said pulling out a small scroll from a pouch. "I visited doctor after doctor. Traveled for miles in every direction looking for anyone who knew anything. I was gone for a few days and when I returned she was dead."

"How?"

The Traveler looked at the stranger's reflection in his untouched drink and held tight to the small scroll in his other hand. The parchment crackled softly in his hand. "Something burst out from her head. Tore her skull apart like old wood. I came back and found her lying cold and limp on there. It just left her in the middle of the room to rot."

"Something was living in her head?" The Bartender repeated. The Traveler nodded slowly.

"Found some paw prints outside the house. Spent most of my time roaming woods hunting deer so I know prints. These were like nothing I'd seen before. Four legs. Small, with three toes with large talons." The Traveler unrolled the scroll onto the bar. Pictured on it was a hideous creature that defied logic. It was a hideous wrinkly grey mass atop four clawed legs.

"It looks like a... a..." The Bartender paused to rethink the description.



"I know." The Traveler forced a reassuring smile. It was an interesting mix of humorous and disturbing. A brain with legs. If you hadn't seen it, you'd laugh he thought. "Got this a few months after my wife died. I was traveling around looking for anyone who could tell me what had happened. This passing bard gave this to me. Claimed to have won it from a warlock or something. He called it an Intellect Devourer."

"Unbelievable."

"That's what I thought. Didn't believe him at first. It was creepy the way he never stopped smiling, like he was laughing at a private joke. Anyway, his information paid off though. I found one that looked just like this. It was unbelievable, I had trouble believing my own eyes."

"What was it like... in the flesh?"

"Smaller than it looks on paper. Less than a foot long. But quick, near impossible to hit. Its body is hard, like it has a shell. I hit it with a half dozen arrows and none stuck. Bounced right off. Struck it with a lamp full of burning oil and it never even slowed down."

"Impressive."

The Traveler nodded finishing off his drink. The Bartender poured another, his own remaining untouched in front of him. The Traveler shrugged. "It would have been even more impressive if I'd have killed it. But nothing. Luckily it ran away from the flame or it may have killed me. Found a couple more over the months with similar results. Heck, could have even been the same one, they all look rather alike."

"So what did you do?"

"The only thing I could. Find out what it is, how it works. If I know what it wants I know where it will be. Then I can avenge my wife."

"What have you learned?"

"Nothing that makes any sense." The Traveler said resting his head in his hands. A strand of dirty hair fell down in front of his face. "Talked to all manner of people who must be as crazy as I am. They talk of things that walk like men but have tentacles where their mouths should be. Like they have squids for heads. Apparently these things raise Devourers, treat them like pets. Use them as spies."

"Spies? You'd think you'd notice one of these bugger runnin' around peeping in windows and the like."

The Traveler shook his head. "No, they have a better way. See, these things attack you, and when you're stunned they cut you and crawl inside your head. They eat your brain and walk around wearing your body like a suit!"

"Like they did with your wife?"

"No. No, what they did to her was different. I thought that's what it did for a while, but... I know different now."

"So what do you know now?"

"I'm getting there. See, when they get inside your head they absorb what you know. Digest your memories. But the host bodies don't last long, maybe a week. That thing was in my wife for a month. That's what confused me. Went against what all the other evidence pointed to. Because they're inhuman, so even if they know everything their host knows they'll still act different. They're colder and have no real emotions. And they're not driven by the same urges as we are. The hosts don't eat much and sleep even less. And they're stiff and clumsy. Just like my wife was. It made so much sense."

“So that’s how you identify one? They’re clumsy?”

“Sometimes. They also don’t like light. I noticed that with my wife. The rooms were always dark and the lanterns turned down low. She would jerk abruptly whenever I turned up the flame. Most of the times they just act strange, eerie. Like they’re one second behind the entire world.”

“So where do these things come from?” The Bartender asked passing over a small plate of leftovers. The Traveler picked slowly at the small slices of baked potatoes.

“South of Barovia. Used to be another land down there before the Great Upheaval. Wasteland of rock and hills called Bluetspur.”

“I’ve heard of it. The Thaani came from there. Long ago.”

“So did the Devourers, sent out by their masters to see what else was around. Probably left with the Thaani. Went where they went, unseen and unknown. Then the Mists rose up and engulfed Bluetspur. Now I guess they’re on their own doing whatever they please.”

The Bartender refilled the Traveler’s glass. “You still haven’t told me what happened to yer wife.”

The Traveler sipped on his drink. His hands quivered slightly and the stranger in the glass blurred as the drink waved and shook. “This is mostly my own guess, from bits and pieces I’ve picked up. I haven’t learned anything about their biology, how they breed or what they eat. Nothing. No one knows. I reckon that whatever or however they breed normally, doesn’t work outside of their mountain pits.”

“So they’re dying out then, you’re in luck then.”

The Traveler shook his head. “I don’t think so. Instead I think they’re using people as hosts, injecting bits of themselves inside people’s brains to grow. Copying themselves whenever they get too old or injured or sick. They just lie dormant inside some innocent victim, like my wife, while their old body goes out of control. It becomes just a mindless rampaging shell.”

They stood silent for a moment. Behind them the storm howled fiercer for a second. The outer door shook abruptly for a second. Neither turned. The Bartender looked up and dipped his finger in his untouched drink. Pulling it out he sucked slowly on the tip. “So now you hunt these things. To revenge yourself for your wife.”

“I’m closing in every day. See, I think they travel in groups, pods I’ve heard them called. So they leave a lot of distinct bodies around whenever they’re masquerading as people, gathering information or what have you. I’ll catch up one day and avenge her death.”

“Well I wish you luck on that.” The Bartender said tapping his glass against the Traveler’s. “I think you’ll need it.”

The Traveler nodded and picked up his own glass. “As long as I keep my guard up and am ready for anything.”

The Bartender nodded and refilled his guest’s glass. “Not doing a very good job of that. How many of these have you had? Eight? Nine? That can’t be good for your guard.” He looked up and slowly. Their eyes met.

The Traveler rose and tried to back up. He stumbled over his chair and collapsed onto the floor. He struggled to rise but the room seemed to spin around him bobbing and weaving. The Bartender rose and climbed slowly over the bar.

“How did... what...” the Traveler muttered attempting to free his sword from its scabbard.

“I remembered your fondness for warm drink on stormy days, oh ‘husband’. And I was curious about how much you have learned of us.” The ‘Bartender’ hauled the Traveler’s sword from its sheath and swung the blade a few times. “Nice balance. Good craftsmanship. Would not have been much use against me and mine.” The ‘Bartender’ placed a foot firmly on the Traveler’s chest and held the smaller man onto the ground. “Now,” He said calmly as the expression vanishing from his face, save for a cruel grin. “Let us find out what else you know.”

# Dread Devourers

## Intellect Devourers in the Land of Mists

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### Hosts

To perform their mission as spies for the illithids, devourers invade the bodies of humanoid hosts. When a Devourer takes over a host's body, it literally crawls inside the skull of the chosen victim eating the brain as it goes. The lower back of the Devourer sends out thin tendrils that intertwine with the host creature's spinal column allowing it to animate it.

Devourers have imperfect control over newly stolen bodies, for they can only use the body to the limits of its own compromised abilities. As well, the amount of damage the body can take is drastically reduced; the body can only take so much punishment before it is unusable and uncontrollable. All statistics physical statistics are replaced by the Devourer's or remain unchanged which ever is lower. Mental statistics are all replaced by the Devourer's. The Host has six hitpoints plus one for ever character level the host possessed. When the hitpoints have been expended the body is not destroyed, it is simply no longer usable. The amour class of the Host is unchanged, but the base attack bonus the devourer uses while using the body is a maximum of +4. Devourers usually avoid combat when possible given this frailty of their Hosts. The speed of the Host is unchanged, though the devourer requires time to adapt to the new surroundings. For the first twelve hours in a new host the Devourer suffers a -2 penalty to initiative.

As it consumes the brain of an intended receptacle, the Devourer absorbs all of its knowledge and memories. All secrets and thoughts are now possessed by the aberration. However, despite absorbing the memories of the Host the Devourer has trouble applying this knowledge. The Devourer cannot attempt to use any Feats, Skills or Class Abilities the host knew in life.

Host bodies fall apart rapidly suffering a combination of decay and fatigue. As Devourers do not need to eat in the same manner they seldom remember to feed their Host's bodies. A body will last for 1d4+4 days plus any Constitution modifiers the Host may have previously had.

Devourers tend to possess the bodies of victims who are still alive or are dying, and only enter the heads of the dead as a last option. Corpses that have been dead for longer than a week cannot be used as Hosts unless they have been specially preserved. Bodies of the dead used as Hosts suffer a -2 penalty to Dexterity and Initiative and move 10ft slower than their base speed.

The bodies of former Hosts can be resurrected if a *Regenerate* spell is quickly cast on the remains within a minute of the Devourer's exit, providing the body was not already dead. However the former Host is never quite what they were and permanently loses a point of Intelligence. After such spiritual trauma, madness is also often a result.

## Spawning

*Devourers normally produce offspring, known as ustilagor, as their method of reproduction. However, this is rarely done in Ravenloft for reasons unknown. Instead, some Devourers have developed the ability known as 'spawning'. It does not replenish their numbers but prevents what few that do exist from succumbing to poisons or illness.*

A Host is found, much like when Devourers perform their *Body Thief* ability, however instead of crawling inside the victim's skull they implant a small piece of themselves. This 'seed' remains dormant for a period of time and nourishes itself by drawing strength from the Host. In response the Host's appetite increases and then it usually becomes weak and lethargic. This is the dormancy period and lasts 1d4+1 weeks.

Meanwhile the original body of the Devourer decays rapidly and loses all rational thought as that part of it has been removed. If it is in possession of a Host both quickly become violent irrational beings seeking only the destruction of themselves and others. If they do not kill themselves within a few hours they collapse into a vegetative state as their brain and former Devourer begins to liquefy.

The new host of the Devourer's consciousness slowly wastes away until the malevolent intelligence hiding inside awakes. It slowly begins to take control of the Host's mind, spreading its influence slowly outward. The Host loses one point of Intelligence every day while the parasite inside gains one. After the Devourer larva possesses the majority of the brain it can effectively control the body. The drain continues until the Devourer has consumed all of

its host's intelligence. It will continue to gain Intelligence until it reaches its maximum, although once it has uncontested control it is considered fully-grown and can leave the body at anytime.

While it is gestating the Devourer is vulnerable to some forms of magic, such as the *Remove Disease* spell. After it has completed its slow take-over of the brain it is no longer subject to such spells. Instead it must be actually removed, either through surgery or magic.

## Salient Powers

Intellect Devourers have been known to exhibit other abilities over time. Scholars are unsure if they are born with the potential for these abilities or learn them during their life span. It is theorized that the roles or tasks they are assigned play some part in their development of salient powers, as if the Devourer's self-image influences what they are and can do.

### Detect Thoughts (Su)

CR Adjustment: +1

This ability allows the Devourer to sense if intelligent or thinking creatures are close to it. This allows it to distinguish animals from higher beings as well as prevents it from being surprised. The power functions in a sphere all around the Devourer with a radius of 40ft. Once a creature is within range the Devourer is instantly aware of its presence and location and can act accordingly. Thinking creatures who are aware of this ability can attempt to hide their thoughts and are allowed a Will Saving Throw (DC 19) to avoid detection.

### Empower Host (Su)

CR Adjustment: +2

*The Devourer has the ability to strengthen its Hosts increasing their strength and abilities at the price of the host's life span. The Host gains a +4 bonus to Strength and Constitution and 3d12 extra hitpoints. However the Host body cannot last as long with the extra strain on its frame. It only lasts for 1d4 days before the body burns itself out.*

*The Devourer can also choose to dramatically increase the strength of the Host for a limited time. This doubled the bonus, increasing it to +8, but the body burns out within minutes, collapsing after only 2d4 rounds. This is obviously a last ditch maneuver.*

#### **Longevity (Su)**

CR Adjustment: +1/2

*The Host body possessed by the Devourer can be maintained for extended periods of time. With this ability the Host body lasts for 2d4+6 days before it is no longer usable. However, the body tends to quickly adopt and unhealthy waxen or jaundice appearance, often appearing more and more cadaver-like as time passes.*

#### **Mimicry (Ex)**

CR Adjustment: +1

The Devourer is far better at impersonation and acting like the Host or other creatures of the Host's type. The Devourer is even adept at feigning emotions and other responses. It receives a +8 bonus to all *Bluff*, *Performance*, and *Disguise* checks.

#### **Paralyzing Slime (Ex)**

CR Adjustment: +2

The crusty outer covering of the Devourer is coated with a thick sticky slime that causes paralysis to those who touch it. Devourers with this ability

often coat their claws with the substance to render victims stunned and easier to use as Hosts. Upon contact with the slime the victim must make a Fortitude save at a DC of 17 or be immediately paralyzed for 2d4+2 rounds.

#### **Spawning (Su)**

CR Adjustment: +1

The Devourer gains the ability to gestate spawn of itself inside the brains of sentient creatures. The spawn possesses all memories and abilities of the original but are younger and free of any injury or illness that may have struck the sire. Injecting the spawn inflicts 1d6 damage upon the recipient. See above for more details.

#### **Thought Tracking (Su)**

CR Adjustment: +1

This ability allows Devourers to follow the psychic residue left by an individual, a mental spoor that the creature can sense and home in on. Tracking using this power is unhindered by conditions such as dry or wet ground, the environment has no bearing on the psychic imprint left behind. This ability acts as the *Track* feat and also grants a +6 bonus to the relevant skill.

## **Pods**

Devourers are sometimes found in groups, known as pods. Pods number as many as seven Devourers but most commonly three or four. These pods are sometimes the result of Devourers choosing companionship, but more often than not they are formed by the will of an Illithid master. Pods are guards of objects of value and importance to the Illithids. Pods are not sent outside the Underdark lightly, for they know too much about Mind Flayer society to be lost.



All pods have a similar structure; the strongest and oldest Devourer is the Alpha, the leader of the pod. Its job is to interpret the orders of its Mind Flayer master and apply them to the situation at hand. Initiative and original thought is not prized among Alphas; it is not their place to ask questions. Alphas are primarily concerned with the day-to-day plans of the pod and its security as well as being aware of any possible threats.

Pods also often have a Devourer who has been given a spiritual role; these aberrations often adopt the title of religious figures they encounter. Their task is to keep the pod focused and unwavering. While an Alpha's role is to ensure the survival and safety of the pod during the duration of the mission it is the religious Devourer that reminds the pod of their larger role in Illithid society. This role model reinforces the established hierarchy and watches out for dangerous or objectionable activity such as questioning orders or possible betrayal. Missions come and go, but their position never changes.

Other members of the pod have less detailed roles, often given positions such as Tracker, Spy or Hunter. These positions are fairly self-explanatory and are usually assigned to younger or less experienced Devourers.

## The Lost Ones: A Sample Pod

After their arrival in Ravenloft the Illithids of Bluetspur sent out several small Pods to explore the surrounding lands and report back anything they discovered. Of interest were the inhabitants and potential slaves to be found as well as any threats that might emerge. Pods entered into Kartakass, Barovia, Hazlan, The Nightmare Lands

and two into the Mists that formed the lower border of Bluetspur.

Over the years the pods reported back and more were sent out to explore the farther reaches of the land. Then came the Grant Conjunction where the land was rent apart and Bluetspur was wrenched from the Core to become an Island of Terror. Any pods still outside the borders of the land were isolated without means to report back or find their way home. The Lost Ones is one such pod.

Their mission was to explore the lands to the West of the Core, such as Arkandale, Invidia and Verbrek. After their home vanished they set out to explore the rest of the Core to see if it had simply been moved as Valachan had. So far they have had little success and have confirmed that their home is now isolated in the Mists. They do not wish to simply step idly into the Misty Border and trust to luck and are seeking another way to return to their masters with what they have learned.

**The Alpha - Intellect Devourer:**  
CR 10; Medium aberration; HD 8d8+12; hp 47; Init +4; Spd 40ft; AC 16 (touch 14, flat-footed 10); Atk +6 melee (4 claws 1d3+2); SA none; SQ Damage Reduction 20/magic, electrical resistance 20, fire immunity, psionics, body-thief, *protection from evil* vulnerability, empower host, spawning; AL LE; SV Fort +5, Ref +6, Will +6; Str 15, Dex 19, Con 15, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 10.

*Skills and Feats:* Climb +8, Diplomacy +2, Jump +8, Knowledge (Planes) +3, Listen +8, Perform (act) +7, Spot +9; Alertness, Skill Focus (Perform).

*Appearance:* The Alpha is an older Devourer that has been involved in numerous battles. Several scars decorate

the hard crust that cover's its body. One particularly long scar, inflicted by a large battle-axe, runs along the entire back. A clawed toe on the left forepaw was severed in battle and is now a stump. Despite having two claws remaining the Alpha favor's its right paw while running. These markings persist despite repeated spawnings, they are simply part of the Alpha.

*Background:* The Alpha was once with the original pods that left Bluetspur to investigate Kartakass to the West. It was given the role of 'Hunter' and was responsible for killing those dangerous individuals encountered by the pod. After returning it was given the role as Alpha in the next pod sent West, not as a promotion or reward but because it was simply the most knowledgeable Devourer that was also expendable.

Soon after the disappearance of Bluetspur two members of the pod, those given the roles of Guard and Tracker, were slain by a band of adventurers. Since then the Alpha has been preoccupied with the safety of the remaining pod.

*Personality:* The Alpha is determined and relentless in its goal to return to its masters. However, it is beginning to suffer doubts of whether or not this is possible. It has been eighteen years since the Grand Conjunction and they are still no closer to their goal. This uncertainty and fear over losing any more members of the pod has left the Alpha with waning confidence and growing paranoia. It knows that directly questioning the last orders of their masters or suggesting their abandonment will be treason in the mind of the Deacon. Nonetheless, the Alpha believes that the two objectives, to learn what they can and report back and to protect

the members of the pod, are contradictory objectives.

**The Scout - Intellect Devourer:**  
CR 8; Small aberration; HD 6d8+12; hp 38; Init +4; Spd 40ft; AC 17 (touch 15, flat-footed 11); Atk +6 melee (4 claws 1d3+1); SA none; SQ Damage Reduction 20/magic, electrical resistance 20, fire immunity, psionics, body-thief, *protection from evil* vulnerability, mimicry, spawning; AL LE; SV Fort +4, Ref +6, Will +6; Str 13, Dex 19, Con 15, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 12.

*Skills and Feats:* Bluff +9, Climb +7, Disguise +10, Diplomacy +4, Jump +8, Listen +7, Perform (act) +18, Spot +9; Alertness, Skill Focus (Perform).

*Appearance:* The Scout is a young Devourer and its hard crusty shell is still smooth and unblemished to the touch. Small patches of a curious grey moss still cling tenaciously to the underside of its frame, residue from its previous state. It is small for a Devourer, even a young one, noticeably smaller than the Alpha and the Deacon. As a result of this the Scout is very sensitive about its size.

*Background:* *The Scout had just matured from its larval state when it was assigned to the pod. Proud of its accomplishment it worked hard to gather information and do recognizance for the pod. However the Scout's inexperience resulted in its targeting the wrong victim as a host which drew the unwelcome attention of a band of adventurers. This confrontation resulted in the deaths of two of the pod.*

*Personality:* Sensitive of its size the Scout has a tendency to pick out large individuals as hosts, usually above normal height. It would rather have no host at all than chose one of small stature, such as a halfling. After the encounter with the adventuring party, the

scout has become even more selective in its choice of hosts. It has even begun stalking and shadowing victims for a few days before attacking them. This has led to minor complications.

As the Scout knows so much of the habits of its victims absorbing their memories has begun to affect the Scout. Occasionally, after assuming the body of a Host, it has trouble distinguishing between its own memories and that of this host, sometimes even forgetting who and what it is! This quickly fades after a few hours but the effects seem to be growing more frequent and lasting longer. So far the Scout has managed to keep this from the rest of the pod.

**The Deacon - Intellect Devourer:**

CR 7; Medium aberration; HD 7d8+12; hp 41; Init +4; Spd 40ft; AC 15 (touch 13, flat-footed 9); Atk +6 melee (4 claws 1d3+2); SA none; SQ Damage Reduction 20/magic, electrical resistance 20, fire immunity, psionics, body-thief, *protection from evil* vulnerability; AL LE; SV Fort +5, Ref +6, Will +7; Str 13, Dex 18, Con 15, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 10.

*Skills and Feats:* Climb +10, Jump +9, Listen +8, Perform (act) +8, Spot +9; Alertness, Skill Focus (Perform).

*Appearance:* An old Devourer, the Deacon shell is thin and even brittle in a few places. The colouration of its body has lightened over the years and its wrinkled body has grown soft and saggy. The Deacon's claws have dull just slightly and it has been known to be forgetful on occasion.

*Background:* The oldest of the Pod the Deacon was a personal guard for an Illithid for many years before being

assigned to the pod. The Deacon spent much time investigating the cultures of the human prey, fascinated by their religions and holy sects. It spent days comparing the two different spiritualities and conversing with men of the cloth while in host bodies.

*While indulging in its exploration of the sacred the pod was assaulted by adventurers and two of its number destroyed. The Deacon blames itself for being away from 'its flock' when this occurred and suffered a prolonged period of guilt for failing to guard its pod-members. It viewed this as a breach of Devourer behavior and a large failing on its part. The Deacon is the only one of the pod remaining that cannot produce a Spawn, this is something it is very sensitive about and wishes to change.*

*Personality:* The Deacon recovered from its guilt through adopting the human ideas of sin and divine punishment. The Deacon has begun to see the deaths of its companions as a result of their unworthiness and diversion from the path of true Devourers. If they had been faithful and devout they would have been stronger and able to fight of the heroes.

Since then the Deacon has become unwavering in its beliefs in duty, responsibility and fulfilling one's mission and views any breach of this as sin in the highest order. The Deacon has started targeting hosts that it feels are sinful and worthy of death and punishment, those who fail in their duty or leave tasks incomplete.

# Growls in the Night

## Alhoons

By Andrew "alhoon" Pavlides  
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Every community has its black sheep, even the rigid community of Bluetspur. Occasionally, the illithid race spawns a mind flayer that seeks what is forbidden by tradition and custom; arcane magic. Shunned by their kin they are banished from the community, ostracized from the over mind and forever denied the right to join with the hive mind in death. Rather than resolve themselves to oblivion, these rogue mind flayer wizards seek to gain immortality through the use of their magic. Those who succeed become unholy abominations of the most bizarre variety; alhoons, undead mind flayers.

Alhoons, or illithiliches as they are sometimes known, appear much as they did in life; vile amphibians with qualities of both humanoids and squids. Unlike their living kin, the skin of an alhoon is dry like parchment. Although alhoons prefer to use their spells and magic, they are still as powerful in psionics as their living kin. This combination of magic and mental might makes them extremely dangerous. Their immunity to psionics, their forbidden arcane practices and their undead nature make them feared and hated by living illithids. Mind flayers organize hunting parties to destroy an alhoon as soon as they learn its existence, while alhoons gladly accept the challenge to destroy as many of its kin as they can before fleeing to another secret place.

## Creating an Alhoon

Alhoon is a template that can be added only to mind flayers that use arcane magic. To perform the necessary rituals, a mind flayer must have at least 9 spell casting levels. The creature type of the illithid change to undead upon gaining the alhoon template.

**HD:** change to d12

**AC:** An alhoon's natural armor improves to +5.

**Damage:** An alhoon's tentacles deal 1d4 + strength modifier physical damage with each successful strike. The alhoon no longer possesses the enzyme the living mind flayers have and relies on brute force to crack a victim's skull open to feast on the victim's brain.

**Special attacks:** An alhoon retains all of the special attacks of a living mind flayer and also gains the following:

**Fear Aura (su):** Alhoons are cloaked in an aura of fear. Creatures of less than 5 HD within 60 feet of an alhoon must succeed at a will save (DC = 10 + 1/2 Alhoon's HD + cha modifier) or be affected as though by a fear spell.

**Special qualities:** An alhoon possesses all of the special qualities of a living mind flayer and gains the following:

**Turn Resistance (Ex):** An alhoon has +4 turn resistance.

**Damage reduction (Ex):** An alhoon has damage reduction 15/ magic & bludgeoning

**Immunities (su):** Alhoons are immune to cold, electricity, polymorph

and mind affecting attacks.

**Mnemonic Metabolism (Ex):** While eating the brain of a living creature the alhoon receives glimpses of the victim's memories. It is for this reason that alhoons continue to crave the brains of the living. Through this grisly feeding, the alhoon may receive specific information the victim knew in life, information such as the location of a special place, people the victim knew, or even secret knowledge. Upon devouring a brain, the alhoon must succeed at an intelligence check of DC 21 to extract information. If the alhoon looks for a specific piece of information the DC rises to 24. An alhoon wizard could use this ability to learn spells from wizards or even sorcerers, though to use these spells the alhoon must copy the spells into its spell book and prepare them as usual.

**Abilities:** An alhoon gains a +2 to intelligence, wisdom and charisma scores but as an undead creature, it has no constitution score.

**Skills:** Alhoons have a +8 racial bonus on Hide, Listen, Move Silently, Search, Sense Motive, and Spot checks.

**Organization:** Solitary or troupe (1 alhoon plus 3 - 12 skeletons with increased HD).

**Challenge Rating:** Same as the base creature + 2.

**Treasure:** Standard coins; double goods; double items.

**Alignment:** Any evil.

**Advancement:** By character class.

**Level Adjustment:** +6.

### Combat

The alhoon has extremely high spell resistance and power resistance. As undead, the alhoon is immune to most of the psionic attacks of its living kin. However, mind flayers also have

very high spell and power resistance and thus resistant to the attacks of alhoons. While both sides are vulnerable to tentacle attacks, alhoons and mind flayers avoid bludgeoning each other with tentacle rakes. Instead, both sides prefer to use thralls and summoned monsters to destroy one another.

The alhoon is an extremely effective opponent against humanoid opponents. Its extreme intelligence and powerful spells are always used to their fullest advantage. An alhoon's lair is always filled with clever traps and hidden places wherefrom the alhoon could strike while hidden.

## Alhoon

	Medium Undead (9th level wizard)
<b>Hit Dice:</b>	17d12 (110 hp)
<b>Initiative:</b>	+6
<b>Speed:</b>	30 ft. (6 squares)
<b>Armour Class:</b>	19 (+2 Dex, +5 natural, +3 deflection), touch 15, flat-footed 15
<b>Base Attack:</b>	+11/+11
<b>Attack:</b>	tentacle +12 melee (1d4+1)
<b>Full Attack:</b>	4 tentacles +12 (1d4+1)
<b>Space/Reach:</b>	5 ft./5 ft.
<b>Special Attacks:</b>	spells, extract, improved grab, psionics, fear aura
<b>Special Qualities:</b>	Undead traits, turn resistance +4, damage reduction 15/magic & bludgeoning, immunities, spell resistance 35, Mnemonic metabolism
<b>Saves:</b>	Fort +8, Ref +10, Will +21
<b>Abilities:</b>	Str 12, Dex 14, Con -, Int 26, Wis 22, Cha 22
<b>Skills:</b>	bluff +14,

	concentration +24, craft (alchemy) +16 diplomacy +11, hide +14, intimidation +12, listen +18, move silently +14, sense motive +18, search +16, speak language (3 extra languages), spot +18, spell craft +18, Scry +16, Knowledge (any nine) +14
<b>Feats:</b>	Combat Casting, weapon finesse, improved initiative, scribe scroll, empower spell, craft wondrous item, craft wand, spell penetration
<b>Environment:</b>	Any, usually underground
<b>Organization:</b>	Solitary
<b>Challenge Rating:</b>	16
<b>Treasure:</b>	Standard coins; double goods; double items
<b>Alignment:</b>	Always lawful evil
<b>Advancement:</b>	by character class
<b>Outcast</b>	+6

**Equipment:** Wand of Evard's black tentacles (9th lvl caster), cloak +3 saves, necklace of deflection +3, wand of fireballs (9th lvl caster), Wand of wall of ice (9th lvl caster).

Scrolls (9th lvl caster): mage armor, summon monster V x2 (mist elemental), dimension door x2, stone skin, teleport, fog cloud x2, web, see invisibility x2, Greater invisibility x2, dispel magic x2, lighting bolt, vampiric touch, fly, baleful polymorph, cloudkill, lesser planar binding.

**Prepared spells:** save DC = 18 + spell level.

1st: mage armor, magic missile, unseen servant, identify, ray of enfeeblement, change self

2nd: minor image, web, summon swarm, melf's acid arrow, shatter, darkness (or daylight if underground)

3rd: dispel magic, major image x2, fly, haste

4th: confusion, greater invisibility, enervation, scrying

5th: cloudkill, summon monster V



# Misted Mounts

## Paladins' Steeds in the Dread Realms

David "The Jester" Gibson

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*The cold mists parted revealing thick marshy trees covered in a thick moss. My home was gone and I was trapped in this strange new place. I knew not what had brought me here, far beyond the great city of wonders that had my home. I suspected evil wizards and dark enchantments at first, but these proved to be false.*

*The first sign that I had left my home was my steed, Rothwell. He was the gift of my god, the only companion I ever kept. Whenever I was in a time of need I would call him forth and out he would ride from the distance, the glowing light of the sun raining down upon him. When our struggles ceased, he retired to the blessed realms of my Lord, crossing the planar boundaries at my call. Yet in this land of mists, as with many things, this happened differently.*

*I have been told that no mortal magic can pierce the veil that surrounds this place. I thought it impossible at first that my god could not bend these rules but grim experience has shown that he is either unwilling or unable to intervene within these lands.*

*I noticed no difference at first, Rothwell was the same as always, but with fear I soon realized that he had changed. When he left my side, the horse became insubstantial, dissipating into the fog. Even still, he never truly left my side. He continued to follow and watch over me from his ghostly state and on quiet nights it was possible to hear my mount neigh or even make out the*

*faint pounding of its hoofs. I felt as if I were being stalked or followed by an unseen creature, watched at all times by invisible eyes.*

*I soon realized that Rothwell needed not my call to come to my aid. Without my summons he could not become fully solid, but instead he could become a like a phantom, solid for a few scant moments when he felt it necessary. After a bartender threw me out into the night because I had no coins from places he recognized, he was found trampled to death the next morning. At first I thought little of this, merely a coincidence. Then later I saw a pickpocket I had been chasing, one who had relieved me of a small bauble, abruptly crushed by a speeding beast I instantly recognized. How could so noble and just a beast as Rothwell turn a servant of darkness?*

*-Fragment from the memoirs of Dælan, Paladin of Tyr*

## Mounts of the Mist

In other lands, when not in use, a paladin's mount returns to the Outer Planes to heal and rejuvenate. However, in *Ravenloft*, nothing can leave without the permission of the Dark Powers. Powerful fiends, demons and even demigods have been bound to the land, so how could a simple steed escape? A mount rides away into the fog and dissipates, becoming one with the Mists. Similarly, mounts called into service while in the Dread Realms form from the substance of the Mists. In this

regard, these mounts are like conjured creatures. Both newly summoned and outlander mounts take on the Mist descriptor like all summoned creatures.

A newly summoned steed becomes a *Dread Companion*, in the same manner as a familiar. However, unlike familiars, even mounts brought from outside Ravenloft can become *Dread Companions*. These creatures spend much of their time in the Mists when not in use and quickly become tied to the land. It is possible the Dark Powers strive hardest to tempt paladins or work to isolate them by manipulating their mounts.

Although they cannot become fully corporeal without their master's call, dread Companion mounts have the ability to summon themselves. At these times the steed is often mistaken for a ghost or other creature of the night. A steed can self-manifest for two minutes for each level of its master, one minute for every hour it can be called. This time is not taken from the paladin's daily allotment. Most mounts only stay for as little time as they feel they are needed. When not in need they observe their master unseen and undetectable as misty phantoms separated from the world.

Like all dread companions, the mount is protective of its master to a fault. A steed will often strike out at those it views as having harmed, cheated or wronged its master. Unlike other dread companions, a paladin's mount is neither sneaky nor thievish. It is an honorable beast that refuses to strike by surprise or from the rear. It obeys all promises its master has made to the letter, even long after the master is gone.

## Life and Deaths

*Things have not yet improved. The streak of bad luck that has followed us since we lost our paladin, Erick, has not abated. I still remember his body after we dug him from the landslide, the shattered frame crushed beneath the bulk of his steed and the heavy rocks. Shandor thinks this is simply a series of coincidences, things have just happened and are unrelated, but I am not so sure. It is almost as if we are cursed.*

*First, when we were sneaking up to dispatch the self-styled Lord Dragoon, the table overturned just as we were about to strike. I can still feel Dragoon's claws rake across my arm; the scars have only just started fading. Then there was that botched attempt to infiltrate the bank's records vault. I'm still not sure how the alarm was tripped.*

*The final incident was the night at the inn. We met with an informant who promised us information on the Lord and his secret vulnerability. Despite his cocky smirk I suspect our informant was a little nervous talking with us. Odd, in retrospect perhaps he knew something about what was plaguing us; perhaps that was why he left so abruptly. He escaped before the fire started. The inn-keeper swore he was always careful with that lantern and had no idea how it ended up in the stable. My lungs still ache from the smoke. I no longer feel safe; my nights are a mess of tossing and turning. My suggestions to seek out the aid of the Vistani go unheeded, at least for now. Once something else of note happens, the others may quickly change their tune.*

*Again I hear the sound of hoofs in the distance. It has been a sound I have heard often lately. Could some malevolent rider be shadowing us? I am unsure if I should mention this to the others; they tire of my theories and are*

*busy. With the little information we received from the bard, they think we now know Lord's hidden weakness. Still, my hopes are low. Again I hear hoofs! But there is no one in sight...*

-Passage from the musings of Keryn of Moondale

A paladin's mount finds itself gaining several advantages when it becomes a mist-bound Dread Companion. First, the animal no longer needs to eat. It can consume food if asked but it draws most of its sustenance from the mists. Secondly, the mists heal any wounds suffered on the mount. It no longer heals naturally and must rejoin the mists to repair any injuries inflicted. There is no set rate of recovery but even the most severe of punishment can be healed in a matter of hours.

However, the union with the Mists has a strong disadvantage to the mount; the creature is forever bound to the Mists. Even should a paladin manage to escape Ravenloft, her mount will not be able to follow. Much as a fiend binds itself to a land gaining *Corruption Points*, a mount has become inseparably tied to the Land. Likewise, if a paladin dies, as all paladins eventually do, the animal cannot join its master in the afterlife. The creature is forced to lurk in the Mists, forever trapped between worlds. Most mounts cannot survive being trapped alone and eventually fade away, while others go insane from the loneliness. These maddened creatures can still manifest themselves and occasionally decide to take vengeance on those they view as responsible for their master's death. Often the mount targets the companions of the paladin, those who were unable to save her life.

Similarly, a mount slain in the Land of the Mists occasionally finds

itself unable to leave the demiplane and find its eternal rest. Its soul, once bound to the demiplane, cannot depart. In other instances, the mount is simply unwilling to leave its master behind, unprotected. The creature returns as a spectral animal that haunts its master, either blaming her for its death or still attempting to protect her in a twisted fashion. Another common recipient of the dead steed's wrath is any replacement mount summoned, which the slain animal invariably views with seething jealousy as a usurper and unworthy replacement.

## Mounts of Ezra

*Fear not in the dark places that are home to the Legions of the Night for I am forever at thy side with my sword and my shield and my belladonna. Though they are many of number and though they are fierce of disposition, falter not. Thine is the path of righteousness my followers and thine is the path of glory.*

*Thy need not walk the path alone through the dark places. I aid thee through your invocation of my will and I aid you through the renewed strength of your arms. My light will guide and protect.*

*Divine warriors must never fear to walk alone for I bless them with this the greatest of gifts, companionship. Stalwart and unwavering, strong and stout; a steed I grant to thee, one beyond the measure of mortal beats of burden. One fit to carry the burden of loyalty.*

*This is my mount I give freely to thee. It will be thine legs when thee can no longer walk and thine back when thee can no longer carry. This gift I give to thee.*

-Excerpt from the Second Book of Ezra

According to legend, Ezra was unwilling to have her holy champions bound to animals of evil and misguided loyalty. This belief is derived primarily among paladins of the Mordentish Sect of the faith. Rather than summon creatures from the mists, these paladins instead use a divine version of the *Phantom Steed* spell. The animal called forth is known as the *Mount of Ezra*. The mount looks much like the creature commonly conjured by the spell, though it appears much more substantial. The mount of Ezra looks to be a grey-white horse, though the colour of the animal seems to shift and flow like the mists. The mane and tail of the mount always appear to be blowing in some faint wind and the sound of its hooves seems muted and hollow.

To gain the *Mount of Ezra*, paladins must forever surrender the ability to summon a mount. The paladin can instead cast the *Phantom Steed* spell as a Sorcerer of the same level. This ability is usable once per day for every three Paladin levels and is gained at the fifth level.

Furthermore, by sacrificing one opportunity to summon the mount per day a paladin can permanently bolster her steed with an additional +2 bonus Hit Dice and a +4 bonus to AC. This can be done multiple times, but the Paladin still has to be able to summon the steed once a day minimum. For example: Meninis has reached ninth level and can summon her mount three times. She decides to reduce this by one to twice a day giving the animal 2-16 extra hitpoints and an armor bonus of +4.

There are disadvantages to having a *Mount of Ezra*. Should a paladin in the service of Ezra manage to leave Ravenloft, she cannot summon her mount, nor can she summon a standard

paladin mount. Likewise if the paladin converts faiths, the mount cannot be summoned. *Mounts of Ezra* are also subject to spells such as *Dispel Magic* that disperses the creature until summoned again. The mount, while intelligent, is also not a true living creature and lacks any personality or individuality. A *Mount of Ezra* seldom acts on its own initiative typically waiting until it is asked to do something before acting.

### Blessed Steeds of Belenus

*I give you greetings my children as I come forth to you in the name of our Lord Belenus, to give praise for this past week and prayers for the week yet to come.*

*We give thanks today to Belenus for sending his avenging warrior to strike down the foul creature that did blight our lands. Yes, we all give thanks to Sir Malcolme, our brave soldier of the sun. The Dougal family gives a special praise to the brave Malcolme, who did rescue their youngest daughter from the evil that plagued us.*

*He is a noble soul, as was immediately apparent as he rode in to town proudly atop his blessed steed, a true champion of our lord, Belenus. The beast held its head high as it knew the righteous purpose it served in the smiting of the wicked and sinful, but its head was still lower than that of brave Sir Malcolme.*

*Thus we learn the price for sin and the vulnerability of our small village. We must be stout and unwavering in our devotion so the glory of Belenus will shine on us. Else we too may fall into the pit of temptation and risk our immortal souls, which will burn in the fires of the damned. Fear for your spirits for they*



*will be like ashes in the rivers of fire if you waver from the light of Belenus.*

*Look to the noble beasts, the dog that obediently sits at its master's feet. So too must we kneel before the glory of Belenus. Even the great Sir Malcolme humbles himself prostrate before the greatness out our Lord. Look to him and his animal, for like the dog is the horse in loyalty, ever loyal before their masters, both mortal and divine.*

-Transcript of the sermon of Alpin, priest of Belenus, October 12, 746

Another variant of the paladin's warhorse belongs to the faith of Belenus and their anointing of *Blessed Steeds*. Through a prolonged ritual a beast is chosen to be the favored mount of the animal and instrument of Belenus' will. This rite permanently brands a horse as a servant of the sun god, granting the animal special powers as well as additional gifts that can be invoked at will. This ability replaces the paladin's power to call a mount.

The paladin must first find a suitable horse, usually a superior member of the species. The animal has to be carefully selected and have an appropriate disposition and good health. Passion and righteous fury is viewed as essential to the protection of the flock, thus horses selected by paladins of Belenus tend to be brave and fearless warhorses, often with fiery dispositions. They are beasts of divine anger, with a tendency for rebellion and rashness poorly suited to stealth or subterfuge. They very seldom tolerate being handled or ridden individuals other than their master.

Having chosen an appropriate animal, the paladin must pray and fulfill the appropriate divine rituals over the beast for a full twenty-four hours, from

sunrise to sunrise. Additionally the ritual consumes holy oils, wafers, incense and other supplies valued at total of 200 gold pieces. The ceremony involves painting the horse with geometric symbols and detailed interweaving knots to symbolize the connection between animal and master. Once painted, the horse is placed in a circle of kindling which are set ablaze. If the animal panics or flees, it is declared unworthy and another horse must be found. In this event, the ritual's materials have already been consumed and must be repurchased. Once the ritual is completed, the mount now has a strong mystical potential that can be activated when the paladin wishes.

The blessing permanently alters the animal so it is smarter and more durable than the average horse, granting it an intelligence bonus of +3 and an additional 2 hit dice. Unlike the standard paladin's mount, the *Blessed Steed* is not always supernaturally strong, nor does it gain the same bonus to Armor Class. Instead the mount gains other special powers that can be unlocked once each day, as a full round action. This grants blessed creature extra strengths for a period of four minutes for each paladin level.

For every additional level of paladin the mount gains other special powers, these must be invoked to take effect (see above) and are selected from the list below:

\*Additional Evocation (Su): The Paladin can summon the full blessing of Belenus an additional time per day.

\*Armoured (Ex): The AC of the mount is increased by +1.

\*Courage (Ex): The animal gains a +4 bonus to save against Fear checks. This ability can only be chosen once.

\*Evasion (Ex): The creature gains the feat of the same name. This can only be selected once.

\*Fortunate (Ex): The mount gains a natural +1 bonus to all its saves.

\*Haste (Ex): The animal's speed increases by 10 feet. This ability can only be selected twice.

\*Rage (Ex): The mount gains a +2 bonus to damage it inflicts.

\*Righteous Fury (Ex): The mount becomes enraged gaining a +2 to Strength and Constitution and an additional +6 hitpoints but suffers a -4 penalty to armour class. This can only be chosen once.

\*Toughness (Ex): The mount's Hit Dice are increased by +1.

Unless otherwise stated, powers can be taken repeatedly.

Typically, the powers are invoked by placing both hands on the head of the animal and voicing a prayer to Belenus.

When the animal's blessing is evoked the painted knotwork and symbols painted upon it during the blessing ritual reappear as fading stains on the animal's hide.

If the *Blessed Steed* should die she must then wait a full month before another animal can be found and blessed. Rather than press lame animals into service, a paladin may remove the blessing placed upon her mount and seek a new companion. The paladin can remove her blessing of the animal at any time restoring it as a regular horse. Revoking the blessing takes five minutes, without interruption, for every month the animal has been blessed. Once revoked, the horse keeps its improved Intelligence, but is severely weakened as it loses the bonus Hit Dice. After this rite, the steed can never be re-blessed.



# Brutes and Banshees

## A Guide to the Caliban Race

Uri "Shadowking" Barak

**For Mercy has a human heart  
Pity, a human face:  
And Love, the human form divine,  
And Peace, the human dress.**

**Cruelty has a Human Heart  
And Jealousy a Human Face  
Terror, the Human Form Divine  
And Secrecy, the Human Dress**

**The Human Dress, is forged Iron  
The Human Form, a fiery Forge.  
The Human Face, a Furnace seal'd  
The Human Heart, its hungry Gorge.**

"Songs of Experience", William Blake

The manuscript of this conversation was found by adventurers in an abandoned warehouse in the city of Mayvin, Darkon. There is a high probability that the place once served the dread Kargatane as a hideout and base of operations, although it was abandoned some time ago for unknown reasons. The owners were apparently spying on an organization called the Fraternity by placing a sleeper agent in its ranks, monitoring its activities for an enigmatic being called "Rouge," which means "crimson" in High Mordentish.

This Fraternity was active for a time at the local university. Its members were respected teachers and promising students who used less-than-holy means to delve into secrets better left unknown for their own selfish goals, viewing themselves as scholars of both science

and the Arcane. The Fraternity's ultimate fate at the wake of the evidences remains unknown, even though we do have some suspicions that it is just the tip of a far larger conspiracy. It is a mere strand in a vast web of shadows and deceit...

### Esteemed Brothers of the Shadow

I have just completed my research concerning the demihuman creatures known as "calibans." Two excruciating years of hard work have finally come to fruition, bringing our sacred Fraternity a step closer to our goal, which you all know well. I have traveled the length and breadth of the Core, consorting with hideous aberrations of nature, putting my life at risk at the hands of inbred savages and delving into tomes of the darkest Arcane.

I did all of this in search of answers to my questions: Who are these deformed creatures? What fell energies warped them into their sorry state? I wanted a list of the physical, mental, and spiritual deformities and imperfections of the human form as examined in various caliban test subjects. How do they fit in the various nations of the Core and what roles they fill in society? Most importantly, what greater power and understanding of the Land can be gained from all these?

The bulk of my hard-earned research is presented in this article (but

not all- even a scholar must have his secrets, as you already know). I hope you use it well- for knowledge is power.

### What are Calibans?

Caliban is the common scientific name for a member of this varied race. Caliban is a bastardized form of the Mordentish word "cannibal," which means "one who devours the flesh of his own kin." Contrary to the popular belief in some domains, most calibans aren't the vicious, wicked monsters their hideous appearance suggests they are.

To most of the ignorant population, however, they are simply "the hidden," "freaks," "monsters," or even "demons." Humanity has little tolerance for those who are different than the common man, and a caliban is most often either a social outcast to be hidden away or abandoned by shameful human parents or is actively persecuted and hunted down like some beast or criminal due to what he is. Most commoners don't even recognize calibans are a separate race, instead viewing them as horribly deformed humans in the best case and demons in mortal skin in the worst.

Even we, the misunderstood practitioners of the exalted Art hounded by the ignorant folk, cannot truly understand the sheer fear and hatred calibans are faced with in most realms. As a result, they learn to rely only on themselves and often become the very monsters they were said to be. Humanity itself can oftentimes be the worst monster of all.

Calibans were once normal human babies, who were deeply deformed in body or mind while still in the womb. Several theories for the possibly causes for their deformities will be discussed in the next chapter.

Most of a caliban's deformities are merely cosmetic and simply make it look or sound inhuman (such as a Brute caliban's pock marks and mismatched eyes), but a few deformities actually give them unique, inhuman powers, which I'll discuss in the tables presented below. The sum of all the caliban's deformities gives the creature its fearsome appearance and thus its reputation. All calibans, even the most human-looking ones, have something truly unnatural and unsettling about them. They are all that is ugly about humanity's inner side, brought to the painful light of day.

Calibans tend to age and mature at an accelerated rate; one and a half times as much as a normal human. It seems as if magic burns them from within, and, from my research, I suspect that is indeed the case. The mutating energies, which make them what they are, also kill them faster. I can only explain this through magic, since most calibans possess a relatively normal anatomy that is similar to that of humans.

The vast majority of calibans may interbreed both with humans and amongst themselves, thus showing that they are a true race unto themselves instead of merely being deformed humans. Such mating most often results in caliban babes, even if mating between a caliban and a human might sometimes yield a human baby and generations of inbreeding between calibans might result in the birth of a true monster.

Whatever they might claim, calibans are not men, but something different. Despite their monstrous appearance, however, calibans are the most directly related to men of the various demihuman races. Also, men should remember that your own brother

might be born a caliban due to bad luck. Nonetheless, I separated myself from such petty concepts as family and affection in my quest for knowledge.

Much like the stunted halflings, calibans are an offshoot race of humanity. They are a far more recent offshoot, however, as the race still seems to be evolving towards its final form (by judging from the seemingly limitless variety of mutations and deformities exhibited by calibans over the Core and beyond). From my research, I found that the race can generally be divided into five major phenotypes, subraces or breeds. I refer to the breeds (which will be discussed in detail later on) as Banshees, Bestial, Brutes, Cannibals, and Witchspawn. The vast majority of calibans fit into one of these five breeds, even though some calibans are so deformed as to be counted a breed apart. In addition, it is possible that unknown breeds exist in the exotic lands beyond the Core.

We all know our world is not the only one existing in the vast of Creation. Some people actually claim to come from distant worlds beyond the Mists, transported to Ravenloft through various means. By interrogating them, I was able to learn that while human babies are sometimes born deformed in their home-worlds, it is much rarer and less drastic than in Ravenloft. So I can proudly say that calibans, as a species, are truly native to our world. I do not know why this is, but there are several theories in the Origins chapter.

A caliban is sometimes mistaken for another creature of the Night; usually a hag, a tiefling, a corrupted one, a beast-man (such as a legendary minotaur), a lycanthrope, or one of the tormented creatures known as broken ones. Despite a similar appearance,

calibans are wholly different and unrelated to all of these twisted beings. A caliban doesn't possess the powerful innate magic of a hag (even the powers of a Witchspawn caliban are only a pale reflection of a true hag's magic) and isn't inherently malicious despite the common belief of the ignorant and the fanatic. Unlike tieflings, calibans aren't descended from fiends or created from the influence of direct infernal or abyssal power. Once again, unlike tieflings, the will to harm isn't part of their bloodline; most calibans have to endure a certain amount of pain, be mentally broken, and shunned by society before they become the monsters they are said to be. The appearance of corrupted ones, former humans warped by pure evil, is far more monstrous than even that of calibans, and they are always both malicious and insane. Also, it takes a far larger amount of magical energy to create a corrupted one than a caliban.

A caliban doesn't have the horrific, bestial strength of a true beast man (though calibans of the Bestial and Brute breeds are far stronger than ordinary men), and its mind pattern is actually human-like instead like that of a beast. Unlike lycanthropes, calibans aren't afflicted and lack the lycanthrope's supernatural powers. Plus, they only have a single true form like most mortal beings. Finally, the deformities of broken ones (like those created by the mad pseudo-scientist Markov) are far more pronounced and drastic than those of calibans. While calibans were born that way, broken ones are created by powerful magic or mad science from unsuspecting animals and humanoids. This painful process, which inevitably shatters their mind, turns them either into drooling idiots prone to random fits of action or into

homicidal and extremely bitter psychopaths filled with the desire to inflict pain and kill. Unlike broken ones, the mind of the vast majority of calibans remains untouched by the magical energies which twisted them. Mentally, they are just like the humans they could've been if not for the Dark Powers' cruel hand. Generally, while magic flows in a Caliban's bloodline, even powerful magic in some cases, they have no inherent malice about them.

## Origins

From my research and several experiments I had to conduct to prove my theories, I found out that there are various things which may deform a once-normal human baby into a hideous caliban. True calibans are created only from human and half-Vistani stock. Gnomes, elves and half-elves already have too much magic flowing in their blood to be warped by the magical effects which create calibans. Halflings, already an offshoot of humanity, have reached their final stage. The Vistani just seem mysteriously immune (though they didn't co-operate much anyway, telling me I was seeking out things which shouldn't be known to mankind- bah!). Dwarves are unaffected due to the opposite reason from the fey races; an innate resistance to magic and truly deformed. Caliban-like babies birthed by dwarven mothers are always stillborn and never alive.

While ignorant commoners wrongly believe calibans to be the results of fell magic and the gods' curse over mankind's vanity or a divine punishment for sinful women who indulge in debauchery as claimed by the fanatics of the Lawgiver in the domains of Hazlan and Nova Vasaa, this is not the case. At least this is not always the

case. I found out there are several reasons for the birth of calibans, and that different caliban breeds are created from exposure to different conditions. Here I present several of the known causes of caliban birth:

- ❖ **Emotional Twisting:** Emotions pose a strong influence for those unable to tame them, like I did in science's name by following the ideal of the Xamuxx. The savage beast, which is the human mind, may attract the attention of mysterious powers which result in caliban births. The Dark Powers that rule our world from beyond a Misty curtain are fascinated with human emotions and like to manipulate them to their unfathomable whims. I found out that powerful emotions of fear and terror felt by the pregnant mother during the time of birth resulted in the birth of Brute calibans, who are often reminded of the mother's cause of fear. Mothers who felt a powerful, all-consuming rage while being pregnant gave birth to Bestial calibans and mothers who felt grief over the loss of a loved one gave birth to Banshees. During the Dead Man's campaign, when countless husbands lost their lives in the Darkonian front, many women in Falkovnia gave birth to Banshees, though most of these babies were destroyed by King Drakov's superstitious soldiers. A pity, since they would've made excellent research subjects. This, alongside Magical Twisting, is the major cause of caliban births in the Core.
- ❖ **Magical Twisting:** Direct exposure to magical effects by a pregnant mother most often results in the twisting of the baby into a caliban.

Such effects include the corrupting aura of a hag, which very often causes nearby children to be born either dead or as Witchspawn Calibans. The corrupting aura of extraplanar fiends, referred to by Rudolph Van Richten as a reality wrinkle, causes the birth of similar yet different beings. Planetouched humans, referred to in texts as tieflings, are very rare and are a breed apart from calibans. Exposure to raw Arcane power, like the influence of a strong magical site or a magical item, also often results in the birth of either Witchspawn or Brutes. Finally, exposure to the particular force known to us scholars as negative energy, the black essence of death and entropy, brings about the birth of Banshees. This is one of the major reasons for caliban birth.

- ❖ **Flesh Sculpting:** Dark tomes hint at an ancient art called Flesh Sculpting which combines magic, alchemy and surgery. This art allows one to shape mortal flesh, blood, and bone like clay and to create horrid monsters out of normal people and animals. To even learn this vile art, one has to sacrifice his very own humanity. The ravings of a wandering madman in Barovia told of fiends with tentacles who dwell on the moon and maintain massive herds of brain-addled, deformed beings which were once humans and are now nothing but mindless, boorish slaves. Obviously, these poor beings are the horrid results of Flesh Sculpting conducted on humans while still in the womb. Other experiments conducted by these fiends brought about the existence of a different breed of caliban, whose body degenerated and appears like that of an atrophied

baby while their cranium was grown to an unnatural size, so they could fulfill their full mental potential and be able to truly master the mysterious art some know as “psionics.” There might or might not be a grain of truth in these disturbing tales.

- ❖ **Obsession:** Obsession, a powerful emotion and mad desire for a single thing, has brought ruin to countless men and women. In lands which lie next to the Misty Border, it is said that a barren mother, who wanted a child so badly she would do anything for him, would sometimes get impregnated by the Mists themselves, and give birth to a malformed baby who wields strange power.
- ❖ **Tainted Flesh:** Mothers who used to indulge in cannibalism, the devouring of the flesh of their own kind; often have their baby deformed into a Cannibal caliban. It seems to be either the tainting influence of the flesh itself (very unlikely though not out of the way), or (as I suspect) the subtle touch of the Powers That Be. I suspect the Cannibal tribes, which dwell in the Invidian wilderness, were created this way as well as through inbreeding, as their parents degenerated into cannibalism and inter-relationships during the long years of the war when their once-great cities were besieged.
- ❖ **Necrophilia and Possession:** Acts of necrophilia, perverted acts of sex with the dead and the undead, very often bring about the birth of Cannibal calibans. Once again, I suspect the hand of the Powers That Be is in that matter. Also, mothers impregnated by someone possessed by a Ghost or similar spectral undead



or possessed during birth give birth to Banshees.

- ❖ **Curses:** Curses are a powerful force in our world, similar yet different from magic at the same time. They offer poetic justice or wicked pain for those suffering under their effect. Some curses are so powerful that they could twist a newborn human babe into a hideous caliban, sometimes over the course of several generations. Having sex on certain days of the year, which are considered to be cursed or unlucky (like the eve of the Requiem), sometimes also results in caliban babies. In the specific case of the Requiem, Cannibals are usually born. In the land of Tepest, the curses over the desecration of nature bestowed by angry Druids are said to create Bestial calibans. Brutes and Witchspawn calibans are also often created as the result of a curse. Sometimes breaking the curse may "restore" the child into a normal human, though my experiments showed that calibans aren't "diseased." Besides, no amount of magic or surgery can transform a caliban into a human unless the Dark Powers themselves dabble in the matter... In this cause of caliban birth, the mother is oftentimes not to blame. For example, a tragic legend talks of one of the past Kings of Darkon, Seron the Cruel. The King's line faltered after a wronged Vistani seer cursed his bloodline for the murder of her own child. From that day on, any children born to him from his various Queens (who were usually executed after birth, being blamed for the result) were hideous, horridly deformed calibans who were unfit to succeed him.

- ❖ **Inbreeding:** Constant inter-breeding between close family members often results in the birth of calibans, usually of either the Brute or Cannibal breeds. Commoners believe this is a divine punishment for breaking the taboo, though I hardly believe such ravings. Instead, recent discoveries from Lamordia show the existence of "genes," tiny particles which make up a man's body. Perhaps inbreeding re-arranges these "genes" in a different sort of way which creates calibans. I'll have to delve further into the matter. Interbreeding between calibans of all types also results in the birth of calibans; marking them as a true race (they are very rarely sterile).
- ❖ **Chemistry and Alchemy:** Research associates from the domain of Nosos have sent me reports about an increasing number of deformed children born in the great city and its satellite towns. From my limited knowledge of mundane science, I suspect there is something in the water supply, the food, or the air that somehow corrupts and deforms these babies. Certain alchemical potions are also said to twist the child into a Witchspawn caliban if ingested by a pregnant woman.
- ❖ **Unknown:** Yet, some calibans are born and none of the reasons stated above can explain their deformities. For all my efforts, I wasn't able to determine the cause of these births, which spanned calibans of all five breeds. Perhaps these births are connected to an upcoming cosmic event, which affects mothers and babies seemingly at random. Or perhaps there is some intelligent force at work here, with its own hidden agenda and goal. These



unknown reasons may fall into the eight categories mentioned above, but I wasn't able to find the connection. My research on the unknown birth cause of Calibans is

yet to be complete and yet obscured in shadow despite my best efforts. It will likely require the combined efforts of the Brothers for its successful continuation.

Unknown	Chemistry and Alchemy	Inbreeding	Curses	Necrophilia and Possession	Tainted Flesh	Obsession	Flesh Sculpting	Magical Twisting	Emotional Twisting	
+				+				+	+	Banshee
+		+	+						+	Bestial
+	+	+	+				+	+	+	Brute
+		+	+		+					Cannibal
+	+		+			+	+	+		Witch-spawn

Overall, calibans are born and created due to the myriad of reasons detailed above.

Those supporting the theory of mystical domains ruled by powerful evil individuals called Darklords (a theory I'm quite fond of) claim the deformities of calibans born in a specific domain somehow reflect that land's Darklord; being sort of a twisted caricature of his own inner faults and characteristics.

In the last few decades, the number of caliban births in the lands of the Core is steadily rising, especially in places ravaged by magical cataclysms such as the Requiem and the Grand Conjunction. I suspect the increasing number of caliban births heralds the coming of another such event, perhaps even the legendary Time of Unparalleled Darkness hinted at in Ezrite texts. Watch out Brothers, for the time of testing is near at hand...

### The Five Breeds

From careful observation and research, I was able to divide the

calibans into five "sub-races," phenotypes, or breeds as I most commonly refer to them. Calibans of the same breed usually share common deformities, powers, and general appearance. More so than even humans, no two calibans appear the same. Here are small descriptions of the appearance and behavior of each of the five breeds and realms in the Core in which they usually are born. By rarity, the caliban breeds are arranged this way (from most common to rarest): Brute, Cannibal, Bestial, Banshee, and Witchspawn. Certain breeds are more common (although calibans are a tiny minority in all known realms of Ravenloft) in certain domains, maybe because of the place's particular nature which causes the circumstances which create calibans of a certain breed. I've added my results on this in a list later on.

**Banshee (Wailing Women):** At first sight, Banshees are beautiful and alluring creatures, mistaken for comely humans, or even elves in their unearthly,

delicate and almost-spectral beauty. They are all female for some reason, but I was unable to find out why. They are also the second rarest of all caliban breeds, after Witchspawn, and for their rarity and cold beauty are also called "ice queens." In a closer observation (or dissection), one sees there is something clearly unnatural about the Banshees. Their deformities are subtle and not blatant like those of calibans of other breeds, and thus are even more disturbing. Their skin is unnaturally pale and cold to the touch, like that of a corpse just before it starts to decay. Sometimes, harmless frost will form and dissipate from their skin instead of sweat. Their hair, usually being pitch black, silver or white, is smooth and grows to great lengths at a relatively short amount of time. Their lips are likewise either black or white. Their voices are melodic and disturbing at the same time, filled with hidden melancholia and a longing for that which was lost. Banshees are beautiful indeed, but their beauty is macabre and unnatural. They are often suspected for dealing in the Dark Arts by the ignorant masses or for actually being undead such as vampires or even ghosts. Banshees are unearthly creatures not of this world, and this aloofness often causes them to be persecuted by humans. They are also weak and frail of body, vulnerable to blows, diseases and the chill wind.

Their great charisma, beauteous appearance and voice make Banshees ideal singers and performers, and they usually wander the Core (often as part of a carnival), specializing in singing ballads of keening, lament and loss. Their performances usually attract lots of listeners, who love and fear the Banshee at the same time. Banshees are as lonely as any caliban, for while

humans lust after their beauty, they also hate and fear their association with death and the unnatural, for they see the inevitability of their own demise in a Banshee's dark eyes and hear the bells of the Reaper in the Banshee's haunting voice. Due to the circumstances of their birth, their deformities and their harsh lives, Banshees have a true understanding of the nature of grief, death and the underworld. This often causes power-hungry Banshees to pursue the dark and dangerous Art of Necromancy, of which they become skilled users.

**Bestial (Man-beast):** Bestial calibans are usually the most in tune with their inhuman nature, and are the third most common of the five breeds. They are the most inhuman appearing calibans, though they rarely are downright ugly like Brutes and Cannibals. Combining the features of men and beasts, their deformities include coarse hair, scales or even carapace, an animal-like head, the claws and teeth of a predator, or even membranous wings like those of a bat. Of particular note is the subtype of Bestial born in the land of Arak, deformed in the manner of a spider and dubbed Arachne by myself and "Spider Children" by the locals of that desolate land. Occasionally, Bestial will run on all four limbs in the manner of a beast. Their strength is legendary, rivaling that of Brute calibans, but the magic which warps them into beastlike forms also harms their minds, making them somewhat less intelligent and aware of themselves than humans.

Despite their unnatural origins, Bestial calibans have an innate, powerful connection to the natural world. They are often mistaken for lycanthropes or beast-men, but besides heightened

instincts and a sense of belonging to nature which somehow eases their loneliness they are not innately malicious or murderous. However, when roused, Bestial calibans are driven into an animalistic rage which causes them to tear anything in their path like a frenzied animal. A few Bestial perform at circuses and carnivals under monikers such as "the Amazing Wolf-Girl" and "the Foaming Berserk", although of all calibans they are the least likely to amuse men with their deformities.

Bestial calibans rarely live in human society, for their appearance is the most blatantly inhuman and hard to conceal. Eventually, either by being driven out or traveling there themselves, they reach the wild areas of the domains. There they start a solitary life by developing a strong bond with the natural world of animals and plants around them. They are the most likely of calibans to find rest, for they do have a place to belong, though not in the world of humans.

**Brutes (the Accursed):** For some reason, probably due to their most common cause of birth (fear), Brute calibans are the most common and widespread of breeds. Brutes are known to exist in all of Ravenloft's domains, though like all calibans, their mere existence is usually denied and they are feared and hated for what they are as a blemish on the "perfect" human race. Brutes tower above and are wider than most men, and usually bulge with muscles. Their ability to endure pain is also above and beyond that of ordinary, unchanged humans. Legends relate them to the lost races of ogres and giants, born of centuries of degeneration and breeding with ordinary human women.

Just as they are strong, Brutes are

deformed and ugly. Common deformities include pock-marks, warts, tiny bone ridges jutting out of the skin, or mismatched eyes. The magic that distorts their body also affects their minds the most of all other calibans, and from conversation and careful analysis of a Brute's reactions to various challenges I found out Brutes tend to be mentally limited compared to other calibans or ordinary humans. Brutes are shunned like all other caliban breeds. Nothing is said to them in their face directly, since humans fear their monstrous strength and stamina. Only when they have the advantage of numbers or weaponry, do humans dare say what they truly think.

Brutes lack a society of their own, and unlike other caliban don't even attempt to create it. Instead they live amongst mankind where they are barely accepted, mainly for their value as a strong and tireless work force. They are employed in hard works which require strength, such as construction and labor at the docks or factories, though they are always kept in the back by their bosses, away from the prying eyes of society. Brute workers, unaware of their rights, are often worked in conditions of near-slavery. In the underworld, they often work as hired thugs and extorters for crime bosses. Some Brutes also join circuses and carnivals as strong men.

Brutes are often recruited to the armies of human kingdoms due to their improved physical attributes (both Vlad Drakov and Malocchio Aderre are known to employ entire battalions of the creatures), though they may never hope to ascend above the positions of a simple grunt because of their superiors' bigotry. Quite frankly, most Brutes lack the brains to become generals.

**Cannibal (Living Ghoul):** Without a doubt, calibans of this breed are the most wretched and misshapen members of the race, and give it its bad reputation as foul devourers of the living and the dead. They are also the second most common breed after Brutes. Together with Brutes and Witchspawn, they are the most physically repulsive of calibans. Common deformities include a hunched walk in the manner of a rat or a slithering snake, hairless rubbery skin, drools, crooked, sharp teeth and a constantly wriggling tongue. They also tend to smell pretty bad. However, they move and react much more quickly than ordinary humans. Cannibals are often mistaken for undead ghouls (though rest assured, countless experiments have shown me they are not undead and are vulnerable to anything which affects other mortal beings), and I have unconfirmed suspicions some of them might have a ghoul or ghastr forefather in their twisted bloodline (though even I shudder at the thought of crossing these repulsive decaying undead with humans).

Unlike most calibans, the strange energies which make them appear inhuman also affect their minds, imbuing them with an unnatural desire to devour the flesh of other humanoids. In the interrogations, Cannibals described this feeling as a numb pain in their head and stomach, urging them to consume their own kin. Those Cannibals who live in human society usually do work that doesn't require them to be seen or that takes advantage of their natural agility, like tending the sewers or sweeping chimneys. Others might find employment in the more shady areas as thieves or assassins (jobs which naturally require them to remain unseen, thus not disturbing society with their

uncomfortable appearance). A few might join a carnival and wander with it, joining the cast of freaks under nicknames such as "the Ravenous Ghoul."

While the vast majority of Cannibals suppress their cannibalistic tendencies (sating their hunger on animal meat), some indulge in their cannibalism and turn into vile murderers after being shunned from society for their appearance and suffering the inevitable abuse at the hands of humans. If these murderers aren't outright killed, they usually escape into the wilderness (or the most despicable parts of a city's slums) and gather in savage gangs or clans with other escaped Cannibals. These barbaric societies are a twisted mirror of the human society which drove out the Calibans, extravagating all that is wicked, treacherous and brutal about humanity. They are what you and I could become, under the right (or wrong) circumstances.

The rivalry between Cannibal and ghoul clans is legendary, especially since Cannibals have a tendency to rise as ghouls upon death. Especially great and old clans are known to dwell in the Invidian wilderness; the results of the ancient wars which once ravaged the area and led to cannibalism and inbreeding. Recently, Malocchio the Dukkar was able to recruit these vicious creatures (taught to kill and devour since birth) into his army. I prefer not to think what he had offered them in return for an alliance. I also classify Horg, the Caliban assistant of Dr. Victor Mordenheim, as a Cannibal, even though his deformities are more common to Brutes.

**Witchspawn (Arcane Scion):** Witchspawn are the rarest of all caliban breeds and their connection to magic is

the strongest. In the land of Tepest, they are believed to be the descendants of the Elf-Knight, a powerful bogeyman who stalks the wood tempting mortal women then leaving them forever yearning for his touch. Such poor women are said to live out a sad and lonely life, since no mortal man can ever satisfy them, and they sometimes wander off into the Shadow Rift in search of their darkling lover. While I don't believe this rubbish, I do agree that a Witchspawn's connection to the Arcane is almost as strong as that of a true fey.

Personally, I view them as exalted and blessed creatures, for their body serves as a conduit for the chaotic, invisible forces of the Beyond. They are the one caliban breed that both fascinates and frightens me the most. Physically, Witchspawn are some of the most deformed of caliban breeds. Their bodies are weak and frail, wasted and warped by the powerful magic they channel. Their deformities include the "classic" marks of a spellcaster according to legend and superstition, such as a witch nipple, different skin color, and hooves like a devil. They are the most stereotypically fiendish in appearance of all calibans, and this serves to increase the hostility towards them. In addition to obvious physical deformities, all Witchspawn are surrounded with a pulsing aura of power which causes unease in the hearts of men and beasts. Witchspawn are possibly the most hated and repulsed of all calibans, for even the dumbest peasant recognizes the sheer power that is their heritage. While their towering intellect and magical affinities enable them to make capable users of Wizardry, most wizard guilds in the Land of the Mists fear Witchspawn and refuse to share their secrets with them

(being gripped by the same idiotic superstitions as the commoners), for they seem to herald the coming of an ill omen. Thus Witchspawn in search of power most often turn to their natural talents as sorcerers, magnified by a powerful force of personality. Witchspawn are the most likely of calibans to be killed by the ignorant mob, and their great intelligence allows them to realize this fact soon enough.

Most Witchspawn abandon the human settlements and forsake the petty world of humanity behind, heading the call in their blood towards the earning of what truly matters: power. Traveling the wilderness, they often become spell-slingers of terrifying strength. Very rarely do they follow any other career, for their weak bodies are unfit for most menial tasks. Occasionally, they might perform at circuses with their magical talents and horrific appearance. Also, some disguised Witchspawn offer their services to human settlements as wise-men and diviners of the future, as their magical powers enable them to fulfill a man or woman's desire; for the right price...

I view Witchspawn calibans as kindred spirits to the Fraternity, and by offering them acceptance in our organization we can harness their might to our side. Their power is rising, and woe to any who stands in their path...

### Caliban Psyche, Relations and Society: Into the Mind of a Monster

From observations, interrogations, and experiments conducted by your faithful servant, I found out that the psyche of most calibans remains untouched by the effects which warped their body at the

womb and their thought patterns are almost identical to those of ordinary humans. Like the majority of humans, calibans are social creatures who seek to belong to a society that accepts them for who they are in addition to finding wealth, love and happiness. The things which break a human mind are also just as likely to break a Caliban's psyche.

However, due to their monstrous, inhuman appearance, calibans almost never get to fulfill these simple human desires. Instead, they are shunned, feared and hated for the deformities which forever set them apart from humans. This is the tragedy and irony of the caliban race. Upon birth, if they and their mothers aren't killed outright (which is most often the case in barbaric places such as Tepest and Falkovnia), either out of sheer hatred or even mercy (as most calibans find only misery in life) they usually are hidden away by their shameful parents, kept in damp basements like a dark secret, abandoned in the wilderness to fend for themselves (which most often causes their death) or are given away to orphanages or even the Vistani, who sometimes view the potential in a caliban baby and understand their condition as outcasts. As a caliban grows up, all he finds in society is pity (in the best case) or fear and hatred (in the worst). The caliban's very own family is fearful and ashamed of him instead of giving him the love he deserves as their child. He usually has no friends as children tend to be very cruel and judging towards those different than themselves- when they don't run away in fear upon sight of the caliban, bringing the adults to violently drive him away. They also mature much faster than human children, further alienating them from society. Even the physically powerful Bestial and Brutes are bullied

as children and youths, since the other children possess the advantage of numbers over their own physical strength. When puberty comes it is the worst, as the caliban can only watch in envy and frustration on the other happy boys and girls discovering the joys of love while he is constantly rejected and feared by members of the other sex.

As adults, calibans continue to face persecution where they show their face. Adults tend to be less direct and blatant than children, hiding their hate and fear beyond a mask of sweet-talking. Calibans have to live in hiding from the prying eyes of society and the finger constantly pointed at them. They constantly move from place to place when their nature is revealed and the disguise lifted, for a caliban is never accepted for who is. Even in societies which perceive themselves as advanced and enlightened (like the nations of the League of Four), calibans face hate, fear and prejudice. They are viewed more as freaks of nature rather than demon-spawn like in the primitive domains, though. Most calibans are driven out or escape from the human settlements, but in places such as Darkon or Nova Vaasa, where their worth as workers is recognized, they are allowed to live the cities, in a walled, separate section of the slums called a "ghetto", often together with other demihumans and social outcasts, under the excuse of "offering protection" (while actually keeping the calibans off the normal population who dislikes, fears and hates them). Ghettos are amongst the worst places in the domains, rampant with crime, disease and sometimes even famine. In the ghetto, many calibans become the monsters they were said to be, altered by the harsh conditions of life and just trying to survive. Criminals, psychopaths



and supernatural predators (such as red widows, vampires and vampires) pose a serious threat in the ghetto, for rarely do the guards or police force venture inside. Even in capitalist domains such as Richemulot where social advancement can be earned through money, power and knowledge, calibans cannot advance since they are viewed as sub-human monsters.

Rarely do calibans die a natural death. Most often, they die at the hands of a lynch mob or at the command a self-righteous judge or priest for some invented wrong. Other times, they commit suicide or degenerate to the use of drugs or alcohol to ease their suffering. A caliban is actually better living on the street or in the wilderness than amongst ordinary civilization. Among criminals only strength and cunning matter and the beasts in the wild judge no one by his appearance and offer unconditional love and friendship to the shunned caliban. Calibans are also highly respected as "marked" and "exalted" by the members of various mystery cults dedicated to careless use of the Arcane, chaos, change and fiend-worship, though this is usually not the kind of attention one wants to receive.

Individual calibans react differently to their inevitably harsh lives. All calibans become jaded to common, petty insults and threats, having faced persecution so many times in their lives. They all learn to become extremely self-reliant and tough, knowing that they live in a society which fears and hates them for what they are. They come to learn the value of hard work, as this is almost always the only way they can be somehow accepted by society.

They also often detest the laws of the state and society much as society detests the calibans themselves. Calibans

also shun most religions, which view them as abominations. The Church of the Lawgiver sees them as corruptions of humanity which must be destroyed, the Church of Belenus sees them as the wretched spawn of fey or fiends (depending on the individual priest asked), the Darkonian sect of Ezra seeks to "cure" calibans though their experiments haven't proven effective until now, the Mordentish sect argues within itself about whether to recognize calibans as cursed humans (Children of the Goddess) or monsters (Children of the Night) while the Dementlieu sect and Home Faith take no official stance, but generally view calibans with hostility.

The teachings of Hala speak to them, and an increasingly large amount of calibans are said to be amongst the Weaver's flock. I've personally met a fledgling caliban priest in the order. The concept of racial pride appeals to some calibans, mainly because so many of them were degraded during their lives. Others live in self-loathing and denial of who they are, but most calibans walk a narrow path between these two extremes.

Some calibans, unsurprisingly, grow malicious and hateful from their constant years of abuse at society's hand, seeking to gain revenge on the society which denied them. Others become traitors to their own kind, being cruel to other outcasts to gain status in the eyes of the humans, who only mock them for this. The monstrous deeds of these creatures blemish the reputation of the entire race and reinforce the caliban stereotype. Other, much rarer calibans, realize the wrongs of human society and seek to correct them, by dedicating themselves to the betterment and service of the society which denied them, seeking to repay abuse with love and

kindness. Personally, I cannot understand them, but a few calibans do pursue this path, which they call "the path of good." Fools, they know not that morality is the eye of the beholder! Indeed, how many of their own brethren have died in the name of "good" and "just" gods and ideals?

Most calibans walk a path in between those opposite philosophies, simply seeking to be accepted and not isolated outcasts. Children born to caliban parents (who are almost always calibans) are educated according to their parents' view of life, and they are far less lonely and sad than calibans born to human parents, already aware of the dangers of the human world if they choose to attempt to live amongst mankind.

From their years of suffering, calibans come to value the simple joys of life, like the unconditional love of a pet, the beauty of the waves crashing on shore, or the petals of a flower, slowly dropping to the ground. Calibans also tend to be very loyal friends, as they know what it is like to be truly alone. They are much more in touch with nature than humans despite their unnatural origins, and many barbarians, rangers and druids come from the race, especially (and naturally) from Bestial stock. Years on the road have created the start of unique caliban folklore, such as the legend of the Haven (a marvelous city at the edge of the world where two seas meet, ruled by a powerful sorcerer whose soul is as beautiful as his face is hideous, who offers a sanctuary for all outcasts in his magnificent city). I know not if such a place truly exists, though I suspect the legend was simply born of the calibans' desire to find a place where they can truly belong. If such a place does exist, I doubt this sorcerer is as just

and merciful as he is said to be. Judging from experience in the realm of the Mists, he might actually be the wicked, dread lord of this fabled realm. Many calibans have spent their lives in a quest to find this Haven, but no caliban has been able to find it yet. The legends say only one who is "purged" (of what?) will be able to find the exact road leading to this Haven. Others say Haven is actually a bastardized word for "Heaven", where calibans go after death as a reward for their suffering in life for nothing. Thus, Haven doesn't exist in the mortal realm. The rare few calibans who were able to find rest in life and a place they feel comfortable and part of actually say Haven is no actual place in the mortal or immortal realms but a state of mind and being.

The calibans' own lack of realization they are a breed apart humans (as they constantly seek to belong in the human society which rejects them) prevents them from forming societies of their own, as are their relatively small numbers compared to the human population of the domains (less than 1% in most domains, though higher in places where the Arcane flourishes like Darkon and Hazlan) and the oppression they face. Most calibans think they are unique, the only freaks in the world. Indeed, the only known caliban society in the Core are the wretched Cannibal clans of Invidia, devolved creatures prone to their most basic needs; barbaric butchers who do as they please as long as they may force their debased needs on others. By forsaking their humanity beyond and becoming like savage, hateful beasts, Cannibals who join one of these clans finds a sort of solace in causing pain and destruction to others and consuming their flesh.

Calibans have a mixed

relationship with the various demihuman races which inhabit Ravenloft. Both halflings and half-elves, who are part of human culture, shun calibans. Dwarves respect calibans for their toughness, but are terrified of their magical nature at the same time. While full-blooded Elves find calibans fascinating due to their connection to the Arcane, similar to the Elves' own Arcane nature, they also tend to look down on their unaesthetic appearance and their relation to the hated, upstart race of humans who pollute the world and disturb the balance between civilization and nature, magic and technology. However, some Witchspawn and especially Banshees have found solace in the elven society of Sithicus. Gnomes also find calibans curious, but fear them the same time. However, Gnomish society is more open to calibans than the human one.

Due to their nature as mutants born of humanity, calibans lack a language of their own. They most often speak the language of the domain they were born in, though some calibans learn Patternia, the Vistani language picked from parts of other languages, as this mixed tongue mirrors their nature as wanderers and outcasts well.

### Ending Words: the Future of Calibans

The amount of calibans in the Land of the Mists is ever-rising, and from my interrogations of a particular Witchspawn who was able to sense the very winds of magic, I suspect they will play a large role in the events which will shake up the Demiplane in the future. The scattered calibans have the potential to be more (and less) than men. They just need the right leader and the right cause. The Dukkar Malocchio of Invidia knows this fact well, and he is already

forging himself a vast army made of the "tamed" cannibal clans of the wastes. Experienced in combat and jaded to the terrors of the world, these murderers make truly efficient warriors, especially with their unquenched lust for mortal flesh. Once our Fraternity decides to take action towards our goal (which you already know well), caliban soldiers, with their hatred for men magnified through the new technique called "brain-washing", will be the key to victory.

Brothers, when dealing with calibans, remember that despite what you think they are all individuals. Their desires and motives are like those of mankind, from which they were mutated. However, a caliban's personality is often shaped by his or her deformities and the inevitable hardships he is forced to endure through life.

Of all caliban breeds, I am most fascinated by the Witchspawn. Arcane might flows in their blood, and they are born closer to ultimate power than any human. The existence of a possible psionic variant, which I dub the Carnium, is also interesting. Of all calibans, they are also the most far-removed of the petty human concepts of friendship and love, which they'll never gain anyway, and instead free themselves to pursue true knowledge and power. They will make perfect allies for our Fraternity, and we should seek them out across the land. I think that by researching and focusing the Arcane energies which create Witchspawn, we might be able to perfect the process and create a master race of Arcane dabblers who will be able to gain true understanding of the true power over this world and beyond. We should inform our suppliers to bring some new "subjects" for research. However, we must keep a vigil eye over our new

creations, for with great power comes great ambition, as we know all too well. Alternately, we could try to eliminate these rivals before they discover their full powers and unite under a powerful leader and cause, because the challenge might be too great then.

### To Drink is to Know

Finally, in the appendix, I've added extra info on the five breeds and an extensive list with details on all the deformities that I recorded during my travels. You will also find the profiles of five calibans from all the breeds to show you that these inhuman beings are persons too.

### Caliban Feats:

#### Extra Deformities [Caliban]

The caliban embraces his monstrous heritage and actually grows more deformed.

**Prerequisites:** Con 13<sup>+</sup>

**Benefits:** The caliban gains a number of extra deformities equal to his Con modifier, which are picked from the deformity list available to each subrace.

**Special:** The caliban gains an additional +2 Outcast Rating, as he is even more physically twisted than usual members of his race.

### Betrayal of the Flesh: Creating a Caliban

All calibans share the racial traits detailed below, which are altered according to the caliban's specific breed; Banshee, Bestial, Brute, Cannibal or Witchspawn. The various breeds and deformities allow a PC or a DM to create a truly customized caliban character

#### Caliban Traits (Generic)

❖ +2 to 1-3 ability scores, -2 to 1-3

instead merely of a Ravenloftian half-orc, although both Bestial and Brutes fill this niche quite well. A DM may create his own types of calibans by using the existing breeds as guidelines for balance issues and maintaining the flavor of the race (optional choices for new breeds could be the Arachne of Arak and Carnium of Bluetspur). Also, take notice that some deformities may be more powerful than others. To offset this, DMs should play the caliban's Outcast Rating to its fullest. The caliban might be slightly more powerful than a human of the same level due to his deformities, but what use is this power when he is constantly hounded and his mere presence causes unease? In the case of calibans, role-playing disadvantages should negate their slight power advantage instead of an ECL.

Another way to minimize the power of deformities is by forcing the PC to roll them randomly. In the worst case, a DM should just scrap the deformities altogether and use the breeds as they are, for the deformities are mainly for flavor and the breed system already archives powering-up and making calibans more unique. A DM should feel free to adjust or invent his own deformities, using the ones presented here as guidelines. Generally, a deformity shouldn't offer as powerful of an advantage as a feat or a monster special ability or quality. It shouldn't be too drastic (like making the caliban huge) but still be pretty freaky and should almost always offer some sort of disadvantage in return for the benefit offered by it.

#### ability scores

❖ **Medium-size.**

❖ **Unnatural Blood:** Calibans gain

Use Magic Device as a class skill, due to the fact magic literally flows in their bloodline.

- ❖ **The Hidden:** Calibans gain Disguise as a class skill, as they skulk through society attempting to hide their deformities.
- ❖ **Deformities:** A Caliban picks 1D4 +1 deformities from the list below upon its creation. Certain types favor certain deformities. A Caliban will often possess additional deformities which won't affect his game statistics like those described below. Generally a deformity cannot be cured by anything short of a Limited Wish, though some may be removed by careful surgery (Heal or Profession- Surgeon checks with an especially high DC). However, a Caliban automatically qualifies for the Willing Deformity Vile Feat chain if he is evil, and needn't take the Willing Deformity feat.
- ❖ **Automatic Languages:** As Ravenloft campaign setting.
- ❖ **Favored Class:** Varies.
- ❖ **Outcast Rating:** +5- Calibans are always twisted and distorted in some which clearly marks them as inhuman.

### Caliban Traits (Banshee)

- ❖ **+2 Cha, -2 Con:** Banshee Calibans are hauntingly beautiful and charismatic, but frail of body and often succumb to illness or the sword.
- ❖ **Medium-size.**
- ❖ **Unnatural Blood:** Calibans gain Use Magic Device as a class skill, due to the fact magic literally flows in their bloodline.
- ❖ **The Hidden:** Calibans gain Disguise as a class skill, as they skulk through society attempting to hide their

deformities.

- ❖ **Deformities:** Witch Fingers, Gaunt, Material Vulnerability, Pale, Twisted Organs, Witch Nipple, Backwards Eye, Double Irises, Eyes of Darkness, Swirling Eyes, Angelic Visage, Large Ears, Backwards Feet, Deranged, Magical Affinity (Any Bard or Necromancy), Eerie Whisper, Forked Tongue, Voice of Many
- ❖ **Automatic Languages:** As Ravenloft campaign setting
- ❖ **Favored Class:** Wizard (Necromancer) or Bard
- ❖ **Outcast Rating:** +5- Calibans are always twisted and distorted in some which clearly marks them as inhuman.

### Caliban Traits (Bestial)

- ❖ **+2 Str, -2 Int, -2 Cha:** Bestial Calibans are powerful, but lack intellect or social finesse.
- ❖ **Medium-size.**
- ❖ **Unnatural Blood:** Calibans gain Use Magic Device as a class skill, due to the fact magic literally flows in their bloodline.
- ❖ **The Hidden:** Calibans gain Disguise as a class skill, as they skulk through society attempting to hide their deformities.
- ❖ **Deformities:** Claws, Extra Arms, Multi-Segmented Limbs, Suckers, Bones of Steel, Fur, Giant, Gills, Increased Metabolism, Membrane Wings, Rough Skin, Shedding, Spinnerets, Tail, Bulbous Eyes, Bloodshot Eyes, Horns, Great Nose, Large Ears, Frogs Legs, Gorilla Feet, Hooves, Quadrepad, Webbed Limbs, Magical Affinity (Any Druid), Forked Tongue, Frog Tongue, Projectile Vomit, Sharp Teeth, Unusual Appetite.



- ❖ **Automatic Languages:** As Ravenloft campaign setting.
- ❖ **Favored Class:** Barbarian or Druid.
- ❖ **Outcast Rating:** +5- Calibans are always twisted and distorted in some which clearly marks them as inhuman.

### Caliban Traits (Brute)

- ❖ **+2 Str, +2 Con, -2 Int, -2 Wis, -2 Cha:** Brute Calibans are strong and very tough, but mentally they are lacking.
- ❖ **Medium-size.**
- ❖ **Unnatural Blood:** Calibans gain Use Magic Device as a class skill, due to the fact magic literally flows in their bloodline.
- ❖ **The Hidden:** Calibans gain Disguise as a class skill, as they skulk through society attempting to hide their deformities.
- ❖ **Deformities:** Extra Arms, Multi-Segmented Limbs, Witch Fingers, Aberrant, Bones of Steel, Giant, Hunchback, Increased Metabolism, Material Vulnerability, Obesity, Rough Skin, Rubbery, Short Neck, Skulk, Slimy, Toxic Blood, Twisted Organs, Witch Nipple, Backwards Eye, Bulbous Eyes, Bloodshot Eyes, Cyclops, Face of Nightmare, Great Nose, Large Ears, No Nose, Backwards Feet, Gorilla Feet, Webbed Limbs, Deranged, Magical Affinity (Any), Malformed Twin, Frog Tongue, Projectile Vomit, Sharp Teeth, Unusual Appetite.
- ❖ **Automatic Languages:** As Ravenloft campaign setting.
- ❖ **Favored Class:** Fighter.
- ❖ **Outcast Rating:** +5- Calibans are always twisted and distorted in some which clearly marks them as inhuman.

### Caliban Traits (Cannibal)

- ❖ **+2 Dex, -2 Cha:** Cannibals are misshapen and constantly consumed with vile thoughts of lust and gluttony, but move with the grace of an assassin.
- ❖ **Medium-size.**
- ❖ **Unnatural Blood:** Calibans gain Use Magic Device as a class skill, due to the fact magic literally flows in their bloodline.
- ❖ **The Hidden:** Calibans gain Disguise as a class skill, as they skulk through society attempting to hide their deformities.
- ❖ **Deformities:** Claws, Extra Arms, Multi-Segmented Limbs, Suckers, Aberrant, Dwarfism, Gaunt, Hunchback, Increased Metabolism, Material Vulnerability, Membrane Wings, Obesity, Pale, Rough Skin, Rubbery, Skulk, Slimy, Spinnerets, Toxic Blood, Twisted Organs, Bulbous Eyes, Bloodshot Eyes, Eyes of Darkness, Face of Nightmare, Great Nose, Frogs Legs, Gorilla Feet, Quadruped, Webbed Limbs, Deranged, Malformed Twin, Eerie Whisper, Forked Tongue, Frog Tongue, Sharp Teeth, Unusual Appetite.
- ❖ **Automatic Languages:** As Ravenloft campaign setting.
- ❖ **Favored Class:** Rogue.
- ❖ **Outcast Rating:** +5- Calibans are always twisted and distorted in some which clearly marks them as inhuman.

### Caliban Traits (Witchspawn)

- ❖ **+2 Int, +2 Cha, -2 Str, -2 Con:** Witchspawn Calibans are charismatic and intelligent but quite frail and weak, as their Arcane power seemingly drains their bodies constantly.



- ❖ **Medium-size**
- ❖ **Unnatural Blood:** Calibans gain Use Magic Device as a class skill, due to the fact magic literally flows in their bloodline.
- ❖ **The Hidden:** Calibans gain Disguise as a class skill, as they skulk through society attempting to hide their deformities.
- ❖ **Deformities:** Witch Fingers, Aberrant, Dwarfism, Gaunt, Hunchback, Material Vulnerability, Membrane Wings, Pale, Tail, Touch of Unease, Twisted Organs, Witch Nipple, Backwards Eye, Double Irises, Eyes of Darkness, Swirling Eyes, Angelic Visage, Face of Nightmare, Horns, Large Ears, Backwards Feet, Hooves, Deranged, Magical Affinity (Any), Malformed Twin, Mark of the Warlock, Forked Tongue, Unusual Appetite, Voice of Many.
- ❖ **Automatic Languages:** As Ravenloft campaign setting
- ❖ **Favored Class:** Sorcerer.
- ❖ **Outcast Rating:** +5- Calibans are always twisted and distorted in some which clearly marks them as inhuman

### Caliban Breeds in Each Domain (Core Only):

**Barovia-** Brute, Witchspawn  
**Borca-** Banshee, Brute, Cannibal  
**Darkon-** Banshee, Bestial, Brute, Cannibal, Witchspawn  
**Dementlieu-** Banshee, Witchspawn  
**Falkovnia-** Banshee, Brute, Cannibal  
**Forlorn-** Banshee, Bestial, Brute, Witchspawn  
**Ghastaria-** Brute, Cannibal  
**Hazlan-** Banshee, Bestial, Brute, Cannibal, Witchspawn  
**Invidia-** Brute, Cannibal  
**Kartakass-** Banshee, Bestial, Cannibal

**Keening-** Banshee  
**Lamordia-** Bestial, Brute, Cannibal  
**Markovia-** Bestial, Brute, Cannibal  
**Mordent-** Banshee, Brute, Cannibal  
**Necropolis-** Banshee, Bestial, Brute, Cannibal, Witchspawn (All Undead)  
**Nocturnal Sea-** Banshee, Brute, Cannibal, Witchspawn  
**Nova Vasaa-** Brute, Cannibal  
**Richemulot-** Bestial, Brute, Cannibal, Witchspawn  
**Sea of Sorrows-** Bestial, Brute, Witchspawn  
**Sithicus-** Banshee, Bestial, Witchspawn  
**Tepest-** Banshee, Brute, Bestial, Witchspawn  
**Valachan-** Bestial, Brute, Witchspawn  
**Vechor-** Banshee, Bestial, Brute, Cannibal, Witchspawn  
**Verberk-** Bestial, Cannibal

### Deformity List by Types (60 Deformities):

- ❖ **Of the Arms (5):** Claws, Extra Arms, Multi-Segmented Limbs, Suckers, Witch Fingers.
- ❖ **Of the Body (26):** Aberrant, Bones of Steel, Dwarfism, Fur, Gaunt, Giant, Gills, Hunchback, Increased Metabolism, Material Vulnerability, Membrane Wings, Obesity, Pale, Rough Skin, Rubbery, Shedding, Short Neck, Skulk, Slimy, Spinnerets, Tail, Touch of Unease, Toxic Blood, Twisted Organs, Witch Nipple.
- ❖ **Of the Eyes (7):** Backwards Eye, Bulbous Eyes, Bloodshot Eyes, Cyclops, Double Irises, Eyes of Darkness, Swirling Eyes.
- ❖ **Of the Face (6):** Angelic Visage, Horns, Face of Nightmare, Great Nose, Large Ears, No Nose.
- ❖ **Of the Legs (6):** Backwards Feet, Frogs Legs, Gorilla Feet, Hooves, Quadruped, Webbed Limbs.

- ❖ **Of the Mind (4):** Deranged, Magical Affinity, Malformed Twin, Mark of the Warlock.
- ❖ **Of the Mouth (7):** Eerie Whisper, Forked Tongue, Frog Tongue, Projectile Vomit, Sharp Teeth, Unusual Appetite, Voice of Many.

### Deformities of the Arms

- ❖ **Claws:** The caliban has sharp claws instead of normal fingernails and gains 2 claw attacks, each of which deals 1d4 points of damage + Str modifier. The caliban can use his remaining claw to make an off-hand attack when using another one-handed weapon in his other claw. This is considered a natural weapon.
- ❖ **Extra Arms:** The caliban was born with an extra weakened functional set of arms. He may use these extra arms in combat but only uses half his normal Str modifier. In addition all armor worn by the Caliban must be custom made.
- ❖ **Multi-Segmented Limbs:** The limbs of these calibans contain an extra joint. The caliban gains +4 to all Escape Artist checks.
- ❖ **Suckers:** The caliban has octopus-like suckers on his hands; giving him +2 to Climb checks and any attempts to Disarm him are made at a -2 penalty.
- ❖ **Witch Fingers:** The caliban has a sixth finger on each of his hands, which constantly twitches of its own accord. He gains +1 to hit with Touch attacks, but -2 to Pick Pocket.

### Deformities of the Body

- ❖ **Aberrant:** The magic that warps the caliban has wholly distorted his very nature, making him an Aberration rather than a Humanoid like other calibans.

**Bones of Steel:** The caliban's bones are partially made of metal. He gains +2 Natural Armor class, but suffers a penalty of -2 to Jump and Tumble skills due to his relative stiffness as well as extra 5 points of damage from electrical attacks as he conduits electricity just as easily as an iron bar. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Rubbery**.*

- ❖ **Dwarfism:** The caliban is unnaturally small, almost to the point of looking like a shrunken version of the man he could be. He is Small-size instead of Medium. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Giant**.*
- ❖ **Fur:** The caliban is covered in shaggy fur, and gains +2 to Animal Empathy checks due to his bestial appearance and suffers half damage from environmental (not spell-induced) Cold damage. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Rough Skin, Rubbery, Shedding or Slimy**.*
- ❖ **Gaunt:** The caliban is painfully gaunt no matter how much he eats, gaining DR 3/slashing and piercing weapons at the cost of -1 Con. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Increased Metabolism, Obesity or Twisted Organs**.*
- ❖ **Giant:** The caliban is Large-sized, with all the associated bonuses and penalties. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Dwarfism or Skulk**.*
- ❖ **Gills:** The caliban has gills and can breathe water but must keep the gills moist at all times, needing approximately two water skins worth of water a day to do this. Failure to keep the gills wet results in a dry irritating rash that distracts the calibans; putting him at -1 to checks involving physical activity (including combat, Reflex saves and

most skill checks). These penalties stop once the character has spent two whole days with his gills adequately moistened.

- ❖ **Hunchback:** The caliban has a hunched back, giving him -1 Dex for a +4 effective bonus to Charisma for the purpose of bestowing a curse.
- ❖ **Increased Metabolism:** The caliban's metabolism works at a greatly accelerated rate. His natural healing rate is doubled. However when sent below 0 hit points he loses 2 hit points a round instead of 1. The onset time of all poisons and diseases is halved, and he must eat twice as much as anyone else. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with Gaunt.*
- ❖ **Material Vulnerability:** Magic flows strong in the caliban's blood, and he is resistant to physical damage except from a single material, which actually deals him extra damage. The caliban gains DR 3/material (usually iron or silver), but actually suffers 3 extra points of damage when attacked by weapons made of this material. An injection of this material in liquid form might even prove fatal to him.
- ❖ **Membrane Wings:** The caliban has a thin layer of membrane stretched between his arms and his body. When falling from any height, the caliban can make a Reflex save with a DC of 5 + 1 per 10 feet of falling to stabilize himself and allowing him to glide on the air (though not truly fly), negating any damage from the fall and allowing him to travel horizontally up to four times the vertical distance descended. The caliban may choose to gain momentum before the glide by running, and for every 10 feet the caliban runs before gliding the DC is

reduced by 1 and the gliding distance is extended by 5 feet. Any cloth and armor worn by the caliban must be custom-made.

- ❖ **Obesity:** The caliban is unnaturally obese no matter how little he eats, gaining +1 Con at the cost of reducing land movement speed at -10 ft. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with Gaunt.*
- ❖ **Pale:** The caliban's skin is unnaturally pale and he has an affinity for the dead, granting him +2 to either Psychic (good or neutral) or Reign Undead (neutral or evil) skills at the cost of suffering 1 point of damage for each hour of direct exposure to the sun.
- ❖ **Rough Skin:** The caliban has a rough skin, being either scaly or leather-like, gaining +1 natural armor class. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with Fur, Rubbery or Shedding.*
- ❖ **Rubbery:** The caliban's skin is rubbery and hairless, and his bones are also flexible. He gains a +2 bonus to escape grapples and may fit through spaces of down to Tiny size by squeezing his body through. However, he suffers 3 extra points of damage from cold attacks. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with either Bones of Steel, Fur, Rough Skin or Shedding.*
- ❖ **Shedding:** The caliban constantly sheds his skin, much like a snake or lizard. He constantly leaves patches of skin behind and can be tracked easily (+2 to Wilderness Lore checks when attempting to track the caliban down). However, every 10 years of life the caliban completely sheds his skin in an extremely painful process which takes an entire week, during which he suffers a -2 penalty to

attack rolls and skill rolls, -2 natural AC and is weak and in great pain. For every two sheddings, the caliban gains +1 natural armor class. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Fur, Rough Skin or Rubbery**.*

- ❖ **Short Neck:** The caliban has an extremely short, stubby neck which is almost non-existent, granting him +6 bonus to saves against Vorpall effects or any other attempts made to decapitate him.
- ❖ **Skulk:** The caliban's body is naturally fitted for hiding and sneaking around, gaining +2 to Hide and Move Silently checks. He is often either small for its type or has a limited camouflage quality. However, the creature has a weak personality and is often ignored by others, gaining -1 Cha. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Giant or Obesity**.*
- ❖ **Slimy:** The caliban's skin is coated in a thin layer of mucous secreted from his pores. He receives a +2 to escape artist checks and a +2 to rolls made to break out of a grapple, but gets a -2 penalty to maintain a grapple. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Fur, Touch of Unease, Toxic Blood or Witch Nipple**.*
- ❖ **Spinnerets:** The caliban has the ability to create webs. They originate from an opening in a large gland in his gut (the opening is approximately where a belly button would be). The organ converts the caliban's fatty tissue/blood/muscle into a thick black web-like structure. As a standard action the caliban can create either a single thick 30' long "rope" of web or a large number of finer particles (treat as web spell but fills only one 5ft square). Either of these actions costs the caliban one point of

temporary Constitution damage. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Twisted Organs**.*

- ❖ **Tail:** The caliban has a malformed tail dangling from behind him, granting him +2 to Balance checks.
- ❖ **Touch of Unease:** The caliban's skin is pulsing with power from beneath, which can make lesser men faint. Anyone who touches the caliban's bare skin with his own bare skin takes 1 point of subdual damage per round of contact, with no save. Outsiders and Fey are immune to this damage, as creatures of magic. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Slimy**.*
- ❖ **Toxic Blood:** The caliban's very blood is toxic, and often has a weird color or texture (like being black and oily or being thin and colorless) and a foul smell. When injected to a living body (through a wound caused by the caliban's claws or teeth or by applying the poison to a piercing or slashing weapon), the poison forces the target to pass a Fortitude save with a DC equal to 5 + Caliban's Con modifier or suffer 1d2 points of primary ability damage and 1d2 points of secondary ability damage (which depends on the caliban's breed- Banshees cause Con damage, Bestials cause Int damage, Brutes cause Cha damage, Cannibals cause Wis damage and Witchpsawn deal Str damage). The caliban may cause some of his toxic blood to burst through his skin in an especially painful process which requires a full-round action, or otherwise cut himself for 1 or more points of damage to gain access to his toxic blood and apply it to his claws, teeth or weapons. The poison becomes inert after 1d6 rounds of exposure to

air. A caliban is immune to his own toxic blood. This deformity is especially common in the domains of Nosos and Borca. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Witch Nipple**.*

- ❖ **Twisted Organs:** The caliban's innards are all twisted around and located in an unusual alignment (his heart might be down in his gut while his intestines weave around throughout his chest wrapping around the other organs etc.). This makes the Caliban weaker and more susceptible to poison and disease (-1 con) but makes his vital organs harder to find. Any roll to confirm a threat made against the Caliban is at -2 and anyone attempting to Sneak Attack him must make a DC 10 Spot check to find his vulnerable spots and successfully deliver a Sneak Attack (this Spot check is a free action). *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Gaunt** or **Spinnerets**.*
- ❖ **Witch Nipple:** The caliban, even if male, has a third nipple which secretes oily milk. A number of times per equal to half his Constitution modifier, the caliban can let others suckle from this milk, which takes 2 rounds and heals them of 1d6 HP. This is extremely painful for the caliban, and he suffers a -2 penalty to attack rolls and skill checks during while breast-feeding. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Touch of Unease** or **Toxic Blood**.*

### Deformities of the Eyes

- ❖ **Backwards Eye:** The caliban has a third eye in the back of his head. As long as he keeps it clear (no hats, scarves, helmets etc) he has 360 vision and cannot be flanked (except by a rogue 2 levels higher than himself) however the third eye distorts his depth perception giving him a -1 to all ranged attacks while it is open. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Cyclops**.*
- ❖ **Bloodshot Eyes:** The caliban's eyes are constantly red and bloodshot, giving him Lowlight Vision. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Eyes of Darkness**.*
- ❖ **Bulbous Eyes:** The caliban's Eyes are bulbous and especially large, giving him Darkvision 60'. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Eyes of Darkness**.*
- ❖ **Cyclops:** The caliban has a single large eye in the middle of his forehead instead of the normal two eyes. He gains -2 to Spot and Search checks, but +4 to saves against gaze attacks. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Backwards Eye**.*
- ❖ **Double Irises:** The caliban has 2 pupils in his eyes instead of merely one. He gains +2 to Spot and Search checks but -1 to Wisdom, as he often sees things that shouldn't be. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Swirling Eyes**.*
- ❖ **Eyes of Darkness:** The caliban's eyes are two pools of pure darkness. He actually uses darkness for sight instead of light, and treats dark areas. This means he uses normal vision in dark areas but his sight is penalized in the light much like a normal human's sight in the dark and he is unable to see anything in areas of pure light (with no shadow of any kind. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Bloodshot Eyes**, **Bulbous Eyes**, **Double Irises** and **Swirling Eyes**.*
- ❖ **Swirling Eyes:** The caliban's eyes constantly swirl in a hypnotic pattern, gaining +2 to Hypnosis



checks at the cost of -2 to Spot checks. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Double Irises**.*

### Deformities of the Face

- ❖ **Angelic Visage:** The caliban has an extremely beautiful, ever-youthful face, like that of an angelic doll. The caliban has an Outcast Rating of 4 instead of the usual 5, but suffers -2 to Intimidate checks as he is never taken seriously. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Face of Nightmare**.*
- ❖ **Horns:** The caliban has a pair of bestial horns jutting from his head, like those of a ram, a deer or even a demon. He gains a single gore attack which deals 1d4 points of damage and 2d4 points of damage when charging. This is considered a natural attack. Any hats or helmets worn by the caliban must be treated accordingly.
- ❖ **Face of Nightmare:** The caliban's face is extremely hideous (either withered, mismatched or truly monstrous), gaining +2 to Intimidate checks but -2 to Diplomacy checks. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Angelic Visage**.*
- ❖ **Great Nose:** The caliban has an extremely and sensitive large nose. He gains the Scent feat for free. However, he gains -2 to saves against effects and spells which depend on scent (such as Stinking Cloud) and whenever telling a lie his nose grows longer by an inch for two full days. The effects of multiple lies stack. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **No Nose**.*
- ❖ **Large Ears:** The caliban has large, pointed ears and might be mistaken for an elf or half-elf. He gains a +2 bonus to Listen checks, but suffers

an extra point of damage from Sonic attacks.

- ❖ **No Nose:** The caliban has a flat space in the center of his face where a nose should be. He is immune to spells and effects which depend on scent (such as Stinking Cloud) but gains -2 to Spot checks made using scent, and a -2 penalty to HP gained first level as at first breathing proves difficult for him. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Great Nose**.*

### Deformities of the Legs

- ❖ **Backwards Feet:** The caliban's feet go backwards, and his tracks are altered proportionally. Those attempting to Track him gain a -4 penalty to Wilderness Lore checks unless they are aware of the deformity. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Quadruped**.*
- ❖ **Frogs Legs:** The caliban has misshapen legs like those of a frog. He gains a +4 to Jump checks but his movement is reduced by 10 ft. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Gorilla Feet, Hooves or Quadruped**.*
- ❖ **Gorilla Feet:** The caliban's feet are closer to large bent misshapen hands like those of an ape. His shoes or boots must be specially made to fit him. While not wearing shoes he can pick up things up with his feet and perform limited item manipulation (no weapon use or spellcasting, -4 to all actions made using these hands). *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Frogs Legs, Hooves or Webbed Limbs**.*
- ❖ **Hooves:** The caliban's legs are hoofed like those of a demon or satyr, granting him +10 speed on land. The caliban cannot wear boots, but instead may make use of magical hooves. *Note: this deformity cannot*



*stack with either **Frogs Legs**, **Gorilla Feet** or **Webbed Limbs**.*

- ❖ **Quadruped:** The caliban is accustomed to using all four of his limbs for walking in the manner of a beast. He gains +20 ft to land speed when running on all 4 legs but his unease when walking on two penalizes his land speed by -10 ft. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with **Backwards Feet** or **Frogs Legs**.*
- ❖ **Webbed Limbs:** The caliban has large webs of skin between his fingers and toes, allowing him to swim at his base land speed but ruining his skill for fine manipulation (-2 to Pick Pocket and Open Locks). *Note: this deformity cannot stack with either **Gorilla Feet** or **Hooves**.*

### Deformities of the Mind

- ❖ **Deranged:** The caliban was born mad. Upon his creation, roll a Madness check. The resulting madness cannot be cured normally. However, the caliban's madness gives him a freakish insight into that which is hidden, gaining +2 to Knowledge (Ravenloft) and Knowledge (Arcana) checks.
- ❖ **Magical Affinity:** The caliban picks either a cantrip or a 1st level Wizard/Sorcerer or Druid spell and can use it thrice per day (if it is a cantrip) or once per day (if it is a 1st level spell) as a Sorcerer of his HD. The caliban's deformity is according to its magical affinity. For example, a caliban who can cast *Unnerving Gaze* has black, pupil less eyes, a caliban who can cast *Alter Self* has a face which appears to be made of clay, a caliban who can cast *Grease* has greasy hair and skin, while a caliban who can cast *Burning Hands*

sweats constantly from the hands.

- ❖ **Malformed Twin:** During birth, the caliban has partially absorbed his twin into his body. The twisted, half-formed fetus is still attached somewhere to the caliban's body, and they are bonded physically and mentally. The malformed twin still has fragments of his mind and soul in his body, giving the caliban a +2 bonus to Will saves against mind-affecting spells and a +2 to saves against Necromancy spells which target the soul (like *Trap the Soul*). However, the twin has a dormant sentience within him and longs to truly live through its host. It has the character's mental scores and a randomly determined alignment (roll a 1d3 twice for the twin's moral and ethical alignments), with its own motives and the desire to stay in control. During times of great emotional stress (fear, horror or madness checks or Barbarian rage) the caliban must roll a Will save with a DC equal to 10 + twin's Charisma modifier or the twin takes over its host's mind for 1d8 hours. After this period is over, the Caliban makes another Will save with a DC of 5 + Cha modifier to break free of the twin's control. If he fails the save, the control lasts for 1d4 hours after which the twin can no longer maintain control. After the caliban breaks free, he can remember nothing of the time when the twin is in control.
- ❖ **Mark of the Warlock:** The caliban has a strange birthmark shaped like an arcane symbol somewhere on his body. As long as the sign is visible, he gains +1 caster level but -1 to saves against spells.

### Deformities of the Mouth

- ❖ **Eerie Whisper:** The caliban can only talk in whispers, gaining a +2 to Innuendo checks.
- ❖ **Forked Tongue:** The caliban has a forked tongue like that of a snake, granting him a +4 bonus to Knowledge (Nature) checks used to identify poison through taste and a +1 Fortitude save vs. poison. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with Frog Tongue.*
- ❖ **Frog Tongue:** The caliban has a 5-foot long tongue like that of a frog. He gains a single tongue attack, which doesn't deal any damage but can be used freely for Grappling at a +2 bonus. *Note: this deformity cannot stack with Forked Tongue.*
- ❖ **Projectile Vomit:** The stomach of this caliban is deformed to the point that it can not eat solid food and must vomit up a selection of stomach acid to pre-dissolve his food. A number of times per day equal to his Con modifier the PC may vomit a globe of acid for 2d6 points of damage at a single enemy within 20

ft. (a Reflex save halves the damage).

**Sharp Teeth:** The caliban has sharp teeth and gains a bite attack which deals 1d6 points of damage + Strength modifier. This is considered a natural weapon.

- ❖ **Unusual Appetite:** The caliban has an unusual appetite, and may feast on rotting meat, bugs, blood and other disgusting foods without suffering any ill effects, and gains +1 to Fortitude saves against poison and disease. However, the caliban constantly reeks of his disgusting foods and gains a -2 penalty to Diplomacy and Bluff checks unless the smell is extremely well hidden.
- ❖ **Voice of Many:** The caliban's voice sounds like many voices talking at once, giving him +2 to Bluff checks at the cost of -2 to Diplomacy checks.

*The caliban NPC profiles will be posted in Brutes and Banshees II: Spawn of the Beyond.*

# In Shadow

## Oddities From the Churning Void

By Eddy Brennan aka Wiccy of the Fraternify  
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For over a decade and a half one dominant feature of the dread realms has stood to baffle and defeat the greatest minds and scholars. This feature is known as the Shadowrift. Home to the elusive and mysterious Shadow Fey and many other bizarre horrors that stand as a testament to that all of what a person could do to prepare for the unusual can never prepare enough for this solemn place. Arak, the domain that rests at the bottom of the rift is one of perpetual twilight. No sun or moon ever hangs in the sky, only the daunting deep grey and black mists that hang high above, constantly swimming and churning like they were boiling in a pot. This article addresses some unusual aspects to the domain of Arak and some of its inhabitants. While it is not designed as a gazetteer to the domain, it is designed to add more depth and unusual nature to the domain.

Encounters within the Shadowrift are as mundane or outlandish as the Dungeon Master wishes them to be. *The Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* accessory *The Shadowrift* gave several examples of what unusual behaviour could be encountered in the domain, however all these did was scratch the surface of what may be.

### The Bleeding Forest

This region of the domain lays approximately five miles south of the North Ford, which rests near the Fracture to the west of the Falling River

and east of the road that leads south to the Malachite Palace. This forest is very overgrown and impassable in some areas, but those with determination can make their way through the patch in time. When cut, the fauna in the forest makes a shrill screaming sound and bleeds for some time. The fauna of the Bleeding Forest has developed an unusual form of bark that contains minute shards of metallic substances. These are a defence mechanism against having them cut down. When cut the shrill noise that utters from the plant sounds not dissimilar to that of a child screaming. The bleeding that issues forth from any cuts in the plants is sap, though through the twisting nature of the domain, it has turned red and has a similar consistency as blood. The situation is quite off putting and can easily turn the stomachs of those who make their way through the Bleeding Forest

### Sunken Barrows

The sunken barrows are a grouping of ancient Sith burial chambers that date back within the Shadowrift some two thousand years or more. The barrows are located halfway between Anvolee and Esmerth as one crosses the plains and forests between the two towns. While Barrows usually rise up above the ground, these sink down into it, creating a nesting of sunken pockets varying from ten to thirty feet across and from four to thirteen feet deep. The depth of

each barrow does not represent the width of them, so some barrows that are only seven feet across may have almost sheer slopes that plunge over ten feet before beginning to flatten out. Each barrow is marked at the centre with a stone tablet, upon which is the name and role of the Sith buried below. This writing is in the native Arak tongue and is unreadable to travellers in the domain, even if they should find the barrows.

Found in the centre of forest, the barrows form a clearing some several hundred yards across. The trees nearest the barrows have long since died and locals in the nearby towns and villages do not speak of the place. The ground of the area is blanketed in a pale mist that rises no more than a foot about the ground, anyone who crouches low enough to smell this mist will find that it stinks of heavily rotted meat. On occasion the mist changes hue to a lilac, crimson or peach tone, the reasons in the Shadowrift for this are unknown, but outside the events coincide with the full and new moons in Tepest and any lunar eclipse in neighbouring domains.

The Barrows count as a Rank 3 Sink Hole of Evil from the ill energies and fame of the location. Those that were buried here were once proud and noble figures; in death they were buried in a poorly chosen location. Today the restless spirits and corporeal dead that were once Shadow Fey haunt the barrows.

The Sith that haunt the area are those found in *Denizens of Dread* and may have a couple of levels of Warrior, Adept or Expert attached to represent their previous lives. They should then have the appropriate undead template attached to them. Geists, Ghosts, Spectres, Zombies, Skeletons, Wights

and Wraiths are the most common forms of undead found in the area.

Each Sith was buried with his or her fortune, so each barrow houses a collection of Shadow Fey trinkets, coinage and the occasional weapon or magical items. Warriors tended to be buried in full armour and weaponry, while an Adept would likely to have been buried with their favourite creation or their spell book. Opening a barrow is dangerous and will awaken the restless dead within the barrow and any sounds of battle may awaken neighbouring undead Sith.

## Powrie Bone Yard

Dating from around the time of the Sunken Barrows, this other gravesite is small in comparison and holds very little in the way of legend. However, this is the oldest graveyard still in use within the Shadowrift. The burial area rests in the Stowndowns near the Grimfey Flow as it approaches the Abyss. The graveyard is marked by a ring of stunted ancient trees, from which hang thousands of tiny strands that have the bones from small birds and animals tied to them.

Within this circle is barren ground littered with the bones of dead Powrie. However some bodies may be more recent and still decaying. The area is not more than a dozen yards across at its widest point and always has a cold wind blowing through it. Many who encounter this wind swear to have heard the voices of the dead Powrie upon it.

The Powrie Bone Yard is not haunted or even supernatural by any means, it is simply a place where the Powrie discard of their carcasses. The chill wind that blows through the circle is a permanent version of Whispering Wind cast on the burial site. Those who

placed the spell on the area thought it fun to place their voices within it, to make interlopers believe the site was haunted and to chase them off. A small group of Powrie guard the location at all times and often find it funny to see those who have intruded on the area run off in terror from the dead voices on the wind. The wind itself can inflict a fear check, but there is no actual threat here except the Powrie guards that hide close by.

### The Petrified Couple

This statue can be found at the fork in the main road north and west of the South and West Fords. Many legends and stories are attached to the statues, telling of a Shee woman that took in a human lover for a century of time in the Shadowrift. Over the century, the Shee fell in love with the man and when their time was over, she could not bear parting with him. She created an elixir and said she would walk with him to the fords there they would make their parting official. At the fork, she brought out the elixir and asked him to drink from it, that it would wipe his mind of the times they had together, he also not being wanting to part with her drank of the elixir so that his heart would not be sad the rest of his days. They marked their time with a final moment and a kiss, one that would seal the magic of the elixir, but the Shee lied to the man. Instead of wiping their minds, it would turn them both to stone so that they would spend eternity together, locked in the embrace of the other in an eternal kiss. They turned to stone instantly and have stood in the spot they kissed ever since.

The statue that stands on the site of the lovers is not the original. The earthquakes that rocked the domain when Gwydion attempted to free himself of the Obsidian Gate destroyed the

original, shattering it into a thousand pieces. In memory of the couple, the Shee have since recreated the lovers perfectly from granite and have stood them in their original place. Some pieces of the original couple can still be found littering the area of the fork.

The Shee look upon the statue as a grim reminder of what might be if they are not careful in taking mortal companions and has become a traditional site for them to part ways with their mortal lovers. The statue is enchanted so those who are in love and within fifty feet of the statue are granted the effects of a Protection from Evil spell that cannot be dispelled. The enchantment is permanent so long as the person is within fifty feet of the statue.

### Shadow Pass

As one may travel the Abyss north of the Darkenheights, they may encounter a small pass that is overshadowed by rocky outcroppings. This small area is known as Shadow Pass. The pass goes on for only several hundred yards and in recent times has become haunted by the shattered souls of the Sith, that died at the Obsidian Gate when Gwydion attempted to gain his freedom and enter the domain. The stone of the area turned to pure obsidian during that time and is now avoided by all Arak.

The pass winds and twists as it goes on, one blind turn after another with poor visibility due to the overhangs. Those who wander the pass do so almost blind due to the darkness that fills it. Light sources are also said to be all but ineffective within the pass. Stories and legends of the area vary but all contain hints of the area being haunted by shadow-like fiends that stalk and prey those who attempt to cross the pass.



Shadow Pass is infested with Shadows (see the Monster Manual for details of these creatures) and once anyone attempting to walk through the pass reaches approximately half way, the creatures will attack without mercy. For every person attempting to negotiate the pass, three Shadows will attack. Those who use light sources (magical or otherwise) in the pass find that they are only a third as effective as normal, causing vision in the area to be severely hampered by the shadow energy that permeates the area.

### The Amber Caves

Situated north east of Esmerth, these caves cut into the plateau the town rests upon. The small entrance can be easily overlooked as one travels the region, but careful investigation and a sharp eye will reveal a small entrance about half the size of a man that passes into the plateau at ground level. Within these caves, the natural hollow formations scatter out into a honeycomb

labyrinth of caves of various sizes, some almost vertical and difficult to traverse. Large deposits of amber can be found in the walls, floors and ceiling of the caves and some rare stories tell of it being a portal to another world. Some other stories of strange rock creatures are also abundant in reference to the area.

The Amber Caves are not a portal to another world, but they do hold the Amber Passage. This Mistway (Moderate Reliability, one-way) offers passage to domain of I'Cath. Finding the Mistway is all but impossible and no one from living memory in the Shadowrift has yet to stumble upon it.

The tales of the rock creatures are true to an extreme, the caves are home to a rare breed of Erdluite (see *The Shadowrift* accessory, pages 99 - 101 for more details) that are crafted from the stone found in the Amber Caves. These creatures are riddled with amber and look very different from their cousins in the Stowndowns.

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### Fey Touched

More commonly known as Elf Shot, a term that originated among the Tepestani Inquisition shortly after its creation. These poor individuals are those who have encountered Shadow Fey and suffered a very harmful result from it. These people seem to have no soul, as if it has been ripped from the bodies and carried off by whatever means the Shadow Fey have for performing this act. Physically, so long as they are cared for, those that are Elf Shot have good chances of living long lives. They are all but incapable of the simplest of tasks, requiring supervision

even if left to perform tasks they knew well under normal conditions, they will simulate this task in a haphazard fashion. A fey touched tailor could still sew, but her work would be dismal at best and very ill fitting.

Fey Touched walk about as if in a trance, from a distance they can appear to be a form of well preserved zombie or similar corporeal undead. Close to it is easy to tell that these people still breathe and are very much alive, they just have no true spark of life in their eyes or minds. The eyes of the Fey Touched are blank and devoid of all emotion. They will see without seeing as the term goes. They will wander about with no intent



and get themselves into dangerous predicaments by accident. During one instance in Briggdarrow (see *The Shadowrift* accessory for details) where the entire village fell foul to Muryan Arak, more than a dozen individuals died after the attack from wandering into the lake and drowning. This behaviour proves that once Fey Touched those who suffer this fate have little or no instinct for self-preservation. Of course, those who are Fey Touched have no spark of life and have no recognition of events around them, so calling them suicidal would be incorrect.

The most distinguishing feature of the Fey Touched is the most startling and often overlooked. Those who have become Fey Shot are all missing their shadows. The shadows of the elf-shot have been taken by the Shadow Fey into the Shadowrift, for unknown reasons.

### **Creating Fey Touched**

The Shadow Fey watch mortal races with interest and sometimes an individual rises up that captures their interest. These individuals are always geniuses in their field, be they a musician, seamstress, baker, author, horseback rider, anything that attracts the attentions of the Shadow Fey. While the Inquisition has thought long and hard over how a person's shadow can be stripped from them, the formula is simple. The Shadow Fey force their victims to eat some of their fey food and use a sharp implement to sever the shadow once the food has been consumed. This fey food takes the form of a small cake and smells sweetly. When tasted it will be reminiscent of something that person enjoyed as a child, a favourite candy, cake, breads anything that the person enjoyed eating in their youth. As they swallow the

food, the shadow is severed and the world turns to darkness for the mortal, who is now Fey Touched as a result.

Those who are Fey Touched lose all of their Charisma score until their shadow is restored. However, their minds and memories are intact, they just do not perceive the outside world properly. Those with the ability to do so can enter the mind of a Fey Touched individual and see their memories and possibly restore them to a degree. Such attempts are difficult and dangerous and have cost the minds of those attempting to save someone who is Fey Touched. Contacting the mind of a Fey Touched individual forces a Will save (DC 22) on the person attempting the contact, if they fail this save, the mind of the Fey Touched is treated as an Alien Mind (like undead, Mind Flayer, etc) and results in a Madness Check. When a successful attempt to mentally restore a Fey Touched is achieved the person regains half of their Charisma score. Only the reattachment of their shadow will restore them the rest of the way and the mental restoration is only a temporary solution. The Fey Touched will lose a point of Charisma a month until it reaches 0, at which point she is truly Fey Touched again.

### **Restoring the Fey Touched**

The only true method of restoring the fey touched is to restore their shadows to them. A simple task but difficult to undertake. The shadows taken from victims are nearly brought back to the Shadowrift, where they take on a corporeal humanoid form and become a master of their craft for eternity. The Changelings as they are known are consumed by their work and know nothing of interaction with others. They may be commanded to build a

specific item or perform a specific task, but they will not reply in a social manner. If these Changelings are attacked, they will not defend themselves unless they have some form of combat expertise. Slaying a Changeling will force the shadow back to the Fey Touched victim and restore them fully. Unless they have some form of class that would allow them to fight in a skilful manner, Changelings will never fight back against those who strike at them and always counts as flat-footed. More information on the Fey Touched and Changelings can be found in *The Shadowrift* accessory.

## New Arak

### Arak, Lus y Vuignagh

**Hit Dice:** Large Fey  
8d6+16 (40 hp)  
**Initiative:** +3 (+3 Dex)  
**Speed:** 50 ft.  
**Armour** 15 (-1 Size, + 3 Dex,  
**Class:** +3 Natural), Touch 12,  
Flatfooted 12  
**Base Attack:** +4/+11  
**Attack:** Longsword +7 melee  
(2d6+, Crit 19-20 x2);  
or Composite Longbow  
(+2 Str bonus) +7  
ranged (1d8+2, Crit x3)  
**Full Attack:** Longsword +7 melee  
(2d6+3, Crit 19-20 x2)  
and 2 hooves +2 melee  
(1d6+2) or Composite  
Longbow (+2 Str  
bonus) +6 ranged  
(1d8+2, Crit x3)  
**Space/Reach:** 10 ft./5 ft.  
**Special**  
**Attacks:** Marksman, spells  
**Special**  
**Qualities:** Damage reduction  
15/bone, fading, low  
light vision, dark vision

120 ft., luck, steel  
immunity  
**Saves:** Fort +9 Ref +13 Will  
+10  
**Abilities:** Str 17, Dex 16, Con 14,  
Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 16  
**Skills:** Bluff +8, Concentration  
+7, Diplomacy +13,  
Handle Animal +8,  
Hide +6, Knowledge  
(Fey) +6, Knowledge  
(Shadowrift) +6, Listen  
+6, Move Silently +8,  
Sense Motive +9, Spot  
+6, Survival +7  
**Feats:** Negotiator, Skill Focus  
(Diplomacy)  
**Environment:** Any land (Shadowrift)  
**Organization:** Solitary or herd (5-10)  
**Challenge** 6  
**Rating:**  
**Treasure:** Standard  
**Alignment:** Usually Neutral  
**Advancement:** By character class  
**Level** +3  
**Advancement:**

Lus y Vuignagh is a rare breed of Arak inhabiting the most isolated parts of the Greenlands. They operate freely and beyond the governing of the Seelie and Unseelie Courts and often act as mediators in the event of heated debate between the opposing sides of the monarchy. They love the wilderness and abhor the more civilised ways other breeds of Arak. Lus y Vuignagh also act as shepherds across the northern lands of the domain, hunting dangerous creatures that stumble into the land that may prove threatening to the life of the Arak people. Most of their actions go unrewarded by the rest of their kind, several breeds of Arak not truly believing that the Lus y Vuignagh crossed into the dread realms with the

rest of their people and are still slaves to Gwydion's will in some far off plane of existence.

The Lus y Vuignagh is a centaur breed, they sport the torso, and head and arms of a well muscled sith with silken silver hair and deep grey eyes. Their skin is milky white but may deepen to a luminescent grey, the exact shade varying from one member of the breed to another. Their arms are lean, long and move gracefully, but conceal almost superhuman strength. The lower portion of a Lus y Vuignagh is that of a sleek white or light grey horse. They have long slim legs that end in snowy white cloven hooves. Nearly a quarter of this breed sport some patterning in the fur on their lower regions of their bodies, striped tails are rare among the breed do appear. From a distance, the Lus y Vuignagh appear as a cross between unicorns and centaurs and somewhat ethereal, almost ghostlike with the way they fade out of existence from time to time as if temporarily leaving the world itself. Some legends of this breed have surfaced outside the Shadowrift of ghostly centaurs haunting remote forests and grasslands. A favoured sport among the Lus y Vuignagh has been hunting the plains cats of Nova Vaasa, causing encounters with this breed of Arak most commonly in that domain.

Female members of the breed are much smaller in stature than their male counterparts and are the only breed to wear some forms of clothing, usually a simple toga or vest made from silk to cover their torso. All Lus y Vuignagh wear a scabbard and sling for their weapons about their waists and shoulders. Some that carry more belongings with them are also known to sport a light form of saddlebag for convenience.

Lus u Vuignagh can speak Sylvan and up to two other domain languages. The voices greatly differ between genders, females of the breed sporting sweet melodic voices that sound almost like singing, a male producing something close to a low rumble. The two genders do speak different dialects of the same language so a little translation often comes into effect when they speak to between genders and the other breeds of Arak.

### **Combat**

Lus y Vuignagh prefers to fight at a distance, they are marksmen and proud of their well honed skills in the longbow. If drawn into a melee they will draw on their elegant longswords for protection. If possible, Lus y Vuignagh will use whatever limited magic they have to aid them against offensive individuals they encounter.

*Marksman:* As a full round action, the Lus y Vuignagh may aim and fire with her composite longbow. With the aiming implemented into this shot, the shot is treated as a ranged touch attack.

*Fading (Su):* As a standard action, the Lus y Vuignagh may fade from view melding with the shadows around them. They are effectively invisible while they are faded and incorporeal, gaining the benefits of both these abilities. Once a Lus y Vuignagh moves, she may not longer fade.

*Luck (Su):* Graced by some otherworldly power, once each day a Lus y Vuignagh may re-roll a failed saving throw.

*Spells:* A performing Lus y Vuignagh casts spells as a 6<sup>th</sup> level ranger.

*Steel Immunity (Su):* Lus y Vuignagh is immune to any damage inflicted by steel weapons and implements.

*Special Weakness:* Exposure to direct sunlight inflicts 1d4 points of damage per round (no saving throw) to Lus y Vuignagh. Bone weapons can bypass a Lus y Vuignagh's damage reduction even if not enchanted.

#### Lus y Vuignagh Characters

A Lus y Vuignagh is most often a ranger, though a few druids, sorcerers and bards are found among them. They are generally illiterate, relying instead on the word of mouth for knowledge. They choose aberrations, constructs and undead as their favoured enemy as these creatures are the epitome of disregard for nature and all things the Lus y Vuignagh enjoy in the world.

Lus y Vuignagh characters possess the following racial traits:

- +6 Strength, +5 Dex, +2 Constitution, +2 Wisdom.
- Large size, -1 penalty to Armour Class, -1 penalty on attack rolls, -4 penalty on Hide checks, +4 bonus on Grapple checks. Lifting and carrying limits are double those of medium-size characters.
- Space/Reach: 10 feet/ 5 feet.
- A Lus y Vuignagh's base land speed is 50 feet.
- Dark vision is out to 120 feet.
- Racial Hit Dice: Lus y Vuignagh begin with 4 levels of Fey, which provide 4d6 Hit Dice, a base attack bonus of +2 and base saving throw bonuses of Fort +1, Ref +4 and Will +2.
- Racial Feats: Lus y Vuignagh Fey levels, give it 2 feats.
- +3 Natural armour.
- Natural Weapons: Hooves (1d6).
- Lus y Vuignagh Traits: Bone weakness, Sunlight Weakness, Low Light Vision, Dark Vision 120 feet.
- Special Attacks: Marksman and spells.
- Special Qualities: Damage Reduction 15/Bone, Fading, Luck, and Steel Immunity.
- Automatic Languages: Sylvan and any two-domain languages.
- Favoured Class: Ranger.
- Level Adjustment: +3
- Base Outcast Rating: 6

# More Black Arts

## A Closer Look at the Other Witches of Ravenloft

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In the *Undead Sea Scrolls 2003* I introduced a new Prestige Class entitled the *Black Witch* and in that article I discussed the basic motivations and careers of those individuals willing to risk all in their desire for knowledge, no matter how dark or forbidden. This article is designed to follow on and explore these individuals in greater depth, offering revised and expanded explanations, new options and additions that may be taken to develop and enrich these sinister characters.

### Ecology

Black Witches (or Warlocks if male) live secretive lives, ones of darkness, occult lore and ever present danger. Those who follow the careers these individuals take on walk traitorous paths on a razor's edge, always in risk of tumbling one way or the other. Often they will lose sight of who they are and what they may become, welcoming anything willing to expand their horizons in the pursuit of greater knowledge and power. Black Witches will seek out leads, no matter how small or obscure if there is chance of stumbling upon what it is they are seeking at that time. Those who are completely enveloped in their research will sacrifice much to gain little in return, offering up friends and loved ones readily to obtain even the smallest, most insignificant morsel of

material that could further their studies and careers.

Many Black Witches keep journals to note down their findings, often writing them in some person code they have developed over time. Those who stumble upon these journals may find themselves looking at gibberish, perhaps a list of poor recipes for favourite dishes, perhaps the everyday ramblings of a common person. Yet despite appearances, these journals are filled with secret meanings and pieces of information the Black Witch has encountered over time. The codes used can be devilishly complex to decipher or so simple that they are easily overlooked because of their nature. Rarely a Black Witch will keep their notes in a straightforward format that anyone could spot. Those who keep to this practice have short careers once their journals are found and their true self is uncovered, even if they study what they do in the name of what is right. Black Witches will go through a score of journals in their careers, they will keep a handful with them at all times and others will be stored safely away from prying eyes. Black Witches are not trusting souls, so they will never leave their journals, even if written in code, in the care of another. They will have them stored in various secret locations, even somewhere as simple as a university library, secreted beneath a loose panel

in a bookrack or hidden deep in a room filled with musty reference books that are no longer used. Some will even go so far as to hide journals under the floorboards of rooms they have rented in various taverns and inns they have used for temporary abodes during their many travels.

Black Witches are normally solitary travellers, though those able to hide themselves well enough may join with bands of monster hunters, adventurers, gypsies and other bands of travellers able to come and go without authority or a second glance. It is a requirement for Black Witches that develop a successful career to remain on the move since they develop many enemies and jealous rivals over the years of their studies. Often several Black Witches will compete for the same knowledge, the winner earning that what they seek through faster deduction than those about them. Those that lose these races are often left with bitter feelings for she who succeeded and the winner developing more rivals and enemies in return for knowledge others will not have gained access to. Occasionally a group of Black Witches will form a small covey that will operate in league with one another for a short time as they work together in seeking out or deciphering some lost work or tome of forbidden lore. However, once the answers have been found these coveys collapse into petty squabbles, arguments and even full blown violence and rivalry that will last a life time as they compete over who should have access to what they have discovered as a group. Black Witches are greedy in their research and give no thought to sharing their findings with others, though they will quite happily tease their fellows

with small shreds of work that means nothing on its own. They shall also lead others down false paths, falsify information and use any underhanded scheme they can think of to get ahead of their rivals in the race for key pieces of material that might further their own career.

When a Black Witch discovers the presence of a rival in the vicinity they are in they will do anything in their power to bring that rival to the attentions of the public and whatever powers govern that area. They will falsify evidence against them, lie and cheat their way into the arms of those in power and pass out information to the largest gossips in the area. Anything to bring their rival to the attentions of others and have them removed in some fashion. A Black Witch who is the target of this propaganda is often sitting on a powder keg ready to go off without a moment's notice and are considered lucky if they are not lynched and escape with their lives. Black Witches are often hanged, burned or drowned for being witches or practitioners of black magic, being fiends in disguise or anything else the persecutor can bring up from the depths of her imagination. Usually the evidence placed against the rival is fabricated, but occasionally actual evidence is used if it can be proven. False evidence is easy to produce by the accusing party, often created by the accuser, though any piece of genuine evidence that can be proven elsewhere is like gold to those seeking a way to bring down a rival.

Corruption follows those who seek out the most obscure and darkest knowledge in the dread realms. It is very easy for a Black Witch to stumble



from their cause and become tainted by greed and their unquenchable thirst for more and more secret lore and research. They will begin to seek out more dangerous sources such as Hags, Liches, those who study into The Created, research hibernating vampires and the Ancient Dead. More than a few of those willing to employ these methods have found their lives come to an abrupt end, often in the cooking pot of a Hag, the feast for an awakening vampire, dying of horrible diseases transmitted from the Ancient Dead at a single touch. It is easy to understand that those same creatures they have captured and dissected in the name of their research have devoured those Black Witches seeking the true cause of Lycanthropy.

Black Witches stand to gain a lot in their lives and become the greatest masters in the field of subjects that describe the world about them. Mysterious phenomena like the raging fires that sometimes surround Hazlan, the poisonous mists that encompass Barovia, random appearances of the walking dead on the borders of Darkon may well become open to them in time. The price for such knowledge is very high and few have the strength to succeed without losing everything they hold dear. Those who do stand by their motives and remain true to themselves stand among the most powerful men and women among all the dread realms. Even if others do not know them, knowing that they are is enough for any Black Witch.

### Running a Black Witch

Though designed as a non-player character class, the Black Witch may be adopted by characters used by

players with the consent of the dungeon master. Great care must be taken in watching the player that controls a Black Witch, so that they do not overbalance the game and spoil the mystery and fun for others in the group.

The Black Witch character is one that will harbour many secrets and it is better to discuss all topics related to the class between the dungeon master and the player in secret. It is also possible for a player to write a false class on his character sheet in case another player has a peek. Operating in secret is a prerogative of the Black Witch in play, so it is possible through this example to continue this mystery into the gaming group even outside the game. A Black Witch never reveals herself to others, even if she believes with all her heart that she can trust them. Many lay claim to being Hallowed Witches or other specialised forms of spell caster in order to keep the veil over the truth of their being.

Black Witches tend to be greedy and thirsty for knowledge and/or power and will continue this pursuit at all times. They will lie quite freely to their allies in order to gain what they seek and preserve the secrets they uncover, though the more moral Black Witches do this out of mutual protection for both them selves and those they spend their professional time with. It is not uncommon for a Black Witch to take the occasional sabbatical from the group, so a player with one of these characters may have a spare character for when these events occur. This allows for some riveting solo adventures between the dungeon master and the player in question. The player may disappear from the regular

group entirely for a time to simulate her characters absence.

When taking the class to a character it is best to plan ahead of time, thinking up a possible path for the character to take in her career. What is it she seeks most? What is her true motivation? How will she achieve her goals? The archetypes that follow this section can help expand on several ideas that may come to mind.

Firstly you have what the character seeks most. This can be something as simple as the truth behind a myth she heard and intrigued her or something as mundane as seeking the method of devising a spell unique only to her but she requires additional knowledge on the subject first. An endless list of possibilities can come to mind in a short time. It is better to make a list and then work through them, discovering what it better for how you would wish to play the character. Always allow for growth and deviation since the character may become tainted in time and have her goals change to suit her new outlook on life.

What is her motivation? What drives her to achieve her goals may be the pure lust for power, the noble mentality that will be for the good of others, to remove a hidden scourge from her home village. All these and (again) many more are possible with only a little thought. It is very easy to place a Black Witch in the power hungry mind set, but this is rather bland and will dull the characters appeal in time. Be unique and think up a fresh approach.

How will she achieve her goals? This is the hardest part in planning your Black Witch's future and it depends greatly on your characters

alignment and personality. If she is private she may pursue a life of politics or subterfuge, those who are of less moral ambitions may go behind the backs of even those they love (or love them) the most in order to get what they want. Black Witches that seek to enslave others will undoubtedly seek out spells and lore that will allow them to gain power over others. A political profession may also suit them unless they are a little too brash or impatient. Great studies into arcane lore will aid them toward their goals greatly.

Above all, a Black Witch should never appear openly in a game and as mentioned above, it is possible to hide the class from the other players in the group even on your character sheet to keep things hidden. The Black Witch is not a class that should be used without co-operative work and planning between the dungeon master and the player and such an alliance can greatly enrich the game. Just think of a character that the players have grown to trust over a long time has suddenly had a change of heart and has turned against them since she now sees them as a threat to her plans? The players can look back and see the subtle clues as they slowly formed and realise they have been duped for years. Now they face a threat that knows them all to well and must face great dilemma in hunting this new enemy. On the other hand, a rival Black Witch may reveal to the players that their ally is a Black Witch and spread information to them that pervert and distort the secret plans of their friend, introducing problems within the party while the other Black Witch takes advantage of her rivals plight. How would the other characters react to learning that one of their own is a sworn enemy of the

Church of Hala? This becomes a greater dilemma should a follower of Hala be present in the group.

## Archetypes

While all Black Witches share a common goal, that of gaining knowledge and power, each will deviate in their own fashion and follow their own path. While some find pleasure in hunting down a musty tome of forbidden lore, others prefer to learn of folklore, monster lore, arcane rituals or, on rare occasion, seek out allies to forward their careers or perhaps infiltrate political groups to gain power over people. This section discusses several example careers paths a Black Witch may follow in their lifetime, as they work towards their ultimate goal of gaining power.

Several suggestions follow each career example as to how a Black Witch may take their chosen profession.

### Artificer

The artificer is a Black Witch who specialises in the creation and study of magical items and artefacts. They will hunt to the ends of the dread realms in order to find a legendary device even if it has little power, just to study it and discover the method of its workings and creations. Artificers lock themselves away for months at a time while they research a spell that will empower a single gem with the ability to grant its wearer protection from something as simple as getting a tan in summer. Perhaps even empower a dagger with the ability to always point north when put down so that the owner would never get lost.

These Black Witches devote much of their time to magical study and the creation of unique magical items. They will also copy items they have recovered just to discover they're working and creation. Few are more skilled in the creation of magical artefacts than those who follow this profession.

Though they are greedy, these Black Witches realise how expensive their practices are and will hire themselves out to others in need of the odd magical trinket, but will never let the full extent of their talents be known to others. Those who discover the true abilities of an artificer often have short futures ahead of them, often coming to an abrupt end at the hands of a magical item they have purchased or given by the artificer. Artificers also hoard magical texts, books on lore that surround rare and obscure magical devices and will set out on long journeys to find another artefact of item that may prove of interest to them. Unlike other Black Witches, artificers are well aware of their limitations and readily employ others to aid them on their quests for what they seek. They will offer all the treasure, riches and renown encountered on the journey so long as they receive what they are seeking and few decline such an offer, even without suspicion of their employer's motives.

The artificer will often reject class abilities in favour of the Bonus Feat (see later in this article) ability, even to the point of foregoing the Black Art, Mislead, Beguile and Hex class abilities to gain greater prowess in the creation of magical tools and trinkets.

Class skills such as Alchemy, Bluff, Concentration, Craft, Decipher

Script, Gather Information and Knowledge (arcane) are important to their craft, as are Item Creation feats.

Artificers never specialise in any single school of magic, they dabble in all its arts and will seek out whatever suits them best at that moment in time.

### **Folklorist**

The folklorist is a person who seeks out local tales, old wives tales and other stories based on mythology and rumour and find the truths among them. They will spend years finding what little truth is contained in stories spoken of in taverns and whispered rumours of darkness in the local area. The goal of these studies is to find the origin of these tales if it exists at all. A folklorist will travel long and hard, hunt down the most obscure clues and hints from the stories they are told or have read in ancient tomes of lost lore. Above all they are drawn by the single vision of that no matter how unlikely, everything holds some truth and it is this truth that they seek in order to gain power. Folklorists are not the most common of Black Witches, while they will seek out forbidden lore and magical prowess like others of their kind. Instead they are often quiet people who desire only to know that they hold such power and may or may not use it to gain hold over others, even their own rivals.

Folklorists are curious individuals, though shy and prefer to listen to what others say, even if they do not join in with the conversation. Some will use magic to pry open the walls of the minds of those who speak of such tales or offer payment or use more magic to loosen their tongues. They are always willing to take the chance that more information locked

away in some persons mind holds more clues to what may the origin of the myth or folklore.

Folklorists are most likely to take a lot of skill ranks in Knowledge skills, most likely in monster lore, languages, local, history, Ravenloft, folklore, geography, nature, religion, nobility and such. They also prefer skills along the lines of Bluff, Decipher Script, Diplomacy, Gather Information, Intimidate, Listen and Spot.

Spells from the school of Enchantment (charm) are very beneficial to a folklorist as they seek out stories and rumours that feed their imagination and hunger. Many folklorists are cunning people with a lot of natural charisma to aid their career.

### **Occultist**

Occultists prefer to gain magical knowledge above all else, they often dabble in the darker aspects of magic, seeking out ancient tomes of dangerous rituals and spells that are said to contain much power. Occultists also draw the most enemies and rivals about them. Despite this apparent danger, they are the most common of Black Witches found within the dread realms. Occultists operate under the single vision that magic is power and with enough power you are unstoppable. Many of these Black Witches go on to seek lichdom towards the end of their natural lives so they may go on with their search for ultimate power in the field.

Again these are secretive individuals, they rarely seek out the aid of others, even if it would benefit them greatly, instead going off alone on dangerous missions to find forgotten lore that may prove dangerous to their

own mental and physical health. They believe that any cost is worth the eventual power they will hold. However, they are not above employing a few patsies to take the fall for them or lure rivals off in the wrong direction.

A few occultists will work for the greater good of others, but they will never do so out of the goodness of their hearts. Black Witches on this path will always stand to make a profit out of any venture they undertake, whether it is monetary or new rituals or spells to further their careers. They fear other spell casters that are more powerful than they are and are not above a little theft or assassination to hamper or remove these possible rivals.

The occultist often takes an array of skills; most suitable to their careers are Concentration, Decipher Script, Knowledge (arcane), Knowledge (folklore), Spellcraft and Wilderness Lore. It is also common for them to take charisma-based skills, though less important than those that will give them greater knowledge in their chosen field.

Occultists lust after any school of magic and rarely specialise in just the one. If possible an occultist will take mastery in several schools, particularly those that will hold powerful spells to aid their quests and help defeat their rivals. Divination, Evocation and Necromancy are the most common choices for an occultist to master in time, offering powerful magic even when they are at lower levels.

A high Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma is important to an occultist, though those that traverse paths that offer physical danger may take a few

levels in more martial character classes to aid them.

### **Politician**

Those who follow this path are often the most corrupt and dangerous of they're kind. Not only are they greedy like their fellows, they are underhanded and treacherous, willing to betray even their closest allies (such they have any) without notice for even the smallest step forward. Naturally, those who seek this path are very good at the profession and are most likely to succeed. Politicians prefer to start small, often in the service of another senior politician that they will milk for all they are worth. Once their master's usefulness is over, that senior politician often meets with an accident of scandal that will end their career or possibly their lives in more extreme instances.

In the past many a burgomaster, meistersingers council leader and squire have had the positions filled by Black Witches who have risen up and succeeded their superiors through any means necessary. Over the years it has been suspected that several burgomasters of Barovia have been Black Witches, as has several positions of Dementlieu's leading council. Despite their ambitions, politicians prefer some peace and tranquillity in their lives, they tend to be calm, patient and slow tempered. They will employ others to do their work for them and reap the rewards in private. For these Black Witches no cost is too great if it guarantees their climb up the political ladder.

A few politicians have achieved their goals in order to improve standards in the lives of others, but these individuals lived short lives,



usurped by unsuspected rivals that stood to overthrow them.

Politicians tend to be charismatic and have a sharp mind. They will focus on any class skill that will improve their political endeavours, so those with Charisma are immediate choices for them. Several Intelligence and Wisdom-based skills also benefit these Black Witches.

Black Witches who follow this path do not pay much attention to magic, but are most often adept in the use of charm and other enchantment spells. Divination also aids them to a degree, as will spells such as illusions that will help them draw attention away from themselves when needed. Politicians are devious and sly and their skills in magic reflect this.

The Mislead and Beguile class abilities are important for politicians, as is the Hex ability to curse rivals and superiors. The alternative class abilities of Malicious Hex, Minor Hex and Seduction (described later in this article) are also of use.

### **Professor**

Those Black Witches that go on to study as professors are among those individuals that know the most about the world about them. They often have some insight into the Mists and are aware of the presence of the Dark Lords if they do not know the actual identity of at least several of them. Some professors have insight into the Dark Powers themselves if they are stalwart enough to persist in such obscure and difficult studies. Many professors spawned from Black Witches are found within the ranks of the Fraternity of Shadows, the Kargat and other evil secret societies. The

Unholy Order of the Grave also contains a few undead that were Black Witch professors in life when they served their tenure within the University of Il-Aluk prior to the Requiem.

Professors are a walking store of knowledge known only to themselves but some may be known by a scant few around the world. They are not greedy of the knowledge they hold and do not truly care who else might know it, they only care that they do know it. They study endlessly to learn more about various subjects and the truths of the world around them. Never ending in their search even when it is possible that they know everything they could ever learn in one aspect of a single subject.

Professors will share their accumulated knowledge from time to time, often for a price they deem fair for such a privilege. Rival professors are also relatively civil to one another often competing in battles of one-upmanship when they meet in person. Some Black Witches that take this profession often attend the same places of higher learning or live in the same area and meet often, or even work together on occasion out of mutual benefit. However, both will secretly attempt to rob the other of key facts important to the whole subject at hand.

Professors are most likely to take a vast array of Knowledge skills, learning as much as they can in a wide range of subjects from something as simple as local agriculture to the very make up of the world about them (Ravenloft) or even Dark Lords of the Dark Powers. They also nearly always



have some training in the Profession (professor) skill to further their careers.

## Further Development

As the Prestige Class stands, it is clear that the Black Witch is one designed to use a vast network of lies and deceit to reach the pinnacle of their careers and research. However, though they may be powerful through the use of the class itself, this does not truly represent that which a Black Witch may learn during their lives. Each Black Witch will encounter knowledge not known to more than a handful of individuals throughout the world. Some may discover the truth about Dark Lords while another may discover the true essence of the world itself in some aspect, uncovering the ways that the world is a twisted parody unto itself. One may find a way to craft a magical item that would allow her to copy the memories and knowledge of others into her own mind. Meanwhile another might uncover a ritual that would summon the dead by having access to a personal effect of that person and have power over that spirit so that they may absorb all they need to know from the spirit they torment.

These examples show the diversity of the practices used by the Black Witches, which are scattered across the many domains of the Ravenloft Campaign Setting. This section offers up new feats and abilities that may be given to Black Witches to diversify each from all the others. However, many have a cost that must be paid. The Dungeon Master must grant permission before a player can adopt these skills and class abilities to a Black Witch. Other

characters may take the feats with the same permission.

## Feats

These feats are designed for Black Witches to take unto themselves to forward their study and careers. However, some are suitable for other characters to take, if they don't mind the costs attached.

### Analysis

The Black Witch is dedicated to a single form of study or specific subject matter in her quests for forbidden lore. She is utterly devoted to this one subject above all others.

**Prerequisites:** Wis 16, level 1 spell caster.

**Benefits:** The character gains a +2 bonus to her Decipher Script, Gather Information and Profession skill checks.

**Special:** The character may no longer apply skill ranks to 1 Knowledge skill she is trained in, as she turns her attention to another field of study.

### Blackest Art

A Black Witch with this ability has managed to uncover lore that increases her practice in the Black Arts to unheard of levels in power.

**Prerequisite:** Black Witch level 8

**Benefits:** The Black Witch's search for power has uncovered an ancient method that would increase to powers in the Black Arts to legendary status. From this point on she may cast all her spells chosen as Black Arts

as if she were a spell caster 4 levels higher.

**Special:** The Black Witch must make an immediate Powers check on taking this feat the chance of failing is equal to the Black Witch level.

### Deceiver

The Black Witch has become so used to lying and deceiving others that she has woven her ways of deception into a fine art.

**Prerequisite:** Must have access to the Mislead class ability.

**Benefit:** The Black Witch gains a further +2 bonus to her Bluff, Innuendo and Intimidate class skills. The same circumstances that affect the bonuses granted by the class ability also affect these.

**Special:** The Black Witch is so used to lying that she has difficulty telling the truth even when she wishes to. In order for her to tell the truth she must make a Bluff check (DC 25) to avoid telling another lie.

### Epiphany

Through some revelation the Black Witch discovers the true terrors of the path she is following and has an epiphany. She abandons her research into forbidden lore and redeems her true character.

**Prerequisite:** Must not have failed a Powers check, Black Witch level 5.

**Benefit:** The Black Witch abandons the Black Witch prestige class and loses all the class abilities and penalties for taking the class except spell casting. She opens a new chapter in her life. The character

retains the use skill ranks and feats she gained while using the class. These remain as a nagging reminder of her almost complete fall into darkness and losing herself forever. If she has had her alignment altered since taking on the Black Witch class, the alignment she had when adopting the class is restored.

**Special:** The former Black Witch is reminded of what she has learned and is more aware of the horrors about her than others are. Any supernatural influence that inflicts Fear, Horror or Madness checks have the DC's increased by 2 for her. However, her mind is stronger against mental effects, granting her a +4 Will save bonus.

### Font of Lore

From her many studies into the occult, the Black Witch has access to an almost unlimited supply of knowledge on a vast array of subjects.

**Prerequisite:** 10 ranks in at least 3 Knowledge skills.

**Benefits:** The Black Witch can always take 10 or take 20 on any Knowledge skill check, even if circumstances do not normally allow her to do so.

**Special:** Her reputation has increased and her supply of knowledge has drawn many rivals against her. The chance of her being discovered in a settlement is doubled. Also, she may only remain in a settlement for 3 days before the Dungeon Master begins to make checks for her discovery.

### Inside Information

Through careful and meticulous study the Black Witch has stumbled on very rare knowledge on the very

foundations of the dread realms themselves.

**Prerequisite:** Black Witch level 7, Knowledge (Ravenloft) 8 ranks.

**Benefit:** When making any knowledge skill check the Black Witch may add her Mislead modifier to her skill check.

**Special:** The Black Witch must make an immediate Powers check on taking this feat the chance of failing is equal to the Black Witch level. She also loses a skill rank in any 2 Knowledge skills she is trained in to represent the effect this new, found lore has on her mental state.

### Macabre

Through her careers, the Black Witch has lost sight of what she once was and has been effected by that lore she has studied, twisting her somewhat in ways she does not notice.

**Prerequisite:** 5<sup>th</sup> level spell caster.

**Benefit:** The Black Witch has darkened in time, her mind and thoughts have become slightly perverted and she sees things in a very different way to how she once perceived the world about her. She gains a +2 bonus to all Fear, Horror and Madness saves.

**Special:** The Black Witch suffers a permanent loss of 1 to her base Will save bonus, as her mind has twisted, her macabre outlook on life also increases her Outcast Rating by 1.

### Mastermind

The Black Witch is meticulous in her research and planning, she is a perfectionist in all she does and this gives her an edge over her competitors. Essentially she borders on being a true

genius in her respected fields of study and leaves nothing to chance.

**Prerequisites:** Int 15, Wis 15, 10 ranks in any Knowledge skill.

**Benefits:** The Black Witch with this feat may re-roll any failed Will save or Skill check, once per day. She also has a chance of spotting any rival in the same vicinity of her before she is spotted herself so she is never subject to being detected by her rivals and enemies.

**Special:** If the character creates a magical item, she gains the bonus of having to pay 25% less in gold for the materials required in creating the item, as she wastes less resources. However, due to her expensive research into every project she undertakes, she must pay twice the regular XP cost.

### Outside Influence

Through correspondence, secret meetings or some other form of contact the Black Witch has access to more forbidden lore and rituals that will forward her career.

**Prerequisites:** Strong Mind, failed at least 1 Powers check through the Black Witch PrC.

**Benefits:** Every month the Black Witch may add a new spell to her repertoire by substituting it for a spell she already has access to. Once a year she may substitute one of her Black Arts for another spell.

**Special:** Each time the Black Witch substitutes a spell or Black Art she must perform a ritual that costs her 100xp multiplied the spell level of the spell being substituted.

### Studious

When working on a project the character devotes all her time and energy to it, almost becoming fanatical to its eventual outcome and successes it might bring.

**Prerequisites:** Any Item Creation feat, able to cast 2nd level spells.

**Benefits:** The character may cut any period of time required to create a magic item in half, rounding down.

### Alternate Class Abilities

Listed here is a set of new abilities that may be taken by Black Witches instead of those listed in the Prestige Class. Unlike other class abilities, some have prerequisites attached that must be filled for the character to be able to adopt these optional class abilities.

### Acquisition

The Black Witch may take any class ability from any core character class (i.e. – those in the Players Handbook) that belongs to a character of a character level equal to or less than her Black Witch level. She may not use this ability to gain an extra feat or any ability from the Barbarian, Monk or Paladin classes or the Druid Wild Shape ability.

**Prerequisites:** The Black Witch must study into arcane rituals or forbidden lore that is linked to her field of study for the desired class ability. This requires a study of at least 20 hours a week for 3 months. Each week the Black Witch must take a Decipher Script check (DC 20) while the study continues. If any of the checks are failed, she may not take that ability and she may not take any other ability for

gaining that level in the Black Witch class. However, she does gain her BAB and saving throw modifiers, feat (if applicable, but not a bonus feat from the class), skill ranks and spell casting level as usual.

### A Thousand Faces

On attaining 7<sup>th</sup> level in the Black Witch class, the character may take this class ability instead of the Beguile ability.

The Black Witch through trial and error and having encountered much trouble in the past from rivals has developed skills, both mundane and supernatural in order to protect her self. Though the technique is used to avoid discovery in towns and around known rivals, the Black Witch may use this to fool and deceive anyone she meets.

As a full round action, the Black Witch is able to alter her physical appearance, speech patterns and all other tell tale signs of her true self. The disguise whether mundane or magical is perfect in every way and cannot be disbelieved through any other means other than true seeing. Even then the Black Witch is allowed an opposed Will save (DC 10 + half hit dice + Cha modifier of the character attempting the true seeing) to avoid discovery.

**Prerequisite:** Must have been discovered by a rival and run out of town in the past.

### Bonus Feat

On obtaining any level in the Black Witch class, the character may decide to take a Metamagic or Item creation feat instead of taking the ability that she would normally take on attaining that level.

If the Black Witch would normally gain a bonus Metamagic feat that level, she may instead choose to take an Item Creation feat or class ability she has previously rejected in favour of a bonus feat.

### **Infallible**

If the Black Witch has the Strong Mind class ability, she may, adopt this at any time she later gains a new level in the Black Witch class instead of the ability normally taken at that level. When she does take this ability her mind has become so trained and the witch so jaded that her Strong Mind bonus is increased to +8.

**Prerequisite:** The taking of this class ability is the result of incredible focus and dedication on the Black Witch's behalf, and she must have spent at least 6 months studying the most vile subject matter and heinous texts for a period not less than 6 months. It is possible for the Black Witch to have trained herself through other means, such as practising her craft with hags, requiring only 3 months of study. While studying in the company of hags, there is a 25% chance each month, which they have turned on her and tainted her, causing her alignment to slip 1 step toward Evil. If she takes this class ability through regular study and training, she may make a Will save (DC 30) to avoid having her alignment slip a step.

### **Malicious Hex**

On reaching 10<sup>th</sup> level in the Black Witch class, the character may take this ability if she fills the requirements.

The Black Witch may use her Hex ability as usual but she may also bring about curses that are of

dangerous strength in addition to those the Hex ability grants.

**Prerequisites:** The Black Witch must have an evil alignment and have failed at least 1 Powers check related to the Black Witch prestige class.

### **Minor Hex**

Instead of taking the Mislead class ability, the Black Witch may adopt a more primitive version of the Hex class ability. This ability only allows Embarrassing strength curses to manifest from the use of this power, other than that it works in an identical fashion to the standard Hex class ability the Black Witch would receive at 10<sup>th</sup> level.

### **Reality Wrinkle**

Instead of taking the Hex class ability, the Black Witch may adopt this one. She has become so infused with her rituals and studies that the Black Witch has become something more than mortal through some accident or arcane miracle of her concoction. She has a Reality Wrinkle like those belonging to Outsiders in dread realms with a radius equal to 10 feet for every hit dice the Black Witch has.

Within her wrinkle, the Black Witch has all the benefits and penalties an Outsider would normally have and she is also able to perform Power Rituals like those a Fiend would use.

Her racial type is changed to Outsider (with alignment based subtype) and she is now subject to anything that would effect that racial type, including weapons designed to slay those creatures and spells that would effect them. I.e. – should she ever leave the dread realms, she could be called back, she may also be summoned via a Gate spell. The Black

Witch also obtains a phylactery that she must sacrifice 1000xp to create. She also gains Damage Reduction 5 (with a weakness of the DM's discretion).

Taking this class ability inflicts another Powers check (this is in addition to the one taken for gaining a new level in the prestige class) with a chance of failing equal to 15%. If she does fail, her alignment immediately becomes Chaotic Evil and she becomes an NPC under the control of the Dungeon Master. If she passes this Powers check, her alignment remains the same and she an entity tied to her alignment. From that point on her alignment may never be altered in the future.

### **Seduction**

The Black Witch may adopt this ability instead of taking a Black Art. Instead of devoting to her search of greater knowledge through

conventional means, she has practised the art of seduction to a fine art. Whenever she attempts to seduce a target, she is counted as having used a more mundane version of her Beguile ability. The target is allowed a Will save (DC 10 + Black Witch level + Cha modifier + Mislead modifier) to avoid the seduction. If she successfully seduces her target, the target will part with any knowledge she wishes to learn, from lore that will aid a current investigation or project, fund the creation of a magic item she is working on, grant her access to spells she may learn and so forth.

Using this ability for the acquisition of information and resources that will be used to forward evil means will require a Powers check with a chance of failure equal to the Black Witch's class level.

**Prerequisites:** Bluff 8 ranks, Intimidate 8 ranks.



# Tayce Bloodyblades

## A Legend Come to Life

By Anson "the Stray" Brehmer

"Nursery Rhymes are said  
Verses in my head  
Into our childhood they're spoon-fed  
Hidden violence revealed  
Darkness that seems real  
look at the pages that cause all this evil..."

--KoRn, "Shoofs & Ladders"

How quickly people seem to forget the important things. History becomes legend, legend becomes myth, and myth becomes fairy tales, told only to children and believed only by the gullible. So few remember the sometimes horrific events that are remembered now only in children's nursery rhymes. For instance, a deadly plague, one that wiped out nearly a third of the total population of an entire continent, is now told only through innocent mouths. "Ring around the rosies, pockets full of posies, ashes, ashes, all fall down." Such a simple rhyme is all the legacy left after the Black Death descended and wiped out whole towns and cities. So too is the legend of The Bloodyblades ill-remembered. "Tayce, Tayce, Bloodyblades Stalks the night on goat-foot legs All should cry, Beware! Beware! His blazing eyes and silver hair!" This rhyme is passed down by mothers to scare their children into behaving. Tayce, the boogieman. "Clean your room, or I shall summon

Tayce!"

"Eat your vegetables, or the Bloodyblades will know you've been bad. I'll call him, and he'll take you away forever."

"He comes at night to punish all the wicked children, you naughty, naughty child."

And all the children shudder and pull the covers over their head, and imagine red eyes in the darkness, or a flash of silver hair, or fantasize that a thin, skeletal figure is creeping up on them out of the shadows, his bloody dagger clutched in his bandaged hands, raised and ready to strike...

And they should fear. Because Tayce exists. And it is far, far easier to call him up than it should be.

## The History

The history of Tayce, the real Tayce, is shrouded in mystery, as all good assassins would want. Some say he was orphaned in a war and took to thievery to survive before he found there was a profit to be had by the stealthy kill. Others say he was one of the first Shadowdancers, who bound himself to the night in order to spread terror and death. A few claim that he was not human at all, but a satyr who took glee in causing torment to travelers and was cast out of his wood for his crimes. And there are other legends, all different, the only connection being the name and his

profession, a slayer in the night.

The legends agree, too, that Tayce preyed on children. he enjoyed the purity of their terror, and would stalk them, kidnap them, and torture them in as many fiendish ways as he could imagine. But when the local authorities discovered the son of the local lord, skinned and dissected on a tavern table, Tayce found himself being the hunted instead of the hunter. In desperation, he sought a way to continue playing his games forever, and turned to darker powers. He called up a monster using a description and a name that he found in an old tome one of his victims had owned, a creature he thought was a demon, and bested it, demanding that it grant him his wish. But the "demon" was no such thing. It was an Ennui, a nightmare spawn that, while having some power, could not grant what Tayce sought. It knew of something that could, though, and told him to "seek the Mask of Dreams Fulfilled."

The legendary Mask of Dreams Fulfilled was an artifact of tremendous potency, a mask that would literally make all the wearer's dreams come true. After searching for years, hounded every step of the way by the Lord's men, Tayce found the mask in an old, abandoned shop. "Put me on, and All your dreams shall be fulfilled" the Mask told him, whispering the words in his mind. Tayce smiled, and just as the Lord's guards burst down the door, he slipped the mask over his head, and said, "I wish never to be caught. I wish never to die." And with those words, Tayce melted away...leaving only his magical dagger behind.

The mask had, indeed, granted his

request. It changed his structure, turning him into an elemental creature of fear and shadows. He could not be killed so long as his dagger remained intact, and with his new powers over the shadows, he could not be caught, either. But he could not kill freely. The mask had granted all of his dreams, it is true, but nightmares are dreams, too, and Tayce's deepest nightmare was that he would be bound to another's service and unable to do whatever he willed. The Lord who had Tayce's dagger discovered a chant written along its edge which summoned the shadowy fiend that Tayce had become. No fool, the Lord quickly realized that having a bound fiend as an assassin would make him a powerful political force, and so he used Tayce as his personal servant and hit man.

This state of existence enraged the beast, and because Tayce could not harm the Lord directly while he held the dagger, the Bloodyblades (as he became known) could do nothing about it. Until he realized one day that the dagger could only summon him, not banish him. After he killed his target, he could do as he wished until summoned again. And so a plan formed in Tayce's mind.

He began to cause dangerous "accidents" around the manor, subtly attacking the Lord's other children. He would insult the Lord and make veiled threats at every opportunity, and slowly the Lord began to fear for the safety of his family. When he was sent off to assassinate far-away targets, he would leave little clues and hints as to who had ordered the execution, gradually raising suspicions about the Lord. Even though his curse prevented him from acting during daylight, he still made life miserable around the town, using his shadowy

powers to sneak into homes and cause terror night after night. And the more fear he caused, the more power he gained.

The peasants, backed by lords who had been hamstrung by the Lord's pet assassin and would take no more abuse, revolted. As they stormed his manor, the panicked Lord summoned Tayce and begged the fiend to protect him. This was the moment Tayce had been waiting for. He agreed, then turned and slew the Lord's youngest daughter, right in front of the Lord's eyes. The Lord was shocked and angered. He demanded to know why Tayce had slain his beloved girl, and the fiend replied coldly that he was only bound to protect the Lord, and no one else. Enraged, the Lord attacked Tayce with his own blade, driving it deep into the fiend's heart. Tayce only grinned, and stepped back, the dagger still protruding from his chest.

"And now that I have my dagger back," he said, "I don't need to protect you, either."

When the villagers broke down the throne room's doors, they came upon a hideous scene. They found the Lord and his daughter slashed apart and placed in each other's embrace, while above them was scrawled a single word in blood on the wall. "FREE!"

As the story goes, someone remembered the words on Tayce's dagger, the ones that revealed the way to summon him.

"Name me twice, call me thrice,  
Name the one who'll go away  
A knock, a knock, a broken glass  
and Tayce shall come to play."

A few ambitious nobles tried to work the summoning through the years,

but none could manage to call up the fiend. Some believed that this was because possession of the dagger was necessary for the incantation to work, while others believed that the rhyme wasn't an incantation at all, but a riddle, and whoever solved it would have the key to calling him forth. They tried many methods, but nothing seemed to work. It seemed Tayce was, indeed, free.

And so they spread this rhyme to their children, to warn them that the monster was still out there. And as the rhyme spread, it was embellished, and added to. Throughout the generations, people forgot the terror that the words remembered, and he became a myth. A boogieman, fit only to scare children. A minor footnote in history, quickly brushed aside. Except...

Except Tayce was not free. The legend was supposed to end with Tayce's escape into the night from his murdered Lord's castle, but the curse of the Mask of Dreams Fulfilled would not be shaken off so easily.

In truth, when Tayce executed his grand betrayal, and brazenly defied his curse, the Mists rose up and snatched him away to be punished for his arrogance. Perhaps he was locked in a glass prison by the Church of Ezra or the Order of Guardians. Perhaps he became the pet of some long forgotten Darklord. Perhaps he became a Darklord himself, absolute ruler of a tiny Island of Terror floating somewhere in the Misty Border. Perhaps he became trapped in the Mists, like a ghost. Only the Dark Powers know for certain. But for three and a half decades, it seemed as if he'd simply ceased to exist.

Not long after the Great Upheaval, a child in a small mining town discovered a rusty, pitted dagger in an empty well he'd jumped in to avoid the larger village boys who'd decided he needed a good thrashing. He was able to make out the words inscribed on the blade, and, desperate, remembered the tales his mother had frightened him with when he was younger. Clutching the dagger to himself, he began to whisper to himself as the sun set and the shadows grew longer.

"Tayce, Tayce, Bloodyblades!  
Tayce, Tayce, Bloodyblades!  
Tayce, Tayce, come and play!  
Make the bad kids go away!"

The bodies weren't found until the following morning, horribly cut and mutilated. Someone had carved the words "I'M BACK!" in the chest of the largest of the boys. The child who'd hidden in the well was never seen again, so his fate is unknown.

What *is* known is that stories of Tayce appearing in response to being summoned increased dramatically after that. Occasionally, it would be a parent, angered at a child one too many times, who, in frustration, made good his threat to call up the Bloodyblades to take his naughty child away. Or perhaps a kid, either because he'd been mercilessly picked on or on a dare, would stumble on to just the right meaning of "Name me Twice, Call me Thrice." Whatever the reason, The legend was alive again. And like many such urban myths, it grew upon itself.

## The Legend

To hear the legend these days is to hear what happens after someone has called up the Bloodyblades. Once the call has

been made, legend says Tayce is bound to answer it. There will be a knock at the door of only two raps, then the sound of something inside the house, usually a glass or mirror if one is available, shattering. And by these signs you will know he's come...and the killing will start.

First Tayce will stalk the named victim for a few days, whispering threats and other, nastier things that only the victim will be able to hear. Maybe he'll slice the person a few times with his dagger, whose cuts are cursed and do not heal naturally. Then he'll watch, silently, always appearing to be right at the corner of his victim's sight, ready to strike. Only when this treatment has driven his victim to the brink of insanity will he strike, leaving the body slashed up in grisly and creative ways, to be found in the place where it will cause the most horror.

But the true horror has only just begun. He will not just go away after being summoned, and he resents being called up. He will turn on the summoner and start stalking him, but he won't kill the pool soul. Not yet. First he will find out who associates with the poor fool who conjured him up, and slay them, all the while trying to drive the one who called him up mad. And unless he is driven away, he will, eventually, slay the one who called him from the shadows.

There are three ways to stop him. First, he cannot abide the bite of cold steel, the only metal that can truly wound him. Second, he cannot act in daylight, and powerful magical light hampers many of his powers, though not all of them. And third, bearing the sliver holy symbol of a good deity will protect you from his

touch, though not his powers, and he will keep trying to trick you into putting the symbol down or at least covering it up. Only these can keep you safe, and if he is unable to harm you, and your will is strong, he might just give up. If you can destroy his body, he will stop tormenting you, but it won't kill him...not permanently, anyway...

## Adventure Hooks

Children play with things that they don't always understand. A child that the party is friendly with, who's been abused or picked on by others, has been talking lately about a "magic genie" that's become her imaginary friend. Only, the children who've been mean to her suddenly begin dying in horrible string of gruesome murders, and their parents ask the PCs to investigate. Could it be that the girl's "magic genie" is actually the Bloodyblades? And, if so, can they stop him before he turns against the girl's family in revenge for being summoned?

The PCs face a great evil (a lich, vampire lord, or other singular person with great power), one they can't face directly by themselves. Some of the less moral among them hear rumors about a dagger that the leader of the Assassin's guild has, one that has the power to call up a monster capable of destroying the evil once and for all. The players manage to acquire the dagger (through theft, bribery, or performing some sort of service for the guild) and summon Tayce to fight their battle for them. The battle goes as planned, but now the fiend has marked the party as his next targets...and he'll make sure to make them suffer by attacking their associates and relatives first.

A powerful noble asks the PCs for help. Something is stalking him, causing

all sorts of nasty "accidents" on his manor grounds that threaten his wife and children. When the PCs investigate, they discover that the person behind all this is none other than Tayce...the noble has his dagger, and has been using the creature as a pet assassin to maintain his power base. Now the PCs have an interesting choice to make: Stop the Bloodyblades and help the murderous lord, or let poetic justice take its course as Tayce prepares to slay the lord for summoning him up, putting the noble's innocent family at risk.

A bizarre string of murders has the townsfolk on edge. Someone calling himself "Tayce Bloodyblades" has descended on the hapless village, and the townsfolk are afraid to fight back because of their fear of all his legendary powers. The PCs must discover if this is, truly, the work of the Bloodyblades, or an imposter who's using the name to spread fear and keep himself safe. As an added complication, if it *is* an imposter, what happens if the real Tayce discovers what's going on? Will he be enraged, and start an even more bloody rampage to prove who's really in charge? Or will he be delighted, and help protect the deranged maniac who's using his name and gaining power for him?

## TAYCE BLOODYBLADES

**Medium-sized      Fey      (Evil)**

**HD:** 12d6+36 (90 hp)

**Imitative:** +12 (Dex, Improved Initiative)

**Speed:** 40 ft., Climb 40 ft.

**AC:** 21 (+8 Dex, +3 Natural) Touch 18, Flat Footed 21

**Base Attack Bonus/Grapple:** +6/+8

**Attack:** +2 *Wounding Dagger* +17

**Melee** (1d4+5 plus 1 point of



Constitution Damage)  
**Full Attack:** +2 *Wounding Dagger*  
 +17/+12 Melee (1d4+5 plus 1 point of  
 Constitution Damage)  
**Space/Reach:** 5 ft./5 ft.  
**Special Attacks:** Maddening Whispers,  
 Cursed Wounding, Sneak Attack +4d6,  
 Cloud of Night  
**Special Qualities:** DR 10/Cold Iron, SR  
 21, Regeneration 5, Shadow Blend,  
 Shadow Walk, Corner of the Eye, Hide  
 in Plain Sight, Improved Uncanny  
 Dodge, Darkvision 60', Unnatural Aura,  
 Daylight Powerlessness, Repelled by  
 Holy Symbols, Phylactery  
**Saves:** Fort +7, Ref +16, Will +9  
**Abilities:** Str 16, Dex 26, Con 17, Int 16,  
 Wis 12, Cha 16  
**Skills:** Bluff +18, Climb +21, Escape  
 Artist +27, Hide +27, intimidate +15,  
 Listen +11, Move Silently +27, Sense  
 Motive +16, Slight of Hand +20, Spot  
 +11, Tumble +27  
**Feats:** Combat Expertise, Improved  
 Feint, Improved Initiative, Weapon  
 Finesse, Weapon Focus (Dagger).  
**Climate/Terrain:** Any rural or urban  
**Organization:** Unique  
**Challenge Rating:** 15  
**Treasure:** none  
**Alignment:** Chaotic Evil  
**Advancement:** By Character Class  
 (Favored Class: Rogue)

*Sinister red eyes shine in the darkness, following your movements. You occasionally catch flashes of silver hair, and once or twice you catch the suggestion of a gaunt, almost skeletal figure clad only in a tattered brown cloak and tight, leathery skin the color of a drowned man's body skittering about on goat-like legs, a bloody dagger clutched in its bandaged hands...*  
 Tayce Bloodyblades may seem like a demon at first glance, but in truth he is a natural creation, formed of shadows,

fear, and madness. He is, literally, made from the fear of the darkness and the unknown things that go bump in the night. He feeds on this fear, and it sustains him. Though he loathes the fact that he can be summoned by just about anyone who would care to call him, he realizes that the horror and mayhem he causes have made him nearly immortal, so he does little to try and lift his curse.

Tayce needs fear to thrive. If he's prevented from causing terror and mayhem, or if people stop believing that he exists, he starves, and begins to fade in a manner similar to the way a Sinkhole of Evil fades if the emotions behind it are not maintained. He suffers one negative level each week he remains in a domain where no one, living or undead, believes he exists or remembers his legend as anything more than grim fairy tale, to a minimum of one HD. He can restore lost levels at a rate of one per week through sustained activity and promotion of the terror surrounding his name. (This can also be used to scale Tayce for lower-level PCs, if the DM desires).

Like a vampire, Tayce sleeps during the day, but unlike vampires he is not helpless and can be roused normally by sounds, movement, attacks, etc. He normally chooses a secluded, shadowy area to hide in for the day, preferable somewhere inside his victim's house where he can easily use his Maddening Whispers and Corner of the Eye abilities and can spy on his victim while relying on his Hide in Plain Sight ability to remain undetected.. Occasionally, he remains awake to spy more actively on his victim, but he suffers the usual penalties from sleep deprivation (Cannot regain hit points through natural healing,



cumulative -1 morale penalty on attack rolls, saves, skill checks, and ability checks per full day without rest, to a maximum of -4).

### **Combat**

Tayce vastly prefers to stalk his chosen victim for days before striking, using his Maddening Whispers and an occasional slice from his cursed Wounding Dagger to inspire the terror that sustains him. His goal is to wring as much horror from the person as he can before finally slaying his victim. When the time for the kill does come, he strikes from unexpected locations and tries to get in as many Sneak Attacks as possible, often by either using his Improved Feint ability to get past his opponent's guard, or else using his Hide in Plain Sight ability to sneak around his victim.

**Maddening Whispers (Su):** Tayce may use this ability on any one target within 120 feet once per day. Only the chosen victim can hear the insane whispers and dire threats of the Bloodyblades. Treat this as a Gaslighting attempt (see Madness Saves in the Ravenloft PHB, pg 83.) except that it takes only ten days instead of thirty, and Tayce doesn't have to spend time gaining the trust of his victim. Typically, Tayce stalks his victim for several days, wearing away at his target's sanity with this ability and an occasional cut with his Cursed Wounding ability until the creature goes insane and begs for death, or takes its own life, or Tayce bores of the game and decides to finish off the poor soul.

**Cursed Wounding (Su):** When using his *Wounding Dagger* Tayce can leave cuts that are vicious and hard to heal. All the Constitution damage Tayce deals with his *Wounding Dagger* is vile

damage, which does not heal naturally and can only be healed magically on *Consecrated* or *Hallowed* ground. The vile damage is a supernatural ability of Tayce himself, and not a property of his blade.

**Sneak Attack (Ex):** Tayce can make a sneak attack like a rogue, dealing an extra 4d6 damage whenever a foe is denied his or her Dexterity bonus, or whenever Tayce is flanking.

**Cloud of Night (Sp):** Tayce can call upon his dark heritage to create a mass of inky shadows that he can use to hide in. He can use *Darkness* 3/day at a caster level of 12.

**Regeneration 5 (Ex):** Only Cold Iron or good-aligned weapons deal normal damage to Tayce, thanks to his connection to the shadows. Additionally, Tayce cannot use Regeneration in natural daylight or within the radius of an Evocation [Light] spell of 3rd level or higher (such as a *Daylight* spell)

**Shadow Blend (Su):** Tayce Bloodyblades has an innate connection to the shadows. In any conditions other than full daylight Tayce can disappear into the shadows, gaining total concealment (50% miss chance). Artificial illumination, even magical illumination such as a *light* or *continual flames* spell, does not negate this ability. A *Daylight* spell, however, will.

**Shadow Jump (Su):** Tayce has the ability to travel between the shadows as if by means of a *dimensional door* spell, provided that the transport begins and ends in an area with at least some shadows in it. Tayce can use this ability as a move action at will.

**Hide in Plain Sight (Su):** Tayce can use the Hide skill even while being observed. As long as the Bloodyblades is within 10 feet of some sort of shadow, he can hide himself from view in the open without having anything to actually hide behind. He can't hide in his own shadow, however, nor can he hide while in direct natural sunlight or in the radius of a *Daylight* spell.

**Corner of the Eye (Su):** As long as Tayce is stalking a victim, he always seems to be lurking just at the corner of his chosen victim's field of vision, regardless of whether he's actually present or not. The victim takes a -2 penalty on all Wisdom-based skill checks as long as the Bloodyblades stalks him.

**Improved Uncanny Dodge (Ex):** Tayce can react to danger faster than his senses would normally allow him to. He retains his Dexterity bonus to AC in situations where he would normally lose it, and he cannot be flanked.

**Unnatural Aura (Su):** animals, whether wild or domesticated, can sense the unnerving presence of the Bloodyblades at a distance of 30 feet. They do not willingly approach nearer than that and panic if forced to do so; they remain panicked as long as they are within that range.

**Daylight Powerlessness (Ex):** Tayce is powerless in natural sunlight (not merely a *daylight* spell) and will flee from it. If

Tayce is caught in sunlight he cannot attack and can only take either a single move action or a single standard action in a round. Furthermore, Tayce takes damage from light-based magic (such as a *Searing Light* or *Sunbeam* spell) as if he were an undead vulnerable to light.

**Repelled by Holy Symbols (Ex):** Tayce cannot touch or make a melee attack against anyone who boldly presents a silver holy symbol, and must remain at least 5 feet from the person as long as the symbol is strongly presented. This doesn't harm Tayce, however--it merely keeps him at bay.

**Phylactery:** Tayce cannot be killed normally. Even if his body is destroyed, as long as his phylactery exists he can form a new body from the surrounding shadows and other elements within 1d10 days. His phylactery is his favored weapon, his +2 *Wounding Dagger*. Tayce keeps his real dagger hidden, using a replica formed from the same shadowstuff that forms his body in combat and for stalking purposes. If the replica is separated from Tayce's body form more than 1 minute it dissolves. Anyone who can find the Bloodyblades' real dagger can command him as though through a *Dominate Monster* spell as long as he owns it, though Tayce will obsessively try to kill his captor or trick him into putting down the dagger every chance he gets. If the phylactery is destroyed, Tayce dies as well. Tayce's dagger is a Tiny object and has 40 hp, a hardness of 20, and a break DC of 40.

# Xavier D'Arcey

## Soul of a Poet, Skin of a Beast

By Joseph "Bela" Zeffelmaier

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### Xavier D'Arcey

**Male marikith ftr3:** CR 5; Medium-size aberration (5 ft. 11 in.); HD 3d8+3d10+12; hp 41; Init +8; Speed 40 ft., climb 20 ft.; AC 19 (touch 16, flat-footed 15); Atk +9 melee (1d4+3, claws) and +4 melee (2d4+3, bite); SA voice mimicry; SQ compression, darkvision 120 ft., immunities; AL NG; SV Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +5; Str 16, Dex 19, Con 15, Int 15, Wis 14, Cha 5\*.

*Skills and Feats:* Diplomacy +4, Escape Artist +16, Hide +12, Jump +4, Listen +8, Move Silently +14, Profession (Writing) +10, Spot +8; Back Against the Wall, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Weapon Focus (Bite), Weapon Focus (Claws).

*Languages:* Mordentish\*, Balok, Darkonese, Thaani.

*Signature possessions:* ring of protection +2, sword cane (+1 rapier).

\*If dealing with someone who cannot see him, Xavier D'Arcey's Charisma functions as though it were 16.

Despite his cultured voice and mannered ways, no one would mistake Xavier D'Arcey for a gentleman. Indeed, he's not a man at all. He stands just less than six feet tall, but his body is thin and wiry. He moves with fluid, eerie grace, and his body slight smells of foul oil. Most that get a good look at him are filled with revulsion. His skin is midnight black, and shimmers with a greasy shine. He moves as though he has

no bones, and in truth, he has none. His hairless body is supported by internal bladders that give him a humanoid shape. The closest things D'Arcey has to bones are chitinous fangs and talons, clearly meant to rend living flesh. His eyes are red, devoid of iris or pupils. They shine in the darkness in which he usually resides. Few outside of Paridon have ever seen such a creature, and only a handful of Paridoners have caught glimpse of this beast and survived. Xavier D'Arcey is a Marikith hunter...but his heart and mind are still those of a mortal man.

### Background

Xavier D'Arcey was the son of a minor noble family in Richemulot. He was a sensitive young child, given to reading and writing at an early age. Though he excelled at fencing and wrestling, his heart belonged to poetry and art. He attended the best schools, and grew from a curious youth to a handsome young man. Xavier had everything a man could want; a striking figure, a keen mind, charm, and wealth. Although not a cruel lad, he did share his bed with many women. He broke many hearts, but he believed his heart simply held more passion than any one person could satisfy. Often in the throws of love, he produced excellent poetry and short stories, filling his words with the beauty he saw all around him.

When Xavier was twenty, several of his friends decided they'd had enough of the pampered life. They sought a life of adventure, and Xavier's voice joined theirs in a call for excitement. Xavier said good-bye to his family and lady friends, and joined his four colleagues on the open road. Their first year abroad was full of adventure. They escaped the clutches of Verbreker werewolves, aided in putting a Mordentish ghost to rest, traveled along the Musrade on a mysterious paddleboat, and studied the strange magic of Hazlan. Xavier's heart swelled with every journey, and he grew more skilled as a swordsman. His journals swelled with exciting tales, and he began to dream of a life as an author...after he'd seen everything this world had to offer.

It was the beginning of the friend's second year of travels. Having seen much of the core, they decided to spend some time at sea. They set sail on a merchant vessel, and waited to sea where the mists would take them. Their first stop was Paridon. At first, Xavier and his friends felt oddly at home. After all, Paridon was a highly advanced island, full of the high-quality entertainment and lodging they were used to. Still, the five knew well that there was most certainly adventure waiting in the cramped back-alleys and seedier parts of town. Unfortunately for all of them, they were right.

The first few nights in Paridon were eventful, if not dangerous. The group visited the religious headquarters of the Divinity of Mankind, where they learned of Paridon's greatest threats-Doppelgangers and Marikith. The group met, discussed, and finally made their decision. Gathering up their gear, the group made their way to the sewers. Armed with fire, pistols and enchanted

blades, the quintet went from the filthy city of Paridon to the utterly deadly tunnels of Timor. Their first few encounters were mundane enough; giant vermin and the occasional sewer-dwelling lunatic. But their trouble truly began when the pipe they were crawling through collapsed from underneath them. The group found themselves separated; three of them in the upper tunnels, while Xavier and his friend Marc fell to deeper ones. And that was where the Marikith hunters found them.

No sooner had the two friends relit their lanterns than they found themselves surrounded by glowing red eyes. They raised their weapons, and a wave of hideous monsters descended upon them. Marc and Xavier fought hard but were overwhelmingly outnumbered. They fell back with the hunters racing behind them. With a surge of adrenaline, Xavier made a great leap back into an upper tunnel. Marc's leap wasn't as impressive, but he managed to grasp the lip of the pipe. Marc cried out for Xavier to help pull him up, but something sinister stirred within D'Arcey's soul. He realized that, if he let Marc fall, then the Marikith hunters would likely focus all their efforts on him. Xavier would have enough of a respite to escape. And though it pained him greatly, he placed a boot heel on Marc's forehead and pushed him back into the Marikith's murderous fangs.

What many travelers don't realize is there is a curse in the pipe ways of Timor. When one does an evil act in these tunnels, the Dark Powers may take hold and twist the sinner. And so was the case with Xavier D'Arcey. After about an hour, Xavier's remaining friends found him. However, he was no longer the handsome young noble they knew. Already, his skin was darkening, and his

bones liquefying in his body. It was his screams of agony that drew them to him, and they were shocked to see him turning into the very monster he was fleeing from...a Marikith Hunter. One member of the group, a spellcaster, managed to put Xavier into a magical slumber, and they hauled him out of the sewers and into Paridon proper.

The first thing the group did was take Xavier to the temple of the Divinity of Mankind. There, they were greeted by an old priest they were acquainted with. They hurried the rapidly-transforming Xavier to a private laboratory. It turned out that the old priest was also a skilled alchemist, and one of a very specialized group within the church. Years earlier, the serial killer named "Bloody Jack" was revealed to be a doppelganger. A select few in the church believed that the doppelgangers weren't monsters, but sad creatures yearning to achieve the perfection of the human form. The old priest was in that camp, and had developed a potion that he hoped would lock such creatures into one form. It was his hope that, by altering the alchemical substance slightly, he might be able to stop Xavier's transformation into a Markith hunter.

So Xavier's three remaining allies tied him to a table, and the priest forced the chemicals down his throat. The man-monster writhed and screamed out in agony, then passed out. They all hovered over the unconscious Xavier, awaiting his reversion to human form. Sadly, it never came. One of the friends, an older fellow named Gaston, raised his sword, prepared to put Xavier out of his misery. Suddenly, the beast's red eyes opened wide, but it was Xavier's voice that came out. The old priest was the first to realize what had happened. While the potion hadn't returned Xavier to his

original form, it had restored his mind. They untied Xavier, who staggered to a mirror. The boy screamed with pain as he saw the twisted monster that starred back. His friends tried to calm him, to no avail. Xavier fled into the temple, knocking over sconces and torches along the way. Without intending it, he'd set the church on fire. He staggered onto the street, sobbing in despair. When he turned to face the burning building, he realized what he'd done. In a matter of moments, the entire temple was ablaze, and only Gaston was able to escape it alive.

Gaston and Xavier ducked into the shadowy areas of Paridon, and managed to secure passage back to the Core. Xavier remained in the bowels of the ship, hiding in the darkness he'd begun to grow accustomed to. Gaston spent many hours with his friend, keeping him from utterly falling into despair. Still, Xavier was crushed. Everything he had once was now gone, except for his writing. Gaston found every piece of paper he could, and kept Xavier writing. Indeed, it helped raise the man's spirit slightly, as it reminded him that his mind and soul were still human.

The two friends made it back to Richemulot, keeping Xavier hidden from view under thick cloaks and heavy clothing. When Xavier returned to his home in Pont-a-Museau, he found that his family had been killed and his lands claimed after a feud with the famous Renier family. Only the constant friendship of Gaston kept Xavier from descending into madness. The two purchased one of the many abandoned estates in the city, and set themselves up with the money they'd gained from adventuring.

Gaston worked constantly to keep the oft-suicidal Xavier in his right mind.



One day, Gaston took one of Xavier's manuscripts to a publisher. The publisher was enraptured with Xavier's work, and immediately begged Gaston for whatever else he might have. Gaston explained that he was but a humble servant for this reclusive author, and explained the entire situation to Xavier when he returned. To his surprise, Xavier was thrilled by the news. Becoming a published writer made him feel like a normal man again, in some way.

Over the past few years, Xavier D'Arcey's works have become rather well-known. His novels tend to be adventure-romances, and filled with the detail only a well-traveled writer can have. The popularity of his latest series, entitled "The Heart's Blade Series," as drawn many women to seek out the famous recluse, but they are all turned away by Gaston. The mystery of Xavier D'Arcey has only made him more renowned, but only Gaston and one other know the real source of his solitude.

### Current Sketch

The strange situation of Xavier D'Arcey has taken a darker turn lately. He's discovered that the old priest's cure was not entirely complete. About six months ago, he found himself feeling the pull to scramble underground and fill his mouth with human flesh. His reason was vanishing, and some dark instinct was taking hold. He crept out of his house that night, and stumbled upon a robber accosting a young couple. With superhuman speed, Xavier grabbed the criminal and dragged him into a side alley. The night was full of horrible screaming as D'Arcey tore the man to pieces and devoured his flesh. No sooner had he eaten his fill than his rational

mind returned to him. Creeping back to his manor, he explained what had happened to Gaston. Since then, once a week, the monster in him begins to rise up again, and only human flesh can return his sanity to him. Xavier has sworn to kill only the guilty, feasting on the many criminals that haunt Pont-a-Museau.

Recently, Xavier came to the attention of Jacqueline Renier, Richemulot's Darklord. She is actually quite a fan of his work, and decided to seek the man out. Gaston was unable to turn her away, and she barged into Xavier's private chambers. There, a man who looked like a monster met a monster that could transform into a woman. Renier wasn't put off by his hideous appearance, and was quite congenial to him. Unable to resist the interest of a lovely woman after so long, Xavier told his entire story to her. Jacqueline considered the loss of some of Richemulot's filth to be an acceptable price to keep this literary treasure in her city. However, she expressly forbade him from killing any wererats, unless she herself gave him permission. That night, an insidious agreement was forged. From time to time, Renier would tell Xavier of a wererat who had become troublesome to her. That night, D'Arcey would slip into the streets and murder the victims, their blood helping to keep his human mind intact.

Renier has kept her knowledge of Xavier's secret to herself, sharing it with no one. She even visits him from time to time, finding him to be charming and verbose company. Still, Gaston has begun to become suspicious, fearing that Renier's influence may lead Xavier down a path from which there is no turning back.



## Personality

Xavier is truly a man torn. He loathes what he has become, and all the reflective surfaces in his house are kept covered. His only real outlet is his writing, which he pursues with a fury. Gaston is his only real connection with the outside world, and he feels great remorse for that situation. Gaston will hear none of it, feeling his own guilt for not being able to truly cure his only surviving friend. Xavier has become something of a state-sanctioned vigilante, and the local guard has labeled him "The Render," based on his method of killing. Still, he seems to kill only the wicked, so the police are not actively hunting him. He has begun to enjoy his occasional bloodlust, as it is the only time he can forget what he did to Marc. He knows that he brought damnation upon himself. The money he's made writing keeps his house well-furnished, and he still wears noble finery, in a constant attempt to remind himself what he was and still is. He treads a very thin line, and he knows it. Still, he will not kill anyone he believes innocent, and is desperately trying to cling to whatever remnants of goodness lie within him.

## Combat

Xavier D'Arcey holds all the abilities of a Marikith hunter, combined with his own skill as a fighter.

**Voice mimicry (Ex):** Xavier can reproduce any voice he's heard with eerie accuracy. To fool a subject, he must make an opposed bluff check (+10 racial bonus) against his opponent's listen check.

**Compression (Ex):** Due to his boneless nature, Xavier can squeeze through any space at least 1 foot in diameter as a free action. He can squeeze through a 7-11 inch diameter gap as a

move-equivalent action, and a 3-6 inch diameter gap as a full-round action.

**Immunities:** Xavier takes only half damage from bludgeoning attacks. He does not, however, share typical Marikith immunity to Fear, Horror and Madness checks. He has somehow managed to overcome a Marikith's vulnerability to light, though he does tend to avoid anything stronger than torchlight.

## Dread Possibilities

- ❖ A local noblewoman, or perhaps a player character, has become smitten with the novels of Xavier D'Arcey. The more she hears of his reclusive nature, the more taken with him she becomes. Perhaps the two have begun to share a letter-writing correspondence, and Xavier has begun to return her affections. She may even sneak into the D'Arcey estate in an attempt to meet the man himself. When this person comes screaming about a monster living in his home, the PCs may have to come investigate. This scenario is made all the harder by the fact that Xavier desperately seeks companionship again.
- ❖ The PCs may be on the streets of Pont-a-Museau when they hear blood-curdling screams nearby. They turn a corner to find an eviscerated thug, and a black-skinned monster slithering into a drainpipe. They might be able to magically track him back to the D'Arcey estate. Their investigation takes a turn for the mysterious when they discover who lives there, or manage to get the real story from Gaston. Do they stop a criminal-killer who longs to be human, or do they allow him to murder again? And if they do kill

Xavier, they would certainly earn the wrath of Jacqueline Renier.

- ❖ Gaston is finally beginning to feel the strain of his friend's situation. He longs to be free of this life. Still, he won't abandon Xavier, who needs him not only to serve as an intermediary for his writing, but as a connection to reality. Jacqueline Renier becomes aware of Gaston's turmoil, and decides to turn him into a wererat, to force his loyalty. If she were to do this, however, it would surely drive a wedge between her and Xavier. D'Arcey may seek the PCs help in facing the Darklord of Richemulot.
- ❖ Xavier has been meeting with an alchemist, who he believes may have discovered a cure for his condition. He meets at the scientist's place

every few nights, where he drinks a strange draught that renders him unconscious for a few hours. He has been told that it is part of the healing process, but the truth is the potion not only puts him to sleep but allows the alchemist to take control of the tormented man-marikith. During these hypnotic times, the alchemist uses Xavier to steal rare substances and money and kill any who would stop him. Xavier has no memory of these actions and attributes the rash of killings to rogue wererats. The PCs stumble upon one of Xavier's mesmerized attacks and track him back to the doctor's lab. They may well discover the truth behind Xavier and realize that the real villain is the alchemist.

# Diminutive Aberrations

## Little Horrors

By Eddy Brennan (Wiccy of the Fraternity)

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*Dearest readers, it has been far too long since I have last put pen to paper and bring another treatise of my travels and findings while searching out the mysteries of legends among the lands we collectively know as the Dread Realms. For more than a year I have been unable to write what I would and report on what I have found, but at least I have found time to myself and settle down for a short time to bring you this latest offering. As always, these words are not for those of a weak disposition. Though I always attempt to tame my words, so to speak so that what I find will not appear so heinous or abominable, this time I strive to continue this practice but find it difficult.*

*Magic is all about us in this world, in every world in fact. Those of you who read these works already know that I came from another world, though not so different from your own it was another world entirely to itself. Magic existed in that world as it does in this, though most would not believe it so. Magic exists in nature; man-made artefacts; spells, almost anything could be associated with having some degree of magic attached to it. Aberrations are no different, but they are so twisted and abhorrent in the face of nature I shudder to my very soul to think that people would create these things willingly, to want to bring them into creation. Though some may think such things among the number of the "Created" to*

*borrow a term from Dr. Van Richten, they are not. Aberrations are the creation of men and women who act in direct hatred toward nature and it's balance in all things.*

*As usual I will provide several examples of the discoveries I have made in my work and difficult studies. Some of the knowledge I have come upon has almost shattered my mind on more than one occasion in the past year, but thanks to the care of dear friends I have pulled through. I only hope that if you make the same discoveries as I you will be as fortunate. This treatise also carries a moral warning to those who read it the subject matter is taboo, far beyond that which I would normally write about. Do not attempt to imitate those creatures I have encountered prior to writing these words and avoid hunting for the tome that I spent so long seeking to end Estabane's legacy, the tome is (as far as I know) beyond all reach and should remain as such.*

## The Leech Lice

*This creature was something that I came upon by complete accident several years ago while hunting a terrifying creature I have referred to as Beast since its creation (but this is not the place to go into details of this despicable creature), the Leech Lice as I came to refer to them were small plague carrying insects found in the small Darkonese village of Rikstell. It is common legend*

*within the district that several decades back, a renowned sorcerer by the name Estabane Tear retired from the world of adventuring and set her roots in the village to live out the rest of her life in peace. During her retirement she was called back into service on a number of occasions, but after one such journey she returned with a drained look. In her possession was a single tome wrapped in stained leather. She claimed at the time that she had been battling a sorcerer almost equal to her own ability and it had taken her some time to win the battle, the prize was the book in her possession. She said little more about the tome in the legend, but after stumbling upon her private journals, I found that she initially took the book for the secrets it contained, one that no person should ever know, her plan was to destroy the book to save others from its influence. Sadly, she also fell to the book's power and worked with its power holding sway over her judgement.*

*Estabane conducted many experiments under the influence of the books power (the current whereabouts of this book is something I would wish to discover so that I may cast it into the deepest abyss to avoid Estabane's downfall be repeated), all were abhorrent in the eyes of nature and every one had some diabolical outcome. She destroyed much of what she created out of shame, but she always returned to the book to conduct further atrocities. The Leech Lice is one of these experiments and one of her successes, as Estabane put it too bluntly.*

*I was passing through Rikstell when I decided to stop for a few days the creature I had been hunting had gone to ground once more and the trail very cold. I booked into the inn and spend a restless night in the bed, itching the*

*entire time. I woke with a severe rash on much of my legs and arms. Upon enquiry in the morning I found that several complaints had been filed about the room over the years the current owner had run the inn, but despite his best efforts, including replacing the entire bed, the lice refused to leave. Offering my services so that I may get a sound night's sleep, I vowed to rid the vermin from the inn. While not one of the more riveting promises made by monster hunters, it is one I promised and one I meant to keep. I was given free board and another room for my stay in case I was successful.*

*Through careful study of the straw mattress I discovered several of the creatures and managed to trap them, I then had some of my more specialised equipment brought to me by my former apprentice Hans. It took him over a fortnight to get from Vallaki to where I was staying, but I was dedicated in solving this mysterious flea problem. It was also during these two weeks that I uncovered a loose panel in the room's floor and stumbled upon Estabane's last journals. When Hans arrived I was quick in setting up the equipment and took closer looks at the fleas I had caught. My first impressions were one of amazement. Though many would not know it, the common flea is of a dark brownish red, what I looked at through my magnifying scope was a pale green. Referencing to Estabane's journals I discovered that this was her last creation using her tome to draw influence.*

*Reading through Estabane's journals I found the symptoms of a stinging and itching rash to be the same and the markings to be the same colouration the sorceress described in her writing, I then felt a grave coldness as I went to read on the side effects of*

successive attacks from the fleas. Over a period of weeks, the fleas continue to feast on the victim but not in the same way as their common, natural cousins. Instead they feed on muscular tissue and spinal fluid. With Hans' assistance I found a large rash down the centre of my back, all this after spending a single night sharing a bed with the vermin. Thankfully, not long enough for the true side effects of the creatures to take effect. Over a period of weeks, the Leech Lice will feed on what they desire from the victim, causing physical weakness and chronic insomnia to creep in. The muscle weakness is from their feeding, the insomnia from the incessant itching caused by their bites.

I knew my foe at last and after making the pledge to the innkeeper I looked back in retrospect and was glad I had given my word to help him. If the attacks had gone on, the next person to stay in the room may not have been as fortunate as I.

I spent several days after this discovery investigating a possible effect for removing the fleas. Since the entire bed and mattress had been changed on several occasions I suspected that the bed was not their nest. Investigating the room again I made the discovery of a small nest beneath another floor board, though easy to look over as the effect wood worm have, the small holes in the board caught my attention and I had a look for the sake of curiosity. The nest was approximately several inches in diameter and covered in some sticky fluid that allowed it to stick to the underside of the board. From here the fleas would go out and forage to food based on a hive society. I found a single queen within the nest as well as male suitors to her, the rest of the populace were genderless in what I could gather

from my findings and Estabane's journal. Pleased in finding the problem, I presented the proof to the innkeeper shortly before destroying the nest and the tiny creatures within it. Those fleas that were not in the nest when I found it would have died within days, having a surprisingly short lifespan.

While a few weeks stay rent free at an inn is not among the grandest of rewards, it was a pleasant change from my usual jaunts around the country seeking out creatures that could tear you apart in second. The event also taught me that monster hunters would perform any task to help another person, no matter how unrewarding or embarrassing it may seem at first.

Leech Lice may be destroyed by snapping the creatures in two at the neck, this is a full round action. However, this is time consuming when they are always found in proximity to the nest. Finding the nest may take some time, but it tends to be found near something wooden and out of the light. Leech Lice are severely allergic to light and will burn up under direct sunlight. A total of 2 points of fire damage will destroy an entire nest and all the Leech Lice within it at that time. Leech Lice have a life expectancy of only nine days they appear to disintegrate after this period only a queen lives for long, somewhere in the region of a month to five weeks.

Leech Lice attack while their victims sleep and attack in they're hundreds. While the damage they do is insignificant, they leave small rashes that appear inflamed and hundred of tiny green and purple bruises that blend together into something quite repulsive. On second attack the victim must make a Fort save (DC 10) or suffer a -1 penalty



to Str, Dex and Con. This save is taken each successive time the victim is attack on successful nights, each time the saving throw DC being raised by 1. Once an ability score has been reduced to half its original score the victim must also roll a Will save (DC 10 + 1 per successive attack) to avoid insomnia. If insomnia does set in, the victim loses a point from Int, Wis and Cha for every 3 days without a proper sleep from mental exhaustion. Magical sleep will restore lost ability points from insomnia. If an ability score is reduced to 0, the victim dies.

Those who die from Leech Lice attacks cannot be resurrected until a *restoration* spell has been cast upon the corpse.

## Plague Grasshoppers

*Following on from my deduction of the Leech Lice and the problems they had been causing, I continued to study into Estabane's journals and uncovered more clues to where the book she brought back might be. Following the trail to Falkovnia, a land that I truly loathe, to one of Estabane's many homes during her life. It was in this building, though it had been occupied once more, that I found a chest containing several of her old possessions and more of her journals. Reading these small books with care, due to her tiny handwriting, I found that the Leech Lice were not the last of her creations that she had been working on another at the time of her death. She knew these as "Plague Grasshoppers".*

*Suspecting a similar trend to the Leech Lice, I investigated the area and found no clues as to unusual insect activity or any form of unusual insect in the region. Instead I set my sights further afield and called upon some old*

*allies in many battles against various fiends and monsters. Though they found my interest in unusual insects and their activity unusual, even for me that did abide me and listened to what I had to say. A few of them had heard of Estabane and one had met the woman when she was in the final years of her life. None of them knew of her obsession with creating somewhat deadly artificial life so I did not destroy their vision of her, as most who knew of her would remember her.*

*With the aid of my contacts I did discover one possible source for the Plague Grasshopper in Sithicus, so I set my sights on that land, thinking it is a good a place as any to beginning the new leg of my investigation. En-route I met up with one of the contacts that had led me in my current direction, a Gwyn Evanstock. Gwyn was an outlander like myself, but had settled in Sithicus shortly after his arrival, formed a new life for himself, a family and a livelihood. It was to his farm that the trail would take us and there I would make the discovery I had been seeking.*

*Gwyn had several problems with plague carrying insects on his farm on several occasions over the few years he had owned the land and after reading the letter I sent him in correspondence he had thought the information I was seeking was similar to his hindering insects. The insects carried a plague that effected animal, food produce and human alike, though in different ways. Food, if infected with the plague would become a carrier for the disease until eaten, where the plague would manifest. Animals would either become carriers or sufferers and humans (as well as demihumans) would suffer from the plague has victims. Once on his farm I had Gwyn take me into the fields so that*



*I may hope to find one of the Plague Grasshoppers I was hoping to find. The journal that Estabane had detailed her research on these aberrations contained detailed analysis, as well as descriptions on the pests.*

*The plague would appear initially as a boil-like sore on the body of the victim before symptoms not unlike influenza would appear. Since influenza is often deadly, it is difficult to differentiate between the aberration's legacy and the genuine illness. Approximately a week after infection, the victim would begin to vomit blood and die within days.*

*After searching the farm for several hours, our efforts were rewarded by the capture of three specimens that may have proved to be the Plague Grasshopper. Returning to his small cottage where his family made themselves busy with their daily chores, I retired to the attic that I had been given as some form of guest room and began my study on the creatures. For the next four days I spent much of my time in the attic, leaving only when nature required me to do so, to eat or stretch my legs and unwind. Sleep was a rarity and after those days Gwyn's wife woke me at my chest I had been using as a desk. Her and I talked over breakfast, the rest of the family already hard at work about the farm and I discussed my profession and her, her life about the farm and other things. It was a welcome break to the past four days, but before sleep had overtaken me in the middle of the night I had decided that the specimens I had captured could be none other than the Plague Grasshopper. The only conflicting evidence not supporting my theory was that Estabane never entered Sithicus throughout her life she*

*made that fact well known in the journal and often stated it as follows.*

*"Having never visited the green lands and lush forests of Sithicus where it is reported that wild elves dwell, I feel a great pity in my heart than as I grow older I may never be able to cast my eyes upon the wondrous sights of that bewildering land. My research has dominated my life for far too long and my health has faded as age sunk into my bones. Darkon is the last land I shall know as home, but perhaps I will learn of the land through others before I say my last farewell to this plane of existence and pass into the next one."*

*With my decisions on the Plague Grasshopper and the validity of Gwyn's pests to be that which I was seeking, I set out into the fields once more to search near the area we found the specimens I had studied. Finding more samples of the Plague Grasshopper, I began to scour the area more completely, uncovering several nests of the creature and bringing a swift end to their incursions. Once I was certain I had killed all examples I could find of the creatures, I returned to the cottage for much needed rest. I departed Gwyn's cottage just over a week later, we parted ways pleasantly and promised that we would spend time together once more, his wife (who I have not named since she did not permit me to do so) also hoped that I would return, she enjoyed the company of another woman about the place, even one that would lock herself in the attic for several days.*

*On my journey from Sithicus into Invidia where I had spent several months a few years earlier I opened to a new chapter in Estabane's life and the horrific legacy that she left to the world*

### **Plague Grasshopper**

Fine Aberration  
**Hit Dice** 1/4d8 (1hp)  
**Initiative** +11 (+7 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)  
**Speed** Leap 10 ft., fly 20 ft. (perfect)  
**Armour Class** 25 (+7 Dex, +8 Size)  
**Base Attack/Grapple** -5/-26  
**Attack** Bite +3 (1 plus disease)  
**Space/Reach** 1/2 ft./0 ft.  
**Special Attacks** Disease  
**Saves** Fort +0 Ref +7 Will +0.  
**Abilities** Str 1, Dex 24, Con 10, Int 1, Wis 10, Cha 12.  
**Skills** Balance +8, Hide +9\*, Move Silently +8\*  
**Feats** Alertness, Improved Initiative  
**Environment** Any temperate land  
**Organisation** Solitary, Pair, group (4-10), swarm (10-100)  
**Challenge Rating** 1/3  
**Treasure** None  
**Alignment** Usually Neutral  
**Advancement** None  
**Level Adjustment** -

Plague Grasshoppers appear as other grasshoppers except their heads are a dull purple. They tend to have a migratory existence and rarely remain in the same location for more than a few months. They are artificial creatures and have a long life span of about 5 years and may breed among themselves to continue the species existence.

Plague Grasshoppers are at home within nature where they spread their plague. They are attracted more to small settlements and farms, but forests and other isolated places are equally likely to be home to them.

### Combat

Plague Grasshoppers are not equipped for fighting, they are the agents of infiltration and disease spreading. If they are threatened, their instincts are to escape though they may deliver a small bite that can sting for several hours.

**Disease (Su):** Supernatural Disease – bite, Fortitude Save DC 12, incubation 24 hours, damage none. Animals have 50% chance of becoming carriers. Plants bitten by a Plague Grasshopper is also a carrier. Those who carry the disease will inflict the disease upon those who eat them/it those who eat the carrier must make a Fortitude Save DC 12.

24 hours after infection, a small boil appears where the victim was bitten, they then begin to suffer the effects of a influenza-like disease, suffering a loss of half their physical ability scores (rounding down), the victim requires full bed rest. Nine days after infection, the victim begins to vomit blood and will die 1d3 days later.

Cure is found through the blood of the Plague Grasshopper and mixing it with aconite and boiling in 1 pint of water. Drinking a mug of this antidote will allow full recovery from the plague disease in 24 hours and will halt the development of the plague regardless of it's current stage.

**Skills:** A Plague Grasshopper has a +8 racial bonus Hide and Move Silently check while within their natural habitat.

## Scarlet Beetle

*Scouring several chapters of Estabane's journal I became aware of a creature that I had encountered several years before in Invidia. It was an insect the likes of which I had not cast eyes upon before, a large beetle with a deep crimson shell and a single horn growing*

*from the bottom of the mandible. As I mentioned, they were quite large and could grow up to several inches in length from my past study of them, though at the time my study was somewhat rushed and I may have overlooked their more unusual qualities. What captured my attention more was the fact that the Scarlet Beetle featured several elements that I had not encountered during my brief encounter with the creatures.*

*I travelled to the Hunadora area of the small kingdom being careful the entire time I spent travelling in the land to avoid unwanted attention. The land is known for its brigands and harsh mercenary control and either of these can be generally bothersome at the very least. Taking a long route to Hunadora I spent much of my time tracking through forestry and away from the main roads, I knew of several largely unused roads that passed through the area I was headed and used those instead. Upon my arrival to where I was headed, several miles west of Hunadora castle I entered the network of caves where I previously ran across these tiny terrors. The caves had been used by a pack of ghouls that I had sent into the next world, they used the caves as their nest and had preyed upon local wildlife. It is estimated that the undead fiends had been active for some time before they wandered out further and attacked a travelling merchant passing through the region, most likely hoping to avoid the same things I had wanted to. During my exploration of the caves with several allies and swords for hire, we separated into groups to cover more ground in less time and it was during this that I got separated from the other members of my group during a battle against a ghast and several of its minions. Working my*

*way back to a point we had decided to regroup if we got separated I found a small cave filled with the beetles, so it was for this portion of the caves that I had set my sights.*

*Exploring the caves again took some time before I found the small area I had been seeking. The cave was how I remembered it with its low ceiling and slick walls and floor, treading carefully to avoid slipping I slowly made my way into the darkness with only a small lamp to guide my way. It was without warning that the beetles came upon me and I found myself fighting for my life against the horrid things.*

*The Scarlet Beetle is a carnivore they will eat anything so long as their target is at least animate. They appear to be able to dine on dead flesh as easily as living, so while the ghouls were infesting the caves the aberrations had plenty to feed upon. Without this steady food supply I had suspected that they might have starved to death and I would find nothing more than the decayed remains, but this was not so, the beetles were starving, but very much alive and wanting to feast upon my flesh. With use of several spells and tactics I had prepared before coming, I dispatched those beetles that attacked me. I seared them with burning oil, froze them with ice magic and those that managed to get close enough I cut with my dagger or crushed them underfoot. The battle, though sounding easy, was incredibly difficult having to be sure that I let none of the creatures live. I am not certain how long it took for me to wipe out the group that attacked me but it took some time and I did not get away without feeling their mandible bite into my flesh more than a few times before they were all dead.*

*It was after this initial encounter on my return to the caves that I began my study of those beetles I had destroyed but not damaged beyond inspection.*

*Relating to the journal at hand I made intensive studies of the creatures but found none of the similarities between the Scarlet Beetle Estabane spoke of in her journal and those I had just destroyed. My inspection was made harder by my own irrational phobia for beetles. Certain that I had found some offspring from the sorceress's creation I delved deeper into the caves. I had not gone far before I found the creature I was seeking.*

*When I cast eyes on the monstrosity my heart almost stopped for this was no ordinary insect, the creature was large and bloated, measuring several feet in length. Its iron ore coloured exoskeleton crawled with its smaller relations I had battle only a few scant hours before. Knowing I was not prepared to face such a terrible threat, physical or emotional, I stole myself from the caves to a nearby hamlet and call in assistance.*

*I spent more than a month waiting for those I had summoned to arrive and when they did it was my surprise to see that they had arrived together. Without me knowing, they had formed a sort of adventuring party that came together when they were needed and they were finishing off their latest investigation when they received my letters. Firstly I must mention Johan, I have spoken of him before in my works, the man was not the same as the last I had seen him, during our time apart he had lost his left eye in a battle against a bone golem, however after the incident he counted himself lucky to have survived. Secondly there is Emily Strandh, an anchorite of Ezra who I can hard a hard time with on*

*occasion, especially when she gets that determined mood and attempts to convert me to her faith. While I have nothing against the Church of Ezra, I just wish that Emily would one day realise that both of our religions have merit in our own eyes. Third and finally there is Carl Borvos or Darkon, a former constable of high rank from Martira Bay, he is also a sorcerer of some consummate skill.*

*When the three arrived I filled them in on the past few months and the investigation I was undergoing, I did not mention the tome that inspired Estabane, knowing Carl he would have shown great interest in acquiring and studying its contents than making sure the knowledge it contained was kept safe and away from harm. Telling them of the Scarlet Beetle I had encountered (Johan was familiar with my tale of encountering the creatures before since he served with me on scouring the caves for the ghouls) we drew up a plan to eradicate the monstrous insects.*

*We talked long and hard through the night and halfway into the next day before we were certain we had planned for many eventualities that may rise when you hunt your quarry. We were also certain from my description of the Scarlet Beetle that it would be all but impervious to most forms of standard attack, so it should be attacked with concentrations of magic while those able to fight at close quarters keeps the beast and it's smaller offspring at bay.*

*After resting a day to regain our strength from missing sleep, we made our way to the caves and entered them. Johan and myself knew the area well enough and I led them to the place I spotted the large insect. We entered the area using as much stealth as we could muster and made our way to key*



positions from which we could launch our assault from several directions at once. When we did attack, we made an almost fatal discovery that was entirely my own fault, in my haste to leave before I had only made note of one giant insect, in reality there were more than a dozen of them and we were almost immediately caught in a battle for our very survival. We were crawling with the smaller beetles while the larger ones used their smaller kin to distract us and attack from several sides at once. Some frantic protection spells helped in keeping them at bay long enough for our spells to fell a few of the larger beetles. The last thing I remembered of the battle was feeling a stabbing pain in my side as I cut down one of the creatures with my flame blade.

When I came to I found myself delusional and incoherent, the world about me was distorted and I suffered from terrible hallucinations for several days, a by-product of the Scarlet Beetle's lower horn. The horn secreted rare venom that afflicted the victim with hallucinations and random bouts of unconsciousness. It was nearly a full week before I was on my feet again from constant care from Emily and her healing skills. During my sickness I also suffered from long streams of nightmares when I would dream of being devoured by the giant beetles, they were as vivid and real as this paper before me, the terror and pain I felt in those nightmares was astonishing. Only later was I told that I had come close to death more than one since they pulled me from the cave. Thought my physical wounds were healed through magic, it took careful work to ensure that the venom that had entered my body was dealt with properly. It was during this time that a friend of Emily's, a Natasha Cook had

arrived, an expert on insects that had been with Emily when the letter arrived and had expressed interest in the matter. Natasha was a person I did not know, but someone I felt indebted to after her study was the one that found the anti-venom that saved my life.

Though back on my feet I was in no shape to engage in our quest for some time and the others returned to the caves, leaving me in Natasha's care. It was during this time that I really got to know her. Natasha is a professor at the university of Port-a-Lucine, one of the few women to be among their number. She has interests in many things but has spent the last decade or so studying into rare and unusual forms of insect, my own findings and stories after picking up Estabane's journals fascinated her. So much so in fact that she borrowed one of the journals to learn more of the Scarlet Beetle during my illness in hopes of finding the anti-venom to save me.

Two days after their departure the others returned, battle weary and tired, new scars to add to the old but they were pleased to pass the news on that they had been successful in eradicating the beetles. Natasha was disheartened by this news, having hoped to study a live sample, but her disappointment became joy and excitement when she was presented with several captured examples of the smaller beetle. Natasha was torn between staying with me but was forced to return to her tenure; Johan and Emily were also required elsewhere but Carl opted to stay on as my bodyguard for a time. A "mutual benefit" as he called it and would stay on with me for some time while I looked into Estabane's legacy.

Shortly before I began transcribing my notes into this treatise I received word from Natasha that the

*venom from the Scarlet Beetle preys on the nervous system, causing problems in the cranial area. These problems lead to the nightmares and hallucinations. The initial attack from the venom also causes the victim to lose consciousness. Natasha also reported that although the venom had been eradicated from my body, not all of the damage it does might be undone so easily, this has caused me to suffer from nightmares about the Scarlet Beetle and other horrors since I was wounded by them. However, Emily has also been in contact with me since learning of Natasha's finding and has asked after my health and offered me to visit her in Levkarest in the future when she hopes to be about to use some divine magic to restore the damage that has been done.*

#### Scarlet Beetle

Small Aberration  
**Hit Dice** 5d8 + 15 hp (40hp)  
**Initiative** +2 (Dex)  
**Speed** 30 ft. climb 20 ft.  
**Armour Class** 18 (+2 Dex, +1 Size, +5 Natural)  
**Base Attack/Grapple** +4/-3  
**Attack** Bite +6 (1d4+3), Gore +4 (1d4+3 plus poison)  
**Space/Reach** 5 ft./5 ft.  
**Special Attacks** Poison  
**Special Qualities** Dark Vision 60 ft.  
 Weapon immunities.  
**Saves** Fort +7 Ref +5 Will +2.  
**Abilities** Str 16, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 3, Wis 14, Cha 15.  
**Skills** Balance +5, Hide +4, Listen +5, Move Silently +6, Spot +4, Stealthy  
**Feats** Alertness, Multiattack  
**Environment** Any underground

**Organisation** Solitary, Pair, Group (3-12), Hive (1 – 3 plus 50 – 300 kin), Tribe (3 – 12 plus 100 – 500 kin)

**Challenge Rating** 5

**Treasure** None

**Alignment** Usually Neutral Evil

**Advancement** Medium (6 – 7hd), Large (8 – 10hd)

**Level Adjustment** -

The scarlet beetle is a monstrosity to look upon, by all rights and purposes it is a beetle in physique and proportion, but the experiments that went into its creation have mutated and marked it horribly. The insect stands over a foot in height and some three feet in length, they sport a hard dark crimson carapace. Just below the mandible, the scarlet beetle has a single slim horn growing from the carapace, this excretes a dangerous poison that affects both physical and mental aspects of those that succumb to it. Scarlet beetles shy away from natural light, they have difficulty seeing from its brightness, artificial light sources appear to have a similar yet reduced effect.

Large cave networks close to a food supply is favoured as a lair for these abnormal creations, usually forming a hive about them. Occasionally several hives will come together and form a larger tribe, though thankfully this is rare and only a few scant tribes have been encountered.

#### Combat

Scarlet beetles battle using their powerful mandibles as their primary weapon weakening their victims. Once a victim has been weakened sufficiently, they impale the target on their sharp horn, injecting the unsuspecting target with their potent poison.



**Poison (Ex):** The scarlet beetle delivers a potent poison through its horn; the poison forces Fort saves (DC 15) on the victim. Failure results in unconsciousness in 1d6 rounds, which remains for 1d4+3 hours. The victim also suffers a loss of 2d4 points to Strength, Dexterity and Constitution, these lost points return at a rate of 1 point per ability per day of bed rest. A side effect of the poison is its effect on the nervous system of the victim, inducing hallucinations and nightmares. Once each day, the victim has a 25% chance of suffering some nightmarish hallucination (that may force a Fear or Horror check depending on its focus) and the victim must make a Will save (DC 15) each time she sleep to avoid having nightmares. If she has nightmares, she will have only several hours' sleep before waking up screaming, repeated occurrences of nightmares will induce fatigue in the victim. An anti-venom can be produced from the scarlet beetles venom requiring a Alchemy check (DC 20), this anti-venom removes the poison and restores lost ability points, but does not restore damage to the nervous system, only a Greater Restoration, Miracle, Wish or similar spell may heal this damage.

**Weapon Immunities:** The scarlet beetles hardened carapace renders slashing and piercing weapons all but ineffective against them. These weapons inflict only a quarter normal damage to a scarlet beetle.

#### Scarlet Beetle Kin

Fine Aberration

**Hit Dice** 1/2d8 (2hp)

**Initiative** +6 (Dex)

**Speed** 10 ft., climb 10 ft.

**Armour Class** 24 (+6 Dex, +8 Size)

**Base Attack/Grapple** -5/-26

**Attack** Bite +3 (1)

**Special Qualities** Dark

vision 60 ft.

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

**Saves** Fort +1 Ref +10 Will +0.

**Abilities** Str 1, Dex 22, Con 10, Int 2, Wis 11, Cha 13.

**Skills** Hide +11, Move Silently +11

**Feats** Alertness, Lightning

Reflexes

**Environment** Any underground

**Organisation** Solitary, Pair, group (4-10), swarm (10-100)

**Challenge Rating** 1/10

**Treasure** None

**Alignment** Neutral Evil

**Advancement** Fine (1hd), Diminutive (2hd), Tiny (3hd)

**Level Adjustment** -

The scarlet beetle kin is a form of offspring to the scarlet beetle itself, it is a scaled down imitation of the monstrous creature growing to up to five inches in length at full maturity. The Kin is an earlier experiment of Estabane while she researched the creation process of the scarlet beetle. These earlier experiments have appeared to latch onto their larger cousins and dwell within the same hives. Kin feed on other insects and small creatures, they are also not above cannibalism during times when food is short. They also act as cleaners for their larger counterparts, scouring the lairs and picking at whatever tiny morsels of food lie about and also climb about on the larger creature to clean its carapace of unwanted dirt and bits from recent feasts.

Combat

Though they carry the poison that their counterparts wield, the one

belonging to a scarlet beetle kin is all but ineffective toward anything but the smallest of creatures. Instead they rely on their bite against larger prey. Kin are somewhat cowardly and are scavengers, but they can be controlled easily by their larger counterparts and forced into battle.

## Fireflies

*Following up on the success near Hunadora Carl and myself decided to stay on in the area to hunt for signs of other nests. Over the next few weeks we uncovered several more nests and cleaned them out using techniques that we had prepared before and Carl had improved on during my bedridden absence. Certain we can do all we could in the area we moved on to the next site that drew my attention, my former home and now residence of my old apprentice Hans, Vallaki. Things were not much different in the past few years I had spent away from the town, though people had grown older, as had myself. We decided that Hans would prefer to know of my return as soon as we were back and I found him at my old cottage tending to the herb garden I had originally cultivated and he now cares for with the same conviction I once had. As anticipated Hans was overjoyed by my visit but misinterpreted Carl's presence and something more than a friend. Thankfully we soon sorted out this small misunderstanding.*

*Hans was familiar with the subject I was investigating. He had encountered the insects of my current search in his youth when he lived wild in the forests of west Barovia. I explained the hunts so far and my injuries in Invidia and he expressed worry and concern that I remembered all too well. Knowing that he would want more information I*

*explained to him my latest quarry, a tiny thing referred to as Estabane as a Firefly. I take this passage from Estabane's journals to explain these miniscule terrors.*

*"The Firefly is a fly that radiates an unusual aura of heat about it when it flaps its wings. This aura can reach extreme temperatures when a swarm of Fireflies gather. Through study I have discovered a way of distilling various types of these creatures that induce auras of cold, dread, anger, fear, melancholy, jealousy and several others. While distilling a formula for a cold aura is simple enough, the experiments for those auras that result in psychological effects took long study and conviction to develop. The Firefly appears to be a normal fly when it is at rest, though closer inspection can be taken to reveal a small ring of red dots at the end of its abdomen. A Chill Fly sports a ring of grey spots while dread a lilac ring and so forth. When they are in flight or beat their wings, the aura is detectable and the true nature of the aberration becomes far more apparent."*

*Hans listened carefully to my explanations and I gave him some limited access to the journals, though I trusted him I did not know what effect learning of the existence of the tome that inspired Estabane would have on the young man. To me the lure of the book was become very strong and I had not noticed this within myself until I noticed it upon others, where I would feel a tang of jealousy. When I did eventually notice this urge within myself I kept a more vigilant look upon my own self as well as those about me, fighting off whatever urge I had to take the book for my own by reminding myself of the horrors the book is used to unleash. After his study of the journals, Hans*

*remembered the Fireflies well he had used them in jars to supply a light source in the forests during his youth. The jars would also radiate heat that helped keep him warm on those nights when he could not manage to create a fire. Remembering where I first encountered Hans and him knowing the forests better, the three of us set off into west Barovia in search of the insects.*

*Barovia, for those who have travelled it will know that although it is a small country, travel is slow due to the mountainous countryside and harsh conditions of the main roads even at the height of summer. This slowed our travel a little but we reached the forested area where I first met Hans on the second day after leaving Vallaki. Before we did depart we visited some old acquaintances of mine that Hans has drawn close to and purchased equipment and materials we may need.*

*The forest is not a hospitable place, it was once roamed by various monsters and I believe it still is, the population having been reduced by myself and several others after many hunts over a period of years. Even now you hear of the occasional monster being hunted in the region, but these tales are now quite rare. We worked through various areas of the forest where Hans remembered finding the flies before and we managed to trap a few for study. Comparing them to Estabane's descriptions they were identical, right down to the exact degrees of heat the aura gave dependant on the number of flies that produced it. With this proof we were certain that we had uncovered the Fireflies, I hatched my plot to destroy them. Though not harmful in the numbers they would normally gather in, it is easily possible for large swarms of these creatures to*

*mass together and cause terrible fires. I suspect more than one forest or home have burst into flames in the summer when a swarm of Fireflies has been present. With some simple testing it was proved that m plan would succeed. Fireflies are terribly vulnerable to effects that are the reverse of their heat aura, making them susceptible to cold and only a minor spell is required to produce enough cold to destroy several of the creatures.*

*We worked through the areas where Hans once found all of the creatures and dispatched those we did find. It is my own personal opinion that these creatures are not born from nature and are thus an abomination on the world, this is my argument in conducting these investigations and destroying the creatures I found to match the information at my disposal. Some small groups of Fireflies had gathered in places and their number was enough for us to feel their auras almost twenty feet away on one occasion. This repeats my earlier warning that sufficient numbers of these aberrations can be a hazard to the safety of many innocents.*

#### **Firefly**

Fine Aberration

**Hit Dice** 1/4d8 (1hp)

**Initiative** +8 (Dex)

**Speed** 5 ft., fly 20 ft. (perfect)

**Armour Class** 26 (+8 Dex, +8

Size)

**Base Attack/Grapple** None

**Attack** None

**Special Qualities** Heat aura

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

**Saves** Fort +0 Ref + Will +0.

**Abilities** Str 1, Dex 27, Con 10,  
Int 1, Wis 10, Cha 10.

**Skills** Hide +8, Spot +7

<b>Feats</b>	Alertness,	Lightning
Reflexes		
<b>Environment</b>	Any	temperate
land		
<b>Organisation</b>	Solitary,	Pair,
group (4-10), swarm (10-300)		
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	1/6	
<b>Treasure</b>	None	
<b>Alignment</b>	Neutral	
<b>Advancement</b>	None	
<b>Level Adjustment</b>	-	

The Firefly has an almost identical appear to it as a common housefly, but careful viewing of one will uncover a ring of red spots on the end of the abdomen. They prefer to live in or around wooded areas and sometimes they wander into small villages. They are a migratory species and move on every few months to another area, but they have a limited number of locales they call their home and if they move on from one location they are certain to return within a couple of years. Fireflies have a short lifespan of only a couple of seasons, so the aberration displays a form of genetic memory, the migratory habits of those before it are handed down to the later generations through the genetic structure passed on to it. Fireflies generate a mild aura of heat, while a single example of the creature only produces enough heat so that it may be felt by holding the insect in your cupped hands, a large group or swarm can produce much larger auras that may prove dangerous.

#### Combat

The Firefly has no form of attack or defence except for its aura and this is only useful in most situations against natural predators of flies, such as spiders.

**Heat Aura (Su):** The heat aura of the Firefly is all but unnoticed when a lone sample of the creature is encountered, but the larger the number of Fireflies in a group, the larger and more potent the aura becomes, each fly lending a cumulative effect to its strength. A lone Firefly produces enough heat to inflict a single point of damage per round to a creature of Fine size and the aura reaches out an inch from the fly. The following table shows the damage rates of the aura dependant on the number of Fireflies in the group in reflection to the size of a creature that may suffer damage from it per round.

Damage of Aura				
Creature Damage per number of Fireflies				
Size	1	5	10	25
50	100	250	500	
<b>Fine</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>25</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>200</b>	
<b>Diminutive</b>	-	-	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Tiny</b>	-	-	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>50</b>	
<b>Small</b>	-	-	-	<b>1</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>25</b>	
<b>Medium</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	
<b>Large</b>	-	-	-	-
-	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	
<b>Huge</b>	-	-	-	-
-	-	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	

The radius of the aura, like its potency is dependant, on the number of Fireflies that make up the group, the following table shows this formula.

Radius of Aura	
Number of	Aura
Fireflies	Radius
1	1"

56"	
10	1ft.
25	2ft.
50	3ft.
100	5ft.
250	10ft.
500	20ft.

**Note:** as mentioned in the flavour text of the article, other forms of aura are possible to create variations on the Firefly. The Chill Fly radiates a Cold Aura and would produce an aura of similar size and damage to the Firefly. However, other variations that may produce more unusual auras such as dread, fear, anxiety and so forth would require a redesign to incorporate saving throws, varied difficulty classes and various modifiers for failing the save as a result of the aura in question.

#### Further Investigations

*After a rest in Vallaki, Carl and myself departed Hans and other old faces to study and investigate further into Estabane's journals and the varied results of her insane experimentations. We found little to no evidence of the creations she went on to list and detail in her journals, so it is possible they do not exist. Another possibility is that some of these creations eluded our exhaustive searches or are unique creations, having only a single example of their type in existence. Several of these abominations are mentioned in following.*

### Temporal Maggot

*This creation is known from Estabane's journals to have only a single example of it in creation, if she finished her work. It is the last aberration she worked on before she died and toward the end of her days, her journal entries became scattered and*

*unreliable. She would go weeks or even months without keeping her journals up to date, making me believe that her work become an all consuming obsession and eventually drove her to forget her journals, at least up to the point of her not recording her findings within their pages. It is also possible that I am missing journals from toward the end of her days, though this creature is mentioned several times in the final chapters she wrote in those I have in my possession.*

*The Temporal Maggot, according to Estabane's writing was a mammoth creature that had the ability to jump through time to a point of its choosing, was sentient and very much aware of its own existence and the world about it. The creature was to measure some twenty feet in length and weigh in excess of several tonnes, have a dull grey hide with porcupine-like spines that it used to push itself along, it was both nocturnal and subterranean in ecology and was carnivorous, drawing its greatest nourishment from sentient life. These details were all I could extract from the journal it was contained in and as I mentioned, we were unable to track down the creature, should it exist. Some tales of a creature similar to it have been encountered in Martira Bay and is said to dwell in the sewers below the city, but our own investigations found no truth in the stories and we discovered no evidence in its passing. However, given that the creature is to be able to jump through time at will, could it be that we may just not have been in the right place at the right time to encounter and battle the fiendish monster?*

#### Temporal Maggot

Huge Aberration

**Hit Dice** 15d8 + 105 hp (170hp)



**Initiative** -3 (-3 Dex)  
**Speed** 20 ft., burrow 20 ft.  
**Armour Class** 17 (-3 Dex, -2 Size, +12 Natural)  
**Base Attack/Grapple** +11/+27  
**Attack** Bite +11 (2d6)  
**Full Attack** Bite +19/+13/+9 (2d6)  
**Special Attacks** Swallow whole  
**Special Qualities** Dark vision 60 ft., fast heal 5, immunities, time displacement  
**Space/Reach** 15 ft./10 ft.  
**Saves** Fort +29 Ref +10 Will +17.  
**Abilities** Str 26, Dex 5, Con 25, Int 14, Wis 18, Cha 17.  
**Skills** Escape Artist +7, Hide +7, Intimidate +15, Listen +14, Spot +14, Survival +14, Swim +18  
**Feats** Diehard, Endurance, Great Fortitude, Snatch  
**Environment** Any underground  
**Organisation** Unique  
**Challenge Rating** 16  
**Treasure** None  
**Alignment** Neutral Evil  
**Advancement** None  
**Level Adjustment** -

The Temporal Maggot is a giant maggot of obese proportion. It measures nearly 20 feet in length and almost half as tall. Its extremely thick hide is a dull grey and several inches deep, covered with bands of long porcupine-like spines that allow it to move easier. It's head is small in proportion to its body but is able to consume vast amounts of food very quickly, it's soft jaw able to dislocate to fit creatures over half the maggots own size within its mouth and swallow them whole. The maggot has no natural ground that it calls its home, it drifts through time according to its own design and plan, the purpose for which is as

mysterious as the creation process of the creature itself. However, it does prefer to remain below ground at all times. The area about the maggot seems to twist and distort time, an effect noticeable by those that stray to close to it.

#### Combat

The Temporal Maggot tends to appear from nowhere, shifting into time using its astounding and terrifying ability to jump from one point in time to another. It uses its mouth primarily to feed but can use it to weaken prey or fend off adversaries.

**Swallow Whole (Ex):** On a successful grapple, the temporal maggot may make a second attempt to grab the opponent. If the attempt is successful the temporal maggot has swallowed its victim whole. The maggot may hold 2 creatures of large size or 4 medium-size or 8 small and so forth in its enormous stomach. Each round, swallowed victims suffer 2d6+8 points of crushing damage plus 1d8 points of acid damage. The victim may cut herself free using natural weapons or those of size medium or smaller, dealing half of the maggot's total hit points to its stomach (AC 19). Once the victim exits, other held within the stomach may also leave that round, but after that, the maggot's fast healing ability will have healed enough damage to close the hole and prevent others leaving.

**Immunities:** The temporal maggot is immune to all bludgeoning weapons, it is also unaffected by spells and effects that effect time. It is also immune to all abilities, spells and effects that would affect it mentally.

**Time Displacement (Su):** The area within 10 feet of the temporal maggot is disported by the maggot's

presence, within this area. All who are within the area (except the maggot) are affected by the time displacement. Those affected have their initiative altered by 1d6-1d10, leaving the area and then re-entering it will cause a new initiative modifier to come into effect.

The temporal maggot may also use this time displacement to seemingly teleport up to 100 ft. in any lateral direction, though it has not teleported but distorted time so that it has appeared to have, done so. As a full round action, the maggot may use this ability to shift through time, this is normally used to protect itself from those who are possibly capable of being able to kill it. If it shifts through time, the maggot leaves combat at the end of that round and is effectively treated as having teleported out of the area.

## Tarnish Spider

*According to Estabane's own words the Tarnish Spider was one that could enter metal object and cause them to rust from the inside out over a short period. She claims to have created a magical weapon of some potent power and the spider managed to turn the weapon to little more than rust in a few scant days. The spider was said to have been unleashed in Port-a-Lucine and we approached the investigation with a pinch of salt. We were both beginning to feel that Estabane was now attempting to outlive her true successes through her journals and was expecting them to be found at some point. We did spend some time hunting what we thought could have been the Tarnish Spider but it resulted in an encounter with something we later came to understand to be a Rust Monster after some much later correspondence with Natasha. Given our own findings, Carl, Natasha and myself came to the*

*decisive conclusion that the Tarnish Spider does not exist, if it ever did at all.*

## Dread Possibility

The narrator Megan Llewelyn is incorrect with her findings. The Tarnish Spider was created by Estabane Tear and still exists in the dread realms, however it has become imprisoned within a mithril orb of some potent enchantment after several adventurers were employed to track and trap the creature. The search by these adventurers was kept secret and the person who employed them rewarded them privately. The orb measures 6" across and weighs 2lb, it has a hardness of 20 and 30 hit points. The orb has the property of being able to imprison and single creature it comes into contact with, so those who handle it must wear gloves to do so safely and avoid being imprisoned themselves. If another living creature is imprisoned within the orb, the Tarnish Spider will be set free.

If it does somehow break free, the Tarnish Spider is treated as a Monstrous Spider (small) with the rust ability of a Rust Monster and has a challenge rating of 1. Unlike a Rust Monster, on a successful attack, the Tarnish Spider may opt to enter the metal object and rust it from within, taking 24 hours (+1 day per enchantment on the object), once the object is rusted completely, it will leave the item and seek out the closest metal item in proximity to it. It may enter any metal item regardless of its size. The Tarnish Spider does not have the poison, web or vermin traits of the monstrous spider.

## Eclipse Moth

*This creature is written to be able to phase in and out of reality and when is nocturnal. When it enters reality it*

will cause lunar eclipses regardless of the lunar cycle. This creature was meant to be in Borca, but we found no trace of it. However we did find a mundane breed of moth that was identical to the moth we were seeking. However this moth has no supernatural ability and like other moths was attracted to our lamps when we happened upon it by accident while out seeking the Eclipse Moth. We did spend some time studying the moth to make certain (a waste of time some might say but you can never be too cautious when you are investigating something supernatural) but it was not the creature we were seeking. It was our belief that Estabane in her greed and determination to lay claim to falsehood ran across this moth and used it for an experimentation she never perfected. The tome that Estabane had did contain methods for creating such a creature, but we feel that it would take many centuries to decipher the formulae, Estabane realised this also and created this lie within her journals to cover for her failure.

The Eclipse Moth does not exist Estabane lacked the patience to decipher the texts on it and instead worked on a simpler formula to create another aberration.

### Estabane's Legacy

As well as those mentioned above, we looked into more than a dozen other leads from Estabane's journals and uncovered further journals along the way, but we never managed to find conclusive evidence to prove many more of her claims were true. We did encounter a couple of her odder creations that I shall not detail to greatly, but one was a hybrid of bee and earwig that would sting people and then

implant its seed when they fell unconscious from the drug inside their venom. The aberration would then die for no apparent reason and later the host for the seed would also die shortly after the new creature was born from them. Secondly we found one of her few claims at creating something not insect-based, a form of cat that could walk through walls and defy gravity, it could also bond telepathically with sentient creatures and drive them insane. Both of these creatures were unique by Estabane's claims and were destroyed. However I fell prey to the cat's ability for some time when I attempted to pet the thing on our initial encounter with it, not realising the creature could mask its true appearance and spent close to two months under mental care in Dementlieu. It is a blessing that the short contact I had with the creature only led to a temporary lapse of mental cognition and I made full recovery.

After nearly a full year of searching into the journals I found in Darkon we did eventually find some proper clues to the hiding place of the tome Estabane had in her possession. The place was a maze of traps and other deadly terrors that she had placed there to protect the book. It appears she did retain some of her regular thought since she had the book guarded so well to keep others out, it seems doubtful that she would have gone so far to keep it for herself when she knew that her remaining time in this world was short. The book was written in a foreign tongue I am not familiar with and the writings were beyond my ability, I was not to research the book though I was to find it and be certain that no one ever fell under its influence again. The book is now where I feel it would be safest from the reach of others and it took great

*willpower to place the book where I did. When I held it, it was like having a small voice in my head urging me to take the book and make it my own, to read the knowledge and expand new horizons. All these things I feel were a trick of my own curious nature and I do not believe the book itself can truly speak, however such strange things have been said to happen before so I can only give my own personal thoughts on the matter.*

### **Dread Possibility: Estabane's Legacy**

Estabane's Legacy is a minor artefact that was held in Castle Avernus for most of Azalin's reign over Darkon. However in the early 700s it was taken from his library by a transmuter named Silus Mortison. This transmuter used the book to create oddities and monstrous abominations and was eventually hunted down by his own apprentice Estabane Tear who smite him in a magical duel and then took the book to find a way to destroy it after her own magic failed to damage the book. During her journey home, the book consumed her will and took over her mortal body. During the last few natural years of her life, Estabane was used by the book to recreate many horrors from the tome while she served its will, only later in the final months of her life was she freed by the book as it wanted her to pass it on to another. Estabane finally within her own senses again designed a large trap to keep the book in and hid it there. It lay dormant for years before Megan stumbled on the journals and managed to track down the tome's final resting place. The book attempted to take Megan's mind, but her previous infection of Lycanthropy where her mind shattered in two left her immune to all but its most subtle suggestions, it could not force itself on her, only

suggest and leave the decision to her. Megan was successful in her final judgement and cast the book into the Shadowrift.

Given its nature, the tome may not have been removed from reality like other things are when they enter the mists of the Shadowrift, so it is possible that it passed through harmlessly and landed in the domain below, or that it appeared elsewhere within the dread realms. The book contains the rituals, spells, formulae and knowledge to create almost a hundred different forms of aberration and under the influence of the book anyone can create these creatures. However it does prefer spellcasters for their gifts in magic, especially sorcerers. Anyone who possesses the tome for any length of time will begin to feel the books influence on him or her. They are forced to make a Will save (DC 10 + 1 per day they have the tome), failure resulting in the tome taking over their free will and they will begin to research the creations the book can unleash. Those who have suffered from a failed Madness check in the past are immune to the books stronger approaches in taking over their psyche and it may only suggest things in a subtle way. They must still make a will save, but the DC remains consistent (DC10) and must make the save each week they retain the book in their possession. It takes 1d3+2 months to research an aberration and then they must make a Decipher Script skill check (DC 25), if successful they have managed to decipher and create one of the aberrations within the tome (the exact working of the aberration is left to the dungeon master).

The tome also knows when a person should die of natural causes and six months prior to this, it will release its hold on them, expecting them to dispose

of the tome in some careless way for it to fall into someone the hands of another.

There are no known ways to destroying the book has many rumours about it, including that Azalin himself was to have penned it while in the service of Strahd von Zarovich, but there is no proof to confirm or deny this legend.

## Conclusions

*Aberrations are a blemish on the world and they soil it with their very existence. They are unnatural and unclean and deserve to have no right in existing among us no matter they're worth or form. Magic is something pure and something to be respected and not mutated or altered to suit the will of an individual. No matter their intent or however gallant they feel their actions are in manipulating magic to their own will, it is wrong and magic will also rebel if forced to strongly. Perhaps Estabane's Legacy is a testament to this warning and should be observed very strongly by all practitioners of the magical arts? I for one, do not have a*

*definite answer but it is what my heart and personal beliefs have always told me. I trust that those of you who read these words will take my warnings to heart and do not pursue that which may be forbidden lore, for to take one step into its study can cost you more than you could ever imagine.*

*Estabane was unfortunate in her judgement and paid the price with her mind and possibly her soul, only in the final days of her life did she possibly redeem herself and many more would not have been so fortunate. They would be lost forever to the temptations of forbidden lore and the cursed knowledge it brings. I trust, gentle readers, that when in the future, should you ever encounter some knowledge that should not be, that you turn your back on it or destroy the source of that knowledge, though for us it is a struggle, we save countless others with our sacrifices.*

*Blessings upon you all*

*Megan Llewelyn  
February 10<sup>th</sup> 758, Mordentshire*



# Credits

## Contributors

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**Coan “Coan” J. Harvey**  
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**David “The Jester” Gibson**  
[jester\\_canuk@hotmail.com](mailto:jester_canuk@hotmail.com). Author of the Hunted, creator of Dread Devourers and Misted Mounts. David has also contributed 3.0E stats of Rudolph Van to QtR#2, his take on the Carnival's creepplings appeared in #3, multiple works on the Abber in #6, and the Shadow Fiend and revamped Gentleman Caller popped up in #7. He has been lost in the Mists since he first discovered the

Red Box and has not looked back since. Except when he's balancing his budget as buying almost every Ravenloft product known to man is not cheap.

**Joseph “Bela” Zettelmaier**  
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## Editors

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has been a Ravenloft fan since 1998, has contributed fan-based articles for the campaign world, including the Worlds of Ravenloft series of netbooks, and manages the Midway Haven Alchemical Observatory. Dion is also a local folklorist and scholar of urban esoterica, whatever that means.

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Author of Diminutive Abberations, In Shadow, and More Black Arts. Member of the Fraternity of Shadows and a person of many tastes. I have had some success in the professional animation, design and illustration fields and since decided to try and write a book of poetry, I also have plans for a novel in the future (when he finds a good proofreader). Previous work in the Online Ravenloft Community may been found in the Kargatane's Book of Sacrifices, Midway Haven's Crisis in Hunadora (a long narrative compiled by the kind souls at the Midway Haven Alchemical Observatory), The Malodorous Goat Netbook as well as previous Undead Sea Scrolls netbooks and the first Quoth the Raven. Other than Ravenloft, I have many interests including theology, some parts of history, folklore, mythology, reading, the occasional video game, art, poetry and writing in general.

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