

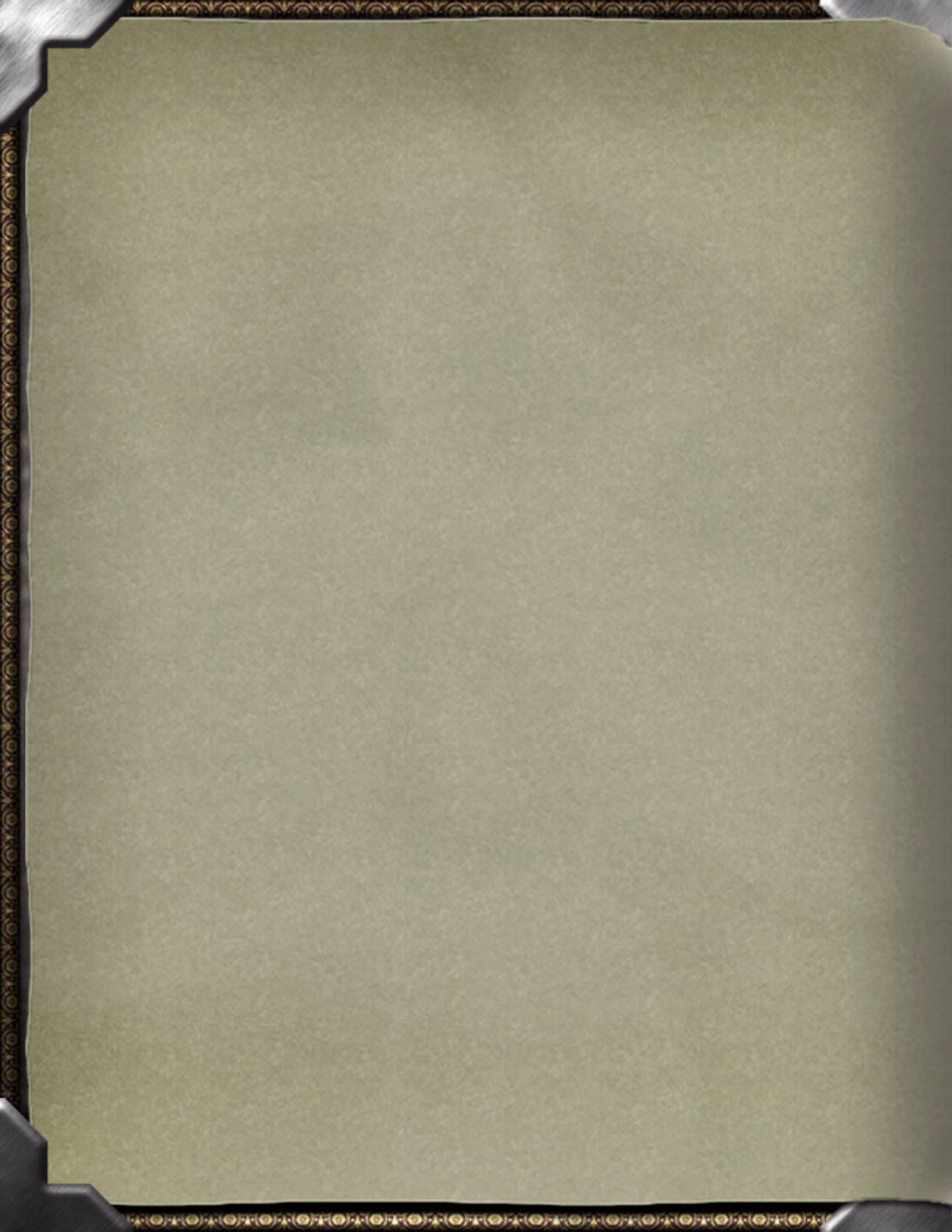
# Quoth the Raven



Volume 17

Zhakata Edition





*Quoth the Raven*  
XVII





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Quoth the Raven Vol. 16 Ed. 2nd

Dec 20 2010

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# *Lost Wonders of the Mist*

## *Three Ancient Ruins*

*By Stephen "ScS" Sutton*

*isawtheraven@hotmail.com*

*By Prof. J.R. Livingston*

I must begin this letter with an admission, or rather, an omission: This letter will in no way address my recent expedition to the land of Har'Akir. No doubt this amuses a number of my critics. Though I and my companions have returned alive, and with plentiful treasures, we all carry with us the burden of a vow of silence. We have made this solemn oath to honour one that we came to know in that land of amber wastes, a brave soul who remained behind that we might leave. I count myself lucky that the experience has cost me only the use of a leg. If my secrecy should cost me a reputation as well, I shall not regret it.

I am writing this letter ensconced within the library of my ancestral home, only a few odd miles from Missaconic University. As I sit by the fire, convalescing from my injuries, my mind wanders back to my youth. The books that surround me were collected by my mother's father. My father, the esteemed theologian, believed these foreign tomes would corrupt my impressionable mind, yet my mother insisted that the collection remain in our home. When my

mother passed away, I spent countless hours in this place, hiding from my father and his religion. In this sanctuary, I wandered through ancient tomes and escaped into the worlds described therein. It was here that I learned of the wide world outside these walls. Even as I child I knew that I would leave this house, escape my father and his God, and seek my place amongst the fantastic and terrifying places that lay beyond.

That was so long ago. My father has heard Ezra's call and joined my mother. Little has changed in this room since my boyhood, except for a new bookcase that holds the collected works of my father and me. Even as I sit, I can feel my bones begin to settle. My career of adventurer may very well end where it began, right here in this library.

I have dedicated my life to the expansion of the knowledge of mankind, yet there are so many questions unanswered, so many secrets unrevealed, and so shadowy places unexplored. If it is indeed my time to retire, it shall not come before I pass on my torch. Here are my recollections of a few of the most remarkable places I have found in my

many travels. In each case, I spent only a short amount of time in the site and could not make a thorough survey. This task now falls to the next generation of scholars and explorers.

Be foretold: The way is dark and treacherous, beset with peril. There are terrors in the mists and wonders, too.

## *The Mastaba of the Sphinx*

The Amber Wastes holds a great fascination for men such as I. Its great rolling seas of sand hold countless secrets. The dry desert heat preserves nearly everything for millennia, and though the shifting dunes might burry wondrous treasures, they are just as likely to reveal them. It is only by the capricious of the desert that I ever happened upon the Mastaba of the Sphinx.

I made this discovery while starving in the desert. Only a day previous, I had escaped from a group of black robed slavers and found myself alone and adrift in an endless sea of sand. The raiders were of a tribe of Pharazian nomads, who had seized me and the band of merchants with whom I was traveling. The caravan had hardly resisted the bandits, for the traders expected gentle treatment in exchange for their passivity. Indeed, many of the merchants present had already previously abducted by other tribes of nomads; the occasional kidnapping was seen by these men as a cost of doing business in the burning wastes. Sure enough, the merchants and their closest staff were taken to the East, to the home of the nomads where they would be held and ransomed. My traveling companions had neglected to inform me that as a foreigner, I would be singled out for a worse fate.

When the merchants and their captors departed the nomads divided the remaining caravan members into two groups. The first were the common labourers and foreigners

destined for the auction block in some distant slave market. The second group was comprised of the followers of Diamabel. Though these poor strange cultists had expected immediate murder and torture from the nomads, their captors had other plans. What horror would befall them, I did not guess and surely it would have remained a mystery to me, had one of the nomads not proved somewhat friendlier than the others. I reciprocated the raider's advance with a solid kick and I pause my narrative only to note that while light ring mail makes very effective armour in the desert climate, it is no substitute for a proper codpiece. Following a severe beating from the rest of the slavers, I was tied to the chain of Pharazians and led into the wastes.

My fate in that company was surely sealed, so I resolved to take the first opportunity to escape, no matter how desperate and unlikely. As we marched, I held the Anchorite amulet of Ezra's kite shield that my father had given me when first I left home. In all the years that the steel medallion had hung at my chest, I had found no use for it. That day, I found it made a suitable means of sawing through rope. As the sun began to set, I severed the last threads of the rope and bolted from the chain. Behind me, my co-captives made their own breaks and the slave chain erupted into chaos.

Even with an uprising on their hands, I did not expect the slavers to ignore me. Sure enough, one rider followed hot on my heels, waving a dreadful lance. Its fear that gives men wings, but in the amber dunes of Sebua, no wing is a match for a fleet footed camel. Surely I would have been skewered in the back by that slaver's spear, had fate not intervened.

Darkness had suddenly descended, and the azure sky turned instantly grey green. Though I did not slow my pell-mell sprint, I heard behind me the rider halt his pursuit and



shriek. In my flight, I crested a dune and saw the sight that had forced my pursuer to turn and flee. A tsunami of sand towered from heaven to earth and stretched as far as I could see on the horizon. In an instant, it rolled over me and consumed my entire world.

I did not walk or crawl through the storm, but rather I swam. An endless rain of needles and daggers scoured my skin as I slithered blindly through that burning abyss of sand. I know not how long I wormed my way through the heaving sands, but finally I felt something solid and grabbed on for dear life. Infinity is a maelstrom of sand, raging in the endless wastes of Sebuu; it is a howling dun coloured nightmare of solid stinging matter and shrieking vacuum; it is a universe of terror in a grain of yellow sand. In an absolute measurement of time, the storm must only lasted a few hours, yet in some corner of my brain, it storms forever.

After eons of screeching hell, the storm eased. I finally dared to raise my head from my hands, and beheld a bewildering sight. I could see very clearly for a mile around, and perceived an endless wall of twisting sand. I was trapped in the calm eye of a hurricane of sand. My moment of respite from the storm seemed only to torment me further. I was as close to despaired then as I ever have been, when my natural curiosity snapped me from my melancholy. I realized that I stood on firm solid ground.

In my blind stupor I had thought that I had taken refuge behind a boulder or hillock. Instead, I had crouched behind the wall of a mighty black stone ziggurat. As I lay huddled, the fierce storm had blown away a mountain of sand and revealed the pyramidal building that had lain buried below.

Compared to some of the mighty tombs of Har' Akir, the ancient mastaba was crude. The structure was a flat topped step pyramid, made of small blocks of a black stone. The

dunes still buried much of the structure, so I could not guess its true height, but I could see that the walls were built at a thirty degree angle, which is quite steep compared to other pyramidal structures. The steps of the tomb-temple were each a story in height, and the top most four levels had been uncovered by the sand storm. Most notable was a long stone ramp, which led down from the second highest level of the building and into the rolling sea of sand below.

Above me, the green sky darkened and the whistle of wind returned. The storm was moving once more, and soon the calm eye of this hurricane must blink shut. My only chance at survival lay in finding shelter inside the mastaba. I knew that it was possible that the sands would rebury the tomb, though having already endured one storm, I was prepared to risk my life to avoid another.

At the top of the ramp I found an entrance way. Once upon a time, a great stone door had stood in the gate, though by my time it lay in great broken pieces strewn across the ramp. Above the great rectangular passage had been carved a likeness of a sphinx. The sphinx is a reoccurring symbol found throughout the Amber Wastes; it is a chimerical entity combining various parts of a lion, a bird and a human being. Supposedly such creatures exist, though more likely they are the concoction of some diseased primitive mind. The combination of animal parts to men is a common, if disturbing form of artistic allegory. While pretty enough as a stone carving, I dreaded to contemplate the literal existence of such an abomination.

As I descended into the cool shade of the tomb-temple, I felt along the walls. Once there had been carvings here but the walls of the gateway were worn smooth, no doubt due to erosion from countless sandstorms over the centuries. I groped blindly for a time until I found a side chamber branching off of

the hall. Leaning against the walls, I was delighted to feel the sensation of cool moisture on my skin. So desperate was I that I licked the stone walls for water. Survivalists should take note, for this disgusting act provided me with enough fluid to continue my activities until such time as I found proper drink.

Too soon, the storm descended blocked out the faint light that had been filtering through the passage. The endless howling of the wind wore at my nerves, and so I decided to flee deeper into the ancient ziggurat. Dreading the darkness, I tore strips from my tattered clothing and improvised a crude bundle of kindling from the threads. Once again I put my anchorite amulet to work, this time as a sparking device. After some half an hour, I had a source of light to guide my descent into the crypt.

I made a conscious effort to remember my steps through those dark corridors, for I knew too well how easily I might become lost in the lifeless depths of the tomb. The interior of the mastaba consisted of the same black stone as the exterior, though the coloration was more striking in the absence of millennia and erosion. The walls were adorned with intricate drawings, carved and painted into the brick.

The corridors began to spiral downwards deeper into the ziggurat, and as I descended I found that the atmosphere became cooler and more damp. I guessed that the temple had been built on some ancient spring, which bubbled water into the depths of the crypt, which in turn wafted into the upper corridors. I used a cloth to collect beads of moisture off of the wall, and in doing so, found myself studying the hieroglyph paintings. Even by my faint light, I could see that the wall paintings bore a distinct resemblance to Akiri art, albeit more crude and less formalized.

I wandered the winding corridors for hours, watching with rapt fascination as the artwork played out its tale before my eyes. Most striking of the differences was the repetition of the sphinx symbols. The creature appeared in nearly every scene depicted in the hieroglyphs, along with a number of other chimerical creatures. A strange mob of animal headed monsters seemed to follow the sphinx in every drawing. Even rendered in paint they were terrible to behold. The carvings even hinted at all manner of disturbing behaviour, including acts of apparent cannibalism. I felt it strange that monstrous figures should feature so prominently in the artworks, and wondered if they represented real people, albeit demonized. I was pondering the metaphorical significance of this artwork when I stumbled quite literally over the answer.

Through my journey into the tomb, I had carefully parcelled out my cloth strips so as to preserve my faint light. Yet in my tumble, I accidentally gave light to my precious kindling in a single fleeting moment of illumination. Those short few seconds shall haunt me for all of my days. Nothing moved in that moment; nothing had stirred in that dreadful, damp tomb for countless centuries. Yet I ran, then, as if all the hounds of hell followed at my feet.

I fled back the way I came, groping blindly through the black stone void. I followed my mental map of the tomb and retraced my steps back to the surface. After an hour of stumbling, I felt a stab of terror, for I knew I must have been close to the gateway and yet I heard nothing of the terrible storm that had driven me into the hideous tomb. Without warning, the ground dropped out from me.

Above me, the night starts whirled as I tumbled down the long stone ramp. I had escaped the tomb and burst into the calm night. I rolled painfully down the man-made



mountain, and finally crashed to the soft sand below. Even in my addled state, I realized that the storm had past, and in doing so revealed yet more of the mastaba. After a long moment, I collected myself and tried to stand up. I was brought short when I realized that a great form loomed before me. It was still and solid, so I guessed that it must be a statue, unburied by the storm. Slowly my eyes took in the faint rays of starlight, and I perceived the shape of the statue. Standing there before me, rendered in black stone, was the sphinx. I screamed and fled into the desert night.

Fortune forsakes no man forever, and after some hours of travel I stumbled into an oasis. Though little more than a muddy puddle sheltered between the dunes, the spring had provided me with desperately needed water. I was not long alone at that oasis, for a lone horse had smelt the oasis and come to drink. In the pale moonlight, I recognised the tack and saddle as belonging to the Pharazian nomads.

Not far from the oasis I found the remains of the nomad slavers, their captives and the animals. All of their number had been dried to the consistency of a kipper. Were it not for my newly acquired horse, I might have believed them all killed by a Simoom, the dreaded wave of hot wind so powerful as to bake a man in mere moments. A cursory examination revealed that the bodies were covered in disgusting sucker marks. I surmised that some horrid thing had attacked the slavers and drained them all of their fluids. Though I could not fathom what breed of monster could perform such a ghastly feat, I did find tracks leading off to the North. Thus, I set out to the South.

I was eventually rescued, as irony would have it, by a group of Pharazian nomads. Such people are as fickle as the desert in which they dwell; the band I encountered was as enthusiastic to rendering aid as the

other group had been to attack and enslave. In that kind company the wounds from my ordeal healed quickly, and soon I was back on my original path. I did not search for the mastaba, for I cannot be certain exactly where in the desert it lies. I cannot even be certain that the whole tomb-temple has not been buried again by the rolling dunes. Regardless, somewhere in the wastes a cold, wet wind blows up from a shadowy netherworld and wafts through the forsaken resting place of the sphinx and its legion of dreadful animal-headed abominations.

## *Atlas*

I first glimpsed the city from a swaying perch some fifty feet above the rolling Sea of Sorrow. The sky was overcast as usual, but unusually calm, and so I instantly remarked the flash of white light amidst the endless grey of the horizon. At the time I was acting as a lookout in the crow's nest of the schooner Gwydion, a merchant vessel out of Arden Bay. I was officially an assistant to Professor Mosby during his famous expedition. None the less, I was required to serve whatever role was needed, be it labourer, guard, nurse, or in this case, sailor.

I called down my sighting, and reported updates as our ship approached the island. Though the distance was great, I could clearly mark the shapes of manmade structures on a great rocky island. From my perch, I observed the ensuing argument between the leaders of the expedition and the ship's master. Though our course took us close to this uncharted island, Captain Jacob Earl wanted to bypass the rock completely. This wind was to our backs, and the captain did not wish to waste so much as a day of fair sailing for something as frivolous as exploration. Even from my lofty distance, I could see that the captain was concerned with something far ominous than weather patterns.

We approached the island and soon I had a commanding view of the island, and could see the settlement in detail. Such a city has never before been seen! The city encompassed the entirety of the island, nearly three miles in diameter. Everywhere I looked was white marble, gleaming brilliant in the faint rays of the sun. I saw great buildings of stone held aloft by mighty columns, spiral towers that seemed to jab at the clouds, boulevards paved in stone, and courtyards filled with statues that but for their size and stillness might have been real men and women. I thought I saw a vast dome at the center of the island city, though even from my elevated view in the crow's nest I was unable to see for certain.

The deck buzzed with the assembled members of our expedition, who seemed so eager to see the city for themselves that I feared they might jump into the seas and swim for shore. Had they done so, they would have been disappointed. The city was lifted some ten or twenty feet out of the ocean on a sheer platform of slate grey rock. Worse yet, the waters around the island were littered with towering shoals, making a close approach risky in the extreme. We made our hails and signalled with flags, horns, and cannon. Yet for all our efforts, we neither heard nor saw a response.

The captain renewed his objections. After a great deal of shouting and gesticulating, Professor Mosby convinced Captain Earl to circle the island. The barren island precluded any agriculture, and so we were sure that such a settlement must surely have a bay through which supplies might be imported. As we made our circuit, a dozen or so men searched the island with spyglasses, seeking some signs of the city's elusive builders. Yet for all the wonders we saw, not one of us found a single living creature. We saw neither birds, nor men, nor even trees; only stone.

As we circled, our hopes began to wane, but then we sighted a break in the slate cliffs. A narrow jagged passage opened into the interior of the island. As our ship neared the cliffs, we could see into the yawning natural cove within the island. The wondrous city we had observed before was merely the outermost edge of a fantastic metropolis encircling a harbour. No wonder that this city was so grand: the harbour was sheltered so deep within the slate cliffs that the fiercest storm could scarcely cause a ripple in the bay.

The inlet seemed shallow, though by the light of the day we could easily see through the aqua green waters to the sandy bottom. Even Captain Earl admitted that the way into the great bay was safe for our sailing vessel, though he did express concerns for the rocky cliffs.

Suddenly Professor Karn cried out and pointed to the far rim of the city. The sharp eyed biologist had spotted the greatest wonder of all: Seated on a titan's throne, presiding over the vast stone metropolis, was the god of the city. That stone titan could be none other. The great stone deity was comprised solely of the same slate grey rock as the rest of the island and loomed nearly one hundred feet high. The dome that I had chanced to site from the other side of the island was merely the crown of this deity's massive head. Flawless was the rendering of the god, made in the image of man. Blank eyes seemed to stare out at us from beneath a furrowed brow. Even the tangles of its hair and beard were rendered in rock, like a nest of tentacles or feelers hanging about its head. Most amazing for a statue was its pose; it reached out with its right arm, as if beckoning us forward.

As the sailors prepared the sweeps to take us into the channel, our expedition members busied themselves with their spy glasses. I could not study the gargantuan for long.



Being a lowly student, I was drafted into the ranks of the paddlers. I exchanged my place with Marcus, the apprentice sail maker, and took my place in the lower decks to manhandle a massive paddle through a modified gun port.

As I laboured, I pondered strange things: Ocean-going peoples always revered the gods and goddess of the sea. Yet sheltered in this secure bay, protected from their fiercest of storms, surrounded by so many wondrous creations, the people of this city might easily see themselves as gods. In who's image was this stone idol created? Was this great stone god the creator of this city, or was it the city that created this god?

As we entered the calm green bay, Doctor Morton sighted an inscription at the base of the statue. It read simply: ATLAS. I heard Mosby repeat the word, and soon all of the members of the expedition began to repeat it. They did not know whether that word was the name of the island, the city, or the God, nor did they care. Atlas became a chant as our collective minds puzzled the countless possible meanings of that word. Atlas, the mantra representing the endless mystery within that city, soon to be revealed. Atlas, the endless cry that echoed in the bay, building with every repetition until it resounded like thunder and shook the cliffs.

Whether triggered by awful luck or the reverberating vibrations in the bay, a terrible avalanche rained down from the cliffs, threatening to choke our one egress from this lifeless island. Though the assembled doctors and professors were enraptured, Captain Earl and his crew remained alert and at the ready. As the cliffs rocked and stones crashed, the captain shouted orders. By our efforts, the Gwydion pivoted sharply in the bay.

There was nearly a mutiny on deck when Professor Mosby and the others realized our intent. Fortunately, an unruly mob of

intellectuals is little match for hardened sailors. Below decks, the paddlers and I laboured with desperate fervour. The Gwydion surged back through the inlet, even as boulders crashed into the foaming water. With terrible effort we propelled our ship back out into the blue ocean, even as the cliff face closed behind us like the snapping jaws of some great beast.

Professor Mosby spent an hour screaming himself hoarse but his efforts were for naught. Captain Earl refused to remain at the island and set sail immediately. Further exploration of the unstable isle would have to wait for another time and our expedition would have to satisfy itself to mark the island on our charts. Readers who are familiar with the unique characteristics of the Sea of Sorrows will note this fact with much amusement.

Later that night, I happened upon Marcus, deep in his cups. The young sailor was normally a sober man, yet this night he drank with a purpose. His fellows told me that he was escaping my colleagues. As the lookout, it was he who had the most commanding view of the metropolis and no doubt the last of us to have a clear view of the city. Deprived of the opportunity to survey the city themselves, the expedition members had resorted to a remorseless interrogation of the hapless scout.

I felt such sympathy for the man that I said nothing to him the whole night, and even lent him my flask. He said one thing, before he nodded off into an oblivious stupor: "It moved. The statue. It moved."

## *Temple of Angor Kai*

Some years ago, whilst traveling through the Karshi Plain in the land of Sri Raji I was invited to attend a dinner at the home of a noble lord. The Raja and his guests were most curious to meet a foreign man, and I

was able to regale the assembly with tales of my studies of the temples and holy sites scattered throughout their land. Though the assembled party listened to my tales with great interest, my frank discussion inadvertently offended a local holy man. This yogi assured us all that such studies bordered on an affront to the gods, and that a quest such as mine would inevitably lead me to a pilgrimage to Angor Kai. At the very mention of that place, the table fell silent. After a tense moment, my host laughed loudly and changed the topic of conversation. Even still, I was intrigued.

I made a few discrete inquiries and learned that Angor Kai was a kind of temple, lost to the people centuries before the rise of Kali's temple. More myth than fact, the temple was imagined to be some fantastical shrine built by a primordial race. I was told that this temple, should it exist, would be found in the Indu Kush valley, only a few miles away. I was warned, however, that there were no known path through the vale. The basin was said to be overrun by impenetrable jungle, swarmed by poisonous creatures, and oppressed by a climate so hot as to boil a man's brain inside his own skull. The lower caste servants were terrified of the valley and refused any entreaty to act as a guide or porter.

Later that same night, a simple misunderstanding and social faux pas precipitated my early departure. I pause now only to note that, while many women in Sri Raji wear scarves, it is divorcees and widows who wear orange scarves, betrothed maidens who wear red, and that the two groups should never be confused.

Hoping to make the most of a six hour head start, I left the beaten trail. As I had learned from many painful experiences, when hunted by a superior force, one's survival lies in breaking contact with the pursuing group. My only chance lay in

braving the myth-haunted Indu Kush. In retrospect, the yogi was indeed correct; like it or not, I was destined for Angor Kai.

After some hours of flight, I beheld the Indu Kush, a vast crater in the face of the Karshi Plain. Wild vegetation fills the vale, like a bubbling green soup threatening to overflow its bowl. I hesitated then and pondered circling the valley, rather than actually entering it. The sound of baying dogs behind me settled the matter, and so I plunged into the steaming green hell below.

I'll spare my readers the details of my miserable trek into the jungle; suffice it to say that even an experienced traveler, loaded with provisions and tools, will find any foray into a tropical forest an agonizing ordeal. The omnipresent heat was terrible, though nothing compared to the horrible itching humidity. I dared not blaze a trail for fear of my pursuers, so instead relied upon a variation of the naval compass and traveled towards magnetic North. This route would lead me down into the center of the valley, and hopefully to the other side.

Travel became easier when I reached the valley floor. Great twisted banyan trees formed a dark green canopy; the low-lying branches and bushes that made walking so difficult grew scarce in the inky shadows. In the absence of scrub, I perceived a series of straight rows in the earth, broken only by vast roots of the trees. After a moment, I realized that I stood on an ancient roadway. Though the road ran in a perfect straight line, I was forced to navigate a twisted path around the massive twisting trees that sprouted from the roadbed. That such an ancient jungle had not yet obliterated the road was a humbling testimony to the ancient civilization that had laid the path.

As I traveled, I fancied that I could perceive the flattened plains of farmlands, the stepped terraces of rice patties, and mounds made from the buried ruins of



houses and huts. As I walked, I prayed that I would see an intact example of the ancient architecture. Little did I suspect that my wish would soon be granted.

By my estimate I had come to the center of the valley where the ancient road came to an abrupt end at a narrow stream. I noticed that the path of the stream was nearly straight and at a perfect right angle to the road. After a study of the bank, I found the remains of a collapsed retaining wall and confirmed that the waterway was in fact an ancient canal. I noticed that the sun had begun to set, and as I began to look for a suitable spot to make camp I happened to glance up the stream.

The stream cut through the thick forest, like a great laneway. Beyond that channel stretched a burning sky of orange and gold. The blazing crimson disk of the sun seemed to sit at the edge of the valley. As I looked I realized that a great black shape interposed itself before the sun. As I squinted against the light, I could see the shadow of a vast pyramidal structure, rising from the jungle floor. I could not be sure of the perspective, but in the dying light of the dusk, I saw great domed towers, looming walls, vast terraces, and mighty columns of stone. Just as the sun finally dipped behind the valley ridge, a flock of bats seemed to explode out from the great domed tower in the center. I knew that this temple could be no other than the dreaded mythical Angor Kai.

That night I slept on a hastily constructed platform in the thick branches of a jackfruit tree. Throughout that fitful night I was haunted by wild dreams. No doubt my fevered imagination was spurred on by the alien sounds of the jungle and the thrill of my recent discoveries. I cannot recall the details of my frantic reverie, but I distinctly remember the deep booming of a great bell or gong, a deep wailing chant, all accompanied by a resonating throaty growl.

After aeons of restlessness, morning came. I rose before the sun and made my way along the bank of the ancient canal. Little by the little, the sun regained the sky and illuminated my way. The antediluvian jungle seemed to shy from the banks of the canal, though it had overrun whatever structures had once stood by the stream. I followed the stream to its terminus; a rectangular lake that lay at the foot of the temple like a reflecting pool.

In the rosy light of dawn, I saw the temple in all its majesty: a great conical tower rose from the center of wide step-pyramid, formed of three square levels. At each corner of the pyramid stood a tower; they were thinner and shorter than the central spire. All of the towers were crowned with a peculiar egg-shaped dome adorned by rings of chevron-like carvings. They appeared like gigantic stone pine cones.

The outer walls of the temple seemed to have been hewn out of titanic blocks of dark granite. Each of the three levels rose roughly ten feet in height. Thick green creeping vines had taken root over the walls, but still I could still make out the incredible carvings of people, animals, and monsters dancing over every surface. Though the lowest level seemed to be a solid unbroken wall, I noticed cross-shaped windows carved into the walls of the second and third levels.

Monkeys and birds swarmed across the vine covered walls, chattering their greetings to the rising sun. Projecting from the tops of the walls were long poles of copper or bronze, long since corroded and turned to solid green verdigris. I fancied that they might once have been flag-staves, though whatever pennants they might once have flown would long since rotted away.

I walked the perimeter of the temple, and found the lowest level to be roughly three hundred yards square. Apart from weedy elephant grass, the grounds surrounding the

temple were barren. For a time I wondered whether or not human hands had kept the forest at bay, though I felt it unlikely. I had half completed my circuit when I found the gateway.

A great square gatehouse projected forth from the lower level looming above the weed choked remains of an abandoned laneway. Of the doorway, all that remained were two shattered bronze lattice doors. Even from a distance I could see where some recent event had broken the patina from the bronze beneath. Approaching cautiously, I notice that the damage had been extremely recent: the coppery smell of broken verdigris still hung in the air. Someone had broken through this doorway only a few hours before.

A sensible man would have fled then. There was no doubt in my mind that my pursuers had braved the dreaded Indu Kush and overtaken me in the night. Surely they had sought me out here in the ancient temple, and most probably still waited within. Of course, I decided to go in after them after them.

This action was not as foolish as it might first appear: My hunters outnumbered me considerably, and had proved that they were both faster than me and willing to take risks in their pursuit. Having inadvertently doubled back on them, I felt I should hide under their very noses.

It has long been my mantra to avoid entering any unknown situation through the front door, and so I climbed up to the second level. Centuries of weathering and the network of vines aided me immeasurably. Gaining the top of the first level, I noticed that there was little roof to speak of, apart from a few stone arches running from one side to another. Looking down into the first level, I saw that the floor was partitioned into a labyrinth of rooms, arcades, and galleries. These rooms seemed to hold no purpose,

though their walls were adorned with yet more intricate carvings and statuary.

Though I was intrigued by the architectural curiosity below me, I remained fixed upon finding my hunters. I skulked along the ledge of the wall for some time, watching for any sign of my enemies. After an hour of prowling, I heard a faint sound come from a second floor window. Cautiously, I crept to the cruciform portal and looking into the room within. There I found my pursuers, or rather, what was left of them.

I recognized many of the men present in that room, though I identified them by their size, shape, and clothing, since so little of their faces remained visible. I shall refrain from discussing the details, but suffice it instead to say, that they would harm neither me nor anyone else in this world. From my perch, I studied the room and located the sound of the groaning. A single survivor lay huddled beneath the body of one of his former comrades. Though we were enemies, I knew that I could not condemn the man to the lonely death that had haunted me throughout my career. Devoid of any obvious guardians or obstacles, the open gallery seemed safe. Naturally, I searched for traps.

I was not long in finding a floor tile that threatened to move when pressure was applied. Nearly every floor tile was a trapped by pressure plates and all of the tiles in the room were inscribed with strange symbols. I presume that the correct path through the trap might have been deduced by knowing some secret word or phrase, and spelling it out with one's steps on the floor. Not knowing the correct answer, I made do with my knowledge of traps.

Though slow, my navigation through the room was hindered only by the bodies that littered the ground. Eventually I was able to extricate the wounded man from his dead cohort, and carry him back to the window



through which I had entered. With the man's limp weight across my back, I retraced my creep across the first level. Though the burden was great, I was grateful that the man possessed the wiry build of a native Sri Rajian. Had he been as thickset as I, he might have been injured when I accidentally dropped him as I climbed down the wall.

For a reason I cannot explain, I did not feel safe being so close to the temple at night. After tending to the man's wounds, I made a litter and dragged the man a mile from the temple before building a makeshift camp for the night.

Eventually my wounded companion came to his senses, and related the fate of his fellows. I had guessed correctly that his party had sought me at the temple: the posse had broken into three groups with two parties to search the ruins, while the man, Rajit as he was called, and his squad lay in wait at the entrance. By morning, none of the other groups had returned so Rajit and his company sought them. Instead of their companions, the searchers found lethal death traps. Many of the chambers within the temple were thus protected, and Rajit's party lost several members in their futile search before their ultimate end on the second floor gallery. There was no doubt between us as to the fate of the other two groups. Neither of us dared sleep that night.

Later that night, Rajit became agitated. He swore that he felt the presence of evil nearby. Though I felt fine, I have long made it a point not to discount the instincts of others. Taking a torch down to water, I beheld the night.

The crescent moon hung low in the azure sky, raining silver beams of light down upon the black jungle valley. In the west, I could make out the looming pyramidal shadow of Angor Kai. The shadow seemed to beckon to me, and for a moment I found myself lost in thought, pondering what great secrets and

forbidden knowledge might be hidden somewhere within the depths of that dreadful, mythological temple. Then I heard the sounds of splashing in the river. I threw the torch towards the riverbank, expecting to illuminate some bird or crocodile. Instead I found Rajit's companions.

Four and twenty men were wading through the river. They had not yet decomposed, but they were surely dead. Numerous mortal wounds had been carved into their flesh, yet still they moved with a deliberate, mechanical rhythm. As one, two dozen turned to face me. I did not hesitate. I ran.

Rajit did not ask for an explanation when I returned from camp, my face told him everything. I gave him my sabre, hoisted the front legs of the litter onto my shoulders, and dragged the wounded man behind me. Though he seemed to be a skilled warrior, I was not sure if Rajit would be a match for one of the walking dead whilst bound to a litter. Fortunately, our lifeless hunters were slow and fear gave me the strength to push on. I followed the river east until I found the ancient road that had led me to this steaming green hell. We might have easily become lost in that benighted forest, but the ancient road builders had proved their timeless skill, and I was able to follow their lane even in the total dark. When the road ended, I climbed uphill.

It was morning by the time we emerged from the Indu Kush valley. Safely outside the shadowed vale, I left Rajit and made the long journey to summon help. Rajit's family was immensely grateful and they proved helpful in clearing my name, and so I was able to continue my journey through the Karshi Plain.

Looking back now, I cannot say why I did not return to Angor Kai. Instead, I continued my studies of the temples of Sri Raji. I have since traveled to strange places, faced terrible perils, and fought countless deathless horrors. Yet I never again braved the vine

choked arcades of that shadowed temple. I hope only that this tale might lead some intrepid explorer to finish the task that I began, and plumb the shadowy secrets buried within the ruins of mythical Angor Kai.



# *Noblesse Oblige*

## *Aristocracy Amongst the Damned*

*By James "The Confessor" Spahn*

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*Lord Westchester leaned back in his chair and an arrogant grin slithered slowly onto his face. Taking a long draw from the pipe clenched in his teeth, he cast a gaze across the table at his fellow conspirator. "We needn't worry about the interference from the Lamplighters or those nosy Weathermay-Foxgrove twins. I have seen to it that they will be," he paused, considering his words for a moment before continuing, "otherwise occupied."*

*The hooded stranger across the table growled slightly, "How?"*

*Westchester let out a bored sigh and tapped the edge of his pipe into a nearby ashtray of tarnished brass as the lasts wisps of smoke slipped from his lips and faded into the darkness beyond the candle light, "With a few words, my dear fellow. With a few well placed words."*

From the illustrious halls Dementlieu to the wind-worn manors of Mordent, to the reluctant Burgomasters of Barovia, the Core is always in need of rulers. Nobles fill this place in society, typically born into their position and raised in great wealth. It is not

unheard of, though, for someone to rise to Noble status through his or her own great words and deeds. They are rich and powerful, often able to take or save a life with but a word.

**Adventures:** Most Nobles who take up the call of adventure do so for a specific reason. Whether they're searching for an ancient family heirloom or simply taking a tour of the realm, the Noble usually finds the life of an adventurer to be unique and unexpected. This is often a welcome blessing from the rigid structure of most high-society events.

**Characteristics:** Nobles very adept in social matters, like Bards. However, where the Bard is the voice of the common man, the Noble finds himself most comfortable when dealing with authority figures and members of high society. Nobles often find themselves in positions of leadership in many adventuring parties, and they wouldn't have it any other way.

**Alignment:** Nobles can be found in any alignment, though there is a tendency towards Lawful attitudes due to the typically rigid way in which they were raised. Many Nobles are deeply affected by the moral axis

of their alignment. Evil Nobles typically care little for their kingdom or its residents, while Good Nobles want to see everyone prosper under their rule. Neutral Nobles place the kingdom as a whole above all else.

**Religion:** Nobles are not, on a whole, very religious. They are typically too wrapped up in matters of duty and obligation to even considering saddling themselves with the additional dedication to piety. Many of the more fierce Nobles of the Core offer some level of service to The Lawgiver.

**Background:** Nobles spend their lives in privilege and wealth. Most are raised from birth, knowing that they will one day be kings and queens, lords and princes. Because of this, they typically expect obedience from others. The rare Noble who takes up the adventurer's life is typically seen as one who is going on a tour of the Core. In some cases, the Noble may have been forced to take up adventuring due to some great shame they suffered.

**Races:** Almost all Nobles found in the Core are Human. Other races simply do not have enough influence in the core to warrant this profession in life. The rare non-human who is a Noble is typically a very minor one, such as the mayor of a small town and only possesses a few levels in this class.

**Other Classes:** Nobles typically regard all other classes as secondary to themselves. Nobles naturally assume positions of leadership and expect others, regardless of class, to follow. They have a particular dislike of rogues, who they typically view as common thieves and generally see barbarians as unchained and dangerous savages.

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### *Game Rule Information*

Nobles have the following game statistics.

**Abilities:** Charisma is the single most important attribute to the Noble. It is the cornerstone of most of his abilities and in-class skills. Intelligence and Wisdom can also be useful, as they offer insight to any delicate social situation. A Noble who expects to see combat should also keep an eye on his Dexterity.

**Alignment:** Though they have a propensity for lawfulness, Nobles may be of any alignment.

**Hit Dice:** d6

The Noble's class skills (and the key abilities for each skill) are Appraise (Int), Bluff (Cha), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Gather Information (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (History), Knowledge (Local), Knowledge (Nobility & Royalty), (Int), Listen (Wis), Perform (Cha), Profession (Int), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), and Speak Language.

**Skill Points at 1st Level:**  $(6 + \text{Int modifier}) \times 4$

**Skill Points at Each Additional Level:**  $6 + \text{Int modifier}$

**Starting Gold:** 10d4x10 gold pieces.

**Weapon and Armour Proficiencies:** Nobles are proficient in all simple weapons and light armour, as well as light shields.

**Native Domain:** A Noble receives a +2 class bonus to all Diplomacy, Gather Information, Knowledge (History), Knowledge (Nobility & Royalty), and Knowledge (Local) checks made within his Native Domain.

**Educated:** All Nobles have a diverse education. Among this training is the ability to wield a gentleman's weapon. At 1st level, the Noble receives weapon proficiency in any one of the following weapons: Firearms, Long Sword, Rapier, or Short Sword. In addition, a Noble's education is often very diverse. Because of this diversity, a Noble may select one cross-class skill that is, from



then on, considered to be in-class for the Noble.

**Juicy Gossip:** By spending a week in a single manor, town or city, the Noble is able to hear a few pieces particularly useful or damaging gossip. To accomplish this, the Noble must succeed on a Gather Information check (DC 15) and spend a day observing the social patterns of a given area. If successful, he receives a +2 to all Bluff, Diplomacy,

Intimidate and Gather Information checks made when interacting with one particular person as the gossip he has learned grants him a small bit of leverage in all matters political. This bonus remains for a number of days equal to the Noble's Charisma modifier, after which time the Noble may not attempt to use this ability against the same target for at least a week.

### *The Noble*

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort	Ref	Will	Special
1st	+0	+0	+2	+2	Native Domain, Educated
2nd	+1	+0	+3	+3	Juicy Gossip
3rd	+2	+1	+3	+3	Inspire Loyalty
4th	+3	+1	+4	+4	
5th	+3	+1	+4	+4	Call in a Favour
6th	+4	+2	+5	+5	Demand Satisfaction
7th	+5	+2	+5	+5	Embarrassing Rumour
8th	+6/+1	+2	+6	+6	
9th	+6/+1	+3	+6	+6	Inspire Courage
10th	+7/+2	+3	+7	+7	Call on a Favour
11th	+8/+3	+3	+7	+7	Dirty Secrets
12th	+9/+4	+4	+8	+8	Demand Honour
13th	+9/+4	+4	+8	+8	
14th	+10/+5	+4	+9	+9	
15th	+11/+6/+1	+5	+9	+9	Inspire Heroism
16th	+12/+7/+2	+5	+10	+10	Call in a Favour, Ruin Reputation
17th	+12/+7/+2	+5	+10	+10	
18th	+13/+8/+3	+6	+11	+11	Demand Retribution
19th	+14/+9/+4	+6	+11	+11	
20th	+15/+10/+5	+6	+12	+12	Call in a Favour

**Inspire Loyalty (Ex):** By spending a standard action the Noble can use his oratory gifts to inspire fellowship and loyalty in his allies within 60 feet of him. A Noble may affect a number of allies equal to half his class level. Allies affected by this ability receive a +2 morale bonus to all attack and damage rolls, as well as receiving a +4 to all Will saves made to resist mind-influencing spells that would turn them against the Noble. This affect lasts 5 rounds. This ability may only be used once per encounter.

**Call in a Favor:** As a Noble's reputation and influence grows, he typically makes several connections and allies throughout the political world. By spending a day sending the proper correspondence and talking to the correct people, the Noble may "Call in a Favor". Once a favor has been used, it may never be used again - it is spent. However, Nobles gain more favors as their power and sphere of influence increases. Calling in a Favor is a major expenditure of a Noble's influence and resources and can typically accomplish amazing things. Listed below are some examples of what can be accomplished:

*Gather Resources:* A Noble receives a stipend of gold equal to his (Noble Level x Noble Level) x 1000 gold pieces. This is typically represented in actual possessions and resources (such as a ship or a cache of weapons), though up to 25% of it may be actual gold. This cannot be used to acquire magical items.

*Noble's Decree:* A Noble may Take 20 on any one Diplomacy, Intimidate, Gather Information, Knowledge (History), Knowledge (Local) or Knowledge (Nobility and Royalty) check, adding all appropriate modifiers.

*Get Away With Murder:* A Noble may publicly and without fear, commit any single crime without fear of lawful retribution. From petty theft to arson to murder, the

Noble will, through his political influences, be found innocent of this charges as long as he willingly submits to the due process of the local law enforcement after he commits the crime. However, despite being declared "innocent", he suffers a +5 on his Outcast Rating for the next six months while in that domain.

*Save the Condemned:* A Noble may use his influence to over-turn a verdict or public decision that has found someone else guilty of a crime. This can be anything from demanding the freedom of a vile criminal to making a rousing speech in order to stop a lynch mob from hanging a so-called "witch." But, it allows a Noble to guarantee that their will is carried out and that the condemned is released unharmed and considered to be innocent of the crime for all legal purposes.

The Noble's player is free to suggest other potential uses of the Call in a Favour ability, though the DM has final approval over the limitations of this ability.

**Demand Satisfaction (Ex):** A Noble may, as a standard action, call out to a single foe and demand that this opponent face him. If the target can see and understand that he is being addressed, he must make a Will saving throw (DC 10 +  $\frac{1}{2}$  Noble's Class Level + Noble's Charisma modifier) or do everything reasonably possible to attack the Noble. The target's tactics will depend on how intelligent they are, and they will not simply charge recklessly towards the Noble randomly (unless they're particularly reckless or stupid). Once they have attempted an attack of some sort against the Noble they are free from any further obligation. This is a mind-affecting ability. A foe may only be the target of this ability once per encounter.

**Embarrassing Rumour:** Similar to Juicy Gossip, the Noble is now able to learn particularly embarrassing rumours regarding several members of the local populous. By spending a week observing social patterns



within a town and succeeding on a Gather Information check (DC 20) the Noble may opt to automatically Take 10 when using Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate or Gather Information when these skills are used in relation to or against a number of targets equal to the Noble's Charisma modifier. This ability remains active for a number of days equal to the Noble's Charisma modifier, after which time the Noble may not attempt to use this ability against the same targets for at least a month.

**Inspire Courage (Ex):** By spending a standard action the Noble can use his oratory gifts to inspire bravery and fearlessness in his allies within 60 feet of him. A Noble may affect a number of allies equal to half his class level. Allies affected by this ability become immune to all Fear effects for the next five rounds. They cannot be shaken, panicked, cowered or frightened and automatically succeed in any Fear saving throw. In addition, they receive a +2 morale bonus to all Horror saves for five rounds as well. This ability may only be used once per encounter.

**Dirty Secrets:** The Noble has become so skilled at learning the dirty laundry of his peers that by 11th level, he is often able to force others into political alliance with him through blackmail. The Noble may select a single target whom he then spends a week studying. If the Noble then succeeds in a Gather Information check (DC 25), he learns a great and terrible secret in his target's past that may be used as leverage against that individual. Once the Noble makes their target aware that their secret is out the target of this ability must succeed in a Will saving throw (DC  $10 + \frac{1}{2}$  the Noble's Class Level + Noble's Charisma Modifier) or reluctantly become Helpful towards the Noble for a number of days equal to the Noble's Charisma modifier. After this time, the target's disposition automatically becomes

Hostile. A Noble may only successfully use this ability against a target once a year.

**Demand Honour (Ex):** A Noble may, as a standard action, call out to a single foe and demand that this opponent face him in personal combat. If the target can see and understand that he is being addressed, he must make a Will saving throw (DC  $10 + \frac{1}{2}$  Noble's Class Level + Noble's Charisma modifier) or do everything reasonably possible to engage the Noble in melee combat. The target's tactics and methods of reaching the Noble will depend on how intelligent they are, and they will not simply charge recklessly towards the Noble randomly (unless they're particularly reckless or stupid). Once they have attempted a melee attack of some sort against the Noble they are free from any further obligation. This is a mind-affecting ability. A foe may only be the target of this ability once per encounter.

**Inspire Heroism (Ex):** By spending a standard action the Noble can use his oratory gifts to inspire bravery and fearlessness in his allies within 60 feet of him. A Noble may affect a number of allies equal to half his class level. Allies who are affected by this ability are inspired to new heights of heroism and selflessness. They see the greatness within themselves and can bring it to bear when facing evil. These allies receive a morale bonus to all attack rolls, damage rolls, and saving throws equal to the Noble's Charisma modifier as well as receiving +5d6 temporary hit points. These temporary hit points are expended before the target's normal hit points. This affect lasts 5 rounds. This ability may only be used once per encounter and only when the party is faced with a foe whose CR is two points higher than the party's ECL. It is only in dark times that the brightest of lights can shine, after all.

**Ruin Reputation:** By 16th level the Noble can unearth the deepest, darkest secrets in a

person's past and use them to ruin that person socially. If no such secret exists, the Noble can choose to seed a community with false rumors to create equal devastation. Truth is incidental in politics.

The Noble must spend a week studying a single target as well as speaking to members of the community about their target. They must then make a Gather Information check (DC 30). If this check is successful, the Noble has learned a dark secret in their target's past. If no such secret exists, then the Noble has learned enough circumstantial evidence to fabricate such a secret believably. Once these secrets (whether true or false) are learned, a Noble has one month to reveal them. Once these secrets are revealed, the target suffers a +5 to their Outcast rating while in any one Domain determined by the Noble. This penalty remains in effect for an entire year, but this ability may only be successfully used against a target once, ever.

**Demand Retribution (Ex):** A Noble who suffers a particularly grievous blow may call out to his allies and demand that they extract retribution against the foe that so deeply wounded him. Within 3 rounds of suffering a critical hit from a single foe the Noble may, as a standard action, demand that his allies seek retribution for his grave wounds. Allies affected by this must be within 60 feet of the Noble at the time he demands retribution and a Noble may only affect a number of allies equal to his Charisma modifier.

Those allies may make a single attack against the Noble's chosen foe on their next action that, if it hits, is considered automatically to be a Critical Hit. A foe may only be the target of this ability once per encounter. If the foe is immune to critical hits, this ability has no effect.



# *Maps from a Troubled Mind*

## *Collected Scriblings of a Mad Man*

*By Andrew "ashoon" Pavfides*

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Rerock turned another page of the Journal, as he took a moment to let his gaze envelop the sea of Sorrows in the twilight, a spectacle visible from the window of his hotel room. He was getting tired. At the behest of his employer, a secretive nobleman from Richemulot he has traveled to Dementlieu and payed a visit to a small asylum there. His employer wanted him to procure the diary of the warden along with any and all paintings of a special guest of the asylum; a lost one reputed to be an outlander hero that has lost his mind fighting the horrors of distant lands. He was also to make sure that the warden wouldn't make another diary and the Lost hero wouldn't make more paintings; ever. Still, he found it strange that the patient was missing. He couldn't complete his mission to perfection. How a man that couldn't even speak escaped an asylum, without alerting the staff, was beyond him.

Rerock stood up to go open the window for a bit of fresh air; standing up made him somewhat dizzy. Perhaps he was down with a cold. He should better delay the rendezvous with his secretive, and perhaps insane, employer. He chuckled at that. The rich guy probably wouldn't consider a common cold

as an excuse for a delay. After all, he probably wanted to play important to some of his fellow "members of the Fraternity" something Rerock has "accidentally" overheard. Why did rich people so often joined private clubs, secretive associations or arcane cults he couldn't understand.

He missed a step as he reached the window; he was getting dizzy. That's strange. Then he saw that the bedchamber, next to his bed has been misplaced. Someone has been in the room! He reached for his dagger, but he felt his hands trembling. They were slow to respond. With mounting fear he tried to keep standing, but his knees were buckling. He fell to one knee and grasped the bed; it was getting difficult to breathe... he has been poisoned!

He heard footsteps outside. The door opened and his employer came in as if everything was in order. He moved to pick up the journal. Rerock tried to scream. Only a hoarse whisper escaped his lungs. The old man turned to him and gave him a wicked smile. As Rerock's vision blurred and he was slipping to the floor he heard the old noble say "Oh, you're still alive. Don't worry, it

*won't be painful and it would be any minute now. You shouldn't have tried to overhear my discussion with my bodyguard Rerock. I'm sorry. I don't give second chances."*

### *12th September*

The patient in room 11 can't speak. The ones that brought him to my care informed me that in his prime, he was a powerful arcanist, some would call him a hero, from someplace else, perhaps beyond the mists. I've heard rumors about him, that he has been cursed by gypsies, that he lost his mind fighting fiends that feast on the sanity of men, that his mind was lost when he was trapped by fairies or that his mind was crushed by mishandling magic too powerful and more. None of the theories suggest any mundane reason for his condition. He never speaks to anyone and rarely acknowledges other persons, spending long hours babbling incoherently to himself curled in a fetal ball and spending the rest of his waking hours trying to scratch images on the wall. He seems truly lost. Most rumors from the previous asylum he was held, one that was destroyed in a fire, seemed to agree that he was an accomplished painter and that he has kept his skill even after losing his mind.

### *18th September*

I decided to entrust the patient of room 11 with some rudimentary painting brushes and colors, and some canvas. Perhaps finding an outlet to express himself his condition will improve. I was checking him often the first day to make sure he doesn't harm himself. He seemed... content. After inspecting him for a day, I have to say that he seems to have some skill and that he makes the drawing with dedication, like he does them on purpose. Also, the paintings seem to have a focus that I haven't seen before in men of his condition. I'll keep checking.

### *26th September*

The patient of room 11 seemed to acknowledge me for the first time since he got here. He doesn't respond to the nurse bringing him food, or even when she gave him a bath. He didn't respond to me at any time when I tested him, or checked on him. Yet, today when I was passing from his room to check on his health and condition, he looked at me, straight at me, smiled and offered me... a painting. The painting seemed to be a map of all things. Perhaps something he remembers from his travels? Perhaps something that he made up? A combination of both?

Just in case, I decided to keep the map. I'll compare it with anything else he draws in case I find any similarities so I can end up with any conclusions.

### *27th September, the First map*

I was studying the painting, or better the map that the patient of room 11 gave me. I have to say that I find it very interesting. It certainly doesn't seem the product of a damaged mind. The patient has included a border with letters in some language I can't understand and even scale!

The map clearly depicts an unknown to me land, surrounded by mists. The western side of this land seems to be heavily forested. The elevation rises towards the east and it seems that there's a large mountain range comprising a large portion of this far away land of mystery. The patient might have tried to denote height with the different colors, marking with white the, probably snowed, mountain top. To the south, there seem to be some settlements. The larger of the three I can see, seems to be in the delta of the river; probably a town of a couple of thousand people at most. 10-12 miles to the east, according to the map, seems to be another settlement on the coast, a village probably connected to the town with what seems to be



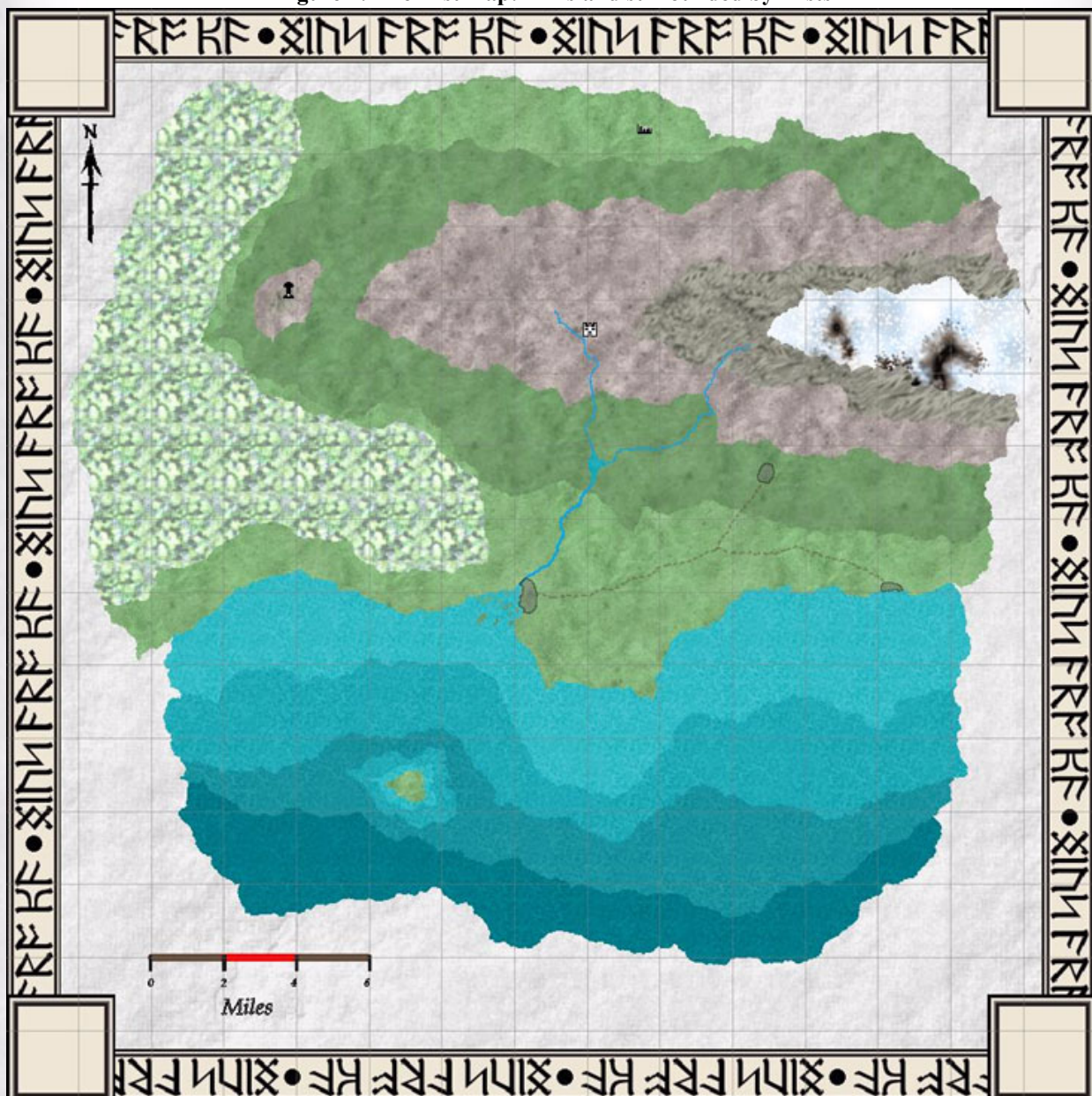
a road. Somewhere along the way, the road seems to fork northwards, towards another village on what is either the feet of the mountains or hills; I can't tell with for sure.

The map certainly leaves many questions unanswered. For example, there seems to be a castle about 10 miles north of the coastal town, on the mountain range. Yet, it's not connected to the settlements by road, just by the river. That's strange. If it's inhabited by the ruler of the land, or some garrison to

protect the people, why there's no road? If it's abandoned, why the patient of room 11 placed it on the map? And why was it abandoned in the first place?

A few miles north from the mysterious mountain fort, in the other side of the mountains, is what I can only guess it's a ruin. Perhaps a destroyed fort? An abandoned temple? A settlement destroyed by invaders in this land's past that forced the

Figure 1: The first map: An island surrounded by mists





people relocate to a small area in the south instead of spreading out?

On a lonely mountain top in the east also seems to be a tower, painted black by the patient. The tower seems to stand alone, almost as far as one can be from the fort and the settled part of this land.

Does this land exist, or it's the product of an once powerful but now demented mind? Just by looking the map, I get a feeling of loneliness. If the land exists at all, the people there probably feel completely isolated, even from their own land since so little of it seems to be settled.

Perhaps I should show the map to someone that knows more about the world and its places than me.

### *3rd October*

I showed the painting to a couple of fellow doctors in the Asylum. Both were intrigued by the map and by the implications that has on how we may treat the patient. Doctor Aliseur was confident that painting would help the man break out of his mental prison and might even make him a functional individual again. We all decided to keep an eye on the patient of room 11. So far, the patient seems to ignore me again and is occupied with his next painting.

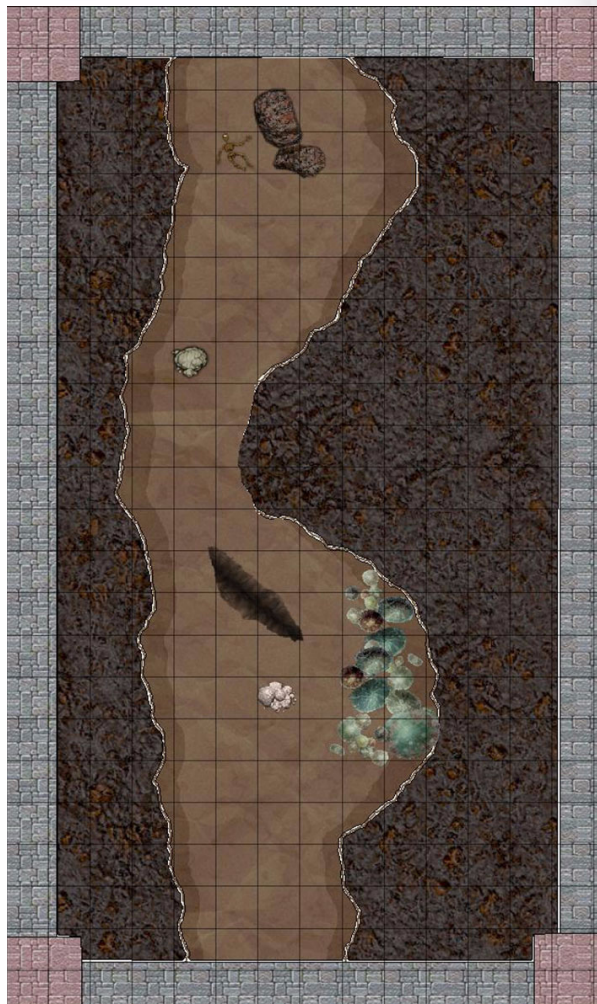
### *5th October*

The patient gave me another painting today. Again in his sudden, smiling way. At least I know that he acknowledges the world around him now, even if he doesn't respond to it. Why me though? Why not the nurse that feeds him, bathes him and tends to him?

### *6th October, the second map*

This map seems more... unsettling than the last one. It seems to be the map of an either an underground place, of a dried river bed or just a narrow passage between dark rocks.

**Figure 2: The second map, of a path in an underground cave, a dried riverbed or a path between rocks.**



Again the patient seemed intent to focus on details.

There are a few rocks strewn in the small path along with large mushrooms and even a humanoid skeleton. Perhaps the site of the last stand of one his friends and allies? Is it another image that exists only in his troubled mind? Is the skeleton there just to signify "danger"? What is that large crack near the mushrooms? Is it important or just a detail?

From the size of the skeleton, Dr Monseau suggested that each square of the grid equals about 5 feet. I agree with him.



### *12th October*

So far, nobody my colleagues and I have found anyone who knows anything about the patient, the maps he draws or the places depicted. Perhaps it's just the vivid imagination of the patient but both Dr. Aliseur and Dr. Monseau seem to think the places might actually exist and keep asking visitors or men of knowledge. I have to admit that I share their optimism.

### *16th October*

While the patient of room 11 keeps painting his new project, one that also seems to be a map, a nurse suggested that perhaps adventurers should know of these places even if they don't belong to the academic cycles that we used to ask. That's an interesting idea and we all agreed to include traveling mercenaries and adventurers that pass by the town if we find any.

### *18th October*

This day again, when I was checking on the patient of room 11 he smiled and handed me another map, this one depicting a statue near some ruins. Dr Monseau has also been visiting the patient, and he even passed today a couple of hours before me, but the patient ignored him. We have agreed with my colleagues that the patient feels a kinship with me, and that I should work with him more closely.

### *19th October, The third map*

The third map I was given, seems to be the same motif with the second map.

This map seems again to be either in a cavern or among rocks. The most prominent feature is the large statue in the middle of the map, and the rubble next to it.

There seems to be a slight green undertone there. Perhaps the mushrooms are poisonous? Perhaps it's my idea? Again,

there's a skeleton on the map, this time next to the mushrooms.

Again, a lot of questions remain unanswered about this map. Where does the rubble come from? If the columns shown have fallen, how come the statue still stands? Perhaps it was built later, but by whom? There seems no point in building a statue in the middle of nowhere, leaving rubble strewn around. Is there a connection between this place and the place depicted in the second map? Are these two places nearby in that far away land he painted for the first map? Perhaps nearby in his mind? That could mean he follows some kind of rational procedure realizing that such places are quite similar in geology.

### *23rd October*

Today, Dr Aliseur informed us that he was told about a mercenary from Invidia with some reputation as monster-hunter. When the adventurer was shown the later two maps, he showed signs of distress, denied that he has ever seen anything like that, excused himself and left for his room. Perhaps Dr Aliseur was mistaken about the "signs of distress" but perhaps there's more to these maps. From what we have heard about this mercenary, he has never left the Core, so it's possible that the second and third map are not from the island shown in the first map. Or perhaps, the monster hunter faces inner demons of his own, something not unknown in his chosen profession.



Figure 3: The Third map, of a statue near some ruins



*27th October, the 4th map*

Yesterday I was again presented with a map. This map seems to be from a small coastal settlement. Perhaps the town of that first map? Unlike the other two maps, this one seems peaceful by comparison. A beach, some tidy homes with gardens and fence and what seems to be a couple of warehouses.

There's also seems to be some land reserved for tents and vendors. I can see a cart and a couple of tents on it. From the size of the horse, I would guess again that one square equals 5 feet.

Yet, there's something that got my attention in this painting: The Sea. It seems to become deep waters very close to the coast leading me to guess that there's a steep incline within it. Why was that important for the



**Figure 4: The partial map of a tidy small coastal settlement bordering deep waters.**



patient of room 11 tpaint? Is that just an artistic expression of his part? Does the depth symbolizes something that would give me insight in his troubled mind? Or, there's another reason? Deep waters symbolize danger. Perhaps there are hidden horrors in these depths. I wish I could communicate with the patient tjust ask him.

Never the less, this is the first time we've got the painting of a part of a settlement. Perhaps someone will recognize it this time.

### *1st November*

Today we had an unexpected offer: A nobleman from Richemulot seems to be interested in the maps the patient makes. His servant said that his lord is interested in them in an artistic way as he finds fascinating the aesthetic products of the trouble mind. That was suspiciously fast. The patient is in our care for less than two months, and although we have asked around for the maps, it's weird that word would have reached



Richemulot nobility, generate interest and brought us prospecting customers. Moreover, the servant didn't name his lord and when asked he said that his lord would like to keep his anonymity to dissuade thieves or even other nobles from taking an interest.

I told the servant that I'll talk with my colleagues but that parting with these maps just for profit would be unethical since they could become part of the therapy of the patient.

### *2nd November*

The nobleman seemed determined to purchase those maps. Today he arrived himself along with his servant and called himself "Sir Avrasheur", probably a false name. I told him the same I've told the previous day, that the maps weren't for sale since they could help heal the poor man. He didn't seem impressed and made sure to tell all of us that the price he would pay for the maps would be a hefty "donation" to the Asylum, and it would be enough for improving the living conditions of the patients and the staff immensely. Dr Aliseur informed him that we're not interested in making profit from the patients.

Sir Avrasheur seemed disappointed. He asked to at least see the maps and we complied. He seemed very interested in them and examined every little detail of them for some time. Then he came back to us and just named his price. I have to admit that for a moment I was tempted. He was offering a fortune for the maps. Still we declined his offer and apologized for the trouble he went into to come visit us.

### *4th November*

The patient of room 11 seems to be more intent in making his maps as if his work is urgent, for the last couple of days; coincidentally since the nobleman showed

interest in his work. He paints for more than 15 hours each day now, which in his condition and age isn't healthy. Perhaps we'll have to start sedating him so he will at least get enough sleep.

About the nobleman's offer Dr Monseau came up with interesting news: The price the nobleman offered for these "artistic" pieces is what someone would pay for good quality and accurate land maps.

### *6th November, the 5th map*

The patient gave me another unsettling map. Still he doesn't acknowledge the nurses or my colleagues.

This map depicts vividly a forested patch of land. What immediately gets the attention of anyone looking at it, is the two dead bodies and the destroyed cart.

Again there are questions that come to mind: why aren't there any dead horses or mules depicted? Why the patient decided to draw the bloodpools of the unfortunate travelers? Why would someone with a cart bring it out of a road and in such a forested and rocky ground? Perhaps the cart was chased by bandits or someone else and the pursuers got up with the travelers eventually in that place.

Why is that important for the patient? Was he there? Did he lose friends there and later tried to avenge them? Does this place of spilled blood even exist outside of his mind?

### *11th November*

The patient didn't touch his food today, as if he knew we have added a mild sedative to help him sleep. Perhaps a coincidence but when we gave him another plate of food, without sedatives, he stood there passively to be fed as he usually does. When I went by his room, he moved to his bed and lied down, as if he knew what we were trying to do and why. Sometimes, I really wonder how much this man knows and how. He certainly



is lost in his own world, and unresponsive but he seems to react in a certain way. Certainly not rationally, but with a certain logic of his own. Still he paints with intent and dedication. He seems as he tries to work faster so he can paint as many maps as possible, while sleeping more as we would like.

*15th November, the 6th map*

Another map was presented to me today. This time of a mysterious altar in a forested area.

There's no road leading to this place, no indication it's being used any more.

My attention was drawn to the strange marking on the elevated large stone table in the middle of the map. I've never seen such a symbol. Perhaps they symbol of a religious cult of some kind? An arcane symbol?

**Figure 6: Map of an altar of some kind deep in a forest.**





Something the patient put there that has a meaning only for him?

What about the altar itself? It seems to depict a bird of some kind, over a candlelit stone altar table. Who went in this isolated place to light the candles?

I also noticed the pillars. The shadowy side of the obelisks that surround the central platform and the unknown symbol seem to be on the outside, as if the light in the map comes from the center of the elevated stone platform. Was that the patient's way to draw my attention on possible supernatural elements of this place?

I'll check the library for any symbol like that since it may be recorded. Perhaps an anchorite will know that altar, although I doubt it's one of Ezra's places of worship.

### *18th November*

I've failed so far to find any reference to the symbol in the last map the patient of room 11 gave me. Still, we were not without any luck. Dr Monseau has located an adventurer and mercenary, Mr. Rerock, that from what he heard of the maps thinks he may recognize a couple of the places. Mr. Rerock will visit the Asylum in a couple of days.

The patient of room 11 seemed a bit nervous today. When I was checking his condition he seemed unresponsive as usual, but I think that once he looked at me sadly. Dr Aliseur was in the room with me and he agreed that the patient seemed more nervous and that he seemed to look at me, slightly recognizing I was there. It seems we're making progress with this man, and it's been only 2 months. Dr Monseau agreed with us.

### *21st November*

Mr. Rerock arrived today. He doesn't seem a sophisticated fellow, more a mercenary than a monster hunter I would say. I invited him in my office in the asylum to show him the

maps. He checked the maps and informed Dr Monseau and me that a couple of the maps, like the harbor, remind him vaguely of a couple of places, but he can't be sure. He said that he will correspond with his allies and ask them for more details.

He wanted to see the patient of room 11 out of curiosity but when we got there, we found him in his bed, covered with his blanket, probably asleep. That's rare. I've never seen the patient taking a midday nap. It almost seemed as if he wanted to avoid Mr. Rerock seeing him.

In the afternoon, I found him again working on his canvas although he turned to watch me as I passed by. He seemed sad. Still, it seems he responds more to me these days. Why is he sad though? Are sad memories returning back to him? Is he afraid of something?

### *24th November, the "final" map (?)*

A series of unexplained and very unsettling events have shaken me. Today the patient of room 11 spoke to me, for the first time. As I finished his health inspection he stood up, took the map, looked at me sadly and told me "This is my final gift to you Dr Freiherr. I'll leave soon. I'm sorry I can't help you." That took me by surprise. As I inquired gently what he's sorry about and planning to find out why and how he thought he would leave I saw what was on the map:

It was my cellar.

Impossible as it may seem, the patient has drawn a map of my cellar even though he has never been there. And what's more unsettling he has placed a **body** on my cellar's floor. I was lost and confused. I didn't know what to say or to think. All the questions about the places he has drawn in maps just multiplied.

Everything else was where it was supposed to be. My old desk in the lower right corner, near the two spare chairs I've stacked in



there. The barrels for water, oil and vinegar I use on the upper left corner. The chests that I keep my spare clothing and books, the boxes containing of my notes and foodstuff, even the lamp, all in their place.

And then, it was the body on the floor. No blood this time around it like the 5th map.

How the patient knew all these details about my cellar? I would be hard-pressed to remember exactly where was that. What does this mean about his other maps?

And what is that body? Why it's lying there without any short of blood? Finally, as I write these words I find the courage to ask myself:

Is that my body lying there? As if someone hid it?

It seems impossible. Why would anyone want to harm me? But all of this seems impossible. I'll make sure that I double lock tonight.

### *25th November*

I barely slept last night. Dr Monseau and Dr Aliseur seem to share my concern. I was hoping they would call me paranoid and that all these about the maps are getting to my head.

The patient seems... peaceful. He didn't paint today. He didn't even touch his brush. We have made sure to place a double lock on his cell and we've mentioned to the night shift nurse that he may try something. When she asked us why, we couldn't tell her the truth.

I decided to ask for more help. I wrote a letter to the Weathermay women of Mordent and I'll mail it first thing in the afternoon. I hope those noblewomen, that seem so more knowledgeable about the world than me, could help me.

Within all these troubles, Mr. Rerock wants to pay the asylum another visit in the

afternoon to check the maps again. Dr Aliseur informed him that it wasn't a good time, but he said he's leaving tomorrow so he has to see me today.



Figure 7: The "final gift" from the patient of room 11, my cellar





# *Bound in Darkness*

## *The Binder in Ravenloft: part one*

*By Doctor-Evil (E. G. M. Parsons)*

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The 3.5 edition Tome of Magic introduced the Binder and pact magic. However the vestiges that grant pacts with binders do not fit well into the Ravenloft setting. However, Rotipher of the Fraternity on the café du Nuit noticeboard suggested that vestiges could perhaps be drawn from Ravenloft folklore, perhaps the major arcane of the Tarokka deck? So with due acknowledgement to Rotipher's idea, below are some suggested vestiges for lower level binders based on the major arcana

**Influence:** The binder's looks upon the world with innocent surprise and find it hard to think ill of anyone. They have a -2 penalty to sense motive rolls.

**Special requirement:** The binder must not do anything that might require a powers check whilst binding the Innocent.

### **Granted Abilities:**

**Luck of the innocent:** The binder can call on a luck bonus equal to their cha modifier for a single Fortitude, Reflex or Will save verses spells or supernatural abilities as an immediate action. Once you have used this ability you cannot do so again for 5 rounds.

**Innocent charm:** Due to your open and trustworthy demeanor, you gain a +2 bonus on Gather Information, Diplomacy, Handle animal and Wild empathy rolls.

**Innocent face:** The binder's face looks plain and nondescript, allowing them to blend in with a crowd. This gives the binder a +10 bonus on disguise checks against those trying to seek them out.

**Evoke mercy:** The air of innocence cloaking the binder invokes merciful feelings and second thoughts in a would-be attacker. The binder can cast sanctuary as an immediate action. Once you have used this ability you cannot do so again for 5 rounds.

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## *The Innocent*

(1st level) Binding DC 15

**Manifestation:** After the tarokka card is placed within a hermetic circle, the sky seems to lighten, bluebirds fly up from the center of the card and circle around the binders head singing, and rose petals billow out from the card swirling around the binder.

**Sign:** When a binder makes a pact with the Innocent, their eyes widen as if in surprise, they continuously host a faint smile on their face and have a slight perfume of rose petals. Someone making a listen check (DC16) can here the faint sound faint sound of bluebirds singing whenever they are present.

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## *The Temptress*

(1st level) Binding DC 16

**Manifestation:** After the tarokka card is placed within a hermetic circle, a nubile, barely clad woman rises from the center of the card. She then proceeds to sway and dance in a sultry manner before the summoner, winks at them, blows kiss then slowly she licks her lips.

**Sign:** When a binder makes a pact with the Temptress, they instinctively loosen and modify their clothing as much as feasible exposing a swath of bare chest, cleavage or thigh. The binder talks in a breathy voice, dripping with honey, and they adopt movements are sinuous, slow and provocative.

**Influence:** The binder's libido escalates, as the vestige's influence acts like an aphrodisiac. Morals and propriety are put on the back shelf, as the binder's innermost lusts boil to the surface.

**Granted Abilities:** As the temptress' name suggests, she grants power to tempt and beguile.

**Seductive:** You gain a +4 bonus to Bluff and Sense motive checks with the opposite sex.

**Alluring:** You can cast charm person as a supernatural ability. Once you have used this ability you cannot do so again for 5 rounds. If the binder already has the ability to cast charm person (e.g. as a spell or supernatural ability) any charm spells cast are at +1 to the save DC and their duration is extended by 50%.

**Silver tongue:** You can take 10 on a bluff or diplomacy check even if distracted. You can make a rushed diplomacy check as a standard action with no penalty (normal: rushed diplomacy check is a full round action and accrues a penalty of -10) (see Nabarius entry, Tome of Magic p 42).

**Fascinate:** The temptress can imbue a binder with the ability to Fascinate (as the bardic ability). However, instead of a perform check, the binder uses bluff or diplomacy (their choice), and this is the DC for each affected creature's Will save against the effect. If a creature's saving throw succeeds, the binder cannot attempt to fascinate that creature again for 24 hours. If its saving throw fails, the creature is enraptured by the binder, staring at them longingly and open-mouthed, taking no other actions, for as long as the binder concentrates concentrate (up to a maximum of 1 round per binder level). The fascinated creature takes a -4 penalty on skill checks made as reactions, such as Listen and Spot checks. Any potential threat requires the bard to make another Perform check and allows the creature a new saving throw against a DC equal to the new Perform check result.

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## *The Marionette*

(2nd level) Binding DC 17

**Manifestation:** After the tarokka card is placed within a hermetic circle, blood red strings that glisten like fleshy tendons shoot down from the sky into the center of the card attaching to the limbs of the marionette image on the card. As the strings tighten, they pull the image from the surface of the card until it becomes a three dimensional figure. The marionette is wooden and dressed in jester's motley or a clown outfit, but it's features bear an uncanny resemblance to the binder. The marionette then dances a jig, puts it's hand behind its back and produces a straight razor that it slashes towards the binder (missing) then uses to sever its strings.

**Sign:** The binder walks and moves in a jerky fashion, lifting their hands and legs slightly



to high in the air, as if they were being manipulated by strings like a marionette.

**Influence:** The binder becomes a retentive, control freak, displaying obsessive compulsive behaviour and a need to organize and control the entire party and allies.

**Granted Abilities:** The marionette grants abilities which allow the binder to control the actions and movements of others.

**Voice of command:** You can give a verbal command to a target within 30', that acts as if it were a command spell. This ability is a swift action.

**Master manipulator:** the binder can cast suggestion as a supernatural ability. Once you have used this ability you cannot do so again for 5 rounds.

**Holding the strings:** the binder can cast hold person as a supernatural ability. Once you have used this ability you cannot do so again for 5 rounds.

**Wooden heart:** due to the marionette's wooden heart and lack of empathy, the binder gains a +4 bonus against horror saves and a +2 bonus against enchantment spells.

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### *The Artefact*

(2ndlevel) Binding DC 18

**Manifestation:** After the tarokka card is placed within a hermetic circle, a cloud of black smoke and sparks pours from the center of the card, there's the sound of an anvil being struck.

**Sign:** A smell of hot metal accompanies the binder. Moreover, the item which enhanced (see below) glows with a sickly green light that provides illumination in a 5' radius.

**Influence:** The binder becomes a greedy and possessive with regards to their belongings and will argue to obtain any masterwork or magical items the party comes across, even

though the binder may not be able to utilize them.

**Granted Abilities:** The artifact grants abilities to find and identify and use magical artifacts. Moreover, the vestige allows the binder to enhance one magical weapon or item of armour. If the binder has spellcaster levels, they can cast conjuration spells as if they were one level higher if they involve creation or summoning of items.

**Locate artifacts:** The binder can cast locate object (duration 1minute/binder level).

**Artifact knowledge:** The binder can cast identify at will. Moreover, by handling a magic item the binder may make a roll to determine the history or the item (modified by the casters intelligence bonus plus binder level). A successful roll with a DC of 20 gives the binder information on the basic history of the item and details about its most recent owner. A successful roll (DC 25) gives information on the three most influential owners and their fates. A successful roll (DC30) gives information of the ancient history of the item including its creation and its creator.

**Artifact mastery:** The binder gains a +3 bonus to use magic device rolls. The binder can also choose to ten 10 on use magic device rolls even when under stress.

**Enhance artifact:** One magical weapon or item of magical armor that the binder possesses obtains a special ability of up to +1 market value (e.g. keen) so long as the vestige is active. Alternatively the binder can imbue the item with an ability of up to +3 market value three times a day (for a duration lasting 10 minutes/binder level).

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### *The Raven*

(3nd level) Binding DC 20

**Manifestation:** After the tarokka card is placed within a hermetic circle, an unkindness (swarm) of ravens pours forth from the center of the card and circles the binder cawing loudly and pecking at the character's head - this is painful but does no damage.

**Sign:** The binder's eyes become pure black, with no iris or white of the eye being visible.

**Influence:** The binder becomes attracted to shiny objects and will do what ever they can, within reason, to obtain them.

**Granted Abilities:** The raven grants wisdom and protects the mind while also granting abilities to see 'the other'.

**Steadfast mind:** The binder becomes immune to drain or damage of mental abilities (charisma, intelligence or wisdom). The binder also becomes immune to madness checks.

**Wise raven:** The binder gains a +4 bonus to their wisdom score while the vestige is active.

**Eyes of the raven:** The black eyes of the raven give the binder low light vision, ghostsight and the ability to see ethereal resonance (as in the ravenloft feats).

**Pretty sparklies:** The raven's influence gives the binder a +4 bonus on appraise checks.

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### *The Broken One*

(3rd level)

**Manifestation:** After the tarokka card is placed within a hermetic circle, a random collection of limbs from a variety of different creatures slither out from the center of the card, trailing blood. These assemble themselves into a vaguely humanoid shape in front of the caster. The binder must also make a horror check (DC 16).

**Sign:** The caster takes on characteristics of a broken one: a hunchback, random patches of fur, or scales. The binder's OR rating increases by three.

**Influence:** The vestige's influence is expressed in terms of external physical changes (the increased OR noted above).

**Granted Abilities:** The broken one gives the binder some of its abilities and powers.

**Frenzy:** Whenever the binder is reduced in hit points to a quarter of their maximum hit points they fly into a frenzy which grants a +4 bonus to strength, 2 temporary hp per binder level, damage reduction 2/- and a +2 bonus to saving throws, but also suffer a -2 penalty to armor class. The broken one remains in a frenzy until its attacker is dead.

**Additional limb:** The binder gains the ability to grow, or reabsorb, and extra limb as a full round action. The binder also gains the multiattack feat and an additional slam attack (at a -2 penalty due to multiattack; damage dependent on size: small: 1-4; medium: 1-6; large: 1-8, plus strength modifier). Moreover, the binder gains improved grab, which he or she can use if the slam attack is successful.

**Fluid body:** Although the binder doesn't gain a broken one's ability to flow through cracks, they do gain a +8 bonus on escape artist rolls when trying to slip out of ropes, manacles, or through tight spaces.

**Child of the night:** The binder gains both low light vision and darkvision.

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### *The Horseman*

(4th level)

**Manifestation:** The headless horseman appears in front of the binder. The horseman tips out a sack of severed heads which roll on the ground circling the binder, then holds up a head, newly severed, which is a



identical to the binder's. The head swings so that it stares at the binder and its lips move, silently asking for help. The binder must also make a horror check (DC 21).

**Sign:** The binder's head becomes desiccated and skeletal whilst under the influence of the horseman. The binder's eyes seemingly vanish and become hollow pits of darkness (OR rating increases by four).

**Influence:** The binder must collect the heads of any foes that he or she has defeated.

**Granted Abilities:** The binder gains the ability to summon a supernatural mount and supernatural weapon, so that they can emulate the headless horseman.

**Mount:** A midnight black heavy warhorse is summoned and serves for one hour per caster level. The warhorse has as many HD as the summoner has binder levels, and has maximum hit points and a natural armour class bonus equal to half the binder's level (rounded down). The mount is very definitely a dread companion (evil alignment).

**Saddle sure:** the binder gains +8 on ride rolls and gains the mounted combat feat whilst possessed by the horseman.

**Powerful attack:** Any slashing weapon the binder uses has its critical damage multiplier increased by one, i.e. a bastard sword gives x3 damage on a successful roll of 19 or 20.

**Summon horseman's weapon:** The binder can summon at will a large, magical kukri a number of times a day equal to half the binder's level (rounded down). The summoning is a swift action. The summoned kukri is conjured for one minute per binder level and disappears after this time limit is reached. The binder is automatically proficient with the kukri and although the weapon is of the large size category, the caster has no penalty with wielding it in one hand. Moreover the binder temporarily gains

weapon focus (kukri). The kukri is a +2 keen kukri of wounding (+3 bonus to hit [weapon focus and magical bonus]; Damage 1-6+2 [magical bonus]; critical 15-20 x 3 [keen and powerful attack - see above]). Any killing blow with the kukri beheads the opponent. Also the wielder may deliver a coup de grace as a swift action, again beheading the opponent.

**Fearsome aspect:** Sight of the binder on its steed is so terrifying that it imbues fear into all those it attacks. If the binder is successful in striking a foe from horseback, the binder gets an intimidation check as an immediate action (with a +2 bonus if the strike is with the summoned kukri).

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## *The Hero*

(4th level)

**Manifestation:** After the tarokka card has been placed in the center of the hermetic circle, a snowy white charged mount with a knight in gleaming silvery armour and visored helm appears. The mount rears and the knight swings a longsword around their head. The knight then pushes back their helm to reveal the face of the binder.

**Sign:** Any armour or weapons the binder possesses becomes clean, shiny and positively glistens.

**Influence:** The binder must be suitably heroic, saving those in distress, holding back the enemy so that others may escape etc. The hero must also do nothing that would provoke a powers check.

**Granted Abilities:** The binder gains access to a suit of magical armour and shield and also gains a number of martial feats.

**Master at arms:** the binder gains martial weapon, shield (including tower shield) and heavy armour proficiency proficiencies. The

binder also gains a +1 morale bonus to attack and damage with one melee weapon.

**Call armour:** the binder can summon a suit of magical armour as a full round action. The armour automatically appears on the binder. The design on the shield surface is the same as on the face of The Hero tarokka card.

7-9	+1 full plate & masterwork large shield
10-12	+2 light fortification full plate & +1 large shield
13-15	+2 moderate fortification full plate & +2 large shield
16-18	+4 moderate fortification full plate & +3 large shield
19-20	+4 heavy fortification & +4 large shield

**Courageous:** The binder gains the courage feat (i.e. +4 vs fear saves). Also the binder may elect to reroll a failed fear save. The binder must keep the second rerolled save, however, even if it is lower than the first roll.

**Smite the enemy legions:** The binder gains the benefits of Power attack and Cleave feats (even though they don't have prerequisite ability scores).

Additional Vestiges to be covered in Part II

- The Mists (5th level)
- The Spirit (5th level)
- The Beast (6th level)
- The Hangman (6th level)
- The Prison (7th level)
- The Darklord (8th level)



# *Children of Zhakata*

## *The Chain Devourer*

*By Dani "A G Thing" Hatcher*

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*"Hunger knows no friend but its feeder."*

*-Aristophanes 450-385 BC*

### *To my Employers*

*I make note that the small hamlet that I found nestled within the wilds within Nova Vasa and the ruins that were beneath it have vanished leaving not but a crater chewed from the earth and the tack of a single post to mark where once near two a dozen men, women and children once called home. I will mark that it was titled Thountsbarrow for those who may care to remember.*

*I diligently began investigating the ruins found near the edge of town that seemed to be the foundation of an old castle. The language was reportedly odd to the folk who had discovered the small inlet. It was as they led me in only a variant of Balok but it was very old and many characters and pictographs covered the text. Part of the text was broken and crumbled recently as if shattered by a strike.*

*Asking about this recent damage I was informed that the man who had discovered it had been found unconscious within. Though he roused he had become ill and was once*

*again unconscious. With more trepidation I began examining the ruined pieces but I did not recognize more than the beginnings of a simple unidentifiable prayer. I could not know that it was to a foul god or the beginnings of the warning signs of a foul curse.*

*I did not mention this to them at first hoping to delay fear in the matter for I was not sure. The runes and script were so broken I and my Balok rusty I wished a day to examine further. It was a mistake as the signs were already upon us and as I heard more I admit I should have acted sooner.*

*They told a tale of the man as he became more and more craven. He seemed paranoid after his brush with death. He kept to himself staring at the ruins, and at meals ate separate from all others though glancing at them over his shoulder. Soon he became short with all in attendance and after one further day fell suddenly to the ground unconscious.*

*The elder father of the Hithgal family now lay severely ill in this torpor shortly before I arrived. Inquiring I discovered that apparently the man had become feverish*

during rest, shaking as if he was chill and restless in his fevered dreams as if preoccupied. Confined to his bed the man had in his fevered mad sleep consumed his own finger and mumbled in tongues but did not rise.

Sequestered as he was the townsfolk told me why they truly had revealed the discovery. I saw the logic in it and why they suspected a curse. I also saw why they had sent the message to you my employers though I wish I had known of this as well. I went to bed trying to think of what measures I might bring against such foul magic if it was such.

Later that night, however, he vanished, but not alone for the youngest son was also found absent assumed taken by the raving man in the night. He ran silently into the night but he made no effort to hide his flight. I thought at that point I may have perhaps discerned the truth even if too late for the tragic child and his father.

I suspected he had become something akin to a ghoul but one that may have left some sort of trail of fluid I cannot place to any known type. Still I found no sign of the boy's body whether whole or remains of any kind and his trail ended near town center with no sign of where from there he had departed evaporating before I could travel it to the end.

I had the presence of mind to recall Gehenna of old before it had vanished in the Grand Conjunction. Had I perhaps been wiser I might have looked closer at the well in the town center at the trails but I did not.

Suffice to say that night the land became fouler, and it lingered on after. Something residual hung in the air as if death had spoken a riddle to all who remained. I was not spared this strange melancholic feeling as I tried to find where the lost man had taken his child. The ruins seemed obvious but they did not appear to have been

disturbed and the tunnels beyond were still filled with dirt. I cast divinations to divine where the man may have gone but each such only gave impressions of that broken trail at the end of the well at first and then random locations in town.

By the time the next of the simple folk vanished and others had begun to act similarly my situation had become desperate. Those taken were now being taken in force with great holes left in walls, and floors where they had dug into the earth. The creatures shadow was claimed to be massive as it was always obscured by shadow or fog but with it followed with it the screams of the last victim. It is in this late hour that I looked deep into the well to see the shape of a rather large hole ripped from the mortar wall.

I sent word to the nearby towns requesting aid. By the time those sell swords that would come arrived the count had reached sixteen souls taken by whatever black curse had caused such. They were not much to remark of and to speak of them now that they are gone is unnecessary but they did hold to the task they were paid for.

What is of import is that they and I followed the main of the many various tunnels some parts of that ruin still buried but others newly dug on what seemed to be a winding trail. It had lain in wait underneath the earth having somehow tunneled all over to claim its victims. It was by my guess in the largest of the tunnels and it often turned around back the way it started but always descending ever deeper under the center of the town.

The sound of chewing as best I can call it echoed down there as the first sign of our foe. Only after creeping to the edge of the shadows we began to see the horrid beast. It pulsed and writhed as if to move but it stayed coiled in the mass of horrible bodies each gnawing the next. The victims barely seen



*though the strange covering of flesh I can best describe as that of a beasts innards.*

*As we braced our courage to charge the creature, we did not think it could move as it did. It launched towards us, its now horrid maw open with each of its many teeth as if the petals of a horrid sunflower, the grasping arms and face of its last victim at the center. It hurled us aside knocking many to the ground myself staying just out of its forceful reach. I prepared to cast hoping that I could distract the foul thing with my illusion but I must say that my courage faulted in the face of seeing a rather large warrior who boasting of grand feats of daring just before, now being devoured whole and alive. I did not fully register my flight until the echoing curses of my cowardice were hurled by my hired subordinates as I fled to the surface.*

*I found no courage to face the townsfolk that night and saddling my horse I left as confused shouts rang out behind me from those remaining. That night I slept unwell having nightmares and feeling sick to my stomach. By morning the feeling still did not pass, and only out of guilt two days later did I return to discover that nothing was left for me to apologize to. I had failed these people and I am without explanation as to what it is that I faced except that I believed it to be the result of that foul script in that ruined foundation.*

*It is also now at this point with great sorrow sirs that I admit that while I once felt up to the task of discovering such secrets that I can no longer serve such interests. My heart continues to ache and I feel those damning cries of my cowardice eating my soul.*

*I must I fear for moral reasons resign for I have not the heart to continue on such assignments after this.*

*Respectfully yours good sirs:*

***Scribe Abraham Tolstem***

Fiends generally come to the dread realms only by those foolish enough to summon them or corrupt enough to begin the process of transposition. So it is those few that exist due to the machinations of one mad enough to create them that can be quite disturbing. One that has been brought to light by one of our agents is such a horrid beast. It is the ceremonial spawn of those that worship the foul god Zhakata.

One being composed of many the creature it's self is something that should be best left to the wastes where the cursed followers reside. These creatures are made of those whose hunger is now insatiable to the point where each body within the slithering translucent length that surrounds them is constantly devouring the flesh of the one with in reach. It is often the work of a single devout disciple that wanders the lands preaching and defiling those he may.

This pilgrimage is considered a rare but sacred rite we have learned so that a priest may gain atonement through Yagno from Zhakata. Until the ritual has been performed the priest may not return, and should the ritual fail the priest cannot ever return. Still it is an old rite in the religion and comparing previous notes of such script in ancient foundations it is perhaps that it is found often recorded in the lowest parts of such temples to Zhakata.

Whether given as a curse or blessing the wandering priest marks those that garner his attention. He does so by bringing them to a place of power. The marked victim(s) are the first step in the chain of a dark ritual that will take at least a dozen souls before it is complete.

Each new soul so entrapped becomes yet another link in the living chain of eternal hunger until as the ritual calls for the 17th victim is added. Once this is done the beast becomes the living covenant of the very god

that claims its parentage, forming a ring of corpses each devouring the other. If not slain within seventeen hours it shines with a screaming darkness that resonates with voices of the seventeen. This darkness expands into a sphere devouring all that it touches including the land and all within in 17 times 17 men's paces (17x17x5=1,445ft) in all directions; causing the crash of thunder as even the very air is consumed.

The beast, the darkness and what ever remains within that darkness after seventeen rounds finally vanishes with that final sound leaving nothing in its wake but a chewed crater.

### *Chain Devourer*

<b>Hit Dice</b>	17d8+85 (166 hp)
<b>Initiative</b>	+5 (Dex)
<b>Speed</b>	50 ft., burrow 50 ft.
<b>AC</b>	18 (-2 Size, +5 Dex, +5 Natural)
<b>Attacks</b>	2 Slams +23 melee, Bite +24 melee
<b>Damage</b>	Slam 2d6+6, Bite 3d6+6
<b>Face/Reach</b>	10 ft. by 10 ft./20 ft.
<b>Special Attacks</b>	Devour, Trample, Death Rattle, Mark of the End, Improved Grab, Spell-Like Abilities, Swallow Whole
<b>Special Quality</b>	Mucus, Fast Healing 18, DR 10 magic/good/silver, Fire Electric Acid Resistance 15, Vulnerable to Cold, Tool of Faith, Gnawing, Howl of Hunger, Rebuke Undead, Absorb Positive/Negative Energy,
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +15, Ref +15, Will +9
<b>Abilities</b>	Str 23, Dex 20, Con 21, Int 12, Wis 8, Cha 18

<b>Hit Dice</b>	17d8+85 (166 hp)
<b>Skills</b>	Climb +19, Bluff +17, Intimidate +17, Listen +12, Spot +12, Hide +18, Move Silently +18, Search +14, Knowledge Religion +14,
<b>Feats</b>	Power Attack, Weapon Focus Bite, Voice of Wrath, Snatch, Improved Natural Attack Bite, Profane Aura,
<b>Climate/Terrain</b>	Any land
<b>Organization</b>	Solitary
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	15
<b>Treasure</b>	Standard
<b>Alignment</b>	Always chaotic evil
<b>Advancement</b>	2-7 HD (Large-size), 8-13 Huge

The hulking mass writhes and bulges before you like large intestine stretched to the point that it has become almost transparent. Pus like mucus covers its form showing clearly several bodies clawing within as they gnaw at the legs of those ahead of them. As it stirs to notice the maw opens before you as if a horrid spiral of teeth centered by the head of the latest victim screaming with hands stretched as if the parody of mandibles of a sort.

### *Combat*

A Chain Devourer is the epitome of mad ravenous hunger in combat, but it is far from mindless. It attempts lure victims to within range of its reach and then attempts to swallow one and then burrow within the earth to escape using its speed and mucus to out run its victims to its lair. If confronted in its lair it will not hesitate to use the same tactics using the tunnels it has crafted as ambush points. The only time it ignores



such strategy is if it is obviously superior or it has already claimed its seventeen victims at which point it refuses to flee hoping to crush its victims in its moment of glory. It is in these final seventeen hours and seventeen rounds that it will move to where it can consume the most souls and stand its ground as its ritual is cast. It is then at its most dangerous but it will not run giving those that would hunt it that small advantage.

**Swallow Whole (Ex):** A Chain Devourer may attempt to consume a living creature of up to on size lower than it's own that it has hit with a successful bite attack and grappled the previous round. It must make another grapple check (Grapple Bonus +29) and if successful the creature swallowed. A swallowed creature takes 2d6+6 slashing and bludgeoning damage as it is attacked by the bodies within the Chain Devourer and +3 points of acid damage as digestive juices attempt to dissolve the creature. Creature killed while swallowed trigger the Devour effect listed below. A swallowed creature may cut its way out by using claws or a small or tiny slashing weapon to deal 17 points of damage to the innards (AC 18). Once a creature exits mucus and internal pressure close the hole; thus another swallowed creature must cut its own way out. A Chain Devourer may only swallow one creature per round no matter its number of attacks.

**Death Rattle (Su):** Upon the death of the Chain Devourer the bodies within appear for the first round after to lie dead. In the next round however they animate as one hit die ghouls and begin writhing trying to burst free of their bonds helpless for that round only. Those witnessing this must make a Horror save at a DC 19 and a Fear save at DC 17. Once free the ghouls run forward screeching and each attack a different target unless there are not enough at which point divide them among the closest targets but

evenly so. They fight for seventeen rounds upon which time they fall dead triggering the Mark of the End ability.

**Mark of the End (Sp):** Upon the final death of the Chain Devourer, any who damaged it hear the voices of the thirteen victims speak a curse to them. This voice is spoken by the bodies and in the minds of those it affects and thus is not stopped by a silence spell. Any that directly damaged the Chain Devourer or the Ghouls that attacked at the end are subject to this ability. Those affected are subject to a Madness save DC 17 and whether successful or not must following that make a Will save DC 17 or be subject to the Mark of Zhakata as described below.

**Devour (Ex):** When ever a Chain Devourer consumes a living creature using its Swallow Whole attack and it dies within the Devourer is subject to the effects of Devour as listed here. If the creature swallowed was not a monstrous humanoid or humanoid it delays Gnawing for 24 hours. If however the Devourer does swallow a monstrous humanoid or humanoid it automatically gains the effects of having increased in hit die on the following table in addition to delaying the Gnawing effect for 24 hours.

**NOTE:** This is the only way in which a Chain Devourer may advance in Hit Die. To decrease a Chain Devourers hit die simply subtract the above tables values from what is listed in the stat block above. Treat a Chain Devourer as a single hit die ghoul when at one hit die with no abilities listed above except Devour until it eats it's first victim then adjust up to a Chain Devourer of 2 Hit Dice.

**Fast Healing (Su):** A Chain Devourer has fast healing equal to its hit die +1.

**Howl of Hunger (Su):** Upon the seventeen rounds at the end of the ritual the Chain Devourers mouths stop devouring each other and each screams out as the expand-

ing darkness grows. This darkness expands 85ft per round for 17 rounds totalling 1,445ft on the 17th round. This ends any Gnawing effect and any creature outside of the darkness that hears such must make a Fear save at a DC of 17. The DC within the darkness is 21.

**Gnawing (Ex):** Each day that the Chain Devourer does not Devour something living, it takes one point of damage per hit die every other round.

**Spell-like Abilities (Sp):** At Will - Darkness, Slow, Cause Fear, Dispel Magic, Telekinesis, Read Magic, 1/per day - Desecrate. These spell like abilities are cast as a Sorcerer with a level equal to the Chain Devourers hit die. The DC for saves against these abilities is 14 + spell level of the ability.

**Absorb Positive/Negative Energy (Su):** Any spell or spell like or supernatural ability that uses positive or negative energy is automatically absorbed if cast within 65ft of the Chain Devourer healing by a number of hit points equal to the spells level up to half its current maximum.

**Tool of Faith (Su):** A Chain Devourer may only be turned by clerics of other faiths. Only clerics of Zhakata may rebuke a Chain Devourer.

**Mucus (Ex):** A Chain Devourer constantly exudes a strange mucus from its body. While it is harmless to the touch and foul its only useful quality is that it is extremely slippery. Any creature except for the Chain Devourer must make a DC 15 Balance check to avoid falling when moving faster than their base speed. This mucus also covers the Chain Devourer and gives it a +10 bonus to escape any grapple or slip bonds. This mucus covers an area around the Chain Devourer equal to a 10ft radius and expands at a rate of 10ft per round it remains in place to a maximum distance of 10ft+10ft per hit die. This mucus evaporates into nothingness

in one round outside of the maximum radius of the effect. Upon the Chain Devourers death the mucus evaporates after 13 rounds.

**Land Based Power (Su):** Upon reaching its 13th Hit Die the Chain Devourer automatically receives the land based power of the domain it resides in when it does so, as if it had completed a successful power ritual.

**Mark of Zhakata (Su):** This quality is conferred by the priests of Zhakata and Chain Devourers, and is the first step in the creation of a new Chain Devourer. Those subject to it have an invisible brand placed upon their lips that is in the shape of a rune sacred to the dark god. This rune forever marks those who wear it as under the eyes of Zhakata and his faithful. The effect this has upon the character is negligible in that only those of the faith of Zhakata may see the mark. It confers a -1 penalty to all relations to those of the faith of Zhakata who are not clergy as they view the characters with suspicion. Priests, Clerics and other clergy of Zhakata however receive a +2 bonus to all checks when interacting in any way with the characters as they gain dark knowledge of them from the bond, and may after seeing the characters mark always target them with divination (With the +2 bonus to all rolls included) except through closed domain borders.



**Hit Die****Abilities Gained**

- |    |  |
|----|--|
| 2  | Fast Healing base 3, Bite, Improved Grab, Devour, Swallow Whole, Vulnerable to Cold, Mark of End, Stolen Voice, Cannot Swim, Weapon Focus Bite, Gnawing, Tool of Faith |
| 3  | Fast Healing +1, +2 Str, Death Rattle, Power Attack, Trample 1d6, Slam, Absorb Positive/Negative Energy, Profane Aura  |
| 4  | Fast Healing +1, Mucus, Fire/Acid/Elec resistance 5, +1 Str  |
| 5  | Fast Healing +1, Rebuke Undead as Cleric   |
| 6  | Fast Healing +1, DR 5 Silver/Magic/Good, +1 Str, At Will - Darkness  |
| 7  | Fast Healing +1, Trample 2d6, +1 Str, At Will - Slow, Improved Natural Attack Bite   |
| 8  | Fast Healing +1, +1 Str, At Will - Cause Fear  |
| 9  | Fast Healing +1  |
| 10 | Fast Healing +1, Fire/Acid/Elec resistance 10, +1 Str, At Will - Dispel Magic, Huge Size   |
| 11 | Fast Healing +1, Trample 3d6, +1 Str, At Will - Telekinesis, Snatch  |
| 12 | Fast Healing +1  |
| 13 | Fast Healing +1, DR10 Silver/Magic/Good, +1 Str  |
| 14 | Fast Healing +1, +1 Str, At Will - Read Magic  |
| 15 | Fast Healing +1, Fire/Acid/Elec resistance 15, Voice of Wrath, Trample 4d6, +1 Str   |
| 16 | Fast Healing +1  |
| 17 | Fast Healing +1, +1 Str, Land Based Power, Once Per Day - Desecrate, Howl of Hunger  |





# *Unhappy in its Own Way*

*100 and 1 Towns, Villages and Hamlets*

*By Stephen "ScS" Sutton*

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All villages, like the people within them, are unique. Below are one hundred and one unique traits that can be added to any small town, village, or settlement to make it stand apart from all others.

1. Fat black crows nest inside every house. The villagers pay no attention to the constant crowing.
2. The townsfolk treat all visitors as if they were lifelong acquaintances. The villagers know intimate details of that person's life, as though they had lived in the town for all their life. This ability does not reveal any secret that a visitor would keep, but does reveal any detail that is common public knowledge.
3. Several houses are empty. The doors of these abandoned homes are marked in red paint. Furniture and other possessions sit unused and gather dust.
4. The town square is dominated by a massive cathedral. The great temple is far too large for such a small a town. The town has never been larger than its current size. As far as any of the villagers know, the massive cathedral was constructed solely to serve their tiny settlement.
5. The town is built on the burned out ruins of a castle. Stores are built against the sides of collapsed walls, homes are made from piles of rubble, and the remaining towers have been partitioned into living apartments. No attempt has been made to rebuild the castle fortifications.
6. Each family in the town is extremely paranoid and suspects that their neighbors are out to do them harm. They attempt to form alliances with any visitor "just in case".
7. The village is built in a swamp. All houses and stores are constructed on boats and anchored into the mud below. Rope bridges are strung from boat to boat to serve as laneways.
8. The townsfolk do not eat meat and they do not permit anyone to eat meat or fish inside their village. The very concept that anyone eats meat revolts the villagers.
9. The town is surrounded by a wall. All gates are guarded and no one is allowed to leave the town unless someone from the outside

takes their place. A number of people wait just at the edge of town, watching for their opportunity to escape. If someone should try to leave without a replacement, the townsfolk use force to stop them.

10. Every room, in every house and store, has its own mechanical clock. Each clock runs at a slightly different speed.
11. The town is on the verge of becoming a city. The expansion comes with growing pains; homes must be moved to make way for bigger roads, some businesses are being shut out of the new market square, and the town administrators are untrained and unsure of the new bylaws. Chaos and confusion reign, though opportunities abound.
12. While sitting inside a building, a person will hear the wind howl as though a great storm were raging outside. Outside, the weather is calm and peaceful.
13. Every man in the town is withered, shrunken and old; every woman in town is young and vital. There are no children of any kind in the village.
14. Unless directly addressing a person, the townsfolk act as though that person was not present. Servers ignore patrons, housemaids attempt to sweep through passers by, and teamsters drive wagons through groups of people.
15. The town has no buildings of any kind. All structures are tents made of animal hide. The town is a permanent settlement and does not lack building materials.
16. Many houses are barricaded from the outside, as though to keep something inside from getting out.
17. None of the townsfolk know or recognize any of their neighbors. Once introduced the townsfolk quickly forget each other; the villagers can only recognize their family members and visitors who live

outside of the town. Townsfolk do remember the layout of the village, and simply assume that anyone inside of a house or business must be the owner.

18. The townsfolk are obsessed with cleanliness. The villagers wash themselves frequently, and even bathe their pets and livestock. Visitors are followed by a maid who continually clean whatever marks they leave.
19. Whenever a villager goes outside, he or she looks to the sky, as if afraid. Chimneys are barred with metal lattices and windows are always locked at night.
20. The townsfolk react to visitors as though the stranger were hideous in appearance. They attempt to remain polite, but cannot help but show their revulsion. Children point and stare.
21. The villagers do not light fires. All food is raw, dried in the sun, or poached in a vinegar solution. Interior light is provided by reflective mirrors or by jars of glow worms. Houses and other buildings are insulated with massive amounts of hair and down feathers. There are neither bakers nor blacksmith in town.
22. The entire town seems to be conspiring against a nearby village. Though they have no definite plan, it is clear that they mean to do unspecified harm to the neighboring settlement, sometime in the future. The villagers have no motivation for their rancor, and if pressed for details, admit that there is nothing unusual about their rival town.
23. Cobwebs hang on tables, chairs, hallways, and nearly every surface. Anyone who is seated for too long may find webs being woven on them. Mundane, nonpoisonous spiders rebuild whatever webs are disrupted. The villagers pay no heed to the spiders and the webs.



24. Public bylaws forbid any animals from the town limits. Horses and oxen must be stabled outside the village, at the owner's expense. Birds, mice, insects and vermin are completely absent.
25. A distant bell tolls at random times of the day and night.
26. Every exterior door of every building in the town is adorned with a grotesque mask. Many of the gargoyle faces are carved directly into the wood. The faces have no knockers, peepholes, or any other utility other than their terrible appearance.
27. All of the villagers wear gloves, at all times. The townsfolk change gloves only when in private, and are extremely embarrassed if forced to be barehanded in public.
28. No one speaks while outside. While indoors the people speak without difficulty, though while outside they are unable or unwilling to use language of any kind. The villagers will laugh, grunt, sing, or call out wordlessly in order to communicate, though they can make no more sense from the wordless communication than any outsider. The townsfolk are fully capable of understanding spoken or written language while outdoors; they simply don't use it themselves. There are no written signs outside of any building, though there are pictures on signboards.
29. Everyone in the village is frightened of a bully known to them as "Big Roy". No one will admit to ever having met Big Roy, or even knowing what he looks like. No one even knows what he might do should someone anger him, as no one can recall Big Roy actually having done anything, to anyone, ever. None the less, the villagers are convinced of his existence.
30. Ground floor rooms are left open and abandoned. The townsfolk live in attics and crude upper floor additions on buildings. More recent buildings are built on massive stilts or stone and mortar columns, roughly one story in height. Villagers use ladders to ascend and descend. Even the stables are built on raised platforms and connected to the road by ramps.
31. Animals are treated very much like people. Though the beasts are of normal animal intelligence, the villagers expect proper human behavior from them. This perception does not prevent the townsfolk from slaughtering animals for food.
32. No one in the town eats or drinks. If pressed, they insist that they have already eaten. The townsfolk will serve food to guests, though they stare at diners with obvious envy.
33. At random intervals, individual villagers disappear and are replaced by new people. These replacements know everything that their predecessor knew, and perform the exact same roles, even living with the same families. The villagers treat this replacement exactly as they would treat the predecessor, though they fully acknowledge that this newcomer is not the same person as was previously there. The replacement neither knows nor cares where they themselves have come from, nor where their predecessor has gone, nor whether or not that person will return.
34. At the edge of town is an ancient stone column upon which sits a man. This man is filthy and battered by constant exposure to the elements. He is counting downwards from an impossibly large number.
35. There are no odors of any kind in the village. Food still carries some of its taste, though it has no aromatic component.
36. Instead of buildings, the villagers live and work in great wagons. The townsfolk are

taking advantage of loopholes in poorly worded laws. Just after harvest, before the tax collector arrives, the whole town migrates across the border to the neighboring county. Each year, the process is reversed.

37. The sky above the village is always grey and overcast. The wind blows cold, even during summer months.
38. A tall stone tower stands at the edge of the village. One of the villagers stands watch in the tower at all times. Every hour, on the hour, a new watcher arrives to relieve the last sentry. All of the villagers take a turn in the tower; young and old, men and women, rich and poor alike.
39. All furniture is sized for children. The townsfolk scoff at normal sized tables and chairs.
40. Two villages have been recently amalgamated by decree of the local ruler. The townsfolk bitterly argue over the most minor details, such as street names or the shape of the new city council. The village leaders are only making the problem worse.
41. The townsfolk speak only in whispers. They are physically unable to speak any louder than a hiss.
42. All women are covered up by scarves, shawls, hoods or even masks. They walk hunched over, as if trying to lower their profile while about. Whenever possible, the women hide, even from other women.
43. The town is surrounded by trees, brush and all of the buildings are camouflaged. Roadways do not run to the village, but only pass close by. The villagers practice noise discipline at all times and try to cover their tracks. The townsfolk avoid walking the same path twice, as if afraid to leave a trail.
44. Horses are treated with extreme care and affection. The villagers provide their horses with quality food and lavish stables, even though the villagers might wallow in poverty. Horses are only expected to work for short periods before given several hours of rest.
45. The village is divided by a stream, connected by a covered wooden bridge. The bridge is extremely old and decrepit, with many gaping holes in the roadbed and roof. The foundation is mostly worn away by erosion and the bridge sways in the wind. The villagers will outright refuse to repair the structure, even though they depend upon it.
46. Rats are given free reign over the town. The rodents feed on any food left unattended for even a moment and even snuggle next to sleeping villagers in their beds.
47. Whenever an outsider enters a room, all of the townsfolk will halt whatever they were doing and wait in silence, as if waiting for the visitor to say or do something. The townsfolk repeat this behavior at random, with no indication as to whether they will behave normally or watch in silence.
48. At every entrance to the village is a series of gibbets and crows nests. Dead criminals are left to rot in the iron cages until they are reduced to skeletons. The town obtains executed criminals from other villages to display at their town limits.
49. No one in the village wants to be alone, for even the shortest amount of time. Though they are unafraid, they are reluctant to be left by themselves. The villagers do everything in pairs. Helpful villagers offer to follow visitors who don't have anyone to keep them company.
50. The townsfolk have no attachment to the bodies of their dead. There are no



graveyards, though families maintain memorials. The deceased are stripped of their belongings and thrown in a dump at the edge of town. Dogs and crows swarm the dump and gnaw at the human remains.

51. Beneath the town is the ruin of an ancient city, buried under the earth. Some of the occupied buildings in the town have basements leading down into the cavernous ruins. The major source of income for the village is the systematic looting of the ruins.
52. Villagers burst out laughing at nothing in particular. These fits can last as long as a minute.
53. The townsfolk seem indifferent to visitors, until they attempt to leave. The villagers try everything in their power to entice visitors to stay. The inn lowers its rate, merchants offer discounts, and saboteurs attack their wagons and animals. Should the visitor relent and stay longer, the villagers begin to ignore him, at least until he tries to leave again.
54. The village is situated in an ancient necropolis. Townsfolk make their homes inside old tombs, mausoleums have been made over into stores, and an old crypt serves as an inn and tavern. Most of the dead bodies have been relocated to an ossuary, though there are skeletons still left undiscovered all over town.
55. A blind man aimlessly wanders the town. He blunders into people at every turn, accidentally knocks over furniture, and flails wildly about with his cane. The townsfolk allow him to enter their homes and businesses at any hour of the day or night.
56. Townsfolk only go to the well or river while in armed groups. For this reason, men and women carry clubs and small children carry daggers. When a villager does draw water, the rest of the group watches for danger from all directions, including the water itself and the sky above.
57. A ten-foot tall wall encircles one small section of town. The gate to the enclave is guarded at all times and no one without an official set of travel papers is permitted to enter. There is nothing within the enclave to differentiate it from the rest of the town.
58. The town is populated with refugees from a far away land. They speak a different language from everyone else in the area, eat different foods, and honor different traditions. Neighboring communities shun the foreigners and even attempt to drive them away.
59. When a visitor approaches the town, he or she meets a man in red traveling in the opposite direction. The man asks the outsider to "hold something" for him. If the visitor agrees, the man smiles and walks away without another word. The townsfolk ostracize anyone who has agreed to hold something for the man in red; whenever the villagers see a holder, they point and call out "Shame!"
60. There are no beds of any kind in the village. Everyone sleeps on bare floors.
61. Before eating any meal, the villagers bow their head and say a blessing. This blessing is spoken in a harsh guttural language that sounds more like the barking of an animal than any human speech.
62. The villagers prefer to skulk in shadows rather than be in the light. Awnings and overhangs are built into every building, so that the townsfolk might linger in the shadows while outside.
63. The villagers are extremely uncouth and unmannered. The townsfolk practice poor hygiene and dress shabbily. They openly mock anyone better behaved or better

dressed. Otherwise, the villagers are extremely permissive and accepting.

64. The dead of the village are ritualistically mummified and kept in special tombs. The villagers visit the dead often and bring them gifts of fruits and wine.
65. A magistrate wanders the town with his bailiffs, dealing out harsh corporal punishment to any crime. Beatings are delivered for even small infractions of the law.
66. An old decrepit toolshed stands in a farmer's field at the edge of town. Each night, the villagers choose one person to stay the night inside the shed. That person returns in the morning, unharmed but disturbed.
67. In the center of the village is a shrine to an evil deity. The townsfolk are good and peaceful and their priestess is a friendly and tolerant woman who welcomes people of all faiths. At services the villagers pray openly for their blood-drinking god to lead them on an orgy of destruction. Townsfolk cheerfully invite outsiders to the temple, though they are not offended if the visitors reject their religion. As the townsfolk often say, "It's not for everyone."
68. Most of the villagers show flesh wounds that have been stitched together. The local doctor explains that the villagers do not heal normally and need to be repaired with surgical operations. The townsfolk are proud of their local surgeon and often claim, "If it wasn't for the doctor, none of us would be here."
69. Any time an outsider says anything, one of the villagers openly contradicts them. If confronted, the contrary person insists that they are merely saying what everyone else is thinking.
70. The village is a smuggler's den. Goods are imported through the village to avoid paying duties and taxes. The whole town profits from the scheme, so they are extremely secretive and hostile to outsiders.
71. Sounds echo in the village endlessly. Keen listeners may detect the sounds of conversations hours after they occurred.
72. The villagers are compulsive gamblers. They even maintain a "death pool" and bet on which of their number will die next. Visitors might even find themselves added to the pool.
73. The villagers all suffer from night terrors. At the same time, each night, the villagers begin to scream in their sleep. In the morning no one remembers the nightmares that plague their sleep.
74. The town is a lawless den of thieves. Highway men and other criminals congregate to plot their crimes and fence their goods. The shiftless residents are all criminals, ruled by a gang of extortionists. Rumor has it that the local ruler has allowed the town to exist, in exchange for a generous cut of the action.
75. The villagers believe that the sun is supposed to always shine and do not know what the night is. The townsfolk go about their day under the assumption that the day will not end. Each dusk they panic and huddle in their homes, trying in vain to understand the darkness that has engulfed them. Each dawn they leave their homes, relieved that their ordeal has ended and confident that it will never reoccur.
76. The townsfolk are literal-minded bureaucrats. Citizens display nametags at all times and visitors must apply for an entrance visa before being admitted inside. Weapons are permitted within the village, though they must be tagged for identification purposes. Idle gossip is permitted only in designated chat rooms.



Tavern patrons purchase tickets to trade for alcohol, which must be served outside of the tavern, but can only be consumed inside the building.

77. The village is a cut into the side of a mountain, twenty feet up a sheer rock face. The buildings are hewn out of the living rock and the complex is accessible only by long ladders, which are withdrawn into the village at nightfall.
78. The villagers cannot look anyone in the eye. Their eyes and head roll as if on their own accord in order to prevent them from meeting the gaze of another person. The townsfolk are even unable to look into their own eyes in a mirror.
79. The village practices a form of institutionalized kleptomania. The townsfolk steal anything left unattended, even objects for which they have no use. Crime is still outlawed and if caught, perpetrators are sentenced to a night in the stockade. Consequently, all of the villagers are skilled thieves.
80. The townsfolk single out one member of a group of visitors and cruelly discriminate against him or her. The villagers suggest that other outsiders should also shun that person since "They're not our kind".
81. The town harvests a species of fungus that cause euphoric hallucinations. Many of the villagers are addicted to the mushrooms and spend their days in a blissful haze. Visitors will notice that their food may be laced with the fungus by cooks who are too confused to realize the harm.
82. The townsfolk are compulsive gossips. They cannot help but discuss other people, even when that person is still within earshot.
83. The residents of the city are all recent immigrants. They busy themselves with the reconstruction of the village, which was recently raised to the ground. The reconstruction efforts show that the same town has been rebuilt and destroyed countless times.
84. The villagers exchange occupations once or twice every week. As a result, none of the villagers are especially talented in any task, though everyone is knowledgeable in a wide range of skills.
85. The villagers believe that their luck and prosperity can only be preserved by convincing outsiders to join their cult. Anyone who joins the cult must convert two more people to the faith, or else suffer damnation. Any outsider who enters is immediately beset by desperate believers who try to convert them.
86. The village stands along the line of an ancient aqueduct. Though weathered by the centuries, the aqueduct still empties frigid mountain steams into a pond next to the town. The locals occasionally find strange things in the channel drifting down from the mountains.
87. Every building and object in the village is comprised solely of organic materials. Neither bricks, nor glass, nor iron are used within the town. The villagers are extremely crafty and construct everything with bone, wood, leather, and hemp.
88. The villagers are extremely nosy. Visitors will find locals eavesdropping on every conversation and spying on every move they make. The townsfolk have no sinister motivation, they are merely curious.
89. The hierarchy of the village is organized by descending order of height. The shortest citizens of the town bully their taller counterparts without mercy. Outsiders are expected to submit to the tyranny.
90. None of the villagers use coins. All transactions are performed with barter or with promissory notes. The local

merchants will not accept coins, though the local smith will trade for precious metals for use as raw materials.

91. Every object in the village is blue. All of the villagers' clothes are dyed blue, all buildings are painted blue. All exposed wood is stained with a blue tint, and all metals are coated with a blue patina. Gold is the only exception to this rule.
92. The village is a boomtown at the center of a gold rush. Hundreds of people have flocked to the area hoping to make their fortune. Businesses of all kinds are opening to cater to the needs of the gold miners, especially taverns and brothels. Local authorities may attempt to crack down on the village, though the rough citizenry seems ready to resist all attempts to curb their freedom.
93. Reading and writing is forbidden in the village. The strict town elders associate literacy with devilry. A few written signs are left up as traps to snare the unwitting.
94. On the far edge of town stands an impressive temple. This temple is constructed from a bizarre and exotic style, alien to the area. The temple appears to be new, though no one in the village remembers when it was constructed, who built it, or what god the temple honors. The townsfolk do not fear the shrine, nor are they the least bit curious about it.
95. The town is preoccupied with the ocean. Many of the buildings are constructed of wood that once made up boats. Homes and businesses are decorated with paintings and carvings of fish, octopi and other aquatic life. Seagulls nest on buildings and the town even smells like the salt spray of the sea. This is all in spite of the fact that the town is completely landlocked and the ocean is several miles away.
96. The village has recently been bypassed by a new roadway. Without traveling merchants, the town is slowly dying. The villagers who remain are bitter people, too stubborn to leave. The townsfolk are hostile to outsiders and try to shake them down for as much gold as possible before rudely sending them on their way.
97. The villagers believe that words have power and that even talking about a given thing will cause that to happen. Thus, they refuse to discuss anything unpleasant. Occasionally, they will outright lie in the vain hopes that the telling of a falsehood will make it true.
98. Every building in the village is decrepit and on the verge of collapse. Falling ceilings and collapsing floors are a common hazard. Many structures are propped up with shoddy reinforcements. The villagers insist that their workmanship is safe, even though many of them have been injured.
99. The townsfolk abide by a strict set of formal manners and are unfailingly polite. They expect everyone to follow their example and may refuse service to anyone who deviates from their formal etiquette.
100. Wealthy adventurers have recently passed through the town, unloading their treasure and trading for supplies. The sudden surge of coins has devalued the price of gold while food and drink have become more expensive.
101. The village is a ghost town. The townsfolk moved away years ago, for a variety of reasons. No one dwells within its houses, except for the innkeeper. A local nobleman recently inherited the village and is desperately trying to convince new people to inhabit his town.



# *You Are What You Eat*

## *A New Race for Ravenloft*

*By Doctor-Evil (E. G. M. Parsons)*

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### *Humghoul*

The humghoul is based on a character in the 1980 British movie *The Monster Club*. The movie is an anthology of three horror stories, one of which involves a movie director, who is looking for a film location, driving down a misty lane and finding himself in the monochromatic and anachronistic village of Loughville. The misty and decaying village turns out to be inhabited by ghouls, but he is befriended and aided by Luna, a beautiful young humghoul. The girl's pregnant mother was infected by the ghouls and she now lives with her undead "Dada". Luna helps the director to escape, or does he...

Here is a Pathfinder compatible description of the Humghoul as a character race.

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### *Racial Traits*

#### **+2 to Dexterity**

There are at least three families in Mordentshire who are said to be Humghouls, the most famous, or rather infamous, being the Bean family. Humghouls are created when a near term pregnant female is infected by a ghoul or ghastr. The child that is born, is tainted by the undead's disease, but is largely protected from transforming entirely by the placenta. The result is a child that is not quite

human, and these traits are passed onto offspring.

**Darkvision:** Humghouls can see 60' in total darkness.

**Agile:** Humghouls gain a +2 bonus to stealth and climb rolls.

**Humghoul immunities:** Humghouls are immune to disease, ghoul paralysis and ingested poisons.

**Keen senses:** Humghouls gain a +2 bonus to perception checks.

**Cold One:** Humghouls gain the "cold one" feat as a bonus feat.

**Languages:** Humghouls speak their native domain language.

**Macabre diet:** The ghoulish natures of humghouls come out through their diet. They often get cravings for the taste of carrion. Once a week the humghoul must make a will save (DC15) or crave the taste of dead human flesh, and suffer a cumulative -1 penalty to attack rolls, saves and perception checks for each day they go without feeding this craving. Once they have feasted on at least a pound of dead flesh, the craving is satiated for at least another week.

**Outcast rating:** Although they look human, humghouls have pale, greenish skin, have slightly sharper teeth, long thin tongues and slightly tapered ears and the smell of dead

decaying flesh tends to stick to them. They have an outcast rating of 3. (A disguise check DC15 and the application of perfume can reduce this OR by 2).

**Cursed passing:** A humghoul has a 2% chance per character level of transforming into a ghoul (or ghastr, or ghoul lord depending upon level) upon their death.



# *The Man in the Cage*

## *A Story of Betrayal*

*By Dani "A G Thing" Hatcher*

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*"When the blameless and the righteous die,  
the very gods for vengeance cry"*

-Steven Brust's Vlad Taltos series

The day had been cold once... He remembered cold in only the barest of meanings only, but it had been cold that day. He was young, bright of eye, and fair to behold for the time of his youth and it had been cold on that long ago night when he lost all. Twelve summers did not prepare him for the sight of his family's home burnt to naught but cinder and ash.

There was no one about still staring by the time of his return on that late hour. None came out to investigate the sounds of a child's wailing cries nor did they give comfort to him. No one cared to witness as the child dug through the ashes finding the finger bones of what may have been his younger sister's hand, blackened but still in the shape of a pained grasping claw. They just huddled within their small homes and put up with the sorrowful sounds until he had fallen into exhausted sleep.

The next morning was perhaps as cold as the night before, and had it not been from the heat of the still smouldering ash the young boy may not have lived through that cold. He rose to see sun blocked by the image of a man in priestly robes of Lanil which stood silhouetted before him. The man was looking directly at him in his eyes and then looked up for the slightest of seconds to the

center of the ruins. He was looking to the simple dual arch made of two sticks that the boy had made.

The symbolism of the church ritual perhaps had moved him but he spoke with a questioning and soft voice. "Did you do that for them boy?"

The child that day could do little but nod and look rather blankly not understanding what the man was bothering to ask. He was surprised by his reaction however.

"Well that is the best funeral arch I have ever seen... They alongside our goddess must be quite happy to look down and see such a sight from the heavens." He smiled and the man now kneeling before him made the boy confused again but his ears perked up as he heard the clatter of the priest's armour below the cloth of the robes.

"I could use a good grave keeper in my home parish and I think Lanil and your loved ones have brought us together for a reason child. Would you like to come with us?" Looking at this he finally looked past the man to the other priests and the knights that followed this him. He still did not recognize the man from his reputation but he did see that he was important. He nodded for the time vacantly as he played in his mind the thoughts of the night before and yet becoming more aware of other things.

As he was lifted into the saddle of the man's horse a young blond haired priest not much older than him smiled gently to him

from the ground his eyes wise for one of his age. Perhaps it was that he saw a similar look to his eyes now but the boy did not recognize that then. He looked from him with his head hung tiredly but he glanced about at the neighbors who had done nothing when he needed them and now looked to the sight before them. They were so fearful of inspiring the same fate that had befallen his family simply by touching him only the night before.

Now they glanced out at the priest's courage and he saw that there was buried hope beneath that fearful gaze. It was just a glimmer but as they watched this sight it was brought slightly to the surface. It was not pity that moved them but the truth of their cowardice shown plain that made them want for something better. Looking back to the man whose horse he now rode and whose white robes were stained black upon the soot from his touch he felt a sense of something stir in his heart, and though it pained him from the stiffness of his ill sleep he straightened in the saddle.



So from that long off night the boy grew in the eye of that church and realized that he had truly been blessed that day. The priest was the head of the priesthood of Lanil, a holy man, a war hero, a general and a royal in line for the throne. And he had knelt to help one boy who by all sense should have starved froze to death in that ruin. It had been near ten years since then and he had not seen that great man for the last eight but he pictured him the same as he had always been before.

The man was the second in line for the throne but by most peoples opinions he should have been the first. Always diligent and kind there was no one who did not like him except perhaps his brother and his ilk. When the royal line had been threatened

from the neighbouring kingdoms assassins his brother took power as eldest and set the kingdom to war.

A war the younger brother now fought almost endlessly on his behalf. Still the death toll was massive to the common man and yet this royal man did not waste life. His men spoke of his quality and care and there was talk of him as though he were a saint. The boy had seen this quality early on and it had made a lasting stain on his character.

Still it sat beside the other stain of what had brought him to the attention of such a man. The death of his family had never been clouded completely from his mind and heart. The simple fact that his mother's father had been from their neighbouring enemy had earned them disapproval, harsh treatment by the guardsmen and tax collectors drove them closer and closer to poverty. Finally false suspicions on their trade practices led to trumped up charges of sedition and treason. He had been away from the house during the raid gathering what he could from the woods for meals but he had delayed out in those woods on childhood fancy.

The child now a man had put aside such fancies and taken to his duties as grave keeper as best he could. He knew his talent for making the arches was not so great but he did it to keep near the order hoping to join in the greatness that could inspire such hope. Those that came to him were already beyond most others help, and if his duty lay in making appeals to Lanil for them he would do so proudly. He never set aside his work for the dead that came to him for they deserved to meet the goddess in her good graces. He trained diligently to become a priest learning the scriptures and taking the rites down, he learned the battle methods of the holy knights, the tales of the scribes, showing a knack for literacy that he brought into the telling of stories that taught the works of Lanil or simply entertained those



he met. His gift even extended to those grieving few in the poetry of the arches he inscribed to comfort those who would visit the dead he tended.

His time was perhaps not that of the youth a normal child might have had but it was spent in the pursuit of something greater than himself. He would one day inspire hope and bring mercy and justice to the people of his homeland. Just as \_\_\_\_\_ did for him and the few people who witnessed his deed that day long ago. As he still did on the battle front today fighting for them all against \_\_\_\_\_.

He had hoped to join the others when the next call for troops came for the holy crusade so as to do what the church asked and his heart demanded of him. However, he was to be denied for when he applied to be a full priest and no longer a lay brother his acceptance was refused by the highest order. Shocked with no answers as to why, he became somewhat distraught and frustrated that his saviour of the past would do this.

He had served for more than the five years required. He had an arm greater in the sword than any other in the initiates training. While not a squire he could have been a knight years before those who had trained beside him if only he had noble blood or title. He could not reason why his hero thought that he should not serve the church when battle clerics were so needed to lead the charge.

It was only an hour after this time when that young blond priest of long ago who he came to know from his personal instruction at first as Father Simon came home. While he was surely glad to see his mentor returned from the front it was more the joy of having ones family returned to you; though his title was no longer how he addressed him most times, for in personal moments he now simply called him Simon for the two acted as close as brothers when in private. But later when Simon also became a knight his title

grew and he had become known as Sir Simon the High Fathers personal guard. This assignment had been a shock to most of the priesthood for Simon while a fine brother had never been the best or most favored noble son or holy priest in the temple but everyone wished him well. The young man had missed him as well but in his daydreams he had at times been secretly jealous of him, for his duty required him to leave for the front and after three years only now surprisingly had he returned. He would perhaps have grand stories of battle, salvation and other heroic tales beside their lord that he himself would apparently not be able to have now that he was denied. But he put aside for the time his frustration and clasped his mentor and best friend in joy at his safe return from the battlefield if only shortly.

"Simon my friend, it is surely a blessing of Lanil that you are returned to us alive! And yet you are far too sober for such a momentous meeting!" He laughed with volume and joy at the mirth of the moment.

His tired demeanor instantly a bit more returned to the old vitality the young man remembered Simon spoke with the familiar tone of ages past. "Surely that is a mistake that we might remedy my friend. And with the help of the coins of a kind and skilled businessman and well to do grave-keeper, to perhaps donate to such a cause I might be saved such a poor homecoming?" Simon's revived smile dimmed only a little when he had noticed the boys flinch as a puzzled look crossed his own eyes.

But after the barest of moments and a slight laugh the young man was smiling again. He would not spoil the mood nor would he deny the humour of the joke of his dear mentor. Simon was when in town a favoured regular in the pubs and taverns of town, and his drinks, were always freely donated by the proprietors' for his "services".

In the next moment he was smiling as brightly as he had in the many times when they had gone into the town to administer lessons in the pub in which he learned of life and the joys worth protecting while his instructor enjoyed the perks of his "business" and its "services".

Simon did not perform the typical duties of a priest on these occasions, for he dealt with something most priests of Lanil felt best avoided. It was in business that he found his holy calling however, and so he provided his holy "services" in aiding the various virtuous trade guilds in avoiding certain corrupt unlawful taxes by accepting "donations" from one party and then granting an "indulgence" of "holy items" to another faithful donator. He then gave part of the coin to the first poor donator and took a slight amount for the church to continue the good works. He had a conscience in his dealings and while he was not present for every such deal he never did see Simon take on a deal or ply his services with those that would profit off the backs of others unfairly. This balanced service allowed the people to live better and for the soldiers and knights the church brought to field to be well provisioned. It also earned Simon and by extension himself many a free drink and meal so everyone was happy.

At the time he had never understood why he was privy to such dealings but their friendship was so that he trusted Simon as he should of a brother, a knight and a priest. Besides the few necessary excesses resulting from such good works were as slight as over indulgences, minor vulgarities and trade for profit while ignoring the corrupt laws of the king, and were done in a way that was never breaking with the vows of mother church. They surely bent them slightly but he never saw any true darkness in Simon and by all accounts he held his business dealings to a standard that would make some knights

envious. While he had learned well and had taken on the duties with perhaps less drinking and fewer curse words when Simon left for the front, he had felt always as if he were standing in for the master. The young man remembered all those past days of intrigue fondly and the two headed laughing to their favourite spot in the Crested Glass Tavern already speaking of past adventures in the innocent times.

There was much drinking and laughing in the greeting ceremonies of soldiers to town as the locals showed their appreciation and good will to the long absent pair of regulars. The Crested Glass was packed with many of \_\_\_\_\_ local citizens all enjoying the arrival of both a bard and the rarer sight of several soldiers given leave to return for a time from the front of their more than decades long war. After navigating the barrage of well wishers and yet accepting the free ale the two of them eventually settled into personal reminiscence and memories at their favored business table in the far corner luckily absent of occupants as if it had awaited their return.

Simon and he spoke on many subjects but the knight priest never brought up the subject of the battlefield only wanting to talk of things in town. \_\_\_\_\_ was surprised at the change to his friends demeanor but did not press him once he found such tales to be blocked. Many soldiers would not speak of battle when home or when not among other soldiers so he understood that maybe his tales were not right for happy times. So after speaking of the old times, the young man told tales of the life around the church but he delayed and skirted the issue of his denial of entry; speaking the many young girls that had become interested in him since the fair haired priest had left, and of his few youthful last indulgences before preparing for his own holy work. He went on about the minor



adventures he had in simple life though none too exciting or impressive and even how the business had fared when Simon had passed the holy rites into his hands upon leaving. But eventually when the question of his joining the church was brought up by his friend and he could change to no further tale, it was with a begrudging tone that he made himself speak the words.

"I don't doubt the Lord High Priest has his reasons but I don't understand those reasons too be sure. I have not been allowed to serve the faith, and surely he does not see some fault reported in the Archons letters speaking of my character or works? Surely the goddess has not spoken to him against such?" He looked imploringly to Simon as if he could answer the reason for such a decision for he had been beside the great man as a trusted guard.

Simon did not respond but with bemused silence and a slight nod that neither seemed to confirm or deny if he had such knowledge or not.

At this the young man took a drink of his ale and winced slightly as the current bards performance began to take a nobler flavour. Glancing to the performer he began recognizing the growing silence that would soon change to disapproval of the loud kind if the man did not change back to more conventional fare. From his own few times on stage trying his hand at performance and story telling he knew the crowd at the Crested Glass liked to listen to political mockeries and few cared for what the court considered refined. They wanted stirring stories of the triumphant underdog and songs of simple pleasures and crude humours but not the absurd glorifications or interests of the high court.

Turning his eye back to his friend the corner of something laid before him came to view just in the lowest part of his vision. Looking down then quizzically back to

Simon the man found no answers to what lay in the bundle or how it had gotten there beyond what the smile on the face of his mentor could tell him. Opening the simple leather bundles wrapping he discovered within a small wooden box and a large and sealed scroll. The seal was that of the lord high priest and pressed within the center of the wax double arch was a single small diamond. This was a scroll meant for the eyes of someone in high regard of the lord and no other person, for given the importance of it was of that of the word of Lanil herself by the addition of that simple gem.

Setting aside the scroll, he looked to Simon and seeing no objection opened the box, inside which he found within a handful of diamonds perhaps worth enough to keep the church for a year. Closing the box and grasping the scroll he began wrapping it once more quickly and under the table. He then stared at him frustrated and confused again at the sudden breach of the code by Simon. Still the unspoken question was left unanswered and with no response forthcoming he finally spoke. "What is the meaning of showing me this? It is surely to be delivered to the Archon and I..."

"No I have delivered it as I was commanded by the lord certainly!" Simon simply kept his smile on as he matched the young mans stare. It was only once he looked down that Simon also looked away but to join the crowd in booing the poor performance of the bard, yet the smile was the same as before.

Looking down at the simple parcel it felt like a weight on his shoulders had grown. Why would the lord call upon him if he would not allow him to serve the church? Why would the holy command of Lanil fall to him if he was not worthy to preach her word?

Slowly unfolding the leather once more he examines the box but sets it aside and taking the scroll snaps the seal with a slight hesitation. Opening it inside the in flowing script of what must be his lords hand writing came what would become his purpose in life.

*My dear and faithful friend...*

*I write you now to apologize for my need to ask of you what I must and what I already have without telling you. In truth I did act honestly in giving you the home I did but I was led there by providence of our Goddess to find the one who could help me in times of trouble and there you lay under our goddess seal. I had to believe it to be you and I do not believe it is a mistake that you came to be my grave-keeper. I think now you might do what you have been fated to do.*

*There are enemies abroad my loyal friend and while I would have you fight them with me they are but the tail of the serpent. There are others who started this war for their own ends and I have discovered them and yet while I am moving myself into position to strike they keep me busy with this fodder on the front. It is hard to move away and resources and news of home reach my ears poorly.*

*Still outside of this I must ask of you tend to other business of which you were meant. I and the goddess Lanil would ask that you take care to tend the graves of three men who deserve nothing short of the best hands at the task. I have heard rumours of their ill fortune as they kept our nation on course from within and away from the front.*

*Three such prominent figures stricken and falling outside of the war deserve only the highest rites available and their funerals will be perhaps one of the most important events in our land. So when they*

*are before you I ask that you give them the rites they deserve under our goddess.*

*Balius Septalum the famous noble trader of spices and other 'wares' is to be laid to rest in the peace Lanil would decree. He is truly a miracle worker beyond my own deeds as Simon will tell you. His business and those within its folds know a prosperity that Lanil usually grants only to the most virtuous. It is only by his diligent efforts that we might be so well supplied to defend our lands and he should be treated with much respect.*

*Daylin Ra' Laskein was a rather prominent royal guardsman, and he is traveling even now toward his gravesite. So notable are his faithful patrols of our kingdom and the justice so lasting in his efforts that the people should know when he is laid to rest so the fanfare might be appropriate. It is wrong that one such as him should fall in guarding our people from within. Still I leave the matter of his burial rites to you as you are more knowledgeable in the task and you are closer to him than I or even perhaps Lanil.*

*The final of these graves is to be that of a dear friend of mine who gave such a present many times over to the people of our land. Crown High King Alden De'Luke who is unknown to most all to be coming closer to death each day, has in his way asked for the goddess rites of final passing. My brother has certainly earned this honour through diligent service and is to be given the highest honours that Lanil reserves for those of his great standing. I am sad to say that I cannot attend to such a task myself for family is always most important.*

*I know you will perform your service for our goddess well my dear grave-keeper. These men deserve only your level of dedication when they are to journey to the hereafter. Perhaps when this duty is*



*fulfilled I can in good conscious bring you into the faith but for now the most I can do is declare this.*

*While not in ceremony I grant you \_\_\_\_\_, the noble title of Earl and in regard to your long measure of service the further title of Knight of the Archlady. May you live by the measure of a child of the goddess, may your hands bring pure justice to those deserving it, and may the people forever speak your name with pride and loving memory.*

*The gemstones are to purchase provisions necessary for both your station and to prepare the steps for the funerals of these great men. Now that you are of noble rank you may associate with the nobles and there will be no question of your worthiness I hope to your being chosen in handling of my brothers and the others preparations. When I return we will formally announce your true station. Until then respect your new responsibilities as you have your past ones and I know you will live up to the task.*

*By the word of Lanil,*

*This script is law,*

*Let thy servants hands,*

*Act in thy hands stead,*

*And thy will be done.*

*Lanil's word as spoken through*

*Lord High Father \_\_\_\_\_*

He finished the scroll and rolling up once he looked across to Simon who sat smiling at him. He saw in him a look that was questioning him and yet also seemed to be congratulating him. This disturbed the young man a bit for while the scroll was all that he had wanted it to be he was smart enough to recognize signs he did not expect of the High Father. As he had heard not a word of any of these men relating to their

current or coming deaths he could only assume what he dared not... Looking back to his friend with that look as if a cunning cat still resting upon his face he could little help the question that next came to mind.

"Have you read this Simon?"

"Well, as I was the one it was dictated to and my assignment is to aid you in this task then I certainly have... Is my penmanship so unrecognizable after only three years?" He smiled brighter still even as the young mans mind reeled.

"I cannot believe... What are... You and..." He stuttered and began to feel sick inside for the tone of the letter was not lost on him. He stumbled out to the street and Simon followed making some excuse about a sour stomach for the day. Once clear of the door he certainly lent credence to the lie.

As Simon patted his back he spoke in a low tone to his ear. "Come. Let us go to some place we might discuss this more freely?" It was both a question and yet also not a request. This was Simon's business face, when the duty was to be handled precisely and directly. It was with that same unthreatening manner that Simon had once held a knife to the throat of a man who after striking her had threatened both an honest woman's honour and life at the bar. Had the man not relented Simon though saddened by having to kill him would have done so with a prayer and perhaps a penance of a sort but his noble heritage would have supported such. He knew his friend could be quite wrathful to those who earned his ire but he spoke like this mostly to convey a sense of urgency.

By that tone the young man knew the matter was serious and he believed it was out of concern that he spoke so his way. He was too scared of the meaning of the scroll to do more than try and hold his confused mind together as they stumbled back to the small house on the graveyard grounds that he lived

in and used in his duties as the grave-keeper. Using his key the young man stumbled to his bed quite dizzied by the magnitude of his many thoughts.

Simon shutting the door behind them followed him across the room and taking down \_\_\_\_\_ stash of personal brandy wine and poured them each a glass. Looking up finally composed enough to act the young man looked at him almost in anger as he calmly set out cheese and bread to go with the drink. "You had best explain what is going on here Simon!"

"I am setting out something so that you might settle your stomach some." Simon looked at the cheese cutting a small portion of mould from the wheel and placing it on the cutting board. "I would think that obvious?"

"You know that I mean! The scrolls words! Too often have you shown me ciphers and obfuscations in other letters and messages! I have dealt with rogues of all sorts and their double meanings in conversation were seldom lost to me. This is heresy against the crown and murder in the name of Lanil! If this is the word Lanil by our Lord \_\_\_\_\_ then how can he be suggesting that I take the lives of the innocent? It is against all of Lanil's teachings!" He was hoping that Simons next words would be a revelation that would straighten the whole mess out. That his trained eye was wrong.

"The letter its self is Lanil's word my dear \_\_\_\_\_, there can be no mistake of that. So it is by default her will that this task be done is it not?" Simon taking a bite of cheese and bread after the few matter of fact words looked across the table at him, that smiling but serious face still showing his focus on the matter.

After hearing that it took him a moment to fully register the dark implications of this. He had not said it openly as he had but

Simon had confirmed his suspicions in his way. The High Father demanded that these men die and his authority to request such was by account given by divine mandate of their goddess. The hero of his land and his personal idol had asked him to do something against everything the church and what he believed they two stood for. It was an impossibility that was even now burning into his mind like a hot knife, but the young man still railed against the idea that murder of these faithful and by all accounts innocent souls was the just and only course.

"But why these men? Certainly there must be a just reason to call for their deaths and if that is so then why not use such to..." He stopped himself at that. These men were described as powerful and in positions of honour. They would do as the powerful have done for years and simply use that power to protect their positions. But if the people were told certainly it could not harm their cause. They would rally to see justice done to criminals and villains especially if their High Lord Priest could prove it was so. "I cannot accept this! Killing unless done to protect lives is something reserved for Lanil alone and even she does not take life without reason! By what account can the secrecy of such deaths be justified, that a public outcry could not aid and make more righteous? If they are so guilty then what proof of their crimes exists and if so damning why not ruin them with it?"

"Excellent question! The reason such proof is not sufficient is because the proof is from the hands of our current enemy!" Taking a bite after the short statement Simon gave a slight pause as he chewed hoping to finish his mouthful before continuing.

The young man anxious to learn more waited rather impatiently for his rather slow jawed mentor to clear his throat. "Please continue!"



As Simon finished the bite he took a drink appearing as not to notice the ire at his meal and the delays it caused. "Thank you! (Gulp!) Ahhhhh... So this enemy soldier surrendered to our camp near two years ago claiming that he had information of the most vital importance. So important that it might end the war he claimed and yet he refused to speak of it to anyone other than our Lord High Priest. The man was an enemy captain in the brigades of \_\_\_\_\_ so the High Lord gave him the benefit of the doubt, but he demanded my presence as his body guard."

Simon took another large quaff of the brandy wine and then with a slight exhale continued. "After his confession before both me and the Lord we asked him and ourselves similar questions of doubt. We spent resources and so much time investigating the truth of it all, sending envoys and spies to watch the gentlemen the defecting enemy captain mentioned and discovering while only in sight of deed links in the chain leading to these three men. Remember that our Lord spoke of fighting the tail of the serpent? Well what he was forced to leave out is that the head of that very snake is nested here; only in truth it has more than one such head." Simon taking in a huge mouth full of cheese between thin bread chewed and chewed for what seemed ages.

After waiting for what seemed minutes the knight priest had made little progress in clearing his mouth to talk once more causing the young man to become quite irritated. "Will you stop trying to eat as you talk if your teeth are so dull? This is important to me my brother! Please I implore you continue without delay!" \_\_\_\_\_ voice was shaking slightly with a frustration that was purely bore of the matters at hand.

After a nod and a few drinks to clear his throat Simon set aside the food and looked directly at him. "I will then cut to what you

need know my brother so that I might eat the meal I was denied at our leaving the tavern... Balias Septalum is not just a simple merchant famous for his spices but deals in the trade of slaves and weapons. If it was only those slaves brought in from the exotic \_\_\_\_\_ he would be of little concern." He pauses for a second looking to the side gravely and in that moment he appears to be frustrated in his efforts to simply arrange his next thoughts.

His eyes look deeply into the young man at this point and he speaks with an edge to his voice not there in the last line. "It is because, however, that through his efforts a greater abuse is made possible. He is the one who profits from those conscripted for tax evasion or other crimes and are made slaves. During the many years the war has been waged such unfortunates have been sold into the militias to pay their debts. They are kept in service and bondage on the promise that their crimes will be forgiven in such service."

He takes a seat as if the next words pull the strength from his legs in that moment. "This however does not clear the financial side of the debt the slave owes Septalum for arranging such and as by law such debts fall to the families of such men. Septalum uses this debt to force payment or enslaves the families of these forced soldiers so he may sell them at profit to cover his 'costs'. These profits he generously donates to the kingdom and yet the king does not invest this wealth in the field nor the troubles of his subjects. This gold found in the breaking of people's lives is spent on the expenditures of the court. Rich silks; spices and exotic wares and entertainment which the corrupt trader has dealt in to much acclaim and is well favoured for. Septalum is for his efforts is further rewarded by special exemption for his vast contributions to the kingdom. The man sits within a keep perhaps larger and

more grand than the castle our king is in spending his life in debauchery and managing his corrupt and legitimate business affairs."

Simon smiles sadly then his head hanging a bit further but the young man entrapped by his words followed his lips movements as to catch every tone. "By his illegal trade we have been able to field the army we have with few shortages in manpower. Our lord maintains the supply side of things as the church directs its profits more from charities to that purpose..."

At this Simon took a deep breath and looked up into \_\_\_\_\_ eyes a tired look in his own. "I have fought beside such conscripted men as these, both before and after learning this truth of their service. Many claimed to be innocent and some while not truly as innocent still believe that freedom and a measure of redemption lay on the other side of their service. Many spoke of families and homes I now know they will most likely never find when they return. If they return from such hell that is the \_\_\_\_\_ front."

Simon taking a large swig of the wine pauses only but a second after then starts again more forcefully than moments before. "Do you understand now where this is headed? These slaves are taken from criminals of our own people. And the one who enforced the common law of \_\_\_\_\_ is none other than the Royal Guardsman Daylin Ra' Laskein."

Simon spit upon the floor as if to clear his mouth of the name and with another drink begins again with the same venom as a moment ago. "Were he simply following orders, he might be simply a wretch but that man profits from the state of the law in both coin and his indulgences against the peasantry, exceeding Septalum in both savagery and grandeur. He has become the third greatest of the nobles who are landed in

the country and it is by removal of those who own such land in false arrest or execution that he is able to acquire it by martial law."

Simon taking the knife from the table slammed the blade through the cheese and cutting board out of some wrathful impulse. "Laskein is the center link between the King and Septalum but make no mistake that for all his power he could be replaced where the King and Septalum could not be and he knows it. He had once been an honoured knight but he is now a pawn playing at gaining greater value by crossing the board. He is gaining that power too, for as he takes the lands of those he enslaves or murders he puts soldiers' families and others of value to the military in the best lands of all with lowered taxes which he pays himself through plunder. With each day he gains more pull over the royal army and if the king is not careful he may find his own military turned against him by the traitor may he burn."

\_\_\_\_\_ thought for a second on the tale at hand and while he had a question or two concerning more of Laskein he decided it might be better to wait just a bit. He was so very moved by the words of his mentor and adoptive brother that he began to consider the possibility that these men could merit such a fate. Still if he was even to consider acting against them, he must be sure of their guilt. "Very well... Such words are moving and I will look to see what may be true of them but first I ask this. So what of the king? Certainly he has not been pillaging or selling slaves directly, and while he has supported these corrupt people what crime has he committed that the law might not forgive him of the royal line? It is one thing to accuse a noble but the scion of a divinely mandated line? There is no life but that under Lanil's own word or hand that he cannot command to death or worse in service to the kingdom."



Simon simply looked surprised at the question. "But dear brother is it not obvious? His crime against Lanil is what started the war! In one act he broke both such tenants required of him!"

Blanching at the absurdity of such words \_\_\_\_\_ spoke almost out of a gut reaction. "What? Surely you are wrong? They killed the assassin while he was fleeing from the scene! A recognized criminal and native of \_\_\_\_\_, who we fight to this day even so many years later for that very reason! Why would the crown prince destined to gain the throne when his father passed away perhaps in a year or so destroy his countries prosperity for so little gain?" The young man doubted the tale as anyone might for no man would destroy his own home as a normal mind could fathom.

"But you assume that all was as you said it and others have told you! The truth revealed to me by our Lord \_\_\_\_\_ is that Alden De' Luke was never to be King in the first place. Their father in his wisdom was going to declare the land split between the two of them so as to spare infighting for the throne. Neither one would have had all but both would rule everything as Lords of their respective portions."

Simon seeing the wheels of his brothers mind begin to turn in time spoke as if to lead the conversation. "The sudden death of the king and the present need for strong leadership is how he has prevented the will of the last king from coming to pass. By now he is almost free to rule as he pleases for there are none of the former king's guard or advisors with enough power to deny him anything save his own brother who keeps surviving the battles he has forced upon him."

"Should he ever gain control of the full army and the church the thin line between leadership and true incompetence which we fight against to hold back the \_\_\_\_\_s

would most assuredly be crossed and we would never recover the momentum against so trained a force no matter how many slaves we set against them."

Simon ended on that note of finality and turning to the wine once again filled his cup as \_\_\_\_\_ thought in silence. His mind was for a time closed to everything else but the thoughts of the last few hours with Simon and what they had come to mean. Looking at him drinking heavily he could not shake that he was not right for the task but his heart was already flooded with anger at the thought of these men. He had never killed and while he knew that battles would result in such death the matters they spoke of were death of a different sort.

There would be no honour by which a knight could claim rights in the lives lost this way. There was no chance that he might offer them forgiveness as a battle cleric might a misguided foe; for these men, if truly so guilty had committed these offenses against the grand litanies' then they could not be forgiven by any but Lanil and she is the one who now called for their deaths.

But it was in his heart that he listened and yet that voice spoke both for justice and yet also for mercy. It was by the corrupt and unjust of the land that he himself had been placed in this position. He could not however see how such action could serve the goddess.

After hours of continued silence he barely murmured a simple farewell to Simon as the priest mentioned leaving him to his thoughts for the night and of finding a bed.

There would be little sleep for the young man that night.

~{oOo}~

He rose from his bed when the early sound of the cockerel rang out. The sun had not risen, and the early cry was to some a sign of ill omen should you rise to it. Still he walked out into the slightly misted morning walking with a purpose past the arches of the graves toward the temple proper. As he did he walked past the elder priests and initiates who tended the grounds of the temple before morning service. Would any of them be called upon by Lanil such as he was to be now.

Entering the temple he walked past the rows of pews to the altar and the stained glass window beyond it. While most times the lay had to turn to pray to the arch of the temples door way the priests were allowed to pray to the temples grand window arch. But that was required during services only and now before the throngs of worshipers came with only those page boy initiates setting the reliquaries and other artefacts of the faith needed for service out, he offered a simple prayer silently in his mind to his goddess.

"Lanil I am by your words to be but an executioner. I serve as your grave-keeper, I carry your message in the stories I give out to the people and I do so though I remain not a priest by yours and your servant's word. I do not doubt you for I have seen your blessings and the love and hope you inspire through your words and their message. Please I ask but one thing for I am lost as to if it is truly your word spoken. Reveal to me the truth so that I might serve your will and your will alone in all things."

With the motion of the double arch traced to cross at his forehead and leaving his hands upon the opposing shoulders for the second required he stood hoping his prayer sat favorably in the view of his Goddess. Walking to the priests quarters there inside he found Simon sleeping as if he had fallen

into bed and done nothing else. His regalia still adorned him though it was crumpled and made him appear foolish it was suiting to see him so relaxed after the pain and fierce emotion of the days talk before. Of course he did notice the hand that lay beneath the pillow and the slight gleam of a dagger pommel just visible to view.

Lowering his voice so as not to shock his friend into striking out he gently shook his mentor as he spoke. "Wake Simon for I have need of you my friend!" This did little to rouse the sleeping priest but trying any harder to shake the holy man awake might be dangerous, so \_\_\_\_\_ was unperturbed as stepping away toward a cleansing bowl laid out in the room he spoke louder. "Wake you silly excuse for priest for you and I have matters most urgent to attend to!"

"I will rise... (Yawn) when the sun does and no sooner!" His eyes never opening, following these words Simon had simply rolled over and fallen back into a heavy sleep. He would not remember speaking those words for he had not truly been awake to say them.

He surely however would remember the contents of the cleansing bowl as extremely cold as they were spilling over him. Leaping up with a fierce shout he might have been impressive and intimidating were his feet not tangled within his blanket. The warriors battle cry changed to that of a confused note as the wet clerical knight fell to the ground. Looking up at \_\_\_\_\_ he smiled the cat smile of before and set to standing drying his hair with the blankets few dry spots.

"You know you could have just shook me awake gently?" He was a little bitter of tone but the smile took all bite from the words. "So, does this little playful sign mean you have found your heart for action? If so we should get to work on..."



Speaking over Simon's voice the young man asks the first of the questions that have come to him. "First tell me if what I suspect is true... Is Laskein the one who committed my family to flame and death?"

Simon hesitates in his actions but finally speaks slowly "Yes... He is but he is not the only one, they all share the burden of that crime and we have to make our preparations for the..."

"How long has the Lord, or more so you known this fact and I have not?" He was still calm on the outside as he asked the question though the emotion behind it was clear to Simon.

"We knew the answer to such but weeks after we found you... But I could not tell you as was not my place... The Lord decided..."

"He decided what? To deny me a face to put to the rage already in my heart! For years I have tempered that fire till the ashes are cold. I thought vengeance forever and for the best denied and now our Lord after waiting till the hearth is cold stokes that fire so that I might be incensed to kill for him?"

Simon looked at him sadly but sternly speaking as he had to his charge when he had been called to discipline him. "He never wished for you to learn of it for the very reason you just spoke! Would you have killed him and been satisfied for mere vengeance? No the knowledge would have destroyed that noble side of you that he cared for! You would having no way to bring the law to your side for it was on his, have charged off sword in hand screaming of justice against the dog until Laskein or one of his men found you and silenced you with no harm to his name other than missing killing you the first time! So our Lord left you here among warrior clerics, fierce knights and under my teachings of the true ways of life in order to prepare you to serve

the true measure of justice not just simple vengeance!"

He looked back to his teachers words and spit the words back pushing his arms from his shoulders. "But why did he not tell me of all this? Am I so untrustworthy as to be naught but a tool!"

Simon looks to him with an understanding look a softer smile crossing his lips. "Do you honestly think that of both him and I? What of Lanil who set the whole thing in motion? Would your goddess have given you so many gifts if she only wished for a tool?"

Looking back and unsure for the moment the young man saw the carelessness of those words. "I cannot be sure of it with so much being revealed to me! I do not want to believe it is so!"

"Then do not... The lord thought well on this before ever requesting it of you. You were by all accounts chosen for this by the Goddess! This plan is something that you can do, do not doubt it but it is your choice. None of us will force it on you, but I believe you can do it and I know you believe that as well for you even now want only to do what is right and good."

Staring at Simon calmly the troubled young man speaks slower as he calms from the anger of moments before. "Perhaps but what is this plan that is detailed in the scroll. Certainly I cannot possibly raid the castle even with you by my side no more than I could fight a full legion of patrolling Royal Guard to kill one corrupt captain. And from what I know of business the Septalum does not leave his Keep anymore preferring revels to travels now? Attempting all three would be a fool's errand especially after the death of the first was reported, so how?"

"Then let me tell you my friend! We will enter into the Keep of that pompous merchant and we will find all three of them

in our grasp at once. It will be a simple measure to get close to them when the disguise is built into the theme of the party as it is a masquerade in honour of the King. If done correctly the war and all the corruption will end that very night now that you..."

He holds up his hand to slow Simon's speech. "I will kill no one until I am sure they deserve it! I will go with you and we will orchestrate some way of revealing these men for what they are before me. Only then will I strike them down in Lanil name and only if they truly are guilty." He said it with finality but his mentor he knew would do exactly as he did.

"But we have done so already at great cost! Our spies saw the acts, the enemy had revealed, witnessed the corruption first hand! What more do you need know?" Simon spat with a sarcastic edge as if slightly disappointed to hear such words.

Looking more confidently to his mentor he answered thusly "I must know exactly what their stories are! If they are still able to be given the graces of our Goddess before they pass. Would that I could but I cannot cast any man so lightly into the abyss!"

"And how will you ask them of such deeds? You need to become important to all of them and they will only be together in that one night for the masque! If they escape such punishment they will turn and destroy you or move from your grasp!"

"I will walk up and ask them!" The young man said flatly.

Looking at him queerly for a moment the wet priest flicked the water from his hands violently but smiled once more. "Very well. But let it be on your head if they catch you in your amateur intrigues!"

"They won't..." He smiled this time to match as he met his friends gaze. "I learned of intrigue from the best!"

~{oOo}~

Dressed the part the two noble gentlemen the knights arrived at the chambers of Septalum's manor by carriage quite ready for the occasion. Each wore a mask and while Simons was pale and studded with small gems and gold flourishes, the young knight beside him wondered at his own mask. It was black with a long hook nose and while it was quite suited to his dark hair he felt somewhat foolish. That feeling increased when they were joined by the fine ladies they accompanied. Their dresses were large and styled with many layers and their hair done up into an intricacy he had seen only in passing never so close. He felt himself fortunate as did Simon as was apparent in his change in character to have found such well to do escorts in time for the event.

The ladies also looked them over and their talk to each other before their meeting was filled with hidden laughter and appreciative looks behind the fans and the masks they wore. Word was that all who mattered in the structure of the land would be in attendance for the masquerade party. They would have surely looked foolish to not have the presence of noble admirers on their arms at the masque but they had found such hidden gems so late in the hour they would be the envy of the event to the other young ladies in attendance..

In truth the would be assassins felt lucky to have found the ladies so unaccompanied before such an event as well. The time frame that Simon had mentioned at first had been cut slim when the party had been moved up so as to accommodate the presence of the king and adjust to his schedule. Their own arranged dates for the evening would not arrive for two days as the event was originally planned. They had rushed to find suitable costumes for the event and now dressed in such finery were thanking Lanil



for the ladies lack of proper male accompaniment. One could not come alone to such an event without such a woman of class. It would have been far too out of sorts.

They had been lucky indeed and yet looking over at his friend, the grave-keeper now wondered what the soldier priest was thinking in flirting so openly with his raven haired maiden in mask of flowers made of many colored gems. She spoke of him and gave all the signs of lustful interest and Simon ever adventurous returned them even though her name he could not yet know due to the parties rules. Surely he was not going to marry her and yet he persisted even though his vows of celibacy until marriage could spoil all the rather lurid plans they were making should the two find themselves alone. He was diving into his role as a spoiled noble a little too much and he hoped it would not come back to haunt them.

His own maiden however spoke to him and as distracted as he was by his fears of what he would perhaps have to do, she also distracted him from those important things to come. She spoke of poetry and tales and her earnest delight when he gave her samples of his own work was quite rewarding. He found himself watching her face with intrest though he might only see her pink lips slight on pale skin her gentle jaw and slender neck were taking even before he examined her emerald eyes under the black and gold mask below the sculpted red locks. Her delicate nature was something often removed from his life in the many country girls he had met, and where Simon's lady was quite open in her affections this young woman still had an innocence about her that he had only heard of in song and prose. She was something that he had never really expected to see and he was glad to have her choose him for company this evening even though he knew it was all pretense on his side.

When the carriage stopped they looked upon the size of the building with no small measure of respect. The manor keep was quite huge as to dwarf even the grand cathedral temple they had lived under but its adornments were more plain. Where arches and spires graced the temple this simple castle had only engravings and statuary to cover the plain stone. Still the mass of light radiating from it dimmed the stars in sky as if the town its self were lit around it.

As they entered the front doors and due to it being a masque event they were introduced by 'nom de guerre' as the annoucer requested. Simon's lady deciding upon the clever title of the "Sainted Flower" led the rather mischievous priest in disguise into choosing without a moments hesitation the title of the "Lecherous Gardener" perhaps attracting more stares than he should to which the lady on his arm held a hand to her face to hide the laugh as her makeup hid the blush.

The young man however could do little but think how he should act in such a proper place as his etiquette felt inadequate to the task. It was only when asked what his own pseudonym for the evening would be that he fell back into attention. He had missed his escorts name and now was expected to come up with a clever and thoughtful or at the very least amusing match in his own. With a small prayer to Lanil he spoke as clearly as he could to the herald who announced. "The Storykeeper."

The crowd whispered and many gave signs of approval to the chosen name. Looking to his date for the evening he saw that she was sufficiently pleased with the title and clear of that obstacle they entered in and set to mingling with those in the room. He set himself to trying to catch his dates own title for the evening though it took some guessing to come up with from the many fanciful lines that used parts of it here and there in

conversation she had taken on the name of the "Wellspoken Mute". He thought it quite amusing considering how fitting some of it was and could see how he had blessedly chosen well.

For a time they wandered about the room enduring the niceties of the nobles and other importants there. It was painful to him as each conversation was a whirl of boring drivel that the Storykeeper forced himself to smile through. His darling Mute sensing such discomfort at times whisked him into dances declaring the need for such simply to make spare him such efforts at pretension. Still at times he could enjoy the talk they could not escape and was glad to see he had misjudged some of the nobles from his own views. Lewd jokes and comical behavior however provided some amusement as these nobles showed their relation to the commoners that many others looked down upon so much.

Glancing over to the blond head of Simon as he laughed and merrily flirted with all the flowers that his gardener persona allowed him the Storykeeper shook his head. For all his seriousness before Simon seemed to have lost himself in his role. His own role perhaps was also attracting a bit too much attention, but in the choice of the Storykeeper the young man found some value besides that it matched the title of which his date chose quite well. Constantly he worked the magics of his bardic trade both arcane and mundane to dazzle and charm the crowd to his ends as they begged him for stories. He weaved the words within his florid prose as he had perfected in the tavern trying to piece who in the room might give him the tales that would condemn or redeem his victims but doing so with great care. He would speak tales to them and they would open to him like a book confessing slight hints into the character of the men he was here to observe. For the most part they spoke of Balius and his trade

in the positive and many while familiar with the name of the Royal Guard captain did not have anything more than to congratulate his efforts in finding so many traitors and tax cheats.

Still his efforts were rewarded for in speaking with an older gentleman who introduced himself as the "Plucked Goose" and what he could only guess was a well fed woman within that extremely feathered monstrosity that she perhaps considered a fashionable dress who also addressed herself as the "Downy Maid"

He addressed himself and his dear Mute and then found himself trapped in listening to this man drone on becoming more sure he was here as a relic of station more than popularity or the fun he might add to the party. He kept speaking on and on for a time but when his wife went off to examine some 'art' near the buffet table and by what he saw as a misfortune also took his lady Mute with her as if needed for something, that was when the plucked ones speech became more conspiratorial.

"I see that you have a taste for the beautiful my friend!" The older man said with the same tone that Simon had spoken in earlier in his lewdness but with none of the humour.

"Well I do try to surround myself with beauty good sir! Though it does cost one each time one would wish it so, but my Mute makes it worth it sir!" His attempt at such crude lusts was poor but the elder did not notice as he was showing a bit more the actual amount he had drunk for the evening.

"Well let me tell you a tale that might save you coin in the long term Storykeeper. If you are willing to pay good money once I can lead you to a man who will let you pick from some of the choicest beauty in the lands. Perhaps you might find him here at the party if you know of who I speak." He nodded to a rather rotund man wearing as suit of dress armour that had been fitted to



his particular girth that he could only assume was Balias Septalum "I paid for the contract of a fine indentured maid that is working off her debt to me quite well. She works twice as hard when my Downy Maid is out of the house if you get my meaning?"

"I most certainly do sir Goose! I cannot thank you enough for that for it has been of interest to me for what has felt like the longest time now. Rest assured that I will be by to meet you in that regard once I have tended to my business first. Till then I will keep your story fresh in my mind sir!" If not for the scene and the need for cover the Storykeeper might have broken from his role and struck the wretch. It was perhaps luck or even a blessing to stumble across such a tale, even if it was blended with a bitter slice of life. Still he would not forget the set of that mans jaw for he would come to call on him.

Walking to the other side of the room to make the acquaintance of the man that might be Septalum under that guise he turned but later than most everyone else to the sound of the trumpet heraldry and the voice of the events announcer speaking aloud.

"His majesty Crown High King of \_\_\_\_\_ Lord Alden De'Luke."

All in the crowd bowed before the king as was expected of them but only two souls in that crowds pulse raced in a different rhythm then the others in the presence of the king. The king strode in, in regal attire with only a modest mask upon his brow and eyes that could not cover his appearance more than ring his eyes in gold and gems. He was attended only by his servants and no other and his pace left him almost pushing through people on his path. The silent whispers were suddenly dimmed some as the musicians began playing again but the discord of his arrival was noticed by all by then yet it was politely ignored. His forceful path ended right before the supposed form of Balias Septalum who bowed low only to be pulled

to the side quite forcefully by the kings man; a rather tall, muscular and dourly dressed figure, his head shaved under the tri-corner hat that sat atop his head.

They began speaking and to hear the Storykeeper began moving closer to listen in to the conversation, but found it was not so very necessary as it soon rose in tone so that it could be heard for the most part out in the open. "... it is not your job to think what is best for anything! I had plans for that land and the people on it but you told that brute to destroy the estate of a Duchess and her vineyard so you could sell your own swill... Do you realize what your foolish grapes have cost me?"

"Your majesty I did not know that was the case. I checked my register given to me by your steward and it never excluded that parcel, nor the people on it. When he arrives perhaps you might ask him yourself? For now how about a drink my lord?" The foolish knight that might be Septalum looked almost defiant to the king holding a glass of wine before him. Of course the king took it poorly.

"YOU SWINE!" Smacking the portly knight with what appeared to be a riding crop repeatedly none paid notice or stared at the event. "You rob me of people of the quality of the Duchess. The very quality I need more than any other and dare offer me the very wine she was executed for thinning as comfort. If I did not have need of your life I would lash you to death here and now."

Arriving back at his side the dear Mute like the many others in attendance that evening pretended not to notice but she did stay silent as she watched him as he listened.

"I am at your mercy oh Lord De'Luke! What might I do to ease the burden I have placed upon you?" His tone while feigning apology was still mocking toward the very man who held his life in his hands and this made the Storykeepers eyes narrow in

focused contemplation at such brash disregard for the threat that was there.

"You might give me everything you have earned for a month, from coins, silks, arts; everything down to the grain of salt in trade! You will not tell my guard what other criminals are to be taken ever again except for those on the lists, for they are mine to dispense justice with and I will not have them serve so low a creature as you who makes such mistakes... And lastly my dear Septalum... If you ever so much as say a word to me that I do not believe is entirely earnest again I will have you nailed to the beam of the tallest tower of my castle by your tongue. Am I clear in my meaning?"

For once the Balias Septalum revealed for himself seemed to lose his fearless resolve. Quivering slightly his face purple in outrage and yet his voice calm as he spoke this time his fake armour rattled to give away his fear. "Yes your majesty! You are very clear!"

With a final look of disdain De'Luke strode away and out into the keep further out from the event. The Storykeeper could not fully grasp all of what had happened in the exchange. He did know that he could not rely on the small amount of conversation he had been able to overhear to determine the truth about the King but surely Septalum was looking more and more the part of one deserving justice.

Watching the small man who once out from under the eyes of the king, headed to the side of the room; apparently wishing to be alone in his anger. Looking over to the lovely lady who he had escorted through the evening he quickly smiled in a gentle fashion raising her hand to his lips. "My dearest Mute you are the one glowing star in this evening but I fear I must leave you to shine here alone for a time. I must attend to a certain matter but will return to you my lovely star as soon as I am able."

With a kiss he turned in what he believed was a dashing fashion not looking back to see the effect it had upon the woman. Perhaps that charming line would satisfy her for a while but he would not be back to see. For now he stalked the man to the small side room in which he paced drinking as if hoping to swallow some bitter medicine.

"I apologize good sir knight but I was hoping..."

"Can you not see that I wish to be alone you fool?" Turning to look at the one he insulted his flushed fat face narrowed in a grimace at the figure before him.

Trying to turn the conversation on the head of a pin the Storykeeper decided to change his approach. "I understand sir but I would have word on behalf of my master the honourable Daylin Ra' Laskein on a matter most urgent!"

"Ah so the Storykeeper is a dog of that fool Laskein! Well I don't know what you speak of, but out with it!" Septalum now dealing with someone he believed he could order was once again becoming more at ease.

"Yes sir. It is in regards to the families debts you requested be collected sir. Some are ill and there are few that are not too young or too old to effectively pay such a debt. He asked that I ask what should be done for the gains would not cover the amount."

Blanching as if completely in the dark as to what he spoke of he examined this strange Storykeeper before him. "You speak in nonsense sir! He knows my instructions are clear in these matters that you call pressing. If that fool wishes to waste my time when he could have done as commanded and taken my tax from the flesh of the one most responsible for paying I might as well hire a vile street thug."

"I apologize for my lord for any slight sir. I simply thought to address the issue before



it became a problem when more of your valuable time was wasted dealing with a load of infants and elderly women." He bowed seeing that the emotional and proud Balius may still be a cunning opponent.

"Your concern for my time is a rare quality for one under that brute Laskein sir Storykeeper. Your choice of name was the perhaps the most fitting and intelligent of the party and I now see why you are paired with the lady Mute. Tell me of your quality sir so that I might know a valuable man when his face is clear to me." Septalum smiled wide spreading the thin line that was his mouth in a wide smile that was similar to Simon's but with a hideous quality that made it seem as if a gargoyles snear.

Confused for as second at the reference of the lady Mute the Storykeeper however quickly recovered. "Well to know of my quality sir I offer you a friendly challenge my good sir that may appeal to one of your intelligence. A simple riddle that is of my own devising is all you need to decipher. In reward for your success I will give you my tale sir but should you not I would perhaps hear one of yours?" Waiting with thin calm measured breaths of one at the threshold he waits for the cliff to drop out from under him.

But it does not.

"You are going to challenge me to a test of wits? You certainly think high of yourself to challenge my mind sir, but your suggestion has returned some of my good spirit in this night. Very well! Give me your riddle boy!" Septalum smiles even wider and his eyes narrow as though staring at a mouse.

He thought back to his childhood musings and one of his first successful writings. A little puzzle that had stumped all in the temple grounds except for Simon who figured it out in seconds. It perhaps would work but if Septalum was truly a business man as Simon was it may work against him.

"We deal in selling our goods aplenty bought from foreign lands."

"Yet each time we meet the money we bring must certainly change hands"

"In the busy market You and I will meet four times."

"In four market spots and in four separate lines."

"I give you four You give me none."

"I take nine and You keep one."

"I eat three You make four."

"I sell eight and You sell one more,"

"I declare us done and You take score."

"Of that which was said and of those who sell and buy"

"Who has the highest total in end, that of You or I?"

Balius laughs and spends a long moment thinking of what the answer might be. His eyes turn to meet those of the Storykeepers behind the mask ,however, after shorter than he would care to see causing him to fear his riddle too simple.

"It is a shame you did not impress me in this. Simple math against one such as I? The answer is that I have more in the end at four coins. Now if you..."

"I must say that is wrong sir... By the final count I was in debt to You for two, while You had four coins. You clearly had four coins, not I."

"What but that is what I have... Wait a minute? Ah hahaha ha ha ha what an exceptional little puzzle sir. Very well Storykeeper you asked for my story and I lost with in the very rules of our deal so I would ask what story of mine would you wish to hear?" The wide smile looked to be even less inviting now that his face was

turned into such a look of delight rather than puzzlement.

"I ask for the story of why you trade the lives of men for the King sir? You are so notable of a trader could you not live comfortably in honest trade?" He motions with his hand to take the discussion to the nearby balcony.

Septalum wanders out into the night air and following behind the Storykeeper shuts the curtains to provide a small measure of privacy. "Why sir would you want to know that? Surely you have seen enough from your masters end to know the reasons for such evil? What more can my reasons for doing so give to you who is already part of such black business?"

"If I am to understand this black business as you call it and perhaps thrive in it, I must have all sides of the coin not just the simple reason for why it is there but why a man might choose it when he need not! I would simply wish to know what I am getting into for the good and bad of it." Staying still behind his costume he tries to seem truly interested for the immoral reasons such a trade might interest the corrupt soldier he now impersonates.

"Very well... If Storykeeper you must keep one story of mine, then perhaps when I am dust and you are to follow you will let this be known before you die for it is the truth I fear will be forgotten. I trade mens lives and the lives of their families not for the profit of coin or at least not solely so, it is more or less as you surmised. I was quite rich before my days in the slave market. In truth I was settling in for a long and hedonistic retirement. I am not so fierce as I was before and despite my hard edge I do not enjoy the punishment of those that are indebted to me. I want nothing of them other than to be left to my vices and pleasures but while the king plays battle with his advisors at holding my reigns I must be a good work

horse. I have no want of their intrigues just the continuation of the joys of rest I earned but they threatened to take apart my legacy." At this the jovial figures features droop in mock defeat a tragic smile still upon Septalums face.

"My children and wives of which I have many of both all work within my guild or are supported by the trade profit. So when an envoy of the prince came to me years ago and demanded my allegiance or the destruction of my life's work I did what I must as any business man would. I profit surely and while I still enjoy the perks they are but passing things to distract me from my fatigue. Still I cannot care that others suffer by my living for the way I see the cards falling we will all be dead soon enough the way things are going. I cannot enslave the nation but the demand for fresh troops never ends. I am placed into this deal I cannot refuse, on a course of assured destruction. My only choice is how fast I wish my life and its works to die, so I have choosen the slow path and accept it for what it is." At this Septalum looks upon the masked figure and sees the blade being drawn from the folds of the ornate cloak. "So it would seem that Laskein is perhaps more cunning than I had imagined? You know boy that I have only to shout and you will not step from this balcony alive?"

"I know the risks, and yet I do not think that you will do such Septalum." The young man advanced toward the portly man his hand shaking on the grip of the dagger as he pressed closer to the man who he began to see as worthy of death but it in his last stride that the dagger stopped short of his chest. "I understand you now Balius Septalum, and I fear that perhaps you do not see what you should. You are protecting your family true but why is it that your family should be spared suffering at the cost of inflicting greater suffering? You no longer care to risk



for something better because you don't want to lose what you have. You are a coward and the worst of it is that you know it. You sacrificed so many just to have your joys and pleasures all the while using the demands of royalty your family as a crutch to hold you up. "

The masked Storykeeper looked him in the eyes as the man before him trembled but with anger did not do more than wait for death with words that had lost their measured edge of moments before. "And so what if it is them or me... You pig slaughterers under Laskein are no better than I. You are far worse then I will ever be! I kill to get only what I deserve or need but your master will never be satiated. I gave him name after name of my rivals families and still he always demanded twenty more not safe under the kings decrees. Once my rivals were no more I still needed to give him names and still he demanded them in excess. Where he is a hungry beast I am a meager rat and I just want my due. The fortune of the world is finite and I would collect it all if that were the minimum I must have to be happy in this cruel world! If I must do so through evil to be happy then so be it. If I cannot be happy then I would much rather be dead anyways for I will not be content with a poor mans lot. I..." His words stopped short from the sharp pain just under his ribs he jerked a bit and moaned as red bubbled from his lips.

"So my murderer... My Storykeeper... May I know why I die at the very least?" The words are quiet from Septalum's lips, as if he is whispering for a private secret to the figure who clasps him now in that personal deadly embrace.

The knight murderer listening to the proud wretch became cold inside from the anger of the strike before. "You died long before on a day long past my friend. Lanil watched you take these lives with others hands and she

brought one through such death back to you! He stands here now this Storykeeper and he..."

~{oOo}~

He faded back from his reminiscence of the past back to where that path had led him... The snow that had covered his hand did not chill him and it hung there covering him melting slowly from heat he did not feel. His shallow breath through a dry mouth not steaming much in the chill of the eternal night he dwelled in. He sat in his Crow Cage as he had with the skulls of the three men who's lives he had taken. He had done as they asked and his goddess demanded so why was he betrayed to such torment. Why could he not remember the parts of the story that he most desperately needed to hear?

"Because you lie to yourself still my dear Storykeeper!"

He did not turn to look upon the face of his accuser as he was forced to listen to the familiar voice of that costumed scoundrel he had slain. "I did what I must to free the lands from your predations!" He could not muster any real conviction other than what he had already said many times before.

"Oh yes you said as much when you stuck each of us with your little dagger, and I am sure you believed that as a knight your righteousness would make you right! Of course you never were really a knight were you little Storykeeper? "

He ground his teeth as he heard Laskein speak the familiar but still biting taunt and his angry words leapt from his throat though he still dare not face the specter. "I killed only those who profited from evil, my code was followed even if I was a knight in deed alone! Such cannot be said of you fiend!" He felt them watching still but they remained

silent to him as they watched his back burning for a long moments silence.

Then another haunting voice broke that silence. "And what of me your dearest Mute? Did I deserve the fate of my father for what he had done to your family?"

As he always did when she spoke, he closed his eyes to the pain and swallowed a bit of guilt but pressed on. "As I have said just as I did at the time it came to pass... I regret it but you threatened to reveal me when you felt the dagger and questioned your fathers disappearance! If I had not the villain king would have fled to continue his evils!"

"But you know that is a lie as well traitor! I may have been a poor King but by the time you had ended dear Laskein and his daughter you did not believe me! Did my fearful tone and plea's merit so little consideration? I spoke of those who controlled my reign through threats in the church! Without such elite hands on the field I could not stay the armies of our enemies. My brother may have failed to kill me with our father with his first assassin but surely you succeeded. I claimed my desperation only to keep the kingdom from being destroyed or falling into his hands but you let my brother take it by one more thrust after so many!"

It burned his heart and soul more to hear it spoken again but he spat the words in anger again his eyes clamped shut. "I could not have known he was thus! And a life time of allowing his evil does not excuse you! You cannot judge me for I acted for the good of Lanil!"

But the ghostly voice next spoke plainly and without accusation. "You did? But what of me my Brother? I had done nothing but come to you here and you..."

In tone it was more than he could stand and he did not wish to hear it again this night like all the others. "I was betrayed! You left me

to rot for months in that cage, and not once did you defend me though you should share the blame! You plotted and planned and once there you cavorted with your trollop while I stained my hands! Then as the king lie dead and the guard held me you let them take me before your master to be denounced and sentenced to this death! Why are you not here with me?"

"But I am and was do you not remember? You and I were left here with the bones of our victims! For a time we were civil but there was little we could do when the hunger and cold took its toll. We fought over scraps and argued fault for our crimes for alone as we were we could do little else with our rage at our betrayal. As we both lay here starving under the same blanket you now wear I thought to forgive you but you stabbed me with one of the ribs laying in the cage bottom, cursing me for our fate though I shared it. It is the same rib you even now have in your belt though every time I tell you so you do not remember it!"

He looked down at his belt and there it sat... "I would never have..." He did not remember him ever being there. But the rib stained with so much dried blood and sharpened by some hand was there though he did not remember using it. His mind playing over his own tale again he began trying to piece together all that he had forgotten once again.

Perhaps he would find the names he needed to hear to tell another so they might tell him of his home. Many wandered in from exotic places, travelers and tradesmen and in trade for his tales he had heard of their own lands he asked only of those they might know of his home land. He needed to know so that next time someone came they could tell him of it for he was always short certain facts. He could not tell them his name though surely he was infamous.



So much he did not remember in the cold of the eternal night on this road... But he did remember the cold though he could no longer feel it... The day had been cold once... He remembered cold in only the barest of meanings only, but it had been cold that day.





# The Storykeeper

## The Darklord of Serpents Fork

By Dani "A G Thing" Hatcher

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### The Storykeeper

Darklord of "The Serpents Tongue Fork" Pocket Domain

**Medium-Size Humanoid (Human), Undead (Unique), 5th lvl Bard, 5th lvl Knight**

<b>Hit Dice</b>	10d12 (64 hp)
<b>Initiative</b>	+3 (+3Dex)
<b>Speed</b>	30 ft., swim 20 ft.
<b>AC</b>	21 (+3Dex, +3 Natural, +4 Cage, +1 Feat)
<b>Attacks</b>	touch +8 melee, Dagger +9 melee
<b>Damage</b>	touch (Capture), Dagger 1d4+3
<b>Face/Reach</b>	5 ft. by 5-ft./5 ft.
<b>Special Attacks</b>	Knights Challenge, Fighting Challenge, Test of Mettle, Bard Spells, Skeleton Swarm,
<b>Special Quality</b>	Turning Immunity, SR 22, Immune Cold/Fire, Undead Traits, Regeneration, Living Death, Slightly Mad, Knights Code, Armor Mastery, Bardic Knowledge, Bulwark of Defense, Shield Block +1, Vigilant Defender, Bardic Music 5/day (Countersong, Fascinate, Inspire Competence, Inspire Courage +1, Charm), Permanent Tongues, Captive Audience.

<b>Saves</b>	Fort +2, Ref +8, Will +12
<b>Abilities</b>	Str 17, Dex 16, Con -, Int 14, Wis 18, Cha 18
<b>Skills</b>	Appraise +11 , Bluff +13 , Diplomacy +13 , Disguise +13 , Gather Information +9 , Intimidate +13/34 , Knowledge(History) +32 , Listen +13 , Perform(Storytelling) +25 , Spot +13 ,
<b>Feats</b>	Ghost Sight, Keen Eared Scout, Lifesense, Lunging Strike, Mounted Combat, Requiem, Skill Focus: Perform(Stories), Weapon Focus: Dagger,
<b>Climate / Terrain</b>	Pocket Domain
<b>Organization</b>	Solitary
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	12
<b>Treasure</b>	Double Standard
<b>Alignment</b>	Lawful Evil
<b>Advancement</b>	As Class
<b>Possessions</b>	Four Skulls, Rib Dagger

### Description

As the misted road way clears in but a patch you come across a large post that though rotted holds a large crow cage big enough for three men. While several bones within show

that others may have occupied the cage there is only one occupant that seems to still be whole. The dark tattered cloth that covers most of the pale man is blackened in the light you shine upon it as if from mold and filth. The white skin is dirty, but looks unhealthy yet the limbs appear spry and healthy. His lack of movement lends him the appearance of a corpse but suddenly tired and dry throated words echo from the man's throat asking for the mercy of some water for a tale.

### *Background*

The background of the Storykeeper is incomplete at best and is a mystery even to him. He has been wronged and is a victim but his telling of the tale paints him as though the innocent. If it is to be believed then on some outlander world the Storykeeper was once made an orphan by the corrupt excesses of his kingdom during wartime exploitation. His family slaughtered he was divinely chosen to be saved by the Lord High Priest of his god and led a charmed existence as the student of that church to a god he names Lanil. After many years in priests training and as a grave keeper circumstance finally brought that peace to a head. He was divinely mandated to become a hero but also an assassin for his lord the High Priest that rescued him from death on the streets.

From there he travels to the party that seems to have all of his chosen victims within and after learning all of their stories proceeds to kill them their guilt assured. After this he is betrayed to the fate he claims now and he has been there for so long he has lost count of the time as the sun no longer rises or sets.

But there are gaps and missing facts to the tale and the Storykeeper is aware of it. He knows he was betrayed but he can no longer remember by who or what. His guilt is there gnawing similar to the ghosts of those that

haunt him and remind him his guilt only for him to forget moments later. Still he fights and yells at them for he does not see what there is to be guilty for and has rationalized these gaps away under the pretenses of duty and faithful service betrayed and the curse he is under. If he could remember something of it he could direct his anger and vengeance properly at his betrayer and perhaps escape his curse and find his way home and redeem his good name.

If he could only remember his own name...

### *Current Sketch*

The Storykeeper is not idle despite his faults for while he is not able to remember his land he believes others would know of it. All who travel risk entering his domain at night and he is certainly glad for some sort of interaction with them but must be careful not to seem to eager. He is learning much of the land and his place within it though he believes that the curse has befallen his own world and that it is out there waiting beyond the mists that trap him. He therefore has set others to searching for him and begun trying to get travelers to help him learn the truth or free him though he despairs ever attaining either.

He however suffers quite severely as he still lives in a way and thus he seems to be a poor soul in need of aid at most times. He hates to be pitied though he bemoans his fate often so it is hard for many to relate to his madness. He sooner or later turns the topic to stories and the like and constantly offers insight and aid in revealing something about their past they may not have known or remembered. He other times twists these tales into ways he might make them believe he is important and worth releasing from his condition. A lost relative or friend trying to pry his way into their past and make them work to free him. Many are the fools



looking for foul artifacts or fighting foul lords or creatures trying to free the dear Storykeeper in the guise of a friend.

In the end though these betrayed few die in their efforts, or are killed by the very friend they hoped to aid when they cannot free him with their methods.

They then join the many who wail at him each night begging for his story as to why they had to die.

### **Combat**

The Storykeeper if he must fight relies upon his curse and cage attempting to pull as many souls as he can into his cage and finish them with his dagger. He never initiates combat except to get his vengeance against those who mock or betray him. He is vicious in battle stabbing with abandon and never leaves victims breathing if he can. Still if one flees from him there is nothing he can do to follow.

**Turning Immunity (Ex):** The Storykeeper may not be turned, rebuked, destroyed or commanded by clerics or paladins that do not worship Lanil.

**Captive Audience (Su):** Anyone touched by the Storykeeper may if he wishes be made to make a Will save DC 18 or find themselves transported inside the cage.

**Skeleton Swarm (Su):** From the nearby woods on both sides of the road the Storykeeper may summon at will the bones of his victims as 6 Hit Die Skeletons from the monstrous manual with regeneration 1. These skeletons may be turned, rebuked, destroyed or controlled as normal but they are only affected for one round. Destroyed skeletons rise as soon as they regenerate 1 hp. If they are utterly destroyed such as by disintegration that skeleton may not be restored for 24 hours. A corpse slain by these skeletons counts as a victim of his but

the flesh must rot from it first and it will not rise until then.

**Foreknowledge (Su):** The Storykeeper is automatically aware of the events of the past of anyone that enters his domain but not all the details or facts that would tell him exactly what it is about. For example he may describe a characters bravest battle but could not tell them the name of the faithful squire who died next to them fighting the vampire lord. The facts most crucial to the story are there but it is incomplete. This makes him hunger to be told the story so that he might find some common link for he imagines each story to perhaps have some clue as to his homelands fate or some inkling of his past. He would give almost anything if he could remember his own name for but a moment but even if he were to learn such he would forget it soon enough. Those whose stories displease him by getting his hopes up often find themselves lured whether by lies or charmed by his stories magic (as the dark powers have given him such a power as a use of his bardic music) into coming near him at which he traps them inside with him and slaughters them screaming of mocking his unfair fate. He however remembers every story he has gained by this ability and keeps these stories however just as his title implies and thus he has great if incomplete knowledge on much of the past of Ravenloft.

**Fire and Cold Immunity (Ex):** The Storykeeper takes no damage from effects that deal cold or fire damage. He cannot feel extremes of heat or cold either though he does enjoy the presence of a fire. If the players light a campfire within his range he receives a +5 bonus to all bardic knowledge, Perform (storytelling) and Knowledge History Checks but also a +5% penalty to not be subject to his Slightly Mad effect as the fire distracts him.

**Spell Resistance (Ex):** The Storykeeper while in his cage has spell resistance equal to 12 + his level thus a spell resistance of 22.

**Regeneration (Ex):** The Storykeeper regenerates 1 hp per level per hour. If the Story keeper is reduced to 0 hp he is not slain though he appears so until he has recovered to full hp at which time he appears to revive once more. He is still subject to subdual damage but heals it at twice the normal rate of speed thus 1 hp per level per half hour. The moment he is reduced to 0 hp the door to his crows cage creaks open, so any trapped inside by his powers may exit. If the door is shut again it locks fast and will not open again until the Storykeeper first is restored and then reduced to 0 hp once more. As long as he remains within the cage this regeneration applies but if ever freed and slain or taken out while slain the Storykeeper remains dead until placed back within.

**Living Death (Su):** The Storykeeper while undead is also by the barest measure still alive. He may be healed, must eat, drink, sleep and while it is so shallow you might not notice he does breathe. He however does not have a con score due to his partially undead state but is still subject to critical hits, subdual damage and death from massive damage though these things do not kill him. He is otherwise still immune to mind affecting spells and effects, poison, paralysis, stunning, ability damage and disease.

**Slightly Mad (Ex):** The Storykeeper has from what he speaks of suffered immensely and continues to suffer under the curse of Darklordship, his immortality and undeath. While the signs are less apparent while he is calm any time he is drawn into conflict or becomes excited emotionally there is a 5% chance that instead of acting in his best interests he instead takes an illogical course of action. He may begin to rant and rave about injustice ignoring attacks, slam his head into the bars of his cage, begin to mock any present, or simply recite poetry. These actions often in someway act out the insecurities of someone present though The Storykeeper does not have control over what his madness brings.

**Bard spells known:** (3/4/2; DC 14 + spell level): 0th - detect magic, dirge, ghost sound, open/close, prestidigitation, read magic; 1st - alarm, cure light wounds, hypnotism, mage armor; 2nd - bull's strength, invisibility, tongues.

### *Closing the Borders*

The Storykeeper may not close the borders of his domain by any known means but if he must try to keep someone within his pocket domain he may summon his former victims skeletons and use them.

**The Caress** +2 Knowledge (History)

**The Enticement** +4 Perform (Storytelling)

**The Invitation** +6 Knowledge (History)

**The Embrace** +8 Perform (Storytelling)

**The Creature** +10 Knowledge (History)

**The Darklord** Conversion to unique undead, domain, Darklord powers

+1 OR Eerie stillness

+2 OR Whispers when thinking tself.

+4 OR Haunted by victims' ghosts.

+6 OR Horrified Rage & Delusions of innocence

+8 OR Torturous existence



# *Paths through Shadow*

## *Pathfinder Rules for Ravenloft*

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### *Traits*

The pathfinder rules allow each character to take a single trait that functions like a "mini-feat" but also helps to develop the background and unique history of each character. Below are some suggested traits for Ravenloft characters.

### *Noble Traits*

#### *Bastard*

(limited to human, half-elf or half-vistani characters)

One of your parents was a member of one of the great families of Mordent. Yet you have no substantive proof of your nobility, and you've learned that claiming nobility without evidence makes you as good as a liar. While you might own a piece of jewelry, a scrap of once-rich fabric, or an aged confession of love, none of this directly supports your claim. Thus, you've lived your life in the shadow of the gentry, knowing that you deserve the comforts and esteem of the elite, even though the contempt of fate brings you nothing but their scorn. Whether a recent attempt to prove your heritage has brought down the wrath of an aristocratic family's henchmen or you merely seek to prove the worth of the blood in your veins, you've sought out adventure, hoping to make a

name all your own. You take a -1 penalty on all Charisma-based skill checks made when dealing with members of gentry but gain a +1 trait bonus on Will saves as a result of your stubbornness and individuality. (The penalty aspect of this trait is removed if you ever manage to establish yourself as a true noble). Years of hearing people's taunts and jibes at your heritage have also made you taunts and distractions. You also gain a +2 bonus to concentration checks.

#### *Mordentish Gentry*

You claim a tangential but legitimate connection to one of Mordent's aristocratic families. If you aren't human, you were likely adopted by one of these clans or were instead a favored servant or even a childhood friend of a noble scion. Whatever the cause, you've had a comfortable life, but one far from the dignity and decadence your distant cousins know. Although you are associated with an esteemed name, your immediate family is hardly well to do, and you've found your name to be more of a burden to you than a boon in many social situations. You've recently decided to test yourself, to see if you can face the world without the aegis of a name you have little real claim or care for. An expedition seems like just the test to see if you really are worth the title "noble." Choose one of the following noble families

and associated benefit its. Your primary language is High Mordentish.

**Audaire:** The Audaire family are extremely proud of their lineage its place in history. You gain a +1 bonus to Knowledge (history) or Knowledge (nobility) and both are class skills for you.

**Bennett:** The Bennett family renowned for their willfulness, but often misunderstand the subtleties of local politics. You gain a +1 bonus to Will saves and a +1 bonus to fear saves, but suffer a -1 penalty to sense motive rolls.

**Bingley:** The Bingley's are sought after guests for all social events as they are very charming; whether this charm is honest or not depends on the family member. They are also renowned pursuers of outdoor sports. You gain a +1 trait bonus in either diplomacy or bluff, and a +1 bonus in ride and handle animal, and all three are always class skills. However, the Bingley's are also not known to be the brightest family - in fact they can be "complete duffers". You suffer a -1 penalty to all knowledge skills and knowledges can never be class skills, except for knowledge (nobility).

**Blackthorn:** Your family has long a deep respect for the wilderness and is superstitious about the creatures that dwell therein. You gain a +2 trait bonus on all Diplomacy checks made to deal with fey creatures and a +1 trait bonus on Will saves made against their spells and supernatural abilities.

**Campbell:** The Campbell family are notorious for their avarice and obsession with society gossip. Appraise and Knowledge (nobility) are always class skills for you, and you gain a +2 bonus with Diplomacy when being used to find out rumors.

**Dancy:** The aloof and stand-offish are extremely proud of their lineage and

standing, considering themselves to be superior to even many of the noble clans of Mordent. You gain a +1 bonus to Intimidate and Knowledge (nobility). The latter is always a class skill for you.

**Dashwood:** The Dashwood family have a reputation for exploration to far off and distant climes. Knowledge (geography) is always a class skill, and you start play with an exotic weapon and for you this is treated as a martial weapon.

**De Courcy:** The De Courcy family owe their wealth and status through their covert activities. They are secretly spies in the employ of Azalin Rex, and keep him apprised of the political intricacies of Mordent and Dementlieu. Bluff is always a class skill for you, and moreover you gain a +1 bonus. Also you gain a +1 to gather information through Diplomacy checks.

**De Winter:** The pale complexioned, steely eyed De Winter family keep themselves to themselves, but it is widely rumored that their progenitor was a Dhampire. You are able to see 50% further than normal in low light conditions and have a +1 to perception checks.

**Foxgrove:** The Foxgrove family are famous metaphysical scholars. You gain a +1 trait bonus on Knowledge (arcana) and Knowledge (religion) checks and one is a class skill. Furthermore, you gain a +2 bonus to search checks when conducting research in a library.

**Hemlock:** Your family has made a living off the coasts of the Sea of Sorrows for as long as anyone can remember. You gain a +2 trait bonus on Swim checks, and Swim is always treated as a class skill for you. You can also hold your breath three times as long as normal (6 rnds per point of constitution, with a +3 bonus to constitution checks thereafter). However, the genetic profile of your family tends to large mouths, widely spaced eyes



and pale clammy skin. You possess an Outcast rating of 1.

**Knightly:** The knightly family are considered somewhat eccentric and the nouveau riche upstarts amongst the noble clans of Mordent (you suffer a -1 penalty on Charisma-based checks with nobles). However the Knightlys are grudgingly respected as they insist that all family members are taught to fence from an early age, even girls. They you begin play with a masterwork rapier and you are proficient in its use.

**Lowestoft:** The Lowestoft family have dabbled in occult secrets for decades, and have an unhealthy, cult-like, fascination for the disturbing creatures of the far realms. Knowledge (dungeoneering) is class skill and you gain +1 bonus when using this skill to determine details about aberrations. Thanks to an extensive occult library in the Lowestoft mansion, Knowledge (planes) also a class skill.

**Roquet:** Your family has a famous reputation for their equestrian skills. You start play with a light warhorse. You furthermore gain a +1 bonus to ride checks.

**Summerville:** The Summerville clan were infamous for their prickly temper and a penchant for duels. One of your family members died in a duel, or you have killed or maimed a member of the gentry in a duel. As a result there you have a long standing feud with another noble family (pick one) with whom you suffer a -5 penalty for Charisma-based bonuses. You start play with a masterwork pistol.

**Weathermay:** Although from a distant branch of the Weathermay family, a childhood of visits to the gloomy, ghost filled mansions of your relatives, has given you a matter of fact approach to the life beyond the veil. You gain a +4 morale bonus to fear checks when induced by ghosts or other incorporeal undead.

**Westcote:** Your family have a long history of breeding fine hounds. You start play with a pet mastiff. Handle animal is a class skill for you and you gain a +2 bonus to this skill with domestic dogs.

**Woodhouse:** The Woodhouse family are known to be quite charming, and attract the loyalty of their friends. They are also infamous for the enthusiasm with which they pursue "project". However, they are also infamous for being socially somewhat clueless. You gain a +2 bonus when attracting cohorts and followers through the leadership feat. You also gain +1 to the skill of your choice, which is always a class skill for you. However you also suffer a -1 penalty to sense motive rolls and to diplomacy rolls when trying to uncover local rumours.

**Whitney:** Your family's history of trading dominions of the core pervades your blood. As a deft merchant of the core realms, you gain a bonus language: Balok, Vaasi, Low Mordentish, Daronese, Falkovnia or Lamordian.

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### *Additional noble traits:*

#### *Academic gentleman (gentlewoman)*

You may belong to a noble family (as listed above) and have the trait for that family, or you may be independently prosperous. You have a leaning towards the academic, and your finances have allowed to indulge this interest. You gain a +2 bonus to a specific knowledge, which is always a class skill for you. However, your fascination with this subject also means that you tend to be caught up in the subject and less aware of your surroundings. You take a -1 penalty to perception checks (except when these are relevant to research in your particular subject of choice).

### *Courtesan*

You are professional mistress or high class prostitute to the nobility. You gain a +2 bonus to bluff rolls, and your skill with make-up and clothing grants you a +1 bonus to disguise rolls. However you suffer a -2 penalty to diplomacy rolls versus aristocrats and members of the upper class from your own sex.

### *Destitute*

You belong to one of the noble families above and possess the trait for this particular family. However, through bad investments, gambling debts, poor estate management, drunkenness, or legal/ political machinations your branch of the family is financially destitute. You have embarked on an adventuring career to win back some of your family's lost capital. You start play with one third of the normal gold. However, your family's financial woes have left you embittered and suspicious and you gain a +2 trait bonus to sense motive rolls and sense motive is a class skill.

### *Inbred nobility*

Centuries of selective breeding have resulted in a weakened constitution and weakened mind. You suffer a -2 to Fortitude save versus disease and a -1 trait penalty to either knowledge rolls or diplomacy, bluff and sense motive. Pick one gentry trait. You gain the bonuses and penalties of this trait, however the material and trait bonuses are doubled (to a maximum of +5).

### *Inheritance*

You have inherited a small run down manor house. It has a small courtyard, a kitchen, dining room, study/library, lounge/sitting room, master bedroom suite, two guest suites, two servant's bedrooms and a basic stable block. However the building is so dilapidated it would require at least 25,000gp

to renovate and furnish the building, before it could be livable.

### *Long-lost heir*

Your family (or perhaps you alone) are the last surviving heirs of one of the lost Mordent families, all of which are believed to have vanished during mysterious circumstances. The gentry of mordent may not recognize your claim, but nonetheless you still retain the skills and abilities of your blood line.

**De Bostribues:** This family vanished, believed to have been decimated by lycanthropes. You gain a +1 attack and damage trait bonus versus werewolves.

**Blackthorn-Bruce:** This family was famous for their inventions and scientific knowledge. Knowledge (engineering) and Craft (alchemy) are always class skills for you and you gain a +1 trait bonus to alchemy.

**Gauldemon:** This family met an untimely end at the hands, or rather talons, of a summoned demon from the outer planes. You are proficient in the language Abyssal (level 3) and Knowledge (planes) is always a class skill for you class skill. Many from this family take the Diabolist prestige class.

**Godefroy:** The Godefroy family have been associated with the House of Gryphon Hill for centuries. They, however, lost their lands after the Lord Wildfroy's scandal. You gain See Ethereal Resonance feat, however this view into the bleak and depressing nature of the land has had an impact on your sanity. Your wisdom is considered to be 4 lower than it really (for a minimum of 3) is for the purpose of maximum sanity and triggering temporary or indefinite insanity.

**Halloway:** The Halloways were masters of Steadfast and the Arden river, but were spirited away by a Mist ferryman. The chances that you are led astray on a Mistway



are halves, and you only have a 1% chance of being mist-led on a mistway of excellent reliability.

**Holsworth:** This family used to reside in a mansion overlooking the Sea of Sorrow. However, family members were compelled by a curse to seek an island far out to sea. You gain a +2 trait bonus to Profession(sailor) and this is a class skill for you. You also gain a +2 bonus to survival checks when trying to navigate at sea. This increased to +4 when fog bound.

**Mournesworth:** This family was famous protectors against the undead and their mastery of divine powers. You gain a +1 bonus per dice when determining channeling damage.

**Scottmatter:** The Scottmatter family vanished mysteriously, drawn to a midnight convocation by the mysterious Lord Sithington. The Scottmatter family were skilled artisans and would often apprentice with a craftsman in their youth. Craft is a class skill for you and you gain a +2 bonus in this trait.

## *Vistani-Blood Traits*

A grandparent was vistani, and their blood still flows in your veins. You suffer a -1 penalty to Will saves during the nights of the full moon. However you gain a +1 bonus to survival and a plus one to the following skills (dependent upon bloodline), and the skill in question is always a class skill:

**Canjar:** +1 Spellcraft

**Corvara:** +1 Open lock

**Equaar:** +1 Ride

**Kamii:** +1 Craft checks with metal

**Naiat:** +1 on all Perform rolls

**Vatraska:** +1 to Heal

**Zarovan:** +1 to Initiative

## *Other Traits*

### *Annoying*

Something about you is extremely irritating, either a lack of social skills or perhaps a very shrill sounding voice. The difficulty of all those within 20' of you while you are talking, and who can hear you, suffer a -2 penalty to concentration checks. This penalty is dependent upon sharing a common language.

### *Betrayed*

Someone once betrayed you, and you will never forget. Sense motive is always a class skill for you, and you gain a +1 bonus with this skill.

### *Cad*

You have a way with one specific sex, wooing them, using them, but then abusing them. You leave a trail of broken hearts and ruined reputations in your path. You gain a +1 trait bonus to bluff, diplomacy and sense motive with a sex of your choice, but you suffer a -1 penalty to diplomacy with the sex you do not have bonuses with - as they look down on you and despise you.

### *Caliban-Blood*

Through genetic inheritance, or supernatural taint, you have something of the caliban about you. You gain a +1 bonus to damage rolls, but you acquire an OR of 1.

### *Canjar talisman*

You possess a canjar talisman when you start play. However, you acquired this in dubious circumstances and this is known to the local vistani. You suffer a -2 penalty with charisma based rolls against the vistani.

### *Child of the Mists*

You have unusual grey eyes. Locals refer to such people as "children of the mists". You

gain a +5 bonus to survival checks to predict the weather. You may roll twice when trying to overcome concealment because of mist and fog. You however gain an OR of 1 due to the superstitions associated with people with your eye color.

### *Creepy*

There is something unnerving about you. You have a -1 penalty to diplomacy rolls, but you gain +2 bonus to intimidate rolls and intimidate is always a class skill for you.

### *Cursed*

A vistani maiden cursed either you or your family for some slight, real or imagined. You have a -2 penalty to one trait, or a -4 penalty to a trait during certain (but commonly occurring ) circumstances (e.g -4 verses children). However suffering this curse has lead to greater willpower and resilience (+1 to Will and Fort saves). The curse cannot be broken with remove curse, but break enchantment will remove it. The curse can also be removed if certain difficult, but not impossible, conditions occur (e.g. a blue eyed gypsy agrees to marry you of her own free will).

### *Cursed heirloom*

You inherited a magical wondrous item, piece or armor or weapon worth no more than 2000gp. However, the item is cursed and you suffer a -1 penalty to either attack, armour class or saves, or a -4 penalty to one skill. The curse can be removed with a remove curse but if this occurs you suffer a -1 penalty to Fort saves for one month as the removal of the curse drains your health. A break enchantment will remove the curse without the penalty.

### *Dark Secret*

You have a dark secret in your past, or present, which you must hide. Perhaps the

secret is shameful, perhaps you committed an appalling act. Wherever the secret, you have had years of practice trying to keep the secret secure. You have a +2 trait bonus to bluff rolls.

### *Deathly dull*

You go on an on and on about the dullest, most boring things. You suffer a -1 penalty to diplomacy checks, but your focus on the inane gives you a +1 bonus to both will and concentration checks.

### *Dread Elemental Bloodline*

One of your ancestors was touched by the dread elements. Select an element (mist, grave, pyre, or blood). You gain a +1 trait bonus on saving throws against attacks that utilize that element (cold for mist, acid for grave, fire for pyre, and electricity for blood), and gain a +1 trait bonus on Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, and Sense Motive checks made against creatures of that subtype.

### *Drunk*

You have a prestigious capacity for drinking, and you gain a +3 bonus on fortitude saves with poisons. You drink whenever opportunity presents itself. However, you become very unpleasant when sober and suffer a -2 penalty to diplomacy rolls in this state.

### *Easily Surprised*

You are always jumping and flinching. You are flat footed for one extra round after the surprise round. However, your heightened startle response gives you a +2 bonus on reflex saves.

### *Everyone Hates Me*

You are socially awkward and do not make friends easily. You suffer a -1 penalty to diplomacy checks. However, you cannot



believe that anyone would want to be friends with you. You gain a +3 bonus on saves against charms and compulsions.

### *Ex-slave*

You spent a significant portion of your childhood as a slave in Falkovnia, but escaped several years ago. You have the Falkovnian eagle brand on your forehead and scars from the lash on your back. You take a -3 penalty to disguise rolls because of the brand. However, you gain a +1 trait bonus on Fortitude saves and escape artist checks, and you possess Falkovnian as a bonus language.

### *Healthy*

You gain a +2 bonus to fortitude saves against disease.

### *Horrific episode*

You were exposed to something truly horrific in your past. Perhaps you saw your parents, or siblings murdered in a gruesome fashion. Perhaps you had an encounter with a horrific creature as a child. However, over the years you have come to terms with your experience, or you have deadened your mind to the memory. You gain +2 to horror checks.

### *Hot-tempered*

You are quick to anger and spring into physical action. You gain a +3 bonus to initiative rolls, but take a -1 penalty to Will saves.

### *Hunter*

You've long heard rumors of monsters in the night, of evil conspiracies and dark deeds. But they were just rumours until you saw evidence at first hand. Perhaps you encountered a creature, or mayhaps a family member, loved one or close friend was killed by one. Maybe, even one of your family or friends turned out to be one of these vile and

unnatural beasts. Whatever the circumstances, you are now determined to seek them out and destroy them. Choose one of the following skills: Bluff, Diplomacy, Knowledge (local), Perception, Sense Motive, Survival or Stealth. You gain a +1 trait bonus on this skill and it is always considered a class skill for you.

### *Illicit affair*

You are having an affair with someone who you should not. Perhaps the person is married, in any event the affair represents a betrayal. Roll a dark powers check for a minor betrayal, and you gain a +1 trait bonus to bluff and stealth, with bluff always being a class skill for you. If you choose to roll a dark powers check for a major betrayal instead, the affair is more morally problematic - perhaps you are married with a family, or the affair is with the partner of a sibling or your best friend - your trait bonus to bluff increases to +2.

### *Inquisitive*

Your curious nature gives you a +1 bonus to perception and sense motive.

### *Insomniac*

You cannot sleep properly. Although over the years you have adapted to function with less sleep than normal, you find it hard to drop off. You don't take penalties for not resting normally (although if your night is disturbed by an encounter, this can result in fatigue or inability to cast regain spells as normal). However, magical sleep spells have little effect. You gain a +4 to save against sleep spells and even if you fail, you may resave every round. You even get a save against sleep-type spells that don't normally have a saving throw (albeit without the +4 bonus).

### *Let's be friends*

Perhaps you had a lonely childhood, or were traumatized at school. No matter the reason, you now have an over whelming urge to make people your friends. You gain a +2 bonus to diplomacy when trying to win people over, and diplomacy is always a class skill.. However, this willingness to please has left you vulnerable and you suffer a -4 penalty to charm and compulsion spells.

### *Liberator*

Your parents allowed escaping Falkovnian slaves to hide in your home frequently, and the stories you've heard from these escaping slaves instilled into you a deep loathing of slavery. You gain a +1 trait bonus on any skill check or attack roll made during the process of escaping capture or in helping a slave escape bondage, and Escape Artist is always a class skill for you.\*

### *Manic-depressive*

At the beginning of each day you have a 50% chance of being in your manic phase and gain a +3 bonus to initiative for that day. However you also have a 50% chance of being in the depressive phase and sluggish to react and take a -1 penalty to initiative and -1 penalty to charisma-based rolls.

### *Masochist*

You enjoy being injured and feeling pain. As a result to can take more punishment than normal. You have one additional hit point hp and penalties resulting from pain are reduced by 2.

### *Mental retreat*

Events you were exposed to in your past resulted in you retreating into your mind, to block out the pain or horror. Your mind has blocked out traumatic memories allowing you to function. Years of using this self-

preservation tactic allows you a +2 bonus on Concentration checks.

### *Oaf*

You are large and clumsy and suffer a -2 penalty to stealth rolls. However your thanks to your robust nature you gain a +1 bonus to fortitude rolls and an extra hit point.

### *Oblivious academic*

You gain a +2 bonus to one knowledge skill all knowledge skills are class skills for you.. However you are so wrapped up in your research that you are oblivious to the outside world. You suffer a -1 penalty to perception checks.

### *Petty academic (wizard or cleric only)*

You are renowned scholar and innovator in the magic arts, but you also have a reputation for being competitive, petty, mean-spirited or unethical . You have a +3 bonus to knowledge(arcane) or knowledge(religion) if a wizard, or cleric, respectively, but you suffer a -1 penalty to diplomacy rolls with members of your class and diplomacy is never a class skill for you.

### *Racist*

You gain a +1 attack and damage bonus with a character race of your choice (except calibans). However you suffer a -2 penalty on charisma rolls with this race, and an additional -1 penalty, to a total of -3 for diplomacy rolls with this race.

### *Rapier wit*

You always have a witty comment and a bon mot to hand. You have you gain a +1 bonus with Perform (comedy) and this type of performance (but not others) is always a class skill for you.



### *Redhead*

You have flaming red hair. Locals believe that You gain a 0th level bard or sorcerer cantrip that you can cast a number of times a day equal to your charisma bonus (a minimum of once a day). You however gain an OR of 1 due to the superstitions associated with people with your hair colour. This spell-like ability is cast at your highest caster level gained; if you have no caster level, it functions at CL 1st. The spell-like ability's save DC is Charisma-based.

### *Sadist*

You enjoy inflicting pain. If you are not careful however, this may lead to the dark powers taking notice. You gain a +1 on damage rolls when you are alone with your opponent, or if you know that you are obscured/concealed from view.

### *Isn't that... squirrel*

You are very easily distracted. Gain a +2 bonus to perception rolls, but you suffer a -2 penalty to concentration checks and concentration can never be a class skill for you.

### *Sleeper, heavy*

You can sleep anywhere. Normally the penalty to perception rolls while asleep is -10, but for you it is -15. However, you sleep so soundly that you can sleep even while wearing armor without becoming fatigued.

### *Sleeper, light*

The slightest sound wakes you. Normally the penalty to perception rolls while asleep is -10, but for you it is -5. You also are not flat-footed on the round that you awaken. However each morning when you wake, roll a d6. On a roll of one you awaken fatigued due to lack of sleep.

### *Shut*

Thanks to your salacious nature you gain a +2 bonus with Bluff and Diplomacy with the sex of your choice. However, but thanks to your too easy nature you suffer a -2 penalty to saves against charms and compulsions.

### *Submissive*

You are used to being brow-beaten and belittled, either through accident, or design. You gain a +4 bonus against attempts to demoralize through the intimidate skill.

### *Suicidal thoughts*

You keep thinking about ways to die, but you are sacred of taking that final step. However you have thought in great detail about the most effective way to kill yourself. As a result you can deliver a coup de gras as a move action. However you suffer a -2 penalty to resist being compelled to take an action that might result in your death.

### *Stalker*

You are in love from afar. Your ability to interact with normal people is poor, so you secretly stalk and watch the object of your affections. You suffer a -1 penalty to diplomacy, but gain a +2 bonus to stealth, which is a class skill for you.

### *Tortured past*

You were beaten and tortured as a child, and as a result you are cautious and jumpy. You gain a +1 bonus on Reflex saves.

### *Through the woods to grandma's house*

You were raised on the moors, or on the edges of the forests where fierce and horrific predators well. Every day you would take you life into your hands just walking to the local village. As a result of your upbringing you are an expert in evading predators. You

gain a +1 trait bonus on Stealth checks and stealth is always a class skill for you.

### *Unimaginative*

You simply do not have much in the way of imagination or creativity. You suffer a -2 penalty to performance checks, but you gain a +1 bonus to fear and horror checks and +2 to saves against illusions.

### *Werewolf hunter*

You grew up on the borders of Verbrek where werewolves were a fact of life. You killed your first werewolf at a young age when a pack attacked your village, home, or caravan, and your hatred of them has only grown since then. Something

in your past fueled your hatred of werewolves even further- perhaps your family was slaughtered by them? You gain a +1 trait bonus on attack rolls and weapon damage rolls made against werewolves. If you are a barbarian and you're fighting werewolves, your rage lasts 1 round longer than normal. If you're a ranger and you select shapeshifters as a favored enemy, your trait bonus on attack rolls and weapon damage rolls against werewolves increases to +2. If you're a spellcaster, you gain a +1 trait bonus to spell save DCs for damaging spells against werewolves.

### *What's that mean?*

You are immersed in your work and you are oblivious to cultural references and current social interplay. You suffer a -1 penalty to knowledge (local) and it can never be a class skill for you and you suffer a -1 penalty when trying to gain information about local rumors. However, this focus means that you gain a +2 trait bonus to a knowledge, craft or profession of your choice.

### *Why grandma, what big teeth you have?*

You gain a +3 trait bonus to perception rolls to see through disguises.

## *Alternative Necromancers*

As a wizard, necromancers gain a free feat at first level. However, in lieu of this feat, a necromancer may choose the following alternative abilities. These alternative abilities are inspired by the kits that appear in the 2 edition "Complete Book of Necromancers". Each alternative ability has a hindrance that must also be adhered to by the necromancers in question.

### *The Chirgeon*

(a necromancer who uses their arts to heal)

A chirgeon gains a +2 bonus to Heal checks. A chirgeon can also take 10 on a roll to treat deadly wounds. Moreover when treating deadly wounds they can add their intelligence modifier in addition to their wisdom modifier.

**Hindrance:** To keep their skills current they must conduct a dissection on a human or demi-human cadaver once a month. In most communities dissection and meddling with corpses is forbidden, and thus anatomists frequently turn, directly or indirectly, to grave robbing.

### *The Coroner*

(a necromancer who uses their arts to investigate deaths)

The coroner has an ability to perform autopsies to determine cause of death. The character performs a heal check [DC 15 for routine cause of death (e.g. heart attack, stroke, filth fever, common poison), DC 20 for a more unusual cause of death (e.g. blood drain, mummy rot, energy drain) and DC 25 for a rare and unusual cause of death (death



by banshee wail, finger of death spell, very rare poison) and DC 30 for a death where steps have been taken to disguise or hide the cause].

**Hindrance:** Like the churgeon, to keep their skills current they must conduct a dissection on a human or demi-human cadaver once a month. In most communities dissection and meddling with corpses is forbidden, and thus anatomists frequently turn, directly or indirectly, to grave robbing.

### *The Slayer*

(a necromancer who uses their arts to combat undead)

The slayer chooses one specific type of intelligent undead (e.g. vampire, mummy) and gains the following abilities:

(1) A +2 bonus to melee, touch and ray attacks against the specific type of undead.

(2) A +2 Will bonus against mind affecting spells or abilities used by the specific type of undead.

**Hindrance:** Deathslayers are very focused on destroying undead and so during combat will preferentially attack any undead present, even if there are non-undead foes which pose more of a risk to the party. Their focused and blunt natures also result in them suffering a -1 penalty to diplomacy checks.

### *The Undead Master*

(a necromancer who uses their arts to create and control undead)

(1) The undead master can use Intimidate against any intelligent undead (albeit with a -4 penalty).

(2) The undead master gains the ability to use enchantment spells on intelligent undead (The undead gain, however, bonus to will saves equal to their channeling bonus).

**Hindrance:** Because of their focus, undead masters have difficulty dealing with and

understanding the living and suffer a -1 penalty on diplomacy and sense motive rolls against living targets.

### *The Mortician*

(uses their powers to change the appearance and preserve dead corpses)

(1) Mortician gains a +4 bonus to make dead, and undead, bodies appear as if they were alive.

(2) Through their use of embalming fluids and preservatives, they can preserve the state of corpses. Corpses they animate have one extra hit point per HD, for every four levels of necromancer the animating character possesses.

**Hindrance:** In addition to Disguise, a mortician is also required to put at least one rank into Craft (alchemy), in order to handle and prepare the various embalming fluids required in their profession. Moreover, morticians typically carry with them a distinct aroma of embalming chemicals and decay. As such, they suffer a -2 penalty to disguise checks upon themselves, and if tracked by a creature with the scent ability, the tracking creature gains a +4 bonus to their survival rolls.





# *Robert Sweeney's adventure archives*

## *Adventure Hooks for Ravenloft Adventures*

*By Robert Sweeney*

Older Ravenloft fans will remember Robert Sweeney's name. He was very active on the late Alanik Ray web site. Mr Sweeney did opened his archives for us, providing his adventure ideas.

These seven story hooks are unfinished, unpolished gems, but they have many story twists a DM could use!

### *All in the family*

#### *Courtship:*

Cameal Draco, wooed by Johnathan Knight, reeled at the startling revelation made by her would-be husband. "I'm a vampire, dear, Cameal, cursed by the dark gift, I am unworthy of your, my dearest one," he admitted through tears of blood running down his pale skin. Cameal's love for Johnathan, however, won over her fear over his curse. She took him in her arms as a lover would. As one newly 'turned' to the darkness, his loins could yet bear both the act, and a child.

Lying in bed with each other, they whisper their plans to live together for many years. Johnathan, enthralled with bliss and hope he had dared not consider could be his, tarried with his new lover, gentle Cameal, for too long that night. Seeing the sun already rising, he knows he cannot make it back to his crypt before the sun's scorching rays immolate

him. Cameal, loving and generous soul that she is, asks her dearest Johnathan to sleep in her bed until the sun sets.

One more thing, her dearest Johnathan asks of his lover. "Cameal, I need a handful of soil from my grave or else I cannot rest and will be haunted by feverish delusions until the sun sets again." Fearing any pain come to her lover, brave Johnathan, Cameal leaves to gather the sacred soil.

#### *Othilia, inheritance from separation*

Heading off, Cameal gathers the soil from the grave, noticing his store of treasures but leaving them be. For she loves he so much that greed would not enter her mind. As she returns however, the house has erupted in flames, "Johnathan!", she cries out, but no voice answers sweet Cameal.

Tragic, horrified, she wails and cries long hours into the night. The lover's family learns he was burned to death in the fire and comes to finally find their son, and learn some answers as to why he ran off so suddenly from them. Othilia Night, Johnathan's dear saintly mother, takes the gentle Cameal in as their own daughter and gives her a small dowry to help her raise the child.

Cameal gladly accepts Othilia's aid and comfort. While the rest of the family returns from whence they came, Othilia remains to

nurture and support her sweet daughter-in-law, Cameal and help her raise her grandson. Heartened by Othilia's support, Cameal bears a son, whom she names Johnathan Night Jr., after his departed father. Little Johnathan shares the dark, curly air, and powerful jet black eyes of his sire. Strong, healthy, and hale the omens say he will rise to greatness.

Using the riches from her lover's grave, Cameal builds a suitable crypt for him and rebuilds her family home. A solitary item, a medallion of ESP aids her in business dealings enough to build a small fortune upon the fortune she inherited from the grave of her lover, Johnathan Sr.

### *An apparent heir*

Johnathan Night Jr grows into a strong man under the love and support of his mother, Cameal, and his grandmother, Othilia. Cameal confides in her young ebon-eyed son, Johnathan, about the medallion but they keep it a secret from the saintly, Othilia. Johnathan Jr. uses the enchanted medallion to build the family business, a vineyard. He marries a woman, named Dawn, but commonly called Dame Night after marriage. Dawn bears him two healthy sons, sandy haired lads with keen eyes. During this time, a restless ghost begins haunting the house, a pair of ghosts it seems.

"Great Grandma Othilia", a religious woman, begins adorning the house with religious symbols and leaving small decanters of blessed water in each bedroom, hoping to hold at bay any evil spirits haunting the house. One night, while making her rounds, she trips on a lump in the rug. Her venerable form tumbles down the stairs, breaking every bone in her body. Saddened, the house buries her solemnly. "Grandma Cameal" lays the last white rose upon the coffin lid, tearfully saying goodbye to the "most wonderful and blessed woman I have ever known, more loved by me than my own

mother and more loving towards me than any I've ever known."

A tragic accident on the eve of the birth of this third male heir brings tragedy to the house and madness to his wife, Dawn. Jonathan the Second dies a violent death at the hands of highwaymen. Johnathan is found gutted after failing to return home from yet another long business trip. "Grandma Cameal" dies in her sleep of a broken heart, but Dawn takes the news, perhaps, harder still. Refusing to believe Johnathan the Second, her dear husband, has died, she insists that he comes to her at night and joins her in their bed. She begets a child, dark of eyes and mood, but strong of mind and will, whom she names Johnathan Night the Third. Slowly, however, she sickens and dies. As Dawn passes into the twilight, a new chapter unfolds.

### *Strangeness in the night*

Before Dawn's death, however, the family had occasion to learn some startling truths. While investigating tales of 'visitations' by the deceased father, one of the older boys, Jake, stood guard outside the chamber by night. No one entered.

As his mother, Dawn's, condition degraded, he began waiting by the bed at night, but Dawn, fearing her loving husband would not come, always sent him away. Growing nervous, he stole in the bedroom early and hid before Dawn retired to bed. Someone climb in the window and Jake moves to attack.

His quick and short scream wakes the house, a pool of blood on the floor where Jake last stood and his severed hand still clutching the short knife he intended to drive home into some intruder's heart. The body, never found, the family reports their eldest son killed and abducted by a thief.



### *Dusk for dawn*

The mother, Dawn, finally dies, emotionally crushed, after learning of the death of Jake, her eldest son. The only remains of the son, Jake, are buried along side the mother. Bagpipes wail as the sun's light gleams over the horizon, mother and son have been buried at dawn.

Jerimiah, the second oldest boy, then notices the disturbed earth over their father's grave. Unearthing the tomb, they open the casket, while the corpse seems unnaturally intact, and the hair and nail grown long in the grave, it evidences no reaction to the light of the sun. The family claims (falsely) that someone has stolen a ring from their departed father's hand, an investigation begins.

*[Aside, the trick being that, if dormant, the vampire's are not harmed by sunlight. In olden days, villagers would dig up corpses and stake them through the heart. What idiot would have chosen night time to do this? A vampire, if present, would be awake and roaming. Thus, they dug them up by day, and, of course, the corpses wouldn't just burst into flames. If they did, then no one would have had to stake them, right? These vampires go dormant by day and are burnt by the sun only if they have been unable to find their way back to the earth of their graves. This happened with Johnathan Senior, who was exposed to the light of day while not in his grave, thus erupting in flames.]*

The family, meanwhile, takes the corpses of Johnathan Jr and Dawn and buries them in a private vault, expanding it to hold more than just their deceased grandfather, Johnathan the First, who died in a terrible fire so many years ago. They lay Cameal next to Johnathan and declare the crypt the 'well of sorrow', a place to bury the tragically departed with the ones they loved most dearly.

Securely closing the vault, some household members claim to hear a pounding coming from within the vault intermittently over the course of several days, but the vault remains very thick and the sounds both muffled and indistinct.

### *And so on down the line, the curse waits*

One man in every generation is born a dhampyre, conceived shortly before (or after) their father died (the previous dhampyre). Upon their death, they rise again from their grave and return to their wives, to beget a new son. A son who's vampire lineage makes him stronger, fiercer, and more successful than any of the others. The mother continues to sicken, eventually dying. Mother and Father are then laid together in the crypt known as the "well of sorrows", for it is said that they have suffered the family curse. As the family tells the tale, their love that was so strong, they could not live, or die, apart.

Meanwhile, the youngest son (usually named Johnathan) grows strong. His greater strength and charisma quickly allow him to succeed. His ruthlessness enables him to arrange to succeed the headship of the household, or to rule as a puppet master in the background.

Some sons tempt their elders into gambling and financial ruin, until, impoverished, they sell their birthright to the younger son who still has money to spare. Some arrange for accidents, others take measures to ensure their brothers get no heir. One way or another the dhampire of each generation ensures the their line continues at the expense of the others. Eventually dying while still in the height of their youth, they return as a vampire to complete the cycle.

After several such cycles, the pattern become entrenched, a ritual, and an unspoken family curse. Indeed, slowly, the crimes of each dhampire spawn brings a

cumulative curse down upon his head by the wronged brothers past, the cycle becomes it's own curse, the curse feeds the cycle, the cycle feeds the curse.

The family itself remains financially sound, yet one of each generation is cursed to bear the 'stigma'. Every family member knows the dark haired and dark eyed child will rise to a position of power, and woe to those who stand in his way. They also know, however, that the child will die in the prime of his youth, and those who bide their time will reap financial rewards as the survivors.

This family, then, becomes not a 'darklord' of any kind, but rather a 'cursed' family that can be set in any domain. And, lying in their crypts, a legion of undead family members past, family members doomed to starve until they were too weak to stand again. Weak, starved, but not dead. A powder keg building, waiting for an eventual release. Their hatred for being 'cheated' of their life fuels an aura of malevolent evil, an evil that becomes incarnate in each new dhampire child, an evil that slowly grows, festers, and rages to be set free.

No evil, no waking evil, worth the dread and fear of the locals, but something that marks the family, taints their blood, something that forces the villagers to treat the family with respect, with deference, with service.

### *Gobling monsters, rising up from the depths*

Then a bad thing happens. Some creature with rubbery skin and a warty hide begins ravaging the countryside, killing cows, goats, and sheep. And sometimes shepherders that get in its way. After a few months of this haphazard killing, the villagers start leaving out sacrifices for the beast, the 'eternal one'. It's hunger sated, the beast becomes manageable, if enough sacrifices are left for it, even its dim mind

begins to realize the benefits of this agreement.

But, eventually, there are two such creatures. A pair of eternal ones, one of which who knows the rules, and one who does not. The 'eternal protector' fights with the 'eternal devourer' regularly, until the 'devourer' learns to accept the sacrifices and the villagers learn to sacrifice enough for both 'gods'. Thinking the situation stable, they relax again, accepting a certain loss in return for their safety. After all, bandits fear to ride the trails at night, making life safer, if more expensive for all.

It does not remain so for long, however. Soon more 'eternal ones' start showing up. Smaller, younger, and far more voracious, nothing seems enough for these ravenous 'gobling monsters'. The town, to its later chagrin, offers the sacrifice of a virgin to appease the 'gods'. A fatal mistake. So long at the 'protector eternal one' eaten only animal flesh, that it had forgotten the taste of manflesh. And the young ones knew from their first taste that they were meant to eat human flesh, not animal.

### *Disaster, a call for help*

The town is decimated, and the rich nobles on the hillside send out the call for heroes to save the town. The word, delivered by mail, moves slowly. The word, delivered by rumor and word of mouth, crawls across the country side like wildfire. Eventually, a band of heroes hears about a reward for removing a troublesome group of 'goblins' from a town several days ride west.

So, they head west. That town says they were misinformed, but that they've heard the tales as well. The real town lies north west of here, and so the party moves that way, facing a few small encounters along the way. In that town, the rumors are flying, but more importantly a notice has been placed, written



proof that aid is need in the noble family's town.

### *Goblins? No sweat! Hey, wait a minute*

After fixing a problem of bandits raiding the land by 'posing' as goblin monsters (goblins), they head onward to the town that initially asked for their aid. On the way, they find a smaller nearby town being devoured by 'eternal ones'.

After a hard fight, they drive the monsters backwards. The surviving villagers pack up what goods they can and flee until the heroes can drive the monsters out for good. They are directed towards the original town, but that town has been completely destroyed. (Looting opportunities, however, have drawn bandits that raid the town by day, knowing the monsters will come by night.) The party must fight off these bandits (if they are to get any good looting done themselves, that is.)

They are contacted by a militia man from the noble's house. The man begs the group to protect them from the eternal ones, for the strong walls built by ages for rich men will not keep them back forever. Already, a group has begun digging away at the foundations, knowing that, in time, the walls will collapse.

When the PCs arrive at the house, they are warmly welcomed and told of great rewards should they rid the land of these eternal nightmares. So far, no one in this backwater area has tried to burn the creatures.

### *Ah, I see you need our help*

While the party discusses terms with the "Night" household (most likely coming close to extortion/blackmail), they are attacked. The party must drive back these 'eternal monsters', but they have managed to breach the wall and come in unorganized droves. Enough monsters come to force the PCs to retreat from room to room seeking a better defensive position. Servants die left and right

before their eyes, devoured by hungry monsters.

Eventually, one of the house hold men a young man with dark hair and eyes suggests that they hold in the family vault, for its walls are far too thick for the 'eternals' to dig through before morning comes and they are driven back. The party fights their way to the crypt and swings wide the doors, only to be jumped by a pack of the eternals.

The door wings shut, and the party knows it can live until dawn if they can kill the last few 'eternals'. After a hard desperate fight, they wound the 'eternals' enough to send them packing. The creatures throw themselves into the door, forcing it open and fleeing. The door closes behind them.

### *Whew! That was close*

No one can find the dark haired young man that warned them to hide in the crypt. The wonder whom he could have been and what terrible fate became of him. The other servants know of no one by the description the PCs give of the boy. Their master is older than what they describe.

The scene left behind is horrible to behold. Blood (from undying monsters and slain humans) lies over every surface. Time slowly ticks by. Eventually, a knock comes at the door, startling everyone.

### *Love cannot die*

A man speaks, "Let me in, I have a body for the crypt". The voice beyond the door urges "I have not much time, we must rest, we must rest together in the crypt, our love was too strong, too strong to die alone, "

The survivors look to one another in fear, but are to shell-shocked and stunned to speak. The PCs must decide whether to open the door or not. If they do not open the door, the noise finally stops on the others side. They will find the body of the late husband

(covered in blood) and his wife lying in the soft glow of the rising sun. (Not yet in direct sunlight).

When the door is opened (before or after the two die), they find the body of the master and mistress of the house. The mistress had been killed by violence, the master bleeding to death of dire wounds, perishes seconds after being discovered.

The servants (wailing and moaning) can eventually relate the significance of the phrase 'a love too strong to die alone' telling a tale of a family curse spanning generations, where the two people who loved the strongest and hardest were doomed to an early death. These tragic two would be buried together in this vault with all their brothers and sisters gone before.

Of course, things quickly get far more complicated. As the PCs learn exactly how long this has been going on, one of the servants tells a tale that the original victim of the curse haunts the place as a ghost, trying to protect their descendants. Another tells a tale of a burned man who haunts the halls. One person might relate that this is the ancient grandfather of them all, who was burned in the fire while he loved went out early to collect flowers, flowers that would later grace his grave. Some servants, however, argue at this notion, for the burned ghost possesses blonde hair, not the dark hair and eyes of the man who is doomed to love hard and die young.

### *Unspoken truths, secrets undiscovered*

The truth, of course, is far more insidious. The original pair, woman and vampire lover, were not alone on the fateful night that they had professed their love for each other. No, Brandon, a rival for Cameal's heart, had long suspected her of taking a lover, and wanted proof, and a way to discredit them with the scandal of their affair before marriage could take place. When he learned (from hiding)

that the lover was a vampire, he trembled in fear. When the vampire went into slumber, and Cameal to get soil, Brandon pulled back the curtain a crack, to kill his rival with sunlight.

But the plan failed. When sunlight struck the sleeping vampire, nothing happened at first. Appalled that Johnathan would use such a stupid hoax to get into Cameal's sympathies, he flung back the curtain and proceeded to beat the sleeping man over the head with his fists. A process that woke the vampire, which felt the rays of the sun, which burst into flames, which grappled his attacker in a fiery embrace until crumbling to ash. The flames of his immolation setting the house on fire, burning the body of the would-be lover beyond recognition.

The would-be lover, Brandon Wraith, was buried in the ground with the wrong name, Johnathan Night. Due to the violence of his death, he would roam the restored halls of the manor ever since, needing only to have his true name placed on his grave.

Meanwhile, the dust of the lover, Johnathan, was not recognized as his remains and blew about, never being properly buried, the unlife spirit remained behind as a weak crimson mist feeding on the rats and pests, sometimes partially draining farm animals, but never drinking enough to endanger any creature larger than a mouse (1hp/night).

The Johnathan Night Senior, crimson mist, was able, at times of extreme duress, to take on the physical manifestation of its living days. It was this mist that warned the heroes to seek shelter in the crypt below. However, with the vast quantity of blood spilled, the mist could not feast without expending effort, and grew beyond what it had been for so many years, into a fully formed crimson mist. However, should a prayer be said to ease the deceased spirit of Johnathan, the original lover (if people have figured out that



the deceased was never buried), the unlife spirit quiets and fades away, content with non-existence once receiving 'proper' rites.

### *Hasn't that Fat Lady started singing yet?*

Meanwhile, an even darker tragedy will erupt. As night falls, the dead buried in the crypt will awaken and drink the blood that has spilled into their coffins, and into the earth around them. Drink, and grow strong enough to feebly move about. A hundred fatally weak corpses lumber towards the crypt door, forcing it open,

When the eternal ones come to kill the 'humans' and devour their corpses, they supply the blood needed for the army of dead to grow strong. As some are ended, others lap up the blood of the fallen. Now stronger, the feebly bite down upon the 'eternal ones', sending them into the rapture of the dark kiss. Feeding on the eternal ones, who collapse but shortly stand up again, regenerating their blood supply, the army of vampires grows strong, aware, and resentful of their long imprisonment.

The PCs are considered employees of the nobles and thus subject to the vengeance of the vampires. The PCs flee the army of shambling vampires (not yet up to full speed, but fully capable of killing them out of sheer numbers.) The fleeing pcs are chased into the mists of more eternal ones. The conflict decimates the shambling vampires, but some troll blood is spilled, , and again some vampires grow stronger. Even the weak ones being able to lap up spilled trolls blood to grow strong and heal again.

The PCs run to the nearest town, and hide. An army of trolls and vampires wage war across the town. The vampires (draining blood, not live energy levels) can't kill the trolls (why would they want to). The trolls can't kill the vampires. The inexperienced vampires decimate a town drinking human

blood but don't know that their depredations will cause more vampires to spring forth.

### *I think we have a problem*

Soon the country side is crawling with far too many vampires to be supported, some vampires split into factions, fighting against each other for territory. Some try to expand to new 'territory', not realizing that they must return to the soil of their grave (where they were killed). [A specific weakness of this strain]. Thus we have a region with FAR too many vampires who cannot migrate to more 'open' areas. There are too many vampires to be expelled,

### *Aye Que Caramba*

The vampires try to start some kind of a slave trade, selling off what they can loot in return for slaves. Some try to subsistence feed on animals, or herds of livestock that they drink, but take care not to kill. These don't fare well as less patient vampires burst in to take their fill. Some vampires discover feeding on vampires to be a heady mix. That's when another weakness of the vampires is discovered. "The fate of one is shared by all."

### *We must all hang together, or we shall all hang separately.*

When a vampire has created spawn, and is later slain himself, the spawn all die. Now we have a bizarrely complex dynamic, as a created vampire can't kill his creator, or his creator's creator lest he be destroyed himself.

Some vampires try to hire outsiders to go by day and kill their chief rivals (offering protection by night in return for the daywalker's help). From these attempts at hiring, it becomes known that if a master is slain, the children perish.

Interesting! The party is held accountable for the mess 'they created'. They are told to

find the 'master vampire' and kill him, setting his soul to rest so that the rest all perish.

### *End game, at last?*

Thus begins a cloak and dagger type mission, the PCs infiltrating the area as mercenaries hired out to one of the powerful lords who wants enemy lords annihilated. The PCs are to use this 'cover' to investigate the situation and determine who the 'lead vampire' might be.

With clues from some 'unwilling' vampires, they might learn enough clues to piece together some clues. They might also look up records in old libraries, or do genealogy studies, to determine who the original vampire might have been. If they go back to the crypt where the mess all started, they may run across the uneasy ghost of the burned man, Brandon Wight. Given all the death and undead in the area, the veil between the living and the dead become narrower, making his manifestations easier. However, he still cannot talk well. To get his point across, he initiates a phantom shift of what happened, revealing to the PCs that the corpse buried in the tomb is not the lovers' but his own. They also see a ghostly vision of a red glowing mist rise up from the ashes after the fires faded.

They will eventually see the crimson mist, Johnathan, feeding, and if they manage to destroy the mist, they will annihilate all vampires spawned from his dhampire children. Restoring balance to the region.

## *Falkovia, Nathaniel's Flight*

### *Set-up:*

Traveling along the road, the party meets a carnival. The friendly carnies (gypsies) offer to let the party travel with them, "for there is safety in numbers, my friends." The carnival

is benign, other than the dangers the party brings with them, they have nothing to fear from these simple travelers.

### *Event one:*

As the PCs are traveling, they notice a strange ringing sound in the air, a warbling noise that grates upon the nerves and causes the sinuses to ache. The rest of the carnival and especially the horses grow agitated and hard to control. Animals pace, paw, and complain noisily.

Demi-human characters will suffer a nosebleed, a serious nosebleed. Each character loses 1 hp per character level due to headaches and blood loss from this nosebleed. (Fort Save at DC 15 halves this damage)

The PCs see a strange shimmering in the air, a slightly silvery sheen in the air before them that stretches on several hundred yards just off the main road. The odd peculiar site may be intriguing, but characters with any sense of self-preservation will most likely take a long route around the bizarre and unsettling phenomenon.

Still, those looking intently at the shimmering haze for more than a minute or two must make a will save (DC 15) or be mesmerized. If allowed to stand and stare for 3 minutes more, those affected begin walking slowly towards the shimmering field. Any walking into the haze will cross over into a sinister haunted reality (detailed later).

Assuming the Party is not entranced by the haze: As they confer about their actions, the whine slowly diminishes in volume as the silvery disturbance in the air disappears completely from view. Spooked and unnerved by this, the PC should still cut a wide berth around the area where the phenomenon came from.



Several hours later, the warbling sound can be heard again in the distance, but no silvery mist can be seen. Animals and people grow fearful, tension rise but eventually the carnival makes it to a place where they can camp for the night. People complain of a stretched thin feeling in the air around them, and it takes a long time for most of them to drift off to sleep. Some children cry pitifully, refusing to go to sleep until the noise stops.

### *Event two: Minions sent*

Shortly after falling asleep, a cry of alarm breaks the tenuous rest such fretful slumber provided. Scrambling to their feet, the Pcs can see/hear younger members of the carnival crying out loudly for help. Coming to the scene, they will first notice the whining warble has returned. When they get there, they see rotting corpses milling about in the shimmering shifting air, slowly walking towards the carnival.

Attempts to turn undead are ineffective, since the undead are on the other side of a dimensional rift. Good Aligned Priests or Paladins attempting to rebuke the undead are stricken with an overwhelming sense of evil (will save vs DC 15 or become horror struck for d3 rounds, suffering -2 circumstance penalty to all checks.) Evil Priests attempting to command these undead or mages using magic designed to command the undead become enthralled with this evil malign essence (will save vs DC 20 or become enthralled with the overwhelming evil, walking into the dimensional rift). Any attempt to attack, rebuke, or command these undead attracts their dire attention to the assailant. The attacker and the d4 nearest character must make Fort Saves vs DC 20 or be stunned (1r) as the dimensional rift washes over them. Those making their Fort Saves are pushed back by the advancing dimensional rift and have not been drawn

into it unless they walk forward into the affected area.

At this point, the undead see the Pcs suddenly in their midst and attack (choosing stunned targets first). These undead are immune to normal weapons anywhere except their heads. Blows targeted to the heads release the spirits, which fly away into the night if they do enough damage to kill the skeleton in a single blow. If not, they are ignored. Blows to the body seem to do damage, but this damage is cosmetic only. The bones will fly back into place, flesh will re-knit on the corpse, etc, The eyes will flair briefly as this healing takes place, but there is no other sign of the skeleton's weakness.

### *Skeletons: Humanoid Undead*

**AC:**10

**HD:** 1 (8 hit points)

**#A:** claw+1, claw+1, bite+3

**D/A:** claw(1-2), bite (1-3)

**Saves:**Fort+1, Will+1, Reflex+0

**Special Defenses:** Undead immunities, rejuvenation

**Special Weakness:** Shots to the head kill instantly

**CR:** 1

**Feats:** Rejuvenation

If 'killed' by raw damage, they rejuvenated fully in one round, unless damage was applied to the head. In this case, they are killed permanently.

They can be turned once the rift has been crossed and if destroyed, their spirits escape from the skulls of the corpses. Evil clerics can command them, but 'hears' the voices of their hungry and lamenting souls, reading their undead 'thoughts' and suffering a madness check (will DC 10), each round or suffering from a affliction of insanity. (Mild case, recovering in d20 hours).

The number of skeletons encountered varies depending on the party's level. There should be enough skeletons to equal their CR, the PCs should deplete %20 of their hps and spells before passing to the next stage. The 'encounters' can be spread out as the PCs examine the graveyard (see below) until they have been worn down suitably.

Any PC giving the corpses a proper burial will gain 100 xp per corpse.

When the Pcs look around again, the carnival is gone, and they find themselves in a completely unfamiliar bog, damp, cold, and lost.

### *Event three: Lost in the Darkness*

The Pcs should wander about in a damp bog trying to figure out how to get back to civilization. A light or lantern can be seen up in the distance. Intrigued the Pcs might call out for assistance, but the light simply moves away slowly. Crying out louder, they see the light dip, as if recognizing the sound of a shout. It will then quickly dart away.

Pcs, who may be pressed to quickly follow, will find themselves waste deep in a quicksand bog (Reflex save DC 15). A group of will o' wips surround the bog as the Pcs struggle to get free. They will 'shock' or attack anyone who tries to assist those stuck in the quicksand. Without help, those caught in the quicksand will sink in 1d4 minutes, 2d8 if they hold perfectly still. Once submerged, they begin to suffocate (d20 pts damage per round, fort save DC 15 to reduce to half). Determined help, however, should be able to free those trapped even at the loss of a few hps from the Will o' Wisps.

#### *Will o' Wisp of the Bog: Undead Spirit*

AC 28

#A: shock+10/+5 (ranged touch attack, 10' range).

D/A: 2d8

**Saves:** Fort+5, Will+10, Reflex+15

**Special Attacks:** None

**Special Defenses:** Immune to electrical attacks and magic missiles.

**Special Weakness:** Holy Water

**Feats:** Dodge, Mobility, Spring Attack.

**CR:** (plus bog trap) 5

If attacked with holy water, the Will o' Wisp must make a will save DC 15+1 per point of damage done (2d8) by the holy water or flee. They will not return if driven off with holy water.

Once the Pcs are free of the quicksand, the Will o' Wisps will leave. They have no interest in a normal fight (even though at AC 28, they would probably win) for they cannot feed off those slain in that way. Rather, they leave to find another victim this night.

Enough Wisps should have been encountered to wear the PCs down to 40% expenditure in terms of hps and magic expended. (20% from the skeletons, %20 from the wisps). Additional encounters with Skeletons can get the CR of the encounter to an appropriate level if needed.

As the wisps leave however, they pass quickly by an old tombstone that glistens as they pass. Investigating this, the Pcs will discover that they are in the remains of a very old and ill kept cemetery. The writing on the tombstones is foreign to them, however, as are the numbers. The stones look very old, however. (Addendum, if the PCs are from Krynn, they will be able to read the stones, but the dates don't coincide with the calendar they remember).

Rogues may attempt a 'decipher script' roll to determine the contents of the stones, but they will only discover miscellaneous names and dates. However, one of the tombstones has been engraved with a 'protection from evil' ritual. The strange formulation of this



priestly magic acts as *magic circle of protection from evil 10' radius*. Evil characters within 10' of the reader, however, suffer 1hp damage per ten minutes of exposure (Fort DC 15 save to avoid loss, checked each turn of contact). This spell vanishes from the tombstone when read, but re-appears 1 week later, provided the tombstone has not been molested nor the grave defiled.

#### *Event four: The Newly Dead.*

Something, maybe the PCs hear something out there. "Shunk-chunk, poff" the sounds of a shovel digging through loose dirt. Perhaps more cautions by now, they sneak forward slowly and see a man with a shovel outside an open grave.

At first glance, the man appears to be committing grave robbery. However, suitably observant characters will notice that he's filling the grave in. Why work so diligently so late at night? They know not.

The man wears a broad brimmed hat and clothes of dark browns or blacks. The cut and style of his clothing seems odd, unusual, but reasonable. The broad circle of his hat covers his face and eyes, but his hands appear good, strong, and calloused by their labors.

Questioning this man will startle him greatly. He was not expecting people roaming about the graveyard so late at night. He will introduce himself as Nathaniel and speaks in an accent that is hard for the PCs to understand. They must strain and guess at words to understand his speech. Thieves, who are somewhat used to this process with the written word can make a 'decipher script' roll at DC 15 to understand 90% of what he's saying. Others must make a Int check every round (DC 15) in order to understand this strange man's speech at about 60%-70% competency.

The man's full explanation would be "You have surprised me strangers, what business have you out here so late at night? Are you specters? Are you ghosts? Hold out your hands so that I may examine them, let me prove to myself that you are people and not apparitions." At this point, the man will hold out his hands looking at the PCs and trying to examine them if given the chance. Nathaniel uses his Knowledge: Palmistry skill to read the characters. (See his stats later for details).

"You dress oddly, and perhaps not warmly enough for our cold, cold, winters here in Falkovia. Autumn is upon us and winter will be here soon. Get yourself warmer clothing or you will catch your death. My word, I can hardly understand a thing you say. Could you speak more clearly?"

After some stumbling around over the language barriers, the man continues. Pointing to himself, he says "My name is Nathaniel and I work here, tending to the graves and seeing that each person entombed here should get a peaceful final rest. But grave robbers come and steal whatever interests their greedy little eye from the freshly departed. I hope you good folk are not aligned with such criminals."

He laughs, "I've even tried using a scarecrow to frighten them off, as if grave robbers were as gullible as crows. It doesn't work of course. But it was worth a shot." He points to a 'man' nearby against a tree.

Looking at the PCs he exclaims, "Come, let us get you inside where it's warm. You can wait out the night's passing in my humble abode." He urges the PCs to follow him. After a bit of walking the PCs will find themselves in a tiny, ill kept shack. Nathaniel will apologize for the clutter and toss a few dirty dishes out the window where they cannot be seen. Flicking a bug or two off of his humble straw bed, he offers it to the PCs. There are a few chairs, a single straw bed, a

table, and a small fireplace here. Perhaps people could stretch out on the floor.

The stench from the graveyard permeates this place, but the Pcs will quickly become acclimated to it.

(Mortu Vistani) Nathaniel Methos, CE Cleric 10th Level worshiper of "Death" in Necropolis. [Armor Proficiencies and Weapon Proficiencies: Per Mage] Weapon: Staff AC:10 Hps: 40 Special Equipment: Unholy water x 10, unholy symbol, Talisman of Agreement\* Necklace of Prayer Beads (two beads, curing, bless)\*\* , Book of Vile Darkness\*\*\* Spheres of spells: Necromancy, Divination, Healing. Skills[45pts] of interest:

Healing[10],  
Knowledge:Necrobiology[5],  
Knowledge:Anatomy[5],  
Knowledge:Toxicology[5],  
Profession:Palmetry[10],  
Concentration[5], Spellcraft[5]

\* Effectively allows Nathaniel to cast a Quest spell that can be used on those he is about to Raise from the Dead to ensure their cooperation. This Talisman cannot be used on the living, only the dead about to be raised or animated. Other than the mandatory powers checks for using the item, no other curses are associated with this Talisman.

\*\* The 'curse' associated with this item is its dedication to "Death" in Necropolis. Any cleric wearing this item will gain access to the Sphere of Necromancy and must make a wisdom check each morning or pray for a necromantic spell. Otherwise, continued use of this item by a cleric will slowly cause him/her to lose favor with their deity, but retain access to the Necromantic Sphere.

\*\*\* This book is a special reward for Nathaniel's evil by vile forces beyond human comprehension. Good characters touching this book might feel the oozing evil moving behind the pages. (Spot Check, DC 10). Evil characters holding the book must make a Will Save (DC 15) or become filled with a

desire to read the evil contents. The book contains 20 pages and a character can read one page per character level before developing a splitting headache and simply must stop reading. Upon completion of reading as many pages as possible for them (and vile, evil reading it is), they gain one level as an evil priest (faith chosen by the character). They also gain the services of a Quasit. The level and the Quasit serve for 24 hours. After this passage of time, the Quasit returns to the book, the bonus level vanishes, and the character can again read this vile work in order to regain the level and services of the Quasit, but first they must sacrifice a small animal to the book. If the book is destroyed (as any good aligned group would do) it opens a temporary gate back to the homeworld of the one responsible for this destruction.

Spells: (spell selection must change for 3e cleric)

4 x 1) Detect Magic, Detect Poison, Locate plants and animals x 2

4 x 2) Aid, Aid, Augury, Know Alignment

3 x 3) Animate Dead, Speak with Dead, Locate Object

2 x 4) Divination, Tongues

1 x 5) Raise Dead

Normal rational for spells.

Detect snares and traps helps Nathaniel to avoid the quicksand in the bog. It also helps him to map out where such deathtraps exist, as well as the lairs of giant trapdoor spiders and the like. Thus, if pursued, he can lead the party into a deathtrap.

Detect Magic unlike most poor stupid adventurers, Nathaniel will immediately attempt to cast this spell as soon after meeting new people, provided he can do this without being seen. He will then attempt to converse with newcomers and try to (as casually as possible) determine if they have



spells affecting them or magical items on their person. (And sphere of magic if clerical).

Detect Poison some plants and animals are poisonous and Nathaniel likes to avoid them (or harvest them). He uses this spell to determine what local life is poisonous, map it's location and/or harvest it to make some poisons of his own. If Pcs arrive, he will use the spell to determine if they have/use poison.

Locate plants and animals assists with gathering components for his poisons or research on the golem creation. If Pcs are around and have familiars that Nathaniel can see, he may be able to track them to some extent by using this spell and looking for that familiar's animal type. Otherwise, he can give the Pcs a few 'medicinal herbs' and a sprig of wolfsbane 'just in case'. He can then use this spell to locate whatever rare plant he gave them. (Or if the DM chooses to have this spell detect only living plants, he can give them a small bonsai tree or some other valuable plant gift, perhaps even a sprig of live wolfsbane or an herb in a pot.)

Aid, Nathaniel is actually able to use this spell on his Undead Servitors or himself to increase their edge in battle. Due to a powercheck he has failed in the past, upon casting the Aid spell, all undead slaves animated by him will benefit from the full effects of the typical aid spell.

Augury, Since he has access to this spell, Nathaniel casts it as often as he can without annoying the gods. Often trying to divine if his proposed experiments will meet with success or not. When the Pcs arrive, he will use an Augury to gauge how he ranks compared to them.

Know alignment, He'd use detect good for this, but that would take up another first level spell he prefers to have around. He enjoys secretly casting this spell and examining people's auras (lawful or chaotic only, as he

is in Ravenloft). He's likely to do this while the Pcs sleep, if that seems probable.

Animate Dead Take a wild guess, you ninny. He feels he has enough lesser undead, and more might raise suspicions.

Locate Objects, can help track Pcs. He doesn't normally take this one, but might after the Pcs stay the night.

Speak with Dead, Since he can interrogate those dead up to a year, Nathaniel can 'spy' by asking questions of the newly dead. Loads of fun He can also use this spell to speak with the undead slain by the Pcs and discover a little something about how they fight, if time permits.

Divination is an all around nice spell to have. If planning on going against the Pcs, Nathaniel will use Divination to get some advice on how to battle the Pcs most effectively. The DM gets to use his knowledge of the party to his advantage.

Tongues almost useless unless Pcs show up. This spell enables him to understand their language, even while feigning not to. He could, and probably would, use the spell to intercept any semi-secret communications among party members, be it thieves' cant, druid's tongue, elvish or what have you. Should he try engage the Pcs, he will cast a reversed Tongues to confound their ability to communicate, poorly organized groups may well suffer. (Especially chaotic groups as determined by his Know alignment spell.)

Nathaniel simply enjoys the sheer power of being able to Raise Dead, often he will cast the spell upon the recently deceased and interred, then perform ghastly experiments on them. Indeed, back in the not so distant past, Nathaniel had been traveling with a companion. He died, and the companion performed a mummification ritual. When he awoke, Nathaniel cast Raise Dead upon himself to restore himself to life. To this day, he laughs with malicious glee over the

cleverness of his plot to stave off death. (Indeed, he has carefully programmed a small group of skeletons to perform this very task should he die, one of his 'troups' hangs back, instructed to return the corpse to a set area nearby. In that area, 12 skeletons each perform one stage of the mummification ritual.

Nathaniel will also use Raise Dead on the Pcs under certain circumstances. (Detailed later).

Nathaniel was spying on the Talons of Drakov. However, he was discovered in an incriminating position by a guard and had to kill him. Now, he's hunted by the Falcons for the death. He managed to escape to a small village nearby and secure a job tending to the old graveyard. He quickly animated what undead he could and started work on the construction of a flesh golem to help him get out of Falkovia alive.

He wanted to create a Zombie Golem, but lacks the skill to actually build one of those monsters. He has taken to stitching together corpses he has stolen from the newer graveyard in an attempt to create a flesh golem instead. Despite his strong need of such a creature, he lacks the true obsessive drive required to bring a golem borne of obsession to life. The process is more that body parts and thread.

He simply believes that he "needs fresher body parts". Eventually, his divinations "will show him the way to success". Only a matter of time,

In the meantime, however, he has managed to build a few Necrophidi from his failed attempts at a zombie golem. These snake-like skeletal monsters with a fanged human skull have the normal hypnotic dance of their ilk, but the effect is more like the second level spell, Hypnotic Pattern [up to 18 hd can be hypnotized at one time]. Like a normal

Necrophidi, it's bite does 1d8 points of damage, but a Neutralize Poison removes the paralysis. The duration of the paralysis is only 1-4 rounds as opposed to 1-4 turns, however.

[4]Necrophidi, AC 5 HD: 2 Hp: 8 Special Attacks: Hypnotize, Paralyze Special Defenses: Regenerates 5hp/round any damage not inflicted specifically upon the head. Eyes glow during healing. Immune to charm/sleep/hold and cold based attacks.

The scarecrow Nathaniel pointed out earlier is actually a successful attempt at creating a Scarecrow Golem. Utterly silent, this golem does not cackle and laughs like most of its kind. It has also been empowered with a sick intelligence. At first, it will only move when no one is watching it, slowly at first, maybe an arm or leg out of place, maybe the head has turned to look at the characters. Once it has the characters a bit nervous, the scarecrow will disappear from where the Pcs first saw it and stalk them. This scarecrow golem moves awkwardly like all of its kind, yet still manages to move silently and hide in shadows 55% of the time. Occasionally, it will make enough noise for the Pcs to hear, and suddenly stop when they try to listen for the noise they think they heard. In combat, its gaze paralyzes (not charms) it's victims with fear. Its touch inflicts those struck with Contagion instead of charm (a normal scarecrow charms by touch as well.)

The scarecrow has been constructed with human bones where a normal scarecrow's frame is crafted from wood. For some strange reason this human origin of the Golem results in a weakness to its power. Humans less susceptible to its gaze and touch. Humans or half-humans save at +4.

Should battle go against the Scarecrow, he has one finally card to play. Once a day, he can throw back his pumpkin head and cackle with mad glee. The effect of this laughter is



the same as that of a Korred. Everyone in a 60' radius must roll under their charisma or be stunned for 1-4 rounds. (Nullified by a bard's singing, if applicable.) Alternately, you could use Tasha's Uncontrollable Hideous Laughter instead.

Scarecrow Golem, AC 8 HD 3 Special attacks: Paralyze, Contagion Special Defense: Regenerate 5 hp/round any damage not inflicted specifically upon the gord-like head. Eyes flare during healing. Immune to Charm/Sleep/Hold as well as cold and electricity.

### *Event Five: Back you damnable dead.*

Sometime after the party has had time to acquaint itself with Nathaniel, and things begin to calm down, a group of skeletons that Nathaniel sent out to gather up body parts (from animals in the bog) comes back and looks into the window. Nathaniel will stand and go through the motions of turning undead. When those undead outside the window hear him shout for them to "begone and return to thy graves" they obey him listlessly, walking away to their graves.

Nathaniel will shrug and apologize to the Pcs for the scene. He explains that some of the local dead are restless due to a curse or having their graves desecrated. Nathaniel claims that sometime if he finds which undead are animating he can bless their grave, then bless their animated corpse and bury them again. Usually, this puts the soul to rest without requiring their bodies be chopped to pieces in the process. He also assures the Pcs that the restless dead have no power to rise from their graves during the daylight hours.

Should the Pcs indicate a desire to hunt the undead down and lay them to rest, Nathaniel seems ill at ease about cutting up the corpses, he reference defiling their bodies and a preference to use the 'bless' methods he's

mentioned before. Slower, but kinder to the poor departed.

### *Event Six: Soup's On.*

Nathaniel will prepare a meal for the Pcs. True to nasty DM humor, the soup has a slight human component to it, old decayed meat taken from the grave. Just a touch, however, but the broth will taste slightly spoiled. Most of the meat is taken from corpses of animals the undead bring back to him during the night.

The soup, however, is laced with a dangerous bacteria from the Scarecrow. Any who eat the soup will become ill in the night with diarrhea and vomiting. Nathaniel, of course, casts a 'cure disease' from his necklace upon himself before retiring. In the morning, the Pcs should awaken with symptoms of a 'contagion' spell. (He will, however, feign sickness.)

If the Pcs do not eat the soup, the scarecrow sneaks in the middle of the night and lightly touches all of them. Roll MS for the Scarecrow, 85% considering the Pcs will be sleeping (If they have posted a guard, the Scarecrow will not attempt this lest the guard has fallen asleep or left to relieve himself. (There are no indoor facilities.)

If a single PC does venture outside to relieve his bodily needs, the Scarecrow may kill him, if it believes it can do so. Nathaniel, if he has had time and is still awake, may have used his Divination to let the Scarecrow know if he should, or should not, attempt this mugging/murder.

### *During the Night:*

Nathaniel, seeming to sleep in a corner, will cast detect magic, know alignment, detect poison, Augury, Divination, if possible while the Pcs sleep.

**Augury:** "Will I do well if I confront these men?" Woe befalls the unprepared.

### *Event Seven: Anyone need a note from the Doctor?*

Nathaniel appears concerned and makes a slave for the rash the Pcs have suffered. Blotches on their hands and arms resemble hives or chigger bites. He explains that such pests are a problem here, they carry disease. (Some Pcs might suspect the soup). He gives the Pcs a foul smelling salve that he claims keep the pests away. He offers to treat the Pcs as best he can. He uses mundane healing/herbalism in his attempts to do so, not magic. He has, himself, used some irritating plants to make some rashes appear upon himself similar to those the Pcs suffer from, but not so severe.

The Pcs may or may not feel up to travel at this point. If they do, the priest will not go out of his way to stop or even dissuade them. He will be very helpful. However, he will also ask those who feel well enough to get out of bed to help him with a few small chores first. "Just an hour or so of work in exchange for the hospitality I've tried to show you, if you would, please."

He has to patch a leak in the roof and re-stuff the scarecrow with grass. Whoever touches the scarecrow will later come down with the effects of yet another contagion spell on top of the one they already have suffered by eating the soup.

### *Event Eight: Hey, who's the stiff?*

One of the Pcs perhaps who has complained of being too sick to go out and help with the chores, while the other Pcs are helping Nathaniel with chores might chance to notice something move in the shack. Looking back, he or she would see a panel slightly out of place. Obviously one of the boards can be pulled aside to reveal a hiding place, perhaps a repository of valuables.

Nope, a narrow descending staircase leads down into the earth. Cooler here than above

and outside, the young priest stores foodstuff here. A PC who searches here will find a movable shelf, behind which lies the corpse of many sources. (A would-be golem).

The 'Snakes' will spring into action to protect the golem, hypnotizing/paralyzing the interloper if possible. Biting if needed. Either way, they will entwine and hold him with their body embrace while another 'snake' dances to hold their captive in trace until their master gives them another order.

Nathaniel would try to replace the floorboards and act concerned with the disappearance of the Pcs friend. If a PC sees the floorboards first, Nathaniel will go with them to the basement, but try to keep them away from the sliding shelf (which slides closed again after passage.) He will offer to pray for a 'locate object' spell if the people can think of something easily identifiable that the missing person would be wearing. Nathiel will claim to find no such item in range of his magic.

### *Event Nine: Hunted, Which way did he go?*

Scarecrow, Nephalidai and the priest stalk the Pcs, seeking to kill one or all of them for body parts. "Fresher is better" Nathaniel figures. Alternately, he may be satisfied with help constructing/finishing his flesh golem and leaving Falkovia safely.

At this point we are left with role-playing Nathaniel's attempts to cover and / or hunt down the Pcs. He doesn't want to directly fight the Pcs, because he fears they would roast him. (He's seen the remains of his skeletons from the other night.) Their sickness, he reasons, should weaken them for him, if he can only hold them off for awhile, getting them lost or keeping them from finding town.

To help track the Pcs, Nathaniel will use his "locate object" power or Locate Plants



and Animals when he loses the trail. (Or other spells mentioned as possibly helpful in tracking the Pcs.

When the Pcs (if the Pcs) ask Nathaniel which way to head towards town, he will point them in the direction of greatest danger. There is a road, a narrow seldom used path, outside the old cemetery. But if the Pcs follow it, they will note several small game paths crossing the main road. Some degree of wisdom is required to choose the right path since the undead footprints do not head down the correct path. It will appear that the game trails, on which the undead roam, have more traffic than the actual true path, which is seldom used by those who are afraid of the old cemetery. The footprints are not obviously those of the undead.

Nathaniel has also used the undead to create a small worn path going in the wrong direction, away from the town. This path leads to a stream with a bridge that has long since fallen into ruin. The thin path goes for awhile after crossing the river, but slowly peters out into several branching game trails, perhaps confusing the party. Nathaniel, if asked, will lead them down this path, away from town if he can.

#### *Traps/Ambushes:*

Using what the Dm has learned of the Pcs, Nathaniel should choose his spells, cast his divinations, and set up a trap or ambush for the Pcs. His reversed tongues spell would confound communication between party members, hopefully giving him an edge. He will, of course, have tried to divine the best place for his skeletons to attack the Pcs, hopefully a place with cover.

The Skeletons will advance in military pike formation, attempting to use the short frontage of their makeshift spears (damage 1d4 instead of 1d6 due to the lack of a metal tip.) He may also have a troupe of archer skeletons with bows. (Spear wielding

skeletons will only take half damage from any arrows that hit them accidentally.)

Dancing Nephelidi and the Scare Crow can help matters, especially since the Nephelidi do not have to enter combat directly in order to have an effect on the Pcs. The undead are, of course, not affected by the dance and thus fight on unhindered, the Pcs may not be so lucky. Especially with multiple 'snakes' dancing.

Finally, the Scarecrow Golem can make an appearance. Thankfully, he does not have the power of a Ravenloft Scarecrow, but even so his attacks may be sufficient to do serious damage.

And we haven't even touched on Nathaniel yet, who will have memorized a single reversed "Raise Dead" spell to use as an attack spell the Pcs. (As an individual, this is pretty much his only aggressive strike, the rest of his killing is done through his associates/creations.)

All weapons will be lightly poisoned to the best of Nathaniel's ability, determine what would be a challenge for the Pcs without decimating them. Perhaps the use of debilitating poisons is best.

Should a PC die, Nathaniel will sadistically pull back from combat and wait for the reversed Tongues spell to fade. He will leave behind a note in his language (requiring a Read Languages roll to decipher since the Pcs don't know his tongue, they are off-worlders, or Comprehend Languages spell) which gloats that he can raise the dead in return for service.

Over a barrel, the Pcs may need to cooperate with Nathaniel. Nathaniel can get 9 days of labor out of the Pcs in return for the spell to raise the dead. The newly raised person, however, will be forced to accept a Quest of course. (Most likely not to attack Nathaniel after resurrection or allow his associates to do so.)

### *Notes on Death:*

Nathaniel may very well kill the PCs since his use of Augury, Divination, and perhaps some other divination magic will give him an interesting edge when plotting their demise. His defeat of the PCs should be clearly due to preparation, not strong magical force.

Depending on circumstances (for instance a PC slain for investigating the larder), Nathaniel may use his Quest Talisman and his Raise Dead spell earlier. The Quest (which will have to be role-played with the deceased via Speak with Dead) must be accepted by the slain PC in return for his life. Invariably, it will include a ban on remembering the circumstances of his death for a given period of time and a quest to help Nathaniel escape Falkovnia and Vlad's men. If agreed to, the PC will not remember the circumstances of their death unless Psychic Surgery is used upon them. He or she should obey any reasonable aid Nathaniel asks of them, but can defend themselves and their associates from his attack later on.

Still, Nathaniel's attack on the PCs does not dispel the Quest. True to form, the Quest spell's greater power in RL allows Nathaniel to assign a penalty for not following a quest. Directly acting against Nathaniel's attempts to leave the domain (including create the golem, a means of leaving) result in one or another afflictions. Loss of ten pounds body weight immediately is a good one, no direct effect, but frightening. Failure to follow the quest would result in an additional loss every subsequent day.

### *Isle of desire: Aamora*

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#### *Synopsis:*

Aamora Wilkin (Lady Wilken) and her husband, Grendle Wilken, have an

unconventional relationship that might lead the PCs to suspect Grendle as the 'lustful' lord of this domain. However, Grendle's actual crime is 'rage' not lust. In truth, the supposedly pious priest has been committing the vile murders of various prostitutes. Unable to tame his lustfulness, he decries the immorality of the public at large.

*"Me thinks thou doest protest too much."*

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#### *Background:*

##### *Aamora Wilkin*

Lusty and Lewd, Aamora Wilkin takes lovers knowing that her husband, Grendle, will kill them in a fit of jealous rage. Coos over her husband after he kills them, she seduces him and he forgets his rage in passionate love-making. She finds this bizarre ritual sexually arousing, and has repeated this behavior for years now.

Aamora enjoys Paris' company and affections. She appreciates his music, wit, and charm almost as much as the more base aspects of their relationships. She toys with arranging for Paris to be caught with her, but he usually escapes or quickly talks up a cover-story. She finds this quite amusing, knowing that Paris' loyalty to his "children" makes him vulnerable, needing her assistance and support to further his goals.

Aamora will also visit Paris' Tavern, delighting in both the young boys and the young girls. Paris remains adamant, however, about not delivering them into her arms. His wards, likewise, know to refuse her advances. (Although the boys do get tempted, Paris has even lost one or two to her husband's rage.)

Aamora likes to watch her husband, Grendle, visit Paris' Tavern and have even disguised herself well enough to seduce her own husband. She delights over these things



with malicious glee. Also, since the young men who come to the tavern for sport are so, vulnerable, she takes a few lovers in the alleyways for the perverse thrill of it.

### *Grendle Wilkin, Noble Lord*

Grendle Wilkin, tries to maintain an image of propriety. Has affairs and tries to turn a blind eye to his wife's affairs until she flaunts them in front of him. Fearing public ridicule if other nobles learn of his wife's liaisons, he flies into a rage and murders her lovers. He loves Aamora very much and cannot bear to harm her or live without her. After he kills her lover, she tells him of the lovers he's had and begs him not to fault her overmuch for a crime he himself commits. Occasionally, Aamora takes as a lover a woman who Grendle has taken as his mistress. Of course, the poor woman is murdered by the raging Grendle when Aamora brings the affair to light.

Grendle Wilkin also suffers from man's common weakness, beautiful young ladies. He, like his lady, disguises himself to attend Paris' tavern or even one of the various brothels he knows of (one of these is run by his wife, who goes by the alias Persian Kitty.) He is anguished over this weakness of his and wallows in guilt because of it. When he gives in to his desires, he remembers his beautiful wife whom he loves very much. He fears her discovery of his liaisons and fears she may leave is she discovers them.

She has warned him that she knows of some of his dalliances. After Grendle kills her lover, she taunts him with this knowledge and feigns considerations of divorcing him. A mixture of rage, jealousy, fear, and guilt produces a reaction Aamora finds most interesting indeed.

### *Paris: Half-elf bard/fighter/mage.*

Paris has adopted several orphaned boys and girls. Attempting to find a niche in the local

economy so that he can support his adoptive children, Paris began running a bar. His girls are not prostitutes, but they are exotic dancers. The boys (the few he has adopted) also dance from time to time, but usually serve with other skills he has taught them. (Bouncers, acrobats, singers, musicians.) Paris is extremely protective of his girls, and makes this well known among his patrons. His girls are not sluts, whores, or prostitutes. Anyone suggesting otherwise earns his wrath.

Paris is a warrior of extraordinary skill (better than the PCs) and specialized with darts. These darts (ROF as per specialist) are 'exceptional' darts (+1 to hit/+1 damage). With his skill and dex (18) this boots his hit score by +1 dart +1 specialization +2 dex for + 4 to hit. His damage score is +2 spec and +1 for the dart or + 3. Each dart is covered with a sleep poison strangely reminiscent of drowish poison -4 to saves onset time 1d8 rounds. To hits of those failing their save vs poison (at -4) are at -1 per round since injection during the onset time. ( -1 on the first round, -2 on the second, -3 on the third, etc.) Those afflicted sleep for 1-8 hours or until struck hard enough to cause damage. Paris does not sell his poison.

Paris himself does function as a prostitute. He sleeps with Lady Aamora Wilkin even though he has learned what happens to her lovers who are caught. He is wary and clever however, and isn't caught off guard. So far he has escaped being caught with her. This is owed to both his charisma (17) and skill as a lover which she isn't ready to sacrifice yet to torment her husband's jealousy. Paris lies with Aamora not out of love or even lust. Rather he has his own agenda, most of which centers around keeping his tavern open and legal. He sometimes has his boys perform for her, but has made it quite clear to them and to her that those boys are not for sale.

Paris is extremely unhappy with the way things are working out. Peddling sex is against his beliefs, but he feels he must do what needs to be done in order to deliver the girls and boys in his charge from the squalor in which orphans must otherwise live. Often, when justifying his actions he will grimly say, "I do what must be done" with a dark, angry, almost evil tone. He dances on the edge of darkness to deliver his wards from poverty.

### *Darklord: Father Demonstro*

Despite Aamora's lewdness and immorality, it is actually Demonstro, a respected priest of the local religion that is the darklord of this domicile of dread. Demonstro appears to be a preacher dedicated to the purification of the lewd city in which Paris, Aamora, and Grendle live. (Sodom-Gomorrah?). While preaching purification from the pulpit, Demonstro secretly burns with lustful passion, a searing fire which consumes him day and night. The Preacher proclaims to be Celibate and undergoes self-flogging to fight the building urges within him. Eventually, however, he fails,

He disguises himself and leaves his monastery dedicated to punishing the whores for tempting him. The Preacher seduces both men and women in Taverns and brothels around Sodom.

The curse of the darkpowers is that he is particularly good at seduction, having an eerie pull upon the hearts of those he desires. The Darkpowers other blessing / curse is an unusually good talent for disguise (so he may go undiscovered). When Demonstro gives in to his urgings, he later declares that the sinners must be punished. His hapless lovers are tortured to death. While in Demonstro's domain, no PC cleric is able to gain curative magics of any kind. (This is another blessing of the dark powers, it gives

Demonstro the political power to wage his war against pornography and prostitution. )

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### *Plot:*

Several of Paris' girls are mutilated by a strange murderer. Paris is filled with rage over this and feels impotent to avenge them. Demonstro preaches from the pulpit that the law shouldn't waste their time avenging the death of whores when there are more pressing crimes to be fought.

Aamora and Grendle are unwilling to risk the political backlash of defending prostitutes. (Not to mention the political pressure exerted by the only recognized man in town able to perform curative miracles.)

The PCs are caught up in the murders AFTER they realize that Paris' girls are not whores.

**Option:** Paris thinks one of the PCs is the murderer, and tries to take justice into his own hands. Option: Paris thinks Grendle or Aamora did it, and tries to take justice into his own hands. The PCs however, discover that both Grendle and Aamora have good alibis (one PCs was sleeping with Aamora?).

### *Isle of Pride*

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### *Summary*

The lord, a vain man, strives for physical perfection and nearly preaches racist dogma. Age begins to advance upon him, and the man grows fearful of losing his playboy lifestyle. Obsessed with physical beauty, he tries to maintain his beauty at all costs. Sadly, a terrible accident scars him and he wallows in despair.

Seeking to restore his beauty, he commits dark crimes against his brother, for which he is blessed/cursed by the dark powers. During this process, his body is transformed in



hideous ways. With the aid of a evil necromantic surgeon, the Lord manages to restore his beauty by inflicting his deformations on his captive brother.

The players are drawn into the scenario when the 'ugly' brother escapes and 'kidnaps' the Lord's bride. She is also physically beautiful, but vain. The ugly twin knows that the Lord 'needs' a new beautiful victim to regain his beauty when the mutations appear again. He is trying to protect her. She, despite all reason, grows to love him. The PCs are charged with rescuing her from the 'Beast'.

The players quite possibly kill the beast and return the woman to the vain lord. This would be sad, for they will have judged the man by his exterior, and slew the wrong 'beast'. Still, several months later, they may happen to find a lab assistant disposing of a twisted body, and learn what happened to the blushing bride under her master's care.

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## Long

Sir Geoffrey Goodwall plied his trade as a skilled tailor at 3254 Primrose Blvd. No shortage of lady-friends did this fine young man suffer, for every lady would, at one point or another, visit his fine shop and beg him to employ his grand skill to craft the most exquisite garments in the province.

Well known the locals, his reputation asserted that his hands bore a seemingly mystical skill with cloth, needle, and thread. None other could match the quality of garments produced by his person. His wares fetched exorbitant prices.... Allowing Goodwall to assume some manner of station in society.

Goodwall proved to be a proud man, dressing himself in the finest of his own productions and taking meticulous care with his personal grooming and choice of society

friends. The man and his clothes seemed to match well, for his face was among the most handsome. Many a lady begged his favor, quite a few received it.

Thus did Goodwall, with good fortune in business and good help in his shop manage the life of a playboy in the town elite. Occasionally, when he so desired, he would fashion the gowns and dresses himself, but more often now he left such menial tasks to his qualified help. He, on the other hand, oversaw all aspects of design and purchasing.

His twin, Derrick, shared Geoffrey's fortune with business and ladies, but he held lesser aspirations and preferred to make his living upon the stage and in screen writing as well. Derrick was as dashing a figure as his brother, but not nearly as vain, easier to talk to, and not nearly as wealthy. Actors were, after all, a poor lot. But Derrick enjoyed life nonetheless.

As time moved ever forward, Derrick assumed the older parts in the screen plays, but mostly settled for writing for the theater. He enjoyed the work as much as acting and no longer had to worry that a wrinkle or bit of gray hair would spoil his career.

Geoffrey, however, did not take to aging so well. He had enjoyed his time as the dream of the daughters of the elite. With age, he faced only the pale prospect of being a respected, but old, business man.

He tried every manner of folk cure to restore his hair, his youth, and his status. Slowly, but surely, it fell apart. Various books on alchemy he studied seeking a 'cure' for the very natural condition of aging. He became convinced that people were pointing out his sagging gut, his fading hair, his wrinkled face as he made his way in society events.

Late one night, there came a knocking at the door. Alarmed, he froze in bed and chose

not to answer the summons. Yet still, came the knocking on the door until Geoffrey feared he could stand it no longer. With great trepidation, he slowly made his way to the door and opening it found nothing there but for an ancient tome on the doorstep.

Upon reading this tome, a tome normally devoted to the creation of those monstrosities, golems, Geoffrey became convinced that he could use the knowledge contained in this tome to surgically improve his looks. He began the legally perilous work of anatomically dissecting the dead. His looted cadavers, however, only showed him that to do the work he intended, he would need some form of living tissue to work with.

He began his dark path by seducing a poor street waif with the promise of warm food and shelter in return for implied carnal knowledge. The street-orphan reluctantly agreed and became his first living test subject. This young boy remained alive for several weeks before his usefulness to Geoffrey ended, and he was permitted to die.

Geoffrey had learned, however, several secret steps towards the improvement of his various sagging body ailments and thirsted for still more of this forbidden knowledge. Working away at several alchemical preparations, Geoffrey felt light headed, and woozy, Trying to get up to open a window, Geoffrey cursed his own foolishness at not making sure the ventilation was sufficient for his delicate work. Dizzy, he tripped, and fell. Bottles, vials, and various instruments shattered to the ground.

He awoke several minutes later with a painful sensation on his cheek. Alarmed he ran to a wash basin and washed off the chemicals, but it was by far too late. A look in the mirror revealed a wound that would surely become a dreadful scar. He raged at himself, in his pursuit of youth, he had cursed himself with this injury. Long

moments he looked in the mirror, as if pondering whether he should quit, or wondering if he was beyond the point of no return on this venture.

In the end, he decided to graft a piece of skin over the injured part, but for this he would need another victim. Out into the streets he went once more to find a street-urchin, but finding none, he managed to secure the services of a common prostitute. This poor creature, driven by necessity into the trade just recently, could not have expected the welcome Geoffrey intended for her. Her last pleas for mercy told Geoffrey of her poor child she'd left at home while she sought to get food for them any way she could. Geoffrey either chose not to hear her, or didn't care. Somewhere, somebody's mother never came home.

Pouring over the tome in a desperate attempt to figure out how to graft the tissue, Geoffrey paused to look in the mirror and mark the size and are of tissue he needed to cover in order to conceal his wound from the laboratory acid As he intently examined himself, he saw and almost imperceptible quiver in the glass. Looking, watching for it to repeat, he eventually began to see some faint outline in the surface of the looking glass.

The ghostly reflection spoke to him, and professed to being something of an expert in the Arts Geoffrey has begun to study. After much discussion with this ghost, Geoffrey learned that this being was the author of the very book he had spent many hours pouring over. Geoffrey complained that many sections of the book had been destroyed by the previous owner's ill care. The apparition replied that the segments lost could be replaced. And began to fade from view.

Geoffrey begged the apparition to come back, but with its fading words, it answered "The blood of those that die on thy table commands me forth from the mirror. Choose



carefully should thee wish to hear of me again, for my secrets are dark and forbidden to men. You have been warned."

Warned he was, but care he did not. He worked on the corpse upon his table, carefully excising the proper amount of the young woman's delicate facial skin. Tediously, meticulously, he sowed the skin onto his face in place of his own wounded tissue. Carefully, he covered the newly sewn skin with gauze and investigated the mysteries of the book with the remainder of the corpse left to him.

Soon, however, the stress of puzzling out the missing sections of the text became too much for him, and he longed for an easier way, a quicker way. Thinking back, he remembered the apparition in the mirror. Shortly thereafter a young girl disappeared from her backyard and was lain out upon Geoffrey's table. Again the apparition appeared and coached him in the ways arcane and forbidden. Upon the end of its time, the specter warned Geoffrey again, "The blood of those that die on thy table,"

The next day, Geoffrey awoke alarmed. His hand upon his side revealed a scaly callused patch of skin. Warty, unsightly and misshapen. He frowned. Still, he knew that this would be only a minor matter to fix, now that he knew the secrets of grafting skin.

*(Hint: The ability to summon forth the apparition was the granted power of a failed powercheck. The negative side effect is a wound or scar on Geoffrey's person. This scar can be healed by this skin grafting technique, but it reappears within 3-4 days afterwards, simply in a different location.)*

As time (and victims) marched onward. Geoffrey grew in skill with his baleful profession, but also in curses. The fingers of his hands had grown quick, sure and dexterous, but they had also become thin, emaciate, and unhealthy looking. Dark purple veins oozed with blood visibly under

the thin pale skin. The bones and tendons could be clearly seen. He had to take to wearing gloves to hide this affliction when in public. Even the skin grafts didn't help for long.

Derrick, meanwhile, remained content with his poorer lifestyle as a playwright and had managed to amass some respect in society for the detailed plays he created. He continually invited Geoffrey to his debuts, but was often, if not always, turned down. Geoffrey's studies left him little time for such fanciful pastimes.

As fate would have it, one day he had decided to go to a play with a prospective love interest of his. This young thing laughed and enjoyed the performance immensely. At the end, the playwright was honored and she uttered compliments on how dashing and debonair he looked, stately and refined with his slightly graying hair. Geoffrey simmered that he should have to work so hard to stave off the signs of age, while his brother gained only recognition and respect with his aging.

Back at his studies later he worked upon the corpse of his latest date. The spirit of the mirror came to life again. Geoffrey complained loudly and long to the spirit about his many scars, lacerations, and blemishes that kept appearing every couple of nights. The spirit sadly told him, "You are accumulating too much dark vitae in your blood, you must remove it and replace it with the healthy vitae of another person. In doing so, your afflictions shall be passed on to them and you shall be renewed."

Geoffrey, of course, had a perfect victim in mind...

*Effects: Geoffrey and the spirit invented a machine much like a modern dialysis unit. (But utilizing necromancy magic). They would drain the blood from one patient, distill it, and pump it into the other. On one side, a tube from Geoffrey would pass into the machine. On the other, a tube from*

*Derrick. Inside the machine, the contraption removed the pure vitae from Derrick's blood and purged the corrupt vitae from Geoffrey's own life fluid. Derrick, now a prisoner of his brother, became burdened with the physical manifestations of his brother's crimes. Geoffrey continued to enjoy several benefits of his dark powers.*

### **Geoffrey**

Spirit Advisor (mirror, conditions stated above.)

Dexterity 40 with hand/manual dexterity tasks (+20 checks). As well as all tasks directly involving needles or scalpels.

**Feat:** Weapon Finess with Scalpel. 1-3 points of damage, +20 to hit.

Blighted touch, drain 1-4 pt Chr per touch at will which appears to be a permanent loss, but heals if the 'regeneration' or 'heal' spells are employed.

**Class:** Archanist(Mage)

**Level:** 10th

**Spells used (Through scalpel):** Chill Touch, Spectral Hand (scalpel 'flies'), Vampiric Touch, Enervation (only targets touched by scalpel in one round, up to 4), Animate Dead -- Touch (only victims slain on his table and only for 1 turn/level. However, victim is continually affected by Animate Dead. As soon as they fall... reanimating unless physically destroyed entirely.)

**Special benefits:** In return for his limited spell selection, he can cast 3 x more spells than a normal necromancer of his level.

### **Derrick**

**Curses:** Claws, teeth, horns, scaly hide, tail, wings, hunched back, club foot.

**Resulting powers:** Damage 1-4, 1-4, AC 5, 1-2, Fly 6", (none), Jump 15' up 30' forward. + move 15" on all fours.

**Class:** Bard 10th (Enchantment spells only)

Geoffrey has neared the end of his ability to drain Derrick and has started courting Amanda, a beautiful young woman. Derrick hears Geoffrey considering using her with the dreadful machine, or for skin grafts. Appalled, he renews his efforts to break free and sneaks away.

Derrick will kidnap the woman trying to save her, Geoffrey will hire the PCs to recapture her. She will have fallen in love with the "Beast" but the PCs will have seen the beast use enchantment spells to protect himself, thus suspect magic is at work. They may not realize until it's too late that the "Beast" wasn't a beast inside.

If returned to Geoffrey, Amanda will eventually be used for experiments and vitae draining. A disfigured corpse will eventually be disposed of in the alley.

**Notes:** The Machine can only be used on one who is 'pure and good' thus most people Geoffrey hooks up to the machine fail to work. Only Amanda and his brother have worked thus far, but anyone Geoffrey grows fond of will work.

The 'spirit' is Geoffrey's remaining humanity... cursed to watch the sad remains of himself struggle to avoid the rigors of age... and his curse. The spirit is bound to obey Geoffrey and provide information he requests (info granted by the DPs.)

If Geoffrey is ever destroyed an Imp will steal the book and carry it off to it's true creator, Sin. Lord of the Seven Isles.

Geoffrey is proposed as a possible Incarnation of Evil, Pride.



# *Isle of Rage*

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## *Premise*

The son of a wrongly slain witch. His father, an abusive man, influenced the law and religious leaders to validate the execution of his estranged wife. This causes the boy, Zean, to enter a live time crusade against lawmen and holy men as well.

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## *Story*

Amanda Worum, single mother of but one child, Zaen, did her best to protect her child. But Victor Worum, her husband would stay neither his hurtful tongue or his hand. Zaen knew enough to fear his father and to hate him. Zaen was, however, not large enough to oppose him. Victor struck Amanda hard once, hard enough to require that she remain in bed for several weeks to recover. Amanda suffered from this incident and was never quite the same afterwards... suffering a touch of delusion and hysteria.

Amanda fled, to protect her boy, from the terrible situation. Victor, you see, was one of the lawmen. She would get nothing from asking the Sheriff for protection. Her only choice was to flee as far and as fast as she could taking whatever she could. So, with her boy in one hand and a box of family silverware, she was off.

But people in the backwoods have large shoulders and broad backs, but for all their skill with farming, they grow some of the very smallest minds around. A lone woman suddenly appearing in town started the local gossip mill a spinning. Then other 'signs' began happening. A black cat refused to cross, Amanda's path. Milk soured suddenly. The butter churn would be pumped all day without effect. In truth, each of this things had a reasonable explanation, but reason is

anathema to a small mind, they avoid it whenever they can.

So a hot period came upon the town and the wells began to go dry. Crops withered from want of rain. Amanda set up a seamstress shop and proved rather skilled. This got the other town seamstress no love for the newcomer.

Meanwhile Zean, a handsome youth of 14 had made good progress clearing and fixing up the land his mother had purchased with what little she had taken from her husband when she left. He had a strong back and was not adverse to hard labor. Due to his efforts, the land around his mothers house did better than the surrounding fields.

Before long, the hot weather and Amanda's head injury began to make her strange behavior even worse. Singing to herself and sometimes spouting nonsense, gibberish phrases led the townsfolk to make the ward against evil when she approached. Sometimes she would sit and stare at nothing for long stretches of time. Some nights her hysterical wailing could be heard from her house.

A plague came to the town then, and the local pastor lost his newborn son. Distraught over the loss, he felt the need to blame someone, so blame someone he did.

The witch trials began, and Amanda was not the only one to be accused. She was, however, one of the first and with her, they accused the boy. By a variety of means, they performed 'tests' to prove the claims of witchery. Of course, anyone who knows of such things realized it was impossible to survive the test and be proclaimed not a witch. People were slowly crushed by the gradual application of stones... one man lasting as long as three days. Another was dunked until she drowned. Others were given the seemingly easy task of saying a well known prayer... any hesitation or mistake marking one as a witch. (The stress

of the moment making it very likely that one would pause, stammer, or make a mistake.)

Zeal was tortured with a red-hot heated holy symbol (as was his mother.) When, under such duress, he broke and said anything they wanted to hear to stop the torment, they proclaimed not only him a witch, but his mother as well.

His mother was burned alive at the stake, her son at her side.

Down to the last Zeal tried to worm his hands free of the ropes that held them bound. The holy man said a prayer for the souls of "these sinners" and threw the torch upon the wood. As the fires engulfed them, however, Zeal did manage to break free from his bonds. Aflame, he rushed off into the woods, where he rolled out the fire upon the leaves. He could hear his mother screaming, but could do nothing to save her as men who were watching the burning of the "witches" pursued him and began beating and kicking him into submission.

Zeal was strong, however, and his rage was raised. No pain did he feel as he lifted the man from the ground with strength born of hell-borne fury. Dropping the man's back upon his knee, Zeal snapped his spine and ended his life. The others, in fear and awe that Zeal could even rise backpedaled out of cowardice. Had they the courage to press on, things would have been different.

Zeal was angry, enraged, but to injured to fight. He retreated to the woods where he lived as a wild man, hunting game and / or stealing food and clothing from the townsfolk when he could. He wanted to avenge his mother's death, but some small part of him held out.

Zeal was self-taught enough to know his letters and a fair number of written words. When the time came for the townsfolk to ship a supply of grain to the state and a portion to the church as their tithe, he

convinced himself that some good man in the law or in the church would avenge the wrong done here... if only they could be told what had happened. He wrote a letter and hid it in the grain... one copy in a sack bound for the law, one copy in a sack bound for the church.

He waited as patiently as he good, holding back his anger in hopes that justice would be done. His spirits soared as from his place of hiding in the woods, he saw the bishop and the knight approaching on the road. He followed then at a distance eager to see / hear what they would do.

Hidden out of sight, he heard their proclamation.

"From His Grace the Cardinal of Esher to Pastor Wildham. Report has come to my attentions of thy acts in the name of faith during the summer drought. A note delivered to my hand from the stores of grain tell of how you and your men held on trail members of your township on charge of witchcraft.

"Accolades to you, good sir, for the Lord tells us we should never suffer the presence of a witch. A man of weaker faith than you might have turned from the true path as a result of a weak stomach. But your resolve has no doubt aided thy faithful in surviving both the drought and the plague...."

And the letter when on, heaping more praise and blessings upon the witch trials and their leader, Pastor Wildham. Hidden from view during the reading of the note Zeal's heart burned within his breast. Tears of outrage ran down his cheeks. He couldn't breathe, much less move as he heard the horrid letter continue,

"... one of His Lordship, Duke of Cantil's men, Victor Worum has independently verified that one Amanda Worum, his one time wife, and her son, Zeal, were not only



witches of the vilest sort, but thieves as well. Your faith and wisdom..."

There in the shadows, a blackness settled over Zaen's heart as the last shreds of humanity withered into an empty shell, which cracked into a shattered husk and blew away ... forever lost. They would all suffer... all of them.

The knight and the Bishop were charged with helping round up and exterminate the witch that had escaped during the trial, for if Zaen regained his strength, it was claimed he would work great evil upon them with his sorcery.

Now of course, Zaen became a raging murderous monster who killed his victims slowly and horribly... becoming a more skilled serial killer with time. His experience with Law led him to hate lawmen and government. His experience with the holymen during the witch trials, led him to hate priests and any trappings of the religion. He committed various heinous acts of blasphemy and defilement.

Now of course, Zaen is brought into RL and becomes a darklord... granting him any number of abilities to better embark of his crusade of vengeance against any man, woman, and child.

## *Island of Sloth*

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### *Introduction*

Wind picks up wildly. The PCs try valiantly to remain on course, but the wind forces them aside. The trees to the side of the road weave wildly in the wind and rain that falls. The PCs must make camp as best they can and ride out the sudden storm. One of the PCs sees a small glow coming from a nearby cave. A man huddles in this cave, also appearing to be hiding from the fury of the storm.

**NPC:** Ghost, Wylkin Gafthook. LE.

Wylkin suffers withdrawal from the "Somma" of Lord Continere's domain. He continuously feels the pangs of desire for this drug even though out his undead existence. A stray bolt of lightning struck the cave where he had cowered before the might of the storm, leaving him dead so suddenly that his spirit lingers on. He is a weak ghost, however, and of no major concern were it not for his desire for 'Somma'. The PCs are not immediately aware of his special status to begin with. He huddles in the corner, shaking and coughing harshly as they approach. His eyes are protruding, his cheeks sunken. He sweats profusely. If a healer tries to examine him, the find to their dismay that he is non-physical. He disappears upon contact. He reappears moments later, re-enacting his previous performance of coughing, shaking, and sweating. This time however, he seems to notice the PCs. He turns his weary eyes towards the PCs, and pleads to them with a single word, "Somma". Then he fades from sight yet again. At this point, most intelligent PCs will have decided to leave the cave for fear of the Ghost coming back again with a less passive attitude.

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### *Outline*

Meeting with a druggie ghost. (Transports them to Continere, hoping they will bring him back some Somma.)

The land: In ill repair, dark soot fills the sky. The whole landscape looks like an industrial nightmare. Plants withered. Streams dry. Animals and livestock are disease ridden and poorly tended. Slaves work the fields, tending to weed choked crops and trying to harvest what seeds they can,

Slavers whip the slaves, pushing the unhealthy workers to the point of exhaustion.

Some slaves fall, to weary to continue. The slavers beat at them, trying to get them to rise until they must admit the slave has perished.

The slavers have red-rimmed eyes, unkempt hair, and filthy garments. Most of them posses near-endless needle-marks on their arms if closely examined, however they first appear to be some form of pox.

If the PCs are outraged by the actions of the slavers, they may engage them in combat. They should easily rout the Slavers, who are unused to resistance. Now, the PCs have to decide what to do with the slaves, who continue to work in the fields like automatons.

The slave's homes are filthy, disease ridden, and in serious need of repair. The only well accessible for use by the slaves has grown stagnant, filled with mosquito larvae and slime. The slaves drink said water without complaint. Several of the women-folk have gathered up meals of grubs, insects, and rodents (which infest he place.)

Stagnant fields behind the slave's homes lie weed-choked filled with cornstalks who's seeds have mostly been lost to rodents, crows, and other animals. These fields lie untouched by the plow, apparently fallow for some time. The corpse of a recently slain slave hangs from a tree nearby. He wrists were bound and we was lifted off the ground by a rope slung over a tree branch. Once hanging there, someone flayed the skin from his body. A crow pecks out the corpse's eye as the PCs watch. The wind shifts and comes from that direction, the wind wafts a stench from the body, indicating a state of decay. Closer inspection reveals maggots wiggling in the grooves where flesh was stripped from the body.

The manor home lies in much the same condition as the rest of the land. Briars and bramble bushes have overtaken the yard. Fields of tobacco have been nearly

overgrown by these weeds. A large open grave lies to one side, releasing a horrible stench caused by ten or twenty slave corpses dumped unceremoniously therein.

Inside the manor home, the PCs may encounter Edmond, who sits on a bed of pillows drawing a purple smoke through a glass and a long tube with a mouthpiece. (Similar to those old fashioned cigarette holders, you know the long thin black kind.) Another tube from the bong goes to the floor and down a hole to some lower level of the manor. He is naked (or nearly so) with flies, insects, and other vermin crawling in the room and on his bed of pillows. He is sweating profusely. His stomach is bloated like the starving children one might have seen in =91save the children' campaigns. = His eyes appear sunken and his hair lies in oily matted clumps on his perspiration soaked head. A light mist of purple-pink smoke pollutes the air in the room, the air in the room smells acrid and rank. The PCs feel dizzy (-2 to hit, saves, and damage).

If the PCs complain about the treatment of his lands and slaves, he professes not to know anything about it. (nor to care). "Stay, go, I don't care. Free the slaves, steal the slaves, I don't care."

If the PCs try to leave, they find the domain surrounded by a black sludge-filled river. There is but one bridge out of the domain, but lies in shambles. Trying to cross the river is impossible. PCs are struck with dizziness and nausea if they touch the liquid, progress to the far side seems to take forever and they suffer -1 to con, str, and dex per round spent in contact with the liquid. Going to the far shore takes forever. Wading back to the near shore can be accomplished instantly. (This is recovered eventually.)

If the PCs try to teleport across the river, they find that their spells fail. If they try to fly over the river, they lose the ability to maintain flight as soon as they get over the



sludge. They fall into it and must wade back to the near shore. If they try to jump the river, they fall short,= etc=85

Edmond can \*allow\* egress from the domain by willing the bridge to form again, but he is much too lazy to do this, effectively trapping the PCs within the domain.

If confronted by the PCs (in combat) Edmond, the cloud of Somma-smoke around him acts as an instant defense. PCs are overcome with an intense euphoria that is instantly addicting unless they save vs poison. Addicted PCs fall to the ground helpless until Edmond tells one of his men to do something with them or another PCs helps them out. Edmond can also breathe out a jet of Somma that strikes the PCs, making them save vs dragonbreath or be overcome in this manner. Addicted PCs find that Edmond completely controls the supply of Somma. Without him (and his secret method of making Somma) none of this drug is available. Being addicted to Somma also makes the PC try to take the easy way out to get more Somma. In this case, the easy way out is to become a slaver and beat the slaves into greater production. Edmond rewards his slavers with Somma. (The Somma gas is piped through lead pipes through the manor. Bongs like Edmonds allow the slavers to get their fixes. Edmond can control the flow of Somma to these bongs at will.

The manufacture of Somma is performed by a steam-driven machine. The machine crushes the seeds and forces a highly concentrated stream of superheated steam over the crushed seeds. This machine was invented by Edmond as an easier way to produce Somma. Slaves dump barrels of Somma seeds and talk into the hopper, which uses a interlaced tooth design to crush them (like the side of two clockwork gears meshing together.) No safety features (such as railings) have been implemented, however. Occasionally a overworked slave

(being beaten by a addicted slaver) falls into the gears and is mashed into a pulp. Work does not stop for this. The magical Somma and the horrible, sudden, deaths of many slaves over the course of time has caused the machine to be an animated automaton. It attacks to defend itself by destruction as per a mechanical golem that can breathe out a jet of Somma smoke once per 3 rounds as per Edmond's ability.

Destroying the machine causes Edmond to cut off his supply of Somma to the rest of the house and savor the last of his supply. He should move to somehow make another machine, but he is too addicted to Somma to leave his supply for long. He struggles to take action and restore the production of Somma, but doesn't have the will until his bong is empty of smoke. During this time, the cloud of smoke dissipates and he doesn't use his breath weapon (he is defenseless). As soon as his bong is empty of smoke however, he begins bellowing to his servants to make more Somma.

The drug addicted slavers outside the manor continue to beat the slaves horribly. Thinking that they are not working fast enough. There is great loss of life among the slaves. The slavers inside the house may attack the PCs in hysterical mania (as per hasted berserkers). Others try to crudely piece back together the machine. (They look like they might have some measure of success, too, due to their frantic attempts. As soon as several large pieces of the machine are set together again, the other pieces begin sliding back over to it. They become semi-animated and begin rebuilding the machine. The PCs must break the machine up again, kill or drive off the slavers in the room, and kill the defenseless Sir Edmond in order to end this horrible machine's existence. Once all three of these things are done, the domain begins to fill with a purple fog-smoke rising up from the ground.

The PCs awaken in another domain.

### *Sloth, Somma crop*

The somma crop would be a thistle type plant. Long wire-hard branches adorned with sharp barbs and wicket thistles. The harvesting of the seeds requires plucking these thistles off of the plant from under leaves and other difficult places to reach. The slaves fingertips are bloody and sore after a day's work in the fields. They collapse each night into disorganized piles on the ground, their fingertips still bleeding. Those who survive long enough learn to wrap the fingertips in whatever cloth they can find, others have hard, thich, calloses armoring their fingertips.

### *Jerhaad's Wagon*

Jerhaad made wagons. It wasn't much but his career paid the bills. At the very least Jerhaad enjoyed his work, taking care and pride in his work. His work was valuable and he has some small renown for making good products.

Jerhaad had aged some 40 winters without taking a wife and was beginning to grow despondent. Still, he had his work, he had his friends, and he had most of his health. Jerhaad never liked to complain.

His skill as a wagon maker had, after all earned him enough of a reputation to have young boys come to apprentice as in wagon making, to learn of his skill. So, in this way, Jerhaad believed he had a family. He was their father while they lived with him, and he treated them like his sons.

Ah, but not for that blissful summers day. The sun shone as it set, painting the sky breathtaking shades of gold and rose. He had been sitting there, after a hard day's work, just lying on his back chewing on an old piece of straw when they rode by.

Maessur was handsome enough in the face, but his belly had grown with his age. His hair had begun receding at precise part while gray had crept into the sideburns. His skin seemed flushed from either excitement or exertion. Jeraad couldn't really tell which. He was talking to her with all the excitement and energy of a man half his age. Jerhaad smiled at the sight. The man was truly luck.

Fortunate indeed, for the object of his attentions was a delectable lady, the color of the purest cream. Amber locks of hair turned in small curls to fall beside her delicate cheeks only to be swept aside behind her delicate little ear. She wore a bonnet of the finest make tied under her chin to keep that lovely red hair in place as best could be done while riding. Her dress, Jerhaad could see, covered a lithe frame indeed. She seemed, delicate, innocent, pure. She looked upon her lover with absolute adoration. Jerhaad's heart wept from her beauty.

The driver of the cart failed to note a rocky patch in the road, and the wheels of the genteel carriage clanged harshly against it, splintering the wooden axle, perhaps already worn from age. The cart came to a screeching halt.

The gentleman, for the first time since the entered Jerhaad's view turned his attention away from the lovely lady. He stepped out of the carriage to examine the damage, giving Jerhaad even more time to appreciate his luck,

He found himself staring as one would look at a painting crafted by a true master. Her eyes were a watery blue that mesmerized him in their depths. "My God, I'm staring, how impolite, how leecherous", he thought to himself, but could not bring himself to turn away.

He sighed.

She returned his stare, not with the devotion he saw her bestow upon the fat



man, but not with revulsion either. She seemed to bear no hint of bashfulness, despite remaining innocent seeming, and pure. She was positively perfect.

But Jerhaad knew he brought this torture upon himself, she obviously loved the fat man more than words could say. Jerhaad knew the fat man must be terribly wealthy and tried to banish any thoughts of possessing this particular woman.

He closed his eyes and pretended to sleep.

"You there!" cried a voice that must be the fat man's. "You, sleeping there, would you be so kind as to help a fellow indistress?"

And so, did Jerhaad come to take the three weary travelers in a wagon of his own to his humble abode. There the fat man admired his wonderfully crafted wagons, simply demanding that Jerhaad craft a new wagon for him to bring his beautiful lady to tour the country in. A carriage, fit for his lady.

And Jerhaad agreed.

Jerhaad obsessed with making the finest wagon possible. Blood, sweat, tears, and even some of his own money went into its creation. The gentleman did say a wagon fit for that divine lady, and Jerhaad vowed he would create just such a thing.

As time went by, the relationship between the Gentleman and his lady began to deteriorate. Jerhaad thought he saw bruises on her tender flesh, showing purple and ugly through her delicate dress. The look of adoration in her eyes turned to hate.

Jerhaad began considering taking his wagon to the gentleman's estate and riding away with her forever. Romantic, foolish notions, he knows, for he was not a rich man and could hardly support so fine a lady. Nightly, he had tortured dreams of what she and he might be doing. Loving or fighting, both tore at his soul.

Jerhaad was spying on them again, when he saw he horrid thing. There, through the window, he could clearly see the gentle man striking delicate lass with a heated poker. His mind unhinged, rage enveloped him.

He returned quickly home, to the finished carriage (awaiting only her lord to pick her up.) He hitched up the very best horses he had, gathered up his most valuable treasures, and stormed out upon the road like the hand of death.

A storm arose and poured down upon him, pummeling him with its fierceness. But nor mere storm would turn him from his path, his choice, his life. Yes, he would finally be alive. Not just existing, but living!

Riding at breakneck speed, he saw the black-cloaked gentleman preparing to mount his own carriage. Hell fire fury in his eyes, Jerhaad rode down the man where he stood hooves and wheels tearing into mortal flesh, grinding bones and spewing blood. The carriage bounced hard after running over their victim and Jerhaad pulled his horses to a sudden halt.

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I have two perfectly wonderful endings to this story!

### *---Ending #1---*

Climbing down from the wagon, Jerhaad ran to the door of the mansion still swinging in the gale. Soaked to the bone from the fury of the might gale, he bounded inside full of energy, vitality, and damn loopy proclamations of love bearing not one whit of resemblance to poetry but for the fervor in which they were spoken.

There, lining in a pool of cooling blood lie the corpse. Jerhaad's stomach lurched. His eyes turned in disbelief and the bloody gruesome poker, the fell murder weapon discarded in a hasty flight.

Tears welled up in his eyes and his heart beat as if to explode. His knees wavered and he collapsed in a shaking fit before the corpse of the fat gentleman.

"No, nnnoo , No!!!!" he screamed in fear, rage, and denial. Tears welled up from within, streaming down his face. Holding his head in his hands he shook, heart dying inside him. He bolted up and out into the Tepest again, falling before the crumpled body.

Pulling the heavy raincoat aside with trembling hands, his eyes full upon hers. Anguished, he screamed above the gale, "No!," and slowly went mad, his cart shifting in the wind, rolling back and forth as if alive.

### *--Ending #2-----*

Climbing down from the wagon, Jerhaad ran to the door of the mansion still swinging in the gale. Soaked to the bone from the fury of the might gale, he bounded inside full of energy, vitality, and damn loopy proclamations of love bearing not one whit of resemblance to poetry but for the fervor in which they were spoken,

The noise of it deafened him, his lady, whom has always seemed pure and beautiful tore through the house in an absolute rage. Screeching like a banshee she mashed china and glass with the poker used against her. A red, blistered mark from the poker marring her perfect face.

Babbling his proclamations of undying love, Jerhaad fell before his lady. He swore to love her always and forever, paying any price to be with her. He vowed to toil as hard as his poor hands were able to ensure she had every fine thing she could ever want. He begged her to come away with him.

Moved to tears, she cried "Oh, my sweet Jerhaad, long have I wished to be taken from here. Money matters not to me so long as I live in a house with love."

Overjoyed, he embraced her. But she was not finished, and spoke on, "but I cannot go, for the master of this house would forbid it."

"My love, my joy, the monster of man who beat you is no more, He fell beneath my wheels as I rode up in rage to save you from his abuse. You are free my love, free to come with me wherever you will."

So saying they embraced again with a fervor that nearly broke the old man's spine. Laughing he told her her carriage awaited, his most magnificent carriage ever. "And you are the only passenger that will ever be worthy of her."

Safely within the carriage, away from the rain they admired his work. They admired each other. They kissed, they touched. They gave in to passionate embrace. The look of love in their eyes burning so bright that its fire consumed their reason completely and they gave themselves to wanton desire right there in the carriage.

As Jerhaad, nervous beyond words and filled with love tore aside her bodice, his eyes grew round and his heart ceased to beat. The look of love in his eyes turned to one of shock and then horror as he gazed upon the crisscrossed scars that marred her flesh. Bile rose in his throat. Color drained from his skin until he was as pale as she.

Her adoring gaze melted as a snowflake in spring. Her eyes flashed rejection and then quickly burned with rage as hot as her passion a moment ago. She reached out to him with hands clearly once severed at the wrists and inside the perfect wagon, the perfect woman tore into Jerhaad's flesh. Inside the wagon, a torrent of blood flowed a grotesque parody or the Tepest without.

### *-----End story, begin explanation---*

The fat gentleman had created a golem bride for himself, and began to suffer the natural effects of a golem's developing psyche. The



heated poker is the only non-magical thing capable of harming a flesh golem (from VR guide to the Created). Jerhaad also possessed an obsessive drive in the creation of his carriage. In his obsession, he spawned a variant golem as well. The wheels of this golem born of obsession had sufficient HD to harm even the golem-flesh of his would be lover. So you see, either he killed his beloved with his creation, or she killed him in the throws of passion within.

This story, by itself could explain a native PC's drive to destroy the supernatural. Any servant boy at the gentleman's house could well have seen both the flesh golem's creation, the death of the golem, her murderous rage, or the cart unhitch itself from the horses and ride away by itself. (The carriage can love the flesh golem in a way, but never a way that satisfies her.)

The spirit of the murdered man, or the young ladies he murdered to get the fresh corpses (notably a paladin and a bard among them), could still haunt the manor where the foul experiment were performed. The coach could roam the hillside, either seeking his love (which spurns the mechanical creation) or to kill the murderer of his creator (as you see fit.)

The golem-lady could also be encountered in the area, especially lone on a silent evening seen in the distance by a PC who grows to love her beauty and desires to possess her. Perhaps she is pursued by the cart, and makes up a story about an obsessed man who murdered her husband (the gentleman) and came for her. She may claim she killed the madman in self-defense, but several days after his death, the cart began moving of its own, trying to run her down! Then as the PC is about to fall under the wheels of the hell-cart the innocent girl in need of rescuing may raise her rage to save the PC (whom she now has grown to love) displaying her enormous strength. During

this battle, her dress is torn enough to display the scars of her construction.

If the golem-woman was destroyed, the cart remains as a mostly passive magical item. It can roll of its own accord without a horse at a movement rate of 48" across level ground. Also, while hitched to a set of horses, the cart could pull itself along as well, allowing the horses to move at their unhindered movement rate. The walls of the cart would be secure, able to withstand powerful blows and acting as excellent protection vs arrow shot at the inhabitants. To a more magical campaign, the cart may be empowered to ride over water or even fly as he DM sees fit.

Sadly, the cart has the horrible habit of 'accidently' running over lithe young women with curly red hair wearing bonnets and a dress with full sleeves. The first time should seem like a terrible accident. But it keeps happening, and always only red haired ladies, then the PCs figure out what the cart is, try to destroy it, only to find it ready to defend itself.

## *Palmistry*

{Taken from the text "A. V. Laider," written by Max Beerbohm at litgothic.com.}

The plot idea begins with a character who's interested in palmestry or some sort of fortune telling. Very interested. This character seeks out the Vistani, hoping to learn some of the secrets of seeing the future. As the Vistani scoff him for his giorgio 'talent' at fortune telling, he flees in shame under a barrage of insult and scorn.

In the quite of his rooms, for he is a rich man and born to a sort of leisurely privilege, he scorns the Vistani and utters a curse against them. He will take from the Raunie her gift of seeing the future and use it to become rich and famous himself. The dark powers hear his passionate plea and deliver

into his hands a text promising a ritual which may help him in his task. Of course, to his way of thinking the character believes to have uncovered a tome of ancient knowledge to do an exhaustive search and fair expenditure of time, effort, and money.

The tome details a method of stealing the divinational power of another psychic by murdering them with a sapling's root and burying the body under where the sapling still grows. The head, then, must be removed and encased in a sphere of pure glass. So long as the skull remains in his possession, the character is assured that he will retain the psychic powers of the former fortune teller as he holds the departed spirit in necromantic slavery.

Murdering the vistani woman, she curses him with her dying breath to "see only evil turns of fortune with the power you hope to steal." The first palm he reads with his new found skill is his own, a palm that shows a terribly and tragic death ahead of him, one which he will narrowly escape but will be soon followed with his own death. He knows approximately how long he has left before this tragic incident and grows fearful of the day.

Dismayed, he begins traveling across the countryside, telling fortunes, all terrible, all coming true in due course. With his own death continuing to weight upon him, he turns away from reading palms and avoids the topic all together. Assured that his own death lies ahead in just a few short years, he tries to put off all travel, but eventually is forced by a severe bout of influenza to leave his comfortable home for a more secluded area by the sea where he hopes to recover. The trip, however, to this resort crosses the sea of sorrows for a short pace and the character must travel by ship.

During the course of his ship, fearing his death close at hand, he waxes more loquacious than normal, and as he travels

with the PCs, he may engage them in conversation, seeing if they believe or do not believe in fortune telling/palmistry. An acquaintance of his from years back (before he gained true palmistry skill) acclaims the character as a master reading palms and asks for him to read his palms and those of his daughter and wife. He may read the other character's palms (but not all of them) if they wish it, he will say out loud, "death surrounds you wherever you go, on any given day death may find you or pass you by! What a horrible life you live." He may also, at your option, make other vague predictions that you can cause the characters to wonder about farther down the line.

As he performs a reading of their palms, pressured by their insistence, he tells moderately benign fortunes but a successful sense motive check may tell the PCs that he is frightened of what he sees and holding something back.(The wife, daughter, and husband are due to die very soon, but the Husband is set to depart on a long business trip as soon as they reach port, meaning their deaths must happen during this trip.)Investigation of this man, who seems more and more frightened as the evening passes after he has read the others' palms, may turn up the skull in the crystal ball, tomes of arcane magic, or other items implicating sorcerous ability.

As the ship continues on its way, as storm brews. During the height of the storm, sea-zombies start scrambling upon the deck. Many passengers are attacked, but the only immediate fatalities are those for whom the character read the palms earlier. The character also avoids these three individuals like the plague while the zombies attack, refusing to take shelter with them, apparently running off in a blind panic if pressured. At some point, while trying to hide from the zombies, he grasps the palms of another passenger hiding nearby, screams, and runs



out of the room as the zombies burst in, killing that passenger.

He will run away down into his private room. There, the PCs may come after him. If they do so, he cries and moans that death is coming for them all. He claims to have foreseen the death of the people who's palms he read, and babbles about having seen his own death so many years ago. One character might find the crystal ball with a skull inside, at which point he curses the raunie for her trickery. "I only wanted to be able to read fortunes, she wouldn't teach me, she left me no choice," he bawls.

If he sees any of the PCs palms, he seems to have a ray of hope light up his face when suddenly the zombies crash into the room. He's struck forcefully in the head by a zombie and is dazed. If one of the characters is weak and near death, assign that character a fort save (DC 20) to avoid death. If they fail this save, the man, as he's passing out, sees their hand and pronounces their doom "your blood will flow, your body will lie as a corpse upon the floor." (The Zombies will tear into that victim, never missing, always critical hitting, until they are dead, however, they are only "dead" in terms of being in the land of negative hit points and can be saved by first aid from the companions.)

The PCs can then fight off the horde of zombies as day dawns and the storm breaks. The crystal ball will have rolled out the door and have been taken away with the zombies as they loot the rest of the ship just before fleeing dawn's light.

In the personal effects of the palmistry character, they will find a note by Dr. Ilhousen suggesting that the man is delusional, paranoid, and a pathological liar. The good doctor will have found no evidence of his actually being able to foretell the future and complain about the subject's tendency to speak to a plaster skull encased in glass which he commissioned from a

craftsman in Mordentshire for unknown reasons.

So, was he delusional? Was he cursed? Did he foretell the deaths on the ship, or create a delusional paranoid story about it. And, most especially, will the events he may have foretold for some of the PCs come true?





# *Bleedings of the Profane*

## *Spells of Forbidden Lore*

*By Dani "A G Thing" Hatcher*

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*"There is a charm about the forbidden that makes it unspeakably desirable."*

*-Mark Twain*

*I present good sirs my findings into the works of the arcane as its practitioners so blindly call it. Each of these dark works is a testament to the need of all the folk of all lands to put these devils in men's clothes to the sword and flame. These black spells in this foul grimore were taken from such a fey corrupted creature that I and other faithful were able to root out of an eldritch fey ruin near Briggdarrow. I send these foul magic's to be locked away and safely studied so that when the enemy may rise we will know his tricks no matter how ancient and be not afraid.*

*May the truth of Belenus shine upon you...*

*Father Regenal d Lyne*

Those that work in the act of manipulating magical energy, whether divine or arcane, often find in Ravenloft that certain aspects of it require more of them than others. This cost is often found in the sacrifice of the sacred, the defilement of the pure and the bending of the free in order to make reality fit their whims. These spells while not all evil are for the most part considered to be tools of corruption and deceit. Those that

practice such dark magic have either done so to achieve something that they view as worth the cost, or been so thoroughly trapped by the lure of the power offered they feel they might be above such if the use is pure.

These spells are both tools of temptation, and the reward of those who would follow such temptation farther than one should. Those that use the lesser spells found in these pages, be warned for they tread a fine line. Even those not wholly evil can all too easily be used to such purpose. These ancient magic's had perhaps been lost for a reason for while potent they come at a cost to the caster they may not be prepared to pay.

They are tools but their application is so very dependant upon certain acts that evil both fuels the actions and the energy of the spell. Heroes would often scoff at such obvious evil, but if they have need of it for a greater good then what would such a character do with such power. These spells offer a way to test the players' morals when used in the right light and circumstance. The use of these spells should never be trivial or without purpose. When a villain casts them they should shape their plot or plan around their application. A goal should be achieved through the success of this spell and hatred directed at those foolish enough to stop it. Examining clues about the spell may provide the way for heroes to find the creature foul enough to cast them.

So use them well and they will give you ways to tell the story you always wanted... Or thought you wanted...

***Note:** Almost all the spells in this article include the use of profane components or foci. These components and foci are completely necessary and cannot be eschewed for the casting these spells. Any item that casts one of these spells has the powers check chance increased by 1% when used or carried.*



### ***Black Hearts Rhythm***

Enchantment [Evil, Mind Affecting]

**Level:** Sorcerer/Wizard 8, Cleric 7

**Components:** V, M, F

**Casting Time:** 1 round

**Range:** Touch

**Target:** Caster and One living creature

**Duration:** Permanent

**Saving Throw:** Will negates

**Spell Resistance:** Yes

*The link between the victim and the casters mind and body chains them together in the casters evil. The subject must also live with the corruption and curses laid against the caster.*

The subject of this spell becomes the one afflicted with the effects of the curses, diseases, and other such maladies that are cast against or inflicted on the caster by others. The caster may not inflict curses she casts upon herself onto the victim, only curses and maladies others place upon her. This includes lycanthropy, mummy rot, curses of vengeance, and negatives due to energy drain or spells and so on. While the spell continues all aspects of such effects are transmitted to the target from the caster as if they had been cast or affected them. Should

the effect of this spell be ended the caster is affected as normal but the victim still carries the same effects as well though the severity of any curses is reduced by one to a minimum of embarrassing.

This spell cannot affect, remove, or transmit curses or effects resulting from failed Powers Checks.

**Profane Focus:** Two small statues of the victim and caster carved from coal and a small sack to contain the casters statue made from the skin of an innocent and another made of a murderer's skin to contain the victim's statue.

### ***Clutching Flame***

Necromancy [Evil]

**Level:** Sorcerer/Wizard 5

**Components:** V, S, M,

**Casting Time:** 1 Minute

**Range:** Touch

**Duration:** See Text

**Saving Throw:** Fort Partial

**Spell Resistance:** No

*The fire spreads fast and while people throw water upon it the flames do not recede. As one its victims becomes consumed in fire they find that even when submerged in a nearby trough the poor man still burns as if in the center of the blaze.*

This spell causes a source flame to be infused with negative energy, which causes any fire started by the affected source to become unquenchable to normal means as long as the source still burns. The duration of the spell is equal to the amount of time that the flame source continues to burn. Every object that can be lit aflame and catches fire continues to burn until the fuel is consumed or the source is extinguished. Creatures and objects carried by creatures that might be lit aflame by such a fire are entitled to a Fort save using the characters



bonus to such. If successful the fire does not catch while depending upon the effect they may still take half damage from high heat and the like. Each 10ft by 10ft square of fire created by this spell may be Rebuked or Turned as undead of Hit Die equal to it the save DC.

**Profane Component:** The hand of a proven arsonist, clutching a flame source such as a torch, lantern, or candle that uses flame.

### *Come What May*

Illusion (Phantasm) [Fear, Mind Affecting, Evil]

**Level:** Sorcerer/Wizard 6, Cleric 5, Bard 6

**Components:** V, S, F

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** Personal or 1 mile

**Target:** Caster and/or One Living Creature (See text)

**Duration:** 1 minute per/lvl or concentration

**Saving Throw:** Will disbelief (If interacted with) and Will negates (See text)

**Spell Resistance:** No

*Every time the victim tries to make a decision a sudden look of (terror or confidence) crosses their face as they see exactly what their (Fear, Horror, Pride, Love, Rage, etc...) would expect... Or what you desire to twist it into.*

This spell can affect either the caster and/or another target within the listed range upon casting but once decided the target cannot be changed.

If the caster targets herself, along with another then she finds that her appearance, voice, even touch and other noises (but not scent) are disguised from all others for the duration as if made by what ever the viewer would expect to see based on their beliefs

and emotional state. A fearful viewer currently haunted by previous encounters with a werewolf would therefore view the caster as if they were their fearful ideal of a werewolf, prompting another Fear save, Horror save or the like depending upon the situation. A viewer under pleasant emotions such as love with romantic ideals would see the caster as an ideal of their perfect love before them. A proud warrior in battle looking to prove them self would see the caster perhaps as a foul villain or terrible monster of legend beyond reproach. But this illusion does not stop there, for when the other target attempts to interact the second aspect of the spell begins to function.

The spell gives the concealed caster the insight into how the target expects them in the guise of the illusion to behave in response to any given action. This grants the caster an insight bonus equal to AC, Attack Rolls, Charisma, Wisdom, and Intelligence checks, and Reflex saves against the target equal to their caster level to a maximum of +10. However every time they use such a bonus to act against the target all viewing it may make a Will save at the original DC to disbelieve the spell. Upon the end of the duration of this version of the spell the illusion is dismissed so time should be carefully considered upon using it.

Should the caster only target the victim, they are instead subject to a far different effect. For the duration the caster must concentrate, and the victim sees every action they take turnout either successful or as a failure, creating delusional phantasm as their emotions and expectations would dictate but as it is an illusion this is not what happens. A happy person hired to craft something would see and act as if when they arrive that the job it is going perfectly and yet the spell would twist every action to appear successful but in actually the target would automatically fail. A fearful target would

never escape the illusionary werewolf that follows it, missing it even at point blank range, stumbling as they run over obstacles that do not exist. A lover may find the illusionary dream woman/man to finally arrive and be able to prove their love for them and win them over in a fulfilling manner. The target unlike the above version is the only one who sees these alterations and they can be convinced it is false by others easily unless they are alone giving them a save with a +4 bonus to disbelieve the imaginary image (Thus the caster may have to arrange circumstances before hand). When the caster chooses to end this version of the spell, they gain direct control of the illusion in the final five rounds.

The spell allows the caster to make the outcome of the events play to their will. The happy soul may have done what they think is something productive and lock the last piece into place of what they thought was a work of art only to find it is something corrupt they have created. A fearful target may finally slam through a door seeing the beast that had pursued them unready on the other side and open to attack when the image is superimposed over an innocent that does not see the delusion. The lovers may have finally embraced only to have that ideal lover suddenly rot within the poor victim's hands to dust. An appropriate Fear, Horror or Madness check at the spells DC could result from such twisting. Still this spell could be used simply to lie to the character and if done the caster makes any bluff checks with a +8 bonus in those final five rounds.

If the ethereal resonance of the area matches the emotional state of the victim the DC to resist this spell rises, equal to the rank of the resonance. Unlike other emotions if either version is used against someone under the effect of a Rage effect or spell it may still affect them but the +4 bonus to the targets

Will saves applies and all benefits to the caster are halved. If the target is not the caster and travels further than one mile from the caster the spell ends suddenly dismissing the illusion instantly from sight if it is currently visible. With either version of the spell there is a risk that the subject's emotional state might change. If that does happen the caster must make a Will save at the DC of the spell or suffer the effect as if under a Confusion spell for 1d2 rounds as the spell over compensates in the changes and they cannot keep up. If however the beliefs/mental image attached to the illusion changes (which is hard but not impossible), the illusion also changes to match this sudden shift and the target receives a Will save with a +4 bonus to disbelieve it after such a change.

**Profane Focus:** The blood of the caster and the target, along with a gold, silver, and copper coin on a small silver mirror within the skull of an honest man.

### *Covenant Undone*

Universal [Evil]

**Level:** Sorcerer/Wizard 7, Cleric 6,

**Components:** V, S, M

**Casting Time:** 1 round

**Range:** Close (25ft + 5ft per 2 levels)

**Target:** One living creature

**Duration:** Concentration

**Saving Throw:** Will negates

**Spell Resistance:** No

*The subject tries to cast more of its own magic, but there is a hole where such power once resided with nothing left in its place.*

This spell cuts the subject off from any source of magic/psionics upon which it may rely. Any magical/psionic spells, spell-like abilities or supernatural qualities that are related to the creature's race, class, or spells or other effects affecting it become



suppressed for the listed duration. The creature may not benefit from any spells/psionics cast upon it nor may it use magical items requiring activation or spell completion triggers. The creature however also may not be affected by spells that directly target it except if they are cast by the caster, though they may still be harmed by spells that require an attack roll or do so indirectly (such as a fireball, cone of cold, melf's acid arrow etc).

**Profane Component:** The tongues of three casters that use the same source (Arcane, Specific God, Nature, Psionic) as the target creature to acquire their magic.

### *Nihilistic Vision*

Illusion [Evil, Mind Affecting]

**Level:** Sorcerer/Wizard 4, Cleric 4, Blackguard 4

**Components:** S, M

**Casting Time:** Immediate Action

**Range:** Medium (100ft +25ft per level)

**Target:** One Creature

**Duration:** See text

**Saving Throw:** Will partial (See text)

**Spell Resistance:** Yes

*There is a feeling as if the air snaps around the subject. The victim suddenly halts and fearfully glances about as if blind screaming for an instant, choking as if unable to inhale the next and then just as suddenly as before they seem to see once more but their eyes hold a certain disturbed quality for what ever had come to pass.*

Upon a successful save the subject is confused as the spell that round but nothing more. But if they fail the save the subject is to its own mind witness to the destruction of all things except its self. The victim watches helplessly as everything and everyone suffers such a very relative fate to their worst fears but exaggerated to a grand scale,

(crumbles to dust, rots due to disease, destroyed by an army of a sort, is horrifically and utterly destroyed, burned to ash, or consumed by darkness etc) while they remain horribly immune. This causes them to make a horror check at the same DC of the spell or suffer an appropriate effect (such as Fearstruck, Nightmares, Obsession, Revulsion, Fascination, Haunted, Mental Shock, System Shock). Following this cataclysm they are left within an endless void to fall into nothing, unable to breathe, no light to see by, no warmth to hold off the increasing chill setting in (though you are free to describe otherwise for the purposes of conveying the scene). Just as they are about to lose consciousness they awake back into the real world just as they left it but one round later. During that round they are helpless and insensitive to the real world and what ever happens to them. Upon this return they must make a madness save at the same DC or be subject to the Major Madness effect Suicidal Thoughts.

**Profane Component:** A child's hand within a sphere of glass worth at least 5gp that is to be dropped and shattered against the ground upon casting.

### *Reprieve of the Damned*

Necromancy [Evil, Mind Affecting]

**Level:** Sorcerer/Wizard 9, Cleric 8

**Components:** V, S, M, F

**Casting Time:** 1 day

**Range:** Touch

**Target:** One Body

**Duration:** 1 day/per lvl of the body

**Saving Throw:** None

**Spell Resistance:** None

*Forced back again from death the subject is compelled to serve the caster even as they feel their restored life rotting away.*

When cast the subject of this spell is returned to life in a body (not necessarily their own) by the caster even if they do not wish to be, to fulfill a specific contract. They are able to resist normally but whenever they disobey the casters direct commands to keep to their end of the contract they suffer permanent hit point damage equal to the casters level as part of their body turns black with rot. Every day they also suffer the permanent drain of one level as their body decays and the life they were granted slips away. The caster is the only one that may restore these levels and lost hit points and only by casting Reprieve of the Damned again and only for the same contract. A single subject may not be the target of two uses of this spell at the same time for different contracts or casters. Once the subject has fulfilled the contract between them and the caster they are peacefully released into death once again as the contract dissolves to dust. Unless the contract is destroyed the victim cannot be freed from this spell by any means.

**Profane Focus:** A corrupted and befouled alter and a ritual area specially prepared with the seven objects that have been used by the subject directly.

**Profane Component:** A fresh body and a contract signed by the subject describing a service left undone to its bearer.

### *Steal Destiny*

Transmutation [Evil]

**Level:** Sorcerer/Wizard 4, Cleric 3, Bard 4, Hexblade 4, Blackguard 4, Assassin 4

**Components:** V, S, M

**Casting Time:** 10 minutes

**Range:** Medium (200ft +10ft per level)

**Target:** One living creature

**Duration:** (See text)

**Saving Throw:** Will Negates

**Spell Resistance:** Yes

*Suddenly the subject appears in an unfamiliar room standing over the body of someone they do not know, and holding a blood-stained knife when they had just been talking to friends' moments ago. A maid knocks on the door to the room asking for them by name and wondering what the noise was about.*

The target and the caster remain fundamentally who and what they are but they trade positions in the physical world and in the minds and history of those in the world that know them. Equipment is traded as well or to say that it is placed upon who ever takes its owners place. Equipment that will not fit falls to the ground unharmed. Friends, acquaintances and relatives of the caster recognize the target as if they had always lived that life before and the targets relations remember the caster similarly. The memories remain the same however other than changing the appearance of who is actually performing the deeds and actions people remember in their minds. Thus if a chaotic evil caster trades with a lawful good fighter they may find that they have trouble matching up to the history they have stolen and vice versa for the target. Each day after the first the subject may make a Will save at the same DC but with a cumulative +1 bonus. If successful the effect ends and the two switch back to their normal places in the world. Failure indicates that the spell persists for another day. Should the target be killed before they can succeed in saving against the spell, the caster permanently adopts the new life they have stolen. However should the caster die before the spell is broken the target must make one final Will save against the spells DC with current cumulative bonuses gained as above. If



successful the spell is broken normally and to no ill effect, but if not the target remains trapped in the new life unless a wish or miracle is used to break the effect.

**Profane Component:** The caster must murder the single most important person to them in their current life.

### *The Black Thirteen*

Abjuration [Evil]

**Level:** Sorcerer/Wizard 9

**Components:** S, M, F

**Casting Time:** 1 hour

**Range:** Personal

**Target:** One creature

**Duration:** 1 hour

**Saving Throw:** None (Harmless)

**Spell Resistance:** No

*As the clock strikes twelve the hands upon its face freeze in place but all else continues to move.*

The subject of this spell automatically gains one hour to act normally with those he interacts within addition to what is normal for the day. Casting the spell requires the caster and subject to be silent and the subject must (if not also the caster) stare into the face of a clock or other time keeping device from the first chime of eleven o'clock to the last chime of twelve o'clock on the tick. Should the subject or caster of the spell speak or the subject breaks their gaze from the time keeping object (blinking is allowed) the subject and the caster automatically fail the casting and must wait for the next night. The subject may wander about as normal and others who see her acknowledge her and behave normally during the one hour span allotted them. At the end of the spells duration all the events still remain but however all who witnessed the subject in any way forget all details of it as if they only saw a shape. Conversations while remembered

as happening cannot be recalled and nothing no matter how insignificant can be determined to be the result of the subject's presence. When asking witnesses about the time of the events, the length feels as if the allotted portion of the hour they spent went on but all clocks and other time devices seem not to function having stopped at the point in the hour they first meet the subject (This leaves an indirect timeline for those trying to follow). Those who do not interact with the subject (by simply seeing them or even hearing them) do not become entangled within the separate hour. Upon the end of the spell those affected find that no time has passed to those unaffected and the first second after twelve has just passed.

**Focus:** A clock or other time piece of any kind that keeps accurate time.

**Profane Components:** An eye and an ear of one that is still alive but has not reached the age of thirteen.

### *Thought Whisper*

Illusion (Glamour)

**Level:** Sorcerer/Wizard 0, Cleric 0,

**Components:** V, S, M,

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** 30ft

**Target:** One Creature

**Duration:** Instantaneous

**Saving Throw:** Will Negates

**Spell Resistance:** Yes

*A thought of your own comes to the subject's mind that seems to be as if they themselves thought it into existence.*

This spell gives a thought to the subject of the casters about anyone thing no matter what it is. The subject may make a save against any such foreign thoughts and if successful the thought never enters their mind. If they fail however they believe the

thought is their own, though they are not compelled to act upon it in anyway. Such thoughts may cause the subject to be confused or feel shame or such but they cannot cause the victim to suffer a Fear, Horror, or Madness save though they could be used to make them more receptive. Use of this spell adds a +1 bonus to the DC's of all attempts to cause Fear saves, Horror saves, or +1 to a checks to either gaslight a subject or to help them heal from madness.

**Material Component:** A hand full of sand.



# *Allies in Darkness*

## *Pathfinder Allegiances for Ravenloft*

*By Doctor-Evil (E. G. M. Parsons)*

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The Players Handbook 2 introduced rules for developing organizations and affiliations. Below are some possible affiliations for use in Ravenloft, adapted for the Pathfinder rules (for 3.5 simply add an additional 4 to required skill ranks)

### *Noble House*

**Membership:** You must be a member of the gentry, possess the “bastard” trait, or have gained the Nobility feat.

Criterion	Affiliation Mod
<b>One-Time</b>	
Character level	+1/2 levels
Levels in Aristocrat or Dilettante or possess the Nobility feat	+2
Possess the Leadership feat	+1
Skill ranks in Knowledge (nobility) or diplomacy	+1 each
5+ ranks in Knowledge (nobility) or diplomacy	+2 each
No ranks in Knowledge (nobility) or diplomacy	-3
Orphan/Foundling	-2
Illegitimate	-4
Outcast	-1/OR
Own a mansion house, land or other significant property	+2
<b>Multiple Use</b>	
Makes an desirable marriage to another noble house or wealthy family	+2
Makes an undesirable marriage (e.g. to a peasant or vistani)	-4

Criterion	Affiliation Mod
Amass significant wealth (each 20,000gp in luxuries, jewelry, property (other than a mansion as above), clothes, libraries, carriages and ships – does not include magic items)	+1 each 20,000gp
Hold a ball or significant society event (minimum cost 1,000gp) [can be taken a maximum of 3 times a year]	+1

Affiliation Rank	Score	Title: Benefits and Duties
0	4 or lower	<b>Minor nobility:</b> You can put the phrase “the right honorable” in front of your name, No benefits.
1	5-10	<b>Lady/Lady:</b> Gain a minor title (Lord/Lady or Lieutenant if military) and a +1 bonus to diplomacy or intimidate checks when your status is known.
2	11-15	<b>Baronet/Baronette:</b> you gain the title Baronet (or Captain if military; or Deacon if religious) and a personal manservant or maid (NPC equal to half your CL) as an additional follower.  <b>Wealthy living:</b> You must pay at least 100gp x CL/2 a month to maintain your living standards or your affiliation score drops by 1.
3	16-20	<b>Baron/Baroness:</b> You gain the title Baron (or Major if military; Archdeacon if religious). You gain a +2 bonus to diplomacy or intimidate checks when your status is known. You gain a +1 bonus to your effective leadership score.
4	21-25	<b>Viscount/Viscountess:</b> You gain the title Viscount (or Colonel if military; or Bishop if religious)  You are granted title to a mansion, or small fortification, worth 50,000gp. If you already possess a mansion it is remodeled and extended. You also gain a steward (you gain an additional cohort as if you possess the leadership feat, but the cohort only has levels in NPC classes).  <b>Politicking:</b> Must make a diplomacy roll (DC 20) once a month or affiliation score drops by 2
5	26-29	<b>Marquis/Marchioness:</b> (or Brigadier if military; Archbishop if religious). You gain a +3 bonus to diplomacy or intimidate checks when your status is known. You gain a +2 bonus to your effective leadership score. You are granted additional land around your mansion (2 square miles) for your personal enjoyment, or development.
6	30 or higher	<b>Earl/Countess:</b> (or General if military; Cardinal if religious). You gain an additional estate with land and a mansion house . You gain a +4 bonus to diplomacy or intimidate checks when your status is known. You gain a +3 bonus to your effective leadership score.  <b>Plot:</b> Must make a diplomacy roll (DC 30) to gather information or a plot forms against you (DMs choice)  <b>Executive Powers:</b> Law, Pariah, Trade



# Academie Des Sciences

## Affiliation Scores and Membership benefits

**Membership:** In addition to finding an existing member willing to introduce you to this secret society, you must donate an arcane scroll spell, potion or textbook worth at least 500gp.

Potential candidate will be interviewed (Diplomacy roll DC20 and Knowledge (Arcana) roll DC 20) to assess their suitability. Upon membership the candidate will receive a silver moonstone ring (worth 100gp, but suitable for enchantment).

Criterion	Affiliation Mod
<b>One-Time</b>	
Character level	+1/2 levels
Knowledge [arcana] skill ranks	+1
Knowledge [arcana] above 5 ranks	+2
Skill ranks in three or more non-arcane knowledge skills	+1
5+ ranks in three or more non-arcane knowledge skills	+2
Possess the “Knowledgeable” or “University education” feat	each +1
From a CL8 or greater domain	+1
Skill ranks in Use magic device	+1
Use magic device %+ ranks	+2
No ranks in Knowledge [arcana] or Use magic device	each -2
From a CL6 or lower domain	-2
<b>Multiple Use</b>	
Discovers a new or unique magic item	+2
Gives a magic item value 10,000gp or less to the Academy	+1
Gives a magic item of value 10-50,000gp to the Academy	+2
Gives a magic item of value greater than 50,000gp to the Academy	+3
Gives a unique artifact to the Academy	+6
Recovers a magic item for the Academy	+1
Recovers a magic item for the Academy at great risk to self	+2
Fails to retrieve a magic item for the Academy	-4
Destroys a magic item or item-related knowledge	-8
Reveals information about the Academy to outsiders	-10

Affiliation Rank	Score	Title: Benefits and Duties
0	3 or lower	None.
1	4-9	<b>Associate:</b> Gain use of academy’s libraries for research. Gain +2 on Knowledge (arcane) when doing so.

Affiliation Rank	Score	Title: Benefits and Duties
2	10-17	<p><b>Member:</b> May use Academy workshops to create alchemical and magic items. Gain a 10% discount on the cost of material components.</p> <p>Can compare arcane (if a wizard) or divine (if an archivist) spellbooks with Academie members and may transcribe spells (if successful in a diplomacy roll DC 15+3/spell level).</p>
3	18-24	<p><b>Senior Member:</b> Gain a 10% discount on materials when crafting magical items. Gain a 25% discount on the cost of material components for spells.</p> <p>Diplomacy roll to transcribe spells reduced to 13 + 2/spell level.</p>
4	25-29	<p><b>Fellow:</b> May borrow magical item from the Academie repository for a period of one month (or one mission) to a total value of 1500gp/character level value.</p> <p>Diplomacy roll to transcribe spells reduced to 10 + 2/spell level.</p>
5	30 or higher	<p><b>Inner Circle:</b> Gain access to the secret stacks– gain a +10 bonus of knowledge rolls when using the secret stacks to conduct research .</p> <p>The inner circle member is offered an assistant to assist with administrative matters. This assistant is an additional cohort (level as in the leadership feat) but is an archivist or arcane spell caster.</p> <p>If requested, the Inner Circle member may request permission to set up an Academy base of operations (in a city where one does not already exist). The academy will provide a 10,000 gp towards purchasing or constructing a property, but any additional costs must be met by the Inner Circle member.</p> <p><b>Executive Powers:</b> Gift, Research, Trade</p>



## Gift of the Vistani

Criterion	Affiliation Mod
<b>One-Time</b>	
Character level	+1/2 levels
Non-Vistani	+1
<b>Multiple Use</b>	
Completed minor task for the Vistani	+1
Completed major task for the Vistani	+2
Saved the life of a Vistani:	+2

Affiliation Rank	Score	Title: Benefits and Duties
0	3 or lower	None.
1	4-10	<b>Friend of the Blood:</b> Gain +2 Diplomacy with Vistani
2	11+	<b>Blood Brother/Sister:</b> Diplomacy bonus with Vistani increases to +4 Can call on Vistani for aid or a minor favor (minor magical gift service or request aid from 2d8 Vistani rogues/warriors of half the character's level for one task) but this decreases the characters rating by 5

## The Brethren

### Affiliation Scores and Membership benefits

The Brethren are a loose confederacy of pirates, smugglers and nautical rogues that ply the waters of the Sea of Sorrows.

Criterion	Affiliation Mod
<b>One-Time</b>	
Character level	+1/2 levels
Skill ranks in Profession [sailor]	+2
Profession [sailor] above 5 ranks	+4
Skill ranks in Athletics	+1
Have at least one level of rogue	+1
You have been jailed, outlawed, or there is a price on your head	+1
Base attack bonus of +5 or greater	+1
No ranks in Profession [sailor]	-2
You own your own ship	+6
<b>Multiple Use</b>	
You have traded or smuggled illegal goods	+1
You have participated in a raid upon a ship and looted its cargo	+3

Criterion	Affiliation Mod
You have ever disobeyed your captain	-2
You have taken part in a mutiny	-5
You have ever killed your captain	-10
You have ever killed an albatross	-10
Reveals information about the Bretheren to outsiders	-4

Affiliation Rank	Score	Title: Benefits and Duties
0	3 or lower	None.
1	4-10	<b>Little Brother:</b> You gain +25% bonus to the value when you trade illegal, smuggled or stolen goods.
2	11-17	<b>Brother:</b> You gain a +2 bonus to Profession (sailor) and Athletics <b>Outlaw:</b> City guard and law enforcement officers gain a +1 on damage rolls against you
3	18-24	<b>Dread Pirate:</b> You effectively gain the leadership feat and attract a crew of brethren sailors. If you already have the leadership feat, you gain a +4 bonus.
4	25 or above	<b>Pirate Lord:</b> You gain a magic talisman that is a badge of your office. The talisman allows you to cast Summon (aquatic) monster IX once a day. <b>Mutiny:</b> Succeed on a Diplomacy check (DC15) once a month or face a mob/challenger (EL 12) <b>Executive Powers:</b> Plunder, Terrorize, Trade



# The Church of Ezra

## Affiliation Scores and Membership benefits

Criterion	Affiliation Mod
<b>One-Time</b>	
Character level	+1/2 levels
Skill ranks in Knowledge [religion]	+1
Knowledge [religion] above 5 ranks	+2
Has access to spells from the Mist Domain	+2
Can cast 3 <sup>rd</sup> or 4 <sup>th</sup> level divine spells	+2
Can cast 5 <sup>th</sup> or higher divine spells	+3
<b>Multiple Use</b>	
Travels to another land via the mists	each time +2
Converts a new member	+1
Successfully defends a church or structure important to the church	+2
Completes a task on behalf of the church	+1
Successfully completes a major mission on behalf of the church	+4
Founds a church in a new area or land	+10
Defends a community or group unable to defend itself (if good)	+4
Fails to defend a church or structure important to the church	-6
Refuses to take a mission to defend the church	-10
<b>Borca Sept</b>	
Skill ranks in Diplomacy or Sense Motive	each +1
More than 5 ranks in Diplomacy or Sense Motive	each +2
Punishes the blasphemous	+1
Punishes a heretic	+3
Blasphemes	-2
Lawful alignment	+1
Chaotic alignment	-5
Engages in a heretical action	-8
<b>Mordent Sept</b>	
Skill ranks in Diplomacy or Heal	+1
5 or more ranks in Diplomacy or Heal	+2
Lawful alignment	+1
Chaotic alignment	-2
Puts self in danger to shield another (non PC)	+1
Puts self at risk to protect an <i>innocent</i> NPC from harm	+2
Refuses to aid someone in need	each occurrence -3

Criterion	Affiliation Mod
Does anything that warrants a powers check	each occurrence -4
<b>Darkon Sept</b>	
Skill ranks in Intimidate or Sense Motive	each +1
More than 5 ranks in Intimidate or Sense Motive	each +2
Converts a new member (in addition to the bonus given above)	+1
Convert is a member of a different sect of the church of Ezra	additional +1
Possess Jaded or Iron will feat	either +1
Possess Persuasion or Negotiation feat	either +1
Lawful alignment	+1
Chaotic alignment	-2
Put oneself before the needs of the sect	-4
Punishes a heretic	+2
Engages in a heretical action	-5
<b>Dementlieu Sept</b>	
Skill ranks in Decipher script or Sense Motive	each +1
More than 5 ranks in Decipher script or Sense Motive	each +2
5 ranks or more in Knowledge (planes)	+2
10 ranks or more in Knowledge (arcana)	+1
10 ranks or more in Spellcraft	+1
Neutral alignment	+1
Discover a new piece of evidence about the nature of Ezra	+3
Allow information about Ezra to be lost or destroyed	-10

Affiliation Rank	Score	Title: Benefits and Duties
0	3 or lower	<b>Follower:</b> None.
1	4-9	<b>Initiate:</b> Gain +2 bonus on either Diplomacy or Intimidation (choose one) towards followers of the church
2	10-17	<b>Deacon:</b> Gain a +1 to Will saves
3	18-24	<b>Anchorite:</b> Gain mist sight ability. Distance of sight in mist and fog doubles and concealment miss chances or halved. Mist sight is also effective against fog/mist based spells such as Wall of Fog.
4	25-29	<b>Toret* or Warden:</b> If a divine spell caster, gains the ability to spontaneously cast Mist domain spells.
5	30 or higher	<b>Sentire:</b> gains the leadership feat for free. The followers are all members of the same sect. If the character already has the leadership feat, their leadership score is increased by 4.  <b>Executive Powers:</b> Beatify/ Excommunicate and Holiday (Mordent), Research (Dementlieu), Inquisition (Borca) or Terrorize (Darkon)



\* A character who reaches an affiliation level of 4 may be given charge of a parish. The parish is typically encompasses a village, or one or two town/city blocks, and usually includes a small church or mission house. Characters who take this commission receive the title of Toret. The church is small, often little more than a 20' by 30' wooden chapel with a table for an altar and wooden pews, with a 10' x 10' small hut with rude furniture for the Toret's accommodation. The church can be expanded with characters own funds or donations. The character could, alternatively, fund the construction of their own church.

A character who does not take charge of a church is given the title Warden – or wandering anchorite.

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## *The Speakers and Protectors*

The Mordentish Sect has two additional organizations the Speakers and the Protectors which are detailed in Heroes of light.

### *The Speakers*

**Required Feats:** Persuasion or Negotiation

**Required skills:** Perform (oratory) – 5 ranks, Sense motive -5 ranks

Membership of the speakers grants the bardic ability Fascinate. All their character class levels stack to determine how many people are effected. If the character already possessed the Fascinate ability, the number of people they can effect increases by 4.

Speakers can also be provided training and support in order for they to take the Evangelical prestige class (assuming they possess all the required skills and feats).

### *The Protectors*

**Required Feats:** Weapon focus (longsword)

**Required base attack bonus:** +5

**Required skills:** Religion – 5 ranks

Membership of the protectors grants a +2 damage bonus when defending followers of Ezra, innocents, or churches and places special to the church. At the DM's discretion, the bonus may also be granted against major NPC enemies of the church (but not against every monstrous creature encountered).

Protectors can also be provided training and support in order for they to take the *Holy Vindicator* prestige class (see Pathfinder Advanced Players Guide) assuming they possess all the required abilities.

### *Devotion feats*

Priest of Ezra can obtained a modified version of the Air Devotion feat (see Complete Champion). Instead of a swirling barrier of mist, the Anchorite is surrounded by a swirling cloud of mist which conceals and protects the priest. The Anchorite with can also combine their

Shield of Ezra ability with this swirling mist as an immediate action, giving them damage resistance in addition to effects of the feat.

## Lamplighters

Criterion	Affiliation Mod
<b>One-Time</b>	
Character level	+1/2 levels
Base attack bonus +5 or higher	+1
Base attack bonus +10 or higher	+2
Member of lamplighter prestige class	+2
<b>Multiple Use</b>	
Adventures with a member	+1
Recommendation of a member with an affiliation level of 21 or above	+2
Saves the life of a member with an affiliation level of 21 or above	+3
Achieved a goal worthy of respect (e.g. defeating a monster)	+1
Achieved a goal worthy of respect (e.g. saving a town from a threat)	+2
Achieved a goal worthy of great respect (e.g. saving the realm)	+5
Committed a minor infamous act (e.g. theft or corruption)	-2
Committed a minor infamous act (e.g. significant scandal, suspected of murder)	-4
Committed a Major infamous act (e.g. known to have murdered, committed a significant evil act, treason etc)	-10

Affiliation Rank	Score	Title: Benefits and Duties
0	3 or lower	None.
1	4-10	<b>Probationer:</b> Gain +1 bonus on Diplomacy with Mordentshire residents
2	11-20	<b>Lamplighter:</b> May take the lamplighter prestige class. Given a cold iron lantern that can be used as a weapon (Light; 1-4; 20x2; Bludgeoning) <b>Duties:</b> Must defeat 5 evil creatures a month or reduce affiliation rating by 1
3	21-29	<b>Lamplighter Captain:</b> Gain a patrol of 4-6 lamplighters (EL 8) <b>Duties:</b> Must defeat evil CR 10 creature once a month or reduce affiliation rating by 1
4	30 or higher	<b>Lamplighter General:</b> Gain a lamplighter captain (as cohort) and additional patrol of 4-6 lamplighters (EL 8) <b>Duties:</b> Must defeat evil CR 14 creature once a month or reduce affiliation rating by 1 <b>Executive powers:</b> Crusade, Law, Research



# Harmonic Hall

## Affiliation Scores and Membership benefits

### Admission Process:

The candidate should be eligible for an affiliation score of at least 4.

The candidate needs to be introduced by a member who can vouch for the candidate, then pay a 25gp fee introduction fee. This having been completed, an interview and performance will be arranged in front of 3 Master level members, typically within the week.

For the interview the candidate will first need to succeed in a Diplomacy Roll (DC (25) to impress the interviewers.

5 ranks in Knowledge [local], Gather Information and/or Bluff will grant a one-time +2 synergy bonus to this roll.

The candidate must then succeed with a Performance roll (DC20).

The successful candidate received a silver crescent moon stickpin to indicate their membership.

Membership dues are 5gp/level/month.

Criterion	Affiliation Mod
<b>One-Time</b>	
Character level	+1/2 levels
Skill ranks in Performance	+1
Performance above 5 ranks	+2
Skill ranks in three different Performance types	+1
Three different Performance types above 5 ranks	+2
Knowledge [local] 2 ranks and above	+1
Skill ranks in Diplomacy	+1
Diplomacy above 5 ranks	+2
Skill focus [Perform]	+1
Bard	+1
Dirgist	+2
In arrears with membership fees or tardy in repayment of a loan.	-1/10gp owed
Known/suspected to be a wolfling	-2/-5
Known/suspected to be a lycanthrope	-4/-10
<b>Multiple Use</b>	
Composes and performs a new song/poem in Kartakass	each time +3
Achieves a Performance roll of 30 or above in any Kartakass inn/tavern	each time +1
<b>Meistersinger contest</b>	
Competes in the Meistersinger contest	+2
Qualified for round 2 (war of words) of the Meistersinger contest	+4

Criterion	Affiliation Mod
Qualified for round 3 (dueling hearts) of the Meistersinger contest	+8
Wins the Meistersinger contest	+16

Affiliation Rank	Score	Title: Benefits and Duties
0	3 or lower	Denied admittance
1	4-9	<p><b>Probationer:</b> Gain +2 bonus on Gather Information and Diplomacy with guild members.</p> <p>Gain access to Harmonic Hall's general library and practice rooms.</p>
2	10-17	<p><b>Apprentice:</b> Gain a 10% discount on musical instruments in Harmonia. Eligible for <i>Favored in Guild</i> feat.</p> <p>A apprentice may stay in a basic dormitory in Harmonic Hall's guest wing free of charge.</p>
3	18-24	<p><b>Journeyman:</b> May negotiate a loan from harmonic Hall. There is no guarantee that the loan will be given however.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To receive a loan equal to the member's monthly dues requires a Diplomacy roll DC 15</li> <li>• To receive a loan equal to 5x the member's monthly dues requires a Diplomacy roll DC 20</li> <li>• To receive a loan equal to 20x the member's monthly dues requires a Diplomacy roll DC 25</li> </ul> <p>The loan must be paid back within a period of one month or the member starts to receive penalties on their affiliation score.</p>
4	25-29	<p><b>Member:</b> The character gains a +2 bonus on Performance rolls. Moreover the character gains an +2 additional bonus on Knowledge[local], Diplomacy and Gather Information rolls when in Kartakass.</p> <p>A member may stay in a comfortable room in Harmonic Hall's guest wing free of charge.</p>
5	30 or higher	<p><b>Master:</b> The character gains an additional +2 bonus on Performance rolls above that of a member, and moreover gains a +4 bonus on Bluff rolls.</p> <p>A master may also (if they wish) gain a room within Harmonic Hall to use as an office/study.</p> <p>Masters gain access to the secret vaults of Harmonic Hall and gain a +4 bonus to Knowledge rolls when searching for information about lycanthropes, undead, fey, darklords and the nature of the demi-plane.</p> <p>A master may stay in a luxurious suite in Harmonic Hall's guest wing free of charge.</p>



## *New Feats*

### *Nobility*

You have been granted or have inherited status and a title. You qualify for the Noble House affiliation status.

You gain a +1 bonus with the leadership feat, diplomacy, intimidation and knowledge (nobility).

### *Favored in Guild [Harmonic Hall]*

A character must at least qualify for apprentice level affiliation status with Harmonic Hall. Due to innate skill, personality or potential the character receives particular attention from guild members including assistance, advice and mentoring. The character receives a +2 bonus to performance rolls and earns twice the normal income from a performance roll. Moreover, they can use the results of a performance roll in lieu of a diplomacy or gather information roll when interacting with guild members.

### *Favored in Guild [Academy des Sciences]*

The character gains a +3 bonus in Knowledge (arcane) and can take 10 when researching in a library even during stressful situations.





# *Gorn le Sauvage*

*A Short Story*

*By Steve Flam*

*steve.flam@hotmail.com*

*February 19th, 532*

*Pont-A-Museau, Richemulot*

Madame Sardeau's House of Pleasures

Both bodies lay back from their frantic activities. Panting slightly, the man grins lazily. Looking over at his partner, he smiles. "I must leave you once more, Gisèle. Fear not, I shall return next week at the same time, dearest." The figure next to him smiles slightly. "Edmund, as always, leave my payment on the nightstand." The man rises, and begins dressing. When done, he deposits a pouch on the nightstand.

Quickly he exits the room and descends the stairs. Having donned a bowler hat, he leaves the building and heads home.

*November 23rd, 533*

*Pont-A-Museau, Richemulot*

Madame Sardeau's House of Pleasures

The woman weeps, even as she cradles the tiny package in her arms. Only four days old and already weighing near fourteen pounds. Hairiest babe she had ever heard of and definitely one leg longer than the other. Maybe her activities with Edmund had cursed her baby. Nonetheless she would care for him. She had lost contact with Edmund. This was to be expected given he is a prominent member of Richemulose society and of course, married to some fat cow.

*17th May, 544 BT*

Mme Sardeau's House of Pleasures

The youth, larger than most men of thirty sat in his room, thinking. My ole lady keeps tellin' me stories 'bout some horses. I wanna get me one some day. One for me. She calls me Robert. I

don't like it. Gorn, Gorn's what I'm gonna be named. Gorn le sauvage. One day everyone's gonna be afraid of me an fer reason. I'll be the man, they'll be the puny little runts. I promise that. Yeah, Gorn sounds good. Robert sounds like a name fer a fraggin limpy wristed bub.

*23rd June, 548 BT*

Mme Sardeau's House of Pleasures [What's left of it at any rate]

The huge figure grins at his work. The building before him burns fiercely. He relishes in the heat, even welcomes it. As for the barricaded doors and windows, he isn't sorry. He has one more task to accomplish before he will be satisfied he is indeed the last one of his own family, or kind. Laughing, he walks off into the night, uncaring about the screams he hears from the burning occupants of the building, his mother included.

His mother had told him of his father. This was of course after he'd broken both her arms and legs and pulled out three of her teeth barehanded. Moving through the night he smiles to himself. His destination is upon him. Using his brute strength, he kicks down the door, splinters flying everywhere. Entering, he takes his pouch and withdraws a flask. He tosses it in the hallway. It splashes against the wall and explodes, beginning to burn a bright red fire. Sounds can be heard upstairs. Gorn le Sauvage does not care. He takes the stairs two by two. Three figures are in the upper hallway, moving towards the stairs to investigate.

"You Edmund? Edmund Cartier?"

A figure answers meekly "Yes" and steps in front of the other two. Gorn doesn't even wait but moves forward and his huge hand clamps around Cartier's throat.

"Shoulda said no, Clyde. Yer fragged now, runt."

In one fell squeeze, the throat collapses and the man that was Edmund Cartier slumps dead to the floor, eyes open in pure horror.

The other two figures begin whimpering and crying, pleading for their lives. Gorn doesn't care. His fist strikes twice, killing both remaining Cartier's. Satisfied, the huge teen quickly searches the bedroom, gathering a small chest. He runs quickly down the stairs and exits. As he turns a corner he spies from the corner of his eye a patrol running at the Cartier abode.

"I'm alone now. The last of my family and clan. From now on I'll look out for myself and be the main man to this city. People's gonna learn to fear the name Gorn. Gorn le Sauvage."

*July 2nd, 551*

*Pont-A-Museau, Richemulot*

The Rusty Nail, Port P-A-M

The door opens and a large figure enters, walking straight up to the bar. Conversation stops long enough to size up the figure and look twice before confirming the size of the man. Dressed in Hide Armor, a nasty looking firearm slung over his shoulder and a huge sword strapped to his back. Near six and a half feet tall with red eyes. Very muscular and hairy. Long bushy hair and a large goatee moustache. A cigar in his mouth completes the appearance of the man.

"Cornelius here? Wuz told I could find the little fragger here."

The barman replies "I don't know any Cornelius. Maybe you should look somewhere else."



The large man's hand shoots out and grabs the barman by the neck, lifting him square off of his feet. "Wrong answer, Clyde." He proceeds to drag the barman across the bar, knocking away peoples pints, and more importantly knocking the patrons sitting on stools, down. The barman is screaming, kicking and flailing but the man ignores him. By now people are either fleeing or arming themselves. "Name's Gorn. Gorn le Sauvage. Je veut Cornelius et je le veut maintenant. I want Cornelius an I want him now. He tosses the man across the room with no effort. The barman's head crashes into the wall. He dies on the spot.

"Awright, listen up. I want Cornelius an I want him livin. Alla you, I don't care if'n yer ded or alive. Hand 'im over an you live. Otherwise yer next on my list of things ta kill."

More people exit. One person points to a fleeing dwarf "That's him, that's Cornelius!"

Gorn unslings his weapon and taking careful aim, fires! A loud boom resounds in the Inn as the weapon discharges. The dwarf stumbles and falls. He is now yelling and screaming unintelligibly as his leg is now missing. Blood splatters everywhere making a real mess. Gorn doesn't care. He walks through the bloody mess, ignoring the red mess.

The Inn empties, however.

"Dint say you had to be in one piece, Clyde." Gorn moves forward, rearming his firearm. He slings it over his shoulder and when he reaches the slumped figure of the dwarf, reaches down and picks him up by his beard. "Say Mother. C'mon, lemme hear you say it. Say Mommy an I'll be nicer, Clyde. Lemme hear it, c'mon, say it.... say Mommy. C'mon you can do it. Say it.... SAY IT!"

"Mo-mo-mmy, mother, please, please I have family, children...."

The man releases the dwarf. The small man thumps to the ground, wincing and nearly fainting.

"I'm paid ter bring ya ter Van Dieks an thats what I gonna do. Awww you said Mommy. Ok I won't blow off yer other leg. Here, drink this."

He forces the dwarf to drink a vial and once the dwarf drinks it, his leg grows mysteriously back!

"I had my fun, now let's get goin, Corny. Yeah yer new name is Corny, Corny two legs."

Gorn lifts the dwarf by the seat of his pants and exits the Inn.

Gorn pushes through the door, ignoring the splinters and the harm it does to the dwarf. The door is now gone. No big deal, Van Dieks could replace it. He brought the dimbulb who owed Van Dieks gold.

Without knocking, he passes through another door, breaking it into little pieces. His quarry is in his hand, taking the brunt of the breaking doors. "Sorry, Clyde. Need you to open the door, ya fragger." He isn't at all put off about the dwarf's use as a key.

A figure looks up from his position at a desk. "Ah, Gorn. I see you have brought me the dwarf. Do come in."

Le sauvage moves forward, now holding the squirming form of Cornelius Larue by the beard once more. The dwarf begins whimpering and flailing but Gorn ignores it.

"You got my gold, Clyde?"

Van Dieks sighs. "It is Van Dieks, Gorn. Do remember it for future reference."

"Sure Clyde. Pay up, I got yer mark."

The man at the desk grins, reaching under the desk to retrieve the huge man's pay. Gorn tenses as Van Dieks reaches under the desk. He tosses Cornelius against the wall, making the dwarf scream in terror. Gorn by now has his firearm unslung and aimed at Van Dieks.

"Gorn, I am getting your reward, relax already. I have no weapon here, my good man."

The dwarf moans as he attempts to rise. Gorn puts away his firearm slowly, not really trusting Van Dieks anyways.

The man tosses Gorn a large pouch. The caliban's hand sneaks out and grabs it with ease. He weighs it in his hand a little. "Yeah, it feels about right, Clyde. Good thing too. I dint wanna have ta frag ya." The large man laughs then tucks the payment away and turns to exit the room.

"See ya Corny Two legs. Hey Van Dieks I hope you don't get indigestion with this one. Bahahahhahh!" He exits the room, knowing that Van Dieks would be eating yet another thief. "Why do they do it? They know he'll find out and send me to get em? Buncha runts."

The large man walks through the streets of Pont A Museau, unaware that someone is following him. Turning a corner, his stride's full of purpose. Three figures emerge from an alley even as the one following Gorn reveals himself.

"You there, le Sauvage. You have something I want."

The caliban turns, not aware of the three figures as of yet. "You an what army, ya little runt?" Gorn unslings his firearm quickly, red eyes narrowing. "You got a death wish, Clyde?"

The figure emerges from the darkness, revealing itself to be Clothard, a henchman of Van Dieks.

"Aww, you bin lurkin around me, ya turd? Betsy here says you leave or ya lose a leg, Clyde. Then ya kin try doin yer job with one leg."

"Gentlemen, do retrieve the pouch from him."

The three figures rush Gorn. He turns and swats one aside with his firearm. The other two are too quick and both slash each of Gorn's arms, drawing blood.

"Fraggin' frag!" His foot kicks out and he catches one of the two standing in the leg. A sickening crunch of cartilage and bone can be heard in the empty street. The thug screams out in pain and crumbles to the ground, clutching his leg, whimpering and crying.

The remaining standing thug gets nervous and swinging his shortsword, he narrowly misses le sauvage. Gorn's fist streaks out, connecting with his foe's face. Blood spurts everywhere as the other thug clutches his face, red liquid running through his fingers, dripping down his arms.

The fallen thug rises from being tossed by Gorn's powerful firearm sweep. Quickly, he throws a dagger at the huge man. Gorn swears as the blade pierces his arm. "Fraggin fraggin runt! Ya gone ruined my armor ya turd!" Without removing the dagger, Gorn takes careful aim with Betsy and fires the weapon. BOOM! The thug's face implodes from the impact of the weapon's ammunition. The dead thug crumbles to the ground, blood and gore everywhere.

Gorn now removes the dagger, tossing it onto the street. He slings his weapon, eyeing Clothard with a huge grin. "Clyde, yer bimbos aint worth the copper yer payin' 'em. Hire better



help in the future. A nursery ain't the best place to find a decent thug, ya runt. Now git, before I turn you inside out, Clyde."

Clothard eyes Gorn with a newfound respect. Leaving his lackies behind, he moves quickly through the streets, leaving Gorn le Sauvage behind. The caliban doesn't follow him. He continues on his way to his rendezvous. Clothard would think twice before he tried to take him on again. Van Dieks had nothing to do with this. Clothard must have thought Gorn was an easy mark.

### *August 27th, 554*

The hulking figure pushes through the door and stops. Looking around twice, it grunts. Moving as quick as its massive frame will allow, it arrives at its destination.

Le sauvage is enjoying a pint when the brute enters. He grins, knowing full well that ugly mook was here for him, to take him on. So Pierre would have damages on his Inn, who the frag cares, right?

"You Gorn? Gorn de sauvage?"

"Who wants to know?"

"Me. Thorin the HalfOgre."

"Yer lookin more like a halfwit, Clyde. What yer wantin me for, beauty tips?"

Now Gorn stands and though shorter, isn't afraid of the hulking brute. He picks up his pint and says "Here, have a drink on me."

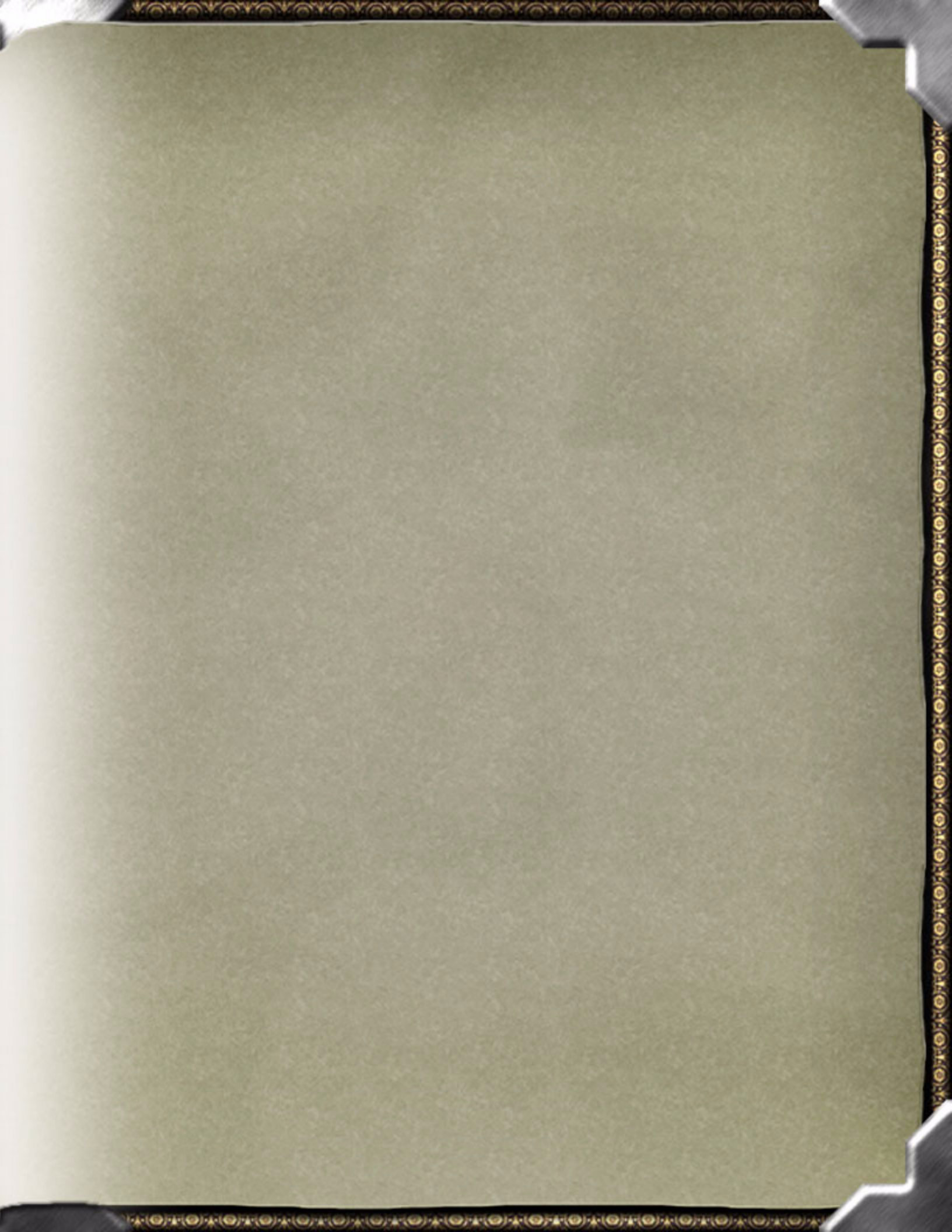
The pint moves back and before Thorin can act, it breaks on his nose. Wood and steel shatter, whilst the nose explodes in a bloody pulpy mess. Thorin grunts in pain but doesn't falter. His huge hand balls up and hits the caliban in the chest, pushing the man back so hard. He nearly falls over a table making that table's patrons fall over in their chairs and scramble away.

Gorn spits on the ground and grins. "Not bad, ya mook. Finally someone worthy of my attention. Bring it on, Clyde!"


The caliban rushes the half ogre head on. Both men tumble in a heap on the floor, breaking tables, chairs and rolling over a few patrons. The fight goes on for near two hours until finally Gorn gets the upper hand through cunning and street fighting savvy. He makes the half ogre submit and both collapse against a wall. The half ogre grunts something and removing gloves from his hands, gives them to Gorn. "You are da bestest I foughted, you winned dese fair and skware." He gets up unevenly and staggers out of what is left inside the Inn.







# Bones of the Past



For use with these Dungeons and Dragons® core books :  
Players Handbook™, Dungeon Master's Guide™, and  
Monster Manual™ as well as the following Ravenloft  
core books: Ravenloft Campaign Setting 3<sup>rd</sup>  
edition™, Ravenloft Player's  
Handbook™ and Ravenloft  
Dungeon Master's  
Guide™