

# Quoth the Raven



We Got Medieval on Ravenloft

# Desperately Seeking Submissions

## Is Anybody Out there?

Hello? Hello? Is anybody out there? If you're reading this then chances are that you have downloaded the fourth issue of Quoth the Raven, the most unofficial netzine on Earth. As strange as it might seem, fan magazines like this one are highly dependant on outside submissions. For the first time the number of editors is greater than contributors. There were a lot of articles submitted to us that were much more suited to the Undead Sea Scrolls than to our magazine. Naturally, the situation was rectified. Lately a lot of fan-based productions have been hurting from two major deficits; submissions and feedback. As to which is more important, who can say? A lot of people feel shy about voicing their opinions, which makes the work of writing articles a lot less appealing. After all, why write an article if no one reads it, or more to the point, no one says they've read it? I just want to tell our readers that we appreciate any feedback and to encourage everyone who reads this magazine to tell us what you think.

This issue is going to be our smallest to date, a few readers might note that two reoccurring articles are missing. Extraordinary Expertise and Heinrich's Curiosities are taking a hiatus for now, but they will however return for the next issue. This will also be the last issue containing Tactics and Techniques, and in all likelihood, Whispers of Darkness. Since the D20 world is flooded with feats and spells there will be no reason to continue to drench our readers. Though the same argument can also be made about prestige classes, the quality of the article Perilous Pursuits has been good enough to warrant keeping it for at least one more issue.

The next issue, due out in August, will follow an Egyptian theme. Special emphasis will be put on articles with that theme, so expect to see articles based on pyramids, mummies, traps and, our favourite, curses! Since we've hit the summer months, we hope to see a lot more submissions.

ScS.

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# Soul Survivor

## Original Fan Fiction

By Conrad Clark aka Chaos Nomad  
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Guilty? Yes, I confess it; I commit myself to fate. Indeed, for what remains of my short, empty life, I shall bare all consequence without complaint. But wilful, no, I deny the charge. And though other, well-intentioned voices now trouble themselves to rise up with double affirmation, my soul is not theirs to judge for I alone retain the truth. What is this truth you ask? Well, it remains for me to bare the horror of it, and to reveal it to you for what it is; a simple series of events.

My name, be names still of import, is Madame Dubelle, and as of now I find myself removed from my house, that of the family Talnoir, in this fair town of A\_. Afore this cruel business my name was mentioned with quiet smiles and seldom was there heard a word spoken against me in either anger or discontent. It is true that some adjudged me an inheritor of repute beyond my breeding, but regardless, circumstance saw me sufficiently established in manner and position to garner respect from all sides.

Yet, all this is for naught; such musing shall not save me now, for tomorrow I shall be hanged as the most heinous criminal. And even my dear, sweet husband, though now returned to his house, cannot save me; my crime is such as to be beyond even his sphere of influence. Perhaps, at some point hence, others will bear witness to my testimony and shed on it a light beyond my feeble cast. For now, however, I can do no more than recount the events that comprise this wretched tale and trust therewith my heart to your care. For it was through love that I sinned; may my husband forgive me.

Though earlier I mentioned my darling husband; that he now rests in his family home. It would be prudent here to explain the infrequency of these visits and then again their brevity. Indeed, the nature of his occupation forbade him many of those privileges enjoyed by the commonest folk. This, I confess, I hated. Without him I was prey to moments of bitter despair and a general discontent. It was a circumstance I attributed to the circle of my acquaintances which, as the duration of my husband's absences extended, gradually reduced, drawing noose-like about me. Eventually, I found myself so poorly attended I began to choke; I found their proximity and unrelenting attention asphyxiating. Yet I found no way to escape them. No way except avoiding each and every opportunity for social interaction.

Initially then, I entertained myself in whatever manner I could. My occupations waxed and waned with my enthusiasm and at times I even suffered to forestall or neglect those duties entrusted me by my husband. A few guests remained troublesome; they would arrive smiling and bearing gifts, only to depart again, disappointed and discontent. I would extend to them, you see, no welcome beyond that expected by my station. The absence of my love permitted no frivolity, and thus, I abstained from all such pleasures.

Such was the extent of my loneliness that, after what could only be a month, I fell into a depression so deep I refused most all sustenance. None in my love's employ could

persuade me the error of it and within only a few days I was so weak as to be rendered invalid and taken to my chambers.

The following few days remain a blur: they appear to me now as a dream to one recently awakened, for I cannot take from them any order, any sequence that should sit with comfort upon reason's chair. And yet, from them I remember... something; it glares into my memory like a polished space on a grubby pane. A voice, a quiet voice, the echoes of which yet chill my heart.

Why it had come, I can only surmise, yet even my shattered mind can recall that night. Obviously delirious with fever, I must have found my way into my husband's chambers where I awoke drenched in sweat. These surrounds, so unfamiliar in my delirium, gave me cause to panic and I began to search vigorously about me for an exit. It was as I scraped and clamoured that I caught a large silken cloth upon my gown and, unawares, pulled it from what it hid. Leaf-like it drifted to the floor, but I ignored it. Already, I was transfixed; before me, sitting on a great wooden pedestal was a ball—a clear glass ball.

I remember now: it had arrived some time previously, part of a shipment brought back by my husband and his colleagues. However the environment generated by them caused me some disquiet and feeling disconcerted, I took to my chamber. Not having seen the object for so long, I had forgotten its existence; however, its re-emergence brought with it a compulsion to observe, to view it in a manner denied by previous circumstance. I fought the urge to approach yet, considering my weakened state, was overcome and found myself staring at the sheen of its surface.

It seemed as nothing of consequence. A glass ball, and though fine it appeared naught to be concerned with. I had heard how in fables some were said to see beyond the mortal world, but this looked a harmless ornament. Foolish as I know it now to be, I touched it. The colours that then flooded the chamber sent me into a daze; blues, reds and green—the deepest, darkest green you ever could imagine— all swam about me and through my head. And then the voice came, quiet and clear:

“Mademoiselle. Mademoiselle, why have you woken me?”

I was shocked, of course, and hardly knew what to do. Have you any idea what it feels like to stand in the presence of such a thing, to have that sound seep into your mind, into your soul. Eventually, I responded, in the best manner I was able; I straightened myself and spoke as clearly as possible into the room. “Who are you? What do you want?”

“Mademoiselle, you know who I am, and as for what I want, well...”

“No Monsieur, I do not know who you are, and neither am I a Mademoiselle. I am a Madame, if you please.”

“Come Mademoiselle, are you certain. One such as you cannot be a Madame, surely. Where then is your master?”

“My Master is away on business, and I'll thank you Monsieur to refrain from making such enquiries.”

“You miss him Mademoiselle, do you not? Your love means so much to you. Without him you are nothing.”

The words settled upon me as a hundred winters on my heart, for I knew them to be true. I confess then that I stumbled, and falling to my knees began to weep. “Yes. Yes, I miss him so. I should do anything to have him back again, here by my side.”

“Mademoiselle, cry no more. All is not lost. Perhaps I might be of some service against your disquiet.”

“How...how could you help me?”

“Well, as one thing brings about another, as a bud is opened by the sun. I can blossom the flower of your desire and you can blossom mine. I propose an arrangement.”

“An arrangement! What do you mean, what kind of arrangement?”

“I can achieve for you the likes of which you can only imagine. I can obtain for you the means to bring your love back. There is a ring that can return him to you. I can place this ring in your possession.”

“A ring? You can give me a ring to bring my love back?”

“Yes, I can. But....”

“But what?”

“There is a cost.”

“So, I am rich. What cost, tell me. What?”

“This is a large kingdom Mademoiselle, is it not?”

“Yes, so? It is quite large, but what do you mean?”

“And a great many souls reside here.”

“Yes, so?”

“I can give you the means to bring your master back, but you must agree to let me have one of them.”

“What? I cannot give you a soul. How can I do that? Why should I do that?”

“You can do it, through me. Just think for one moment. Once you have the ring in your hands, he shall be there, and he can be in your arms before you could even think it. And you want him back, do you not?”

“Yes, but to think of that poor soul.”

“Mademoiselle, you tell me there are so many people in your kingdom, and people fall to darkness each and every day. What then would be the probability of it being an event anyone should suspect? I promise you this Mademoiselle, that person should thoroughly deserve it. Does this now ease your conscience?”

“Yes Monsieur, if they should thoroughly deserve it. I feel no qualm about progressing the inevitable.”

“Quite so mademoiselle, and so justly said too. Then we have our arrangement: you grant me one soul from this kingdom and I bring to you a means to return your master, agreed?”

“Agreed.”

Agreed! Oh, the horror of that word shall remain with me these few short hours; and furthermore, in these final moments I swear never to agree to another thing. No sooner had I uttered it than a great commotion erupted at the front door, knocking and banging, and weeping, crying as though the world had ended and heaven was discovered stillborn. It echoed up the stairwell and through the chamber door.

I ran from the room and down, directly to the front porch, where I found him, my husband, held in the arms of his curious acquaintances. They carried him bodily to the lounge and laid him quietly upon a couch. It was obvious from their expressions that

something was catastrophically wrong; they seemed pained, and each of them, on looking at me, returned their gaze quickly to the floor. One of them, however, a slender pale-skinned preacher with white, flighty hair clutched in one hand a piece of parchment. He looked upon me with wild eyes and pronounced in escalating tones that all was not lost. All was not lost!

Unfurling the parchment, he read from it, his maddened eyes scanning feverishly, his brow creased over. Finally, he moved across to my love and reaching down clasped one of his hands and held it up for all to see. Upon one finger was a band, a dull bronze ring I had never seen before. Before I could ponder a moment, the crazed fellow spoke "This ring," he said with barely restrained excitement, "this simple ring we discovered with the final batch. It can bring him back again. It reads here that, 'the ring can return one soul, one half of twin souls forever betrothed, when used by its other half.'"

I could hardly contain myself. So, it was true: the voice had delivered on its promise; my love was dead. He had returned to me dead, and yet, it had given me the means to bring him back; it had kept its word. Pulling the band from my love's finger, I placed it immediately upon one of my own. The metal's touch was ice and I could not resist the wave of cold that rippled through me; shivering, I asked what I was to do.

They told me, urged me, to call him back, to ask for him to return. So I did.

Laughter filled the house as he opened then his eyes, but it was not that of mirth, and neither did it emerge from those about me. It came from above, from a room up the stairs, and it echoed as it did in my love's empty eyes.

When it was over, they took me from him and brought me to this empty place. Oh pity me, for love sake; I feel that never shall I lay eyes on him again, for he is gone from me always, and I from him. And though I cannot know it, a quiet voice tells me that 'inevitably', I have everything I thoroughly deserve.



# Absolution

## Original Fan Fiction

By Sean Poindexter aka The God Brain

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The hope of seeing the sun rise once more faded from Hershel's heart as he gazed listlessly out the window. The clouds had chosen to unleash another deluge on the streets of Paridon, and while they had yet to burst forth, the sky bore the tell tale sign of the coming storm. Hershel sighed painfully, his lungs straining under the pressure and producing several dry coughs and gasps. When he had regained himself, he looked away from the window and reflecting; he'd always suspected that it would be raining on the day he died.

Footsteps were heard outside his bedchamber, Hershel tensed up with what little strength he had. His calloused fingers gripped the sweat-soaked sheets, as he pulled them up over his sullen chest. The door opened with a creak as the rusty hinges strained to support the thick, decorative oak slat that blocked Hershel's modest bedchamber from the hospice corridor. In stepped a priest, his heavy black robes dragging across the dusty floor, and the hood dropping over his face so that only a thin set of pasty lips and a pale chin could be seen from beneath it.

Hershel felt a chilling rush of anxiety as he beheld the figure. As the door slid shut he managed to rasp out from his tortured lungs, "You are not father Denison?"

The priest sat down on a bed-stool, keeping his head lowered as he produced from the sleeves of his robe two pale, wiry hands. One held a small, leather-bound holy book, the other a short string of beads with a silver wreath of ivy dangling from the end.

"Father Denison is not well," he replied, "I shall be performing your rites in his place."

Something in his voice chilled Hershel's soul, yet also put him at ease. He accounted for this odd conflict in that he was ebbing even closer to death with each breath; such a strain could produce any number of uncomfortable conflicts. He let forth another round of weak coughs, and then wiped spittle away from his cruelly wrinkled chin.

The priest began to chant softly, counting each repetition with the shifting of a bead in his fingers. He had done so half a dozen times, when Hershel stopped him, "Father," he asked "father this...you must wait..."

The priest stopped, and raised his head. He did not do so enough to reveal enough of his face, but Hershel could tell now that this was a young man. Such a revelation brought him little comfort, but he had no choice at this point. Time was too precious to waste on sentiment.

"I must...before my time is over..." he tried to explain, feeling his voice would leave him at any moment "You must take my confession"

If the young priest was surprised, he did not register it physically. Still, he asked of the dying man "Have you not given your confession Father Denison already?"



Hershel shook his head as another bout of weak coughing erupted from his throat. He could hear the distant sound of thunder, mixing with the muffled pounding of a stagecoach somewhere in the streets below the hospice window. When he was able to take in a deep enough breath, he explained himself to the priest,

“I have a sin...something I have never confessed. Something I...” he swallowed back a bloody lump of phlegm, shaken loose by his painful hacking.

“I shall hear your confession then,” the priest replied as Hershel regained himself.

“And I shall have my absolution?” he asked pathetically.

“Of course”

“Very well then” he replied, resting his weary head on the sweaty pillow. Droplets of rain began to fall, but faded away into drizzle before the aged man was able to begin his confession. With an uncomfortable silence hanging in the room, Hershel mustered the last of his breath and gave his final confession.

“As you likely know, I am no native to the streets of Paridon. I am of a country far from here, a land known as Kartakass. And, I did not come to this place as a wandering craftsman, as so many believe. I came here seeking solace, seeking succour from a vengeful past. I fled my homeland, my family...because I was afraid to confront the deeds my past. But I am an old man now, and have nothing left to fear, the cold embrace of death holds no chill for one such as me, riddled with disease and frailty. I fear only that I will meet my maker with a sin unabsolved. A sin so great that it will weight my soul to this world...and that is the most crippling fear of all. I seek from death only rest...rest I have not had in nearly seventy two years.”

“What sin could be so great?” the priest asked “and what sin would have gone so long without confession?”

Hershel closed his eyes as he continued,

“Murder,” the word fell from his lips like a cancerous growth, lanced with a burning iron.

“There is no sin that cannot be absolved,” the priest said, reassuringly. Hershel opened his eyes and peered from beneath heavy lids at his young attendant, then nodded his head,

“Yes...are right, there must be an absolution, for to carry this to my grave would be abominable. It will not do...I will not be damned to this guilt for one moment longer!”

“Then give your confession”

Hershel lowered his head and continued, “I am the son of a farmer, the youngest brother of five, and a sister born but ten months after me. My brothers and I were the very image of our father, rugged and broad. But Chastity, that was our sister, she was the radiant rebirth of our beloved mother, who had passed away during her birth. Chastity was everything to my father, and to my brothers and I the son rose and set in her eyes.

“Hard times befell our farm, floods destroyed our crops and killed out herds. My father, too proud to return to the city empty handed, followed others who’d endured a similar plight across the border into the plains and woodlands of the neighbouring land: Sithicus.

“Sithicus was to Kartakass as night was to day. Our land was a place of beauty and song, theirs was mystery and fear. Worse than the oppressively dark nights and haunting forests were the elves. Loathsome creatures they were, lithe and pale, with eyes like black almonds. They would come up from the forest and taunt us, mock our ways and

laugh at us, then retreat into the woods. There were rumours that they could change shape, take human forms and spread their seed into the wombs of our women. They never aged, they were monsters all of them, and they kept us crippled with fear.

“But our father was a strong man, he feared nothing. In time, the elves came to accept our presence, and by our third season in that land, the taunting stopped. Some of them were willing to trade, though we were never permitted to step into their towns they would frequently visit ours and trade exotic drinks and cheese for milk and wool.

“Everything would have been fine, but for the attention of one elven man towards our beloved sister, Chastity. Those elves, they do not feel love as you or I do...they know only magic and deception. They charm with their words, and so he charmed our sister into taking him into her bed. Having his way with her, he abandoned her to the night. She was lost to us for months as we searched and pleaded with the elves to return her to us. When she was at last found, she was...laden with child.

“Oh, but we knew what magic they had worked on her! She cried and told us of her love for the babe, and her love for the elf that'd lain with her! Ezkalesh was his name! A noble elf of a warrior house, no less! In that place in the woods where we had taken her, five brothers made a pact. She would carry no demon's child; no half-breed bastard would soil our common yet proud line! The shame that had been brought upon our family by this...this Ezkalesh...it would never be known to our father or to the townfolk”

Hershel wearily raised his leathery hand to his face, wiping away greasy sweat, and then gently rubbing the temples of his eyes. His voice had been reduced to a hoarse whisper, but he continued with his confession regardless,

“We kept her in the forest, returning to her nightly with food and water. We built a small cabin there for her, locking her away for the times when we were gone. It was awful, but you see the elf's magic was too strong for us to bring her back. She loved him still, and as her belly swelled so did the power of the foul thing's magic upon her.

“He came to the town; he did...the elf Ezkalesh. He was short and lithe, like his foul breed is apt to be, but his arms were laden with power, and in his eyes we saw a dark power that we should have known better than to molest. He demanded to know where Chastity was, claimed that she was to be his bride. It almost broke my father to hear such lies! But we drove him away; cursing in the foul tongue those beasts use to work their magic.

“The baby came on a stormy night. My brothers and I gathered around in the cabin as she screamed and cried, bringing the half-breed bastard into the world. Crying in pain, she let loose upon the world the foul beast of a babe as the thunder shook the very ground upon which the forest was grown. Before her eyes, we held aloft an axe. My brother Roderick whispered to her ‘It will take but a second!’, and I brought the blade down upon the bloody infant, two of us held her back as I...I lowered the weapon into the soft body of that foul thing. As its sobs died away, so did our sister let forth one final cry of anguish and despair...and then she too passed into the night”

Hershel's fingers tensed and tears of anguish and sorrow fell from his eyes, but he carried on unabated, “She died...the foul magic of that elven devil took her from this world. But just as our sister took her last breath, the door burst open and in came the devilish thing himself, the very father of the bastard child.

“The anger of an elf is nothing to be taken lightly. We were dumbfounded, all of us, stunned by his very presence. His eyes widened as he surveyed the macabre scene before him, and in that very instant, as the lighting brought to life the very air around him, he knew all that had transpired here. He left forth from his wretched lungs a curse so foul that the night the fires darkened and the night breeze became rotten with the darkness in his soul. Then he was gone, with a turn he left into the night, and we...we followed.

“We found him...but only when he wished to be found...in the village. By then it was too late, he had taken from us that which he had no right to take. He had found our father and slew him, then turned his wrath on the townspeople. Covered in their blood, he'd torn through them with his sword, cutting them down as a farmer reaps grain. Nearly a hundred...men, women...children... died that night beneath the blade of that foul demon. He pointed his sword at us, and having taken his revenge, he cursed us once more and fled.

“He was gone, the mists seemed to reach up from the earth and cloak him in their swirling fingers. We burned the cabin to the ground, leaving nothing behind to tell what we had done to our sister, and to that foul child. We made a pact, and that night went our separate ways. Together, we would be found and killed by that monster, but apart we could find solace in the ends of the land”

Hershel stopped for a moment to compose himself; he was nearly shaking with rage and grief. His voice was all but gone now, as a thin trickle of blood lined his lips, and he continued his confession in grinding, throaty rasps.

“I am the last of the five. Roderick died in Lamordia...they said it was an accident but I know better. Mitchell met his death in Mordentshire, poisoned. Wilhiem fell beneath his horse in Kantora, or was likely pushed. He was the last of my brothers, and this was but thirty-two years ago. I traveled the farthest, which likely has provided me with the safety of distance, why that foul thing has not found me. I know that elves live...long lives...but it has been seventy-two years since that dark and bloody night. I am an old man, and even the hatred of one so dark and evil cannot last so long.”

“I would not be so sure” the priest replied, almost under his breath. Hershel paused, and then raised his weary head. Before he could voice his puzzlement, the priest continued “and for what sin do you wish absolution? The murder of the child?”

“Heavens no!” he replied, almost laughing, but unable “I wish only to have the forgiveness for bringing the wrath of that foul thing upon our people! The bewitchment of our fair sister was foul enough, but to tamper with the beast in such a way was but to incur its anger. They know no goodness, no love of temperance, those elves! We danced with fire, and in turn we burned those closest to us!” Hershel fell back to the bed in exhaustion “We were fools...”

“So it is the death of your townsfolk...for which you bear the guilt...that you wish to confess before your death?”

“Oh Goddess...yes!” Hershel cried, his voice full and robust one last time. Thunder cracked outside the window once again, though the old man was unmolested by it. His eyes stung with tears, and his lips trembled as he whimpered out his last plea, “I have carried this guilt with me for my entire life...I have carried this fear of death...only now that I have escaped him...escaped that foul thing can I have my absolution”

“But there can be no absolution for what you have done, Hershel”

The priest's voice was dark and crisp in the silence of the room. As the last syllables passed his lips, the patter of raindrops filled the air, and the crackle of distant thunder brought the air to life. Hershel pushed himself up on his shoulders, mustering the last of his strength, as he faced the priest in confusion, "I do not understand?"

"It's simple, really" he said, placing the holy book down on the bed. His lithe hand rose up to his hood, and he drew it back to reveal a pair of dark, almond shaped eyes, and a halo of silken hair. From the sides of his head, tiny points of ear-tips jutted from behind the silvery locks; and Hershel saw in those eyes a wrath he'd not beheld in over half a century.

"It is...you!" he gasped, blood erupting from his lungs and splattering onto his lips and chin, "you have...no, you have not aged a day!"

"The lives of my people are long, human" Ezkalesh said, rising to his feet "but not so long as our memories. Yes, your distance provided you with some measure of safety, but like all things destined to be, this time would come,"

"By the Goddess..." Hershel exclaimed, his body coming to life now as the rain began to pour violently on the streets "What could you want of me! I am an old man, disease and age will take me from this world before this day is through...what more could you want than my death?"

The elf's eyes narrowed and his voice became thick and his words deliberate "I, like you, seek absolution...for a sin of omission. I failed to protect the woman I loved, failed to defend the child she bore to me. And up until this moment, I have failed to fully avenge their taking from this world."

Hershel's heart beat in his chest as a thundering hammer, pounding away as the dark avenger reached forth and placed his hands on him. Hershel tried to scream, but his voice was gone, it had collapsed under the strain. All that that remained was the moist rattle of bloody lungs as the world began to fade from his view. The last thing he saw before drifting into that foul night was the flicker of lightening in the dark eyes of his fatal confessor. The last thing he heard was not the rumble of thunder, not the patter of rain, but the cold, spectral voice of the grim avenger bidding its last farewell,

"It will take but a second."

# Character Development

## Knight Lord

**Character Archetype:** The knight lord is a member of the feudal class, a warrior and landowner. He is a relatively wealthy landowner who is obligated to perform military service for his superior nobles. Knight lords represent the local nobility of an area; they are the arbiter of laws, the coordinators of defence, the collectors of taxes and the landlords to peasants. Often the knight lord is a defender of religion and other moral institutions. Yet most importantly the knight lord is the protector of his lands.

**Background:** Knight Lords come from a noble background. Born into their station, they spend their youth in training for the responsibilities of knighthood. As children they serve as pages and as adolescents they work as squires. It is only after numerous trials and tests do they become knights in their own right. After years of faithful service to their own lord, these knights might be granted land of their own, only then becoming lords. Though extremely rare, a precious few knight lords begin life as commoners. In the absence of suitable noble children, peasant children can be apprenticed as squires. From that position there is a significant chance that a commoner might climb the ranks and become a lord.

As they are prepared for their military role in feudal society, many knight lords are trained in religious practices. Often these lords will be responsible to spread their religion and to support it, so it becomes important

that they be instructed in their faith. As members of the land owning class knight lords are also educated in a variety of different subjects including history, foreign languages, engineering and philosophy.

**Personality:** Knight Lords vary in personality just as commoners, but there are many common traits that distinguish a knight lord. As noblemen, knight lords are taught that they are superior to commoners. Though this does not necessarily make the knight cruel or abusive to the peasantry, the perceived superiority is evident in all the interactions between these groups. Knight Lords often behave in a condescending manner to lesser-born people, and while not necessarily rude, they behave dismissively. Knight Lords refuse to be led by those of lesser station and actively attempt to usurp command from commoners. Knight Lords always acknowledge higher born nobles as their superior and show these aristocrats due respect.

Knight Lords are always direct and straightforward. Their role as the centrepiece of the feudal army makes these warriors overconfident. In combat these lords seek to strike awe and terror in their opponents. Not given to subtlety, knight lords prefer to show their strength and leave stealth to the cowards. Knight Lords refuse to participate in such behaviour and will not allow their comrades to use such sneakiness.

Finally, knight lords are obsessed with honour and dignity. They behave themselves as gentlemen, trying to portray themselves as the epitome of manhood and dignity. These knight lords follow strict codes of social conduct, showing themselves to be above the animalistic commoners with civilized behaviour.

**Psychology:** Knight Lords see themselves as a race above the commoners, a separate people and a culture unto themselves. Furthermore, knight lords fear chaos and change. As landowners and authority figures, knight lords have the most to lose in the event of massive changes in society. They are a deeply conservative people so they foster the growth and preservation of traditions.

The knight lords see themselves in a paternalistic role; they are the protectors of society and the champions of order. It is the duty of the knight lord to enforce order and to control his peasants, ensuring that society is protected from the base and selfish desires of the commoners. As a consequence of these beliefs, knight lords have a healthy disrespect for their people. The poverty and suffering of those below them is seen as a sad but necessary cost of maintaining the social order.

The noble bloodline is integral to a knight lord's personality. His personal power flows from his heritage, as a member of a line of noble warriors separate from the rabble he commands. To a knight lord, station is determined by blood, not by personal merit. Those of high birth are superior to those of low birth, regardless of accomplishments. A knight lord's behaviour is set by his birth.

**Patterns:** Knight Lords are very predictable people. When faced with a problem a knight lord organizes a large force, whether that force is an army of fellow knights, the local militia or a band of labourers. Knight Lords are staunch in the defence of their lands, they refuse to withdraw or ambush; they confront invaders directly and perish or conquer.

Knight Lords seldom join traveling bands of adventurers, but often gather a small group of professional warriors around them to serve as a retinue. These entourages are gathered by the Knight Lord to help him defeat an enemy that is greater than himself, or to assist him in his own adventures. Many knight lords periodically leave their lands to serve in the armies of their Monarch, or take on crusades, or just to travel to tournaments or other social gatherings. Other knight lords are forced to take on the life of an adventurer after being thrown off their land by an angry monarch.

Knight Lords are natural leaders and they are almost always the leader of any group they join. In this capacity the knight lord issues orders and expects to be obeyed without question. Knight Lords often seize control of the resources in these groups, doling out gold and equipment as he judges fitting. These lords often lead their fellowships to "noble causes" such as defending the lands of other nobles or quashing the agents of chaos that threaten the order of feudal society.

Knight Lords only adventure for a short time. These warriors are primarily landowners, and while they may break from their lives as property owners to accomplish some goal, they inevitably retire from the life of adventure and return to their homes.



**Role-playing:** Knight Lords are always dignified and haughty. Knight Lords behave themselves in a manner that is fitting to their noble station, and always portray an image of confidence and power. These lords are also dismissive of lesser commoners, they refuse to take orders from such peasants and demand the respect that is due to them.

While not necessarily selfish, they put the needs of their comrades last. As a highborn warrior, they feel that their judgment is more important than the opinions of their fellow adventurers. Knight Lords seize leadership by any means necessary; they refuse to be led by commoners and may even abandon the group if they don't feel respect. While playing a knight lord, the player may wish to temper these traits with tolerance for the benefit of keeping order within the group.

**Class and Prestige Classes:** Knight Lords consist of highborn warriors, so the aristocrat and fighter classes are fitting for this character archetype. The traditions of the knight lord mesh with the obligations of a paladin, though only a tiny few paladins come from the noble background of the lord. Few prestige classes are especially fitting for this highborn character, but the classes cavalier and knight of the shadows may be appropriate for certain characters.

**Suggested Feats:** Knight Lords are almost always specialized for mounted combat, so the feats equestrian, mounted combat, ride-by-attack, spirited charge and trample are useful feats. Even aristocratic knight lords make use out of armour, so the heavy armour proficiency feat is also fitting.



# Tome of the Guardians

## The Sword from the Stone

*What is the difference between a coward and a martyr?*

*Brains.*

-Popular Riddle

### The Sword from the Stone

The multiverse is filled with heroes, men and women who fight for truth, justice and all that is good and holy. Beacons of light, they stand against the darkness as icons of righteousness. Even in the land of the mists there are such heroes, fighting against the evil imprisoned in the demiplane. Yet the war against the darkness is difficult in a land made from the vile essence of villains. Champions in the mists forever search for a weapon that could grant them the power they need to fight the evil around them.

Legends tell of a sword that lies hidden in the mists, protected from the evil of the world by a guardian stone. Shaped like an anvil of rock, the stone holds the sword fast, allowing only the most righteous soul to wield the nameless blade. While dismissed by most scholars as fiction, there are bards who are knowledgeable in the lore of many lands. After pursuing the histories of hundreds of lands, they say that such lore reports that every so often, in one land or another, some young person of noble spirit discovers a magnificent sword and becomes a great champion. The stories are extremely varied but all end in a similar manner; the noble warrior becomes a great force of good and then dies tragically. Now, the scalds

say, the stars are right and the time nears for the sword to reappear.

While dismissed as a story, the sword is very real. Encased within an anvil of stone, the sword appears and reappears in different lands. Once found it refuses to be taken from its stone, say by those of pure spirit. The blade drives its wielder to acts of great heroism, schooling its owner to be a paragon of goodness. With the fantastic powers of the sword, its wielder quickly becomes a hero of great renown. Yet though a tool of good, the power of the blade is balanced. Just as evil beings gain power through suffering, so too must a good soul be burdened. The sword drives its owner relentlessly against the forces of darkness, pushing mortal bodies and minds to their limits.

The origins of the sword and the stone are unknown, though there are those who believe that the sword and the stone are as old as the demiplane itself. The first appearance of the sword dates back to the year 500, when a villager in Vallaki discovered a shining sword he found in a cave. The young man became renowned for slaying the beasts of the forests and protecting his village from roving bands of foreign raiders. Though barely a man, the lad was a formidable warrior. His short career ended when he vowed to travel to Barovia and seek an audience with Count Strahd von Zarovich. The young warrior's ravaged carcass was found on the road to Barovia, with the sword nowhere to be found.

The Sword from the Stone reappeared again in Mordent, wielded by a young woman. The warrior-woman ventured into the darkest corners of their land and cleansed them of the taint of evil. After several years she promised to explore Gryphon Hill and remove the malignant force that lurked there. The woman was never seen again.

In the year 623 the sword was discovered in Nidala, on the edge of the phantasmal forest. There was much debate over the nature of the sword, and though many a man tried to liberate the sword from its stone casing, all failed. The stone was brought before Elena Faith-hold, but the Knight Protector was unable to free the blade. Denounced as a demonic trick, the stone was buried in the slope of Mount Malcredo. Several years later a small boy stumbled upon it. He was denounced as an outlaw and forced to flee. It is said that he traveled to other lands and became known as a great hero before he died in battle.

In the tales, the blade is described as a bastard sword crafted of shining silver. The sword has a hilt of electrum, carved into the shape of an angel with outstretched wings. The silver blade is sharp as a razor, commonly glowing with a soft nimbus. The stone that encases the blade is a finely carved block of black rock, cut into the shape of an anvil. The sword is found plunged into the flat top of the anvil; no force can remove it, though an individual of the lawful good alignment or the innocent stage of corruption by remove the blade with no difficulty.

Whomsoever removes the sword from the stone becomes the owner of the blade. The sword has an intelligence of 9, a wisdom of 14 and a charisma of 25. The blade is lawful neutral and possesses an ego rating of 20. Once removed from

the stone the sword functions as a +3 holy bastard sword, granting its wielder the ability to wield it proficiently with one hand. The sword can speak to its wielder with telepathy, though it cannot communicate with any other being. The sword can use the skill sense motive with ten ranks, to a total score of +12. The blade is enveloped in a righteous aura, emanating a constant *Magic Circle against Evil* in a ten-foot radius centred on the blade. Furthermore the blade casts a permanent *Dispel Evil* spell on the wielder. These two spell effects function as if cast by a cleric of 12<sup>th</sup> level.

The blade is a charismatic companion. It uses its telepathic abilities to communicate with its owner and encourages the character to become a champion of goodness. The Sword from the Stone is extremely persuasive; there are few individuals capable of resisting its charms, indeed, most beings willingly agree with the weapon and follow its lead. The sword is an excellent teacher and can school its wielder in the art of swordplay. Though a potent ally, the sword is a cruel taskmaster. The blade will not abide by sloth on the part of its owner and it uses its influence to dominate its wielder and force them back into the good fight. The weapon allows its mortal wielder to eat, sleep, bath and heal but will not allow any other acts of idleness. If more than a few days pass without the owner engaging in combat, the blade dominates the wielder and seeks battle.

The blade is completely fanatical; it judges mankind by an unrealistic standard, hating all creatures not wholly dedicated to goodness. The owner of the blade is forbidden to associate by anyone who does not epitomize nobility. The sword forces its owner to attack openly

evil creatures, rarely letting its owner show any mercy. The blade gives no thought for the safety of its owner, initiating battle regardless of the danger. Indeed, the sword can be a persistent curse. The sword will not allow its owner to relinquish it, even for a moment. If necessary the blade uses its mighty ego to crush the will of its wielder.

The Sword from the Stone has outlived countless owners, never failing to rise again. When its owner is slain, the blade dissolves into mist and fades out of existence. A short time latter the blade rises from the earth, encased within the stone anvil. Often the sword emerges in another domain, though there are some cases where the blade emerges on the very spot where its previous owner died.

# Children of the Night

## Count Yvern the Scourge

Centuries ago, on a distant world, there lived a young knight born from royal lineage. Though but a child in exile, the young Count Yvern was heir to a great kingdom held in the grip of a vile usurper. Throughout his youth he was schooled by an order of holy warriors, known as the knight defenders. Under the tutelage of these warriors, he trained for the day that he would lead them back to their homeland and cleanse it of evil.

With fierce determination, the young man drove himself into his training and dreamt of the day that he would battle against the evil. Little did he realize that the true enemy came not from the darkness, but from the light. Even as the knight defenders rebuilt their shattered order, they discovered a young peasant boy who was favoured by the gods. Confident, courageous and charismatic, the tiny lad Daniel showed the promise to be a great hero. The knights invested their greatest resources to foster the boy's growth, training him to be an unparalleled soldier in the army of righteousness. Thus it was that Yvern met the humble Daniel, as a competitor for the glory of good.

The two men proved to be equal as warriors, but Daniel showed himself to be the more charismatic and most favoured by the gods. Though Daniel was of lower birth, Yvern felt bitterly overshadowed. It was his competitor who was hailed as the champion of goodness, the beacon of hope, and the centre of his people's love. As the holy warriors finally clashed with the fiendish army of the usurper, it would be the

humble born paladin Daniel who gained renown, no matter how desperately Yvern fought for glory.

After years of fierce battle the forces of righteousness were triumphant and the usurper was himself overthrown. Yet even as Yvern prepared to assume the throne, he was tormented. Though he possessed great power, it was his rival who had become the hero of the wars. While the young count might have become a king, he knew that it was Daniel who would become the hero of legend. The taste of success became as bitter as acid. Filled with diabolic envy, Yvern forsook the crown and fled from the kingdom, he cast off the trappings of a holy warrior and took up the mantle of a warlord. If he could not be remembered as a hero, he would be reviled as a villain.

Sworn to eclipse his rival in darkness, Yvern rallied the shattered forces of the fallen warlord and began to scour the borderlands of life. At the head of the fiendish horde, Yvern became The Scourge. The brutal slaughter of innocents soon drew the attention of the Knight Protectors and the battles between the two armies were fierce. Towards the end of winter, Yvern and his minions were forced to make a final stand in a captured village.

The ensuing siege would be short and gruesome. The trapped raiders fought with the ferocity of caged animals as the holy knights closed in. At the climax of the battle Yvern and Daniel met in single combat. The struggle was titanic, the very essences of good and

evil crackled like lightening with each sword stroke. Though infused with darkness, Yvern proved to be the weaker and was brought low. Yet, as Daniel prepared to deliver the killing blow, he toppled forward with a stray arrow protruding from his back.

Without their champion, the knights began to fall. The siege was lifted and the holy warriors fell into a desperate retreat. Yet as his minions chased after their prey, Yvern was held fast to the village. His rival had been slain and he stood victorious, yet in his black heart he knew that he had been cheated. It was he who was the weaker, he who deserved death. True victory was once again denied to the warrior and even as he hunted down the knight protectors, he knew that his conquest was hollow and undeserved.

Ever restless, the Scourge put his kingdom to the torch and traveled the world, committing atrocities, provoking the wrath of righteousness and fighting to prove himself the superior. The years of battle burned away his humanity, leaving him an unliving abomination. Of all the foes he fought, he never encountered another as powerful as Daniel and so never sated his demented needs. One winter night, one hundred years to the day he slew his rival, a fog bank enveloped him. When he emerged, Yvern found himself in a strange new land.

The mists have carried Yvern to many domains, where he has worked his grisly pattern. The death knight seizes isolated villages, terrorizes its people and awaits the arrival of some agent of the Gods. Yet in every land the mists have led him to, he finds no challenge from the forces of goodness. In Nova Vassa and Stanton Bluffs Yvern found only weakling heroes unworthy of his

metal. In Darkon and Nidla only agents of greater evils confronted him. Nowhere in the accursed demiplane did he meet a true hero capable of ending his torment.

And so Yvern travels on. Aided by his retinue of undying soldiers, he travels the path laid by the mists, falling upon villages and provoking the wrath of who ever would come to stop him. After a century of imprisonment, the Scourge grows desperate for some holy warrior to finally put his soul to rest.

### Count Yvern the Scourge

The Scourge is always garbed in the tattered remains of his plate armour. Scorched metal plates and rags of chain mail cloth are permanently welded his mummified carcass. An ancient helmet adorned with two long bullhorns covers his face, obscuring everything save two eyes that smoulder from behind his visor with murderous fire. A long black cloak of burnt fur always trails behind the death knight, flapping in the slightest wind like a pair of demonic wings. Yvern is always mounted upon his mount, a heavy warhorse with a pelt as black as night and eyes that gleam with fiendish intellect.

**Male Death knight Blk 10:** CR 13; medium-size undead; HD 10D12; hp 70; Init +2; Spd 20ft.; AC 21 (+8 full plate, +1 dexterity, +2 large shield); Atk + 15 melee (1D8+5 + 1 temp. Con Damage, touch), +17 melee (1D8, +2 thundering light flail); SA Abyssal Blast, Aura of Despair, Command Undead, Detect Law, Fear Aura, Fiendish Servant, Poison Use, Smite Good, Sneak Attack +3d6, Undead Followers; SQ Damage reduction 15/+1, Dark Blessing, Immunities, Spell Resistance 20, Summon Mount, Turn immunity; AI LE;

SV Fort +10, Ref +8, Will +8; Str 20, Dex 14, Con -, Int 12, Wiz 14, Cha 16.

**Skills and Feats:** Diplomacy +6, Hide +7 (-6 armour check), Intimidate +6, Knowledge (religion) +10, Ride +15; Cleave, Mounted Combat, Power Attack, Ride-by-Attack, Sunder.

**Spells Prepared** (3/3/2/1; base save DC = 12 + spell level): 1<sup>st</sup> –cause fear\* 1, doom \*1, summon monster I \*1, 2<sup>nd</sup> – bulls strength \*1, shatter \*1, summon monster II \*1, 3<sup>rd</sup> – contagion \*1, summon monster III \*1, 4<sup>th</sup> – poison \*1.

### Special Attacks

*Abyssal Blast:* Once per day Yvern may unleash a hellish blast of fire. The blast explodes in a twenty-foot radius anywhere in a range of 800 ft. The explosion deals 10D6 points of damage. Half of the damage is fire, and the other half is from divine power. A reflex save against a DC 18 reduces the damage by half.

*Aura of Despair:* Yvern radiates an aura of malign force. All enemies within 10 feet of him suffer a –2 moral penalty to saving throws.

*Command Undead:* Yvern may command undead as if an evil cleric of 8<sup>th</sup> level.

*Detect Law:* At will Yvern can detect good as a spell-like ability. This ability functions as the spell “detect law”.

*Fear Aura:* Yvern is surrounded in an aura of dread. Creatures of less than 5 HD must succeed at a will save or be affected as though by a “fear” spell cast by a sorcerer of 10<sup>th</sup> level.

*Poison Use:* Yvern may freely use poison and suffers no risk to poison himself.

*Smite Good:* Once per day Yvern may make a smite attack against a good aligned target. This attack gains a +3

bonus and a +10 bonus to damage. If he accidentally smites an evil or neutral aligned target, the attack has no effect and is wasted for the day.

*Sneak Attack:* Once each round Yvern may make a sneak attack against an enemy who is denied his dexterity bonus that round. If this attack is successful it gains a damage bonus of +3D6.

### Special Qualities

*Damage Reduction:* Yvern has damage reduction +15/+1.

*Dark Blessing:* Yvern gains a bonus to all saves equal to his charisma bonus.

*Immunities:* Yvern is immune to cold, electricity, fire, and polymorph effects and possesses all other undead immunities.

*Spell Resistance:* Yvern has Spell Resistance 20.

*Summon Mount:* Yvern has the ability to summon a mount of 5 hit dice. If this mount is killed he may not summon another for one year and one day. Yvern has not used this ability, so should he lose his fiendish mount he can use this ability immediately.

*Turn Immunity:* Yvern is immune to any turn attempt. He remains vulnerable to the spell “Holy Word”.

**Fiendish Servant:** Yvern is served by his mount Daredevil, a dread companion. Daredevil is a heavy warhorse with the following stats.

HD 6d8+18 (48); Init +1; Spd 50 ft; AC 15; Atk 2 hoof +7 (1d6+4); bite +2 (1d4+2); SQ empathic link, improved evasion, scent, share saving throws, share spells; Fort +10, Reflex +5, Will +4; Str 19, Dex 13, Con 17, Int 6, Wiz 13, Cha 6. Listen +7, Spot +7.

Daredevil is a dread familiar and will try to urge his master to great acts of evil. If Yvern is in danger, Daredevil



will sacrifice his own unlife to protect him. This intervention may one day cost Yvern the honourable death he seeks.

**Followers:** Yvern can attract any undead within a 200-mile radius of himself. At any one time he may have a maximum of 20 HD of undead serving him. Currently Yvern has attracted 4 common dread wights with this ability. These wights are loyal followers and would sacrifice themselves in the name of their vile master.

Using his command undead ability Yvern has enslaved four ghouls to act as his minions. These undead are expendable, so they are always first in the battle line.

**Equipment:** Yvern wears the charred remains of what once was armour. He always carries a large shield and a +2 thundering light flail. He cares nothing for wealth so carries nothing else of value.

**Combat:** In combat Yvern orders his undead followers to charge into

combat while he observes the defenders. If his soldiers meet strong resistance, he uses his abyssal blast to weaken his enemies. He casts *summon monster* spells to soften up his opposition then casts *Bull's Strength* upon himself. With his magic expended he charges in on Daredevil and attacks without mercy. If he has reason to believe that his foes are good aligned, he uses his smite good ability on the strongest looking target.

If someone identifiable as a knight or a holy warrior confronts Yvern, the death knight commands his minions to halt their attacks so that he might battle his enemy in single combat. Yvern fights fiercely but fairly, neither using spells nor underhanded tricks to win. If he believes his enemy to be truly good but poorly armed he may drop his mace and fight unarmed, perhaps even holding back his draining touch if he deems his foe a worthy opponent.



# Love, Labour and Lynch Mobs

## Demihumans in Ravenloft

With the exception of a few isolated areas, the demiplane of Ravenloft is populated by an overwhelming majority of humans. In most worlds of the cosmos, humans are surrounded by a plethora of races; they are but one race in a vibrant civilization of many species. Yet in Ravenloft humans are isolated and ignorant, rather than being thrust into a world of many peoples, they are contained in a simple land where humanity is the native race and all other creatures are the foreigners. In absence of the cosmopolitan background that their extraplanar counterparts enjoy, the humans of Ravenloft are xenophobic and ignorant. Rather than accept nonhumans, the natives of Ravenloft treat them as exotic aliens. For the most part this places nonhumans at a great disadvantage, though there are also benefits to the mystique that has been thrust upon them. Indeed, the interactions between humans and nonhumans vary widely.

### Calibans

The relationship between humans and calibans is simple; humans hate calibans and Calibans hate them right back. Humans do not view calibans as a separate race, but rather as a mutated strain of humanity. Always ugly and often unstable, calibans are rightly feared. When born, calibans are seen as a sign of evil, whether that be moral

corruption, outright inbreeding, or even black sorcery. Calibans are never accepted in society, though their family may feel an attachment to their malformed spawn. Many young calibans can be found lurking in attics, basements or even family crypts, fed and sometimes even educated by family members until they are old enough to fend for themselves.

The majority of calibans are raised until they reach maturity, at which point they are forced out of their home, never to return. Calibans often live as hermits in the woods or as urban hoodlums in the streets. Though despised by most of society, criminal and military organizations prize these freaks for their strength. Though too unreliable to make effective guards, Calibans can be found as enforcers and general muscle. The most successful Calibans are found in the employ of monarchs and nobles, working as executioners and torturers.

Though the Inquisition despises all nonhumans, they have been known to mistake some calibans for ugly humans, and even employ them in the Inquisition. Calibans are the only demihumans in Falkovnia treated with any degree of respect, in deference to their military usefulness. Indeed Calibans revel the role of an enforcer, simultaneously avenging themselves on the world that rejected them and gaining the respect and acceptance that they secretly crave.

The most famous of all Calibans was Sir Grumgut Knuckle, the infamous executioner of Darkon. Born the bastard son of the Lord High Executioner, Grumgut lived in the wine cellar beneath his family estate until he was old enough to serve as a prison guard. From there he rose in the ranks to become a torturer, a hangman and finally an executioner. Though a pariah, Grumgut was hailed as the greatest executioner in Darkonian history. With unparalleled sadistic skill, the infamous Knuckle never failed to elicit a confession and the final plea of death from his victims. His perfect record has never been beaten, and in his service he even earned a token knighthood. It is even said that Azalin, King of Darkon, was overheard to say, "Nobody racks better than he."

## Dwarves

Dwarves enjoy a precarious position in Ravenloft, simultaneously accepted and rejected by human society. They resemble humans in many ways, exemplifying stoicism and celebrate a culture similar to that of working class humans. Yet dwarves are surrounded by a reputation of amazing abilities, which set them apart from humans and make them the subject of envy.

It is a common conception that dwarves are unparalleled craftsmen, adding supernatural skills to architecture, brewing, engineering, masonry, mining and all forms of metal smithing. Sadly, it is this popular belief that truly separates dwarves from men. Dwarves are coveted professionals for their skills, fetching ridiculously high prices for their work, sometimes as much as twice the item's worth.

Though accepted as professionals, rural humans refuse to allow dwarves to replace them in the fields. In most

domains dwarves are forbidden to own or even rent land, forcing them to work as craftsmen and skilled professionals. Though dwarves are spared the drudgery of peasant life, they remain dependant upon noble patrons to provide them with housing. In this manner dwarves are trapped in a gilded cage, given wealth beyond their peers, but lacking freedom of any kind.

Humans see only the prosperity of the dwarves; they resent them and malign them at every opportunity. Dwarves become the scapegoats of the core, blamed for everything from plagues to poverty. In some of the larger cities of the Core, the humans occasionally form "short hunts", a drunken posse that seeks out dwarves and attacks them with no provocation. These "short hunts" usually involve a great deal of property damage to dwarves businesses and housing, and occasionally ends with the murder of a dwarf caught on the street. City garrisons are instructed to quash such riots, though they tend to sympathise with the rioters and are always slow to react.

Most dwarves in the core are locked in urban ghettos, usually adjacent to the craftsman districts. Dwarves occupy honoured positions in many crafts and professions, though they are kept isolated from human culture and forbidden to enter guilds. Dwarves reinforce this isolation by withdrawing into their clans. Even more so than their counterparts on other worlds, a dwarf in Ravenloft depends upon his extended clan for everything, ranging from employment, homes, and even marriages. These clans compete for the coveted positions in human society, so much so that violent feuds are not uncommon. Indeed, clan lines often

divide the dwarven ghettos to the point where local officials are forced to maintain the peace.

Dwarven warriors are prized soldiers in Darkon and beyond. Several mercenary units travel the core, working as hired muscle for nobles wealthy enough to pay the price. The infamous Strumdrag Warband is the most noteworthy group, a band of fifty so dwarven soldiers, all from the clan Strumdrag. Gaining fame for their defence of Borca against Falkovnian aggression, there is no other mercenary group better known for discipline or courage.

## Elves

Elves are elegant and graceful, embodying many of the traits that humans associate with beauty. Yet their strange appearance, apparent immortality and magical nature mark elves as alien beings, too curious to ignore and too dangerous to trust. Except in the domain of Sithicus, elves find themselves unwelcome in all corners of the core. Elves are shrouded in an aura of magic and mystique, marking them as exotic outsiders even in the best of times. The proud sylvans avoid much of the violence and harassment that befalls other demihumans, since their natural xenophobia separates their community from humanity and thus circumvents the friction that forms between two species.

Yet those elves unfortunate enough to find themselves alone with humans are quite isolated. Most humans are so intimidated by their alien appearance, or simply their supernatural reputation, that they avoid interacting with elves at every opportunity. Mothers refuse to let their children near sylvans, merchants will not haggle with them and innkeepers rarely

have a free room to offer an elf. Wherever a lone elf goes, he is followed by silence and stares. If an elf stays in one human settlement for more than a day, the local authorities may work up enough courage to try to persuade the elf to leave. Long periods of this treatment can drive even the most cool headed elf to near madness.

Elves are known throughout the demiplane as a magical race and nearly any product of elfin craft is considered to be magical. Elvin woodwork is exceptionally prized, especially arrows and long bows. To sophisticated cultures, elves are the very epitome of exotic. Elvin entertainers are very much sought after, especially by opera and dramatic troupes. Strangely, urbanized humans accept elves much more readily than their rural counterparts. For this reason elves gravitate towards cities and form small communities within them.

Elves are always targeted as fey in Tepest. There is not a single Tepesti man, woman or child who does not recognize the angular features or sharp pointed ears of an elf. Such sylvans are immediately detained, interrogated and more often than not executed. In the land of Falkovnia elves suffer an even slower torment. Elves are seized as property of the state and pressed into labour. Elven males can expect to spend their long lives literally chained to a workbench, creating woodcraft or works of art for Drakov. Elven females are singled out for an even worse duty, kept as “comfort women” for the pleasure of Falkovnian officers.

There are many famous elves in the demiplane, including the astounding Alanik Ray and the enchanting opera singer Angel Pajaro. Known throughout the elite of Port a-Lucine is Lannel De Matrire, the fortune-teller. Claiming her

lineage all the way back to Sithicus, the sylvan claims to be a diviner of great power. Popular amongst the wealthy noblewomen of Dementlieu, it is considered to be a great faux pas to plan a ball or any other event without first consulting the enchanting woman.

## Gnomes

Gnomes are forever battling against the prejudices of a world built by creatures more than twice their size. To the eternal irritation of the gnomes, humans judge them solely by their size and immediately conclude that they are inferior. Gnomes are often dismissed as being irrelevant creatures or treated as children. Normally lively and humorous, the gnomes of Ravenloft have become much more serious and self-conscious than their counterparts on other worlds. Indeed, the life of a gnome is a never-ending battle to be taken seriously by the larger beings that surround them. Though they are treated as inferiors, gnomes are spared much of the suspicion and aggression that befalls other demihumans. Since humans instantly dismiss gnomes, they are never viewed as a threat. It is only in the extremely isolated areas, such as Tepest, that gnomes are viewed as anything alien or threatening.

The humans of Ravenloft openly mocked gnomish traditions, such as multiple names and large hats. As a consequence, many of these traditions have died away and given way to a new gnomish style. Gnomes emphasize their maturity, with males growing distinguished beards and females wearing clothing to highlight their physique. Taking advantage of humanity's preoccupation with death, gnomes have become a very morbid people. Elements of "graveyard"

humour are found throughout gnomish culture, which helps to shock their human neighbours into taking them seriously.

Gnomes are almost never found in Tepest, since their size and their attitudes mark them as dangerous aliens. The gnomes of Falkovnia are the most bitter and morbid creatures. Forced into work as craftsmen, the gnome ghettos are dark and gloomy places. The Falkovnian gnomes have a deep hatred of humans, using foul practical jokes to take their frustrations out on human peasants. Rather than curb these cruel tricks, Drakov's men actually encourage the gnomes. Rare indeed is the Falkovnian soldier who doesn't delight in watching a slighted gnome dump a bucket of blood on an unsuspecting pauper.

Of the great gnomes of Ravenloft is Ambrose Scully, the famous author and playwright. Creator of such hit novels such as *Withering Heights* and *The Hour of Ascension*, Ambrose Scully typifies gnomish morbidity. For more than fifty years Scully shocked and horrified audiences across the Core, ending his reign of literary terror only to pursue intensive research into the history of Ravenloft. Sources close to Ambrose claim that the master of the macabre nears the completion of an epic so terrifying that it has driven all those who have read it to madness.

## Half Elves

Half elves are the hybrids of humans and elves, simultaneously embodying familiar human nature and sylvan mystique. Naturally, half elves are the most accepted race of demihumans. Indeed, there are few villages in the core that have never been home to a half-breed. Since they appear

so similar to pure strain humans, half elves are instantly accepted into most human societies. Even when their ancestry is apparent, half elves are treated with respect. While not as exotic as pure elves, half elves are considered to be partly magical. They are often consulted on matters of the supernatural, asked to read palms or make prophecies.

Half elves are treated as exotic foreigners, and while they are seen as welcome guests, they remain visitors. Half elves are a highly mobile people, never wholly belonging to one community. Sylvan individualism often pushes half elves to the life of a journeyman; such half-breeds often become bards, explorers, merchants or even spies. So entrenched is this reputation that half elves are considered flighty and unreliable. Half elves are never trusted to honour agreements or hold steady employment.

Like true elves, half elves are instantly targeted by the Tepesti inquisition. In Falkovnia, half elves are seized as slaves and pressed into service. Even in more tolerant domains, half elves are viewed with suspicion. Most half elves are smart enough to realize that their half-elven nature is a disadvantage. Fortunately, most half elves can pass for human if they cover their ears with a hat.

Most famous of all such half-breeds is the legendary Shanel Brightwater. A bard of great skill, she traveled the core seeking new songs, stories and adventure. Brightwater added many of her own adventurers to her repertoire of tales. Amongst her more ambitious boasts was the banishment of a demonic creature in the Shadow Rift. Now in her sixties, the sylvan woman has taken a hiatus from her travels to take on students.

## Halflings

Much more so than gnomes, halflings resemble human children. This one characteristic has caused unending sorrow to the halfling people who are forever marginalized and abused by the race of man. While not considered to be a threat, halflings are never treated with respect. Even in the sophisticated corners of the Core, halflings are met with condescension and cruelty. When interacting with halflings, humans often make rude jokes. Most taverns refuse to serve to halflings, unless they perform some sort of service, such as participating in a round of “midget-tossing”.

Though traditionally nomadic, human cruelty has forced halflings to become landed. Communities in Darkon are home to many halfling farmsteads, where these short humanoids live in peace. Halflings rarely venture out into the world beyond, preferring to avoid the “big people” altogether. Halflings are a common presence in the cities. Their small size makes them efficient urban dwellers and their natural dexterity allow them to excel in work too delicate for the clumsy hands of human adults. Marginalized by man, halflings often get the last laugh. The presence of halfling thieves is rarely detected, but always felt. Many a tavern keeper has discovered his till empty, never discovering that he was fleeced by the halfling he turned away at the door.

Humans throughout the core underestimate halflings, with the notable exception of Tepest. The Tepesti Inquisition labels halflings as “fey children” or “changelings”. Like all demihumans, halflings find no mercy at the hands of the clerics. In Falkovnia halflings are enslaved and pressed into

service. Halflings are often sent to labour in mines or sweatshops, performing the labour often reserved for children. Drakov himself is known to keep several halflings as court jesters. These fools are forced to caper for the amusement of the dictator, amusing the Darklord with either their buffoonery or their torturous deaths.

Infamous amongst the scoundrels of The Nocturnal Sea is "The Mouse". Known only by her nickname, this artful

burglar is reputed to be the greatest housebreaker ever born. A halfling of stunning beauty and rapier wit, the Mouse is celebrated for her unsurpassed agility. Legend has it that she once duelled with a dozen of Prince Othmar's personal guards, emerging completely unscathed and with the contents of all of their pockets. Never captured by the law, the whereabouts of the Mouse are unknown, but often speculated.



# Growls in the Night

## Dread Wym

Guilt, it is the ghost of past indiscretion, the indelible stain of wrongdoing. Most often guilt is a passing sensation. It is acquired, suffered and forgotten, like any other disease. Yet there are times where regret does not infect the wrongdoer, but rather ferments and festers in the earth, poisoning a tiny portion of the land and creating a physical manifestation of malignance and misdeed. This is the dread wym, a disgusting serpentine vermin that bores in the earth.

Just as with true guilt, the full sting of regret is felt only by those with the morality to feel the blame for their wrongdoing. All forms of evil can create dread wyrms, but only those wyrms spawned by the righteous are given the nourishment to survive. Burrowing deep within the cold earth, the dread wym is strengthened by the righteousness of its creator and undergoes a vile metamorphosis. When it has grown to term the dread wym emerges from the corrupted ground, a horrid embodiment of wrongdoing. The wym balances the decency of its creator by committing acts of evil, it mocks the virtue of its parent and lives to show the foul imperfections that mar the face of goodness.

Dread wyrms can be found in any climate, though they are always found close by civilization. These beings make lairs for themselves in a variety of places, including islands, caves and mountaintops. Wyrms use their lairs as troves for treasure, a meeting place for its minions, or just as a temporary

shelter. Dread wyrms periodically raid settlements either to steal goods, to put humanoids under its domination, or just to spread mayhem and death. Wyrms always try to draw attention to themselves and their actions, for they are compelled to demonstrate the flaws of goodness and the purity of evil.

The troubadours of Kartakass sing the tale of the most infamous dread wym, Kokalimos the Death Serpent. The vile monster was birthed when a young child rampaged through a graveyard and knocked over a tombstone. While the child grew to be a valiant knight the disgusting worm mutated into the Death Serpent. Eventually the beast erupted forth from the corrupted cemetery and began its campaign of terror.

The fell reptile is described as a terrifying demon encased in blood red scales and born aloft by massive wings. With fangs like daggers and a tail as sharp as a scimitar, it cut a grisly swath through the villages of the Southern Core. It was said that the wym could vomit forth dragon fire, a hellish gout of flame that could incinerate whole fields. Worst of all, the creature could awaken the bodies of its victims, turning them into abominable monsters that terrorized the land long after the beast had left. The final fate of the wym is lost to the mists, though some bards say that the beast is merely dormant, waiting for the stars to be right before beginning its rampage anew.



## Dread Wymr

### Large sized Dragon

<b>Hit Dice</b>	8d12 +24 (56)
<b>Initiative</b>	+5
<b>Speed</b>	50 ft.
<b>AC</b>	18 (+8 natural, +1 dex, -1 size)
<b>Attacks</b>	Bite +14 or Tail +14
<b>Damage</b>	2D6+6 bite, 1D8+6 tail slap
<b>Face/Reach</b>	5 ft. by 10ft./5ft.
<b>Special Attacks</b>	Improved grab, constrict 1D12+6, See Below
<b>Special Quality</b>	Dark Vision 100 feet, Scent, See Below
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +9, Ref +7, Will +9
<b>Abilities</b>	Str 22, Dex 13, Con 17, Int 16, Wiz 16, Cha 16
<b>Skills</b>	Hide +9, Listen +11, Move silently +9,
<b>Feats</b>	Blind Fight, Improved Initiative
<b>Climate/Terrain</b>	Lake sides, rivers and swamps
<b>Organization</b>	Solitary
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	8
<b>Treasure</b>	None
<b>Alignment</b>	Any Evil
<b>Advancement</b>	9-10 large, 11-12 Huge

The life cycle of the dread wymr begins when an innocent child commits some act of selfishness, impiety or any other sin. Such misdeeds carry a tiny chance of spawning a dread wymr, but in the rare case that such a creature is created the vermin lies dormant for years. The dread wymr most often withers away, but in some exceptional

cases its creator matures and becomes a true champion of goodness. The dormant wymr is nourished by the steady flow of righteous deeds and eventually grows into a perverse reflection of its creator.

Dread wymrs are massive serpents with draconic heads, long bladed tails and puny arms capable only of grasping small objects. These vile reptiles vary from one another in behaviour. Lawful wymrs dominate isolated villages and enslave the populous. Chaotic wymrs travel the mists, destroying and devouring anything they come across. Finally, neutral evil wymrs terrorize settlements exploit food and treasure from them and greedily hoard it in their lairs.

**Combat:** Dread Wymrs are clever combatants. They use their powers, their minions and the environment to the fullest effect and rarely face dangerous opposition in a direct conflict. Dread Wymrs prefer to kidnap lone travelers and torture them for information upon nearby settlements and their defences. Thus armed they attack with lightning speed and overwhelming force.

Dread Wymrs attack either with their ferocious bite or their bladed tail. If a dread wymr feels confident, it might use its tail to deal subdual damage, grasp an enemy and take the foe back to its lair alive. There the wymr slowly devours its enemy, limb by limb.

**Constrict:** With a successful grapple check a dread wymr may deal 1D12+6 points of damage each round.

**Dark Vision:** A dread wymr can see with perfect clarity for 100 feet even in the complete absence of light.

**Improved Grab:** If a dread wymr successfully hits a creature of large size

or smaller, the wyrm may automatically make a grapple check.

**Scent:** Dread Wyrms may track by scent. When doing so they gain a +8 bonus to the wilderness lore check to track.

**Special Abilities:** All dread wyrms gain three special abilities, chosen from the following list.

*Animate Dead:* Three times a day a dread wyrm may cast *animate dead* as a spell-like ability. This ability effects as an *animate dead* spell cast by a 10<sup>th</sup> level sorcerer.

*Domination Gaze:* Once per day a dread wyrm may cast *Dominate Person* as a spell-like ability. The DC to resist the domination effect is 18 and has duration of 10 days.

*Dragon Fire:* Once every 1D4 rounds a dread wyrm may breath forth a cone of fire 50 ft. long and 50 ft. wide at its terminus. This breath weapon deals 4D6 points of fire damage. A successful reflex saving throw against a DC 18

allows the victim to suffer only half damage.

*Energy Subtype:* The dread wyrm gets the subtype of one form of energy. The wyrm is then immune to damage from that energy source.

*Fast Healing:* The dread wyrm gains fast healing 5.

*Flight:* The wyrm gains a pair of huge, scaly bat wings. The wyrm gains a speed of 100 ft. flight, poor manoeuvrability.

*Poison Spines:* The tail of the dread wyrm is covered in long poisonous spines. The tail slap attack injects poison into anyone hit. As well, in lieu of a tail slap the wyrm may throw a wave of spines as a ranged attack (+9, range increment 30 ft, 1D6 piercing damage). The poison coating the spines deals 1D3 points of temporary constitution damage, with a fortitude difficult class of 18. There is no secondary damage.

# Feudalism in the Dread Realms

## Medieval society in Ravenloft

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### The Peasants

Starting from Early Medieval period, all land in the country is divided between wealthy landowners. These nobles do not work their land themselves; instead, peasants toil on the land. Nobles in turn rent this land and extract taxes and other fees from their tenant serfs. The lord also maintains a reserve, land that is used for his own benefit only. All income from this part goes directly to the lord's coffers. The lord's home is usually built on this land.

Each family's "working ground" is dispersed throughout the lord's domain, with a strip of a land here and a strip there. The homes of peasants are clustered around their lord's keep for protection. Peasants are bound to the land by contracts. The details of the contract vary from region to region, but the concept remains the same. Peasants agree to live under a heavy burden of taxes and obligations, and in return are protected and allowed to work the land. The following is a list of the most common taxes and obligations:

**Quit-rent:** A fee paid regularly by a peasant for the right to work land.

**Good Duty:** A fraction of goods (usually, grain and the like, wax and raisin), that a landholder is expected to pay to his lord for using lord's land.

**Lods et ventes:** A fee the landholder has to pay when he wishes to give or sell his holding. This fee is charged in order for landowner to verify the transaction.

**Lord's rights:** Essentially, these are lord's monopolies. Holders are required pay to use the lord's mills, bakeries, and breweries. This fee is usually a fraction of the finished product in question. This fee also applies to woodcutting in lord's woods, cattle grazing on lord's fields or fishing in lord's waters.

**Justice:** Most crimes in medieval society are settled with financial compensation. A sample "justice list" follows:

Swearing – 4 sp, Dishonouring – 5 sp. Fight – 1 gp, fighting with blood spilling – 2 gp. Unsheathing a weapon – 3 gp. Hitting a person with a stick – 2 gp, if blood has been spilled – 4 gp. Hit with a weapon – 6 gp.

More serious crimes, such as murder, arson and thievery face the lord's judgment. Punishments can range from torture, to exile or even death. In the case of exile, all property is expropriated.

**Food and Lodging:** A holder is expected to provide food and lodging to any person of noble blood. In most domains, such nobles can demand as much as they want. Only in the more advanced lands are limitations placed upon such guests.

**Prise:** A lord can purchase anything he likes from a peasant's house, including draft animals, food, equipment and furniture. A lord can loan money or any goods from a

merchant for a fixed amount of time and interest.

**Corvee:** A holder is required to personally perform manual work for his lord for a fixed amount of days each year. This work may include any kind of work. Common custom dictates that lord provide food and lodgings for the duration of the service.

Serfs are a distinct class of peasants; in essence, they are the lord's property. They are allowed to work land, marry other serfs of the same lord and may eventually rise above serfdom.

Taxes unique to serfs, symbolic of their state as lord's property, are:

**Capitation:** This is a head tax, paid yearly for every living soul in a family.

**Formariage:** A one-time fee, paid when a serf marries a non-serf or another lord's serf.

Freed peasants are those personally emancipated by their lord, either by a symbolic rite or signing of a specific charter. Individual serfs are freed rarely, however, whole settlements or regions may be freed at once. The price of freedom is usually a fixed amount of money or goods. Freed peasants maintain their own holdings. In reality, this freedom changes little and is frequently used by lords to pull out money or goods out of their subjects' coffers, as a peasant has no right to refuse his lord's wish to free him. The land holdings of freemen are fixed once and for all. They live on the lord's land and work on it, but the landowner has no right to take the land away from them or increase their fees and obligations. Freemen have to pay a yearly rent, called censive.

Overseers, former peasants elevated to serve as administrators, rule large domains for nobles. This hereditary title is known as Major (Darkon, Invidia, Liffe, Tepest, Nidala), Villicus (Hazlan, Sithicus), Meier (Barovia, Borca, Falkovnia, Valachan), or Prikazchiks (Nova Vaasa and Sanguinia).

Nobles do not pay their overseers, for they are expected to provide for themselves. Unsurprisingly, this leads to frequent abuse of peasant's rights and even local laws regarding amounts of fees and services. Domains where such abuse can be encountered with alarming frequency include Barovia, Borca, Falkovnia, Hazlan, Nova Vaasa and Valachan.

## The Nobles

While the nobility is best distinguished by the land they own, their official role in society is as a military caste. Indeed, true nobility descends from the military. The ancestors of ancient conquerors, these nobles trade military service for land. High-ranking nobles, known as seigneurs, award land to vassals. In return for this "feud", the vassal pledges his service to his seigneur. A reigning monarch officially rules the feudal system, but in reality the complex relation between vassals decentralizes authority. Powerful rulers must be masters of diplomacy and intimidation.

In general, only those who possess land and profit from it can be called nobles. The nobility is divided by a series of ranks in the hierarchy of power ranging from the lowly squire to mighty Kings. The highest nobles control and profit from large regions, including dozens of villages. Such landowners can carry the title of Dukes, Marquises,

Counts and Boyars. The next rank comprises of Barons, Viscounts or simply Lords. They are the owners of small groups of settlements. Lower still the most numerous part of nobility, the knights. These nobles may possess as little as their own estate and outlying land or as much as a whole village. The very last rank is composed of various squires and servants. Simple servants initially, they eventually come into possession of small amount of land and in the more advanced domains, they live as landowners amidst the peasants.

The power of custom is very strong and the custom dictates that a noble person cannot marry a commoner. If such alliance comes to pass, the children are considered lowly commoners and have no chance of being accepted in nobility class. In Darkon, Richemulot, Nova Vaasa and Souragne this custom holds less sway over the populace than in other domains because of muted differences between true nobles and rich merchants.

The humble knight makes up the bottom rank and comprises the vast majority of the noble population. To become a knight, one must undergo a long process of training. Every young noble starts from learning the skills of horseback riding, personal combat and siege warfare. He may study in his father's estate, or at his hired tutor's academy. In the latter case, young man actually becomes his tutor's servant, working first as a page and then as a squire until adulthood. After his serving period is over, he is accolade during a special rite.

In domains where religion holds sway over the populace, the young man is expected to spend his last night as a *nourri* in prayer. His sword is blessed on the respected deity's altar and the cleric

reminds the knight of his duty as a protector of the faithful. A special day is usually selected for the aforementioned accolade ceremony, usually a religious holiday or a noteworthy event, like that of an eve of a large battle or marriage of a king or a baptizing of the suzerain heir's. Highborn nobles can expect to begin their careers with impressive titles and lands, though the lowest knights may enter nobility with no lands of their own. Such lords and ladies must either enter a profession and purchase land, or marry into wealth.

When a noble assumes ownership of land, he becomes a vassal of the original owner. The duties of Vassals are listed:

**Aide et conseil:** A vassal is expected to help his seigneur by advise him or her in difficult situations. When a seigneur wishes to gather all his vassals at his court, he invokes this right. Such a right may be used only three times per year. The assembly usually takes place on notable religious holidays, or when a seigneur needs "an honour escort" during important events, such as a marriage or accolade.

**Ost et chevauchee:** A vassal is expected to follow his seigneur when he marches on war abroad or travels through hostile territory. Such a service is usually restricted by time and place

**Estage:** A vassal has an obligation to garrison his seigneur's castle. He must either live their himself, or provide soldiers. Furthermore, a vassal is expected to give over his own castle upon his seigneur's request. Such a castle is referred to as "jurable et rendable". The seigneur can garrison such a castle at his own discretion, but is expected by custom to return the hold in the same state is it was given to him.

**Aide aux quatre cas:** Literally, “Help in four cases”. Usually a money-lending service, the cases of assistance may vary from domain to domain. Possible cases include ransom for seigneur, his gathering in crusade, his daughter’s marriage, or his son’s accolade. Though money is taken from vassals, they, in turn, are free to extort it from their holders

## Regency and Alods

Occasionally a landowner dies without a male heir to his land. In such a case, though it defies the logic of feudal relations, a woman or a child can inherit the feud. In case when an heir came into a legal possession of land, it could happen that a woman became seigneur over a group of male vassals. Such a woman is usually called dame. Since a child cannot rule the land himself, his closest relative on the father’s side became regent until true heir’s maturity. Upon reaching maturity (from 14 to 21 years, depending on the region), an heir orders to accolade himself and accepts oaths of fealty from his vassals.

It can happen that one landowner is a vassal to several seigneurs. When he has several feuds in holding, for example. Such a situation is almost unheard-of, but can be found in the more advanced domains. In this case a vassal swears to loyalty to multiple seigneurs. In this case the obligation is called homage plain and is given by a vassal standing and in full arms.

Of particular note is an “alod”, a land in complete possession of some individual. The owner has absolute legal rights over the land and owes nothing even to the ruler of a region. Alods can be given over to seigneurs as feuds, but no feud can ever become alod. The

practice of giving over one’s alod to a seigneur as a feud becomes more and more popular throughout medieval cultures. This form of land property can be found in Sanguinia and Nova Vaasa, Darkon, Souragne, Invidia, Liffe, Sithicus and Tepest. Other domains are either too lord-oriented or socially advanced (such as Richemulot) to sport alods.

## Warrior Tradition

Since in Medieval the terms of “nobleman” and “warrior” usually meant the same, it is of no surprise that, in absence of external threats, petty wars can erupt over almost any issue, ranging from border disputes to imagined slights. Nobles grand and petty alike can become embroiled in pointless bloody feuds, while reigning rulers desperately attempt to impose order. In the true spirit of knightly honour, one is compelled to forewarn his foe at the beginning of war. Tradition demands that some symbol should be sent to the adversary to warn him of the upcoming hostilities. The symbol may be anything associated with warfare or strife, but usually it is a gauntlet. The act is known as “defi”.

Nobles are attracted to the prospect of war, for the profits are great and risks are surprisingly minor. While peasants and foot soldiers may be slaughtered on the field, the armoured knight has little to fear from confrontations. Indeed, nobles are rarely slain in combat since common tradition offers great incentive for noblemen to be captured alive. These knights are held for ransom and kept as honoured guests in the homes of their enemies.

Sometimes, through no fault of their own, nobles cannot find a reason to start another war. Since the urge to fight and receive a ransom for rich captives



remains, some of the knights of the Core may organize a knightly tournament. Such occasions are times of great excitement for nobles and commoners alike. Peasants gather for leagues around to observe the amazing spectacles, while merchants and performers collect around their prospective customers.

## The Church

In the Land of Mists various churches play secondary roles in the life of society. Though they have almost little influence over the populace at large, they possess large tracts of land. The domains of Borca Darkon, Hazlan, Nova Vaasa, Tepest and Nidala boast the most powerful churches. These institutions have amassed enough influence so that they control and defend their own lands, acting as a separate governing hierarchy answering only to

the local monarch. In these lands secular landowners frequently offer the land as a gift to the church in return for some service. Unlike the feudal system, such church hierarchies are centralized. Thus, the accumulated lands are not split between various lower priests but rather are consolidated beneath the highest clerics. With time, the church gathers more and more land and in some domains, such as Hazlan and Nova Vaasa, they may exert control over secular aspects of government.

Just as nobles needed some means to protect themselves and their holdings, so does church needs to protect its land and its servants. Sometimes this may lead to a bishop or abbot giving the land as a feud to some knight in return for his services as a vassal, drawing the church into the convoluted web of feudal loyalties.



# Corners of the Core

## The Black Spire

Like the talon of a wicked crone, the Black Spire bitterly stabs into the heart of the perfect sky. Long has the accursed tower stood, casting its black shadow across the Watcher's Wood in the Northern Most Corner of Tepest. The tower can even be spied from the Mountains of Misery, for the black rock of the spire stands against the green forests of Tepest like a festering wound. Many Darkonian journeymen have seen the Spire, but none have ever visited it. They describe it as the ruin of a mighty edifice, an ebon tower crumbled to one side, eroded into a dark fang. A dire swamp surrounds the tower itself and floods the ruins of a fallen keep.

### History

On the southern edge of the Watcher's Wood, on the slope of Mount Glendarrow, stands the tiny village of Gladcow. All who dwell in Gladcow have felt the tangible malignance of the Spire, they fear to walk in the Watcher's Woods at night and even the bravest of their number shivers when the shadow of the Tower falls upon them. In the evening the elders tell the tale of the Spire, recanting the story that their ancestors had whispered to them.

Hundreds of years ago, they say, long before the inquisition or the fey, there lived a noble Prince and his clan. Devout believes of Belenus, the nameless family protected the land from the hand of evil and spread goodness to every corner of the land. So righteous was the tribe, that it was blessed with a

child of goodness. Destined to be a servant of the sun God, the child grew to be a maiden of great piety, purity and beauty. Yet the vile minions of evil saw the girl and were fearful. With profane black magic they poisoned her, hoping to extinguish her pure flame. Yet the mercy of Belenus was with her, she was placed into an endless slumber so that she would not die, but forever rest until a cure could be found.

Outraged, the minions of evil struck, hoping to prevent anyone from waking the woman they so feared. The prince and his family were slain, the castle was cursed and forest around them was corrupted. When their work was done, they had imprisoned the maiden in a fortress of evil, ensuring that no one would ever awaken her. Yet the pure goodness of the maid shone even through the black walls of the Spire. At night a white nimbus shines through the empty windows, like a beacon calling out to the believers of Belenus. At the top of the tower she slumbers, waiting for someone to breach her prison and awaken her with the touch of a pure soul.

The elders say that centuries ago many young knights sought to penetrate the tower, yet none ever succeeded. The inquisition officially investigated the tower in 742, though their searchers never breached the forest. Denouncing the keep as a work of the fey, the inquisition forbade anyone to approach the keep. The villagers are wary of anyone who would disturb the evil in the spire, so anyone who expresses an

unhealthy interest in the tower is educated with a sever beating.

### Watcher's Wood

The Watcher's woods are a foreboding forest. Dark and cold even in the daytime, the forest is shaded by a canopy of broad leaves and thick branches. The forest floor is covered in a carpet of green moss, broken by colonies of toadstools and huge mushrooms. Filled with colossal oaks and titanic fallen logs, the Watcher's Woods are nearly impenetrable. Few woodsmen dare enter the woods at any hour, those who walk the woods claim to feel as though they are being observed from afar. Dark things lurk in the woods, darting from shadow to shadow on the edge of sight. At night, the woods echo with the call of the great horned owls that lurk in the canopy. These nocturnal raptors are abnormally large and fierce; some of the locals even claim that the largest creatures can even prey on men.

Watcher's Wood gains its name from a local legend that has existed for more than a hundred years. It is said that after the dark forces transformed the tower, a spirit of nature was drawn into the mortal world. Rather than allowing the evil guardians of the tower to spread their corruption, the earth spirits created a sentinel to destroy anything that tried to escape the tower. This spirit is known as the Watcher, a ghostly will-o-wisp who can appear in the shape of a man. It is said that the Watcher can see through the eyes of the animals and command the very trees of his wood.

### The Forbidden Keep

Several miles deep into the forest, the trees taper into a swamp. A thin

layer of brackish water lies over a deep sea of muck, choked with reeds and fallen trees. The swamp is nearly impassable, anything heavier than a branch sinks into the swamp, never to be seen again. The Spire stands in the centre of bog, surrounded by a deep pool of black water. The ruins of a castle poke up from the marsh throughout the swamp. The broken fragments are so numerous that they make a passable walkway to the spire for those who can jump the gaps between them.

The stinking fen is warm and humid all year round, warmed by the unnatural magic radiating from the Spire. The bog is home to a number of swamp creatures, including serpents, small mammals and swarms of flies. The swamp is dominated by a strange species of oversized frogs. The oversized amphibians are carnivorous and even known to have attacked those few people who have ever reached the swamp. When the remains of the inquisition's band returned, the survivors claimed that they were attacked by a swarm of hideous mutants. The creatures, they said, were abominable hybrids of fish and men, covered in razor sharp scales. Nearly half of the inquisitors were slain by the creatures, either cut to ribbons or dragged screaming beneath the mud.

### The Black Spire

The Black Spire is a mighty tower of black rock, adorned with gothic style windows and fierce gargoyles carved into the walls. The Spire radiates a strange aura, described as a warm, compelling pull towards the tower. One of the surviving inquisitors reported hearing the sound of a melodious voice, beckoning him closer. The structure is roughly thirty feet in diameter, and

stands seven stories above the swamp with at least one floor submerged in the marsh. After centuries of neglect the masonry has crumbled to one side, revealing the interior to the outside. The floor of the tower is littered with the skeletal remains of numerous humans. Though the tale was never collaborated, a local legend claims that the skeletons rise at nightfall and act out a grotesque parody of life inside the blasted tower.

The very top floor of the tower is a massive room encircled by windows. This, it is said, is the resting place of the fabled Maiden. Here she sleeps on a stone slab, forever trapped between life and death, imprisoned in slumber while she waits for the touch a true innocent to free her. At midnight, the villager's say, a bright light shines from this floor. The white nimbus shines for exactly one hour, each night, lighting the night at the witching hour.

### Adventure Hooks

The adventurers may be passing through Tepest and spy the tower. The villagers of Gladcow will try their best to dissuade the party, but there is little that the villagers can do aside from making petty threats. If the adventurers decide to investigate, they will have to traverse Watcher's Wood, the marsh and

the tower itself. If they can overcome the great obstacles before them, the players may even be able to wake the fabled Maiden of the Spire.

Alternately, the adventurers may be drawn to Gladcow by pleas for help. In a time of great famine, a group of hunters have dared the Watcher's Wood. The hunters have not returned for weeks and the villagers fear that the Watcher has taken them. In the search for the missing hunters, the party might discover the tower and investigate. If the party has found the missing men, the villagers will be willing to defy the Inquisition and share their lore.

Finally, the Inquisition may contact the party. After a group of reckless journeymen discover the tower, they awaken the fabled Maiden. The great lady of the Spire has reached out to the nearest villages, drawing followers to join her in a great crusade, to spread the light of Belenus's love to every corner of the land. A rift steadily forms between the clerics converted to the Maiden's cause and those who denounce the woman as a witch. An inquisitive cleric of Belenus calls upon the party to discover the truth motives of the Lady of the Tower and either to protect her from the Inquisition or to destroy her before she plunges Tepest into a religious war.

# Perilous Pursuits

## The Accursed

*“That which cannot kill us only makes us stronger”*

- Proverb.

In most lands curses remain nothing more than angry words, inconsequential and easily forgotten. Yet in the Demiplane of Dread, angry words can take a tangible form. Curses are a very real phenomenon, brought on by vengeful diatribes or even by recrimination. Magical and mysterious, curses persist and plague the guilty and innocent alike. With power ranging from distracting to deadly, these hexes can befall almost anyone, from the greatest lord to the lowliest peasant. Curses often serve as a long lasting punishment, either forcing a wrongdoer to right his ways or merely adding the torment of a villain's dark existence.

Yet sometimes a curse transforms its victim. Rather than collapse under the weight of their burden, these men and women confront their curse. They do not hide away from their curse nor do they run from their suffering, rather, they continue the struggle. They are the accursed, those who are doomed to suffer the pain of their blight and yet refuse to give in to the pain.

The accursed seek to end their suffering by ultimately removing their curses. These men and women try to right the wrongs that brought their curses upon them. They are driven onward by the undying hope that one day they will be freed of their burden. Under the crushing weight of the hex, the accursed become fearless fighters.

The Accursed prestige class is for those characters that suffer from a troublesome, dangerous or lethal curse. To qualify for this class, the curse must be a relatively frequent problem for the character. If the character has found a way to ignore or circumvent his curse, then this prestige class is inappropriate.

## The Accursed

Anyone who is afflicted with some form of magical burden may be drawn to this prestige class. Rogues, fighters and rangers are most likely to become members of the prestige class. The self-reliance these characters developed proves to be a critical resource to an accursed character. Bards, clerics and paladins rarely develop the jaded attitude necessary to gain the benefits of an accursed character, so they are unlikely to ever take levels in this prestige class.

**Hit Die:** D8

**Requirements:** Must suffer from a troublesome, dangerous or lethal curse. A character without a curse cannot take levels in this class. An Accursed character that has alleviated his curse retains all benefits, but may not acquire new levels. At the DM's discretion, a character suffering from some other affliction, such as lycanthropy or a wishing imp, may take levels in this prestige class.

**Skill Points:** 6 + Int modifier.

**Class Skills:** Bluff, climb, craft, concentration, hide, move silently, knowledge (arcana), profession, ride,

sense motive, use magical item, wilderness lore.

**Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** Accursed characters gain proficiency in light armour and simple weapons.

**Class Abilities:**

**Damned:** The curse upon the character drives his soul onward even after death. At death, an accursed character has a base 5% chance of rising from the dead as a ghost or some other form of undead, chosen by the Dungeon Master. This probability increases by 5% for every level in the accursed prestige class beyond the first.

**Misery Loves Company:** As the vistani say, revenge is a living being, forever looking for new individuals to consume. The accursed becomes a carrier for his curse, spreading it like a disease. Once each day an accursed character may use this ability to bestow his curse upon another individual with a successful melee touch attack. The target must make a successful will saving throw against a DC of 10 plus the accursed characters level in the accursed prestige class, modified by the accursed character's charisma modifier. If this check fails, the target suffers from the same curse that plagues the Accursed. The duration of this curse is only 24 hours. If the Accursed character misses his touch attack, or if the target passes his saving throw, the attempt is wasted and the ability may not be used again until the next day.

At fifth level this ability increases. The accursed character may make a gaze attack to bestow his curse. The will DC to resist remains the 10, plus the accursed level, plus the accursed characters charisma modifier. The gaze has a maximum range of 50 feet and

may only target one person of the accursed character's choosing. Just as with the touch attack, if the target succeeds in his saving throw the ability cannot be used again until the next day.

**Only Happy When it Rains:** After suffering for so long, the accursed character's personality becomes badly skewed. Events that would terrify a normal human pale in comparison to the endless torment of the accursed. An accursed character gains a bonus to fear and horror saves equal to his levels in the accursed prestige class.

**Resolve:** An accursed character is driven by the hope that he might one day end the curse that torments him. Once each day, an accursed character can draw upon this hope to help him overcome the obstacles between him and freedom. As a free action the character may activate his resolve, gaining a +4 moral bonus to constitution and a +2 moral bonus to all will saves. These bonuses remain for a number of rounds equal to his wisdom score. At the end of the duration the hit points gained from the increased constitution are subtracted from the character's remaining hit points.

At third level the accursed character may activate his resolve a total of twice each day. At fifth level the resolve of the accursed character becomes greater; the moral bonus to constitution becomes +6 and the bonus to will saves increases to +4.

**Soul Stain:** The effects of the curse taint the natural spirit of the accursed. Effects based upon his alignment can no longer target the accursed character. The accursed is immune to any effect or spell that relies upon a character's alignment, such as an ability that effects any good aligned character. For example, a good aligned

accursed character may handle an *unholy* weapon without suffering from the negative level.

**Through a Lens Darkly:** The accursed's own experience gives him

great insight into the workings of all such hexes. The accursed character gains a +4 insight bonus to knowledge (arcana) checks regarding curses.



## Accursed

Class Level	Base Attack	Fort Save	Reflex Save	Will Save	Special
1 <sup>st</sup>	+0	+2	+0	+2	Damned, only happy when it rains, resolve
2 <sup>nd</sup>	+1	+3	+0	+3	Soul stain, through a lens darkly
3 <sup>rd</sup>	+2	+3	+1	+3	Soul stain (curse), resolve *2/day
4 <sup>th</sup>	+3	+4	+1	+3	Misery loves company
5 <sup>th</sup>	+3	+4	+1	+4	Misery loves company (ranged), Greater Resolve *3/day



# Whispers in the Darkness

## Magic of the Grave

### Create Barrow Wight

Necromancy

**Level:** Cleric 4, Sor/Wiz 5

**Components:** V, S, M

**Casting Time:** 5 minutes

**Target:** One Body

**Duration:** Instantaneous

The grave is the home of the dead, yet the presence of the living is a constant intruder in the abode of the deceased. To prevent the intrusions of the living, a dangerous guardian can be created and bound to a resting place. This spell allows a caster to create a lesser dread wight, a wight with five hit dice, describe don page 170 of *Denizens of the Dark Realms*. This wight is uncontrolled by the caster, but it is permanently bound to a single room or within a subterranean structure no larger than sixty square feet in area.

The wight is completely uncontrollable and always harbours a great resentment towards its creator. However, it is forced to guard the tomb and must attack anything that trespasses in the tomb, though a successful will save against a DC of 16 allows it to resist the compulsion. The wight does not defile the tomb, for any assault upon the sanctity of the grave causes the wight great agony. In the casting of this spell the wight develops a supernatural hatred towards its creator. It is hereafter immune to any attempt of the caster to command it.

This spell must be cast inside of a structure where one or more dead bodies

have been interred. This spell requires an intact body in good condition, and two gems worth 1000 gold pieces. One gem is inserted into chest cavity of the wight, while the other is placed on one of the bodies interred in the tomb. This spell must be cast on a moonless night, roughly at midnight. If this spell is cast as a cleric spell, it requires that a holy symbol of the caster's deity be placed on the body interred within the grave.

### Curse of the Barrow

Necromancy

**Level:** Cleric 5, Sor/Wiz 5

**Components:** V, S, M

**Casting Time:** 1 minute

**Target:** One area of 30ft diameter

**Duration:** Instantaneous

With the casting of this spell a necromancer can lay a lethal trap. The curse of the barrow allows the caster to delay the casting of an animate dead spell until a particular trigger is activated. The caster must have several complete, humanoid skeletons at the time of casting. The caster then determines the number of skeletons to be animated by the animate dead effect of the spell. The caster may not choose to animate more hit dice of skeletons his caster level, though multiple uses of this spell may be used to animate any number.

The skeletons themselves may be buried in soft earth, contained in a coffin or some other space, provided that they are within a thirty-foot radius of the

trigger. The skeletons animated by this spell effect are not under the control of the caster. They are animated at the moment that the spell is triggered and they attack anything and everything in sight, beginning with the character that activated the trigger.

Upon the casting of this spell, the target area becomes under the effects of a desecrate spell, as if cast by a cleric of the same caster level as the caster of Curse of the Barrow. This spell effect lasts until the skeletons animated by the spell are destroyed or self-destruct.

At the time of casting the caster must designate a trigger to activate the casting of the spell. This trigger must be placed on an area, or an object within that area. If on an area, the trigger area is defined as a circle of a maximum diameter of 30 feet. Should any creature pass into the trigger area it activates the casting of the animate dead spell. Alternately, the caster may choose to have the Curse activate the animate dead effect as soon as a creature leaves the trigger area. Some necromancers have been known to use that variant as an inexpensive means of imprisoning captives. If the trigger is placed on an object then there are other variants. The animate dead effect may come into play as soon as someone touches the object, opens the object if it is a door or book, or takes the object beyond the ten foot radius of a fixed trigger area. Nothing that happens to that object outside of the fixed trigger area can activate the spell. Once this trigger is activated, it cannot be reset except by another casting of the spell.

The material components for this spell are complete, human skeletons.

These skeletons are not consumed during casting. Should the skeletons not be destroyed before all creatures in sight are slain, the skeletons collapse into piles of bones.

## Veil of Fear

Evocation

**Level:** Cleric 5, Sor/Wiz 5

**Components:** V, S

**Casting Time:** 3

**Area:** 50 ft radiation

**Duration:** 24 hours +1/level

**Saving Throw:** Will negates

**Spell Resistance:** Yes

There are places in the dread realms where brave men fear to tread, lands where the air itself ripples with the essence of terror. These are accursed places, where even stalwart warriors are driven to fear and panic. With the casting of this spell an area becomes enveloped in an intangible blanket of fear. All creatures entering the area must make a will save against the spell or suffer a -2 moral penalty to all saving throws and skill checks. Characters suffer from this penalty until they leave the area.

The power of this spell can be increased with the addition of a special component. If this spell is cast as a cleric spell and cast centred upon an alter of the cleric's patron deity, then the duration of the spell becomes permanent. The aura remains in effect so long as the alter exists. Anyone wearing a holy symbol of the deity to whom the alter is dedicated becomes immune to this variant of the spell.

# Tactics and Techniques

## Blessings of Hala

### Coven of Friendship

The power of the coven is the chief blessing Hala has placed upon her followers. However the priestesses of Hala are few and far between. Often a witch must work with those who worship different gods and gain power from a different source. Amongst such strangers, a priestess of Hala is greatly weakened. However the Goddess has seen to it to provide her worshipers with a ritual to weave the magic of a coven even amongst outsiders.

**Prerequisites:** Ability to use a medium witchcraft ability.

**Benefits:** With this feat a Hallowed Witch may perform a ritual that binds one or more spell casters into a coven. This ritual takes roughly an hour and must be conducted under the light of a full moon. The nature of this ritual requires that those bound in this coven both be willing to participate and possess a genuine fellowship. This coven can only be formed between spell casters, specifically, characters who currently possess the ability to cast arcane or divine spells. This excludes characters that cannot cast spells, monsters with spell-like abilities, characters with supernatural abilities and psionic characters.

After the characters are united in the ritual, they generate a number of coven abilities as though all members were witches of Hala. All of the restrictions placed upon the use of coven abilities apply. Only A character possessing at least one level in the

Hallowed Witch prestige class can utilize the coven abilities generated.

This coven can be broken should any one member of the coven deliberately harm one of the other members of the coven. Once bound into one coven, a character cannot join another unless a ritual is performed to extract the character from the coven. The Hallowed Witch who first performed the coven ritual can break the coven at will.

### Kiss of the Winter Dragon

The followers of Hala traditionally see their goddess as a gentle and subtle force. Like the unseen hand of nature, Hala works her enchantment from beyond. Yet there are those who see Hala in another aspect, and just as the winter can spread invisible frost, it can also rain down terrible blizzards.

Found mostly in the Frozen Reaches, there is the cult of Hala the Frost Dragon. They see their deity as a single being occupying two aspects, both the intangible goddess and as a mighty wyrm made of the frozen essence of magic. These witches teach their sisters the secret of this transformation, allowing their fellow witches to work both as subtle servants of the goddess and as vengeful agents of the fearsome Winter Dragon

**Prerequisites:** Ability to use a medium witchcraft ability.

**Benefits:** As a breath attack, a hallowed witch with this ability may sacrifice one spell ability to breath a cone of freezing cold. The cone has a

terminal width equal to its length (30 feet, +5 feet /level). The power of this ray depends upon the power of the ability sacrificed. If the ability sacrificed is a minor ability, the ray deals 1D10 points of cold damage. If the ability is a medium ability the damage is 2D10, and if the ability is a major ability the damage is 4D10.

### Law of Threes

As Hala's witches struggle against the evil of the land, they often arouse the wrath of dark creatures. Even in victory the priestesses of the goddess may befall the vengeance of a vanquished foe. The power of curse in Ravenloft is undeniable, and the Goddess has blessed some of her followers with a defence. The Law of Threes is a potent magical principle; it dictates that any malicious magic used against one person is returned upon the caster three fold. While not literally true, the law of threes can be used by witches to return ruin upon those bold enough to curse them.

**Prerequisites:** Base will save +4, ability to cast 3<sup>rd</sup> level spells, craft focus

**Benefits:** If successfully cursed, a character with this feat may perform a ritual to return the curse to the invoker. This ritual takes one half hour to perform and requires the presence of a Hallowed Witch's craft focus. Once the ritual is completed, the witch may make a curse check to bring a curse upon the individual who invoked the witch's blight. This check gains a +4 bonus, and does not incur a powers check. If the check is successful, the original invoker of the curse suffers a curse, similar to that originally laid.

Where it is applicable, this curse should be three times as powerful against the original invoker as it is upon the witch. This curse remains in effect until the original curse is removed from the witch.

**Special:** Self-induced curses are unaffected by this feat. Furthermore, should a witch with this feat successfully invoke a curse under any conditions except the ritual described above, then the witch befalls a self induced curse of three times the strength of the curse laid.

### Rend the Weave

The power of the Hallowed Witch is two fold, to protect and to destroy. There are moments where a Hallowed Witch must struggle against a foe that can twist the powers of magic to their own ends. Rather than foolishly butt heads on the temporal plane, a Hallowed Witch can strike at the root of her enemy's power, the weave itself.

**Prerequisites:** Ability to use a minor witchcraft ability

**Benefits:** Should the Hallowed Witch be the target of a spell or spell-like effect; the witch may sacrifice her highest-level witchcraft ability to counter the effect. Furthermore, the character that attempted to use the cancelled spell or spell effect cannot use that spell or spell ability for 24 hours.

For example, a vampire might target a Hallowed Witch with its charm gaze attack. The witch can counter this spell effect by sacrificing her highest-level witchcraft ability. The witch loses that witchcraft ability and the vampire loses its ability to charm with its gaze, for 24 hour.

# Death Flies on Swift Wings

## Dread Vargouille and the Flying Skull

By Morten Olsen

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### Dread Vargouille

**Small Outsider (Evil, Mists)**

**HD:** 1d8+1 (5 hp)

**Initiative:** +1 (Dex)

**Speed:** Fly 30 ft. (good)

**AC:** 12 (+1 size, +1 Dex)

**Attacks:** Bite +3 melee

**Damage:** Bite 1d4

**Face/reach:** 5 ft. by 5 ft./ 5 ft

**SA:** Shriek, kiss, frightful presence, forget

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

**Abilities:** Str 10, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 5, Wis 12, Cha 8

**Skills:** Hide +6\*, Listen +4, Spot +3,

**Climate/Terrain:** Any land

**Organization:** Solitary or solitary and 1-6 flying skulls

**Challenge rating:** 2

**Treasure:** None

**Alignment:** Always neutral evil

**Advancement:** 2-3 HD (Small)

At first glance, a dread vargouille looks like a skull, with bat-like wings protruding from where ears might once have been. A closer examination reveals that the dread vargouille does indeed have skin, tightly drawn across the bone. Most dread vargouilles have black skin, but specimens with a pale humanlike skin colours have also been observed. The monster lacks any hair; slimy, black tentacles protrude from the top of the monsters head. Whenever a Dread vargouille opens it mouth, a sickly green vapour spills forth. Dread vargouilles makes their lairs in places that remind

them of the netherworld. The monster only leaves its lair to hunt for food. When it slays its prey, a dread vargouille feasts by attaching itself to the neck of a headless corpse. The fiend sucks the intestines out of the victim, leaving an empty husk.

The first dread vargouille came into Ravenloft as an accident. The creature was created when a fiend took possession of the body of Arthurus Velving, the mass murderer. This possession occurred at the exact moment that Velving's head was separated from his body by an executioners axe, trapping the fiend in the severed head. To the dismay of the executioners, the decapitated head instantly sprouted a pair of wings and flew off. According to legend it's still possible that a dread vargouille could be created under similar circumstances. As well, popular lore holds that such a fiend may be created if the head of a truly vile person is left unburied for six day prior to summer solstice.

**Combat:** Dread vargouilles use their shriek attacks as primary weapons, using their bite as a last resort. They will often single out one or two persons and attack them when they are away from the rest of the party. If encountered with its flying skull minions, a dread vargouille will order its minions to attack, while it waits in the background. As a general rule, a dread vargouille is accompanied

by a number of flying skulls equal to its hit dice.

**Shriek (Su):** As a full attack action a dread vargouille may release a horrible screech. The shriek forces all within 60 feet, who can both see and hear the dread vargouille, to succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 12) or be paralysed with fear. This paralysis lasts until the monster attacks them or leaves their sight. If the save is successful, that opponent cannot be affected again by that vargouille's shriek for one day.

**Kiss (Su):** A dread vargouille can kiss a paralysed target with a successful melee touch attack, beginning a terrible transformation. The affected opponent must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 15) or begin to transform. At sundown the victim will go into a comatose sleep. At midnight the victim begins to change into a flying skull. Over the course of six hours the victim's teeth will enlarge, their eyes turn black, and their skin tightens across the skull. At the end, the victim's skull breaks off, instantly killing the victim. The head instantly animates as a Flying Skull under the control of the dread vargouille that kissed the victim.

The casting of a *remove disease* spell can halt this transformation. Furthermore, the process can be delayed until the next sundown by casting daylight on the victim. A single dread vargouille can control up to a maximum of six flying skulls. If a dread vargouille creates more than six, then the eldest flying skull will transform into a dread vargouille.

**Frightful presence (Ex):** Any person watching the dread vargouille shriek must make a fear save with a DC of 9.

**Forget (Sp):** A victim kissed by a dread vargouille must make a Will save (DC 10) or lose all memory of the last 24 hours.

**Skills:** Dread vargouilles receives a +8 racial bonus to Hide checks when it's concealed in a dark place.

## Flying skull

**Small Outsider (Evil, Mists)**

**HD:** 1d8+1 (5 hp)

**Initiative:** +1 (Dex)

**Speed:** fly 30 ft. (good)

**AC:** 12 (+1 size, +1 Dex)

**Attacks:** Bite +3 melee

**Damage:** Bite 1d4

**Face/reach:** 5 ft. by 5 ft./ 5 ft

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

**Abilities:** Str 10, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 3, Wis 12, Cha 8

**Skills:** Hide +6\*, Listen +4, Spot +3,

**Climate/Terrain:** Any land

**Organization:** 1-6 Flying Skulls and 1 Dread Vargouille

**Challenge rating:** 1/2

**Treasure:** None

**Alignment:** Always True neutral

**Advancement:** See below

A flying skull is the victim of a dread vargouilles kiss. The flying skull is physical identical to a dread vargouille, but the skull lacks the dread vargouilles deadly shriek and kiss.

**Combat:** A flying skull attacks to defend itself, or if ordered by its dread vargouille master. If ordered to attack, all flying skulls will rush in for the attack disregarding their own safety.



## New Magical item:

### The Dread Skull

The Dread Skull is a magical necklace that can be used to summon flying skulls. The necklace appears like an ordinary chain made of silver. From the chain hangs a little silver skull with two tiny emeralds as eyes. Whenever its powers are invoked, the eyes of the skull will glow with a green light.

**History:** When Arthurus Velving's head was separated from his body, his head was transformed into a dread vargouille. Hours afterward, Velving's body rose as a restless dead. Craving the return of its head, the headless horror went on a murderous spree, slaying people and attaching their heads to its neck. Though functional, these replacement heads offered only temporary respite, for they quickly withered on Velving's neck, forcing the murderer to seek out a fresh victim. Arthurus sought out the Darkonian wizard Zlatan Venyvic and commissioned the creation of a magic trinket capable of summoning his original head. After a lengthy period of research, the wizard finally created with the Dread Skull. Though designed to summon the original head, the Skull instead summoned the closest dread vargouille. Furious with

the failure, Velving attacked the wizard, instigating a battle that would destroy them both.

The necklace was lost until 689 BC, when a cutpurse named Felix Katsburg discovered it in the ruins of Venyvic's laboratory. The thief kept the pendant until his untimely death a year later. Denounced by the locals as demonic, the pendant was buried with the body of Katsburg. The medallion remained forgotten for many years, though in 698 a similar item was removed from the carcass of a zombie in Darkon.

**Powers:** As a free action, the pendant's owner may summon a Flying Skull. The fiend will serve for 1d6 hours. After the elapsed time, the flying skull will fade into mist. The pendant will work in this manner for 6 uses by a single user. If a given user activates the pendant a seventh time, the pendant will summon a dread vargouille accompanied by 6 flying skulls. The voracious vargouille attacks its summoner and any other living being in the vicinity.

Caster level: 7<sup>th</sup>; Prerequisites: Craft wondrous Item, Summon Monster III and Bestow Curse; Market price: 10,000 gp. Crafting this item requires a powers check with a 10% chance of failure. Wearing the pendant is also a cause for a powers check.

# Castle Falkenstein

## A Ravenloft Adventure

Edited by Dimitri Zorin and Chaos\_Nomad

Castle Falkenstein is an adventure designed for four or five 9<sup>th</sup> level player characters. The adventure is set in Ravenloft and utilizes new templates described in the section "From the Lab". Any party should include several combat-orientated characters, a spell caster and some means of magical healing. A rogue character included in the party will be useful, but not essential. There are enough encounters in this adventure for five ninth level characters to earn enough experience to rise to tenth level. The adventure begins in the Northern Eastern corner of Borca as a mission to rescue captives held in Falkovnia.

### Scaling the Adventure

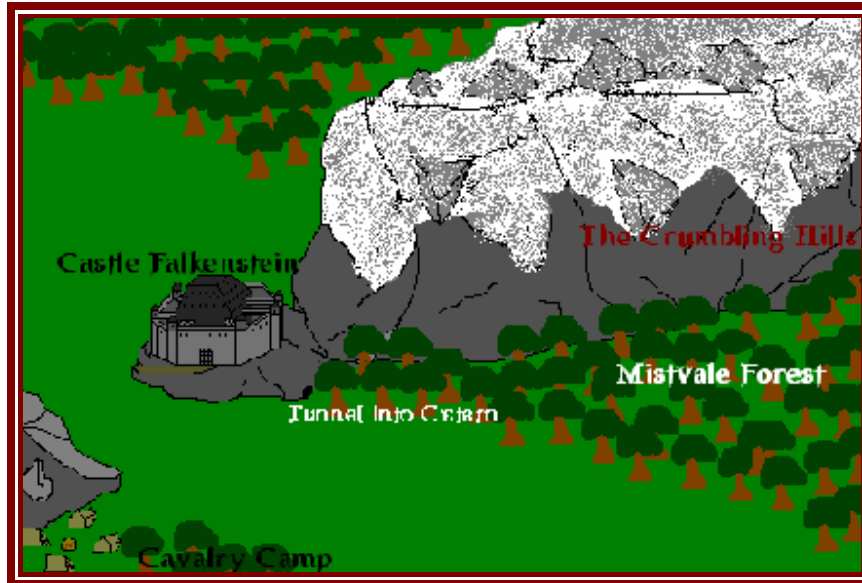
"Castle Falkenstein" is designed to challenge a party of four 9<sup>th</sup> level characters and offers enough encounters to raise the party to tenth level. The adventure can be adapted to be more or less challenging.

**5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> level PCs:** PCs of this level will find many of the encounters in the adventure to be overwhelming. To adapt the adventure to a party of this level the DM should give the party a powerful ally, or equip the party with magical items. Furthermore, the creatures encountered should be altered as follows. Regulars should be reduced to first level fighters, cavalry should be

lowered to 3<sup>rd</sup> level fighters, sandmen and the knights kommando should be lowered to 5<sup>th</sup> level. The Chef, the Jailor and the Smith should be lowered to Barbarians of 6<sup>th</sup> level and Colonel Hellman should be made a sorcerer of only 4<sup>th</sup> level. All templates should be removed from the soldiers and characters. Hounds, falcons and Hellman's familiar should be removed.

**7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> level PCs:** PCs of this level will find the adventure too challenging to succeed. The adventure must be adapted to fit characters of this level. Equip the party with magical items or ally them with a high level spell casting NPC. The cavalry camp encounter may prove too difficult for PCs even with these advantages, so the DM should lower the number of cavalry soldiers.

**10<sup>th</sup> level PCs:** PCs of tenth level, or even ninth level, may find this adventure too easy. To adapt the adventure, remove the keys from the NPCs and force the party to disarm the traps and locks on their own. To make the adventure more challenging, add two sorcerer levels to Colonel Hellman, add two levels of the barbarian class to all of the calibans. To challenge very powerful players, apply either the Knight Kommando template or the Primal Soldier template to all human soldiers in Castle Falkenstein.



## Background

After 722, the Falkovnian dictator Vlad Drakov put aside his overt militarism and invested his efforts into the research of new weapons of warfare. Of these operations none was more ambitious than the attempt to learn arcane magic and to train spell casters. Heading this project was a young and ambitious officer named Colonel Hellman. Starting from scratch, the colonel traveled beyond the hostile domains of the Core to find a magic user who might teach him the secret of magic. After a few months he found his way to Kartakass. Drawn by the fables of “bardic magic”, Hellman was greatly disappointed by what he found. The flowery, musical enchantments of bards proved too decadent, to alien for a career soldier to comprehend. Hellman had decided to travel to Hazlan when he encountered a woman who would change his life, Lannel the Witch.

The daughter of an elven priestess of Hala, Lannel had inherited the gift of sorcery. Yet as a poor orphan, Lannel had lived in abject poverty for all of her life. The half elf had been raised upon

the fantastic stories the bards told, of far away kingdoms and wealth beyond her reckoning. So miserable was Lannel, that she turned her attention from the goddess Hala to other, less savoury, entities. Long did she pray to these strange beings, for some foreign nobleman to arrive and take her to a new life, far from the squalor of her home.

Hellman was indeed ruggedly handsome, and with the Falkovnian gold he carried, it seemed as though Lannel’s prayers had been answered. It took little effort for him to gain her confidence. Lannel taught Hellman much about the worship of spirits and demons, and even hinted at the means by which he himself could bargain for power. Yet try as Hellman did, he could not learn the secrets he desired. Though taken with him, Lannel was not as naïve as she let on. She promised her lover that she would only teach him true magic if he were to take her as his wife.

Hellman was genuinely taken with the sylvan beauty, but his years in the Falkovian military had worked a spell greater than any Lannel might have weaved. Hellman agreed to marry her and took his new wife back with him to

his homeland. Once there he wrung the secret of magic from her on the rack. The sorceress resisted for days but under the relentless torment she broke and gave Hellman all of her arcane knowledge. As she writhed in the throes of death she cursed her husband with her last breath, promising him that they would be reunited once again.

## The Present

Though the Colonel had wrung the information from the sorceress, his own understanding of foul sorcery remained limited. His superiors grew impatient but Hellman's potential for success proved so valuable that Drakov granted him the command of Castle Falkenstein. To provide total security, the castle has been garrisoned with the most experienced units in Falkovnia. Hellman has made the castle a focus for his magical rites, corrupting the edifice with dark rites and blood sacrifice.

Using the ghastly rituals he learned from Lannel, the Colonel sacrifices prisoners and bargains blood for sorcerous power. The dark magic he works grants him the abominable power he sought but warps his body into a demonic mockery. Further more, the ghosts of Hellman's victims have become trapped in the castle and now haunt its halls. Hellman has taken precautions to imprison the spirits, but even he is unaware that the ghost of Lannel has descended upon the forests around the castle.

## Synopsis

The course of the adventure is simple. The adventurers leave the village of Patterborne and travel through Mistvale Forest to reach the Castle. En route to the Castle the players meet the

ghost of Lannel and may encounter the cavalry encampment outside the castle. The players may enter the Castle either through the cistern or as prisoners and make their way up to the keep tower where they confront Colonel Hellman and release the spirits he has enslaved.

## Character Hooks

The adventurers are drawn to Patterborne by the pleas from the downtrodden villagers who have fled their homes to seek assistance. Several of their young women have been abducted from their town and taken to castle Falkenstein. The Borcan army has refused to render any aid so the players are the villager's only hope to see their children again.

The adventure can be easily adapted to begin with other hooks. The players may be contacted by Ivan Dilisnya's agents and paid to invade the Castle and destroy the garrison within. Alternately, the Kargat could have gotten wind of Drakov's plans and persuaded the players to halt the experimentations and confiscate the magical research within. Finally, the Falkovnian Freeman may contact the characters and ask them to lead an insurrection into the castle to free prisoners kept in its dungeons.

## Part I: Patterborne Village

The characters are in Patterborne, a small village on the West bank of the Vasha River, only a few miles from the Falkovnian border. Word of mouth has spread across Borca that the tiny town of Patterborne has been raided and several of its citizens taken as prisoners. It is common knowledge that Ivan Dilisnya refuses to send any soldiers over the Vasha River for fear of instigating

another full-scale war. It is clear that if the villagers are to be rescued, some brave adventurers must do it themselves.

Patterborne is a small village consisting of a handful of families. The area around the village is taken up by farmsteads, though several of the fields show signs of recent fires and other sabotage. The roads to Patterborne are in poor repair, for they have not been rebuilt since they were torn up in the Falkovnian invasion so many years ago. The trek to Patterborne is uneventful but exhausting. The village inn is the largest building and easily identified by the sign that identifies it simply as "Inn".

Tending bar in the tavern is the innkeeper named Benito. He is a large balding man in his forties. The innkeeper seems suspicious of the adventurers but he offers them a bowl of thin broth. There is no one else in the tavern, for the hour is quite late. If questioned the innkeeper refuses to answer queries, but will admit that he is the de-facto leader of the village. If the adventurers reveal that they are here to help, the innkeeper offers them a free room. He will reveal no information, but insists that they speak with him in the morning. The free room is modest but contains four comfortable cots. As the players sleep, their dreams are invaded by a disturbing vision. Read the following:

The mists part from your sight, revealing a woman. She stands above a brewing cauldron in the centre of a simple hut. The room around you is bedecked with strange artifacts; animal bones, beads and wicker crafts hanging from the walls. The woman turns and looks in your direction; she is a pale skinned woman in a simple cotton dress. Her ears are gently pointed and deep green eyes express preternatural charms.

She smiles knowingly as a shadow of a man falls over her. Suddenly he comes into view. He is a tall, light skinned man dressed in cotton robes. He takes her in his arms and they embrace. Yet as they hold one another the man changes. His robes fade, replaced by the uniform of a soldier, the sign of the falcon burns into his forehead and curling horns force their way through his hairless scalp.

His touch becomes horrible to the woman. She dissolves into screams and blood, flowing into a crimson river. The bloody stream drips through the stone of a dungeon, past a swinging scythe, into a prison cell and down into a deep black hole. The ghastly torrent surges through the stone and erupts forth from the earth. The river spills down into a valley, flooding a tiny village below.

The sound of laughter explodes like thunder. The man in the uniform is a demonic titan, straddling a mighty castle while an army of living dead assails the structure. Hundreds of corpses emerge from the flowing river of blood. They reach towards the man, trying to avenge their suffering, yet the walls of the castle repel them. Three black hawks adorn the walls, striking terror in the spirits and force them back into the crimson river.

Above your head a storm rages, spreading forth from the castle, sweeping across the land. A horrible bird rides the storm, blocking out the moon as it wheels in the air. The raptor is horrible to behold, it's eyes blaze with freezing fire and its head bears the curling horns of its demonic master. Suddenly, it turns towards you. It bears its talons and drops. Like a bolt of lightning, it is upon you, its shriek is deafening. With a jolt you wake with the sound of an eagle's cry rings in your ears.



As the day dawns the residents of the inn leave their rooms and empty into the tavern for breakfast. There is a small assortment of folk in the tavern, including a farmer with a hangover, a journeyman traveling to Lechburg, a quiet young woman, and a garishly dressed bard. The fare is a modest loaf of bread and an onion, the most food that the inn can muster for its customers. Once the characters have finished their meal, the innkeeper ushers them to a corner table where he can discuss the situation. Read the following to the players:

As the members of your group finish their meal, the innkeeper passes by your table. He sits down in an empty chair, keeping his head down. The man speaks in whispered tones, as if afraid that someone might overhear him.

“So you came to help us, huh?” He continues under his breath, “I didn’t think anyone would come to help us. No one wants to fight those bloody Birdies any more, no matter what they do. A week ago the soldiers came over the border. They hadn’t done that since 727, not since our riflemen drove ‘em out.” The innkeeper seems very upset; he pauses for a moment to regain his composure.

“We hadn’t had any trouble from the Castle since I was a lad. We thought we were safe. The damn raiders came up in the night and caught us unawares. Some bastards took out the guard with their bare fists! Their horsemen were in the town before anyone could sound the alarm. They started by burning Gillani’s field, just to show us they meant business. They said they wanted gold, but we didn’t have any, so they took the girls instead.” He pauses to spit at the floor, his face growing red with rage.

“They took ten of them, even little Maggie. They carried the girls off to the castle and made them their “comfort women”. Only one girl escaped.” The innkeeper gestures at the quiet young woman who sits alone at a table. “Alice there put a pillow in her dress, pretended she was pregnant. They threw her out right quick. If you go looking for the girls, they’re in Castle Falkenstein. It’s at the pass between the crumbling Hills, just a few miles northwest of here. I don’t know how you could get in there, but if you could get our girls out, anything we have is yours. Be careful with who you speak. We’ve had a lot of shady folk pass through here. Some folk say that Ivan Dilisnya sent spies to check up on us, but the way I see it, the Falkovnian’s are probably keeping tabs.” With that the man gets up and leaves the table.

The innkeeper resists any more questions. If pressed, he will draw the players a crude map to the Castle. The Crumbling Hills are visible from the village, and from its perch on the foothill the Castle can just barely be spotted (spot check DC 18). If the players wish to explore the village they find several shops. There is an herbalist shop, run by an old warty crone, a blacksmith, who’s proprietor also runs the local stables, a carpenter’s shop and a tanner. Outside the village are a dozen farms and a watermill. Few people will speak to the characters, for the villagers are fearful of a Falkovnian reprisal. If the players wish to question the other customers in the inn then there are several individuals with whom to speak.

Alice Degotti, a first level commoner, is the only hostage to have escaped imprisonment at Castle Falkenstein. She was once a lively



young woman, but her spirit has been quashed by the indignities she endured there. Alice is reluctant to speak about her imprisonment, and any interrogation requires a successful *gather information* check against a DC 15. On a successful *gather information* check, Alice reveals that the other women are being kept in the Castle keep, working as servants and kitchen help.

James Flinche is a silversmith journeyman on his way to Lechburg. He is a curious and charming man with a disarming attitude. He is very interested in the adventurers and asks them countless questions about themselves, including where they've been, why they are in Patterborne and where they are going. If they players let their mission slip, he offers to join them in their effort. He assures them that after years of traveling the Core he is a competent combatant and an expert with daggers, a fact that he will demonstrate if doubted.

DMs Note: James Flinche is lying when he suggests that he is a journeyman. He knows little about the work of a silversmith or even Borca for that matter. In reality he is a spy and is attempting to infiltrate the group. If he cannot join in the party, he discreetly leaves town and goes to warn Castle Falkenstein.

Unlike most Falkovnian citizens, Flinche was not branded with the Falcon emblem at birth. As the son of a talon spy he was expected to carry on the tradition, and as such was spared the mark that would have made his career impossible.

**James Flinche, Talon Spy, Rogue 6, Spymaster 2:** CR 8; medium-size humanoid; HD 6D6+2D6+8; hp 36; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 15 (leather armour +2, Dex +3); Atk +9 melee

(1D4+2, dagger), +9 ranged (1D4+2, dagger, range 10 ft); SA sneak attack +4D6; SQ evasion, uncanny dodge, cover identity (silversmith), spell resistance 12, talon bonuses, undetectable alignment; AL NE; SV Fort +3, Ref +11, Will +7; Str 12, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 15, Wiz 14, Cha 14.

*Skills and Feats:* Bluff +15 (+17), Diplomacy +4, Disable Device +13, Disguise +15 (19), Gather Information +15 (19), Hide +14, Innuendo +8, Intimidate +13, Move Silently +14, Listen +7, Open Lock +14, Search +13, Sense Motive +18; Persuasive, Quick Draw, Trust Worthy, Weapon Focus (dagger).

*Combat:* James Flinche has survived his years of intrigue and espionage only by virtue of his intelligence. Flinche uses violence only as a last resort and even then only when he has stacked the odds in his favour. If exposed and out numbered, Flinche flees.

*Cover Identity:* As a spy master Flinche gains a +4 bonus to disguise checks and a +2 bonus to gather information and bluff checks while operating in his cover identity. The skill bonuses in brackets reflect the total bonus to checks made while in his guise as the silversmith.

*Evasion:* If exposed to an effect that normally allows a reflex saving throw for half damage, Flinche takes no damage on a successful reflex throw.

*Uncanny Dodge:* Flinche retains his dexterity bonus even when flatfooted or flanked.

*Sneak Attack:* Whenever an opponent is denied his dexterity bonus to armour class, or when the opponent is flanked, Flinche may make a sneak attack that deals an extra +4D6 points of damage.

*Spell resistance 12:* As a Talon, Flinche possesses a spell resistance 12.

*Talon Bonuses:* As a talon, Flinche receives a +4 bonus to intimidate and sense motive checks skill checks made against Falkovnian citizens. Furthermore Flinche gains a +2 moral bonus on will saves to resist mind-influencing effects.

*Equipment:* James Flinche carries a suit of worn out leather clothing, which acts as leather armour. Beneath his coat, he carries a bandolier of 4 masterwork daggers and 4 mundane daggers. In his pockets is a purse holding 10 gold coins.

Finally there is the bard. This garishly dressed minstrel refers to himself as Handsome Bob and claims to be the most famous Bard this side of the Shadow Rift. Bob offers to buy drinks for the party and tries to engage them in conversation. If he can discover the party's mission to the Castle, he offers to lend them his services. Bob claims to be a master adventurer and can spin endless tales of his bravery.

DMs Note: Bob is indeed a bard, but the tales he tells are lies. In truth, Bob is a spy from Ivan Dilisnya. He tries to join the group so that he can infiltrate the castle and gain as much information on the Castle and its garrison. He cares nothing for risking his life, and if the players take unnecessary risks he will leave them. Bob cast spells, scouts and will use his bardic abilities, but will not engage in combat as long as he can leave that to his dupes.

**Handsome Bob, Bard 8:** CR 8; medium-size humanoid; HD 8D6+16; hp 44; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (leather armour +2, Dex +2); Atk +8/+3 melee (1D6, rapier); SA Bardic abilities, spells;

SQ spells, bardic abilities, bardic knowledge; AI N; SV Fort +4, Ref +8, Will +8; Str 11, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 13, Wiz 14, Cha 17.

*Skills and Feats:* bluff +12, concentration +8, diplomacy +12, gather information +10, listen +6, perform +16, search +6, sense motive +10; alluring, combat casting, skill focus (perform), weapon finesse.

*Bardic Spells* (4/4/4/2; base save DC = 13 + spell level): 0-read daze, detect magic, flare, ghost sound, light, resistance, 1<sup>st</sup> – charm person, identify, silent image, ventriloquism, 2<sup>nd</sup> – cat's grace, invisibility, minor image, Tasha's hideous laughter 3<sup>rd</sup> – charm monster, haste, major image.

*Combat:* Bob may appear to be an arrogant dandy but his years in the service of Dilisnya have made him an expert in combat. Bob prefers to hang back and use his bardic abilities to inspire courage in the rest of the party. Otherwise he uses his spells to bolster the party.

The players are free to go anywhere and may accept or reject the rescue mission. If the characters walk away from Patterborne's plight, the adventure is over and no experience is awarded. The group will be unwelcome if they ever return to Patterborne. If however the group sets out for the Castle, then proceed to Part Two.

## Part 2: Mistvale Forest

The Crumbling Hills are visible from the village, as is the pass over looked by the Castle. Between the pass and the village stands Mistvale forest, a thick dark wood perpetually blanketed in the fog that rises from the Shadow Rift. The forest is divided in two by grassland

running down towards the village from the pass. The players can freely choose to traverse through either the Eastern or Western sides of the woods or the grasslands in between them, though the DM should note their location for latter use. The castle is only ten miles from the village, a mere three-hour walk through the grasslands or five hours by the forest. In that time the players will have three keyed encounters.

### Clearing

One hour's walk up into the hills the players may notice a clearing in the Eastern woods. Characters on the Eastern side or in the grasslands notice the clearing without a check, though characters making their way through the western side must make a spot check against a DC 15 to spot the site. A wilderness lore check against a DC 10 reveals that this site was used as a resting place for several horses a week ago. If the check succeeds by five points, it is revealed that the site accommodated three horses, seven men and two dogs. The Falkovnian cavalry camped while they planned the raid on Patterborne a week ago. As well, a second wilderness lore check against a DC 15 also reveals that three very large pigs have been rooting around the area as early as a few minutes ago.

**Creatures (EL 6):** In fact, the pigs are dire boars that were rooting for fungus and left together to drink from a nearby pond and will return in 1D4 rounds. If the players are still in the clearing by then, the boars charge out of the woods and try to drive them off. If the players flee, they will not be chased. The dire boars are very hungry and there are a great number of fungus still left beneath the clearing. As a consequence, they will not flee from battle.

**Dire Boars (3):** hp 52 each; *Monster Manual*, page 57.

### Dream Girl

Two hours into the journey from the village the mists of the forest begin to swirl around your feet. A fog bank sweeps across the woods, enveloping the characters. The characters can detect the smell of smoke and can see a small fire in the distance. If the players actively avoid the fire, then they bypass the encounter and may continue on without incident. If instead they approach the flame, they meet Lannel.

**Creature:** Standing by the fire is a woman in her thirties, wearing a brown dress and a beaded necklace. She is a half-elven beauty with enchanting green eyes and feline grace. If the players pass an intelligence check against a DC 15, they recognize the woman from the dream they experienced last night. She beckons the characters with her hand, if they approach then read the following.

“Come closer, brave travelers,” she says in a soft, melodic voice, “Rest by the fire awhile. Bask in the warmth of the Goddess and let me share her wisdom with you.”

If the players ask, she will respond that her name is Lannel but she will answer no more questions until the players sit down. The half elf is kind and friendly, but her behaviour is very odd. Her emotional state constantly shifts from serene hospitality, to manic giddiness, to mournful sorrow. Lannel is evasive; she will not explain why she is in the forest, nor will she say how she arrived in the woods. The half elf claims to know nothing of the women from Patterborne, nor does she know anything about the Falkovnians. If asked about

the Castle, she responds with the following:

“The Castle?” She responds, her jaw dropping. She throws her head back and laughs. Slowly her cackle dissolves into a moan, while her head rolls upon her shoulder. “So much evil in the Castle. So much pain...” The woman falls to her knees. “My husband cavorts with demons, there,” She says, “He bargains with blood.” The woman begins to cry, but slowly her sobs becomes a spiteful chuckle.

“He thinks he safe behind those walls.” She laughs, “He’s wrong. A river of blood runs below his precious castle. It carves out a new entrance and undermines that accursed castle.”

If asked about her husband’s victims, Lannel continues:

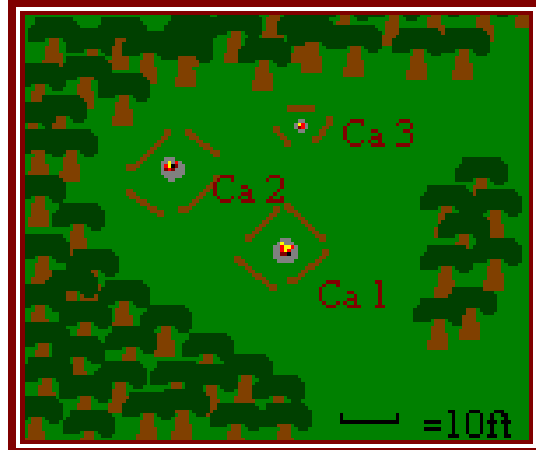
“His victims are trapped in the castle.” She says, “Miserable creatures, bound to serve. They cannot escape, they cannot flee, they cannot avenge themselves. Three hawks guard them, three black birds hold them prisoner. Kill the birds and free the spirits. Then he’ll pay for his crimes.”

As soon as she gives her prophecy she throws the bones into the fire, causing it to explode in a flare of light. When the flare fades away, the fog, the fire and Lannel are gone, leaving the characters right where they were at the beginning of the encounter.

### Cavalry Camp

The party should reach this encounter three hours into their trek. Cut into the Western woods, at the foot of the Hills is a large clearing, currently used as a camp for Falkovnian cavalry.

The camp is camouflaged by a grove of trees to its front, but any character walking in the Western woods is sure to come upon it. Alternately, characters in the Eastern wood completely by pass this encounter.



As the characters near the camp, the DM should make them roll a spot check against a DC of 5. This check will determine how far away the party is from the camp when they spot it. For each point by which the check succeeds, the characters are ten feet from the camp. The camp is being guarded by lookouts, so the party may be spotted as soon as are within 50 feet of the camp, or within 70 feet if the characters are in the grasslands. If the party is actively using stealth within this range, the spot check of the sentries is 15. If the party is spotted in the woods, the soldiers react by quietly forming lines and preparing to receive the attack. If, however, they spot the party in the grasslands, the cavalry charges out while the ground forces follow in formation.

**Creatures:** The positions of the soldiers are described as if the party comes upon them unawares. Three horsemen and their mounts are huddled around the campfire Ca 1. The fire at Ca 2 seats three “sandmen” and three Falkovnian regulars are found at the fire

at Ca 3. The regulars at Ca 3 are tending two mastiff hounds and one falcon.

**Cavalry, Ftr 5 (3):** CR 5; medium-size humanoid; HD 5D10; hp 28 each; Init +0; Spd 30 ft. (50 ft. mounted); AC 18 (splint mail +6, large shield +2); Atk +8 melee (1D8+4, long sword), +7 lance (1D8+2, \*3, triple damage in charge); Al LE; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 14, Dex 11, Con 10, Int 11, Wiz 10, Cha 11.

*Skills and Feats:* climb +10, handle animal +8, Ride +8; mounted combat, ride by attack, spirited charge, weapon focus (long sword), weapon specialization (long sword).

*Combat:* At the first opportunity, the cavalry mounts, charges with their lances, and then switching to their long swords for melee. While attacking unmounted opponents, the cavalry gain the standard +1 bonus to melee attacks. The cavalry fights until all but one of their number are slain, at which point the remaining man flees back to the castle.

*Equipment:* Each cavalryman has one suit of splint mail, one heavy lance, one long sword, two days rations, and 2D6 gold coins in his saddlebag.

**Hawk (1):** hp 4, *Monster Manual*, page 197.

**Heavy War Horses (3):** hp 30 each; *Monster Manual*, page 197.

**Mastiffs (2):** hp 13, *Ravenloft Denizens of Darkness*, page 80.

**Regulars, Ftr 3 (3):** CR 3; medium-size humanoid; HD 3D10; hp 16 each; Init +1; Spd 30 ft; AC 13 (leather armour +2, Dex +1); Atk +4 melee (1D8, heavy mace) +4 ranged (1D10, heavy crossbow); Al LE; SV Fort +2, Ref +0, Will +0; Str 11, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 11, Wiz 10, Cha 11.

*Skills and Feats:* climb +6, handle animal +6, ride +6; point blank shot,

precise shot, weapon focus (crossbow), weapons focus (heavy mace).

*Combat:* The Regulars react to any threat by ordering their trained animals to attack. As the animals attack, the regulars fire into the melee with their crossbows. They switch to their heavy maces if opponents close to melee range. The soldiers are very disciplined, they will not break their close formation and hold the line until slain.

*Equipment:* Each regular possesses a suit of leather armour, one heavy mace, one heavy crossbow, and one quiver holding 20 heavy bolts. Each soldier also possesses enough trail rations for two days and 1D12 gold coins.

**Sandmen, Mnk 6 (3):** CR 6; medium-size humanoid; HD 6D8; hp 28 each; Init +2; Spd 50 ft; AC 15 (Dex +2, wiz +2, Mnk +1); Atk +5/+2 melee (1D8, unarmed attack); SA Improved trip, stunning attack; SQ alertness, blind fight, deflect arrows, evasion, hallucinations, insomniac, purity of body, slow fall (30 ft), still mind, +6 to spot and listen checks at night; Al LE; SV Fort +6, Ref +6, Will +7; Str 13, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 11, Wiz 14, Cha 9.

*Skills and Feats:* climb +10, concentrate +4, hide +13, jump +10, move silently +11, tumble +11; skill focus (hide), skill focus (bluff), Unseen, Weapon focus (unarmed attack).

*Combat:* The sandmen fight as a coordinated unit; the three men charge in as one and direct all of their attacks against the weakest target, progressing up through the ranks. If the battle goes badly, the sandmen flee into the forest and use the 'Unseen' feat to hide. Once the enemy leaves, they go to warn the Castle.



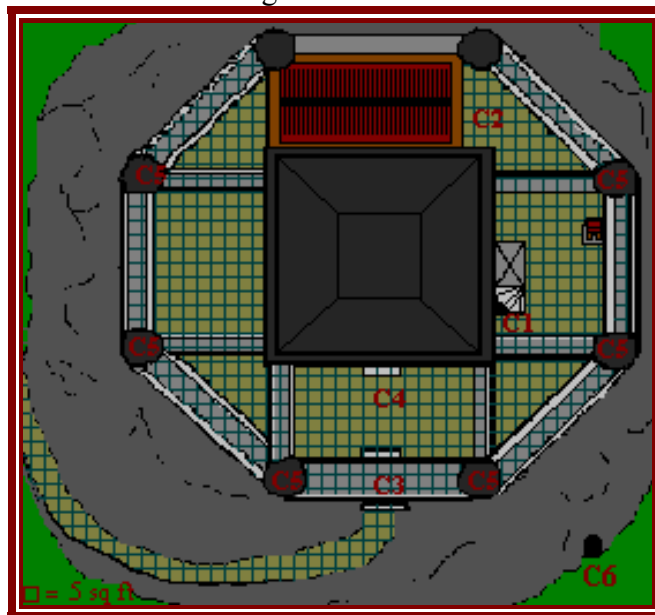
*Equipment:* Each sandman possesses the khaki uniform he wears, two days rations, and 1D4 gold coins.

This encounter should not be overwhelming for an adequately equipped party. However, if the encounter goes badly, the party may be taken captive and brought to the castle. If this occurs the party is locked in the dungeons and left for latter interrogation. On the other hand, the party may strike with such force that the Falkovnian's flee from what quickly becomes a hopeless battle. If these soldiers can raise the alarm, the Castle is put on alert.

### Part 3: Castle Falkenstein

If the characters left Patterborne immediately, they reach the castle just after noon. Castle Falkenstein is a large

fortress, built onto a rocky foothill in the pass between the Crumbling Hills. The towers that ring the Castle hold guards, who watch outside the castle for possible threats. During the day the characters within 100 feet of the castle must take deliberate actions to sneak through the area, making a hide check against a DC 10 or be spotted. The castle is lifted roughly twenty feet off of the ground by the natural rock used as its foundation. Climbing this rock requires a climb check against a DC 15. The pathway from the ground to the gate curves along the rock, exposing anyone who would climb it to the castle defenders. The castle walls are forty feet high, made of superior masonry (break DC 35, hardness 8, hp 90, Climb DC 20) and are four feet thick.



#### C1. Stairway

This structure is a covered stone stairway that leads into the castle's dungeon. The stairway leads down seven feet and stops at a locked, reinforced steel door. Beside the door is a small metal circle decorated with an iron eagle emblem (spot check DC 12). The disk is hinged and covers the door's

lock. The lock is of good quality (open lock DC 30) and can be opened with a "Black Iron Key". Opening the lock disarms the trap located on the other side of the door.

#### C2. Stables

This is a massive wooden structure, built between the Keep and the



rear castle wall. Stationed at the stable entrance are three cavalymen, who will leave this area to attack anyone in the courtyard or stand guard outside the gate if someone tries to storm it.

**Cavalry, Ftr 5 (3):** CR 4; medium-size humanoid; HD 5D10; hp 28 each; Init +0; Spd 30 ft. (50 ft. mounted); AC 18 (splint mail +6, large shield +2); Atk +8 melee (1D8+4, long sword), +7 lance (1D8+2, \*3, triple damage in charge); Al LE; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 14, Dex 11, Con 10, Int 11, Wiz 10, Cha 11.

*Skills and Feats:* climb +10, handle animal +8, Ride +8; mounted combat, ride by attack, spirited charge, weapon focus (long sword), weapon specialization (long sword).

*Combat:* At the first opportunity, the cavalry mounts, charges with their lances, before switching to their long swords. While attacking unmounted opponents, the cavalry gain the standard +1 bonus to melee attacks. The cavalry fights until half of their hit points are lost, at which point they try to flee back and make a stand with the Smith, within the stables.

*Equipment:* Each cavalryman has one suit of splint mail, one heavy lance, one long sword, two days rations, and 2D6 gold coins in his saddlebag.

### C3. Barbican

The gate itself is made of three parts, consisting of wooden outer doors (hardness 5, hp 20, break DC 25), a retractable portcullis (hardness 10, hp 60, lift DC 25) and the murder-holes in between, through which the Castle defenders fire arrows into anyone caught between the doors and the portcullis. The barbican is ten feet wide on the inside, with two small holes in the ceiling, where the soldiers above can fire

crossbow bolts at anyone directly below with no penalty to the attack roll. Normally, no one is stationed here, but if the guards spot the characters before they reach the gate two regulars reach the murder holes in only four rounds.

The portcullis is a heavy steel gate and offers 20% cover to anyone on either side. In the event that someone tries to storm the gate, two regulars descend into the courtyard and fire crossbows through the gate.

### C4. Keep Entrance

The main entrance to the Keep is a massive door, ten feet wide and ten feet tall, made of iron (Hardness 10, hp 60, Break DC 28). The door is locked and barred from the inside by a complex locking mechanism. The door has no visible lock, but with a successful search or spot check, against DC 12, a character can spot the hinged metal disk that covers the lock. The disk is adorned with a blue steel falcon. The lock is of fine quality (open lock DC 30) and can be opened with a “blue steel key”. The door is trapped with a falling portcullis trap. Opening the lock automatically disarms the trap.

**Falling Portcullis Trap:** CR 3; +12 melee (4d6/\*3 crit); Search (DC 23); Disable Device (DC 25). Damage applies to anyone trying to open the door. The portcullis (hardness 10, hp 60, lift DC 25) seals off the keep entrance, but mechanically retracts if the lock is opened. At any given moment the front door is guarded by three sandmen; unless alerted by some threat, they are here engaged in a strange form of meditation.

**Sandmen, Mnk 6 (3):** hp 28 each.

*Combat:* The sandmen fight as a coordinated unit; the three men charge in as one and direct all of their attacks on

the weakest target, progressing up through the ranks. If the battle goes badly, the sandmen flee to the stables and make a stand with the smith.

### **C5. Towers**

The castle is built around eight towers, however only the six that face the pass are manned. The towers stand fifty feet high, containing stone staircases that connect the battlements to the courtyard. The two towers that border the gate also open into a chamber just above entrance, where the gate mechanisms and the murder holes are located. At any given moment one Falkovnian regular is stationed in each tower. These guards leave their position to fire at enemies either outside the walls, in the courtyard or at the gate.

**Regulars, Ftr 3 (6):** CR 3; medium-size humanoid; HD 3D10; hp 16 each; Init +1; Spd 30 ft; AC 13 (leather armour +2, Dex +1); Atk +4 melee (1D8, heavy mace) +4 ranged (1D10, heavy crossbow); Al LE; SV Fort +2, Ref +0, Will +0; Str 11, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 11, Wiz 10, Cha 11.

*Skills and Feats:* climb +6, handle animal +6, ride +6; point blank shot, precise shot, weapon focus (crossbow), weapons focus (heavy mace).

*Combat:* The Regulars fire their crossbows and flee from any melee combat unless cornered. They prefer to fire from behind the battlements, down through murder holes, through the gate, or down into the courtyard from the walkways.

*Equipment:* Each regular possesses a suit of leather armour, one heavy crossbow, and one quiver holding 20 heavy bolts, one heavy mace, two days rations and 1D12 gold coins.

Each of the six manned towers is connected to the keep by a stone

walkway supported forty feet above the ground. These walkways lead to one of four doors, which open to the third floor of the keep. These doors are made of iron (Hardness 10, hp 60, Break DC 28) and are locked with a good lock (Open lock DC 30), which can be opened with a “blue steel key”. The doors are trapped. If anyone attempts to open the door while it remains locked, the section of walkway directly in front of the door swings down, dumping anyone on it down into the courtyard below.

**Pit trap (40 feet deep):** CR 2; no attack roll (4D6); reflex save (DC20) avoids; Search (DC 20); Disable Device (DC 20).

### **C6. Cavern to Cistern**

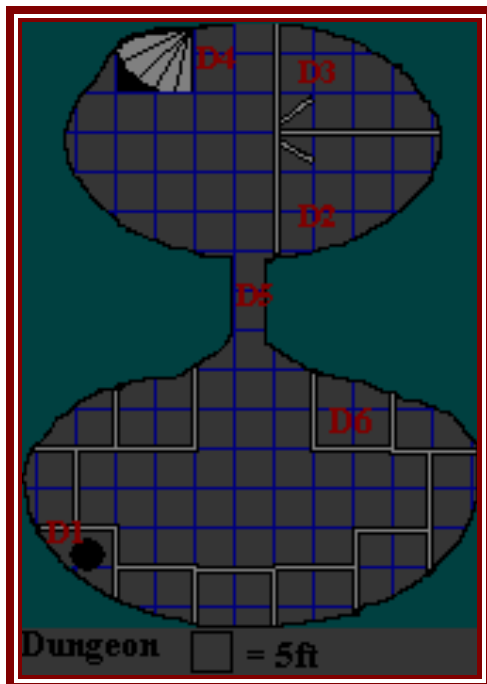
The castle is extremely well defended but there is one unguarded entrance. Over recent years a sinkhole has formed in the soil just outside of the rock. Accidentally spotting the hole is nearly impossible (Spot check against a DC 25). However, if the players are actively searching for such an opening, they receive a bonus of +10 circumstantial to the check.

The cistern is a stone tunnel, carved into the soft rock beneath the castle. The cistern is a large cavern fifteen feet high and filled with four feet of water. The cavern runs in a long line beneath the castle, only opening in the ceiling in three places. The first shaft leads to the well, located in the courtyard, and the other to area D1 in the dungeon. The shafts are twenty feet high, and the rock is unworked and covered with slimy moss. Climb checks are made at a DC 18. The shafts are narrow so only one character may climb a shaft at a time. The final opening is a wide chasm in the ceiling, bridged by the stone walkway in area D5 in the

dungeon. From the cistern below characters can look up into this chasm and spot a swinging pendulum that swings back and forth along the length of the walkway.

## Dungeon

The dungeon can either be accessed through the cistern or by the door in C1. It is a dark, dank place, hewn out of the castle's foundations. The walls are made of a black masonry that is slick with slime. Sconces on the walls in every chamber hold two torches. The dungeon once held prisoners, taken from the Falkovnian countryside; they were held for interrogation and eventual slaughtered. Now there remains but one prisoner, who has the full attention of the guards.



### D1: Cistern Entrance

This is a section of floor that has crumbled into the cavern below. The hole leads into a simple cell that has been left unlocked.

### D2: Jailor's Office

This is the office of "the jailor", the hulking mutant who commands this dungeon. The Jailor has no use for paperwork or other office trappings, so he has converted the office into a den. This room contains a poker table, a dartboard and numerous chairs. The jailor can be found here, whether or not the castle is on alert. Early that day the Jailor and his guards begin a card game with one of the Sandmen officers. After hours of fierce gambling only the jailor and the sandman will remain in the game. While the guards busy themselves with beating the prisoner, the two players are busy drinking.

The door is quite resistant to sound, so the Jailor and his competitor will not be alerted to the presence of invaders until someone opens the door. The Jailor is quite conspicuous; two yellow tusks rise from his lower jaw, and protruding from his face is a wrinkled pig snout, adorned with a nose ring.

**The Jailor, Barb 9:** CR 9; medium-size humanoid (caliban); HD 9D12 +36; hp 94; Init +3; Spd 40 ft.; AC 15 (leather armour +2, Dex +3); Atk +13/+8 melee (2D4+4, spiked chain); SA Rage 3/day; SQ fast movement, uncanny dodge (Dex bonus to AC, can't be flanked); Al NE; SV Fort +10, Ref +7, Will +3; Str 18, Dex 16, Con 18, Int 11, Wiz 10, Cha 9.

*Skills and Feats:* climb +16, craft (torture) +12, handle animal +11, intimidate +11; exotic weapon proficiency (spiked chain), expertise, improved trip, improved disarm.

*Combat:* If someone enters his den, the Jailor enters a rage and attacks with his spiked chain. He devotes his attacks to tripping weak looking characters and disarming the stronger

ones. In the throes of combat it does not occur to the Jailor to flee, so he fights to the death.

*Equipment:* The jailor is wearing a filthy coat of leather armour. His belt is made of a strange material, but a craft: leatherworking, knowledge: anatomy or a heal check against a DC 15 reveals that it is made of flayed human flesh. Tied to the belt is a leather pouch containing seven gold coins, three lumps of gold worth one silver piece (gold fillings from prisoners), and a black iron key.

**Sandmen, Mnk 6 (1):** hp 28.

*Combat:* The sandman fights along side of the Jailor; he tries to engage someone while they are in the doorway, to better block anyone who tries to enter the room. If the sandman can somehow escape the room he will dive into cistern through the chasm in D5, and climb back out through the well in the Courtyard.

*Equipment:* The sandman wears a simple khaki uniform and carries a black iron key on his belt. He has no gold on him, but his pot on the poker table contains seventy silver coins.

### **D3: Torture Chamber**

This is a poorly lit room, dominated by a cold metal rack in the centre. In one corner is a fireplace that holds several brands and steel pincers. On the walls are shelves of torture paraphernalia, including whips, scalpels, human anatomy charts, thumbscrews and pincers.

This abominable chamber is stained in blood; the walls themselves radiate a tangible presence of evil. The spirits of countless victims are bound to this room and haunt the torture chamber when the Jailor is away. If anyone approaches the room, screams begin to emanate from within, followed by blood

seeping from under the door. If anyone opens the door, they are bombarded with a nightmarish image. The geists use their phantom shift to reveal the room as it appears in the ethereal plane; a floor made of blood, floating in a black void.

Anyone opening the door must make a reflex save against DC 15 or be pulled into the room just before the door slams behind them. Victims caught thusly are strapped onto the torture rack and forced to relive the last moments of the torture victims for several minutes. While no physical damage is sustained, the agonizing memories force the victim to make a horror check against DC 15.

As soon as someone else enters the room the illusion is dispelled. Once the illusion is dispelled, the geists disperse throughout the castle.

### **D4: Stairway**

This is the exit from the dungeon. It opens into the courtyard at C1, which is sealed by a hefty iron door described in C1. The door is locked, but to the side of the door is a metal disk decorated with a black iron falcon. Behind this disk is a key lock, which can be opened with the black iron key or an open lock check against DC 30. The spiral stairs are trapped with a lethal crushing device. If anyone tries to open the door from the dungeon side without first unlocking it, a huge stone block drops from the ceiling, slams into the floor, and then is retracted up into the ceiling by a mechanical winch.

**Falling Block Trap:** CR 5; + 15 melee (6D6); Search (DC 20); Disable Device (DC 20). *Note:* Can strike all characters on the stairs.

### **D5: Walkway**

This walkway connects the two sections of the dungeon; the walkway

spans the distance of the chasm, twenty feet above the cistern. Characters who fall into the cistern suffer 1D6 points of damage due to the cushioning force of the water. The walkway is guarded by a large swinging scythe blade sweeps back and forth along the length of the walkway. Built into the wall on either side of the walkway is a hinged disk, decorated with a black iron falcon. This disk hides a lock, which if opened, disarms the trap.

**Swinging Scythe Trap:** CR 2; +10 melee (2D8/\*3 Crit); Search (DC 0); Disable Device (DC 20). *Note:* Any character struck by the blade must make a reflex save against DC 15 or be knocked into the cistern below.

#### **D6: Vulf's Cell**

The three regulars who serve as dungeon guards are busy beating the prisoner Vulf. Since their victim is putting up a fight, they can neither hear nor see anyone entering from D1 or D5.

**Regulars, Ftr 3 (3):** hp 16 each

*Combat:* The Regulars are busy beating on their prisoner; they leave their victim as soon as anyone interferes and focus their assault on the interlopers.

*Equipment:* Each regular possesses a suit of leather armour, and one heavy mace. One regular has a black iron key on a key ring, tied to his belt.

**Vulf, Rgr 5:** CR Na, medium-size humanoid; HD 5D10+5; hp 5; Init +1; Spd 30 ft; AC 11 (Dex +1, +2 back to the wall); Atk +8 melee (1D2 subdual, unarmed attack); SA Favoured Enemy (animals, beasts); SQ Track; AI CG; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +3; Str 12, Dex 12, Con 12, Int 12, Wiz 14, Cha 11.

*Skills and Feats:* climb +8, handle animal +4, hide +9, move silently +9,

ride +9, spot +8, wilderness lore +10; Alertness, Back to the wall, Red Headed.

*Spells Prepared:* Ranger Spells (1; Base DC 12+spell level): 1<sup>st</sup> - Animal Friendship.

Druid Spells (1; Base DC 12+spell level): 1<sup>st</sup> - Cure Light Wounds.

*Combat:* Vulf is severely beaten when the characters find him. He has been subject to horrible treatment for months, surviving only by the ancestral magic he inherited. Vulf is a true fighter; he throws everything he has into the fight as soon as the players come to his rescue.

If healed, Vulf proves to be a competent and fearless warrior. He will willingly sacrifice his own life to protect those of the other party members.

If the adventurers can rescue him, Vulf will tell them everything he knows about the castle. He will explain that the dungeons once held almost fifty Falkovnian Freeman, captured in raids all over the countryside. Over the course of three months the men, women and children were starved and tortured. Several of them were dragged off to the keep, never to be seen again. If the players explain their mission to him, he offers to help them in any way he can.

Should the heroes press Vulf, he will describe his life as a Falkovnian Freeman. Born a peasant, he joined the rebellion against Drakov when drunken soldiers burned his family farmstead.



## Stables

The stable is a large wooden structure, built between the keep and the rear wall. The structure is made of dark wood, felled from the Forests of northern Falkovnia. The structure is clearly more recent than the castle itself; it displays none of the castle's signs of wear, erosion or decay. If there have been no disturbances, then three cavalymen stand just in front of the stables, in C2. If any of the cavalry or the sandmen from the courtyard have been forced to retreat they can be found in here.

### S1: Stalls

There are enough stalls to comfortably accommodate 15 horses. These stalls are currently empty, though nine stalls show signs of recent habitation. There is nothing of interest in these stalls, with the exception of horse droppings and hay.

### S2: Forge

The forge is the small workshop where the metal goods needed for the castle are heated and beaten into shape. The forge is comprised of a fine anvil, a coal furnace and a pool of water for cooling metal. On the wall is a wooden rack holding the bellows and other smithing tools. In the corner is a box of

scrap iron. Beneath the iron are several lumps of the rare mineral adamantine, totalling nearly fifteen pounds. There is enough metal left for a master smith to create a large shield or a weapon weighing up to fifteen pounds.

Unless the Castle has been alerted to the presence of the adventurers, the Smith can be found here standing guard over the forge. The Smith is a hulking mutant with hideous features. His left eye is placed where his cheekbone should be and pig like ears flanks his head. A mercenary from the Crumbling Hills, the smith creates the weapons to be used by the garrison, as well as training the dogs.

**The Smith, Barb 9:** CR 9; medium-size humanoid (caliban); HD 9D12 +36; hp 94; Init +3; Spd 20 ft.; AC 20 (masterwork breast plate +5, large shield +2, Dex +3); Atk +16/+16 melee (1D8+6, adamantine war hammer); SA Rage 3/day; SQ fast movement, uncanny dodge (Dex bonus to AC, can't be flanked); AI NE; SV Fort +10, Ref +7, Will +3; Str 18, Dex 16, Con 18, Int 11, Wiz 10, Cha 9.

*Skills and Feats:* climb +16, craft (metal smithing) +12, handle animal +11, intimidate +11; Power attack, weapon focus (war hammer), cleave, greater cleave.

*Combat:* The Smith is never found out of his armour, nor is he ever without



his beloved hammer. Unless he has been alerted to intruders, he will be found in the forge organizing his tools. In the first round of combat the smith opens the doors to the kennel (S3) and orders the mastiffs within to attack the intruders. Afterwards he goes into a rage and focuses his attacks on a single opponent, singling out either the most armoured person or anyone not already attacked by a hound. If fighting a character with a low AC the smith uses power attack to add five points of damage to each attack.

*Equipment:* The Smith carries a massive adamantine hammer, a masterwork breastplate and a large shield engraved with the image of a boar. The clothes the Smith wears beneath his armour are rank and filthy, but in his pockets are five gold coins and a Blue Steel Key.

### **S3: Kennel**

The kennel is a wide room, closed off by a metal grating that serves as door. The floor of the kennel is covered in hay and animal droppings. Aside from the hounds, there is nothing of interest in this room.

**Mastiffs (5):** hp 13, *Ravenloft Denizens of Darkness*, page 80.

*Combat:* The hounds have been bred for viciousness and trained to attack any unfamiliar individuals. As soon as the Smith opens the door, they leap out and attack anything they find. Each hound attacks a different opponent. If any of their opponents try to flee, the whole group instinctively chases after.

### **S4: Storage Room**

This room is used to store the animal feed, as well as saddles and cavalry barding. The room contains one barrel of oats, one barrel of salted

horsemeat and several saddles stacked one atop the other.

After the incident in the dungeon, one of the geists takes up residence in the storeroom. As soon as someone approaches it, the door begins to rattle. If anyone enters the room, they find that the walls are dripping with black slime; the vile jelly oozes from the walls, drips onto the floor and collects in the centre of the floor, pooling in a pattern similar to a pentagram.

## **Part 4: The Keep**

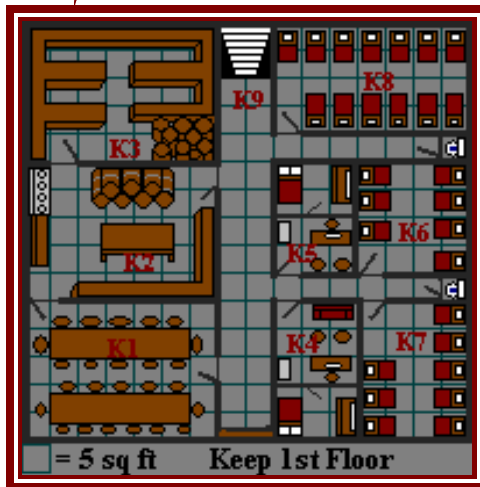
The keep is kept secure at all times, with all entrances locked and trapped. The guards rotate shifts every six hours, which is the only time the doors are opened. The castle garrison is growing lax from boredom. Unless the players attack the castle directly, the denizens inside the keep are ignorant of the invasion until the players enter the keep. If, however, the players spend more than six hours in the courtyard, then the keep garrison discovers that something is wrong. The sandmen inside wait until nightfall then leave the Keep. If the players have set up camp in the courtyard or stables, the sandmen attack. Otherwise the sandmen secure the courtyard, bring out the rest of the keep garrison and systematically secure the rest of the castle.

The keep is a fine example of Falkovnian architecture; the walls are made of finely crafted masonry made from the grey stone, common in that kingdom. Small flying buttresses support vaulted ceilings in every room and an arch of bricks borders every doorway. Though the stonework is worn, it is clear that once this fortress was a great edifice. The halls hold several sconces for burning torches, so

the keep is always illuminated as if it were daylight.

A shadowy force permeates the castle walls. Strange sounds echo in the hallways and those who walk the halls may feel as though they are being watched. A cold draft blows through the walls of the castle, whistling through the air like a mournful call.

## Keep Floor 1



The first floor of the keep contains the main barracks for the rank and file of the garrison. The following encounters are based upon the condition that the castle garrison is unaware of the adventurers. If the castle guards have been previously alerted, the guards barricade the main hallway with tables and desks and are prepared to defend against the invaders.

### K1: Mess Hall

The mess hall is a large room dominated by two large tables. Six regulars can be found loitering here. If there is combat in any other area of the first floor, these soldiers leave the mess and investigate.

**Regulars, Ftr 3 (6):** hp 16 each

**Combat:** These men are highly trained and disciplined, so they are

always armoured and have weapons at hand. The Regulars attack any intruder who enters the mess hall. They immediately tip over a table farthest from the doors and fire from cover. The guards fire in waves of three each round, while the other three reload.

**Equipment:** Each regular possesses a suit of leather armour and one heavy mace. Though off duty, each soldier still carries his crossbow and a quiver of ten bolts.

### K2: Kitchen

The kitchen is a very large room, dedicated to the preparation of food for the castle denizens. Inside the kitchen is a collection of fine culinary materials. Included amongst the items are huge mixing bowls, butter churns, masterwork butcher knives, wood stoves and bread ovens. There are several barrels stacked against the wall, holding wine, beer and other alcohol as well as potatoes, grain, apples and other foodstuffs. The kitchen is the private domain of The Chef, an inbred barbarian from the Crumbling Hills, who works as a mercenary and part time cook. Unless battle has broken out elsewhere on the first floor, or the garrison has been alerted to the presence of invaders, he can be found here.

**The Chef, Barb 9:** CR 9; medium-size humanoid (caliban); HD 9D12 +36; hp 94; Init +3; Spd 20 ft.; AC 16 (leather apron (hide armour)+3, Dex +3); Atk +13/+13/+8 melee (1D6+4, master work hand axes); SA Rage 3/day; SQ fast movement, uncanny dodge (Dex bonus to AC, can't be flanked); AI NE; SV Fort +10, Ref +7, Will +3; Str 18, Dex 16, Con 18, Int 11, Wiz 10, Cha 9.

**Skills and Feats:** Climb +16, Craft (cooking) +12, Handle animal +11, Intimidate +11; Ambidexterity, Power

Attack, Two Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (hand axe).

*Combat:* The Chef immediately attacks anyone not wearing a Falkovnian uniform. He is never without his bloodied leather apron, which acts as hide armour, nor his masterwork meat cleavers, which are identical to hand axes. If the players encounter the chef in the kitchen, he lifts a pot of boiling water from the stove and throws it at the party. All characters in a cone of twenty feet length and diameter must make a reflex save against a DC of 15, or suffer 1D8 points of damage from the boiling water.

Following his water attack, the chef goes into a rage and charging into combat. He uses power attack and focuses all of his attacks upon the weakest looking character. He then flees and tries to find soldiers to help him repel the invaders.

*Equipment:* The Chef carries two masterwork hand axes and a large apron, which acts as hide armour. The white shirt and breaches the Chef wears beneath his apron are splattered with blood. In his apron pocket is a Blue Steel Key.

### **K3: Storage Room**

The storage room is a cold, dry, chamber lined and divided by tall wooden shelves. In one corner of the room stands a collection of barrels that hold wine, beer, grains, fruits and vegetables. The shelves are stacked with salt, pepper, spices, and many roots and herbs. The back wall is dominated by a collection of meat hooks; a dozen chickens, and several sides of beef and pork dangle from the bloodied hooks. The entrance to the storage room is locked with a fine quality lock (open DC

30), and can be opened with a blue steel key.

### **K4: Office**

This room is the office and sleeping quarters for the lieutenants who service the castle; it contains a desk and a filing cabinet, stuffed with parchment records. A search of these records reveals little, though an agent of a foreign nation would find the intelligence information invaluable. Unless there is a disturbance elsewhere, an officer can be found here. In the sleeping quarters there is a chest; inside is twenty-five gold coins, fifty silver coins and a gold ring worth 100 gold pieces.

**Officer, Ftr 5:** CR 5; medium-size humanoid; HD 5D10; hp 27; Init +5; Spd 30 ft; AC 11 (Dex +1); Atk +7 melee (1D8+1, heavy mace); Al LE; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +1; Str 12, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 11, Wiz 10, Cha 11.

*Skills and Feats:* Climb +8, Handle Animal +8, Ride +8; Improved Initiative, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Weapon Focus (crossbow), Weapon Focus (heavy mace).

*Combat:* The officer is trapped in his office, so he might try to surrender if he thinks he can succeed. If shown mercy, he will betray the party at the first opportunity.

*Equipment:* The officer carries one heavy mace and 1D12 gold coins.

### **K5: Office**

Same as K4.

**Officer, Ftr 5:** hp 27 each

### **K6: Cavalry Barracks**

This room contains the beds and personal belongings of the cavalry. After being dispersed from the torture chamber, a geist has entered this room.

It waits until someone approaches the room and then enters the material plane, appearing as it did at the moment of death; the geist takes the form of a woman, covered in bruises and welts. As soon as someone enters the room she holds up her wrists, which gush out ectoplasm. Her lips silently mouth the words "Help Me," before she vanishes. This room is unoccupied and under each bed is a trunk containing clothing and 1D6 gold pieces.

### **K7: Sandman Barracks**

These barracks are the home of the sandmen who guard the castle. The room is empty, but under each bed is a chest containing several spare khaki uniforms and 1D12 gold pieces.

### **K8: Regular Barracks**

These barracks are home to the rank and file soldiers of the castle. If there have been no disturbances, three regulars can be found in this room. Beneath each bed is a chest containing several changes of cloths and 1D6 gold pieces.

**Regulars, Ftr 3 (3):** hp 16 each

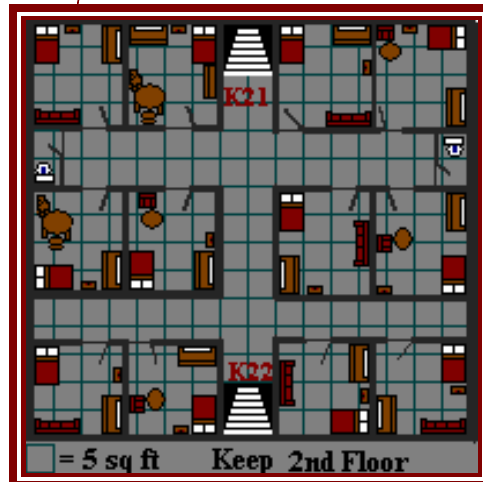
*Combat:* One of the soldiers jumps on one of the bunks, gaining the advantage of higher ground. The other two charge into combat and try to catch the invaders midway through the door.

*Equipment:* Each regular possesses a suit of leather armour and one heavy mace.

### **K9: Staircase**

This staircase leads up to the next floor. This area is the rallying point for soldiers on the first floor. Any soldiers who fled combat may be found here, along with the soldiers from the second floor.

## **Keep Floor 2**



This floor contains the personal chambers of the more notable members of the castle garrison. The rooms in this area are roughly identical, each containing a bed, a dresser, miscellaneous pieces of furniture and a chest containing random pieces of equipment, spare uniforms, and 3D6 gold coins.

### **K21: Second Floor Landing**

If the guards from the first floor have been driven away, they make their stand here. Otherwise, this area is being watched from area K22 by several guards. As soon as an intruder reaches K21, the guards order the dogs to engage the invaders before they then charge into melee.

### **K22: Ascending Stairs**

If, for some reason, the players have not initiated combat in K22, four sentries can be found here. These soldiers are no mere footmen, but rather they are the elite Knights Kommando, humans bred for war and trained since birth. These soldiers are terrible to behold; they wear massive black armour and great steel helms onto which has been welded the double K emblem.

**Knights Kommando, Ftr 6 (4):** CR 7; medium-size humanoid; HD

6D10+18; hp 55; Init +7; Spd 40 ft; AC 20 (Breast Plate + 5, Dex +3, Large Shield +2); Atk +11/+7 melee (1D10+6, masterwork bastard sword), +9 ranged (1D6+3, range 10 ft., throwing axe); SA *Man Hunter*; SQ *Combat Training*; AL LE; SV Fort +8, Ref +5, Will +3; Str 17, Dex 17, Con 17, Int 12, Wiz 13, Cha 9.

*Skills and Feats:* Handle Animal +8, Hide +12, Move Silently +12, Ride +12; Back to the Wall, Cleave, Greater Cleave, Exotic Weapon Proficiency, Improved Initiative, Improved Unarmed Attack, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (bastard sword), Weapon Specialization (bastard sword).

*Combat:* Knights Kommando are ruthless in combat; they let their dogs charge into melee, then toss their throwing axes to soften up their opponents. They make use of their power attack ability on unarmored opponents. If a knight is brought to 13 hit points or less, the feat 'Back to the Wall' grants them a +2 bonus to attacks and armour class. The knights are vicious but not stupid; if half of their number are slain, or they face obviously overwhelming odds, the remaining knights flee to make a stand on the third floor.

*Combat Readiness:* Knights Kommando are specially trained to always live in a constant state of readiness and to fight multiple opponents and. Knights Kommando receive their dexterity bonus even when flatfooted or when struck by an invisible opponent. Furthermore, knights kommando cannot be flanked, except by a rogue with at least four more levels than the knight's hit dice.

*Combat training:* The skills *Climb*, *Hide* and *Move Silently* are always considered class skills.

### *Man Hunter:* Knights

Kommandos are trained to slay human prey. They are thoroughly trained to exploit the vulnerabilities of humans. All attack and damage rolls made by the kommando on human opponents gains a +1 insight bonus.

*Equipment:* Each knight wears a breastplate and a helmet, and carries a large shield; all are adorned with the double K emblem. Each knight carries a masterwork bastard sword and a throwing axe. As pure soldiers, they have no use for gold, so carry none.

## Keep Floor 3



This floor once was the mustering point for the castle garrison. At the corners of this floor are the doors opening to the walkways that connect the keep to the walls. Colonel Hellman had this floor reconstructed as a work area for the castle's women. When construction was completed, all that remained was for the soldiers to gather suitable slaves from Patterborne. Unless combat has driven other soldiers to the third floor, only one soldier guards this floor.

### **K31: Third Floor Landing**



Any soldiers driven from the second floor will be here, waiting. Otherwise, a single sentinel waits to confront anyone who ascends the stairs. While the guard may appear to be an ordinary foot soldier, he is in fact the product of a brutal experiment. When first encountered, he appears to be armed with a simple club, wearing only loose fitting camouflage collared fatigues. As soon as he spots any intruders, he retrieves a syringe of green fluid and injects himself with the vile concoction.

**Captain Jack Karn, Primal Soldier, Ftr 8:** CR 10; medium-size shape changer; HD 8D10+24; hp 74; Init +2; Spd 30 ft; AC 14 (+2 dex, +2 natural); Atk +9/+4 melee (1D6 club); SA Alternate Form; SQ Damage reduction 15/silver; AI LE; SV Fort +7, Ref +6, Will +6; Str 12, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 12, Wiz 14, Cha 11.

*Skills and Feats:* climb +12, handle animal +11, Listen +4, ride +13, spot +4; alertness, back to the wall, combat reflexes, dodge, iron will, lightening reflexes, mobility, quick draw, spring attack.

*Combat:* Karn is presently watching the stairs, standing at the foot of the staircase, a total of ten feet away from the landing at the second floor. Unless the party has some exceptional means of stealth, the soldier spots them instantly. The moment Karn spots an intruder he injects himself with a syringe of Primal Serum. This triggers a horrifying transformation, turning the Falkovnian captain into a savage, lupine beast. Through brutal surgery and alchemical operations, Karn has been specially conditioned to retain his intellect while in his bestial form. Once transformed, the captain uses a bull rush to try to push the invaders down the stairs, so that he can fight them one on

one. The primal soldier makes excellent use of his spring attack ability, striking at unarmored opponents, weakening the party before committing to melee. If necessary, Karn retreats to a further corner of the third floor, waits to heal and then dives back into battle. If reduced to 22 hit points (or 18 if in humanoid form) the primal soldier gains a +2 bonus to attacks and armour class.

*Damage Reduction:* The primal soldier ignores the first 15 points of damage received from each attack in combat. Silver weapons negate this reduction.

*Alternate Form:* The primal soldier may change into a terrifying hybrid, somewhere between a man and wolf. The trigger for this transformation is an injection of primal serum. The metamorphosis requires a standard action, during which time the soldier heals a number of hit points as though he had spent one full day resting. The primal soldier may remain in this shape for 30 minutes, after which he reverts to his humanoid form. His statistics change to the following:

HD 8D10+42; hp 91; Init +8 (+4 dex, +4 initiative); Spd 50ft.; AC 19 (+3 dex, +5 natural); Atk +16/+11 melee (bite 1D8+8); SA Alternate Form; SQ Damage reduction 15/silver, Fast Healing 3; AI LE; SV Fort +16, Reflex +8, Will +9; Str 26, Dex 19, Con 22, Int 12, Wiz 16, Cha 11.

*Skills and Feats:* climb +19, handle animal +11, Listen +13, ride +15, search +8, spot +13; alertness, back to the wall, blind fight, combat reflexes, dodge, improved initiative, iron will, lightening reflexes, mobility, quick draw, spring attack.

*Fast Healing:* The primal soldier regenerates three hit points each round.



*Equipment:* The primal soldier carries little; in his possession are a simple club, a blue steel key, a small skeleton key, two syringes of primal serum and a suit of camouflaged fatigues.

### **K32: Slave Quarters**

This is the chamber where kidnapped women are being held. The room is a cluttered dormitory, filled with cheaply made cots and under-stuffed mattresses. Inside are the ten young women taken from Patterborne. These captives are weakened from their ordeal; many of them are mildly traumatized by the abuse. When not doing the chores in the kitchen or laundry room, the women were locked in this room, allowed out only to serve as ‘company’ for the officers. These women are extremely eager to leave, but afraid. If no one escorts them out of the castle, then they will refuse to leave, for fear of recapture and punishment. Once outside the castle grounds, they hasten back to their village.

**Captive**, Com 1: CR 0, HD 1D4; hp 3 each.

The door is always locked with a fine mechanism. The lock can be opened with a blue steel key or a successful Open Lock check against a DC of 30. The device is built into the wall beside the door, and covered with a hinged disk, decorated with a blue steel eagle emblem. To protect the captives from the predation of the lowly foot soldiers, a trap was installed upon the door. If any attempt is made to open the door while it is locked, a bladed scythe blade sweeps down from the ceiling and arcs through the space just in front of the door. The blade resets itself after one swipe and awaits the next attempt to

open the door. The trap is deactivated as soon as the door is unlocked.

**Swinging Scythe Trap:** CR 2; +10 melee (2D8/\*3 Crit); Search (DC 20); Disable Device (DC 20).

### **K33: Work Room**

This room contains a spinning wheel, dyes, knitting tools and all other materials needed to create clothing and other items. This room is where most of the captives spent their days. Currently, this room is home to one of the many restless spirits. As soon as someone approaches the door to this room, they detect the sounds of a woman humming to herself. As they open the door they see a form, obscured by a grey shawl, hunched over a spinning wheel. The wheel is being turned and a tune seems to emanate from the working figure. As they approach the figure, the work and the tune abruptly stop. Any further investigation reveals that there is no one in the room at all, and that the shawl was merely resting on a high backed chair.

### **K34: Bath**

This room was once the bath for the castle. A large metal tub dominates the room. In the corner is the stove where water was heated for the bath. There is little of interest in this room, save a pile of wet cloths in the corner, by the stove. A foolish knight assumed that one of the women would launder it for him, so he careless discarded the uniform without removing the valuables within. In the pockets of the uniform is a gold key and 10 gold coins.

### **K35: Laundry**

This is the room where the captives washed the filthy uniforms of their captors. This room is filled with washing paraphernalia; there is a

massive washing tub in one corner, which resembles a short barrel with a washboard built in. The shelves of the room are stacked with blocks of soap and of crumpled uniforms. Along the remaining wall are fixed a series of pegs, on which hang the drying uniforms, washed just recently. A thorough search of the uniform pockets yields a total of 15 silver pieces and 10 gold pieces.

### **K36: Armoury and Storage**

This thin room is the holding area for arms, armour and miscellaneous goods. The door is always locked with a fine mechanism that can be opened with a blue steel key or a successful Open Lock check against a DC of 30. The lock itself is built into the wall beside the door, and covered with a hinged disk decorated with a blue steel eagle emblem. The items in the armoury include roughly seven hundred and fifty heavy crossbow bolts, five heavy crossbows, ten heavy maces, seven long swords, ten suits of leather armour, a single set of chain mail, one large shield adorned with the double K emblem and a single master work bastard sword. The mundane items include a barrel of Falkovnian beer, a set of carpenters' tools, twenty candles, ten full oilskins, three lanterns, a telescope and a map of Falkovnia.

### **K37: Officer's Mess**

The officer's mess is the chamber where the high-ranking knights and officers take their meals. This room is dominated by a large round table. There are eight unremarkable chairs placed around the table and a single high backed chair placed farthest from the door. This chair belongs to the Colonel, who forbade anyone else to sit in it in his absence.

### **K38: Treasury**

This room houses the valuables of the castle. The door is always locked with a fine quality lock. The mechanism can be opened with a gold key or a successful Open Lock check against a DC of 30. The lock itself is built into the wall beside the door, and covered with a hinged disk decorated with a golden eagle emblem. Rather than allow greedy footmen to raid the treasury, a trap was installed. Any attempt to open the door while it is locked triggers a massive spear blade hidden in the ceiling. With each attack the blade withdraws into the ceiling, instantly resetting itself.

**Spear Trap:** CR 3; +10 melee (3D8/\*3 Crit); Search (DC 20); Disable Device (DC 20).

The treasury contains a great deal of valuables and goods. In chests, pouches and other containers are the collected booty of the castle; there are a total of 350 gold coins and 350 silver pieces; a hand full of rings and other pieces of jewellery taken from Patterborne, valuing roughly 100 gold.

### **K39: Tower Stairs**

The stairway to the tower is hidden behind two heavy iron doors. The doors are locked with a fine quality mechanism, which is hidden behind a hinged metal disk adorned with a golden eagle. The lock can be opened with an open lock check against a DC 30 or a golden key. The doors are trapped to prevent unwanted visitors to the tower. While the lock is closed any attempt to open the doors triggers a crushing block to fall from the ceiling.

**Falling Block Trap:** CR 6; + 15 melee (7D6); Search (DC 20); Disable Device (DC 20). *Note:* Can strike all

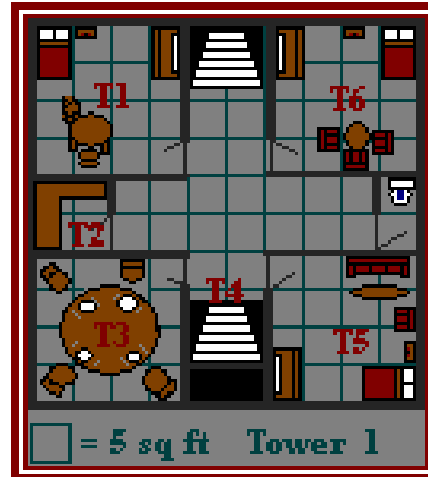
characters in the ten-foot section directly before the double doors to the staircase.

## Part 5: The Tower

The tower is a huge pyramidal structure built upon the top of the keep. This area is very poorly lit; light from even the strongest flame is dimmed to twilight. Those who walk the darkened halls can feel the tangible presence of evil. The shadows themselves seem to move and ghostly sounds echo in the dark. Those sensitive to the spiritual world can feel the presence of pure evil somewhere in the tower.

This is the inner sanctum of the sorcerer Hellman, his shrine to unnameable demonic forces. When Hellman first assumed command of Castle Falkenstein he found that this area was permeated with the essence of darkness. The entire pyramid acts as a resonance chamber for evil magic, allowing Hellman to contact forces far beyond the mortal realm. Hellman has transformed the tower as a bridge between the temporal plane and the dark realm he contacted, allowing him to trade human blood for magical power. The tower now pulsates to the beat of a demonic heart as vile energies leak unchecked into the world of the living. These energies have corrupted Hellman, turning him into an abominable mutant. Though the adventurers cannot know it, his meddling has torn a tiny hole in the fabric of the demiplane. Though it is presently contained within his pentagram, if left unchecked it may erupt forth and consume the whole castle.

## Tower Level 1



If the adventurers have made their way to the tower, then it is clear that they have caused enough noise to draw the attention of the Colonel's personal guards. The last defenders of Castle Falkenstein will be ready to make their final stand against the invaders.

### T1: Flinche's Quarters

This room was the residence of James Flinche, a master spy and the talon representative for the fortress. If for some strange reason he is still with the party, he tries to dissuade the party from entering the room. If they cannot be persuaded otherwise he takes this moment to either attack or slip away. The room contains all of his belongings, including his formal military uniform, his personal log, 50 gold coins, a gold falcon shaped amulet with ruby eyes worth roughly 75 gold coins and four master work daggers.

Flinche's log contains detailed notes on the political dynamics within the Talon organization and Drakov's feudal administration. Agents of Dilisnya or the Kargat would pay a handsome price for the book, perhaps paying as much as 500 pieces of gold. If the party is unwise in their bargaining, their customer may offer them an outrageous sum of money only to lure

the party into a trap, slay them, and simply take the book.

**T2: Storage Closet**

This room contains the materials used by Hellman in his gruesome rituals. The wooden door is locked with a fine lock that can be opened with a gold key or an open lock check against a DC 30. The closet contains a plethora of spell components, including but not limited to bat fur, bits of stone and minerals, charcoal, glass rods, miscellaneous gems and pearls worth a total of 100 gold, pickled frogs and countless parts of the human anatomy held in jars of alcohol. A thorough search of the closet yields the material components needed to cast any arcane spell described in the Player's Handbook of third level or lower.

**T3: Private Mess**

This was the room where Hellman and his personal guard took meals. Just as with the officer's mess on the third floor, Hellman reserved a hefty black throne for himself. There is a meal of bread, duck and beer left on the table in this room. The meal is cold but each serving acts as a whole days ration. A collection of geists reside in this room, amusing themselves by levitating the table, the chairs and the plates. If anyone tries to interrupt the game, they drop their playthings and flee to another room.

**T4: Stairway**

This is the stairway to the floor above and the location of the last of Castle Falkenstein's garrison. The leader of the guards is a hulking brute of a man, distinguished by his massive black beard.

**Sandmen, Mnk 6 (4):** hp 28 each.

*Combat:* The sandmen fight with the Knights as a coordinated unit. The four monks use their unseen ability to remain invisible on the steps, close by the bottom of the staircase. They wait for their opponents to reach the top of the stairs and engage the knights. With the invaders thus engaged the sandmen attack the rear ranks. Though the sandmen are fearsome, they are not foolish. If the battle goes poorly for them then they flee from combat. If the invaders somehow manage to break through the line of knights, then the monks pursue them.

**Knights Kommando, Ftr 6 (3):** hp 55 each

*Combat:* The knights rush into combat and soak up the invader's first assaults. They throw axes into their opponents as they reach the midpoint up the stairs and then prepare for melee. The knights fight at the very top of the steps to keep their enemies further down the steps and gain the advantage of higher ground. If reduced to 13 hit points or less the knights gain a +2 bonus to hit rolls and armour class from the feat *back to the wall*. The knights fight to the death and pursue the invaders if they manage to flee.

**Captain Wrathburn, Ftr 9:** CR 10; HD 9D10+36; hp 77; Init +7; Spd 40 ft; AC 22 (Adamantine Breast Plate + 7, Dex +3, Large Shield +2); Atk +17/+13 melee (1D10+9, adamantine bastard sword, 17-20/\*2 crit.), +13 ranged (1D6+5, range 10 ft., masterwork throwing axe); SA *Man Hunter*; SQ *Combat Training*; AI LE; SV Fort +10, Ref +6, Will +4; Str 17, Dex 17, Con 18, Int 12, Wiz 13, Cha 9.

*Skills and Feats:* Handle animal +11, Hide +15, Move Silently +15, ride +15; Back to the wall, cleave, greater cleave, exotic weapon proficiency,

improved initiative, improved critical (bastard sword), improved unarmed strike, power attack, weapon focus (bastard sword), weapon specialization (bastard sword).

*Combat:* Wrathburn is a terrifying foe in battle. He is a master of the blade and his skill in the lethal arts rivals that of anyone in Falkovnia. He throws his axe into the melee between the knights and the adventurers and stands ready to replace any knight who falls. Wrathburn is fanatically loyal to Drakov and his military, so he eagerly fights to the death.

*Combat Readiness:* Knights Kommando are specially trained to always live in a constant state of readiness and to fight multiple opponents and. Knights Kommando receive their dexterity bonus even when flatfooted or when struck by an invisible opponent. Furthermore, knights kommando cannot be flanked, except by a rogue with at least four more levels than the knight's hit dice.

*Combat training:* The skills Climb, Hide and Move Silently are always considered class skills.

*Man Hunter:* Knights Kommandos are trained to slay human prey. They are thoroughly trained in the vulnerabilities of humans. All attack and damage rolls made by the kommando on human opponents gains a +1 insight bonus.

*Equipment:* Wrathburn is a practical man so he carries nothing but weapons and armour. In his possession is a masterwork throwing axe, a large shield, an adamantine breastplate and an adamantine bastard sword. Wrathburn's shield is adorned with the double K emblem of the Knights Kommando. Wrathburn wears no helmet; his fearsome face bears the jagged scars he

has suffered for this vanity. On his belt he wears a ring holding a golden key.

#### **T5: Wrathburn's Quarters**

This spartanly furnished room is the quarters for Captain Wrathburn. There is nothing of interest here say a large collection of war trophies. Amongst his mementoes include a mummified hand, broken sword hilts and a human skull.

A geist from the dungeon escaped into this room. Ever restless the geist amuses itself by juggling Wrathburn's war trophies. If the geist is interrupted it quit its game and starts throwing the objects at the first person through the door. The geist is a terrible shot, so he misses with each throw. Once the spirit runs out of ammunition, it flees.

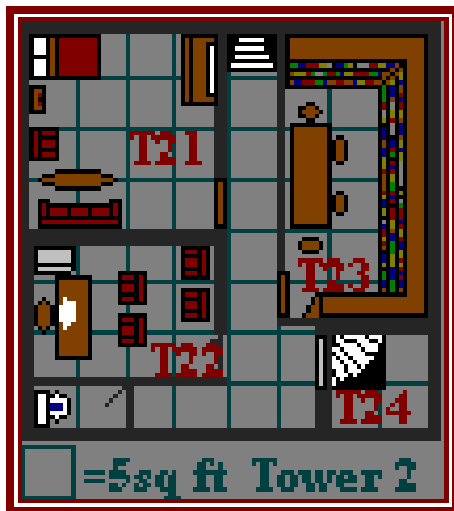
#### **T6: Karn's Quarters**

This once was the quarters for Captain Jack Karn and holds all of his worldly possessions. This room is filled with clutter, ranging from stuffed elf heads to a plaster statue of a mongoose. Beside his bed rests a chest containing several spare fatigues, 25 gold coins, fifty silver coins, a master work short sword and a metal box locked with a poor quality lock that can be opened with either an open lock check against a DC of 20, or with the little skeleton key found on Captain Karn. The box is fragile and can be broken open, but doing so destroys its contents. The box contains more than a dozen syringes of primal serum, an alchemical substance that glows a bright green even in daylight. This is the loup-garou phenotype serum and can temporarily transform anyone who uses it into an uncontrollable beast.

A thorough search of the room reveals that Karn was an avid collector

of pornographic etchings. The assembled etchings hanging on his wall can fetch as much as 150 gold from another aficionado. Underneath his mattress a pouch containing fifteen small rubies and emeralds, each worth seventy-five gold pieces.

## Tower Level 2



If the invading party has ascended to this floor, they find it unguarded. This area is unguarded, but investigative characters will find this area far from harmless.

### T21: Hellman's Room

This room was Hellman's personal quarters. The door to this room is locked with a fine quality mechanism, which can be opened with a gold key or an open lock check against a DC 30. According to his superior rank the Colonel possessed the finest quarters. The room is decorated with Falkovnian tapestries commemorating Drakov's conquests in Borcan and Dorvinia. These propagandist artworks can fetch as much as seventy-five gold pieces on the free market. In the chest beside his bed are a pair of military uniforms and a pouch containing 100 gold coins. On the dresser to the opposite side of the room

is a box containing an extensive set of Falkovnian medals. These medals may be worth as much as a 100 gold pieces to a collector or 50 gold to a curiosity shop.

Beside the medals is Hellman's personal journal. This leather bound book contains a detailed history of Hellman's career leading up to the present date. By spending ten minutes reading through the diary a character may make an intelligence check to learn some important information. The following chart describes the information gained by the check. Each check grants the information from the highest category and everything below it.

Check Result	Information
5 or less	A quick skim of the journal reveals that Hellman spent most of his life in the military and is now the Colonel in charge of Castle Falkenstein.
10 or less	A few key pages outline hideous human sacrifices that Hellman has used to buy power from demons.
15 or less	A late entry in the journal describes Hellman's horror when he accidentally tore open a gate into a realm of elemental evil. The entry goes on to say that the tear is contained in a "summoning circle", but not before its vile energies warped his own body.
20 or less	A few scribbled entries reveal that the presence of the gate has released the spirits of Hellman's victims. The haunting has been



minor so far, but the disturbances are increasing in severity.

25 or less Entries early in the diary describe an affair where Hellman seduced a sorceress names Lannel, married her, and then tortured her to extort the secrets of magic. Latter entries show that Hellman fears that his wife has returned to haunt him. To prevent her from meddling, he erected three warding statues in the sacrificial room.

26 or less Though never explicitly stated, the journal hints that the castle is in great peril. The gate is unstable in it's circle and if released would certainly swallow the whole edifice.

More dangerous is the presence of Lannel and the spirits. Hellman fears that without the three warding statues, the spirits could destroy him.

#### **T22: Hellman's Office**

This room is Hellman's office, the area where he stores the records and intelligence reports gathered from spies in Borca. This room includes an expensive oak desk, several chairs and a cabinet with letters sent from spies within Borca. These letters contain amazingly intimate details of courtly intrigue in Borca, as well as information on the movements of soldiers and the collection of taxes. Perhaps more importantly these letters hint at the identity of more than a dozen spies inside Borcan society. These letters are priceless documents. Borcan nobles and

agents of Dilisnya would pay nearly any price for these letters, though they are just as likely to murder the party to obtain them.

#### **T23: Library**

Hellman's library is an extensive collection of tomes of magic. There are several spell books in the library. The assembled collection contains every spell found in the player's handbook at third level or lower. The entire library contains enough information to grant a +10 bonus to any knowledge (arcane), knowledge (lower planes) or knowledge (religion) check.

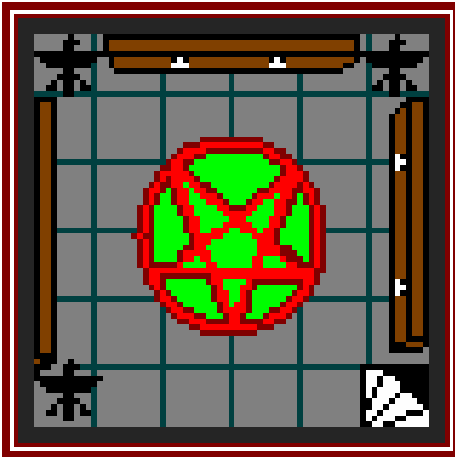
A geist has taken refuge in the library. If anyone stays in the library for longer than a minute, the geist tires to drive them off by throwing books. If the invaders don't leave, then the geist gives up and flees.

#### **T24: Stairs**

This room contains the stairs to the third floor of the tower. The door is locked with a fine lock that can be opened with either a golden key or an open lock check against a DC 30. If someone tries to open the door without first unlocking the door, the wall just adjacent to the stairwell fires a barrage of darts.

**Hail of Poison Needles:** CR 3; +20 ranged (2D4, poison); Search (DC 25); Disable Device (DC 25). *Note:* Can strike all characters in the ten square foot section directly before the door, as well as anyone in the hallway. The poison coating the needles can be resisted with a fortitude save against a DC 20. The initial damage and secondary is 1D6 strength damage.

## Tower Floor 3



The third floor is the final level of the pyramid shaped tower. The length of the spiral stairs to the third floor is twenty feet, and anyone upon the stairs is considered to be in the line of sight of anyone at the top of the stairs.

In the centre of the room is a summoning circle. The circle contains a gate filled with vile energies, just barely kept in check by the pentagram. Anyone inside the circle suffers 8D6 points of unholy energy each round that they are within the circle. The circle itself is vulnerable. A character may take a standard action to break the circle. If this occurs the gate begins to expand. In the first round everyone within the tower section of the castle is exposed to the vile energies and takes 8D6 points of damage with no save. If this occurs, and if any of the adventurers survive, proceed to the end of the adventure.

In the three corners of the room are three wooden statues. These warding statues keep the angry spirits of Hellman's victims at bay. Each statue weighs fifty pounds, has a hardness of 5 and can take as much as 15 points of damage before being destroyed. If all three statues are destroyed, proceeded to the end of the adventure.

### Colonel Hellman, Ftr 2 Sor 7:

CR 11; medium sized outsider (half fiend, half human); HD 2D10+7D4+33; hp 68; Init +7; Spd 30 ft; AC 14 (+3 Dex, +1 natural); Atk +9/+9 melee (claws 1D4+4) and +4 (1D6+2, bite) or +8 ranged (alchemist's fire); SA Spells, spell abilities; SQ Dark vision 60ft, Half fiend resistances, spells, spell abilities; Al LE; SV Fort +8, Ref +7, Will +8; Str 18, Dex 16, Con 16, Int 16, Wiz 12, Cha 16.

*Skills and Feats:* alchemy +7, concentration +9, climb +9, ride +8, jump +9, knowledge (arcane) +9, spell craft +5; heighten spell, improved initiative, iron will, lightning reflexes, spell focus (necromancy), toughness \*2.

*Sorcerer Spells* (6/7/7/5; base save DC = 13 + spell level, DC = 15 for necromancy spells): 0- daze, detect magic, disrupt undead, flare, ray of frost, read magic, resistance 1<sup>st</sup> – cause fear, grease, mage armour, magic missile, ray of enfeeblement 2<sup>nd</sup> – blindness/deafness, blur, Melf's acid arrow 3<sup>rd</sup> – slow, vampiric touch.

*Half-Fiend Abilities:* Exposure to extra planar energy has given Colonel Hellman the following spell-like abilities: Darkness 3/day, desecrate 1/day, unholy blight 1/day, poison 3/day and contagion 1/day. All abilities effect as if cast by a spellcaster of 9<sup>th</sup> level.

*Combat:* Colonel Hellman mixes combat with vile magic, preferring to use his spells to weaken his opponents before closing to melee. Before the invaders open the doors to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor Hellman casts mage armour on himself, increasing his AC by 3, followed by blur. He prepares an action to cast a *slow* spell casts on the first character to enter the door. He follows it with a *grease* spell on the stairs to prevent anyone from climbing up after him. By

the third round Hellman throws a bottle of alchemist's fire at the slowed character.

If more members of the party force their way into the stairwell, the colonel uses his *unholy blight* spell ability to strike the invaders. Otherwise Hellman continues the pattern of slow spells and alchemist's fire three times. He then orders his familiar to deliver the vampiric touch spell in melee, preferring to hit someone he has *slowed*. Once the eagle has attacked twice, he orders it back up to the third floor and switches to acid arrows.

If the party tries to use missile weapons from the doorway on the second floor, Hellman has the advantage of a total of 2/3 cover granted by the staircase and the floor. From behind cover he uses magic missiles to fell the invaders, or orders Samedi to fly down and deliver *blindness* spells with its touch.

If the party somehow closes to melee, Hellman resorts to the poison spell-like ability, then falling on his lethal claws and teeth. If he meets with hard resistance he retreats further back into the room and waits between the wall and the summoning circle. In melee he tries to grapple opponents and throw them into the circle.

If faced with overwhelming resistance, Hellman resorts to his final weapon. Ever the soldier, Hellman decides to destroy the castle rather than let invaders take it. He throws himself into the summoning circle, thereby releasing the gate from its enclosure and triggering disaster.

*Half Fiend Resistances:* Hellman is immune to poison and has acid, cold, electricity and fire resistance 20.

*Darkvision:* Colonel Hellman has the ability to see in total darkness for a range of 60 feet.

*Equipment:* Blood stained robes, belt of spell components and three bottles of alchemist's fire.

**Samedi, Half Fiend Eagle Dread Familiar:** small sized outsider (half fiend, half eagle); hp 34; Init +4; Spd 80 ft. fly (average); AC 21 (+4 Dex, +6 natural, +1 size); Atk +9/+9 melee (claws 1D3+2) and +4 (1D4+2, bite); SQ Dark vision 60ft, familiar abilities, Half fiend resistances; Al LE; SV Fort +7, Ref +7, Will +6; Str 14, Dex 19, Con 14, Int 10, Wiz 14, Cha 8.

*Skills and Feats:* listen +6, spot +6; improved evasion.

*Half Fiend Resistances:* Samedi the familiar is immune to poison and has acid, cold, electricity and fire resistance 20.

*Dark vision:* The half fiend eagle familiar has the ability to see in total darkness for a range of 60 feet.

*Familiar Abilities:* Samedi has the ability to speak with his master and with other birds of prey. The bird has the improved evasion ability and may deliver the touch attack spells of his master. While near his master, Samedi grants Hellman a +2 bonus to spot and listen checks.

## Concluding the Adventure

If players can free the captives and lead them out of the castle, then the girls make good their escape. The villagers will remain eternally grateful to the adventurers, the party is considered heroes and the tale of their deeds will be told for generations. Many of the villagers leave Patterborne for towns farther from the border, spreading word of the heroes.

If the party manages to slay Hellman, then the riches of the castle are theirs for the taking. After a few days the Falkovnian army realizes what has occurred and prepares to retake the castle. After such a sound defeat Drakov is greatly disillusioned with its own forces and is reluctant to face Borca's army. The castle is garrisoned once more and border defences are doubled.

However, if Hellman has the opportunity he will release the gate from its circle. Everyone within the tower is exposed to the vile energies and takes 8D6 points of damage with no saving throw. The castle begins to crumble and the hefty masonry of the Keep begins to crash down on everyone still inside. For every 5 rounds that the survivors are inside the castle, they must make a reflex save against a DC 15 or be struck with a chunk of falling rock. Those hit suffer 4D6 points of crushing damage. In 10 minutes the castle collapses in on itself, killing anyone still inside. The gate appears to be destroyed in the collapse but the ruins remain tainted with vile energy.

If the party manages to destroy all three warding statues on the third tower floor, the spirits of Hellman's victims take their awful revenge. Before the party's horrified eyes an army of cadavers materialize. Led by the mangled corpse of a half elf woman, the geists fall upon the Colonel and drag him into the gate, where he dies horribly. The geists rampage inside the castle, tearing the building apart and killing any living soldiers still inside. Though they ignore the adventurers at first, they loathe the presence of any living being and try to drive them away by throwing heavy objects or even starting fires.

If, for some reason, the players flee the Castle before cleansing it its defenders, then the Falkovnian army gets word of the invasion. In a week's time, a force of a hundred men is raised to attack. Patterborne will be burned to the ground and its people slaughtered in revenge. The conflict dies down into a border skirmish, and an armistice is formed. Eventually, life on the border returns to normal.

# From the Lab

## Falkovnian Super Soldiers

Surrounded by the most advanced domains of the core, Falkovnia is an island of medieval ignorance. Powerful enemies surround the kingdom of Vlad Drakov; with the impenetrable wall of dead to the North and the superior military of the Mutual Defence Pact to the south, Falkovnia has been boxed in. Though Vlad can produce endless armies of men, they are nothing compared to the forces that have been arrayed against him. The blood and steel of Falkovnia has proven to be nothing more than a wave crashing against the shoals of enemy borders.

Since 722 Falkovnia has been at relative peace with its neighbours, limiting the military to minor scrimmages and political posturing. Drakov's has been tormented by his military failures and has devoted the resources of his kingdom to the advancement of his military. Falkovnia has been denied the power that is used against him; both magic and gunpowder are beyond Drakov's reach. Yet the despot's insatiable lust for conquest has driven the minds of the military to seek out new weapons. Rather than rely upon weapons or enchantments, the Falkovnian military has strove to discover the next greatest advancement in warfare: the Super Soldier.

The military of Falkovnia has devoted great efforts to many different experiments to improve upon Falkovnia's greatest resource. These programs incorporate psychological conditioning and chemical engineering, pushing the subjects far beyond the

limits of physical and mental tolerance. Similar to the training of Talons, these programs transform human beings into remorseless predators. Out of hundreds of test subjects only a few dozen survive to the end and even fewer retain sanity. Despite the ridiculous inefficiency of these programs, the surviving test subjects are superior warriors.

Few in number, these soldiers are grouped into elite units to form special strike teams. These teams are Drakov's secret weapons, tested thoroughly upon rebellious Falkovnians and cloistered in hidden fortresses and training camps. In the shadows they wait, nursing their psychotic hatred and dreaming of the time that they will take their rightful place. They are the masters of the battlefield, horrors made of human flesh. They are the super soldiers.

### Knights Kommando

When Falkovnia first emerged from the mists, its knights resembled those of every other domain. Elite noble warriors, they were trained since birth to ride and to fight. Originally Falkovnia expended knights as readily as any other human soldier, yet as the decades past, the availability of noble born warriors dwindled. Perhaps the greatest factor in the age of peace has been the population collapse of the feudal nobles. Rather than abandon knighthood, Falkovnia has attempted to recreate the knight, taking noble breeding to the next phase.

Responding to the demands for elite warriors, the Ministry of Science

experimented to create a new breed of elite soldiers to replace the shattered knighthood. The ethnologists of the Ministry of Science specially selected peasants for breeding with Falkovnian nobles, spawning bastard children with enriched genetic heritage and purity. These children were fed experimental drugs throughout development and given extensive surgical reconstruction, enhancing their physical power and stamina. These creations were subjected to constant training and testing, culling the weak from their numbers and transforming them into heartless killers.

While these knights lacked the horses and noble birth that distinguished their predecessors, they continued the tradition of the elite warrior, surpassing their chivalric forefathers. By 750 the second generation of Kommandos have risen to adulthood and entered the military in special units. While few in number, rumours of these knights have disseminated throughout the army and beyond Falkovnian borders. Initial tests upon rebellious Falkovnians have proven that these knights are far superior to human warriors, many times stronger and tougher than any normal human.

All kommandos are humans and gain all human racial benefits. Knights Kommando are always equipped with the finest arms and armour available to the military. Kommandos are taught to consider Vlad Drakov as their progenitor, though their loyalty is no greater than that of any other soldier. Like most Falkovnians, Knights Kommando are branded with the emblem of the falcon. They are also tattooed on the arm with the double K shown below:



Though stronger and faster than normal humans, Kommandos are antisocial creatures. Some are prideful and haughty, believing themselves to be inherently superior to all humans. The majority are merely maladjusted and socially inept. Knights Kommando organize themselves to “the Unit”, the groupings of the knights. Each Kommando is grouped into a unit at birth. Most Kommandos are highly experienced in combat before reaching adulthood. While in childhood they are sparred against adult captives and prisoners of war. Each unit is trained for different combat duties, including cavalry, guerrilla warfare, siege tactics and bodyguard detail.

### Knight Kommando

The template Knight Kommando can be applied to any human who has been raised under Kommando training. The human retains its base statistics and abilities, with the following exceptions.

**Hit Dice:** As base character.

**Speed:** The base speed of a Kommando is increased above the base character by 10ft.

**AC:** As base creature

**Attacks:** As base creature

**Damage:** Same as base creature.

**Special Attacks:** As base character.

**Special Qualities:** Knights Kommando gain the following special qualities.

*Combat Readiness:* Knights Kommando are specially trained to always live in a constant state of readiness and to fight multiple opponents and. Knights Kommando receive their dexterity bonus even when flatfooted or when struck by an invisible opponent. Furthermore, knights kommando cannot be flanked, except by



a rogue with at least four more levels than the knight's hit dice.

**Combat training:** The skills climb, hide and move silently are always considered class skills.

**Man Hunter:** Knights Kommandos are trained to slay human prey. They are thoroughly trained in the vulnerabilities of humans. All attack and damage rolls made by the kommando on human opponents gains a +1 racial bonus.

**Saves:** Same as base creature.

**Abilities:** Knights kommando gain the following ability adjustments:

Str +4, Dex +4, Con +4, Cha -2

**Skills:** Same as base character.

**Feats:** Same as base creature. Knights Kommando gain the feat improved unarmed strike for free.

**Climate/Terrain:** Falkovnia

**Organization:** Squad (2-6)

**Challenge Rating:** +1

**Alignment:** Always Lawful evil

**Advancement:** By character class

## Project Sandman

The fall of the night often heralds the end of battle. As the sun dips behind horizon, true warfare becomes impossible. Exhausted soldiers make poor fighters, as Drakov found to his eternal frustration. While the massive army of Drakov marched proudly beneath the sun, the darkness of night cloaked the scrimmaging guerrillas of Borca and Dementlieu. As the spent army rested its enemies struck from the shadows, raining chaos and death. Vlad has pushed the Ministry of Science to discover a method to free soldiers of the need for rest and sleep.

Project Sandman set out to relieve soldiers of the need for both sleep and rest of any kind. Under the guidance of the infamous Doctor Zeitman, soldiers

were conditioned into a profound insomnia while chemical therapy heightened their metabolism to a dangerous level. Subjects were trained in meditation and martial exercises to allow them to control their circadian rhythms and their bodies were surgically altered to allow biological waste products to be drained from their bodies. The process permanently immunized soldiers to exhaustion. However, the brutal conditioning causes horrible side effects. While these "sandmen" as they are called, are immune to sleep, they are vulnerable to hallucinations.

The process of training a sandman requires psychological conditioning over the course of a year, intense martial training, extensive brain surgery and chemical therapy. After each month of training, the subject must make a madness check against a DC of 5 + the number of months in the program. If the subject remains sane throughout the year, he gains the Sandman template.

Many of the surviving sandmen are trained to be the scouts and spies of the Falkovnian army. These nocturnal rangers rule the nocturnal forests, their unblinking gaze spotting any intruders, even in the darkness. Some sandmen continue their martial and mental training, becoming experts in unarmed combat. These soldiers make excellent spies and assassins, lethal even while unarmed and unarmored.

## Sandman

The sandman template can be applied to any humanoid creature. The creature retains its base statistics and abilities, with the following exceptions.

**Hit Dice:** As base Creature

**Speed:** Same as Base creature

**AC:** As base creature

**Attacks:** As base creature

**Damage:** As base creature

**Special Attacks:** As base creature

**Special Qualities:** Sandmen gain the following special qualities.

*Hallucinations:* No amount of training has ever cured a sandman of dreams. Rather than dream during sleep, sandmen suffer from hallucinations. Since sandmen are nocturnal, these hallucinations only occur during the day. This effect is identical to the madness effect of the same name; say that the sandman does not suffer from ability damage. This quality is a permanent.

*Insomniac:* Sandmen do not need to sleep. Through training and surgery Sandmen gain the ability to expunge cerebral wastes through their pores, which allows them to function without rest or sleep. Sandmen are immune to sleep effects.

*Tireless:* Sandmen have the ability to purge their body of metabolic waste, expelling the toxins through their nose, ears and pores. This ability makes them immune to exhaustion. Sandmen gain a +10 bonus to any constitution check for prolonged activity such as running, swimming or holding breath.

**Saves:** Same as base creature.

**Abilities:** Same as base creature.

**Skills:** Sandmen gain a +4 racial bonus to concentrate checks. They also gain a +6 racial bonus to listen and spot checks during the night.

**Feats:** Same as base creature. Sandmen gain the feats alertness and blind fight for free.

**Climate/Terrain:** Falkovnia

**Organization:** Squad (2-6)

**Challenge Rating:** Same as base character

**Alignment:** Usually Lawful evil

**Advancement:** By character class

## Operation Tiersoldaten

For decades the infamous Doctor Vjorn Horstman has led Drakov's Ministry of Science. His brilliant mind has produced many abominable experiments, but none more terrifying than the primal serum. Through brutal experimentation Horstman has synthesized the essence of lycanthropy and harnessed the dread disease into a terrifying weapon.

Though the primal serum produced a temporary transformation, its usefulness as a weapon of war remained questionable. The indomitable Horstman refused to abandon his project and refined his efforts. Using the primal serum as a template, Horstman produced a series of treatments to transform ordinary humans into lethal lycanthropes. These "tiersoldaten", or primal soldiers as they are known, appear to be nothing more than ordinary humans, yet with an injection of the primal serum they can become horrible hybrid monsters, capable of tearing through legions of inferior humans. Most importantly, these primal soldiers retain their rational minds, combining military discipline with animalistic fury.

The process of creating a primal soldier is a long series of medical treatments. The chemical compounds used in the creation of a primal soldier are of the improbable technological level. The whole treatment takes over six months and involves a series of torturous transformations. At each month in the process the subject must make a fortitude save against a DC 10 +1 for each month in the process, or be slain by the bone breaking metamorphosis. Naturally, survivorship is highest amongst experienced military personnel.

Primal soldiers who survive the whole treatment become infected lycanthropes of a phenotypes determined during the treatments. Thus far, Horstman has concocted treatments to create mountain loup-garous, werebats, werebears, and weretigers. Unlike normal infected lycanthropes, these primal soldiers are able to retain their personalities while in hybrid shape. Furthermore, their metamorphosis can only occur after they inject themselves with a dose of primal serum. This serum is the trigger for their lycanthropy and immediately forces them to transform.

### Primal Soldier

After surviving the initial treatments, a primal soldier gains the following template. The subject retains his base abilities and statistics, with the following exceptions. This template can be applied to any humanoid that has undergone the “tiersoldaten” treatment. The creature’s type changes to shape changer. The primal soldier gains certain qualities of the “base animal”, determined by the phenotypes of lycanthropy.

**Hit Dice:** As base creature or base animal of the lycanthropy, which ever results in the greatest number of hit points.

**Speed:** Same as base character. The primal soldier uses the base animal’s speed when in hybrid form.

**AC:** A primal soldier gains a +2 natural armour class bonus in human form. In hybrid form a primal soldier’s natural armour bonus increases to +5.

**Attacks:** Same as base character. In hybrid form the primal soldier gains the attacks of the base animal chosen.

**Damage:** Same as base creature. When in hybrid form the primal soldier’s

damage is determined by the base animal.

**Special Attacks:** As base creature. Primal soldiers do not gain the *lycanthropic empathy* or *curse of lycanthropy* special attacks. While in hybrid form primal soldiers gain the special attacks of the base animal.

**Special Qualities:** Primal soldiers gain the following special qualities.

*Alternate form (su):* Primal soldiers may assume the hybrid form of a lycanthrope of their phenotypes. They may only assume this form after being injected with a syringe of primal serum. This metamorphosis does not transform any gear held. The transformation requires a standard action. A primal soldier remains in hybrid form for a duration of 30 minutes before changing back into human form. Upon transforming either to or from hybrid shape the primal soldier heals a number of hit points as though he has spent one full day resting. Slain primal soldiers in hybrid shape revert back into human form.

*Damage Reduction (su):* Primal soldiers in hybrid form gain damage reduction +15/silver. Even mountain loup-garou primal soldier phenotypes are affected by silver.

*Fast Healing:* All primal soldiers gain fast healing 3 in hybrid form.

**Saves:** Same as base creature. In hybrid form a primal soldier’s saves are determined by the base character or by the base animal, which ever is highest. In hybrid form primal soldiers gain a +2 racial bonus to fortitude and will saves.

**Abilities:** Same as base creature. In hybrid form their phenotypes modifies the ability scores of a primal soldier.

**Skills:** Same as base character. In hybrid form primal soldiers gain a +8 bonus to listen, search and spot checks.

**Feats:** Same as base creature. In hybrid form a primal soldier gains bonus feats depending on lycanthrope phenotypes.

**Climate/Terrain:** Falkovnia  
**Organization:** Solitary or Squad  
 (2-6)

**Challenge Rating:** +2

**Alignment:** Usually Lawful evil

**Advancement:** By character class



## Primal Soldier Phenotypes

Phenotype	Base Animal	Ability Adjustments	Damage	Bonus Feats
Mountain Loup-garou	Dire Wolf	Str +14, Dex +4, Con +6, Wiz +2	1D8 bite	Blind-Fight, Improved Initiative
Werebat	Dire Bat	Str +6, Dex +12, Con +6, Wiz +4	1D8 bite	Blind-Fight, Flyby Attack
Werebear	Brown Bear	Str +16, Dex +2, Con +8	2 Claws 1D8, Bite 2D8	Blind-Fight, Multiattack, Power Attack
Weretiger	Tiger	Str +12, Dex +4, Con +6	2 Claws 1D8, Bite 2D6	Blind-Fight, Multiattack, Power Attack

# Secrets and Sorcery

## The Warden Foundation

Beyond the scope of man's knowledge hide hidden horrors. They prey upon the innocent and extend the hand of the Red Death. Yet while these creatures may be concealed in the darkness they are far from safe. Where horrors prey upon humanity there are those men and women who seek vengeance. Such hunters of evil are not without friends in the world for there is one clandestine organization that supports their efforts. The Warden Foundation exists to destroy the minions of the Red Death and wipe the taint of evil from the earth.

### History

The wealthy American industrialist Howard Warden founded The Warden Foundation in 1875. In 1873 Warden lost his wife, his youngest child and most of his left hand in an attack by a pack of wolves in Montana. After being rescued by a hiker Warden claimed that the animals that had attacked him were monstrous wolf-men. The doctors kept him hospitalized long after his wounds had healed, fearing that the animal attack had driven him to dementia. Though he refused to accept that the beasts that had slain his family were no more the mundane animals, Warden was eventually released. The industrialist returned to his business with a dangerous obsession and a new purpose.

Almost immediately he diverted funds from his company and created the Warden Foundation as a method of seeking out supernatural creatures. For

eight years the foundation struggled to find evidence of the paranormal but Warden refused to relent. It wasn't until 1883 that the Foundation found another instance of the murderous shape-shifting wolf-men in Montana. By then Warden was prepared to take a terrible revenge. In the dying days of the Wild West, it was all too easy for the wealthy industrialist to assemble a small army of gunmen and bounty hunters to wage war upon the horrible creatures. In the initial battles many hunters were lost before Warden realised the true nature of the monsters and commissioned the manufacture of silver bullets. With the proper equipment Warden's stalkers decimated the packs of Montana werewolves, as well as the regular wolfs that served as their slaves.

In the aftermath of the slaughter Warden had found the revenge that he had dreamt of but he was unsatisfied. For the next six years the Warden Foundation has monitored news reports all over the civilized world, searching for the next opportunity to strike at the forces of darkness. In the meantime, Warden's industrial investments have increased, allowing him to fund a standing bounty on all the creatures of the night.

### Activities

The Warden Foundation splits its resources between maintaining the bounty and hunting the monsters of the world. The foundation operates a number of offices in the Britain, France,

Germany and the USA. From these quarters, the Foundation monitors every newspaper available, searching for signs of the supernatural menace.

The foundation maintains a number of occultists who investigate each possible threat. When a threat is recognized the Foundation contacts its small army of mercenaries and dispatches them to exterminate the threat. When not on assignment, the Foundation's freelancers are engaged in collecting the bounty. The Warden Foundation pays a hefty bounty on the bodies of all manner of inhuman creatures. A number of cryptozoology experts are retained to identify the bodies of the abominations brought in by the freelancers. As well, occultists and historians are often tapped to research the horrors of the night.

The Foundation is always on the lookout for new freelancers, though in the past there have been unfortunate incidents of untrustworthy individuals and even abominations being accidentally recruited. At every officer is an elite trouble-shooter specially trained to investigate the members of the organization and contend with any complications.

Despite the thorough research of Warden's historians, the organization has not even scratched the surface with its investigations. Countless abominations hide right under the Foundation's nose. The Warden foundation is woefully ignorant such concepts as Lords, qabals or even the Red Death itself.

## Membership and Organization

Membership in the Foundation is divided between permanent employees

and freelancers. The permanent employees take directions from Warden and his personal staff. They are well paid but are often overworked. The staff in every office is made up of a number of investigators with at least one cryptozoologist and trouble-shooter. Permanent employees undergo a rigorous background check before being accepted, though long-term freelancers often find a comfortable permanent position at the Foundation when they are too old or too injured to continue the chase.

To avoid public scrutiny employees are required to agree to a strict confidentiality agreement. Warden's lawyers prosecute any infringement on that agreement to the utmost of the law. By 1890, there are at least two hundred permanent employees working in Europe and North America. Warden hopes to hire more but the selection process is kept slow to ensure only the most trustworthy employees are hired.

Freelancers enjoy a less structured relationship to the foundation. The majority of these men are little better than gun wielding toughs. Many of the freelancers are hardened veterans of the Wild West and only a small fraction of the freelancers are younger than middle aged. Despite their apparent age freelancers are lethal opponents, often surprising careless monsters. Freelancers travel in cells of three to ten, taking advantage of the standing bounty and waiting for the next telegraph from the foundation. Individual cells recruit the new freelancers, pushing newcomers through the gauntlet of the hunt. The number of freelancers is only a little above one hundred though their number fluctuates as old members retire and new members are recruited.



## Resources

Warden's industrial investments give the Foundation limitless wealth. The offices of the Foundation are outfitted with the latest equipment and extensive libraries of paranormal information. Freelancers are equipped with the best tools available, including the finest firearms available. Through extensive connections the offices of the Foundation can acquire less orthodox items such as antiques, specially forged weapons or even holy water.

## Adventure Hooks

The Warden Foundation is a convenient patron for a group of adventurers. If such adventurers are accepted as freelancers, they can enjoy good funding from the organization and the freedom to pursue their own goals. The Warden Foundation is currently being investigated by a number of cabals, though these organizations have not been able to infiltrate the organization due to the cautious recruitment process.

## Wilson Coors

Male human, soldier 5: CR 5, SZ M humanoid; HD 5D10+10, HP 40; Inn +1; Spd 30; AC 11; Atk +7 melee (hunting knife, 1D4+2), +7 ranged (army pistol 1D8), +6 ranged (shotgun 4D6); AL NG; SV: Fort +6, Reflex +2, Will +3; Str 14, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 12, Wiz 14, Chr 13. Skills and Feats: climb +10, hide +9, move silently +9, spot +10; deadly aim, point blank shot, quick draw, rapid shot, weapon focus (army pistol).

Languages: English, Spanish

Equipment: 2 Army pistols, shotgun, hunting knife, 30 pistol rounds, 15 silver rifle rounds.

Wilson Coors is a lean old man with grey hair and skin as tough as tanned leather. The old man is in his seventies but he remains in good physical condition. Coors spent his life traveling across the lawless American frontier working as a bounty hunter and a gun for hire. As the West became less wild Coors drifted without purpose until he met Howard Warden and his organization of hunters. Coors was the first free lancer to join the Warden Foundation and the presence of the aged gunman drew other relics of the West into the fold. Wilson led most of the raids against the werewolves of Montana and afterwards advised Howard Warden on the commission of the standing bounty on all monsters. After a lengthy career as a hunter, Coors joined as a permanent employee of the foundation. Currently, he heads the Foundation's office in Texas.

Coors is a tough old fighter and an even tougher boss. Wilson keeps his staff working hard and goes to great lengths to hire on new freelancers. Coors has put a lot of pressure on the monsters that lurk in the Texan desert and forced countless abominations to flee from his grasp. Ever wary, Coors never leaves the office unarmed even though he lives in the city of Houston. The old man is still a cowboy at heart so he relies on frontier justice. When faced with a challenge Coors first reaction is to plug the offender full of holes.

# Tools of War

## Ammunition in the War on Evil

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century there are few weapons more deadly than a bullet. The bullet is a lethal invention indeed, capable of piercing armour, breaking bones and turning vital organs to putrid jelly. Yet while a slug of burning lead may prove lethal to a mortal man, many minions of darkness can shrug off mundane bullets as though they were buzzing flies. Many a brave man has died with guns ablaze, pumping round after round into a monster immune to bullets. Fortunately for those who hunt the children of the night, all fiends have a weakness. After researching the vulnerabilities of the creatures of the shadows, a resourceful gunsmith can merge modern weapon's technology with substances baneful to the minions of the Red Death. The following are just a sample of some of the ingenious tools used in the war on evil.

### Aqua Vampira

Vampires, the most feared children of the night. Immune to mundane weapons, these might parasites have plagued mankind for millennia. Even the youngest vampire is rendered immune to the effects of mortal weapons, effectively untouchable by all but the most extraordinary hunters. Yet mankind is a resourceful species and it was inevitable that a gunsmith faced the challenge to create an advanced form of ammunition capable of harming the undead.

An aqua vampire bullet is made of pure gold. While the precious metal is

both flashy and expensive, it is chosen primarily for its chemical properties. Once formed from gold the bullet is placed at the bottom of a font of holy water, most often in a well maintained church. The bullet is left in the font, where it is blessed nearly once each day and bathed in the pure essence of the holy water while the stability of gold prevents the bullet from tarnishing or contaminating the water. After 365 days the bullet has absorbed enough holy essence to be baneful to the dead flesh of a vampire. Finally the bullet is completed after it is primed with powder.

Each aqua vampira bullet is considered to be a magical weapon and bypasses the damage reduction of any vampire. The blessed gold of the bullet is disruptive to the negative energy that sustains a vampire, causing an extra 2D6 points of holy damage with each successful hit. This extra damage applies only to vampire spawn or creatures with the vampire template. While dangerous to vampires, the damage caused by the bullets can still be healed with the fast healing quality. Each aqua vampira bullet is made of a relatively pure gold, costing at least \$20. The process of blessing the bullet is priceless and can only be accomplished with the cooperation of a willing priest. This service cannot be purchased with money alone, though even a friendly priest may require a generous donation. At any one font only a dozen bullets can be blessed. Priming the bullet and encasing it in its cartridge requires a

gunsmith check against a DC 15, or be paid for with \$2.00. A few isolated monasteries produce these special bullets for their own use in the war on evil. Such holy institutions might be persuaded to part with some of their relics for a good cause and a generous donation.

## Grave Shells

The undead are miserable creatures trapped in the transition between life and death. Though these animate entities are well known for their hatred of the living, it is a little known fact that they fear the true touch of oblivion. While the touch of metal has no terror for undead spirits, the kiss of a true grave fills them with agony. Gravestones are more than markers for bodies; they are a potent symbol of the final rest to which all spirits must inevitably proceed. In the battle with incorporeal undead the stone of a tomb can serve as a potent tool with which to lay such spirits to their final rest.

A grave shell is a simple shotgun shell modified to harm incorporeal undead. The metal shot of the shell is removed and replaced with stone pellets crushed from a tombstone more than a century old. While less powerful than metal shot, these pellets are permeated by the harmony of true death. The damage die used by grave shells is a D4, so a grave shell uses within the first range increment of the shotgun would deal 4D4 points of damage. However, grave shells act as ghost touch weapons to incorporeal undead.

Grave shells require an ancient tombstone to be destroyed, so unless measures are taken to accommodate the grave, the creation process is considered an act of defilement. One shell can be made from a tombstone for every pound

of stone ground into shot. Grinding the stone into shot requires a craft: stonework check against a DC 10 and loading the shot into a shell requires a craft: gunsmith check against a DC 12. The whole process costs roughly \$5.00 for every shell, though convincing the appropriate experts to prepare the shell may require some fast-talking.

## Iron Tips

Perhaps the most underestimated creatures of all are the fey, the supernatural beings native to earth. As living embodiments of nature the fey reflect the corruption of the Red Death, they are vile creatures with a great mastery of magic. Heroes of the light are often taken back by the fey, for while they are physically delicate they are often immune to mundane weapons. Iron tipped bullets were first designed by an Irish gunsmith in 1865 as a means of harming the malignant fey who plagued his homeland. His design spread amongst the monster hunters of the world and has been modified to fit modern firearms.

An iron tipped bullet is simply a regular bullet with the traditional metal slug removed and replaced with a solid iron projectile. Iron tips are much softer than normal bullets, so each damage roll with an iron tip suffers a -1 circumstantial penalty. While powerful monsters, fey creatures are vulnerable to inherently nonmagical iron. Iron tips circumvent the damage reduction of any fey creature. Furthermore iron is a toxic material to both fey creatures and the abhorrent creatures known as hags. Whenever an iron tip strikes a hag or a fey the creature must make a fortitude save against a DC 15 or suffer 1D4 points of temporary constitution damage.

Iron tips must be made from modified bullets. Such a modification requires a craft: gunsmith check against a DC 14. An iron tipped bullet can be commissioned for roughly \$3.00 each, though most gunsmiths would require an order of at least a dozen before they will make the effort.

### Martyr Bullets

In the war upon evil, there is no better ammunition than the blood of the innocent. While countless heroes shed their blood in the fight against fiends, it is sure that few of them understood the power that their vital essence held. While mundane bullets pass harmlessly through the flesh of evil outsiders, martyr bullets are lethal to the flesh of such fiends. Martyr bullets are created by soaking ordinary bullets in the blood of a truly innocent character. This requires a true sacrifice on the part of the donator, since the blood letting required causes at least 1 point of temporary constitution damage. Each point of constitution damage can produce enough blood to thoroughly soak six bullets.

Such bloodletting is dangerous, requiring a character trained in surgery or healing to make a controlled incision into a vein and then to close the wound after the bloodletting. The process requires a successful check of the skill profession: medicine against a DC 15. For every two points by which the check fails, the donor suffers 1 additional point of temporary constitution damage. The process cannot be bought for any price, since a true innocent would never sell such a service.

Martyr bullets ignore the damage reduction on any evil elemental or outsider. Outsiders are especially vulnerable to the blood of a martyr; their own evil physiology is poisoned by the

pure essence of innocent life force. In addition to suffering normal damage the fiend suffers an additional 2D6 points of holy damage.

### Silver Mercury

Long have werebeast hunters sought a substance that could fell a raging lycanthrope, and as Gothic Earth stands in the wake of the age of chemistry these prayers have been answered. Silver mercury is a toxin lethal to lycanthropes. Combining their allergen to the element silver with the virulence of mercury compounds, qabalist chemists creates a form of ammunition that could very well slay a lycanthrope in a single shot.

The silver mercury bullet is a projectile built with a hollow point containing a quantity of silver mercury toxin. The silver mercury toxin must be synthesized by a chemist with a profession: chemist check against a DC 15. The bullet itself is constructed with a craft: gunsmith check against a DC 18. The process to create one bullet costs roughly \$10.00, and though the mercury can be purchased without difficulty, most gunsmiths will be reluctant to construct such a strange weapon.

Silver mercury hollow points are terrible weapons. The hollow point of the bullet adds extra damage to the point of impact, giving all damage rolls a +1 masterwork bonus. Silver mercury is a toxic substance, anyone who ingests or is injected with the toxin must make a fortitude save against a DC 15 or suffer 1D3 temporary constitution and wisdom damage. Furthermore, any lycanthrope hit by the silver mercury bullet suffers an additional 2D6 points of damage from the toxin.

# Credits

## Contributors

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Author of Absolution. I'm a Sociology student at MSSC College in Joplin Missouri. In addition to Ravenloft and 3rd Edition DnD, my interests include writing, movies, and social activism. I live in a ridiculously small apartment with my girlfriend Amanda, and my cat Odin. I've been playing DnD for 12 years, and I've been into in Ravenloft since the premiere of the Ravenloft Boxed Set. I'm also well known (and loved?) on the Malodorous Goat Tavern message board as The God Brain: the lovable vegetarian illithid enthusiast geek.

## Editors

**Conrad Clark, aka Chaos Nomad** [Dyazion1@aol.com](mailto:Dyazion1@aol.com). Author of "Soul Survivor" and editor of "Castle Falkenstein." An avid philosophy enthusiast, Conrad tends to enjoy spending time in bars, torpedo-fishing inebriated punters, often sending them over the edge and into a perpetual spiral of madness –and yes, he made the power checks... Areas of interest are: the Philosophy of Mind, specifically Personal Identity; the Philosophy of Religion; Modernism; and, The Gothic.

He first became interested in Ravenloft during the Red Box era. His favourite authors include Poe, and Tolkien.

**Dmitri Zorin** [MalVil@rambler.ru](mailto:MalVil@rambler.ru) Author of Feudalism in the Dread Realms and editor of Castle Falkenstein. Born in 1983, Moscow, Russia. Student of Moscow Institute of Radio, Electronics and Automatics (MIREA). Been playing D&D since approximately 1996-97, entered the mists in 1998. Enjoy gothic fiction, movies... and jungle music. Favourite writers: J.R.R. Tolkien, H.P. Lovecraft, B. Stoker, and Ed Greenwood (yes, I play Forgotten Realms too).

**Jason True aka Javier** [xaos313@hotmail.com](mailto:xaos313@hotmail.com). With the possible exception of Planescape, Ravenloft has been my favourite setting to both play in and DM. These particular tastes in campaign settings probably explain why I have a tendency to use various fiends in Ravenloft and have a gothic mood in many of my Planescape adventures. When I'm not brainstorming for new adventure ideas, my time is typically spent between finishing my medical degree and helping plan my wedding. In fact, I would like to dedicate this to my fiancée, Renee, who has been both patient and understanding of all my role-playing interests.

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Coming Soon!

Quoth the Raven Presents



The Amber Wastes

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