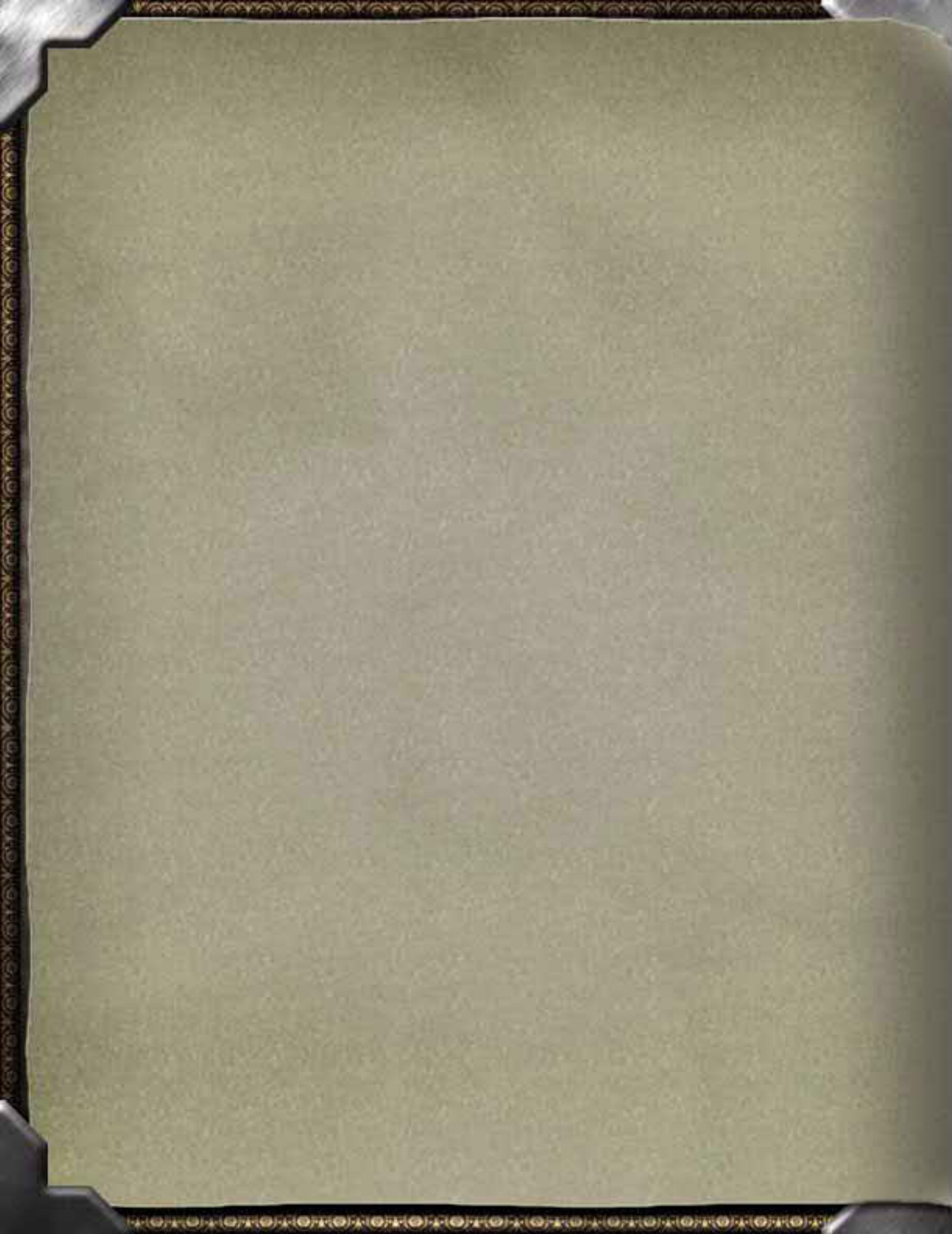


Quoth the Raven



XIV



Quoth the Raven

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Races of the Mists

Part I V - The Gnomic

By David "of the Fraternity" Gibson

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Introduction

Once again I greet you, my Esteemed Brothers. I hope this reaches you in your new home despite our diaspora. I cannot help but shoulder some of the blame for our home's destruction. Although, I know in my heart if I had attended the Manoir's dinner, I would surely have proved just as impotent. I immediately provided as much information as possible to my travelling Brothers, hoping my advice will speed their hunt for our Betrayer. Reflecting on my divided duties, I hope you will forgive the lateness of this missive and my latest report.

I began my chronicle on the gnomish folk (and the other subhuman races) almost two years ago and have now circled the entire Core. While I could focus my research on a single land or two when writing on the dwarf-folk or the Little People, my research of the gnomic race proved far more tiring. I had to visit almost every land on the Core to gather enough information to complete this report; I have encountered gnomes in Richemulot, Mordent, Dementlieu,

Lamordia, Darkon, Nova Vassa, and Valachan to name but a few.

As I write this, I am in Chateaufaux, having spent a lengthy number of months moving back and forth from Mordent to Valachan to communicate with the latter's gnomes. To say nothing of the problems I encountered early on in that dark wooden land. But, despite my weariness my heart is lighter than it has been in two years, lifted by the knowledge that this completes my task. The four major races have been catalogued and thoroughly examined.

I just wish I had not left the most difficult - the most maddening of races - to be my final study. While the other races I have chronicled have not been human, gnomes are the first race I would describe as truly inhuman. Their minds are unfathomable, their lifestyle alien and their actions run the gamut from strange to macabre.

Folklore

There is a sharp divide amongst gnome myths, two radically different camps of stories. The first set of myths describe gnomes as elemental spirits similar to dwarves while the second set describes fey creatures more akin to haflings and other little people. Even within the two groups there are myriad contradictions and variants.

The first group is common amongst the Western Core, specifically Falkovnia, Borca and Lamordia but also Barovia and Hazlan. They describe gnomes as short old men formed of the earth who live in caves and holes in the ground. They are inherently magical and nocturnal for the light of the sun dispels their magic and turns them into stone. They horde treasures of gems and have vast vaults of hidden treasure, most of which is magical. As being of earth, they are able to walk through stone as easily as we walk through air. These myths are almost identical to those of dwarves and Falkovians consider them members of the same species. There is no separate name for gnomes and dwarfs in Balok although the two are sometimes distinguished by prefixes. As elemental spirits gnomes are often described as the earth counterparts of sylphs or nereids.

There are sub-legends unrelated to dwarves. In Barovia it is also believed gnomes share a close relation with kobolds, if they are not the same thing! Both are portrayed as mischievous trickster earth spirits. Gnomes are described as having a prenatal connection with the earth; it can whisper to them and share what it has overhead, commonly the location of lost or dropped objects. This ties into the gnomes' reputation as holders of secrets and collectors of forgotten items. There are rumours of vast vaults of lost possessions, collected over the centuries. There are a number of stories of gnomes teasing

The Gnome King

Deep beneath the earth in a massive cavern the gnome king makes his home in a palace carved from granite and crystal. Few consider him real and even the majority of gnomes believe him a myth.

His subterranean lair is floating pocket domain that moves randomly though the Mists, connecting to existing caves, mines and sewers. The many facets of his crystal castle act as windows to the surface world showing people's secrets and revealing their lies. The Gnome King constantly watches and knows much.

In the stony bowels of his keep is the Great Vault, where objects lost objects are collected by the Mists. Misplaced trinkets ranging from children's toys powerful artifacts and indiscriminately pile in the seemingly endless hall.

The Gnome King sits alone, vested only by rare souls trying to buy his silence, barter for knowledge or trade for something lost. It is unknown what the Gnome King did to earn this solitude or what he longs for and he himself seems to have forgotten.

innocent folk with lost heirlooms or loved one's secrets. Gnomes are also reputed to pay homage to a Gnome King, the oldest and most powerful of gnomes who rules over a subterranean kingdom. They give him tributes of found treasures and the most valuable or most interesting found objects. The Gnome King is rumoured to have terrifying powers and is able to change people into animals or even objects.

In the Eastern Core gnomes are less associated with the ground and are woodland sprits who roam the hills. They still live in burrows and caves, but they are not portrayed living deep underground. These fey-gnome tales come from Tepest, Nova Vassa, Kartakass and the Nocturnal isles. It is also a common belief in a few Western lands, such as Dementlieu and Mordent. They are still described as mischievous, playing pranks on the unsuspecting and humbling the proud. Portrayed as less elemental and more human, they are thought to be akin to elves and faeries more than dwarves. They are also portrayed as far smaller. Mordent and Dementlieu are particularly known for small gnomes described as being roughly a foot tall. Artwork from those lands frequently portrays small bearded gnomes in comically pointed hats cowering behind toadstools or sitting atop large mushrooms smoking long, thin pipes. Gnomes are described as being gardeners or skilled at various household tasks. Recently it has become popular in Dementlieu to place small clay gnome statues in ones' greenery in the hopes of luring real gnomes to tend the grounds. It is argued that since gnomes are tricksters it is justified to play tricks on them. Recent stories have turned the table with tricked gnomes described as extracting poetic vengeance on their tormentors.

These fey gnome are still nocturnal and become lizards or toads during the day. They are less associated with lost item but share the reputation as holders of secrets. They are described as seekers of forbidden knowledge and collectors of lore. There are a number of stories where people petition gnomes for dark secrets, black magiks or obscure information. It is commonly argued that the root of "gnome" comes from the word gnosis, which means "knowledge" (although I would place the origin of "gnome" with nisse, a Vassi word for household spirit).

In both legends gnomes live in maze-like homes filled with illusions, traps and puzzles designed to mislead intruders. Sometimes these traps are lethal while others simply lead the unwary astray or into embarrassing situations. Both stories are equally contradictory in regards to gnomish communities with some legends speaking of small underground collectives with dozens of individuals, while opposing tales refer to gnomes as solitary loners. Very few refer to gnomes living above the ground or in manufactured housing.

Curiously, there is a seldom-heard third branch of tales that most likely originates with Outlanders. These refer to gnomes as much larger creatures. They are often called illusionists, flamboyant showmen or, alternatively, mad obsessed machinists known for crazed inventions. Although these tales are frequently scoffed at by locals who authoritatively tell the Outlanders they're thinking of elves or dwarves.

The Truth

The myths of all the other subhuman races I studied all contained some grains of truth, although skewered with fantasy or lumping several different fantastic creatures together. However, all stories told of gnomes are radically different from the truth bearing almost no relation to reality.

Gnomes are a short humanoid folk, but they are typically well over three feet in height are seldom able to sit atop or hide behind toadstools. They walk about in daylight just fine and do not turn to stone or assume the shape an amphibian. They neither commune with a polymorphing lord nor know the location of your lost coin purse. They are also not fooled by little badly painted clay figured into acting as gardeners (although many are amused by these and use them as test-dummies).

This much is true: gnomes appear as short, old men. They are almost universally bald or balding with curious facial hair and heavily lined faces. When young their hair is often brown or black but this quickly goes grey after adulthood. Female gnomes, which are surprisingly rare, are free of the spastic beards and moustaches, but have equally lined features and silvered hair. Even young gnomes have a number of wrinkles, only adolescent gnomes have smooth skin. To human eyes they are a race of perpetual seniors.

While not fantastic creatures gnomes do have a number of minor supernatural abilities. They cannot see it pitch blackness as dwarves but possess excellent night vision similar to that of elves. They also have innate magical talents and are able cast a few simple spells even if they are not normally spellcasters. These seem to be innate are require no instruction. They know the language of a number of animals, most commonly burrowing mammals but occasionally lizards, vermin or nocturnal creatures.

Talk With the Animals

Gnomes have the innate ability to speak with select animals. What type of animal varies and is chosen at character creation. The gnomes speak to the animals in their own language be it grunts, hisses, or snarls. Gnomes who can speak in the same animal tongue are able to converse with each other in this incomprehensible dialect. Gnomes are only able to speak with normal, non-magical varieties of animals; it does not apply to magical beasts or dire versions or animals that have been awakened.

Animals respond as other intelligent creatures, although they are limited by their low intelligence scores. They typically only understand basic needs and have no understanding of abstract concepts. Unless

an animal possesses extraordinary or supernatural ability, such as Scent, all humanoids look generally the same and they have trouble differentiating between races let alone individuals. They are not forced to communicate and may choose not to. They are not obligated to provide assistance or be helpful. However, social skills such as Diplomacy and Intimidate may be used as per normal.

Typical burrowing mammals include mice, rats, weasels, rabbits, badgers and the like.

Society

To casual observers there is no such thing as gnome society. There are no communities or neighbourhoods or even small hidden villages. There are no underground cavern cities populated entirely by gnomes. Instead, gnomes live as individuals scattered across the entire world. They mingle invisible in human communities, unnoticed by us larger folk. Therefore a casual gnome observer might conclude that there is no larger gnomish society.

Gnomes do not live together but they do share a common culture. They all belong to the interconnected gnomish guilds. Through this overarching collective they correspond with peers and share their latest discoveries and conclusions. Volumous missives and correspondences are rushed across our world from gnome to gnome. Lengthy prolonged debated and conversations are conducted over decades through weekly letters. While gnomes live with human and might not see another gnome for decades they are in frequent contact with their kin.

All gnomes are obsessed with knowledge and discovery. Much like young children, gnome always want to know "why" but also "how". This racial trend unites them and drives the guilds. Each gnome focuses their attention and energy on a single general

topic. The exact school of knowledge varies between individuals but all gnomes have an obsession with something; even the martially inclined who might be obsessed with weaponry or a fighting style. To humans, gnomes seem compulsive -even insane- but gnomes view this as perfectly healthy behaviour and view humans like we would a hyperactive child. I find this paranoia inspiring: that an entire race of clinically insane creatures is living unnoticed within our communities...

Lifestyle: The inexperienced cannot easily distinguish a house occupied by a gnome from that of a human. They are built small, but no so small as to attract attention. They might be called "cozy" or "compact" by passers-by. These homes tend to be unkempt, cluttered and dusty but this is less noticeable from the outside. Exteriors are infrequently maintained with peeling paint, overgrown gardens and un-raked leaves.

Gnomish homes are the same style as the humans' lived amongst, as they buy existing buildings rather than commissioning new construction. Unless their obsession requires being close to something (or someone), gnomes are not particular about where they live. They do not buy lots close to other gnomes, nor do they avoid their brethren.

Gnomes have little separation of space. They differentiate between places to sleep, eat, cook and wash but they work everywhere. Tools, paper, notes, books and other remnants are found throughout their homes. Craftsmen might have unfinished projects and abandoned works scattered throughout their house while a scholar might have dozens of books piled three or four high in every room.

Gnomes are urban creatures. They prefer large towns and cities where there is a better chance of well-stocked stores or libraries. Rural gnomes are uncommon and usually a sign the gnome is focused on animal

husbandry or botany. Farmhouses tend to be cleaner than their city counterparts. This due to the difficulty in leaving half-finished calves and sheep lying about.

Craftwork as we know it is rare amongst gnomes. There are many gnomes artisans and some work as engineers building the most insane of devices, but few deem to sell their masterpieces. Few apply themselves to building simple things like horseshoes or swords. When they do, it is only to make enough money to pay their bills and never a regular occupation. Gnomes frequently take odd jobs to provide them with food and enough money for their next wave of research. They seldom find employment related to their obsession. A rare few find a way of making money from their compulsion, typically in academic settings. There are more than a few gnomes working at the Core's various universities and colleges and usually a couple on the teaching staff.

The exception to gnomish lifestyle is Mayvin, the sole town in the Mists dominated by gnomes (and even here they hold the slimmest of majorities). The small town came about due to a number of factors. First, it became the sole place gnome engineers could practice their architecture and building skills. Mayvin is the only place I have seen gnome-designed and gnome-built buildings and it has the unique layout to prove it. Secondly, it was decided that the Primary Guild needed a central Patent Hall, so one was built in Mayvin. The town also holds the main guildhalls for the nine guilds and all major meetings are held there on a rotating basis. Of the eight hundred or so gnomes that live in Mayvin, a full quarter are temporary residents, in town for guild meetings or bi-decade consultations.

Traditional gnomish buildings favour tall ceilings held up by multiple columns. Gnomes prefer stone as a building material,

especially light marble, although they often paint it bright colours to stimulate the mind. They enjoy arches and curved lines although gnomish buildings suffer from experiments to design better keystones. Gnome-planned buildings tend to have lots of open spaces and courtyards, typically for storage or erecting large machines. Open-air structures with few walls are favoured allowing a free-flow of visitors and preventing smoke from unfortunate explosions from flooding rooms.

Gnome designed towns tend to have open auditoriums and squares for public discussion. It is not expected that everyone, with their busy schedules, will have time to read the latest dissertations, so after noteworthy discoveries gnomes stand at the edge of these squares and explain their ideas to passers-by. Some more respected thinkers in Mayvin regularly "teach" in these squares.

Livestock and crops are only kept by rural gnomes and mostly by those experimenting with breeding. When gnomes do look after animals they exclusively look after a single species; I have seen gnomes raising cows, sheep, goats, chickens, horses, rats, rabbits, cats and more. Greenery ranges from wheat and grains, legumes, nuts, roses, clover, fruit and vegetables, poison ivy, hemp, kelp, mushrooms and moss. I assume that only some were raised as foodstuff.

I spent a week with a gnome who exclusively grew peas. He had some fascinating notes on how the peas took after their parent plants and lineages. Of course, in typical gnome fashion, this conclusion was buried amongst hundreds of pages of notes that carpeted his home and when I asked him if his theories would apply to cattle or even people and he shrugged, mumbled something about pods, and changed the subjects to proper maintenance of vines. His peas were quite impressive: larger than the tip of my thumb and a perfect uniform green.

Gnomish Experiments

Relentless in their pursuits, gnomes let little stop them from proving theories. For most experiments are limited to testing simple hypotheses along with every conceivable (and inconceivable) variable.

However, some testing is much grimmer. Gnomes looking for cures to diseases might feel the need to infect large numbers of people. The anatomy-minded might find cadavers a poor substitute for fresher samples. Weapon designers will always think their designs untested until used in the field. Gnomes curious about the soul might want to extract one for better study or test to see if they are indivisible and what happens if someone only has half a soul.

The majority of wild gnomes live in Valachan away from the towns and off the main roads. They often have small communes of a half-dozen gnomes who share food for well-rounded diets while simultaneously ignoring the existence of each other. It is almost a symbiotic relationship where they benefit each other while being entirely separate. The rest of the populace is mostly unaware of the gnomes as they seldom get involved in politics, have little valuables that can be taxed, and are almost universally male so the local lord exempts them from his bridal lottery.

Gnomish food is a curiosity. Few gnomes feel the urge to specialize as cooks preferring harder sciences such as chemistry over culinary arts (there are a few, working towards designing the perfect meal or a universal spice). However, gnomes still need to eat, albeit proportionately less. They are

no less prone to experiment over food, although speed is also a prerequisite. Few want to separate themselves from their work to cook a lengthy meal. Gnomes produce meals out of any available ingredients. Dishes that can be hastily thrown together or left to cook unsupervised are preferred.

Recipes are never used and meals are always spontaneous creations. The erratic chefs often produce unique stews or casseroles. Pies are common with anything partially edible thrown inside and baked. Mild cases of indigestion are common but gnomes are sturdy and seldom notice. Co-workers invited to stay for dinner are seldom as lucky although deaths are rare (but most wish it was fatal).

Gnomes entertain themselves with their work. Social gatherings are rare since gnomes seldom gather, let alone for festive occasions. A multi-field group experiment is the closet gnomes will ever come to a party. Some find themselves dragged into local human festivities but most simply ignore these as a chance to avoid being interrupted by their co-workers.

This is not to say gnomes have no religious or secular occasions. They celebrate the equinox and solstice and similar natural events such as eclipses and regular comets. They commemorate anniversaries of famous discoveries and hold March fourteenth in high regard for some unfathomable reason. These holidays are often given curious nicknames that are meant to be self-explanatory such as *Towel Day* or *Lead-arc Cone Day*. However, they very rarely celebrate these holidays; not because they do not want to, but because they typically get too wrapped up in their work that the date passes unnoticed and they only remember it a week later.

There is no such thing as art to gnomes. They do not decorate their homes and simply do not see objects as beautiful. To gnomes,

ideas can be beautiful, thoughts can be beautiful and theories can be beautiful but objects just are. A sunset, a blooming flower, a sonnet and a painting are all just distractions. Flowers are identical to weeds. Of all differences between gnomes and men I find this to be the most unsettling.

Rare gnomes keep mementos: pieces of their first invention, scraps of their first blueprint or remnants of a particularly successful invention. If an object can be reused or recycled it is, but when an object has no use but still has sentimental value gnome do keep it. Shelves are sometimes adorned with past successes and failures. Gnomes believe if they are reminded of what they were think in the past they might be inspired again or learn from their mistake. These mementos are only of value to the individual and never passed down along familial lines. When someone dies, their useless possessions are thrown out.

A curious hobby of gnomes is practical jokes. Pranks are an art form to gnomes and a constant source of levity. Pranks tend to be lengthy, overly elaborate and complicated affairs that unfold over days or even weeks. Thankfully, most gnomish pranks are kept within the community and thus contained to Mayvin. The few gnomes with close human companions may feel the need to prank them if necessary.

Pranks are believed to open up people to new possibilities and think of things in a different light. To gnomes, assumptions or taking things for granted are stagnation and require being shaken up. It's typically of gnomish philosophy: if you never question or doubt something, how will you know you have the right answer?

Simple pranks involve hiding necessary tools, repeatedly rearranging workshops or replacing glue with lubricant. Complex pranks include magically staining anything blue into red, moving the gnome while

Mad Gnomes

To most humans and demihumans, gnomes are already insane. They are all manic obsessive/compulsives with sociopath tendencies. Even this like hallucinations or delusions are not viewed negatively. But gnomes can still be driven insane.

Mad Gnomes lack the specialized drive and focus of sane gnomes. They are often easily distracted or unable to focus on anything for a prolonged period. They are typically moody, depressing and morbid. Extreme cases are apathetic and seldom motivated enough to dress or feed themselves.

Other forms of insanity are possible including obsessions with pain and suffering (considered crazy as it is impossible to chart, record or replicate), multiple personalities (especially ones that are non-gnomes), and finding object pretty of aesthetically pleasing.

asleep into an identical building in another town, or convincing everyone the gnome knows to refer to them by the wrong name.

To humans, such pranks might be considered gaslighting: slowly and methodically driving someone insane. For gnomes, being convinced that their deepest held beliefs are wrong is refreshing and invigorating.

Names are held in high regard for gnomes: everything has a common and scientific name as well as a species, genus, family, order, class, etc. They even categorize themselves in this manner. On formal occasions they happily introduce themselves with their genus, species and given name. One example of this would be a Mordentish mathematician who introduced himself as "nomos sapien Wignux."

Gnomish given names are fall into three variants. The first are names taken from nearby items such as Cog, Wignut, Quill and Scalpel: gnomes sometimes get so distracted by work they forget to think of a child's name until it is born. The second group of names are quick and inventive, crafted to be original and unique. Some are based off of gnomish words or phrases in other languages and are designed to encourage the child to "think in new ways" but typically sound like gibberish. The third type of gnomish names are onomatopoeias. I don't know why, they just like it.

Family: Gnomes occasionally need an outside perspective or assistance with something beyond their usual field of expertise. An engineer might require a metallurgist, a botanist might require some help with fertilizer, or an astronomer might require a mathematician. Gnome romantic relationships are usually the result of such shared work, which brings a couple into mental and physical collaboration. The excitement over new discoveries draws the couple closer, which fuels their creative energies leading to more excitement in a cycle of academic passion. However, these relationships inevitably end with the project or when discoveries cease being made. The gnomes go their separate ways and return to their experiments and obsessions. These affairs can last weeks or decades depending on the gnomes and the work being done.

These brief affairs are rare and produce children even more rarely. However, gnomes also have a low infant mortality rate and live very long lives being fertile for centuries. Their sturdy constitutions fend off most diseases and gnomes seldom get into dangerous situations that don't involve exploding inventions. Even with their infrequent and sporadic birth-rate the gnome population remains steady.

Families are simply unimportant to gnomes. They do not dislike families or each other but they are simply not a priority. The largest hurdle for families is that offspring seldom share obsessions and, thusly, often belong to different guilds. It is difficult for gnomes to relate to other members of the same guild, let alone opposing guilds. Marriages are rare and couples tend to stay together just long enough raise their child before parting. Sometimes a parent even leaves before a child has reached adulthood leaving the other to raise it alone. Once a young gnome develops their obsession, usually just after puberty, they often cannot relate to their elder.

Gnomes self-teach their children. There is little formal education for gnomes but parents, understanding their children might devote their lives to anything, teach a wide variety of subjects. Despite their narrow focuses, gnomes are excellent teachers and are typically able to provide a rudimentary education on most subjects, especially those related to their obsession. In fact, many gnomes take jobs as instructors for wealthy families. Gnome tutors (although they are seldom identified as such) as sought after in Dementlieu.

Government: Gnomish society is not based around families or communities but by philosophy and the guilds. The guilds are the dominant social force in all gnomish life. Guild structure is arranged into a pyramid with the administrators of the Primary Guild at the top overseeing the three Secondary Guilds: Physical Sciences, Social Sciences and Mental Sciences. Each of the three Secondary Guilds is divided into three Tertiary Guides to with all gnomes belong. Physical Science includes Physics & Mathematics, Chemistry, and Biology; Social Sciences include Politics, Sociology, and History; Mental includes Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology. There is

Mythic Busting

There is also a little-known, semi-official tenth guild attached to the head guildmaster. The Tester's Guild is sworn to review new discoveries and test their accuracy and replication. It is every gnome's worst fear to undergo a Testing Guild Audit where they will have to justify every conclusion they have ever made.

The Tester's Guild is ruthlessly efficient and recruits only the most intelligent and consistent gnomes for membership. Recruitment is rare and an honour as there is little turn-over in the Guild. Membership is for life. The Guild operates on a stipend from the head guildmaster, paid from the guild dues every gnome contributes.

The Guild can ruin a gnome's reputation with ease. A negative review from the Tester's Guild prevents a gnome from finding work, gaining respect in the guild or having their discoveries published. The Tester's Guild can revoke patents, recall royalties and even seize property.

There are rumours that the Guild has been infiltrated by the Kargat or has an alliance with the infamous secret police. Gnomes, already terrified by the power and reputation of the Guild, refuse to even consider the possibility.

rumoured to be a tenth guild unrelated to the other nine between the Primary and Secondary Guilds in rank, but every gnomes I asked froze in terror at its mention.

Each gnome is grouped by their obsession into one of the three guilds. They correspond at length with other guild members about theories and discoveries while submitting lengthy reports to their guildmasters (Secondary and Tertiary) ever five years. Guilds are more important to gnomes than family or friends; to a gnome his guild is a place he belongs and is unconditionally accepted and understood.

The Tertiary Guilds are led by the senior guildsmen, elected by the entire Guild, mostly through absentee ballots. The leaders of the Secondary Guilds are led by the guildmasters, appointed by the Tertiary leaders. The leader of the Primary Guild, the head guildmaster, is chosen by all twelve Guild leaders and is usually a former Secondary guildmaster. The thirteen leaders set policy for gnomes and make decrees that involve subjects such as forbidden experiments, accepted physical or social laws, accrediting discoveries, and arranging knowledge. The last in the main job of the guild as all knowledge must be organized and categorized in order. However, each head guildmaster views the order of information differently and the work begins anew with each change of office.

In theory the senior guildsmen and guildmasters should be from the ranks of their respective guilds but, in practice, few gnomes from the physical and metal guilds volunteer their services and guild leaders are typically students of sociology or political science. While guild leaders are supposed to only concern themselves with running the guilds most use their position to run social or political experiments or put their theories to the test.

As mentioned above, there are few internal laws governing gnomish actions. One of the few is the restriction on forbidden experiments, of the Black List. These were obsessions so fraught with danger or

Gnomic Golems

All gnomes are gripped by obsession so, by their very nature, every gnome is able to bring life golems, animated objects and other dread constructs. Typically, only gnomes interested in engineering and construction manufacture golems but botanical golems have also been recorded. It is still a time-consuming and expensive process, and the gnome must be motivated to build the artificial being. Gnome cannot be forced to create golems, even if their obsession is related to clockwork men.

Gnomes also occasionally give birth to golems by accident. A book-golem was once created in Richemulot by a librarian. Gnome machinery has an unnerving tendency to develop quirky personalities, even if not fully animated. While not every device develops sentience, most machines worked on for a few decades develop a personality trait or two.

Gnomish philosophers worry about the possibility of what they have named abstract golems: constructs composed of ideas, memories or emotions. They worry that someday a confusion or hate or madness golem might accidentally be unleashed. They are particularly worried about the political guild and the possibilities of a "fascist golem" or a "racism golem".

repeated catastrophe the guilds have banned any further attempts. A few are obvious, such as attempts to resurrect the dead or bring constructed beings to life (typically clockwork men). Mind Control was also banned after an incident referred to only as

"quack-like-a-chicken-week". Immortality is also forbidden with gnomish law stating that anyone who makes themselves immortal will be immediately put to death.

Fashion: Gnomish fashion is utilitarian with a number of pockets and pouches. Fabric tends to be sturdy enough to withstand likely punishments, be it burns, acid, tears, ink or grass stains. Gnomish fashion accessories tend toward tool belts, survey tools, notepads, pens, and the like. Even when dressed for polite society, gnomish clothing tends to be wrinkled, slept-in, and ink stained with pockets bulging with paper scraps that have been furiously scribbled on.

Style tends to be emulated from whatever human (or sub-human) fashions are present. A gnome in Mordent will dress very similar to other Mordentish scholars. While their fashions tend to be a few years out of date this is often unnoticed, even human intellectuals are hardly at the cutting edge of style.

Males and females dress alike, although women often substitute sturdy dresses for breeches. This is by no means universal, as sometimes a dangling skirt is too impractical and the womenfolk must wear trousers.

Jewelry is uncommon in gnomes. Dangling pieces tend to get caught in machines or hook on tools. Gnomes have little aesthetic taste and do not see a purpose on decorative items; to their alien and sub-human minds, beauty has no function.

The gnomish guilds also have a formal academic garb. Every gnome in one of the guilds owns a robe and matching cap. Guild robes, called togas, are single-piece lengths of cloth bound around the waist and thrown over the shoulder, similar to Forlon kilts. Togas are worn at official guild meetings and functions but rarely in racially mixed company or during colder months.

Guild caps are tall and pointed and come in a range of colours. Traditionally, the colour of the pointed cap also reflects the guild the gnome belongs to: Physical Sciences are reds (physics is crimson, chemistry is dark orange, and biology is brown), Social Sciences are yellows (history is light orange, politics is green, sociology is yellow), and Mental Sciences are blues (philosophy is purple, theology is blue-green, and psychology is blue). Guildmasters wear metallic hued caps to represent their formal status (copper, gold and silver respectively) while the head guildmaster wears a cap of black. However, in the past few decades there has been arguments over the colour scheme with some gnomes (mostly from the Physical Sciences guild) demanding that green should replace yellow while the head guildmaster should wear white. The proposal is still in committee.

Defense: Without a unified nation to defend, there is no strong military tradition among gnomes: they are thinkers, not warriors. Even when their obsessions take a martial bend they typically design weapons and armour for others to use. Most gnomes are more than happy to hide behind others or simply run. A few rare battle-gnomes take their experiments into the field for testing, preferring not to leave first hand accounts of success or failure to others.

Although rare, there have been a number of gnomish tacticians through history; gnomes whose forte was military history or planning and who excel at resource management and troop deployment. Equally rare are gnomes who focus on individual combat and are willing to risk their lives in battle.

Magic tends to be the most common defence. Similar to the myths of gnomes (and perhaps inspired by them), gnomes like to simply enchant or mislead their attackers with illusions. Non-magical gnomes will

also sometimes resort to mundane trickery to distract aggressors or lead them away from their homes. Similar to practical jokes, gnomes can be quite creative in confusing those that mean them harm and avoiding conflict.

Gnomes are not agile folk and prefer heavy durable armours, even when in culturally advanced realms that favour light swords and armour. Gnomes are also not used to fighting so most suits of armour tend to be several generations old. A few gnomes set out to build better armour to stop modern weapons, such as rifle balls, but have not yet seen success. Craftsmen often have success

A Good Defence is Something That Stops You From Being Hurt

Gnomes have the choice of adding energy resistance or damage reduction ability to their armour. This must be added at the time of construction, like the masterwork trait, and cannot be changed later. The bonuses only apply to specially treated leathers and cloth and can only be added to light armours.

The property grants the armour the resistance as per the resist energy spell against a single energy type chosen at the item's creation. The armour absorbs 1 point of cold damage per attack that the wearer would normally take. Effects do not stack with other castings of the resist energy spell. Alternatively, it grants the wearer damage reduction 1/slashing, bludgeoning or piercing chosen at creation. Only a single property may be added to a suit and may not be added multiple times.

Adding this property to armour adds 500gp to the cost.

with leather armours, using the suits designed to protect them from backfiring experiments.

Weaponry is only slightly less rare than armour. Gnomish weapons tend to be strange devices that double as tools. Some gnome soldiers are proficient with a curious combination of a pick and a hammer. There are also a number of new technological weapons, although the vast majority began their lives as peaceful tools. For example, in Mayvin there was a carpenter who was trying to build an automatic hammer out of modified flintlock pistols and instead created a new form of gun. Smokepowder weapons and as popular with gnomes as they are with dwarves and many gnomes have devoted their lives to improving pistols and rifles. These are, by far, the most common form of gnomish weapon. Gnomish firearms are among the best in the Core and I myself am never without my gnome-designed, dwarf-built carbine.

Language: Gnomes speak a language everyone else refers to as gnomish but that is actually no less than three separate and distinct languages. One language is used for gnomish interactions, the second is used for scientific terminology, while the third is whatever regional human dialect the gnome was raised with only spoken extremely fast. The first two languages are essentially dead, despite being commonly spoken. New words are being created for either. Gnomes tend to use human tongues, typically Mordentish or Vaasi, for common everyday speech, excluding rare interactions with other gnomes. It is common for two gnomes in a conversation to lapse between the three depending on subject and necessary words.

Classic gnome is unlike most modern languages in the Core but it seems most similar to the languages found on the ruins of the Isle of Demise and the Isle of the Raven (I thank Brother Dirac for the latter). It also

bears superficial similarities to Vechorite. There are few tenses in classic gnomish and even fewer prefix and suffix and instead there is a stunningly large vocabulary.

The scientific language of gnomes bears a curious resemblance to antiquated Darkonese, and is similar in structure. However, there are enough variances between the two tongues for miscommunication, especially with verbs and tenses. Knowledge of scientific gnome is typically limited to nouns and common verbs, typically only in the present simple tense.

Gnomes curiously substitute the alphabet of regional human languages for their writing. A gnome living in Bergovista uses the Vaasi alphabet. For guild-related or scholastic papers, gnomes revert to an alphabet similar to that of Darkonese but with hard edges reminiscent of dwarven runes.

History

There is little surviving gnomish mythology. They have all but rejected a belief in gods and creation stories, instead embracing a very Lamordian scientific view of themselves and the world. The few stories that survive are the purview of the Theology Guild that analyzes and dissects legends and myths from a scientific standpoint.

The old legends state that gnomes were created by their great trickster god who wanted to create living beings like those made by His elfgod and dwarfgod counterparts. But the god of gnomes was not a wholly benevolent deity and He forever played cruel or unusual tricks on the innocent and unsuspecting gnomish people. However, this led them to always question and seek out new explanations; they could not always believe the most obvious of explanations, nor could they take anything

Classic Gnome

Daimonas	monster
Ekrixi	explosion
Idrysi	creation
Ochi	no
Lithos	gem
Majikos	magic
Malista	yes
Megalofyia	genius
Mera	day
Nychta	night

Scientific Gnome

Dies	day
Fumo	steam
Ignis	fire
Ignotus	magic
Novus	new
Nox noctis	night
Rota	wheel
Scientia	knowledge
Senex	old

for granted, and were forced to discover everything for themselves. Their god pushed them to think differently, to be more than reactionary. And thus, the gnomes believe, He taught them how to create their own way.

Beyond the legends, gnomish history is a sprawling extensive list of gnomes and the discoveries they made. A few other races are listed, but always paired with gnomes who verified their accomplishments for themselves. Modern events are often missed

until a few human generations after when they are suddenly remembered and compared to past events. Some gnomes have only just noticed the Great Upheaval.

For gnomes, the past is not just a series of unfolding events but something else to be probed, puzzled over and explained. The Historical Guild continually analyzes the past and ties events into their personal theories for the driving force of history. For ever book of actual events recorded by gnomes there are two dozen proposing reasons for why events occurred.

Looking through archaeology it is hard to tie gnomes to a single land. Few gnomes leave a mark on their respective home domains; they might have always lived there or simply moved in when the land itself was revealed. It is also quite possible all gnomes originated in Darkon (a strong possibility considering the shared language) and quickly spread out into every other domain. Asking the gnomes themselves would seem to be the ideal solution but often gnomes are unsure of their whereabouts at any given time or remember their past only as a lengthy series of experiments and discoveries.

Beliefs

Of all the sub-human races I have studied, the gnomes have the most uniform worldview. There are no exceptions, no real variants or contrasting views. At some level, in their core being, they all have the same beliefs.

All gnomes believe mysteries must be solved and that every question has a single, definitive answer. All gnomes believe in progress and that things must be improved. Nothing is ever finished or perfect for a gnome; everything can be refined, upgraded, and polished. For a gnome, bigger is always better.

Beyond the hub-philosophy there is some diversity amongst gnomes, typically among the Secondary guilds. Gnomes involved with the Physical Sciences tend to be focused on the mundane and physical. They have trouble grasping abstract concepts or even the possibility of the immaterial. In contrast, Mental Sciences guildsmen have no interest in the material and focus entirely on the abstract, ethereal and possibly imagined. Theologists and Philosophers are forever questioning the existence of the soul, the reality of the world, the existence of fundamental truths, and possibility of definitive morality. Social Sciences guildsmen run the middle ground but mostly see patterns in behaviour and events.

Gnomish sense of humour is another universal and another curiosity. They have a well-earned reputation for their dark, macabre humour. As I will describe later, death is not viewed wholly negatively by gnomes and they feel guilt joking about death anymore than one would life; if a bad day is humorous so is a bad death. Gnomes tend to view life more seriously as it is a time for work and progress. Change, however, is always good and forcing someone to change or rethink a situation is positive. Gnomish humour is related to this.

Magic is viewed differently between the three guilds. Physical guildsmen tend to assume magic is a science that has not yet been mastered, a physical force akin to electricity or gravity that has only partially been harnessed. Social Sciences guildsmen tend to just accept magic as it has no bearing on their studies. Mental guildsmen vary in their theories; currently, the most popular theory states that the world is false and illusionary -like a dream- and magic is exerting influence over the dream.

Gnomes, already partial to illusions, believe that if it is possible for trained magicians to create illusions then it is

equally possibly for stronger willed beings to create phantasmal realities. However, gnomes cannot agree on what is creating the illusion-world arguing that it is a shared subconscious of all sentient things creating the world, some "deitific extra planar intelligence" (god), or a single child with a really strong imagination.

Regardless of their beliefs, gnomes readily use magic. It comes naturally to them and even small children display some basic magical aptitude. Most gnomes are limited to the most basic of spells, cantrips and the like, but even this is impressive. Gnomes, of course, fail to see this as noteworthy and laugh at people who make their talents a big deal. To them it is no more impressive than the ability to walk upright or hold a hammer. However, they do not miss the fact that most other races cannot -in their eyes- walk upright without years of dedicated training.

In contrast, logic is not strong in gnomes; they have curious notions of cause and effect. Gnomes believe that results need not be consistent and just because something has reacted the one way the last ten tests that does not mean it will not suddenly and abruptly change. Just because a dropped object has always fallen to the floor before does not mean the next time it will not decide to wildly fly about the room. Thus, gnomes prepare for every conceivable eventuality.

If a human behaved or thought as a gnome they would instantly be labelled incurably insane. This is not only due to the obsessive behaviour of gnome but also their tenuous grasp of causality and alien mindset. For example, $1+1=2$ is seen as crude and inelegant to gnomes who much prefer $1(1+4)-3=2$.

In a lecture, Elder Brother Smithe from Borca once argued that "sanity was statistically" and that if all gnomes believe something then, to themselves, they are sane.

But I have also heard arguments that insanity is doing the same thing twice and expecting different results, something gnomes are obviously wont to do.

Religion: There is only one gnome god who is known in a variety of guises and names. The most common title is the Divine Prankster. There are innumerable stories of him tricking other gods and spirits. Few gnomes believe in him as a literal figure. There are numerous gnome-published books dissecting the Trickster's stories for symbolism and psychology as well as viewing them as allegory. Young gnomes are told the stories to encourage them to think in new ways and avoid assumptions.

Despite this lack of worship and devotion there are a few gnomish clerics of the Divine Prankster. They pay homage to the philosophy and ideals of the figure which, they believe, allows them to alter reality through magic. There is great debate among the Theological Guild about this and whether the clerics are manipulating the inherent falsehood of reality, tapping into a variant of arcane magic or somehow tricking spirits and other beings into enacting minor miracles. I believe the Watchers in the Shadows may be the ones answering the clerics' daily meditations but I did not feel the need to share this opinion.

Traditionally holy days and religious festivals have been forgotten by the gnomes. There are no standardized methods of worship. Shrines and temples have all been torn down or converted to other use. Modern clerics pay homage whenever they remember and respect secular festival days.

Gnomes have contrasting views of human religions. Theologists are fascinated by them and study them endlessly as a Botanist would study a flower. There are very, very few gnomish followers of the Lawgiver or Hala and true clerics are even rarer.

Breaching the Veil

After a century of work a rogue group of gnomes from the theological guild and engineers from the physics guild have constructed a machine they have christened the trans-planar multi-spectralscope. The T*P*M*S is designed to contact the world of souls and bridge the two realities. It is similar to a non-magical well of many worlds that only opens to the ethereal plane and Mists. It was designed mostly for communication but might also allow immaterial matter to pass through becoming flesh.

It has only been activated for short bursts at the moment before it exhausts its power supply. The guildsmen hope that with a large source of energy, either mundane or magical, it might remain open for longer durations.

The device has two potential drawbacks that have not yet become evident. Ghosts and spirits that pass through the device would become physical and material beings, the spirit made flesh. No longer tied to the negative material plane they would be immune to most undead weaknesses while still being dead. They would retain the undead subtype but no longer be affected by anything that targets undead (such as the spell disrupt undead or the turn undead supernatural ability).

The second drawback is that the device weakens the barrier between the two worlds. If it is left on for a prolonged period the ethereal plane might spill over onto the material allowing any spirits to manifest or cross over and not just ghosts.

In Darkon there are a number of gnomes who belong to the Church Eternal Order. They do not believe Azalin Rex is a god but they do believe he is a powerful being and accept he may have some control over reality. Likewise, Ezra is occasionally worshipped as it is presumed she is a mortal who ascended to a higher plane of consciousness and that following in her teachings might likewise lead to enlightenment.

With few strong religious beliefs gnomes have few rituals to dispose of their dead. They follow local customs to avoid upsetting others, burying their brethren in local cemeteries or cremating their remains. Given that so many gnomes hide amongst us, many deaths go unnoticed save by human colleagues.

Gnomes live long lives and few give death much thought. However, unlike other long-lived races such as elves and fey, gnomes have no fear of death. Gnomes are curious beings and death is a great unknown. It is simply another part of life. Gnomes who have passed on are the fortunate few who now know an answer others do not. Even the most material-minded of gnomes do not view death as an end, merely a change. Many gnomes view this life as merely preparation for the next life in much the same way childhood prepares one for adulthood. There is some anticipation for death and many gnomes are fascinated by attempts to communicate with spirits and the departed and have tried creating many machines to do so.

Race Relations

Gnomes are solitary creatures that avoid interacting with others. They do not dislike other races so much as dislike being interrupted and having to cease working. How gnomes view other races is dependant on their view of other individuals. Some gnomes might be considered misanthropic or sociopathic for their lack of concern or doubts of other's reality. More sociable gnomes are merely unconcerned or apathetic unless interest is shown towards their activities.

Humans: Gnomes live invisibly in human society; there is no other race they spend more time interacting with, although humanity remains ignorant of this. Gnomes generally like humans but find them slow and strange. They view us with pity over our lack of drive and focus. They view our lack of arcane talent as sad and sometimes pathetic. It is amusing that they treat us like the mildly delusional ones. In the gnomish guilds, humans have a reputation as being excellent students and assistants but seldom more than this.

Strangely enough, gnomes have had some contact with mentally deranged humans and often find them acceptable company. It is not really surprising that obsessive and compulsive humans get along well with gnomes. Some gnomes are working to spread madness throughout the Core as "progress" hoping to enlighten the population. Thankfully they have not had much success.

Caliban: Gnomes are fascinated by calibans and often pester them with questions about their birth, parentage and abilities. Many gnomes have tried numerous experiments on calibans examining their blood, tissue and reflexes. Most caliban do not like gnomes.

Some gnomes theorize that calibans are a less developed human strain or a subspecies; others place them as a different breed of humans. Categorizing calibans has proven difficult for gnomes and many academic feuds have started as a result. A few alchemically-minded gnomes have started work on "cures" for calibans.

Dwarves: Gnomes respect the work ethic of dwarves and their skill at crafting. A number of more successful gnomish projects have been the result of partnerships with dwarves. The two can get along well enough for short periods but the relationship inevitably becomes strained. Dwarven stubbornness and refusal to change their mind is also contrary to gnomish philosophy and almost insulting. The two related people have opposing core values that put prolonged friendship out of reach for most duos.

Most gnomes consider dwarves to be simple, almost slow and have a form of mute pity for dwarves' willingness to abandon a project just because it is finished. Gnomes also have no patience for dwarves' preference for the old ways viewing it quaintly at best. The gnomes of Mayvin keep offering to build automated mining machines for the neighbouring dwarves and feel slighted by the continual refusals.

Elves: The Fair Folk's reliance on magic confounds gnomes; while they use magic it is considered one tool of many and often a poor substitute for technical know-how. Gnomes also have no patience for elves' idleness and procrastination.

As gnomes have little understanding of aesthetics and beauty they can not fathom elves' interest in music, dance and art. It confuses them to no end. Some gnomes are convinced the entire elven race is playing an elaborate prank on the gnomes, while others believe the fey are being purposely obtuse. Elven hedonism also has no equivalent in

gnomish society as hard and constant work, for gnomes, is self indulgent.

Gnomes also cannot related with the elves' fear of death. This is especially confusing given elves do not die of old age and are functionally immortal. Gnomes believe death is an inevitable and positive change while elves view it as a terrifying end. Since elves are essentially unchanging by nature (by gnomish definitions) they are stagnant beings with inflexible minds and the antithesis of gnomish values.

Halflings: Gnomes enjoy the attention they receive from the Little People and their curiosity over gnomish machines and theories. Gnomes find halflings timid and afraid to take chances and the risks necessary for (gnomish) scientific experiments and discoveries. Halflings also do not understand gnomes' casual attitude towards death or their macabre sense of humour. Likewise, gnomes cannot understand halfling terror over what is thought of as a positive change akin to a child being horrified with the thought of growing up.

Despite this there is a kinship between the two people as both are small folk who often

live invisibly amongst human populations. They recognize each other in crowds as non-humans and will go out of their way to help each other out of principle.

Conclusion

I cannot help but feel the Watchers in the Shadows are taunting us. Gnomes: an intelligent and scientifically minded race with an inherent magical nature and belief that the world is a falsehood. Yet, as a people they are all mad! Hopelessly mad!! Useless to our cause and yet so close to being exactly what we are looking for.

And yet, if one were conditioned early enough to be obsessed with what we are no force would deter them from finding our goal (perhaps this is what drives our Esteemed gnomish Brother?). Still, as irrational and illogical as they are, such a gnome might be more a liability than a blessing.

Thankfully though, my task is complete and I can now begin my journey to Souragne, and la Maison there.



Use In Games

Gnomes are a less common fantasy race that has been in D&D since the beginning but is found in fewer fantasy stories. For example, it is one of the few core races that is not represented in Lord of the Rings and has few iconic characters from established campaign settings such as the Forgotten Realms and Dragonlance.

Included below are optional game rules for playing gnomes and including gnomes in the Ravenloft campaign setting. There is also optional advice for including some version of gnomes in a home campaign.

Role of Gnomes

Base gnomes do not fill a key unoccupied role. For craftsmen and miners dwarves work better, for magical fey creatures elves are best used, and for short energetic hillfolk halflings are the best fit. Emphasising their "tinker" role differentiates gnomes while still maintaining their history as metalworking shortfolk with a magical tradition. Tinker gnomes in Ravenloft become darker mad scientists. They also tinker with philosophies and become seekers of knowledge, tying into older stories of gnomes.

Gnomes work best as obsessed and driven individuals. As NPC they work well as the aforementioned mad scientists or sources of background exposition. The esoteric nature of gnomes makes it easy to explain them having bizarre but crucial pieces of information. Gnomes might also become equipment suppliers providing a party with necessary tools or experimental weapons similar to a medieval fantasy Q. They might work equally well as an eccentric patron of an adventuring party, hiring them to seek out artifacts or information.

Gnomes are very useful for introducing new inventions into a campaign. Dwarves are craftsmen as well, but typically old fashioned and portrayed less as innovators. If a story requires a hot air balloon, steam engine or Nautilus-style submarine then gnomes are very useful in the role of Jules Verne-ish inventor. Gnomes also provide a unique role of bridging technology with magic. Elves, like dwarves, as seldom portrayed as welcoming new ideas. Technomancy, even simple items such as enchanted firearms, are easier to explain with gnomes.

It is also possible to replace gnomes with more mythical creatures. These would likely be tiny-sized fey similar to the brag, fir or portune of the shadow fey, if not those exact breeds. Instead of hiding among humans the gnomes would live in the woods in faerie rings, hollow logs or in other nature-based lairs. They would act similar to legends of gnomes being mischievous creatures who tease mortals, play cruel tricks on the unwary, and know people's hidden secrets.

For human-centric campaigns shying away from demihumans, gnomes are easily replaced by scholastic humans. Mayvin would just be an eccentric community attracts inventor and the academically inclined.

Running Gnomes

Gnomes are combinations of manic inventors and scholars obsessed with a single broad subject or school of thought. They should be portrayed as being experts on their field and bursting with trivia and obscure knowledge but often uninformed or plain ignorant in other areas.

Gnomes might easily be run the Doctor from Doctor Who combined with Socrates and Victor Frankenstein. It is equally valid to portray gnomes as quiet and

contemplative thinkers, perhaps even shy or socially inept. Or gnomes might be brainy know-it-alls constantly offering their opinion even if it's a subject they know little about.

Common Ravenloft gnomes should be portrayed as erratic and a little unbalanced. Only rare gnomes would be considered sane but it is equally rare for gnomes to be completely insane. A little crazy goes a long way. Few gnomes demonstrate serious mental illness such as schizophrenia or symptoms such as hearing voices or seeing things.

Variants

Below are the two common gnomish variants: mist gnomes and mad gnomes. There are fewer gnomish variants as individual gnomes already vary greatly so more options are provided for customization. Also included below is an optional folkloric gnome for use in a less fantastic but more magical game.

Mist Gnomes

These are common gnomes in the Mists. They are found in every domain across the Core and on most islands. Every gnome belongs to one of the nine guilds. The Secondary Guild the gnome belongs to must be chosen at character creation.

Personality: Common gnomes are focused and driven with a deep-rooted obsession for a single academic subject or school of thought. Gnomes are inherently curious beings that have to find the answers to problems and mysteries, especially related to their field.

Racial Traits: Mist gnomes possess all of the racial traits described in the Player's Handbook, with additions and exceptions as noted below.

- **Spell-Like Abilities:** A gnome with a Charisma score of at least 10 can choose three of from the following list as spell-like abilities usable 1/day. Caster level 1st; save DC 10 + gnome's Cha modifier + spell level. AmanuensisS, arcane mark, dancing lights, dawnS, detect magic, detect poison, ghost harpS, ghost sound, know direction, minor disguiseS, mending, message, open/close, prestidigitation, stick. Spells marked with a "S" are from the Spell Compendium.

Guild membership: All gnomes must pick a guild related to their obsession from the list below.

- **Physical Sciences:** The gnome is a member of the Physics and Mathematics, the Chemistry, or the Biology guilds.
- Add +1 to the Difficulty Class for all saving throws against transmutation spells cast by gnomes. This adjustment stacks with those from similar effects. This replaces the bonus to illusion spells.
- +2 racial bonus on either Craft (weaponsmithing) or Craft (armorsmithing) checks. Gnomes in this guild are adept at construction. This replaces the +2 bonus to Craft (alchemy).
- **Favored Class:** Artificer or Magewright (see the Eberron Campaign Setting). A multiclass gnome's artificer or magewright class does not count when determining whether he takes an experience point penalty.
- **Social Sciences:** The gnome is a member of the History, the Political Science, or the Sociology guilds.
- Gnomes in this guild possess all the traits of regular gnomes from the PHB.
- **Mental Sciences:** The gnome is a member of the Psychology, the Philosophy, or the Theological guilds.
- Add +1 to the Difficulty Class for all saving throws against enchantment spells

cast by gnomes. This adjustment stacks with those from similar effects. This replaces the bonus to illusion spells.

- All Knowledge skills are considered class skills and any Knowledge skills already possessed receive a +2 racial bonus. Gnomes in this guild are knowledgeable. This replaces the +2 bonus to Craft (alchemy).
- +2 racial bonus to all Bardic Knowledge checks. Gnomes in this guild are not sociable enough to excel as bards but recall information more readily.
- **Favored Class:** Specialist Wizard. A multiclass gnome's wizard class does not count when determining whether he takes an experience point penalty as long as they are a specialist.

Mad Gnomes

Mad gnomes are gnomes that were born insane. They should be differentiated from gnomes who have been driven insane through mental or emotional trauma. Mad gnomes are physically indistinguishable from regular gnomes except upon close examination. They lack the manic energy and optimistic glimmer to the eyes. Mad gnomes are equally unkempt and dishevelled but this is due to a lack of interest and withdrawal from the world.

Personality: Mad gnomes are easily distracted and unforced with little interest in the world. They are grim, brooding and morbid and seldom show any enthusiasm. They seldom speak but when they do they stick to slow, short sentences in a monotone voice.

Racial Traits: Mad gnomes possess all of the racial traits described in the Player's Handbook.:

- "+2 Constitution, +2 Wisdom, -2 Strength, -2 Charisma. Mad gnomes have limited personalities but their detached natures make them stubborn and strong-willed.
- "+2 racial bonus on Spot checks. Mad gnomes are easily distracted but more prone to have things catch their attention.
- -2 racial penalty on Concentration and Search checks. Mad gnomes are easily distracted and have trouble focusing for long periods.

Folkloric Gnomes

Tiny fey that live in the woods, gnomes make their homes in hollow logs, small burrows and under hills. They are an optional creature that can replace the standard PHB gnomes in a Ravenloft campaign.

Gnomes live alone but sometime visit with elves and other fey in the woods. They spend much of their time following and watching mortals, often playing small tricks on them. Gnomes often take class levels of spellcasting classes to better learn magic and play pranks. They are collectors of knowledge and know much that is hidden or secretive and can sometimes be bartered with for information.

Physical Description: These gnomes are just over a foot tall dressed in simple single-coloured clothing with tall conical caps atop their bearded faces. They favour simple, primary colours and are often seen reclining on large toad stools smoking or napping.

Gnomes look like miniature people with dark brown skin that is heavily lined and looks like old leather. Their hair is pale white and wild with their long beards dangling halfway down their chests. Most gnomes grow beards but some shave their moustaches framing their faces in downy hair.

Personality: Gnomes are unpredictable, chaotic and flighty, being prone to mood swings and erratic behaviour. They enjoy jokes and spend much time laughing and playing in the woods and enjoy leading travellers astray. People who become lost in the woods or wander off clearly marked roads are sometimes said to have been "targeted by the gnomes".

Racial Traits: Gnomes possess the following racial traits:

- +4 Dexterity, +2 Constitution, -6 Strength. Gnomes are small and fast yet lack physical strength.
- **Tiny:** Gnomes are tiny creatures and gain +2 size bonus to Armor Class, a +2 size bonus to attack rolls, and a +12 size bonus to hide checks but he uses smaller weapons than humans use and has no natural reach.
- **Darkvision:** Gnomes see perfectly in the dark up to 120 feet, although this vision is in black and white.
- **Light Sensitivity:** Gnomes, unused to bright lights (or lights of any kind) suffer a -2 circumstance penalty in bright lights, such as the effects of a daylight spell.
- +4 racial bonus on all Knowledge checks and all Knowledge skills can be used untrained. Gnomes are privy to secrets and forbidden knowledge.
- +2 racial bonus on saving throws against illusions.
- Add +1 to the Difficulty Class for all saving throws against illusion spells cast by gnomes. This adjustment stacks with those from similar effects.
- +4 racial bonus on Listen checks. Gnomes have very keen ears.
- **Spell-like Abilities:** At will - Speak with animals. 1/day - Dancing lights, ghost sound, minor disguise, passwall and prestidigitation as Sorcerer of the gnome's level. Spells marked with a "S" are from the Spell Compendium.
- **Alternate Form (Su):** Gnomes can change themselves into tiny or smaller amphibians and reptiles. They may spend up to 12 hours a day in their animal form and may shapeshift freely between forms as long as the total time in animal form does not exceed 12 hours during any 24-hour period.
- **Immunities:** Gnomes are immune to weapons made of stone and any damage inflicted by rocks or stone. Even magical weapons made of stone inflict no damage. Gnomes are also immune to natural and magical fires.
- **Damage Resistance:** 5/ Cold Iron.
- **Sunlight Vulnerability:** A gnome exposed to the light of the sun takes 2d6 damage per round as their body hardens and becomes solid rock.
- CR 2
- Level Adjustment +2

An Audience with the King

Statistics, spell tactics, and other secrets of Azalin Rex

By HuManBing

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This was intended to be a compendium of knowledge, stat blocks, adventure hooks, and spell tactics for Azalin Rex. However, as the initial project swelled to well beyond 50 pages, I realized there was no way it would fit into a Quoth the Raven article's space limitations. More importantly, I wouldn't be able to finish it in time for the Oct. 1 deadline.

This article you read here is a pared-down version of my notes on Azalin. You're still getting a complete revision of his stats, and an analysis of 3.5 PHB spells that he might know. I'm also including the spell analysis of how he might use his PHB spells too. This information is not just useful for Azalin - it can greatly enhance any spellcaster's repertoire, especially the analysis of overcoming enemy saving throws.

This information and excised expansions of it will form the content of a future netbook focusing entirely on Azalin. In the future netbook, I hope to expand the spell analysis to include many other 3.5 sources. I also hope to include the adventure hooks and magic item lists that I've been nursing for many years, and some fiction passages.

The picture of Azalin's live face (drawn by yours truly) currently on his stat page will also be much bigger in the forthcoming netbook.

The Problem with Liches:

In metagaming terms, the DnD lich template is underpowered, compared to other undead templates' attributes (+2 to all mental attributes, compared to the hefty bonuses that a vampire gets) and their combat abilities (no flight, no fast healing, no ethereality). It also excludes Van Richten's Guide to the Lich material.

By contrast, the Dicefreaks lich template does take VRGtL into account, and it allows more flexibility in designing a lich. I applied most of this template for Azalin, and would suggest a peek for anybody looking for more powerful lich enemies. As of this writing, the template can be found online at:

<http://community.dicefreaks.com/viewtopic.php?t=33>

The only thing I did not apply was the phylactery rules (required skills, spells, and feats to build the phylactery), thus freeing up more feats and skill slots for this build. If

you apply the Dicefreaks template in its entirety, be sure to reduce feats and skills accordingly.

The following statistics reflect a complete overhaul of Azalin. I recalculated his skill points from the ground up. The concept is that he is a L18 wizard who became a lich and attained "rank 2" as an Alumnus Lich. This rank is quite suitable, leaving him with mostly the same DR and special abilities as he would have by canon. There is a slight increase in attribute scores from his usual self (giving him one of the highest Int scores of any NPC in Ravenloft). Note also that the DC calculation for Dicefreak liches' touch attack and other fear properties is different - it is $[10 + HD/2 + \text{spellcasting modifier}]$ instead of $[10 + HD/2 + \text{Cha modifier}]$. The CR also is somewhat higher.

If Azalin were to increase in lich ranks, he would become a very powerful enemy indeed, as the progression rate is quite steep for Dicefreak liches. As it is, the main new combat ability he gained in this build is a gaze attack that does the same damage (but lacks the paralysis effect) of his touch. A DM who doesn't like this new power could easily swap it out for another salient ability. Finally, Azalin's curse does not prevent him from advancing in lich ranks. Thus, although he cannot learn new magic, he can still acquire new powers simply by virtue of becoming a more powerful lich.

A liege less ordinary

One major change I added to Azalin is to assume that for the past few levels he had been gradually working towards taking the Archmage Prestige Class. If nothing else, this means his sudden inability to gain XP truly is devastating, as it means all his preparation is largely wasted until he can progress again. I swapped out a few feats to this end.

I calculated Azalin's skill points from the ground up, with a detailed (if initially arbitrary) aging template. I advanced his Intelligence according to his age, levels, and a few Wish spells. (Arbitrarily I said he would likely have enhanced his Int twice with Wishes and three times with level bonuses.) Further details are to be found after the build data.

In my statistics for Azalin, I noted my changes in italicized square brackets. I have also included my working for various total calculations to aid in troubleshooting.

Azalin

Lord of Darkon



Male human Lich Rank 2 (Alumnus) Wiz18 [Ranks from Dicefreaks.]

CR: 24 [CR slightly higher than canon, as per Dicefreaks template.]

Size: M undead (5'11" tall)

Weight: 45 lbs. [150 lbs. live weight, -70% water loss due to lichhood.]

HD: 18d12

Hp: 126

Init: +0

Spd: 30'

AC: (10 standard, +5 natural armor as lich, +5 from Robes) 20 (10 touch, 20 flat footed)

Atk: +12/+7 melee touch (2d8 +3 [Will save for half DC 29, from $10 + \frac{1}{2} HD + \text{spellcasting mod}$] and paralysis [Fort save negates DC 29], negative energy) or +9/+4 ranged touch (by spell).

Also gaze does damage as touch, and triggers Fear, but no paralysis.

To penetrate SR, Azalin's total modifier is +20 (18 from levels, 2 from Robes).

[Touch attack damage calculated differently, and requires two saves: Will save for half damage, Fort save to resist paralysis. Agonizing gaze attack is new.]

SA: damaging touch, fear aura (DC 29 Will), spells [DC 20 + spell level, +1 if necromancy or evocation], paralyzing touch, agonizing gaze, modify memory [only if post-Requiem], undead dominion.

SQ: +2 to all caster checks to overcome SR (from Robes); undead, damage reduction (15/bludgeoning and magic), immunities (cold, electricity, mind-affecting, polymorph, turning resistance +6), lich sight, alternate form, imp familiar ("Squalimous"), Spell Resistance 18 (from Robes).

AL: LE [Though he takes lawfulness much more seriously than he takes evilness.]

SV: Fort 10, Ref 10, Will 17 (6/6/11 wizard base, 0/0/2 attributes, 4/4/4 with Robes) [Attributes are different and Iron Will feat was swapped out.]

Attributes: Str 17, Dex 10; Con -; Int 30; Wis 14; Cha 16 [Dicefreaks lich template attribute progression different; Int and Cha higher.]

Skills: (max ranks 21, total points 146)

[Skill name (ranks + ability mod + [synergy/racial/feat]) = final bonus]

Bluff (10/2 +3) 8,

Concentration (16 +3 [Cha, not Con]) 19,

Diplomacy (10/2 +3, +2 [Bluff synergy] +2 [Sense Motive synergy]) 12,

Disguise (0/2 +3, +2 [Bluff synergy]) 5,

Gather Info (0/2, +3, +2 [Kn Local synergy]) 5,

Hide (0/2 +8 [racial]) 8,

Intimidate (12/2 +3, +2 [Bluff synergy]) 11,

Kn Arcana (16 +10) 26,

Kn History (9 +10) 19,

Kn Local (9 +10) 19,

Kn Religion (9 +10) 19,

Kn Planes (10 +10) 20,

Kn Ravenloft (20 +10) 30, Listen (0/2 +2, +8 [racial]) 10,

Move Silently (0/2 +0, +8 [racial]) +8,

Search (0/2 +2, +8 [racial]) 10,

Sense Motive (10/2 +2, +8 [racial]) 15,

Spellcraft (15 +10, +2 [Kn Arcana synergy], +3 [Skill Focus feat]) 30,

Spot (0/2 +2, +8 [racial]) 10.

[Skill points were completely revised. Skills not listed here are straight attribute checks.]

Feats: Brew Potion [though it's not entirely clear if he'd use this much], Craft Magic Arms & Armor, Craft Wand, Craft Wondrous Item, Empower Spell, Forge Ring, Heighten Spell, Scribe Scroll, Spell Focus (Evocation), Spell Focus (Necromancy), Skill Focus (Spellcraft), Spell Mastery (dimension door, scrying, sending, steal vitality, telekinesis). [Removed Iron Will and Improved Familiar in favor of a second Spell Focus and a Skill Focus in Spellcraft. Both are requirements for Archmage PrC.]

Lich Salient Powers (4): Agonizing Gaze (gaze does damage equal to touch), Fast Healing (10, doubled if 200' near phylactery), Fear Aura (5 HD or less creatures in 60' must make Will save DC 31 or run in fear. Successful save confers immunity for 24 hours), Paralyzing Touch (Fort DC 29). [Entirely new section from the Dicefreaks build, similar to the VRGtL powers.]

Languages: Darkonese, Balok, Draconic, Dwarven, Elven, Old Oeridian (Greyhawk),

Infernal, Mordentish, Vaasi. [Added Old Oeridian.]

Wizard Spells per Day: 4/7*/7*/6*/6/6/6/4/4/3. Base DC = 20 + spell level (+1 for Necromantic or Evocation spells). *Azalin uses his Rings of Wizardry to double his daily allotment of spells for any two levels from One through Three (adding 4 per level).

Spellbook: A matter of DM's prerogative. See below.

Signature Combat Possessions: Ring of Wizardry I, II, III; Wand of Ice Storm (CL 18); Wand of Emotion (CL 18); Black Robe of the Archmagi. Azalin carries a large number of scrolls with Heightened combat spells (as if they were all cast at 9th level, hence save DC of 29 (30 for Necromantic and Evocation spells) and other spells, usually to allow him to escape from combat.

Undead Control : (by source material):

- Azalin can Animate Dead of 8 HD or lower in a 2-mile radius by thought. (Roots of Evil.)
- He also can animate any corpse in Darkon as a skeleton or zombie. (Dark Lord power.) These monsters respond to his orders as if he had cast Control Undead, with no limit to the number or HD thus controlled. All such undead have +6 turn resistance, and he can see, hear, and act through any of them as needed.
- These undead also have burning red eyes, like their master, and can use this as a gaze attack to force a Fear check at the start of combat. Will save DC 22 (VRGttL, using MM calculation for DC).

Design Notes:

Ability score generation record:

Back deducing from GazII information, we strip Azalin's WotC lich template and find his final mortal abilities at transformation to be Str 17, Dex 10, Con ??, Int 22, Wis 12, Cha 14. We know that before he became a lich, he had already grown quite old.

This implies his stats without aging were: Str 23 (!), Dex 16, Con ?? (+6), Int 19, Wis 9, Cha 11. (It is not possible to back deduce his Con, though his 2nd ed. stats had it at 18, which is rather impressive.)

He also had 4 discretionary ability points to assign, at levels 4, 8, 12, and 16 respectively. Arbitrarily we assign those thus: 3 to Int, 1 to Wis.

At his prime, without aging or leveling modifiers, Firan Zal'honan's stats were: Str 23, Dex 16, Con ?? (+6), Int 16, Wis 8, Cha 11.

This is entirely in keeping with a man who had a keen mind but acted rashly on occasion. His Strength score is inhumanly high and one wonders why he didn't become a soldier. (Also his Str was 17 in 2nd ed. and also in 1st ed., in House on Gryphon Hill.)

Applying the Dicefreaks Lich Template to rank 2 (Alumnus), Azalin now has Int/Wis/Cha bonuses of +6/+2/+2. His stats are: Str 17, Dex 16, Con -, Int 28, Wis 14, Cha 16.

We also have a few wishes available. A wizard can prepare up to five Wishes to be cast simultaneously (or in quick succession) to enhance an attribute by +1 each. This build assumes arbitrarily that after Azalin became a venerable human (and quite possibly after he became a lich) he cast two Wishes to boost his Int score. (+2 to Int)

DMs who want to min/max him can apply the full five-Wish +5 bonus to Int, giving him 33, which will affect his spells per day,

his skill points, and the DC of his touch attack at least. (And if you really want to be brutal about it, give him a permanent Fox's Cunning to add another +4, for 37 Int.)

His Strength score is strangely high, but can be explained away by using Wishes to raise his Strength by +5 to score 17. (This would still require that his Strength be 12 when he was a very old man, which then implies it was 18 when he was in his prime... still outstripping his Int somewhat, but at least it's in the realms of possibility.)

His final scores after levelling up, growing old, and transforming into a lich, are: Str 17, Dex 16, Con -, Int 30, Wis 14, Cha 16. I use these stats in my campaign.

Skill points generation record:

We back deduce from GazII and aging modifiers that Firan Zal'honan's Int was 16 when he was born. Furthermore, we arbitrarily assume that he reached 8th level before he turned 35, 12th before he turned 53, and 15th before he turned 70 (total +3 age bonus to Int, to 19). Then we assume that of the 4 discretionary ability points bonuses he gets, he spends 3 on Int at levels 4, 8, and 12 respectively, and spends the last point on Wisdom. His final mortal Int is 22 (two points below the Gaz II's ability rank).

The skill points breakdown per level is:

- Starts L1 at 24.
- Plus 6 for each L2 - L4 (+18).
- He spends a discretionary point to boost his Int to 17, but doesn't change the skill points calculation.
- He gets another 6 for each L5 - L7 (+18), then at L8 he spends another point to boost Int to 18.
- L8 brings in 7 skill points instead of 6. (+7)
- At the end of this level he becomes middle aged, adding another Int point to 19

(which doesn't change the skill points calculation).

- From L9 - L11 he gets 7 per level (+21)
- At L12 he spends his discretionary point in Int, ending with 20 and increasing his skill points. Thus, he gets 8 skill points instead of 7. (+8)
- From L13 - L16 he is old, increasing his Int by one to 21, which does not alter the skill points. He gets 8 points per level. (+32) [At L16, he chooses to spend his discretionary point on something else, likely Wisdom.]
- From L17 - L18 he is venerable, increasing his Int by one to 22, which increases his skill points. He gets 9 points per level. (+18)

His transformation to undeath does not alter his skill points in any way, though it does boost his Int somewhat. For this character stat, we assume he gained no levels while a lich.

The skill points total is 146, and I used this number when assigning his skills. The skills listed in GazII are extremely opaque and there is no visible methodology as to how they were generated. (A trait that practically all other official stat blocks in all other official products also share.) It is quite possible that the designers used the shortcut of calculating all Azalin's skill points based on an Int score of 24 for each level. This would result in skill ratings quite considerably better than what I have here. This calculation is organic, assuming that he had non-optimal scores at L1, and gradually increasing them as he gained in Int.

This calculation is not meant to be a min/max exercise. It is assumed throughout that Azalin had to deal with the same obstacles and sacrifices in levelling up that all PC-type heroic characters would, and that he overcame them, rather than maxing out his

hp. While smoking a pipe. And dating the Simbul.

Feat selection record:

Azalin has 12 feats total: 3 at creation (Scribe Scroll, plus one for 1st level, plus one for being human), plus 3 wizard bonus feats at L5/10/15, plus 6 levelling feats at L3/6/9/12/15/18.

His feats were somewhat of a mishmash. I have changed a few feats from the GazII, specifically throwing out Iron Will and Improved Familiar. (Very few mind affecting spells will work on Azalin anyway, given his lich status, so his current Will save is good enough. Also, Azalin never seemed the type who particularly cared much about his familiar. He apparently never had one while he was alive.)

I added in Spell Focus (Evocation), and Skill Focus (Spellcraft). My build assumes that Azalin was considering becoming an Archmage PrC, and those are prerequisites. This becomes more important later when I run Roots of Evil in my own campaign, wherein Azalin escapes Ravenloft and gains a few levels in Archmage before the adventure closes.



What you don't know...

Parameters of Azalin's curse, and ways to circumvent it

Azalin has, perhaps, the most elastic curse in all of Ravenloft. His curse is to never be able to learn new magic, which would rightly be agonizing for a lich (especially given that he gave up his humanity to be able to learn new magic). However, in terms of game mechanics, the designers rightly saw that this would prove immensely hobbling to him,

and possibly rob him of the very trait that he is supposed to symbolize - a fearsome expertise in wizardry.

The GazII recommends that DMs give Azalin spells that would logically be in his spellbook, rather than arbitrarily exclude a spell that didn't make the cut. As most Wizards supplements contain some new magic, this meant that GazII came before most and as such Azalin missed out.

There are a few in-canon ways that Azalin can work around the curse, but they have limitations.

Canonical workarounds:

Limited Wish and Wish:

These can imitate magical spells within reason, and may even include non-arcane spells that Azalin normally couldn't cast. This costs gold, which Azalin could probably meet without much problem, and XP, which Azalin might be somewhat more reluctant to expend. A general rule of thumb might be that Azalin has a few scrolls of these scribed in general terms, OR specifically to meet general threats, just in case he needs them. He will not have anything scribed to fulfill specific threats unless he knows of them beforehand.

Of course, given his intelligence-gathering capabilities, this is rarely a problem.

Shadow Evocation/Conjuration:

Azalin knows both of these spells, which allow him to mimic any spell below a certain level in those two schools, regardless of whether he actually has the target spell in his spellbook or not. (Shadow Conjuration only works for a certain subset.)

Additionally, Ravenloft has a quirk where these spells are altered to occasionally give rise to shadow monsters upon expiration if the caster fails a Will save. Azalin could

willingly fail his Will save, whereupon he then immediately seizes and commands those shadows to join the fight if needed. Of course, this happens more frequently with Shadow Conjunction than it does with Shadow Evocation, as the latter has more instantaneous spells that won't last long enough to form a shadow monster.

He can mimic Mage Armor using Shadow Evocation and when the spell runs out, he can capture the shadow monster that is subsequently produced. Other evocation spells he can mimic are: Gust of Wind, Scorching Ray, Shocking Grasp (through Spectral Hand), Fire Shield, Shout, and Wall of Fire - however, these all target enemies and they get a chance to disbelieve it.

Using Shadow Conjunction, Azalin can mimic Phantom Steed (which gives him truly exceptional battlefield mobility beyond even what a Fly spell can offer - a fly speed of 240' and an uncomplaining steed that doesn't mind undead riders), Stinking Cloud (to which Azalin and undead/constructs are immune, but which affects enemies so gives them a chance to disbelieve), Sleet Storm (to make a portion of the battlefield inhospitable), Fog Cloud, Glitterdust, Acid Arrow, Summon Swarm, and Grease. Needless to say, all the Summon Monster spells L1 - L3 are available too and are good candidates for the shadow monster exploit (outlined above).

Changes to his spell list supported by official products:

These are spells that Azalin has made use of in official products, but which were left off his list. Alternatively, these are spells that were included in his 3.0 write up but which have shifted around in 3.5.

- Bone Seizure: (GazII) In King of the Dead, Azalin forces two rebellious nobles

to drink goblets filled with poison. They both remain fully conscious of the act and fight it all the way, so it is likely not a mind affecting spell. This spell replicates that sort of struggling coercion quite well.

- Clone: Azalin casts this spell to clone the PCs in From the Shadows. He does not have any servitors with 15 caster levels in arcane spells to cast it for him. It is not in his spellbook but should be included.
- Create Quasimancer: (GazII) Azalin is surrounded by quasimancers in Roots of Evil, and none of his spellcasting servitors is high enough level to cast the spell. The entry in GazII even uses Azalin himself (or at least, a L18 wizard lich) as an example of a caster, but for some reason the spell was left off his spell list. Highly recommended for inclusion. [Also, if the GazII quasimancer isn't detailed enough, consider using the Deathlock monster from Libris Mortis, which is quite similar.]
- Daylight: This spell is no longer L2 but instead L3.
- Detect Thoughts: In King of the Dead, Firan specializes in reading people's minds.
- Emotion: Azalin knew this spell in 3.0, but that was split into two spells in 3.5 - one a Bard spell (clearly off limits to Azalin) and the other a Sorc/Wiz spell, Crushing Despair. Azalin should definitely know Crushing Despair, as it gives him a good tactic to lower enemy saves in battle by -2.
- Erase: Azalin might have used this spell to flummox Strahd by hiding any references of liches from Strahd's compendiums in I, Strahd: the War Against Azalin. Likely paired along with Illusory Script and Secret Page.
- Magic Aura (Nystul's): This L1 spell is one he has used in From the Shadows and

Roots of Evil to enchant false magic items to trick PCs. It was left off his spell list.

- Polymorph Other: This L4 spell has been changed to Baleful Polymorph at L5 in 3.5.
- Power Word Stun: This L7 spell was increased to L8 in 3.5.
- Project Image: This spell has been increased in level from L6 to L7.
- Symbol: Azalin knew this spell in 3.0, but in 3.5 it has been split into many different spells ranging in level. It's reasonable to allow Azalin to know them all.
- Teleport, Greater: This 3.5 spell replaces Greater Without Error from 3.0. Note that Azalin has always had this spell, all the way through 2nd edition and even in 1st edition's House on Gryphon Hill (he has it memorized twice there). In P. N. Elrod's second I, Strahd novel, Strahd asserts that he has never seen Azalin use any teleportation magic. This is an assumption completely unsupported by the canonical rules, as Azalin has Dimension Door and Greater Teleport to get around. In *From the Shadows* it is even shown that he relies on it heavily (his laboratory room in Castle Avernus normally inaccessible by physical means, and he teleports in and out).
- Temporal Stasis: Azalin has known this spell as a L9 spell for many different editions. However, in 3.5 it's no longer L9 but L8.
- Wall of Force: Azalin uses this spell at the end of *From the Shadows* to trap the PCs, despite not having it explicitly on his spell list. He casts it without any vassalich or servitor's help, implying that he does actually know it. This is such a common spell that a DM would be entirely within his rights to assign it to Azalin anyway.

DM-initiated changes to his spell list:

Last and least in authority are the DM-permitted changes to his spell list. This list is not exhaustive - I include only the spells that I've found add to Azalin's interest among my players. I have included my justifications in a few cases. In most other cases, however, I just added whatever felt right, and these spells are at the bottom of each level's lists, without justification. This is entirely non-scientific and highly subjective. I also have not included any spells that are already mentioned above.

Player's Handbook:

Level 1

- Shield: Combat buff.
- Mage Armor: Canonical through via Shadow Conjuration and compatible with Spectral Hand.
- Shocking Grasp and Chill Touch: Compatible with SH.
- True Strike: Almost ensures a successful ranged touch attack. Vital.
- Sleep and Color Spray: After Mind Fog, allows undead allies to coup de grace the entire group.

Level 2

- Blindness/Deafness: Good necromantic spells to neutralize one enemy.
- Ghoul Touch and Touch of Idiocy: Compatible with SH, softens up one enemy. Idiocy tenderizes for Maze and also reduces Will by up to -3.
- Bear/Bull/Cat/Eagle/Fox/Owl Stat Boost: Cheap and quick stat boost compatible with SH. Azalin would likely have at least one of these, and quite possibly have found a way to make some of them permanent. (Using a min/max build, with 5 Wishes to Int and a permanent Fox's

Cunning, his Int could be as high as 37, before any Int-boosting magical items were added. Save DCs against his spells would be 23 + spell level!)

- Fog Cloud: Good for battlefield control.
- Scorching Ray: Combat ranged touch, does more damage than Fireball at his level, with no save.
- False Life, Blur, Fog Cloud.

Level 3

- Phantom Steed: Canonical via Shadow Conjunction. This spell gives him excellent battlefield mobility: up to 240' per round flight. Because the only target of this spell is himself, the disbelief limitations of Shadow Conjunction are mostly sidestepped. The only drawback of this spell is that it can take damage and thus end. Azalin would likely keep close to the ground to minimize falling damage. Also, the phantom steed doesn't fear undead riders.
- Magic Weapon, Greater: It's hard to imagine how Azalin can make magical arms and armor without this spell.
- Stinking Cloud: Combat battlefield control. Azalin is immune.
- Explosive Runes and Snake Sigil: Protection on his scrolls.
- Arcane Sight: Cast at beginning of combat to see what magical protections enemies have
- Tongues: Works in conjunction with his Iron Crown (pre-Requiem).
- Invisibility Sphere: Let allies get surprise while Azalin casts buffing magic.
- Gentle Repose: Transportation back to Avernus.
- Vampiric Touch: Touch spell deliverable through SH.
- Blink and Major Image: Battlefield evasion.

- Slow: Affects 18 enemies in 30', giving among other things -1 to Reflex.
- Protection from Energy, Flame Arrow, Gentle Repose, and Shrink Item.

Level 4

- Fire Shield: Stops melee attacks and grappling.
- Resilient Sphere: Trap an enemy.
- Invisibility Grtr: Excellent for stealth.
- Enervation: He has Energy Drain, so it's odd that he doesn't have this.
- Solid Fog: This stops most ranged attacks, but not magical rays.
- Minor Creation, Detect Scrying, Locate Creature, Geas Lesser, Stone Shape, and Illusory Wall.

Level 5

- Cloudkill and Cone of Cold: To which Azalin and his construct/undead allies would be immune.
- Animal Growth on Ebb the dragon would make her even more powerful than she already is.
- Break Enchantment, Blight, Dismissal, Private Sanctum, Major Creation, Planar Binding Lssr, Teleport, False Vision, Persistent Image, Fabricate.

Level 6

- Dispel Magic Grtr: Essential for Dispel duels, as it increases the CL bonus up to max of +20, whereas Dispel Magic L3 only allows +10 max.
- Globe of Invulnerability: With this active, Azalin may not even need to enter some Dispel duels.
- Suggestion, Mass: Dangerous after a successful Mind Fog.
- Create Undead: Allows Azalin to create specific types of powerful undead.

- Freezing Sphere: Azalin could cast this and allow it to detonate in his hand, injuring anybody who comes within meleeing distance of him. He is immune to the spell.
- Circle of Death: This would kill 18d4 HD of living enemies, which he could raise as undead.
- Repulsion: Makes it very hard for anybody to grapple or melee you.
- Symbol of Fear (3.5 update to Symbol), Lucubration, Wall of Iron, True Seeing, Chain Lightning, Mislend, Programmed Image, Veil, Move Earth.

Level 7

- Arcane Sight Grtr: Intelligence gathering.
- Reverse Gravity: Renders an entire area off limits to landbased creatures. Those entering it are helpless and can be targeted at will with spells.
- Sequester, Phase Door, Plane Shift, Teleport Object, Scrying Grtr, Hold Person Mass, Insanity, Delayed Blast Fireball, Prismatic Spray, Invisibility Mass, Simulacrum, Control Undead, Control Weather.

Level 8

- Polar Ray: Does 1d6/level damage up to 25d6, a better deal than Fireball. It's a ranged touch, meaning Azalin has more control over its success, and even if reflected or turned, it does no damage to Azalin, who is immune to cold. Follow up with a Power Word or other spell that relies directly on the current hp of the victim to function.
- Protection From Spells: Gives +8 to saves vs. spells.
- Create Grtr Undead: Allows more powerful undead to rise.
- Horrid Wilting: Area affect spell to which undead and constructs are immune.

- Dimensional Lock: Stops anybody from teleporting in or out - very useful for strongholds.
- Discern Location, Sunburst, Screen.

Level 9

- Power Word Kill: Only affects those with 100 hp or less. Combined with hp-lowering no-save spells like Polar Ray or Avasculate (Spell Compendium) this is lethal.
- Meteor Swarm: Don't forget this can be a ranged touch attack too, eliminating enemy saves.
- Time Stop: Very powerful spell, allowing Azalin to divide the battlefield, buff his allies, put down illusions, without enemies being able to react.
- Soul Bind, Wail of the Banshee.

Ravenloft Gazetteer I I

L2: Locate Mark (GazII)

A note on lich spell memorization:

This would have to be a house rule, but consider the 2nd edition rules on lich memorization from Van Richten's Guide to the Lich - they can spend one turn per spell level in deep thought to recover a cast spell. This could allow Azalin relatively very quick recovery of spells he cast previously. If he's trying to cast spells that he has under Spell Mastery, then he doesn't even need his spellbook to prepare them.



Sweeping the field

spell use and combat

Anybody who has played through From the Shadows will know that there is a climactic battle against Azalin himself at the very end. However, this treat is somewhat diluted

because (for plot reasons) Azalin is not using his magical tactics to best effect. He is, essentially, playing dumb so the PCs can stand a chance of killing him.

This chapter posits what might happen if Azalin wants to play it smart.

Combat tactics in general:

Touch attack:

A lich's touch attack does something that arcane magic generally cannot do. It can permanently paralyze an enemy. Thus, while mortal arcane casters usually have to keep one eye on their held or ghoul touched foes, because those spells eventually run out, a lich doesn't have this problem. Azalin could theoretically lich touch an enemy and leave him to starve to death (or possibly even die of asphyxiation - there is nothing in the rules to specify that a person so paralyzed can even respire unassisted).

Optional rule - lich healing touch: Azalin's touch attack deals negative damage. In theory this means he should be able to use a standard action per turn to inflict negative damage to an undead and heal it - or possibly even on himself. Using the standard build, it amounts to roughly 9 or 10 hp healing per application. Using the Dicefreaks build, it roughly equates to 12 hp healing per application. Note that an application requires that Azalin stop and spend a standard action to use it that way. Also bear in mind that the Dicefreaks build also allows him fast healing 10 (or 20 if within range of his phylactery) anyway, possibly rendering this obsolete. It could be useful if done on an undead ally.

Optional rule - lich touch through Spectral Hand: Azalin's touch attack is not technically a spell, but if the DM wishes, he might be able to extend its range through a

Spectral Hand spell. In previous editions, there was a wizard spell Lich Touch, so this rule is not entirely unreasonable. This optional rule makes Azalin's Spectral Hand very important for finishing off disadvantaged foes by applying his permanent paralysis to them at a distance. It would also make him a potent rearguard coordinator, healing his undead allies at a distance.

Gaze attack:

The Dicefreaks build gives him a gaze attack that does damage equal to his touch attack, but does not paralyze the enemy. The damage is still $2d8+3$ and a Will save at DC 29 will reduce this by half.

Optional rule - Lich sight: If you choose to use the Van Richten's Guide to the Lich rules, then all liches have a gaze attack that triggers a Fear check, and so do their undead servants. The gaze attack, calculated using the MM guidelines, would be DC 22 (or DC 29 if calculated using the Dicefreaks guidelines). I would lean towards using the higher DC for Azalin himself and the lower one for his servitors. Azalin can choose to deactivate this power. Note that this can become very powerful if used in conjunction with his Agonizing Gaze power (from the Dicefreaks build) - the enemy takes damage and starts running in fear. Throw in an Eyebite spell, and the enemy had better have the Blind-fight feat available.

Servitor animation:

Azalin can animate any number of zombies and skeletons at will, and can also animate more powerful undead through spell use (or through using the Roots of Evil rule of 8 HD max - this is an innate ability). He also can seize control of any undead creatures in Darkon. This is usually enough to bring most combat to an

end very quickly, unless some particular enemy is unusually resistant against undead.

If undead are not suitable allies, Azalin can also cast Reanimate to bring back dead enemies back as a construct instead, although this does allow a save. He also has a few Summon Monster spells available, or at least via Shadow Conjunction.

If Azalin's interested in capturing an enemy, the easiest tactic by far is simply to sit back and let his undead allies swarm them into immobility. If he does this, good buff spells are Invisibility for himself, then Spectral Hand, then a repeating pattern of touch based buffs for his undead minions such as Stoneskin and Magic Circle Against Good. All of these do not affect foes, so Azalin's Invisibility would stay active (though the Spectral Hand may give away his direction, if not his position... it stays between the caster and the target at all times, allowing smart PCs to triangulate his bearing). An enemy, in between dealing with unending hordes of undead, would be hard pressed to find an invisible Azalin.

Optional rule - the shadow summoning trick: Note that Azalin can exploit a little quirk of Ravenloft's spell rules: any Shadow Conjunction or Shadow Evocation spell requires the caster to make a Will save at the end of the duration, or the shadow magic will become a free willed shadow monster (as per MM) and possibly attack the caster. Azalin controls all undead automatically, so he could choose to purposefully fail the Will save, and then seize control of the shadow monster anyway.

Optional rule - Undead command: If you choose to use the Roots of Evil rules, Azalin can also animate and control any undead of 8 HD or less in a 2 mile radius. This is in addition to his ability to control all undead that happen to wander into Darkon regardless of HD, and also to his ability to

animate and control skeletons or zombies anywhere in Darkon regardless of HD.

Scroll use:

Wizards should almost never rely purely on their memorized spells for battle. Memorization is lengthy, chancy, and inefficient. In fact, the mechanics of memorizing spells is so unfavorable (compared to that of clerics, who have much larger spell selection and limited spell swapping, and to that of sorcerors, who have smaller spell selections but unlimited spell swapping) that DnD makes Scribe Scroll available to all wizards at L1.

Azalin has time and money enough to scribe scrolls, and he would have enough spying and scrying resources to figure out what weaknesses his enemies have and to prepare accordingly. With the treasury of a major nation behind his magical enterprises, the DM is well within reason to give Azalin virtually any spell scroll he wants.

Optional rule - Heightened Spell scrolls: If Azalin anticipates combat, a few scrolls with the Heighten Spell feat can really shift the tide of battle. Heighten Spell allows you to sacrifice a higher level spell slot to cast a lower level spell, with the benefit being that the spell has a higher DC. This is usually a poor payoff when dealing with memorized spells, but it becomes a powerful factor in scribed scrolls, if the DM allows it. The very use of a scroll is to expend a spell ahead of time when you don't need it, so that you can apply it in time of need. Azalin might spend a few days each month scribing a few scrolls with Heightened Spells to make things very difficult for anybody who tries to fight him. He can Heighten a spell to L9 to maximize the save DC. (DC would then be 29 for most spells, 30 for Evocation/Necromancy.) Needless to say, Azalin cannot Heighten L9 spells.

Optional rule - Rooms of Magic: Castle Avernus has several rooms of magic, each dedicated to a single school of magic. It also has a room of elemental magic (and of wild magic, which he cannot use). Each room gives a +2 to the effective caster level of anybody casting a spell from that school. At DM's discretion, this could apply to scrolls too, so Azalin could get the benefit by expending that spell in the relevant Room of Magic while scribing his scroll. The actual benefits of this are not particularly great. Most spells max out in power at caster level 18, so increasing the CL to 20 is not particularly important. Two areas where caster level is directly important are: in a Dispel Magic check (1d20 + CL if dispelling, 11 + CL if resisting dispel), and in overcoming Spell Resistance (straight up CL d20 check). If Azalin is up against opposing spellcasters or enemies with substantial SR, he would probably use this tactic to prepare ahead of time.

bludgeoning and adamantite - making it hard to injure him in combat. Mage Armor via Shadow Conjunction is a good touch spell to grant his allies and himself through Spectral Hand.

Magic Circle Against Good grants him or an ally a +2 to AC and saves against effects initiated by good beings. This is one of the spells he would likely be slinging with abandon through Spectral Hand on allies.

A good starting volley once combat breaks out would be Invisibility followed by Fly or a Phantom Steed via Shadow Conjunction for battleground mobility. After that spells like Silent Image, Mirror Image, Minor Image, Permanent Image, and Project Image all help him distract and confuse his enemies without bringing down his own Invisibility. Project Image is especially useful if used in conjunction with Wall spells, as Azalin can get line of sight from the projected image, and can cast spells through it, making it doubly confusing for enemies. If his enemies are split into two parties by a Wall of Force, Project Image gives the illusion that Azalin is on one side casting spells at them, while the real Azalin may be flying invisibly all around the battlefield.

Spell tactics:

Personal buff spells:

Azalin's canonical spell list tends more towards mobility and misdirection than to actual combat resistance. If he has it scribed to scroll, Foresight is a good candidate for a spell - in addition to the AC and Reflex save bonuses, it generally alerts Azalin to what type of threat he faces. Sometimes that knowledge alone is more important than a momentary bonus. This lasts for three hours if cast by Azalin, so he would likely have it active well in advance of combat.

Stoneskin is another spell that Azalin would always have close at hand, and he can also cast it through Spectral Hand to buff up important allies at a distance. He now essentially has DR 15/magic and

Spectral Hand:

Azalin's canonical spell list is missing most of the spells castable through this one. The Spectral Hand spells that Azalin can cast according to canon are:

- L0: Touch of Fatigue, Resistance.
- L3: Fly, Gaseous Form, Magic Circle against Evil, Magic Circle against Good, Nondetection.
- L4: Bestow Curse, Contagion, Polymorph Other, Stoneskin.

Azalin keeps at a distance from his enemies and casts Spectral Hand from a scroll and then channels spells through it. He can cast L0 Resistance on his allies in

combat, especially to bolster the Fort saves of undead allies.

L0: Touch of Fatigue makes enemies unable to charge and also give them a -1 to melee attacks (because of lowered Strength) and a -1 to Reflex saves (because of lowered Dex). The elimination of a charge is important as it prevents enemies from closing with Azalin in close combat, which could prove decisive.

L3: Azalin can deliver Magic Circle Against Good by touch, which allows him to protect his allies (most likely undead, fighting against enemies who are most likely good-aligned) with a modest bonus to AC and saves against attacks by good-aligned creatures.

L4: Bestow Curse spell is useful to reduce an enemy's saving throws by -4, to soften him up for an area effect or other spell that will knock him out instantly. Unfortunately, this spell does allow an initial save.

The Contagion spell has a series of effects, which can cripple an enemy without killing him (in keeping with Azalin's preferences). However, each of the effects relies heavily on the victim failing a Fortitude save first, and then a secondary save (based on the effect). This might be best done following a Bestow Curse spell. Blinding sickness can take a person right out of the combat if they fail a save and lose more than 1 point of Str (they could end up blinded, perfect for Azalin's torture chambers). The other sicknesses can be chosen basically on whether Azalin wants to hamper the victim's Fort, Will, or Reflex saves. Azalin generally will not reduce a person's Strength through this.

The Stoneskin spell can be used to buff allies in the middle of combat. If Azalin has enough scrolls of this, even lowly skeletons and zombies can become extremely dangerous. If the skeletons and zombies are already engaging enemies, it makes sense for

Azalin to cast this, because making them invincible to 150 hp of non-adamantine damage just means it's even more difficult for enemies to get past them to him.

Certain non-canonical spells can be delivered through Spectral Hand, and a few of these are accessible through the Shadow Conjunction/Evocation shortcut outlined above. Of these, Mage Armor and Shocking Grasp are most useful for combat.

Bypassing opponents' Spell Resistance:

Azalin's average roll on an SR check will be 10, for a result of 28 (30 with his Robes). This will usually be high enough to affect most enemies, such that Azalin doesn't have to worry about this unduly. If the DM wants, Azalin can cast from a scroll that he scribed in the relevant Room of Magic, which gives him a +2 to CL and thus to SR piercing.

Generally, Spell Resistance will not present a huge problem for Azalin, even against major enemies. For example, a Solar Angel has SR 32, and Azalin will roll at least a 19 on his check. Casting a scroll with a Room of Magic bonus will up this to 21, and wearing his Robes of the Archmagi will up this to 23. Azalin literally has a 50% chance of piercing a Solar's SR with no extra spells.

Bypassing opponents' saves:

Azalin deals with the same problem that all wizards deal with, and that's enemy saves. Azalin has several paths open to him: he can increase the DC of his own spells, or to decrease the save bonuses that enemy has against them. A third option is to use spells that allow no save at all.

Increasing the save DC of his own spells:

The first method is arguably the easiest. Azalin can arbitrarily set the DC of a spell by using his Heightened Spell feat. This comes with a drawback in that he expends a spell

slot of the relevant level. However, if Azalin makes a scroll of a Heightened Spell, he basically sidesteps that drawback. Even the lowly Charm Person could be heightened to a L9 spell and scribed. Of course, he then pays a premium in XP and money to do so, but for a ruler of a nation with plenty of time on his hands this is not a bad payoff. He could exhaust a large number of scrolls before having to rely on his own memorized spells.

The save DC for Azalin's spells is 20 + spell level (+1 if school focus). A Heightened spell at level 9 automatically has a save DC of 29 or 30, which even a level 20 character using a Good save cannot reliably make without other benefits and bonuses. (L20 has +12, which averages to 22.5.)

Decreasing the save bonuses of his enemies:

This method relies much on spells that decrease enemies' saves directly, or that decrease their attribute scores and thus reduce their saves tangentially. This is much less reliable because the mechanic of the enemy's save roll is completely beyond Azalin's control. Most spells that lower saves still allow an unmodified initial save to resist, and if that save is successful, the tenderizing effect is lost.

One spell is worth a mention because it reduces saves without allowing an initial save to avoid this effect. That spell is Limited Wish, and it can be cast to bestow a -7 penalty to the victim's very next save. Used in conjunction with a devastating tenderizing spell like Mind Fog, the victim has very little chance of success. Azalin would likely have very many scrolls of this spell scribed and ready, and best of all - he does not even need to Heighten the Limited Wish, because it allows no save.

(This begs the question of what effect a Wish would have. A DM could house rule that a Wish would impose a -10 or even -20

on the affected character's next save. The official rules are silent on this.)

Another spell that is worth a mention is Feeblemind, which saddles the target with an initial penalty to save of -4 if they are spellcasters. It does not, however, affect any subsequent saves, though the target is likely hopelessly unable to function (with Int and Cha scores at 1).

Finally, the two examples of Enervation and Energy Drain are worth mentioning. They do not automatically succeed, because they require a ranged touch attack. However, a ranged touch attack is generally easier for the caster to succeed on than hoping the enemy fails a save, especially if the caster can use True Strike. Being hit with either of these spells will automatically reduce saves, as a result of negative levels.

Spells that reduce all saves, and bypass an initial save:

These spells should be in the repertoire of any wizard looking to cast spells on unwilling enemies. These knock down the enemy's saves without the enemy making any sort of roll to avoid it.

- Limited Wish inflicts a -7 on the very next save by this target, with no initial save against this spell. If spell turned, Azalin is vulnerable.
- Energy Drain bestows 2d4 negative levels, which also results in 2d4 penalty to all saves; as a ray attack, this allows no initial save. Azalin is healed if this spell is turned against him.
- Enervation is a lesser form of Energy Drain and like all negative energy attacks, it stacks; as a ray attack it allows no initial save. Azalin normally does not know this spell and in any case it is superseded by Energy Drain.

Spells that don't allow saves:

- Ray of Enfeeblement can be effective against armored fighters, as Azalin immediately drains 6 Str points and up to 11 depending on roll. This reduces the fighter's combat rolls by 3 to 5 and it may make even standing up difficult, given his sudden reduction in carrying capacity. Azalin needs to succeed on a ranged touch attack with this. Targeting a heavily armored fighter or cleric can make them sink to the ground under the weight of their own equipment. There is no explicit rule to state this, but a DM could well house rule that a character or NPC or monster that can't stand up in his armor is now entangled, which hampers movement, spellcasting, and other factors. The rules for entanglement state that the victim moves at ½ speed, cannot run or charge, gets -2 to attacks, -4 to its effective Dex (i.e. -2 to Reflex saves and AC), and then must make Concentration check at DC + Spell level to successfully cast a spell.
- Black Tentacles (or, in my Ravenloft alteration, Grasping Bone-claws) does not allow a save at all, and can be cast to immobilize enemies in a 20' radius in addition to doing crushing damage. Coupled with Ray of Enfeeblement above, these two spells alone could conclude a battle as soon as it begins.
- Forceful Hand and Crushing Hand are both no-save spells that drastically reduce an individual enemy's ability to fight effectively. Coupled with Ray of Enfeeblement, the enemy is in trouble.
- Ice Storm is a somewhat more forgiving spell for Azalin's undead allies, as they are definitely immune to the cold damage and possibly immune to the bludgeoning damage (DM's call). This spell has no save.
- Acid Fog does less damage than Incendiary Cloud, but fewer things are immune to acid than they are to fire. It also obscures vision. If Azalin has some undead with a large number of hp to grapple, he might have no worries about casting this spell to get the PCs to surrender, knowing they'll take damage. Also important, this spell has no save.
- Maze automatically makes an individual disappear for at least a turn, making it good to use on magic users and clerics. However, those types also have the best chance of escaping early from the spell because they tend to have high Int scores. If a particular character is armed to the teeth with undead-killing objects and equipment, that makes a sensible choice of target, especially if it's a fighter or other class not known for having high Int scores. Once Azalin has finished dusting off their friends, he can prepare various spells to immobilize the returning character and strip him of his powerful equipment at leisure. This spell is very dangerous when paired with Feeblemind or Touch of Idiocy (Azalin does not normally know the latter).
- Gate is best thought of as a summoning device, but it can also serve as an unavoidable barrier, at DM's discretion. If Azalin is in a corridor and faces PCs charging him, casting Gate will put a portal to wherever he wants (e.g. The Abyss) which could provide complete cover. This is the normal effect of a non-Ravenloft Gate spell. Inside Ravenloft, however, the Gate cannot allow passage to another plane, but it could at DM's discretion stop things cold as they try to pass through its front facing. This may include arrows and other missile effects, as well as charging PCs or even spell effects. The spell is not clear about this. In Ravenloft fiction, Azalin's attempts to cast Gate and then move through it out of

Ravenloft created a backlash. This suggests at the very least that matter passing into the front of the Gate would be stopped cold, if not actively projected back into Ravenloft forcibly. Of course Azalin could summon things to come through the Gate and attack the PCs, though his previous experience with Fiends suggests that he might think twice before doing this. (Balors have a tendency to get sulky if they find they can't leave the Demiplane of Dread.)

- Obscuring Mist is useful as a distraction tactic. Upon first casting, the PCs will know Azalin is somewhere in there but their missiles and spells may miss because of concealment. In the following rounds, Azalin can use a variety of teleportation or illusionary spells to relocate. The obscuring mist does not follow him as he does this, which could lead to enemies expending resources to dispel or otherwise attack the mists in a vain effort to hit him.

Improving his chances of landing a hit with a ray spell:

- True strike +20 on one attack. Azalin does not normally know this.
- Flat footing the opponent, either by surprise or by ally position.
- Entangling the opponent.

Hitting with a ray spell merely requires a ranged touch attack. Azalin's average roll for a ranged touch attack will be a modified 20 (11 +9) so he has a passable chance of hitting any target whose deflection and Dex bonuses are +10 or less. The bonus can increase if his servitors flank or flat foot the enemy.

Spells that reduce all saves, provided the target fails an initial save:

- Bestow Curse inflicts -4 to all saves; initial Will save negates. This should be cast through Spectral Hand, as it's a touch

attack. Azalin is not immune to this if turned.

- Contagion lowers attribute scores on a failed initial Will save. The relevant ranges for lowering saves are: Shakes Dex 1 to 8 (Reflex reduced by 0 to 4), Slimy doom Con 1 to 4 (Fort reduced by 0 to 2), Filth fever Con 1 to 3 plus Dex 1 to 3 (Fort reduced by 0 to 2, Reflex reduced by 0 to 2), Cackle fever Wis 1 to 6 (Will reduced by 0 to 3). This should be cast through Spectral Hand, as it's a touch attack. Azalin is immune to this if turned.
- Eyebite will sicken the enemy at the very least, causing a -2 to all saves - this might not stack with the Contagion spell above, depending on your DM, as both seem to be a sickening effect. If the optional lich's Fear gaze attack is in use, don't forget to include that, as well as any Dicefreaks gaze attack Azalin may use. For really weak enemies, it will either knock them comatose, or panic them. Once they recover from the panic, they're shaken, which gives them a -2 to various rolls (including saves), although it's not clear whether this stacks with the sickening penalty, above. If so, then Eyebite is a very powerful spell. It lasts for 6 rounds as cast by Azalin and potentially knocks saves down by -2 or -4 if the target fails a Fort save. This is more powerful than Bestow Curse as the caster can hit multiple targets with it over 6 rounds and can do so at range.
- Crushing Despair is an area effect spell, giving -2 to all saves for those who fail an initial Will. It also penalizes attack rolls, damage rolls, and skill checks. Azalin knew the 3.0 precursor to this 3.5 spell, so he should get this by canon. Undead are immune.

Spells that tenderize Will saves specifically:

- Mind Fog inflicts a -10 to Will saves for a whole area of effect; initial Will save negates. This spell is great for casting into combat where Azalin's undead or construct servitors are fighting. They ignore the spell, being undead.
- Feeblemind reduces Int and Cha to 1; initial Will save is at -4 if target is spellcaster.
- Touch of Idiocy reduces Int, Cha, Wis by 1d6, thus Will by 0 to -3. Azalin doesn't canonically know this spell.

Spells that punish low Will saves against an individual:

- Bestow Curse, via Spectral Hand, if he hasn't already cast it at this person. This is a Will save initially - if it takes effect after a Mind Fog, the subject now has a whopping -14 to their Will save.
- Dominate Person, Charm Person, Charm Monster, Suggestion all turn a party member to Azalin's side.
- Feeblemind - drops Int and Cha to 1, effectively nullifying group tactics and spellcasting.
- Hideous Laughter - changed to a Fiendish Cackling instead - neutralizes one enemy combatant for 18 rounds, with only an initial save, making it more powerful than Hold Person.
- Death Sight - GazII spell that he has by canon - forces a Fear and then Horror save if they fail the first Will save. Useful for neutralizing the party's fighter or cleric, who might then turn around and start attacking allies instead.
- Hold Person one individual is held - but this was weakened in 3.5.
- Magic Jar takes one individual out of the battle and gives Azalin access to that

individual's body and equipment. Azalin can likely use this spell with impunity because even if he dies through being too far away from the gem or their corpse, he returns to his phylactery anyway.

- Telekinesis - Azalin can focus on one creature and move it around either as combat maneuvers or as drag and lift. In theory this could be used on a character's armor or equipment, perhaps to suspend the character in mid-air, thus effectively taking him out of combat. If there is dangerous terrain, e.g. a pit or precipice, Azalin could easily carry the person over that and drop them into it.
- Shadow Conjunction and Evocation allow a Will save to disbelieve, which will be difficult after Will tenderizing.

Spells that punish low Will-saves over an area:

- Confusion renders individuals in a 15' radius ineffective for combat for 18 rounds.
- Telekinesis can also be used in one single round to pick up a load of objects or creatures, and throw them at another group of objects or creatures - this could be useful if the PCs are getting physically too close to Azalin for his comfort, by putting some space for his undead to take advantage of.
- Project Image, Minor Image, Silent Image all make it even harder for PCs to locate and fight him.
- Slow affects a group of PCs. Azalin does not normally have this in his spellbook, but it would work very well with Black Tentacles.

Will-save spells are favored for a lich because Azalin can use area-effect spells as he desires, without endangering undead allies, most of which will be immune to mind

effecting spells anyway. More importantly for Azalin, these effects tend to immobilize and disable enemies rather than injure or kill them, which is ideal for his personality and his aims of extracting information. Finally, Azalin is immune to most Will-save spells if they're reflected back at him.

Spells that tenderize Reflex saves:

- Limited Wish, Bestow Curse, Energy Drain, Enervation, Contagion, Crushing Despair, and Eyebite all function for Reflex saves much as they do for Will and Fort saves.
- Slow requires an initial Will save, but reduces speed by half, AC by -1, and Reflex saves by -1. Azalin does not have this spell normally.
- Stiffen (Exemplars of Evil) Fort save or take -4 to Dex, reduced move and maneuverability. Then Fort save or take -8 to Dex, greater reduced move/maneuverability. Azalin does not have this spell normally, but he is immune to it.
- Sap Strength (Book of Vile Darkness) Fort save or get -6 to Dex and Str, i.e. -3 to Reflex and AC. Azalin does not have this spell normally, but he is immune to it.
- Phantasmal Assailants (Spell Compendium) Will save or get -2 to Dex/Con (-4 if Fort save failed). This reduces both Reflex and Fort saves, but the bad news is the victim gets two saves against it.

Spells that punish low Reflex saves over an area:

Azalin also has plenty of Reflex-based area-effect spells, though these are more likely to harm his own allies (and possibly himself) in the midst of combat:

- Web plus any fire-based effect is an effective combination. The Web burns for 2d4 damage (no save) and also holds the

victims in place for Azalin to target them. This can be as lowly as Flaming Sphere or as intense as Fireball, or Incendiary Cloud. Azalin knows all three.

- A note on Incendiary Cloud. This has been held to be inferior to Fireball, and in many respects it deals less damage (4d6 instead of CLd6), but it has notable advantages. First, it lasts for an extended period of time, allowing it to do a protracted amount of damage per round (and possibly ruining enemy spellcasting in multiple rounds). Second, it can move, although the rule book is not too clear on exactly how it moves. It can move up to 10' per round away from the caster, but the caster can concentrate and move it up to 60' per round... but it's not clear whether this is away from him, or whether it's in any direction he chooses. If it's the latter, then this spell becomes quite powerful, because a victim has to move 80' to be outside its effects (the spell has a 20' area and can move 60' per round). All tallied up, the spell cast by Azalin could conceivably do 4d6 damage for 18 rounds, for a total of 72d6 hp. The spell also generates a fair bit of smoke, making it hard for enemies to coordinate themselves. Confused enemies are likely to scatter in all directions, making it easier for Azalin's allies to surround them.
- Confusion can cause enemies in an area to react poorly to area effect spells.
- Telekinetic Sphere allows Azalin to trap any creatures within 18' of each other, which could be as much as five or six medium sized creatures (assuming they were all bunched together). This can keep an enemy from fighting, or protect a neutral creature or object that he doesn't want harmed. It's not certain whether this would negate turning attempts from inside the sphere, but if it did, then in theory Azalin could entrap the party's cleric or

paladin in this and protect his undead from being turned. It's also not clear whether the sphere can be dispelled at will by the caster, with the contents suspended a large distance above the ground.

- Lightning Bolt used to be a wonderful spell for a lich to cast, because in 2nd. ed. it bounced, and liches are immune to electricity damage. In v3.5 they no longer bounce, but they're still useful when the party is in a corridor with nowhere to dodge to.

Spells that punish low Fort saves

These include most of the Necromantic death magic that liches like to use. Azalin is not likely to like to use these in combat unless things really turn for the worse, because he prefers to capture, not kill. However, some mages have Spell Turning or other effects that rebound spells against their casters. If Azalin knows about this, he may open up with many Fort-based spells to begin with, because undead are immune to most of these spells anyway. (Unless they work on objects, e.g. Disintegrate.)

- Contagion falls into this category, and Azalin is immune to it if turned against him.
- Flesh to Stone is a very useful spell that Azalin would likely use with impunity. He has the reverse spell, Stone to Flesh, available, so after battle he could bring the statute back to his lair and set up various containments before casting Stone to Flesh. The spell description says it affects creatures, not objects, which means that it doesn't affect undead (who are immune to Fort save effects that don't also affect objects).
- One quirky spell to cast in mid-combat is Steal Vitality. If it's sustained for long enough, Azalin can effectively age an enemy up to 18 years in just under two minutes. This ageing is irreversible. If

Azalin chooses himself to receive the youthful effect, the effect is essentially wasted, since a lich has nothing to gain from being physiologically younger. Azalin can cast this spell as long as he has spell slots, as he has it in his Spell Mastery list. Useful if he's playing cat and mouse with an enemy, or if an enemy deserves to be tortured thoroughly before being captured. Used against a PC, this will create lasting enmity without actually crippling their ability scores. He stole the best years of my life!

- Horrid Wilting is a favorite of undead spellcasters, inflicting up to 18d6 damage to any living creatures in a 60' diameter. Azalin does not know this spell normally, but it does fit his undead nature. He can march his undead in to attack the PCs as he does this, confident it will not harm his allies.
- Finger of Death and Disintegrate are spells Azalin probably uses rarely. Both stand to utterly destroy an enemy, which he is personally averse to doing, and the latter can be quite deadly against himself if the enemy reflects it on him. (Like most undead, Azalin's Fort save is not particularly strong, but he does have a saving grace in that he can be disintegrated and still come back later.)
- For the same reason as Finger of Death, Azalin will likely not cast Phantasmal Killer often in combat, even though it has no effect against himself and therefore he is safe from it.
- Baleful Polymorph (or Polymorph Other in 3.0) will render individual enemies harmless if they fail a Fort save and then a Will save. The rules allow for some manipulation. If Azalin turns them into a shard of bone that he then animates as part of a skeleton, nobody would be able to find that victim unless they had plenty of time on their hands. Depending on how

you want to read the rules of the spell, a bone shard might still be close enough to a human to qualify for permanent polymorphing.

Other situations:

- If he's really pressed, he can use Shatter, Disintegrate, or even Disjunction if he really must, to knock out an enemy magical items tank or spellcaster. Azalin prefers to collect magical items, however, and will not use this unless things become dire. The one exception to this rule might be enemy turning attempts, all of which require the cleric to forcefully present the holy symbol. Destroying the holy symbol will stop the turning attempts, and Azalin never seemed particularly interested in collecting holy symbols.
- Also, every Ravenloft sourcebook since the 1990 Black Box has said how Azalin loves to let his enemies pick up cursed items that he provides. Logistically, this can prove difficult, as PCs are pretty canny about what they Identify. However, one insidious use of this personality trait is in the spell Trap the Soul. Azalin could enchant a powerful magical item and leave it lying around for PCs to find. Unknown to them, the item is the trigger for a Trap the Soul spell. Once the targeted PC touches the item, he's sucked into a gem in Azalin's lair, and the PCs are down one character in their party until they can get him back. Combat castings of Trap the Soul are riskier because they allow a Will save, but Azalin can use the real name of the PC and impose a -2 to this, on top of all the hefty Will penalties he can pile on top with other spell effects. (Mind Fog -10, Eyebite -2, Contagion up to -3, Bestow Curse -4, Energy Drain up to -8, etc. etc.).
- To take individual enemies out of the battle, Azalin may use repeated Magic

Missile castings and then a Power Word Stun. Various spells mentioned above also have similar uses on the battlefield.

- Hasted undead, especially zombies, can overwhelm unwary enemies.
- Battlefield control is very important against groups of enemies. Forcecage and the various Wall spells prevent enemies from acting optimally, and allow Azalin to drop area effect spells on the enemy who may be unable to escape from it. The various Hand spells that Azalin knows (Crushing and Forceful) can hold a person in an area of effect, though the hand itself may take damage too.

Olerick's Colloquial Guides

Part 2: Vineyards of the Core

Jeremy Roby

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Greetings, fellow travelers!

This volume's subject is one that is dear to my heart - the ancient art of winemaking. To be more precise, I plan to highlight the most popular and prosperous vineyards the Core has to offer. These are the businesses that help to lighten the hearts (and loosen the lips) of people everywhere. After all, this mist-shrouded land of ours is not all about shadows and darkness.

The format for this edition will be slightly different from the first. Instead of a domain by domain breakdown, I've decided to group the vineyards I have chosen by regions. Five separate geographical areas are outlined that I believe cover the entire gamut of wine producing environments in the Core. Not to say that all the wines made in one region are the same, just that they share common climates and soil types.

An astute reader will also note that some domains are conspicuously absent from this guidebook. Some climates, such as Lamordia's, are too frigid for viticulture. Other lands, such as Valachan and Verbrek, don't have enough suitable terrain. Nova Vaasa, on the other hand, has a somewhat

more artificial restriction; under the Lawgiver's precepts, the imbibing of wine is strictly prohibited.

This is by no means an exhaustive survey; only the best of the best will grace the pages of this illustrious list. After all, I have not traveled all across the Core to bring my loyal fans sub par recommendations. Some self-proclaimed connoisseurs may quibble with me over my selections, but once again, I direct readers to send comments or complaints to my generous sponsor, Olerick's Publishing House located in Karg.

Balinok Foothills

This area is comprised of Barovia, Borca, Forlorn and Kartakass. The latter two domains have no domestic viticulture to speak of, however, so I will instead focus on the former two.

We begin with the Boleslaus Vineyard, which can be found just outside the sleepy city of Vor Ziyden along the banks of the Strecura River. Vasali Boleslaus, the founder of the vineyard, was a Barovian who fled his homeland after Borca appeared to its

north. (Some say he was fleeing from Strahd's wrath, although for what transgression no one can say for sure.) Niria, Vasali's granddaughter, now oversees the entire operation. Despite her heritage, she is thoroughly Borcan in her temperament, and is always striving to increase her family's prestige as well as the size of her coffers. The vineyard specializes in producing rich, full-bodied reds that can serve as both dinner and table wines. Niria has recently started selling a line of expensive antique vintages, taken from stock that has been sealed away in the cellar of the family's manor home since the time of the vineyard's founding.

The Borysko Vineyards, located near the city of Sturben, along the Scythe Highway, is commonly known to be the Boleslaus' main rival. Of course, the Borysko family vineyards have been around much longer than the Boleslaus, and consider the latter to be uncouth upstarts. Two brothers, Klous and Mitrin, currently run the operation. Klous tends to the growing of grapes and handles the winemaking, while Mitrin takes care of the shipping and ordering of supplies. The winery produces an amazing assortment of affordable whites and reds, ranging from a light and elegant dessert wine known as Blianko, to the heavy and potent dinner wine known as Rostu. Because of their versatility, they are extremely popular both locally and in neighboring domains.

The next entry, Fiorella's Farm, is a small orchard nestled beside the Viorea Forest near Levkarest. It is run by Trecio Fiorella, a famous Invidian winemaker who abandoned his homeland because, as he puts it, "Lord Malacchio's armies were stomping all over my livelihood." Luckily, Lady Ivana was sympathetic to his plight, and offered him a small parcel of land she had at the ready. Only a few harvests have been reaped so far, but those who have sampled his new batch of yellow and white dessert wines rave about the sweet, milky texture and fragrant

Dread Possibility

Liro is actually one of Ivana's trusted emordenung. He is a dashing, commanding man of 40 years and is a favorite among the ladies in the Levkarest social circles. He has channeled his sorrow over not being able to touch another human being into producing the best wines he can. Ironically, Ivana uses Liro's wines as poisoned gifts that she presents to her rivals. Liro is aware of this, and is deeply disturbed by the perceived "sullyng" of his work, but doesn't see any way to stop it.

aftertaste. It seems like the old man has not lost his touch.

Now we come to the venerable Ikla House, an expansive vineyard that lies to the southeast of Levkarest along the Crimson Road. Ikla House professes to be the oldest vineyard in the domain, and its light, delicate line of white aperitifs and its heady red table wine (its signature brand which shares the name of the original manor) are a favorite of Lady Ivana. It is also the most exported Borcan wine, and its quality rivals that of the best from the Musarde Valley wineries to the north. It is very expensive, and found only in the most discerning households. The estate is currently being run by Liro Cassanova, a cousin of the Ikla's with an infamous drive for perfection. He demands almost inhuman precision and strict attention to details from his workers, and personally tastes from each of the vats before the wines are bottled up.

Zurtiva's Vineyard is a new institution seeking to establish its dominance in Barovia, as well as competing with its more sophisticated neighbor. Boris Zurtiva, a Barovian nobleman who acquired several choice parcels of land after the annexation of Gundarak, established it in 744. It covers a lengthy stretch of land along the Crimson Road between Teudeldorf and Zeidenburg. The orchard makes a variety of tart dessert

Dread Possibility

The land Zurtiva owns is haunted by the ghosts of Duke Gundar's many victims. It is the very blood that has been spilled there that enriches the soil. Entire families of spirits roam the area. The Gundarakites that work for him are very superstitious and several attempted to flee after encountering these apparitions. His armed guards are actually there to keep workers from running off. PCs could be approached by one of the relatives of a captive Gundarakite who received a letter from them asking to help escape their condition. Or Zurtiva himself could approach them, asking their aid in ridding his business of the unwanted phantoms.

wines and aperitifs with a crisp aftertaste. Apples, pears and waldberries are harvested in separate fields and stored in a central warehouse where they are then pressed into wine. Because of the constant threat of Gundarakite rebels, and other more unnatural menaces that hide in the Tepurich woods, Boris has had to heavily fortify his properties with high fences and armed guards. Ironically, he employs many dispossessed Gundarakites whom he kindly allows to live in barracks on the property. While his stock is not of the highest quality, it enjoys a wide popularity among the locals (Barovians and Gundarakites alike).

The Korra Orchard is a smaller, more intimate operation located deep in the Bloodfang Hills in southeastern Barovia. Owned by the Barovian boyar Klovis Barsnost, it is named after his wife Korraina. Klovis originally hails from Vallaki, where his family owned a modest orchard that made plum brandy. He was relocated to Immol 15 years ago by Strahd's order and thus transplanted his love for growing into this new enterprise. He makes up for his relative inexperience in viticulture by frequently consulting with Forfarian herbalists and Hazlani botanists that frequent the city. Barsnost specializes in sparkling

white wines with a light bouquet and a brash aftertaste. Because of the remoteness of his farm, bottles only become available once a year. His stock is delivered to a way station on the Old Svalich Road at the end of each summer where it is then distributed across the land.

Darkon Corridor

This area, as the name suggests, encompasses the entire domain of Darkon, whose offerings are surprisingly scarce when it comes to vineyards. (I imagine the rumors of hordes of wandering undead discourage most local growers.)

The Heart's Blood Vineyard is the only winery in Darkon whose name is well known throughout the Core. Situated to the south of Karg, along the rolling hills of the Vale of Tears, this is a large vineyard that employs over a hundred workers. Nominally, it is run by a consortium of merchants and nobles headquartered in the city, but they have very little to do with day-to-day operations. That task falls to Windal Tinsdale, the vineyard's current director. The ambitious son of a local

Dread Possibility

The Heart's Blood Vineyards is actually a secret Kargat operation. They use the supply lines of the vineyard to transport messages and provide cover stories for their agents operating in other realms. While Windal Tinsdale is human, several of the consortium's sponsors are vampires. Perhaps the PCs can discover a coded message in a leftover wine bottle and then follow the trail to a cell of Kargat agents. Or, the Kargat can approach the PCs and utilize this network to communicate with them. On the other hand, the entire operation could also be used as red herring to throw the PCs off the scent of a real vampire menace because of the obviousness of the name and its associations.

baron, he has aggressively expanded the scope of production and brought in a number of knowledgeable vintners to improve their crop. Its most well known offering is called, unsurprisingly, The Heart's Blood, a heady dinner red that quickly intoxicates. Vintages that date from just after the time of the Crimson Plague (650 BC) are generally regarded as the best, although they are exceedingly rare to come across. The operation has a vast web of importers and exporters all across Darkon as well as in the major cities of the Western Core.

Wintercrest Gardens is the sole elven entry on the list. Common wine drinkers don't fancy elven wine because of its faint, wispy texture, but connoisseurs swear that its aftertaste is the most flavorful. Wintercrest is located in the Mistlands region, roughly halfway between Neblus and Nevuchar Springs in the Nezron River valley. A moderately small operation, it is tended by a dozen gardeners that belong to a monk-like order that is headed by an elf called Endron. The vineyard has been in operation for well over 200 years, but its overseers are continually trying to perfect their cultivation techniques. In that time, they have created several light whites that have become widely popular in sophisticated circles. Their flavors have been dissimilarly described as minty, buttery, and tangy to name but a few.

The Tranquil Hills Vineyards is another unique entry. This small orchard is the brainchild of two halfling brothers, Ginko and Balto Bandy Moss of Rivalis, and is located in the lush, rolling fens that border the edge of the Forest of Shadows. While this is a relatively new venture for the halflings, its success threatens to rival that of their trademark pipeweed. They specialize in fruity dessert wines, including several signature brands, such as Winding River (refreshingly tart, with a lemony aftertaste), Summer Willow (smoky flavor with a hint of herbs) and Morning Dew (nutty with honey

overtones). The operation has a limited shipping network, with wines being available outside Darkon available only through special order. While not as popular with humans, almost any halfling business or home will have a bottle or two on hand.

Lower Musarde Valley

This region encompasses the domains of Dementlieu, Falkovnia, Lamordia, and Richemulot. Lamordia's climate is much too extreme for grape cultivation, however, and Falkovnia's economy is geared mainly towards grain farming. Dementlieu and Richemulot, on the other hand, have more than enough vineyards between them to keep the diligent connoisseur occupied.

Vigne Rouge doesn't need any introduction to even the most casual wine drinker. One of Dementlieu's oldest vineyards, it is quite simply the best wine in the Core. The main orchards are a day's journey west of Chateaufaux along the Avenue de Progres, although the Mondierre family that runs it has several fields outside Port-A-Lucine as well. This vineyard became famous with its self-titled sublime brand of intense red wines. It has since branched out into whites and yellows. Currently, its two most popular labels are Boisson Savoureuse and Ciel Juane. Boisson Savoureuse is their white table wine that has a rich, ripe flavor of junberries. It was introduced in 725 to much acclaim. Ciel Juane is a light, fragrant yellow dessert wine, and is of much more recent vintage, debuting in 743. While the older vintages are out of style these days, most nobles have a bottle or two that they reserve for special occasions in order to impress guests.

Ferme Lacroix, another venerable Dementlieuse institution, can be found nestled along the coast of the Sea of Sorrows a few miles north of Parnault Bay. It is run

by Phillippe Delacroix and his two sons, Xavier and Tomas. Despite the sandy soil and occasional storm, the Delacroix have done an excellent job at producing consistent, quality wines for years. Currently, the vineyard produces several mellow white dessert wines and aperitifs with distinctive amber or straw hues that are very popular among wine drinkers these days. The operation is so successful that the vineyard has its own docks that are used to distribute their wares along the western coast of the Core. And his wares are extremely affordably to the casual imbiber, because Delacroix hires the poor from Port-A-Lucine to help with planting and harvesting. The money he saves from this charity allows him to pass on the savings to his customers.

To the east of Chateaufaux, along the Jewel Box lakes, one can find the many orchards that belong to the collective known as the Macherie Vitners. This is a loose consortium of local growers who decided to pool their efforts which sprung up over 30 years ago. It is headed by Henri Rosseau, the largest landowner amongst the shareholders. The organization was recently able to win away Jean Gaston, an up-and-coming vintner, away from one of the more established vineyards outside of Port-A-Lucine. This group is always researching better techniques and experimenting with new methods to improve their wines. Because of this innovation, the more traditional vineyards have repeatedly tried to sabotage the Macherie Vitner's operations. Currently, their most popular offering is a tart, pinkish wine that they call a Rose (after the group's founder). It has proven quite popular with the masses, although most nobles believe it to be a bastardization of the winemaking process.

We begin our tour of Richemulot with the diminutive vineyard called Coucher Collines, located on the edge of the House of Sages outside of Mortigny. It is the first

Dread Possibility

Sister Valerie and Sister Monique are not anchorites; Valerie is a vampyre and Monique is a red widow. The pair met while hunting for prey in Mortigny. They decided to pool their resources and build a small enclave together using the vineyard as a cover story for their activities. While Toret Thibodeaux does not know of their true evil nature, he has been blackmailed into keeping quiet about their false credentials. They are using the vineyard as a front to prey upon the congregation, and delight in sowing mistrust and betrayal within the community. They are also highly territorial, and have quite publicly hunted several other creatures of the night that have menaced the area in order to garner the goodwill of the locals.

winery on the list run completely by a local branch of the church of Ezra, known as the Cathedral of Beauteous Light. The church is run by Toret Sebastion Thibodeaux, but the vineyard is overseen by a pair of competent anchorites known only as Sisters Valerie and Monique. The fields are tended and harvested by members of the congregation, most of whom are immigrants that have poured into Richemulot from other lands. It carries a wide assortment of mellow quaffers best served before or after meals. Their signature drink is Sang du Dam, a fizzy white wine that makes one very sleepy. While the vineyard cannot compete with its more well-known and established rivals, it is a favorite among the lower classes. The operation sends much of their stock to other Ezran churches to be used during their celebrations, and many anchorites use it to endear themselves to the local populations they are trying to convert.

The next vineyard, Pourpe Chataeu, is widely acclaimed as Richemulot's best winemaker. Next to Vigne Rouge, it is the most respected label in all the land. This large farm is located in the Silent Fields just

west of Ste. Ronges near the Gaspig Lake. It is run by the legendary Dame D'Aubigne, now in her seventies. Because of the large number of fields, the vineyard is able to pick and chose from their best crop, ensuring great consistency between bottles and vintages. Whatever does not stand up to D'Aubigne's exacting standards is used in their line of table and dessert wines. The vineyard's signature label, Pourpe Chateau, is a heavy red dinner wine that appears purple under the right light (hence its name) and has a biting licorice taste. Older bottles (pre-700 BC) are very expensive, but are snatched up quickly by wealthy nobles.

Sol Noir is another distinctive label, named after the dark, rich soil of the winery's orchards. The Penoir family - the patriarch Bertrand and cousins Renard, Cheval, and Odette - runs this medium-sized vineyard located north of Port-A-Museau just across from the Falkovnian border. There have been many petty arguments within the group over how best to run the business, but Bertrand has kept a steady hand overall and their product has not suffered much from all the internal squabbles. Their wines enjoy more local admiration than widespread acclaim, however. The vineyard specializes in red wines of all kinds, but its most notable

Dread Possibility

Of course, the Penoir family is actually a pack of natural wererats. They are one of the oldest wererat clans in the domain, having followed Claude Renier when he fled Falkovnia in 707 BC. Their deepest desire, however, is to wrest control away from Jacqueline and rule Richemulot for themselves. While they have managed to keep their distance from Louise and her doomed machinations, they have secretly been aiding Falkovnian authorities by running a slavery ring right under Jacqueline's nose and are also closely aligned to several of the bandit groups that prowl the Silent Fields region.

offering is a heavy aperitif with a strong black currant bouquet that is popular at masquerades. It is also generally known to be Jacqueline Renier's favorite brand.

Upper Musarde Valley

For the purposes of this guide (and for reasons outlined above), I will limit my discussion of this region to the vineyards of Invidia.

Starting things off is Abalone Vineyards, the oldest vineyard in Invidia. It is run by Blevo Marcella and his youngest son, Kretio. This winery is the only original founder of Karina's famed Harvest Festival that is still in operation today (being established in the days of Lord Bakholis' rule). The family owns several plots surrounding Karina, just east of the Serpent's Tongue river. It produces a wide range of yellow and white table wines with a distinctive airy aftertaste that refreshes the palate. It is easily the most popular choice among natives, as well as the rest of the Southern Core. Though the family has had some recent troubles (Blevo's eldest son, Montavo, was killed by wolves last year) they are friends with several influential people in Karina that have kept his fields safe from Lord Malacchio's depredations.

Next up is Dulce Caprini, a robust operation that in the last few years has become the top exporter of Invidian wines across the Core. It encompasses a small patch of land carved out of the Dreadwood on the banks of the Musarde River. Tav Voryan is the farm's competent overseer and premiere vintner who works day and night, along with a dedicated crew of workmen, to ensure a steady flow of wine. While always rated second in quality to Abalone Vineyards, they produce a range of delectable dinner and dessert wines, specializing in balmy reds that are highly intoxicating. As Tav often says, "Red is the

Dread Possibility

Tav Voryan is a half-Vistani. While usually unconcerned with the activities of his kinsmen, Malacchio's current campaign of persecution against the Vistani has awakened Tav's sense of duty. Under his leadership he has converted the vineyard into an underground railroad for all sorts of covert activities aimed at undermining Malacchio's regime. They provide cover for Gundarakite rebels traveling to Hunadora, as well as ferrying Vistani safely out of the domain.

color Mother Nature intended wine to be." This operation is said to have close ties with the businessmen of Curriculo to protect it from Malacchio's forces as well as the ever-present Gundarakite rebels.

Arrigatto Fields is another vineyard that can be found on the outskirts of Karina near the Vulpwood. It is run by the scandalous brother and sister pair, Marcos and Desmonda Garsonne. They are the subjects of many rumors, and when they are not feuding with rivals they are at each other's throats. (Once they were even accused of being werewolves and having a hand in Montavo Fiorella's death.) They are always trying to outdo the competition. A line of honey-flavored golden wines, called Dolcets, was recently debuted that many see as an attempt to usurp Abalone Vineyard's and Dulce Caprini's customers. Ironically, the Garsonne's farms have lately suffered several wolf attacks, and they have taken to hiring on enforcers lured away from Malacchio's mercenary forces to protect their land.

Our next vineyard, Camp Cambiche, is considered somewhat of a free agent, having no apparent strategic partners or political entanglements. It is a relatively small business operating out the Mantle Woods where the Narov and Gundar rivers meet, near the small village of Tancos. It has

Dread Possibility

Camp Cambiche was originally a front for a werewolf clan from Verbrek. A few years back they were killed by a band of traveling heroes. Afterwards, an up-and-coming merchant family from Curriculo, the Luchettas came in and took over the operation. They in turn were killed by one of Invidia's infamous cannibal clans. This wandering group of flesheaters then used the property as their new headquarters. While they do not harm their workers, anyone else who stumbles upon their land uninvited will be killed, eaten, and have their remains scattered in the forest.

changed hands many times in the last few years, and is currently in the hands of the reclusive Bendocci family, who decided to retain the previous owner's name on their labels. Camp Cambiche is well known throughout the Southern Core for its sparkling white wines that have a slight citrus-y aftertaste and are usually drunk during celebrations. It is not very popular, however, among the more civilized domains to the north.

Vaasi Plateau

This was the most pleasantly surprising leg of my journey. While the wines of this region are characteristically exotic, their taste grows on one after awhile. For previously stated reasons, I will be focusing solely on the wines of Hazlan.

Aziza's Abbey is a modest but noteworthy estate that borders the Mirror River just outside of Sly-Var. As its name suggests, it was once a church dedicated to a long-forgotten god that its current tenants have refurbished. The original Aziza established the vineyard nearly 100 years ago. Today, her beautiful granddaughter, also named Aziza, runs the operation with the help of

Dread Possibility

Aziza is actually an ancient dead who was the original priestess of the church. She was awakened when bandits ransacked the ruined abbey and stole her tomb ward (an round, amber medallion framed in black, meteoric iron). Unable to return to her slumber, she has since become obsessed with reintroducing her cult into the land. She has brainwashed the Rashemi that work for her in thinking that she is a powerful goddess who will overthrow their Mulan masters. They regularly sacrifice plains beasts to sustain her.

dozens of Rashemi laborers. Unlike most Mulan, she treats her workers humanely and they respond with an almost fanatical loyalty to their patron. They have a line of fruity aperitifs and dessert wines that age surprisingly well. Native Hazlani do not like the tart flavor, however, so most of their wares are exported to surrounding domains.

Ozturk Vineyards, producer of the most well-known Hazlani wines, is located just outside Toyalis, along the southern bank of the Saniset River. If you have ever tried Hazlani wine, you have probably drunk a bottle that comes from this vineyard. The Ozturks are a family of shrewd businessmen; and Oadmin Ozturk, who currently oversees the daily operation of the vineyard, is no exception. The winery offers sophisticated red dinner wines that vary from light to heavy consistency and a have peculiar spicy aftertaste. Every few years, they also open a few private family casks for their Prestige series of wines. As these wines are well known for increasing in potency with age (instead of becoming a vinegary mess) bottles of Prestige wines are always eagerly anticipated. As an aside, they also have a sizable distillery on the premises produces boza, the domain's wheatberry beer.

Marmaduke Fields also lies on the bank of the Saniset River, roughly halfway between Toyalis and Sly-Var on the Iron Road. It is run solely by the last scion of that great family, Barzak Marmaduke. It is extremely popularly among natives, but is an acquired taste for outsiders. Indeed, any Hazlani household will have at least one bottle of Marmaduke (as it is called locally) on hand at any time. This farm produces a stunning variety of wines that are suitable for almost any occasion. Their reds make delightfully full-bodied table or dessert wines, and their whites can be used either as a light aperitif or mellow dinner wine. Their most recent vintages are not as well recommended, however, as their older stock.

Conclusion

That finishes our grand tour of the Core's best vineyards. I hope you enjoy learning about these places as much as I did. Until then, may be see each other on the road!

Anatomy of a Horror Tale

A model for a Horror Tale

Alex "Ail" Miranda

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The conversation in the room was animated. Four ladies and two men discussed excitedly the latest craze of the Mordentish high society, amidst the fragrant odours of sundry teas. It was still one hour before sunset and dinner, but in the elegant parlour of Lady Hamilton's country manor, these dandies whiled the time away without concerns. A third man, noticeably bored with the conversation, went to the balcony that gave over the vast lawn and refined gardens of the estate. Another man stood there, absent-mindedly looking at the landscape. The other greeted him:

"Ho Richard, here outside too? "

"Hello Philip. Indeed, the air is lighter here than inside."

"Yes, I noticed you left about an hour ago. They're still at it, you know?"

"What? Still with the latest novel of the Dead Travel Fast?"

"Indeed, old chap. Still there."

"Oh, dear! I really can't stand those books. I don't understand how anyone wastes their time reading them. Was that why you left too?"

"Oh, no, Richard, I just wanted to smoke, you see. I'm not as radical as you. But tell me, by the way, why do you hate those books so much?"

The other looked at him, briefly incensed by an inner fury that quickly subsided.

"Why?! Do you still ask? Have you ever read one of those books?"

"One or two, yes. Margaret loves them and I skim through now and then."

"And did you like them? Oh please, there's nothing in there! No creative idea, no moral dilemma, no genial spark!"

Philip nodded, silently agreeing. Richard continued

"There are so many good works out there, in horror even, why don't we buy those instead? Take the 'Requiem for a Scholar', for instance. How supremely it deals with an ambition that has plagued humanity from the earliest ages and inevitably leads to doom. Or the deep ambiguity and philosophical questions raised by the Lamordian poet in 'Quest for Paradise'. Or even that marvellous play of Lord Percy Ruthgate, the 'Baron Mardiyen'."

Philip drew another heavy breath on his pipe and acquiesced.

"Excellent play that, indeed, full of warnings and advice for travel in distant lands. If I ever go to the dark woods of Borca and Barovia, I'm sure to take some holy symbol and a barrel of holy water."

"Philip, don't tell me you believe in vampires."

"Why not? You do believe in ghosts too, don't you?"

"That's completely different!, Richard exclaimed red in anger, Ghosts exist, you know that as well as I do. But vampires? What a ridiculous notion!"

"If you say so, but what does one know of those eastern countries anyway?"

Richard cooled and gained back his temper.

"Let's go back to the Dead Travel Fast, shall we? I do not want to sour my friendship with you."

Philip patted his friend, relieved.

"Go ahead then, what else is there to say about those... dreadful novels?"

"Well, they're always the same! Have you never noticed? They all follow the same scheme, it's always the same story, only in different garments. Allow me to show you."

Model for a Horror Tale

This article is a study on horror tales. Specifically, it proposes a model to write a horror tale that will encompass many already written stories, but its main purpose is to guide a writer into making a new horror story, and quite possibly the plot scenario for a Ravenloft adventure.

This model was based primarily on the film "Dracula - Prince of Darkness" from Hammer Studios and I've found it can be

applied to many other stories, mainly of the variety where the heroes become stranded against a danger they are not aware of (usually a supernatural creature) and which they have to destroy or evade. Throughout the article, I give some examples of a Ravenloft adventure constructed more or less along these lines.

Part I : The Exposure

In the first part, the heroes begin in complete security and self-assurance. They are, or come from, a completely friendly environment and have no reason to suspect anything to be otherwise. However, they are gradually put through events that start to make them uncomfortable. This can be achieved by a change of location (this is, a travel to a place - ex: from England to Transylvania) where rules are distinct from those they are used to, a scientific breakthrough may create new possibilities and the accompanying moral doubts, the heroes can be told of strange events or local customs that have no explanation but that do not affect them directly or they can be warned into not going to some place.

The important moments here are of two kinds: those defining the absolute safety of the heroes and those that confront the rules they're used to against the new information they have: the warning of a mysterious stranger, the witnessing of suspicious behaviour by other people, seeing strange customs they're not used to (like garlic hanging from the ceiling).

However different the situation they're in, the heroes are never in danger during this phase. They are simply being warned. A threshold from a well known security state has to be crossed irrevocably, but the heroes should not be aware of it at this stage. Curse of Frankenstein is a film that is not well suited for this model, but it also has some of

these defining moments. For example, this threshold is crossed when Victor Frankenstein and Paul Krempe resurrect a dog. From that moment on, the door is open for all the horrors that ensue, and Victor Frankenstein stubbornly refuses to close it.

A good illustration of some of these parts is the classic short story *The Monkey's Paw*. The exposure there is achieved wholly while Morris tells his story to the gathered family, and warns them of all the evil the paw brought to him and its previous bearers. The threshold is crossed when Morris leaves the paw behind. From this moment on, the family is in a very new situation: they have an artifact that purportedly can do strange things for them.

In several examples along the article, I will outline an adventure that was constructed following this model. The adventure reuses many cliches of classic films (but then, most of them do) and merely intends to be illustrative. It is set inside a gloomy castle that once belonged to a vassal of Duke Gundar. The main NPCs in the adventure are Prof. Arcanus, from *Children of the Night: Werebeasts*, and his adopted child H el ene (home-brew). This takes place 15 years after the events described in *CotN:W*. Arcanus has travelled widely, made some studies with the *Soci et e du Legerdemain* (Stuart Turner, in some *BoS* - sorry I forgot which) and finally got enough money to buy a castle in the former Gundarakite region (probably in *Invidia*). For some reason unknown to him, the castle was extremely cheap, so he moved in with all his exhibitions and dedicates himself to his arcane studies. H el ene is an adolescent girl that he found as a baby abandoned on the wayside. He took her under his protection and honestly loves her as a father.

As the adventure starts, the party is travelling through the wild regions of former Gundarak, very near to the Crimson Road.

On their last stop, they have been warned that the woods at night are extremely dangerous due to the many roving lycanthropes and spectres, but they also know the distance to the next village is not that great and the weather is fine, so they should arrive there early in the afternoon. Also, along the road, they might see the figure of an old castle that once had a bad reputation. Supposedly, an old man lives there, reportedly a benefactor of orphanages in the western lands.

This gives a bit of exposure to the characters, but they're still on the safe side. However, this being Ravenloft and the DM wanting to steer the PCs to the castle, an awful storm breaks when they're far too advanced to go back. They should press on, trying to reach the next village, but then are faced with an unexpected obstacle: a very wide river, running tumultuously. The road goes straight to a wooden bridge, that has collapsed under the violence of the storm. It is nearly sunset.

At this point, we're still in the Exposure: the characters haven't crossed the threshold to the beginning of the adventure, but they should be afraid of the night.

Then, help arrives, in the guise of an old, gaunt, stern-looking man driving a coach. He says he comes from the castle (which the PCs might not have noticed yet). His master knows that every winter, on stormy nights like this, the bridge is often destroyed and many travellers are found in the morning dead with horrorized expressions or open gorges.

The PCs should probably accept the invitation. From their position, they can see many lights in the castle which, by all means, looks like a more comfortable place to spend the night.

Part II : The Creation of Doubt

Then comes the second phase, i.e. the slow building of a sense of menace and foreboding. This tension building phase is the defining part of a horror film. The heroes are put in some situation where the warnings they have heard may suddenly make more sense. They could find themselves in the place where the rumours came from, or in the same situation of a story they heard. They can be aware that they could be re-enacting some unhappy event they heard about, should these stories be true.

In this part, tension should grow slowly and by some minor signs. The tension comes from the fact that they are now stranded in a situation where they are vulnerable, according to what they have heard, without any way to exit the situation. Besides, they have learnt in part one what end could await them, and even though they may not entirely know the consequences, they should regard them as highly undesirable, especially if the threat was perhaps exaggerated or somewhat distorted in the first part.

To make the feeling more horrific, the heroes could also feel some more guilt coming from the fact that they had been warned but failed to recognize the signs. For instance in *Prince of Darkness*, the party decides to enter a driverless coach that appeared just for them at that particular moment: a highly suspicious event, but which they choose to ignore, confident that they can turn fate to their wills. Events like these where fate outsmarts the heroes when these think they have found a way out bring more horror home in the heroes' hearts and should be carefully used.

Besides the knowledge that they are falling or have fallen in a dangerous situation, further tension should be created by odd and unexplainable facts, possibly an evolvment of the same kind of discomfoting signs from

the first part. Superstitions should now be actively played: instead of a warning not to go to some place, a local actually refuses to go there. However, these events must not be threatening by themselves and some of them should have some plausible explanation later on. Most commonly, these unexplained events could be mingled with other relaxing events that make the heroes feel it's all in their imaginations, and that there is not a reason to be afraid. Indeed, it should be possible to rationalize and provide adequate answers to the unexplained events, although not completely satisfactory. In short, answers that would be viable under a discomfoting string of ifs that may not seem entirely likely.

A good example comes again from *The Monkey's Paw*: when Mr. White asks for his first wish, a meager 200 pounds, he feels the paw move of its own accord, but his wife and son are certain that was all his imagination. But if it was not, would then the misfortune that struck Morris affect them too?

The defining moments of this part are the events where these out of the ordinary happenings meet the heroes. They create a sense of doubt in the heroes, but there's no clear threat yet. There is the possibility, in the heroes' minds, that all is well and that they are just over-reacting because of all the warnings they heard before.

Take the *Curse of the Werewolf*, a film from Hammer Studios, for example. When Leon is born, there are all sorts of strange omens: a wolf howls, a storm breaks, the baptism water boils and a distorted face, similar to a wolf's muzzle, can be seen reflected there. These are dismissed as pure coincidences, and the wolf's muzzle was after all a simple reflection from the gargoyle above the basin. But the boiling water is not easily explained, and this leaves a troubled mark in the spirits of all that are present.

In this phase, the heroes should feel that they are hanging on a thread, and could fall

to either side: safety if all those strange things are merely a product of fear and emotion, or real danger if those same strange things are very palpable proofs that they are where they should not be.

Some of them may believe they're in danger, and react accordingly, but for the rational minded there is no cause to believe that and any extemporaneous fear is to be avoided because it creates unneeded suffering, prevents the fruition of genuine good moments and clouds judgement, just in case it is needed.

Also, many red herrings or "natural explanations" solutions to the "mystery" could be used by the author to confuse the heroes, and make them lose precious time.

In our adventure, this part is relatively extensive and important. It has to lead to a dramatic encounter for the PCs, one in which they must take action and recognize their danger. But that mood has to be built up with care. There are several possible scenes to add to the sense of foreboding. Keep in mind that PCs are far more untrusting than the heroes of horror films, and a lot more active too. They will be willing to take action, but they will also make careful plans. It is the job of the DM to manipulate them just in the right way to make them take the wrong move.

The first task is to give them harmless but strange facts.

When they reach the castle, the servant leads them to a dining room, where the table is laid for just their exact number. The servant excuses himself and goes to take care of the horses. The PCs wait for enough time to feel a little bit uncomfortable, and to notice that, safe for the planks of the floor and the rafters in the ceiling, nothing in the castle seems to be made of wood. The table is made of wrought iron and glass; the chairs are completely stuffed with fur and hide over a rigid structure. If the PCs investigate, they notice the rest of the furniture is made of

porcelain, horn, bone, the occasional piece of marble and other everything complemented with many cushions and carpets.

When the servant returns, they can clearly see he almost looks like a walking corpse. Despite this, he is impeccably correct and serves them without blemish, announcing that the master has already dined, but will join them after dinner. Outside, the storm increases in intensity, and during the night degenerates into a blizzard, but when the master comes, he turns out to be a perfect gentleman, and entertains his guests with parlour games in such a way that they soon forget about the storm. Hélène also appears during the evening and is introduced to the PCs.

The first evening in the castle serves to put the PCs at rest. There are odd signs, alright, like the cliché that the master does not eat with them, but in general the castle should seem comforting and cosy, especially against the backdrop of the storm.

The following day brings the opposite, though, with the true building of tension and creation of doubt.

The PCs are taken to individual rooms in two different wings. When they take their time to investigate their wares, they notice that their mirrors and wooden objects have all disappeared.

During the next day, Arcanus stays in his room and does not come out even once. Hélène takes the chance to tell her stories about Arcanus. And it couldn't be darker. She tells them she's a prisoner of Arcanus. He is her step-father, but far from giving her love, he instead keeps her locked in this castle and forces her to study the dark arts. For he's an evil magician of no small merit, she says. She always looks frightened as she tells them what she has uncovered about Arcanus: she believes he's turning into a vampire by magic, for he never comes out in the day and

she has never seen him in it. She says it's his servant that supposedly takes his food to his room upstairs, but she has noticed that the "food" is never warm and sometimes she has seen fresh drops of blood on the floor at his door. She adds that the reason there is no wood in the castle, except for some key structural elements, is that that is the only material that can destroy him. And she confirms there are no mirrors at all. The servant claims he's studying in his rooms during the day, but she is certain he's sleeping in his coffin.

She also shows them a secret door that Arcanus has kept concealed from her for most of her life, until she eventually found it when she was already suspicious of him. She does not have the key, but she offers to steal it if the PCs can distract him long enough the next evening.

Hélène is completely honest in what she says. She truly believes her words. And the PCs themselves can confirm the blood drops, even on his person if they look attentively. These signs may be enough to turn some PCs against Arcanus, but more dramatic signs will be manifest during the night, in the shape of several encounters.

On the middle of the following night, all of the awake PCs are able to hear a commotion outside, that resounds even against the huge storm that still rages on. If any one is asleep, there is a big chance that any of them will wake up. Those sleeping in rooms with windows that give over the courtyard are able to see a bunch of gypsies delivering a closed coffin and some infuriated caged wolves which are through a dark gate to the castle.

As they're sleeping in their rooms, one of the PCs wakes with scratching at her door. If she looks in that direction, she hears a low growl as she sees the door handle slowly turning. At that point, a noises of fight erupt, cries of men and howls of beast. In a few

seconds, a last great roar is heard and the fight ceases, only to be followed by dragging sounds. If the PC tries to come out and help, she finds the door is locked from the outside., but in the morning, there are fresh blood marks on the carpet. Also, they can see the servant has been wounded in the face.

If at least one of the PCs drinks the water that has been left for them on the bedside table, she sleeps soundly during the whole night, oblivious to all the noises and agitation in the castle. In the morning, as she gets up, she is dizzy and stumbles to the ground. She may have to be rescued by the other PCs, who find her pale and almost anemic. An examination reveals a puncture mark in her arm, at the elbow junction.

The events of the night should tell the PCs that undeniably there is something fishy going on, and in fact, the last event might be already part of the next phase, although with a twist that will be apparent later.

Part III : The Emergence of Threat

The third part leads to a first climax of the story. The heroes are now immersed in a situation they were warned against in part one, but which they could not evade in part two. There has been a mounting of tension so that there is now doubt in them: are they susceptible to the same bad consequences of the stories they've heard? So far, there has been no clear threat at them, so it could be all stories and tall-tales.

The third part is where an actual threat becomes clear and the heroes are put into danger, thus fulfilling the predictions of part one. After this phase, or during this phase, the heroes understand they have real cause to fear, just as they were warned of, and they know the consequences of that danger. These highly unwanted consequences could be simply death or more horrible than that, but it must have been previously contemplated

as something rather undesirable. It often involves someone the heroes are close to (ex. Lucy and Mina in *Dracula*, Herbert White in *The Monkey's Paw*).

The defining moment is essentially one (or several if the heroes are separated) when the heroes (heroes to be, but not yet heroes, and still powerless) witness something that reveals beyond doubt that they're in danger. To feel this danger, it can appear bigger than what they can handle: the heroes must feel helpless or relatively feeble against it.

This defining moment can come at any time, but it should not be totally unexplained. If possible, the heroes should realize that it happened due to their overlooking something; to something they did and should not have done (this is just to add to the sense of horror, this time born of guilt ex. "why did we remove this stake?", "why did we break the seals to this tomb?" ... etc.).

Frequently, the witnessing of real danger comes from a "sacrifice" for the story to unfold: one of the heroes becomes a victim so the others may understand the reality of the danger. The damage suffered by the victim should be irrevocable and dreadful (ex: death, being a lycanthrope, or turned into a vampire's bride).

In *The Monkey's Paw*, this moment is one of supreme and defeating horror: Mr and Mrs White receive the news that their son is dead. The horror strikes them when the emissary from the company tells them that they are entitled to 200 pounds, exactly the amount Mr White had wished for. This tells them in a definitive manner that the wishes are granted, but in a horrible manner which always leaves them worse than they were before.

After the momentous last night, the PCs might be willing to listen to H el ene. She says all she can remember about his step-father, that he probably uses the children from the

orphanages as his experiments, and that he will stop at nothing to achieve his ends, even possibly killing her.

The time has come to openly reveal the threat. Only it is not what the PCs and H el ene think it is.

That day, H el ene shows them the key for the secret door, that she has been able to steal from Arcanus. Eventually, she leads them to the dungeons below the castle where they find Arcanus's old exhibits. One of them is a case with a skeleton inside, and a wooden stake in its rib cage. Above it, hangs a framed portrait identified as being of Duke Gundar. If the PCs shy from taking the stake, H el ene does it, claiming that Arcanus's exhibits are all fake. Armed with the stake, they should head to the room where Arcanus is supposedly sleeping. They find him there, but he's well awake.

What happens there should be left to the PCs. When Arcanus sees the stake in their hands, he understands where they got it from. He tries to convince the PCs he needs the stake to once again prevent the resurrection of the vampire. The PCs, probably, won't believe him, and in this case he engages them to get the stake, his bestial nature taking the better of him. Ideally, the PCs should kill Arcanus with H el ene's magical help.

Inside his room, they find a laboratory full of vials filled with blood, chemical elements, strange writings, and a coffin with a naked dead man inside, with marks in his arm much alike those in the anemic PC. A dead wolf's fur is hanging over a fireplace, while a cage stands on a lifting platform that sinks into the lower levels of the castle.

At this point, the PCs might feel they have ended the true menace of the castle, and freed a young girl. However, the true threat emerges on the following night. When they took the stake, nothing at all happened to the skeleton, but in the night, it begins to

regenerate. On the next day, the PCs find H el ene has disappeared, and the storm still goes on, as strong as ever.

In fact, she's been taken down below to the dungeons, where Gundar sleeps in his case and has found a place for her. The next night, she too will rise as a vampire capable of wielding magic and the two will hunt the PCs.

What these choose to do will be the meat of the next phase, and is their responsibility.

Part IV - The Confrontation

After the previous part, it is made clear to the heroes that they have a task in hands: to escape, or defeat the threat. Escape stories seem to be more used nowadays than in the classical period, where defeat was the norm, and in game terms, usually defeat is the ultimate objective, for the heroes are indeed heroes (well, most of the time!). From now on, the tale can fall into an action tale instead of horror, but there are still many opportunities for the latter now.

I will analyse here only the variant where the hero defeats the danger or dies trying. Usually, this involves several different actions in simultaneous, so I've divided this part in several phases. For instance, in *Horror of Dracula*, another Hammer film, all these phases except *The Hunt* occur in parallel. I detail them separately in an order that seems natural but which may not be the actual order in which the story is told.

Phase A - The Stronghold

In the first phase of confrontation, the heroes realize they must become heroes. They retreat into a temporarily secure stronghold where they gather around themselves all the resources they have at their disposal and that they can reach safely. This may include escaping for a new location. For example, if

in part two the dire situation was actually a place they couldn't leave, they may leave now. But that is certainly not the only kind of stronghold. It could simply be barricading from the enemy in his own castle (think *Aliens II*) or locking the enemy in a secure cell, as is done in the *Curse of Frankenstein* with the creature being held in the lab's storage room. On the other hand, the stronghold could have a completely abstract or metaphysical nature. For instance, in the *Curse of the Werewolf*, the Stronghold is the tranquil and warming environment of the family where Leon grows, that temporarily saves him from his lycanthropic nature (in this film, Leon is simultaneously hero, victim and villain). In a second phase, this stronghold is replaced by another, Leon's mutual love for the daughter of his employer.

At any rate, the situation is now different because instead of escaping a danger, the heroes' focus is now trying to destroy it. They may find new allies and gather them and may identify and secure certain important items. This phase may not occur at all or may happen just briefly, but there should be a turning point where the heroes change essences: from powerless victims to be, they are transformed into heroes mainly by a change of resolution, and even if this is not explicitly stated, in this moment the heroes assess the means at their disposal.

Phase B - The Research

For the story to be a horror tale, the danger must appear nearly insurmountable to the heroes, and that does not change merely by a change of heroic attitude. Research is necessary to find the weaknesses of the enemy and how to effectively strike at it.

Now, the heroes and their allies identify or look for knowledge that can help them pinpoint the weaknesses of their enemy and its strong points they have to defend against. They may craft a plan of attack.

However, if the previous phase could be attained in just a moment by a change of attitude, this one should actually take some time. There are numerous stories where one "sage" person is available and knows important facts (ex. Van Helsing in Dracula). And while time passes, the heroes must still feel threatened. This adds another element of tension and horror to the story. They are temporarily safe, but still susceptible and probably have been granted only some passing respite. But this truce can vanish at anytime, and then they are again subject to the threat.

The characters may also not be aware of this threat, they may feel entirely safe, although they will have to leave their current safety to accomplish their mission. For example, taking Dracula, when Van Helsing orders that Lucy be guarded with garlic in the windows of her room, a crucifix and a constant guard, he thinks she is completely safe. They have created a Stronghold for her and research is underway. But this sense of security should always be destroyed. There should always be some unaccounted for factor that renders the precautions bare. Either a servant that loves the dying child too much and removes the garlic from her room, either the victim herself that opens the window inviting the vampire, or even some person that everybody thought was safely locked, like Renfield, provides the vampire with a way in that nobody expected. This leads to the next phase.

Phase C - The Assault of Darkness

This phase serves to keep the story a horror story instead of an action one. In here, the heroes realize that danger is present and that it is actually nearer than they thought, and in a position to attack them. Remember that usually at this point the heroes are still in their stronghold that was supposed to be safe and they are attacked precisely in there. This

adds to the tension and keeps the menace up, but the moment of realization that their stronghold is insecure is also a moment of horror that should not be left out. It is even possible that the danger is made concrete and comes to fruition by one of the heroes suffering permanent damage and turning into another victim and even more horrific if the heroes only discover this when that former friend turns the table on them suddenly. At that moment, or after they survive this attack, they should understand how that reversal of situation came to happen, by understanding a previous point they had found inexplicable or by recognizing some mistake of their own.

For instance, in Horror of Dracula, that is done excellently. Van Helsing and Holmwood spend the night watching the house from the outside, preventing Dracula to get in. They are sure the vampire could not enter and thus Mina must be safe. However, they hear her scream and find her bloodied and obviously the victim of the vampire. They are puzzled and doubt their own knowledge. Perhaps they have to do more Research and find more facts about the vampire that they ignored. But how did the vampire get in? He was already in! And when they find he is in their very own house, the moment of horror is unsurpassable.

In Curse of the Werewolf, the abstract nature of the Stronghold makes the Assault of Darkness happen only because Leon indulges in accompanying his friend to a house of vice. In going to a bordello, even if he does not partake of the feast there, the defense his love provided against the lycanthropy is made bare and his bestiality is excited by all the voluptuousness around him. In result, the beast surfaces and he kills a woman.

This phase must be always latent during the Stronghold and the Research. It may force new research to be done or a new

Stronghold to be sought. There is no rule that each of these phases should happen only once. They are simultaneous and several events could belong to one phase but be interspersed with other events of the other phases. This Assault could even happen during The Hunt, if there is a comparably minor danger that attacks the heroes while they are pursuing the greater evil.

Phase D - The Hunt

After the Research is complete and the plan is made, the heroes set out to execute the plan. Then, they pursue the enemy, confront it and hopefully defeat it... or lose. This could mean they are destroyed or that the enemy reaches some point where it is virtually out of the heroes' reach for a long time... time enough for them to die and thus allow the enemy to live or far away enough for the enemy to begin a new spree and thus the heroes' actions will have amounted to nothing except a temporary release of that evil.

This connects with an important element of The Hunt that must be present: the urgency of the action. The threat must still be latent in this phase, it is just dormant while the pursuit takes place, but if it takes too long, either it becomes for ever fruitless and the threat outlives the heroes or it becomes deadly dangerous, with the enemy in full use of its powers. For instance, in Dracula, the heroes race the vampire to the castle. If they do not kill him before the sun sets, Dracula will be too powerful for them and kill them all. Indeed, he does kill Quincey Morris.

Further Considerations

Repeatedly in this text I have used heroes in the plural. This is because a horror story will seldom have only one hero. For example, the research usually entails the appearance of some other more knowledgeable character, and the emergence of threat often implies the disappearance of a victim. This means that the several members of the group may not reach the same phases of the story at the same time. Some may even not go through all of them, and may be just called in for The Confrontation. Others may not survive the Emergence of Threat.

In short, the whole story may be divided in several segments that may focus on parts of the group of heroes. Also, the story segments may run in parallel, for example with some heroes in the Research phase already while others are still struggling with the Emergence of Doubt. Take for example Arthur Holmwood and Van Helsing in Dracula while Lucy is bedridden but still alive. The moment the threat becomes clear for Van Helsing is when he arrives and sees the marks in her neck, but Holmwood is convinced only after he sees Lucy has turned into a monster.

Codex of Darkened Souls

and the Key of Penitent Salvation

By John Pruitt

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Dusk was fast approaching, and Jeanette knew that night has close at hand. She could see the faint night sky starting to envelope the land through the vardo's small window. Knowing that she would have to walk home in the dark of night was enough to make her pull her shawl ever tighter around her shoulders.

"So, seek your future do you? Help you, can I," the elderly gypsy lady then pulled out a tarokka deck, "Seek the future do you, but are you sure that you want that knowledge? You may not like what it holds for you." "No, no! I want to know my future! I must know! Please do a reading for me, I will pay you. I brought gold with me, see?" Jeanette withdrew the small bag and set it in the middle of the table.

"Very well, I need you to cut the deck and think of the questions that you want answered." The gypsy seer set the tarokka deck in front of Jeanette. Claspng her shawl tightly about her, Jeanette reached out and picked up the deck. The ivory cards felt eerily cool in her hands as she divided the deck into three different stacks and then gathered them back together, all the while

she was thinking about Jonathon and their future.

The seer picked up the deck and started dealing the cards, "You are thinking about your lover, a man that digs for the past. He works in a place of books and knowledge. He has gone on a distant journey to dig for a long lost item that could bring him the fame and riches that he desires for you both. But beware, before long you will be greatly tested by what he finds lurking in the sands of time. It will test you both, and can destroy all that you hold dear." The seer looks up at Jeanette, "Be careful what you handle and how you handle it. Beware of the Darkened book. That is all that I can tell you."

He hated the heat and the rocky sand, but together they made an unbearable combination. Especially at night time, a time when you were suppose to be able to rest. This dig, however, would be well worth the misery that he was having to endure. As an archaeologist, Jonathon had been researching this for far too long for it not to turn out something of value. "Then," he thought, "then I can marry Jeanette and we

can live the life that we deserve." Wiping the sweat from his brow, dreaming of achieving the coveted title of Professor of Archaeology at the university, Jonathon was startled as the worker rushed into his tent. "Dr. Carter! Dr. Carter, we have found a sealed doorway! Come quickly!" The worker quickly motioned for Jonathon to follow and then hurriedly exited the tent. Quickly gathering his wits, Jonathon grabbed a lantern and rushed off after the worker.

At the torch lit dig site, a group of workers gathered around the pit that was the focus of this excavation. Jonathon made his way through the people and into the pit. He stood, wide eyed, staring at the stone portal that beckoned to him. In front of him stood an ancient doorway, sealed in stone blocks, and covered with ancient carved glyphs. This was it! This was his ticket to fame and fortune. Here was the fabled tomb of the lost king. His palms were sweating and his stomach had tightened. "Bring more light over here! I need to see the glyphs in order to translate them," Jonathon couldn't wait to open the tomb, to catalog its contents. "We still have a lot of work to do. The doorway needs to be completely cleared before we even try to gain entry." He could taste the success when he returned to campus.

As the sun first started to clear the horizon is when Jonathon's team broke through the stone barrier. With a rushing intake of fresh air, the last block slips out of place and a small opening is made. Dr. Carter and his financier, Lord Carrovan, enter the darkened opening. After trekking down a long, darkened hallway they entered the main chamber. "Whoa...this is better than I imagined," stated Jonathon. Sculpted statues and exquisite stone carvings decorated the room and there were many ornate chests and containers scattered through out. In the center was a massive sarcophagus, inlaid with precious metals and stones. Next to it

was a carved dark wood book stand, decorated with carved figures entwining upon it. Upon the stand was a huge tome, framed in a tarnished silver like metal. Lord Carrovan approach the sarcophagus, while Dr. Carter was drawn to the mysterious tome. Reaching out to examine the book, "Oww!", a sharp lancing pain in this finger caused him to pull his hand back. "What's that about, Carter?," Lord Carrovan asked as he quickly approach, "Are you all right?" "Yeah, I'm ok," looking at the blood welling up on his finger, "it's nothing, just a minor cut."

Spending long hours cataloging and documenting the contents of the tomb had completely worn Jonathon out today. He could only think of the return trip home, to Mortigny and the waiting arms of his beloved, Jeanette. He finished cleaning up and eagerly proceeded to bed, going to sleep right as his head rested on the pillow. "Jonathon," a far away voice echoed, "Jonathon...come to me." Jonathon bolted straight up and looked around. It had to be in the middle of the night. Perhaps he was just dreaming about the voice that he had heard. "Jonathon," a whispering voice called to him from outside. Turning to look, he catches a fleeting glimpse of a figure in sheer drapery walking towards the makeshift tomb entrance. "What the..?," Jonathon jumped up to go after the figure. Nearing the entrance, he caught a whiff of a familiar perfume, "Jeanette. Jeanette wears that scent." He grabbed a torch and entered the tomb.

Was this what the gypsy lady warned her about? Jeanette turned the idea over and over in her head. Since Jonathon had returned from his excavation, she had hardly seen him. He worked til the wee hours of the night, examining and studying over the relics that he had found on his trip. What about

their love? What about their soon to be marriage? It just didn't make any sense. But tonight she would talk to him. Tonight she would find out if he really loved her or not.

After saying good bye to their last dinner guest, Jonathon and Jeanette returned to the kitchen to put away the dishes. "Jeanette, we need to talk," Jonathon started, "about what the future holds for us." Jeanette's heart tightened, she didn't like the way that sounded. "Yes, yes we must. Oh Jonathon, since you returned we haven't even talked like we use to, and.." Jonathon gently placed his hand over her mouth to quiet her, "Shhh, my darling. I know I have neglected you in the past few days, but tonight I'll make it up to you. Now grab your shawl and come with me. I have a surprise for you at the university."

Her heart raced as they drew near to Jonathon's new office at the university. "But Jonathon, what is it? Please tell me." "Now dear, telling you would ruin the surprise, just a little bit longer and my gift will seal our love forever." They neared the door to his office, "Close your eyes and hold on to my hand." Jonathon then opened the door and led Jeanette into his office. "No peeking and be careful, we're about to go down some steps." "Why steps?" Jeanette uttered. "I had to make sure this would be a surprise, didn't I?" At the bottom, they continued on for a short distance until, "Jonathon, what is that smell? It's horrible." "Dear," said Jonathon, "it's nothing to be worried about. Just a little further. Ok my love, open your eyes."

Standing in the open doorway, Jeanette was instantly struck with raw, unadulterated terror. The sight of the glowing magical circle etched into the floor, with the ominous humanoid shapes standing motionless around it and the book at the center of it all, assaulted her eyes. The scene was so horrible she couldn't even scream. "All this

is for you, my love, every last drop of blood was spilled for you," Jonathon uttered then quickly seized her by her arms and begun to force her closer to the center of the circle, and closer to the book. "This tome has promised us eternal life, love and all that we would ever need. All you have to do it touch the cover frame, my love." Jeanette was powerless to resist Jonathon dragging her to the middle of the circle. "No! NO!! Don't!" She struggled against his grip, but it was to no avail, his grip was like iron."Jonathon, what are you doing?!" Jeanette was screaming as her beloved forced her hand toward the tarnished metal frame upon the book. "This is my wedding present to you, my love, the Codex of Darkened Souls. It will keep us together. Forever."



It was at times like this that Tim remembers the first night of dreams that the Key had brought him. While he still couldn't decide whether it was a good or bad thing, Tim would have to admit that they were motivational and somewhat insightful. Thinking back all those years ago, the visions had seemed like uncalled for nightmares. They had haunted him through the years of his barrister apprenticeship, causing him to quit and become just another scribe. They had caused him to lose the lady and love of his life to another man, because she finally lost all hope for him. Yet, the visions helped to train and prepare him for what was to come. Several of his associates had called him mad, they had said that he had lost all sense of reality. But what they didn't know was that he, Timothy Dunning, would be the person, the only person, that could save the world from a reign of darkness and death. That thought had offered him comfort for years, but wistfully looking back, at times it seemed as empty as his life had been. It had been 12 years since the Key showed him the dark prophecy,

twelve years of loneliness and solitude, of personal sacrifice and regrets. After twelve years, Tim had started to wonder if this was all a cruel joke or if this was the beginning of madness, that which had claimed his aunt right before she had passed away.

But now that the prophecy had started, it was up to him to make sure that it never sees fulfillment. It was these "visions" that had drawn him here, to this city called Mortigny. It was here that his battle would begin, and, hopefully, Fates be willing, this would be where it would quickly end. He had just arrived in town, after a long, weary journey from the city of Egertus in Nova Vaasa. Tonight, he would rest here and get an early start of seeking out the cursed tome in the morning. Here, sitting in the quiet little tavern, sipping on an ale, Tim relived the day that the visions had started.

He could never remember a time when he had seen Aunt Lori not wearing her weird little necklace. Ever since he could remember, she had worn the strange little silver skull. She had said that it was her good luck charm. Strange good luck charm, indeed. And why had she willed it to him upon her death? Oh well, it was his beloved aunt's favorite possession, so he would cherish it. But, he told himself, I will keep it in the dresser drawer or a jewelry box, as it is much to gaudy to wear in public. Besides, the last few days of his aunt's life were somewhat strange - all the bizarre dreams she was having and the rants about having to find a book to close it. She must have been slowly losing her mind, as sometimes happens with age. But as her last request, he would gladly take ownership of the silly looking necklace.

Returning home after the funeral, Tim quietly walked into his room and sat on his bed. He took the necklace out of his pocket and just stared at it. As he looked at it, the

little silvered skull lazily twisted for a short time and stopped, pointing in the direction of the kitchen. As Tim sat there, he started daydreaming about this odd looking book, housed in a darkened library. As he drew closer to the book, the shadows started to take the form of people. At that same time, a drop of something wet hit his right cheek. Moving his hand to the wet spot, he wiped his finger across it and looked at the tip of his finger. Ice ran through his veins - the liquid that fell on his face was crimson. It was blood.

The next day found him slowly trekking through the city streets, trying to find the location that the Key was pointing him to. So far his journey had taken up most of the day and the weather had been most dreary, with a storm looming over the city, threatening to unleash at any time. Tim felt like he was chasing his own tail. If he didn't know better, he would swear that the Codex was moving around, changing positions, trying to remain undiscovered. But that wasn't possible, the book couldn't move around by itself. Or could it? What if it's thrall was moving it about? Still, Tim would have seen them out on the streets somewhere. Glancing around, it suddenly struck Tim why he hadn't seen the book or any of it's thralls on the streets - the sewer cover, they were in the sewers. Cursing under his breath, Tim started searching for a sewer entrance that was close to the direction that the Key was pointing. Within a few minutes, he had located one and was on his way through the city's underbelly. "I should have expected this," thought Tim, "what better place to hide?"

After following the key's direction for several minutes and wading through what seemed to be an endless maze of twists and turns, Tim heard a nearby scream. "Fates, don't let me be too late!" Tim broke out in a full sprint down the slimy tunnel. "No!

NO!! Don't!!" He could tell that it was a lady screaming as he got closer. Tim glanced at the now glowing Key. It was still pointing straight ahead and slightly to the left. Ahead he could see a turn with faint, flickering lights coming from somewhere around the corner. "Jonathon, what are you doing?!" Tim turned the corner and there was his long sought after nemesis - the Codex of Darkened Souls setting atop a make shift book stand in the center of a glowing circle. Around the circle were several ominous human shapes that appeared to be outlined in the aura of the undead. In the center of the circle, standing next to the Codex, was a middle aged man, dressed in fine clothing, outlined in the tell tale purple aura of a thrall. Standing next to the thrall was...the most beautiful lady Tim had ever seen. Even though she was completely terrified and in the grasp of the thrall, the very sight of her made Tim's heart flutter with long denied feelings.

"Stop!!" Tim rushed into the slight chamber, drawing his flint lock. "Take your dirty hands off of her!" Everyone in the chamber was surprised at his sudden appearance into the clandestine ritual. Accenting the point, a loud boom of thunder echoed through the tunnels, as the storm outside unleashed its natural fury. Sprinting forward, Tim took advantage of the surprise that he had caused and leveled his pistol at the thrall and fired. The thrall careened from the bullet, as Tim rushed past. The undead shambled towards the interloper attempting to protect the Codex. As they closed to rend Tim limb to limb, he snapped open the Key and slammed the book closed. Tim barely heard the lady scream, "Look out!", before he thrust the Key down onto the alien lock.

As he pressed the key in place, the putrefied hands of the Codex's undead minions closed upon his shoulder. "You're too late to protect your master, foul beasts!" As Tim shouted that in triumph, the runes

surrounding the grimore's lock began to glow an unearthly blue and the sounds of far away, agonized screams issued forth, seemingly from the Codex itself. A destructive wave of eldritch energy unleashed from the Codex, throwing Tim violently away from it. Knocking the wind out of him, he was sent flying through the air, slamming against the far wall. Seeing dancing stars in front of his eyes, Tim was jolted back to reality by another feminine scream. Clumsily getting to his feet, Tim quickly glanced around, looking for the lady. The situation had not gotten any better. The energy wave was apparently more than the old sewer walls could take, as they had started to crumble around them. "Quickly! Follow me! There are stairs over here!" The lady called out to him, motioning towards the stairs in front of her. Tim glanced back at the Codex and the crumbling walls, glanced at the beautiful lady that he has just saved, and decided his work was finished. Now all he had to do was live to enjoy his success.

After the tunnels walls had stopped crumbling, several squeaking noises could be heard in the ruins of the chamber. Multiple small shapes scurried about, checking out the damage. One set of beady little eyes caught sight of a most unusual book. "This," the little rat-thing thought, "might be of interest to someone important."

The Codex

The Codex of Darkened Souls is a malign, intelligent grimore of unknown origin. The exterior of the Codex is surrounded by a hinged, tarnished, metallic frame made of a silver like metal. The frame itself is covered in several unknown arcane symbols and glyphs which are superimposed in the metal with a strange lock of alien design, surrounded by several tiny, almost microscopic, needle like spikes. The cover

of the book itself is of a dark, bizarre stone like material, undecorated, laying underneath the metallic frame work.

The pages within are made of a strange type of leather, thought to have been made from human or demihuman skin. Containing ancient incantations from lost realms, as well as diagrams, spells and other writings from unknown lands, the book is home to a evil sentient intellect. The writing contained there in, appears to have been inked with some kind of blood, appearing almost as if it just written and the blood was still fresh.

The Codex has one major goal to accomplish - to find and destroy the key to it's lock. The Key is the only thing in all of creation that can stop the Codex from achieving its original purpose - to enslave all of the living world. During the creation of the Codex and it's Key, the enchantment process was tampered with, turning the Key into a weapon to be used against the Codex. The Key of Penitent Salvation, when used to lock the Codex, causes the intellect within to become dormant, thereby stripping the Codex of its powers and awareness and rendering the pages within to appear blank. The key holder can always find the Codex, and the Codex can always sense when the key is near.

The power of the Codex is one of seducing its "owner" into committing sequentially greater acts of evil. With it's unnaturally high Charisma and empathic powers, the Codex will tempt its victim with twisted dreams and feelings of what they most desire. As the victim spirals down an ever darkening path, the Codex gains that much more of a grip on the victim's soul. All that is required to awaken the book from it's slumber is but a drop of blood from an intelligent creature to land upon its cover. This creates the initial bond between the Codex and it's new, soon to-be thrall. After the victim's blood is placed upon the Codex,

an empathic link is established, which goes into effect the next time the victim goes to sleep. While sleeping, the victim's dreams will be puppeteered by the Codex, promising them all of their deepest desires, if only they use the Codex. In order for the new thrall to gain any help from the Codex, intelligent creatures must be sacrificed in order to awaken its powers and reveal the hidden texts upon the book's pages. One intelligent creature must be sacrificed per page and all of it's blood drained or poured upon the page to reveal what is contained upon that page.

The Key

The key resembles a small reptilian skull, perhaps that of a small lizard or dragon, made of the same tarnished silver metal as the book frame of the Codex of Darkened Souls. In each of it's eye sockets are a small sapphire. The skull is attached to a small chain, made of the same metal and is unusual in the fact that it's jaw bone is still attached. The jawbone can be opened 180 degrees, complete with a set of miniature teeth. Until the Codex is awakened, the Key is a simple +1 luck charm, beneficially adding +1 to all checks.

When the Codex is activated, the Key becomes a compass, pointing the owner in the direction of the Codex. The owner only has to hold the Key by its chain for it to point in the direction of the Codex. While worn, the key allows its owner to see enchanted, charmed and dominated people by putting a faint purple aurora around them, and allows the owner to see undead produced by the Codex, outlining them in a pale yellow aura. The Key also grants its wearer protection versus enchantment, charm and domination spells and effects.

The key can be used to render the Codex's intellect dormant by securing the lock on the tome's frame work. When this happens, the

key becomes nothing more than a +1 good luck charm again. Any time that the Codex is activated, the key causes it's owner to dream about the dark evil that has been awakened, to try and encourage it's owner to seek out the Codex and close it yet again.

The Codex of Darkened Souls

Minor Magical Intelligent Artifact; Int:15, Wis:8, Chr:18; Ego:25 ; Al:NE; Empathic communication

Powers active and usable all the time -

Locate Object (The Key of Penitent Salvation) 120' radius. This power is always active. If, at any time the key is detected, the Codex gives feelings of mild panic and the desire to quickly move in the opposite direction or to set a trap for the Key and it's carrier.

Charm Person by touch. Anytime an intelligent creature physically touches the Codex, they must save (DC 18) or be under a Charm Person spell.

Death Watch for the main Thrall. The Codex can grant this ability to it's thrall at anytime.

Nondetection as per the spell. This is on the Codex only and does not work against the Key's ability to locate the Codex.

Control Undead The Codex can perpetually control any and all undead that it or it's thrall create.

Spells contained within the Codex - after the spell is rediscovered, each use requires yet another intelligent sacrifice of 1 HD per use. Sacrifices used to this extent are calculated by HD. For each HD a sacrificed creature had, the spell or power may be used one time. The rest are converted into blood runes that run up and down on the outside margin of the page, as a type of magical battery. The blood runes then may be used for additional uses of the spell or power.

This list is by no means complete, and GM's are urged to add to it as suits their campaigns - Animate Dead, Antilife Shell, Bane, Charm Monster, Circle of Death, Contagion, Create Undead, Dominate Monster, Geas, Magic Circle against Good.

The last pages of the Codex are it's special purpose powers. The first is the Slay Living spell, that can be used as a granted power to the book's thrall, and the last is a special Create Greater Undead. The Slay Living requires 2 HD per use, instead of one, and may be granted to the thrall, if within a five mile radius of the Codex. If the creature slain is intelligent, the Codex will animate them to add to it's undead army. The size of this army is all dependant upon the number of sacrifices made to the book. The Codex can control 2 HD of undead for every HD of blood sacrifice that it has received. The total is cumulative. The last spell, Create Greater Undead, is used upon the Codex's main thrall, turning her into an undead creature forever serving the Codex's whim, one of it's commanders of the army against the living. Upon achieving this status, the new commander seeks out a worthy candidate to become the new thrall of the Codex, and all the undead animated while the commander was alive are now under his direct control.

Caster Level: 20th; Weight: 8 lbs.

The Key of Penitent Salvation

Minor Magical Intelligent Artifact; Int: 8; Wis: 18; Chr: 16; Ego:15; Al: NG; Empathic communication

Normal everyday powers - +1 beneficial bonus to all checks made by owner.

Powers active after Codex is awakened -

Locate Object (The Codex of Darkened Souls) any distance. The skull, when held by it's chain, will point in the direction that the Codex lays.

Quoth the Raven

Detect Charmed, Enchanted or Dominated Creatures (by Codex only) 120 ft. Any beings charmed, enchanted or dominated by the Codex or it's thrall will be outlined in a faint purple aura to the owner of the Key.

Detect Undead (made by Codex only) 120 ft. Allows the owner to see all types of undead by outlining them with a pale yellow aura. Owner can not tell the strength of the undead by seeing the aura.

+ 5 Save Bonus on all spells cast by the Codex or it's thrall.

The Key can cast the following spells -

Bless - 3 times per day.

Break Enchantment - 1 time per day.

Cure Light Wounds(1d8+5) - 3 times per day.

Halt Undead - 2 times per day.

Sanctuary - 1 time per day.

The Key has but one purpose to it's existence - to forever contain the evil within the Codex of Darkened Souls. It uses it's empathic ability to manipulate the dreams of it's wear, in order to show what the Codex is capable of and to disclose other pertinent information concerning the Codex and it's location. It will urge it's owner to seek out other means of education that could be highly useful in it's battle against it's arch nemesis. To assist it's wearer in this quest, the Key can cast True Resurrection upon it's owner, if death takes him before he has finished his quest. But the Key may only do this one time per owner.

Caster Level: 15th; Weight: .5 lbs.

Twisted Races

A New Edge to the Core Races

By Wolf K ook

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The Booged

Though few people have really witnessed the presence of the infamous boogeymen, there is an alleged proof of their existence. The booged (Singular and plural) are children deprived of their joy of life by the actions of a boogeyman, who wander the land of the mists transformed into eternal children, who will never grow up, but will never die, and who live without a hint of happiness in their tormented lives.

Personality: Deprived of everything that makes life worthwhile, booged live miserable lives: They never smile, their voice seldom shows surprise or amazement, and they usually seem too intelligent for their apparently young age; something that makes them look like creepy, cold and calculating children. Some booged try to overcompensate for their lack of joy with other things, becoming greedy or megalomaniac and most do not like to be treated like children, at all.

Physical Description: Booged are almost indistinguishable from normal human children, and most reflect between seven and

twelve years old, though younger booged have been seen. Most of them are around three or four feet high, and weigh about 40 pounds, with few differences between both genders. Some booged have silvery white hair, but this trait is hardly the rule. Perhaps the only thing that distinguishes booged from normal children is their eyes, which always look older and wiser than those of other children, and which gaze feels empty of emotions and just a little disturbing.

Relations: As humans commonly mistake booged for children, these characters are for the most part much more tolerated than other races are. Their cold personality and the creepy feel about them works against them, however, and once their true nature is discovered, they usually become as rejected as other races, and perhaps even more, due to their fame of being evil and scheming. Booged are usually treated either as children or with pity and contempt by people who have no previous contact with people of their kind, something which annoys them. They seem to work best teaming up with caliban, using their high intellect and the other's brawn to best advantage, and there seems to be a perfect connection between these races.

Alignment: The high intellect and the lack of positive emotions make most booged incline towards evil, and the need to break the rules to become something on their own makes them naturally chaotic. Lawful booged are few and far between, but really good booged are almost unheard of.

Lands of Origin: Most booged found in the land of the mists have declared to come from a distant land they call "Odiare", a fairy-tale land in which supposedly the children never grow up. There are also legends of a small town of children somewhere in Sithicus. In truth, booged may appear anywhere, wherever a boogeyman starts stalking children and feeding on their joy and innocence.

Adventurers: Booged prefer to keep a low profile, and most prefer to pass like human children. Their incapability to age, however, exposes them for what they are sooner or later, and in most places forces them to leave. As a result, booged are nomadic, constantly wandering from one domain to another, and though most find adventuring too risky for their taste, a lot of them discover it to be their only chance of survival in a land that is usually too dangerous for them.

Classes: Due to their small size and their natural charm, booged make for perfect rogues, though they are usually more interested in the magical arts, turning into sorcerers and wizards, and a lot of them have psionic talents. The path of the bard, on the other hand, is completely alien to them, as they find it hard to instill in others emotions that they don't feel, unless it is sadness or dread. A few booged choose the path of the druid or cleric, and the later usually choose their religion by their place of origin rather than by a racial trend. Small and weak by nature, booged seldom choose combat-oriented classes, but booged paladins and rangers have been heard of.

Language: Booged speak the language of the region in which they were born.

Booged Traits

- +2 Intelligence, -2 Strength. Booged are trapped in an age in which the muscles haven't developed entirely, but the brain is at its highest activity.
- **Small:** As Small creatures, booged gain a +1 size bonus to Armor Class, a +1 size bonus on attack rolls, and a +4 size bonus on Hide checks, but they must use smaller weapons than humans use, and their lifting and carrying limits are three-quarters of those of medium characters.
- Booged base land speed is 20 feet.
- **Ghostsight (Su):** Booged gain the ghostsight feat for free.
- **Mindlink (Psi):** A booged can forge a telepathic bond with another creature within 30 feet, which must have an Intelligence of 3 or higher. The bond can be established only with a willing subject, who therefore receives no saving throw and gains no benefit from psionic resistance. The booged can communicate freely through the bond even if he and the subject do not share a common language. No especial power or influence is established as a result of the bond. Once the bond is formed, it works over any distance (Though it doesn't work through closed domain borders), but only lasts for 1 round per character level. This is a mind-affecting ability.
- +2 bonus on Bluff, Diplomacy and Intimidate checks. Booged are masters of social interaction, influencing others through their resemblance to innocent children and their imposing presence.
- +10 bonus on Disguise checks when trying to pass as children. Except for their

eyes, booged are virtually indistinguishable from human children.

- **Lost innocence:** A booged's innocence has been stolen. As a result, booged cannot be innocent.
- **Languages:** Booged may choose any regional languages as automatic or bonus languages. Odiaran booged have odiaran as their automatic language.
- **Favored Class:** Psion.
- **Outcast Rating:** 3 (0 when posing as humans). Booged have a reputation of being evil and manipulative, and an unnatural aura that works against them.

The Dhampir

Vampires are perhaps the only type of undead capable of having offspring with human women, and only when recently fed. The result of such crossbreeding are the dhampir, tragic creatures trapped in a half-life, with the predatory urges of their undead forefathers, and the fear and despair that only humans can feel.

Personality: Most dhampires are loners; with mothers who rarely survive childbirth and fathers that could not care less about them, they usually grow up unaware of their true natures, and their eeriness is usually felt by those around them, who frequently shun them. This, in addition with the hunger that consumes them, usually submerges them in a downward spiral of self-loathing, which can manifest as introversion, or as a very short temper.

Physical Description: Dhampires are almost indistinguishable from normal humans, except for their almost unnatural paleness and the pronounced circles under their eyes. Most of them have jet black or white hair, and unnaturally reddish or yellowish eyes. As a result of their heritage, dhampirs have long, retractable canines,

which usually grow when they are angered or afraid.

Relations: There is a creepiness about dhampires which makes them shunned by most members of the other races, even by those who are not aware of the dhampir's true nature. The only possible exception for this behavior is the booged, who are eerie enough themselves to be shunning others for their oddities. Most humans cannot understand the difference between a dhampir and a vampire, and when their natures are revealed, most will hunt them to death.

Alignment: Their natural urges keep dhampirs outside of most societies or groups, and make them prone to betray everyone, even themselves, for a taste of blood, a fact that makes them tend toward a chaotic alignment. Off course, these urges are not seen as good by outsiders, and most dhampir end up following the path of evil. Some dhampir try to resist these urges and become good, and only a few learn to take advantage of their natural charms and become lawful.

Lands of Origin: Rarer than any of the other races, dhampir may appear, nonetheless, throughout the land of the mists, without a specific place where they are more or less common, and without communities that congregate more than a handful of them.

Religion: Dhampir do not have a religion of their own, and usually end up shunning all religions completely. Those who embrace religion usually cling to those which are most important in their lands of origin, any which gives them a message of hope in their desperate lives.

Adventures: Some vampires hate having mortal offspring, seeing them as weak and powerless, and try to destroy them at all costs. Some welcome them to their side and instruct them to carry on their daylight activities. Even without interference of their parents, dhampires usually end up being

rejected by society and having to look for a path of their own, which usually ends up leading to adventure after adventure.

Classes: Dhampir are almost perfectly fit for any of the classes: Their physical capabilities make them good fighters or rangers, and their vampiric urges fit very well with the abilities of the barbarian. Their unnatural natures may give them sorcerous powers, or they may incline toward more scholarly approaches, and their natural charm and reclusiveness are a perfect combination for any bard or rogue. Maybe the only classes that are rare among vampire are those with a strong divine streak: Few dhampir are religious enough to be clerics, or worry too much about the natural world to become druids. Dhampir paladins are almost unheard of.

Languages: Dhampir usually speak the language of the region they grew up in, not having a racial language per se.

- **Light Sensitivity:** Dhampires are dazzled in bright light, like under natural sunlight or under the effects of a daylight spell.
- **Restlessness:** Dhampir are doomed to rise as vampires after death, regardless of the cause of their demise. Within a week of their death, the Dhampir will return as a vampire (Or a vampire spawn, if he had less than 5 character levels). This can only be prevented by destroying the dhampir's body as one would dispose of the body of a vampire.

Dhampir Traits

- +2 Charisma, -2 Wisdom. Dhampir have a natural charm and eeriness about them, but their vampiric urges prevent them from thinking with clarity.
- **Medium:** As medium sized creatures, dhampir have no special bonuses or penalties due to their size.
- A dhampir's base land speed is 30 feet.

Dhampir Levels

Dhampir can take up to three levels in "dhampir" at any time. These levels represent the dhampir embracing its true nature and succumbing to its natural urges, becoming powerful with the strength of the feeding, or fighting them and becoming stronger in the process.

Hit Die: d8.

Skill Points at 1st level: (2+Int modifier) x 4

Skill Points at Additional Levels: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Skills: Balance (Dex), Climb (Str), Handle Animal (Cha), Hide (Dex), Jump (Str), Knowledge (Fey Lore) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Search (Int), Spellcraft (Int), Spot (Wis), Survival (Wis).

Table 1: Dhampire Levwla

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Reflex Save	Will Save	Special
1	+0	+0	+0	+2	Bloody Decision, Sunlight Vulnerability.
2	+1	+0	+1	+2	Natural Armor +2, Damage Reduction 5/magic, Cold and Electricity Resistance 10.
3	+2	+1	+1	+3	Natural Armor +4, Damage Reduction 10/magic.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Dhampires born with levels only in dhampire (No actual class levels) are proficient in the use of all simple weapons, including short bows but excluding crossbows, and can wear any light armor.

Bloody Decision (Ex): At first level, the dhampir has to take a decision between embracing his natural urges and resisting them. This decision will affect the manifestation of all his other racial abilities.

Should a dhampir ever change this decision, he will lose all his dhampir levels but the first, and will have to start his progression in these levels all over again.

Sunlight Vulnerability (Ex): At 1st level, the dhampir's light sensitivity is lessened. A dhampir who chose to resist his urges may function normally in daylight, while one who chose to embrace them may do so only if he fed the night before. He will, however, lose all his supernatural abilities while under natural sunlight.

The Fey Born

It is said that the fairies like to exchange their children with human children. It may be right, it may be wrong, but the truth is that sometimes there are special children born in the land of the mists. Fey born (Singular and plural) share some of the traits of the fairies, which may account for the legends that surround them. Being associated with so mischievous beings, however, fey born are usually as rejected as Caliban are, if not more so.

Personality: The fey born do not belong to the fairy world, but they don't fit into the human world entirely, and they always seem a little detached, as if something was amiss. They love nature, but they fear it. They love art, but are seldom satisfied, as they never find something that is beautiful enough for

them in this realm of darkness. As a result, fey born always appear nostalgic and melancholic, something that is part of their magnetic charm.

Physical Description: Fey born are around the same height as humans, but they are for the most part more slender and graceful, with slightly pointed ears and a slight grayish or blue tint on their skin, which turns darker and bluer on their lips. Most fey born have the hair and eye colors of their human forebears, though red, white and golden hair is also common. In the dark, the eyes of a fey-born get bright with a disturbing glow, which is usually of the same color of their eyes, but turns yellow for hazel and brown-eyed fey born and red for black-eyed fey born.

Relations: Fey born are subject to a range of reactions which go from total rejection to sheer fascination, though a certain fearful distance is what they most commonly get from humans, and even members of other races, which see them as mystical and interesting. The Sithican and Darkonese fey born, for their part, see other races as less than themselves, though fey born who are not part of these communities usually thrive for acceptance.

Alignment: Fey born are for the most part more concerned with their own mystical, natural and artistic pursuits than with the dealings of the world, and their contradictory minds, which fear everything they love, make them tend towards neutrality in all facets of their lives. Good and evil fey born are not uncommon, but there is certainly a slight bias to chaos in the ethical axis, as many fey born get confronted with so many contradictions in their long lives.

Lands of Origin: Fey-born are much more common in the Core than they are in the different islands of terror. As a race that breeds true, fey-born even have several growing communities, the largest of which

occupies most of the domain of Sithicus, while all others are placed in Darkon, in the towns of Neblus, Nevuchar Springs and Sidnar, where fey born mingle freely with other races. Fey born also appear commonly in Barovia and Tepest, where they are usually not welcome at all, and more rarely in other regions of the Core.

Religion: Fey born do not represent the status quo so upheld by churches like those of Bane or Belenus, and the church of Ezra is just too human for their taste. On the other hand, their magical nature, their connection with nature, their outcast condition and their love for beauty makes them almost perfect for the church of Hala, and several sithican fey born have adopted this religion. Darkonian fey born tend towards the Eternal Order, though they have a more mystical and cheerful approach to it than humans do, trying to seize and contemplate all the beauty in the world before it is gone.

Languages: Fey born who grow up in human lands usually speak the language they grew up with. Sithican fey born speak sithican, while darkonian fey born speak their own language, which seems like a weird mixture of sithican and darkonese, with several expressions of their own.

Adventurers: Fey born do not feel at home in the communities they grow up in, and though they fear them, they are always drawn by things like nature, beauty and art, and often find themselves wandering either towards or away from these things. As a result, fey born are natural wanderers, and they find adventure in their way as often as adventure finds them.

Classes: Given their magical nature, it is natural that fey-born tend towards magical pursuits, like sorcery, and many of them are also bards. Nature-oriented classes also come naturally to them, and many fey born hear the call of the druid or the ranger. Fey-born clerics in the Core usually adore Hala,

but that mostly depends on their region of origin. Other classes are also common, but fey-born barbarians are all but unheard of.

Fey Born Traits

- +2 Wisdom, -2 Constitution. Fey born have a natural connection with nature, but they have frail frames.
- **Medium:** As medium creatures, fey born have no special bonuses or penalties due to their size.
- Fey born base land speed is 30 feet.
- +2 bonus racial saving throw bonus against enchantment spells and effects.
- **Low-light vision (Ex):** Fey born can normally see two times farther than a human can in starlight, moonlight, torchlight and similar conditions of poor illumination. Fey born retain the ability to distinguish color under these conditions.
- +2 racial bonus on Listen, Search and Spot checks. A fey born who passes near an unusual place in a forest, such as magical trees, cursed spots, marks, living plants, tunnels and the like, is entitled to a Search check to notice it as if he was actively looking for it. Fey born have keen senses and a special bond with the forests.
- **Light Blindness:** Abrupt exposure to bright light (Such as sunlight or a daylight spell) blinds a fey born for 1 round. On subsequent rounds, he is dazzled as long as he remains in the affected area.
- **Languages:** Darkonese, Sithican or Arak. Fey born may choose any regional languages as bonus languages.
- **Racial Levels:** Unlike other races, fey born can take a few levels in "fey born" as a class to embrace their fey heritage and develop their racial qualities fully.
- **Favored Class:** Sorcerer.

- **Outcast Rating:** 3. Fey born are seen with distrust due to their connection with the fey world.

Fey Born Levels

Fey born can take up to three levels in "fey born" at any time. These levels represent the fey born understanding and developing of their connection with the fey and the natural world.

Hit Die: d8.

Skill Points at 1st level: (2+Int modifier) x 4

Skill Points at Additional Levels: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Skills: Balance (Dex), Climb (Str), Handle Animal (Cha), Hide (Dex), Jump (Str), Knowledge (Fey Lore) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Search (Int), Spellcraft (Int), Spot (Wis), Survival (Wis).

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Fey born with levels only in fey born (No actual class levels) are proficient in the use of all simple weapons, including short bows but excluding crossbows, and can wear any light armor.

Darkvision (Ex): At 1st level, a fey born can see in the dark up to 60 feet. Darkvision is black and white only, but it is otherwise just like normal sight. Fey born darkvision is in addition to their normal low light vision.

Light Sensitivity (Ex): At 1st level, the fey born's light blindness is lessened to light

sensitivity. Instead of being blinded by bright light, the fey born is merely dazzled in bright sunlight or within the radius of a daylight spell.

Shadowmeld (Su): At night or in low light environments, a fey born of 1st level or higher gains a +10 circumstance bonus on Hide checks while stationary.

Fast Movement (Ex): At 2nd level, the fey born's base land speed becomes faster than the norm of his race by 10 feet. This benefit applies only when he is wearing no armor or light armor and not carrying a heavy load. Apply this bonus before modifying the fey born's speed because of any load carried or armor worn.

Shadow Form (Sp): Fey born of 3rd level can assume the form of a nonmagical shadow or turn back to their normal form as a standard action. They can move and sense their surroundings in this form, but they cannot make attacks.

Spell-like abilities (Sp): Fey born of 3rd level can choose three of the following spell-like abilities to cast once per day: dancing lights, darkness, faerie fire, hypnotism, pass without trace, speak with animals, summon nature's ally I. Caster level equals the fey born's total character level.

The Midget

Like booged, midgets usually start their lives as normal human children. Unlike them,

Table 2: Fey Born Levwla

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Reflex Save	Will Save	Special
1	+0	+0	+0	+2	Darkvision, light sensitivity, shadowmeld.
2	+1	+0	+1	+2	Damage reduction 5/cold iron, fast movement.
3	+2	+1	+1	+3	+2 Dexterity, shadow form, spell-like abilities.

their transformation into midgets isn't triggered by supernatural forces: Food deprivation, a life of slavery and several other causes prevent their normal development and transform them into small versions of what they could have been under normal conditions: Not eternal children, like booged, but small, misshapen, adults.

Personality: Midgets exhibit the same degrees of personality traits as humans: There are as many happy and cheerful midgets as there are those who are sorrowful and ashamed of their appearance; a lot of them are honest and noble, but there are some who are wicked and cruel. Darkonian Midgets are a specially proud and ritualistic bunch: They have a strong sense of community, and hold to their people and their traditions dearly.

Physical Description: Midgets stand about 2 to 3 feet tall and weight 35 to 55 pounds, with stout frames, comparatively big heads, short legs which seem to make walking a little difficult and arms which may be shorter or long depending on the individual. Hair and eye color depends more on their region of origin than on their race.

Relations: Unlike booged, caliban or fey-born, there is nothing supernatural with the origins of a midget, and a lot of noble humans throughout the land of the mists - amused with their grotesque appearance - take a "do it yourself" approach at breeding midgets. Having a midget servant, usually a buffoon, is seen as fashionable in some lands and as an amulet of good luck in others. Some midgets resent the treatment they are given while others take advantage of their privileged positions, though in some lands - like Nova Vaasa, where by law no midget may be accepted into political or religious places - those privileges are very limited.

Alignment: Though some midgets are quite independent and able to fend for themselves, most are content with depending

on other people -their patrons or their communities -for support. Statistically, thus, it might be said that midgets have a tendency towards a lawful alignment, while in the moral axis they do not incline to a particular end, most preferring to remain neutral.

Lands of Origin: Midgets are raised throughout the land of the mists, purposefully or by accident, ever more frequently as slavery becomes silently widespread and their popularity grows among the nobles. Curiously enough, midgets have proven to breed true, and several midgets have started to gather to create communities of their own, the larger of which is located in the town of Temple Falls in Darkon -a previous slave mine in which the midgets led a revolt for their freedom.

Languages: As midgets are born and raised artificially throughout the land of the mists, they do not share a racial language, instead speaking the language of the region they grow up in. Midgets of the darkonese community in Temple Falls and the near area have their own language, which was probably the language of the human people they were born from, and which has been transformed entirely into midgets.

Adventurers: Midgets do not look for adventure, but they have an almost supernatural tendency to find it wherever they go. They also have a knack for being surrounded by friends who may help them when they are in need, and they usually are very loyal to them.

Midget Traits

- +2 Constitution, -2 Dexterity. Midgets are stout and tough, but their limbs are often too short and cumbersome to use, which prevents quickness of movement.

- **Small:** As Small creatures, booged gain a +1 size bonus to Armor Class, a +1 size bonus on attack rolls, and a +4 size bonus on Hide checks, but they must use smaller weapons than humans use. Unlike other small characters, however, a midget's lifting and carrying limits are the same of those of medium-sized characters.
- Midget base land speed is 20 feet.
- **Endurance (Ex):** Midgets are adept to heavy labor and their stout constitution makes them more resistant. Midgets gain the endurance feat for free.
- **Stability (Ex):** Midgets are exceptionally stable on their feet. A Midget gains a +4 bonus on ability checks made to resist being bull rushed or tripped when standing firmly on the ground (But not when climbing, flying, riding or similar).
- **Languages:** Midgets may choose any regional languages as automatic or bonus languages. Midgets from Temple Falls have Midget as their automatic language.
- **Favored Class:** Bard.
- **Outcast Rating:** 1. Midgets are accepted as humans throughout the land of the mists.

Twisted Age and Vitals

Use the following tables to calculate the age and vital statistics of booged, fey born and Midgets.

They never age, never reach adulthood, and are virtually immortal, at least by regular means.

Age

Midgets share the lifespan of most humans, though they mature more slowly than they do. Fey born live much longer, taking a while to mature, due in part to their fey blood. Booged have the longer life spans:

Height and Weight

Midgets range from the very small (Barely 18 inches) to the almost normal-sized (4 feet), with booged just above them, though booged for their most part look skinnier than the stout midgets. The fey born, for their part, are as tall as a human, and sometimes even taller.

Age and Vitals

Race	Adult	Barbarian, Rogue, Sorcerer	Bard, Fighter, Paladin, Ranger	Cleric, Druid, Wizard
Booged	7	+1d4	+1d6	+2d4
Fey Born	110	+1d6	+2d6	+3d6
Midget	20	+2d4	+3d6	+4d6

Aging Modifiers

Race	Middle Age ^a	Old Age ^b	Venerable ^c	Max Age ^d
Booged	-	-	-	-
Fey Born	150	250	400	+2d%
Midget	50	75	100	+2d20

- a. -1 Str, Dex and Con; +1 Int, Wis and Cha.
- b. -2 Str, Dex and Con; +1 Int, Wis and Cha.
- c. -3 Str, Dex and Con; +1 Int, Wis and Cha.
- d. Booged do not get bonuses or penalties for high age.

Height and Weight

Race	Base Height	Height Mod	Base Weight	Weight Mod
Booged	3	'+2d4	30 lb.	x (1d2) lb.
Fey Born, male	5'1	" +2d8	100 lb.	x (1d6) lb
Fey Born, female	4'9	" +2d8	90 lb.	x (1d6) lb
Midget	1'8	" +2d12	45 lb.	x (1d2) lb

Olerick's Colloquial Guides

Part 1: Weaponsmiths of the Core

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Greetings, fellow travelers!

I would like to welcome you to the first installment in a series of soon-to-be instant classics that outline what I like to call the "lesser institutions" of the Core. These are the often overlooked, but no less important, establishments and industries that make our everyday lives that much easier and enjoyable; such as the trade schools, country hospices, specialty museums, famous breweries, and various other interesting places that dot this mist-shrouded land.

Before we go any further together, allow me to introduce myself - I am the Traveling Cloakman. I have taken this name to ensure my identity is kept secret, so as to make sure the information I receive is accurate and unbiased. Rest assured, all of the data herein is painstakingly researched by your humble author.

Instead of doing a broad overview of a domain's history, geopolitics or haute culture like so many other books on the shelves these days, I will focus on a single enterprise that is practiced or spread throughout the entire Core. Each of my guides will be a totally self-contained work, published by the

prestigious Olerick's Publishing House, and sold in only the finest bookshops of the land.

Let me be clear - this is by no means an exhaustive list. First, this is not a historical survey. Only places that are currently in operation will be considered. Second, very specific criteria has been used to rate each entry to ensure only the best of the best are included in our guides. (If your establishment was not mentioned, please send your concerns or complaints to Olerick's Publishing House in Karg and they will forward them to me.)

This inaugural guidebook promises to be of great interest to the more adventurous reader, or to those warriors who are looking for an edge in their next battle. I talk of course, of the famous weaponsmiths of the Core...

Barovia

Starting alphabetically, we look first at the country of Barovia. Considered a somewhat backwards domain inhabited by superstitious bumpkins, there are admittedly few smithies worthy of inclusion. Even worse, no

distinguished blacksmiths have ever been known to originate from Barovia throughout its long history. Still, two establishments deserve mention.

Pietro's Ferrier can be found in the center of Teudeldorf's bustling merchant district. Pietro Poleschka is an ethnic Barovian who married a Gundarak émigré. After the former nation of Gundarak was annexed by Count von Zarovich, Pietro moved his family to Zeidenberg, so that his wife could be reunited with her relatives. Now, he mostly repairs farm instruments and fits horses. He also fashions sturdy steel blades from time to time for the soldiers stationed nearby in the Ashen Stronghold.

Zagvar's Anvil, two blocks north of the Needle of Ghaddar, is a typical blacksmith shop located in Krezk. Zagvar works mostly in steel, but the Church of the Morninglord has been known to commission special blades made of silver from him. Because of his relationship with the clergy, Zagvar is also able to have weapons blessed in exchange for a small "tithe" to the church.

Dread Possibility

Finding a deep kinship with the Gundarakites oppressed by the boyars, Pietro has decided to flout the weapons ban and is converting farming tools into knives and swords for the Gundarakite rebels. He masquerades as a simple horseshoe-maker to fool the authorities. It is only a matter of time, however, before someone finds out about his ruse. PCs could either be hired by the authorities to apprehend Pietro, or by the rebels he serves to safely smuggle him out of the country (perhaps to Castle Hunadora in Invidia).

Borca

Borca is a land best known for its theatrical arts, thanks to the generous sponsorship of both Lady Ivana and Lord Ivan. It can also boast of two of the most acclaimed blacksmiths of the Core.

The first smithy is known as Sasha's Hammer, and can be found in Levkarest. Many of Ezra's most holy champions have blades that originate in Sasha's forge. He runs a very tidy shop, and is extremely professional with his customers. Anchorites often drop by while visiting the Grand Cathedral on their pilgrimages. This native-born Borcan can create masterwork swords out of silver or steel.

The second smithy is Gunnar's Forge, and can be found among the low-lying cliffs of Lechberg. This is a small, cramped shop that can be easily overlooked if one is not paying attention. It is run by the reclusive Gunnar, who uses his apprentices as go-betweens with his customers. While his weapons are of a lesser quality than Sasha's, Gunnar's shop is a popular stop for Lord Ivan's enforcers.

Dread Possibility

Gunnar is actually a native Falkovnian who escaped from the infamous Blackworks factory in Lekar. The reason Ivan's enforcers buy blades from him is because he knows the secret of creating the dreaded blood-blade, a skill he picked up during his forced servitude. Ivan knows of Gunnar's abilities, and whenever he puts in an order for weapons he also sends over a kidnapped victim to serve as a sacrifice for the dark ritual it takes to make the blades. Perhaps the PCs are hired by a family of one such victim to find out what happened to them.

Darkon

Darkon, being the largest domain of the Core, boasts the most variety in its weaponsmiths. Indeed, there are so many exceptional forges it is hard to choose just a few to highlight. Nevertheless, your humble author has done his best to bring you the most unique establishments you could wish to spend your money in.

The first such shop is Bodean's Smelting, an expansive bloomery located in Upper Karg. One can see several of its chimneys rising up from behind the Church of Sorrowful Dead and belching out thick black smoke from miles away. Morgan Bodean created this unusual company nearly a century ago, taking the leftover ores mined from the Mountains of Misery and creating a more refined steel usable for both buildings and weapons. His great-grandson, Morgan Bodean IV now runs the place, and has turned it into a successful demolition and scrapmetal yard as well. He employs several scouts that constantly search the domain looking for new materials to process.

Carni's Exotic Weaponry is a smithy based out of Matira Bay's South District, and it is a great place to discover those hard-to-find

arms and supplies. Lukas Carnifax is a scarred, shaggy-haired man that prides himself on the fact that he can work with any kind of metal, including bronze, gold, iron, silver, or steel. He even claims to be able to carve ivory or obsidian pieces if needed. Many of the sailors and merchants that come to this cosmopolitan seaport visit Carni's shop for his unique merchandise, several examples of which hang on the walls.

Durgon's Forge, just across the road from Geraldines' Gem Emporium in Tempe Falls, is the most famous smithy in the entire Mountains of Misery region. The burly, black-bearded dwarf, Durgon, is renowned throughout the Core for his masterwork axes, knives, and swords made from silver and gold. Of course, his work doesn't come cheap, but it is well worth the trip to such a desolate region if one has the need for exceptional quality and the coin to pay for it.

Finally, we come to Tassel's Smithy, a small, unassuming shop just outside the gates of Old Town in Nartok. Arcadi Tassel is a stout, fair-haired blacksmith with a deep voice that is especially skilled in crafting weapons made of cold-forged iron. Blades made from his forge are extremely sturdy - lasting much longer and taking more punishment than weapons typically made using the cold-forging process.

Dread Possibility

The blacksmiths working under Morgan are adept at making powerful lich-blades (for the right price). The scrapmetal business is the perfect cover for acquiring metal from graveyards or crypts. In addition, Morgan Bodean IV would love to fund an expedition to the abandoned satellite communities of the former metropolis of Il Aluk in the hope of acquiring cheap material. Perhaps the PCs can arrange a trade (their services for Bodean's goods).

Dread Possibility

Tassel is actually one of the legendary Kartakan songforgers, who fled from his homeland after one too many attacks by wolfweres. After moving to Darkon, he forgot his former life, but retained his blacksmithing skills. He loves to hum and sing while working, and does not know that this is why he is so successful at his craft.

Dementlieu

The citizens of the enlightened domain of Dementlieu generally consider swords barbaric. Two unique smithies do merit a closer examination, however, in this land that is better known for its war of words than any true battlefield prowess.

Grissome's Gun Shoppe can be found a few short, but respectable, blocks off the Widow's Walk in Port-A-Lucine. Lemont Grissome fancies himself an inventor and gunsmith of no small talent. He specializes in making and selling flintlock pistols for the various wealthy nobles and ship captains that frequent his establishment. Supposedly, he puts all the money he earns back into the development of experimental handguns.

In the Merchants Quarter of Port-A-Lucine, two stores down from the Broken Spire Inn, is a much more popular shop - Ralston's Blades. Ralston is rumored to be a half-Vistani. If that's true, then his talent is most unfortunately being wasted on the making of the thin-bladed rapiers and foils that are all the rage among the upper class. He is open to doing custom orders, however, if one is looking for something a bit sturdier.

Falkovnia

The militant nation of Falkovnia is up next. Very early on in his reign, Kingfuhrer Drakov realized that he required a centralized operation for all his weaponry needs. Thus the colossal Blackworks established, located right next to the Great Coliseum, in the capital city of Lekar. Over 50 underground ovens are manned by scores of prisoners while dozens of blacksmiths shape armor and weapons in the above ground studio. This one factory is the source of the majority of weaponry Vlad's dreaded legions carry into battle. Falkfuhrer Abelard Orgstrund oversees the entire operation.

If you're looking for a more personal touch, one could visit Morfenzi to see Hildebrand's Furnace, found just on the south side of the West Timori Road near the soldier's barracks. Gustav Hildebrand and his shop are a veritable diamond in the rough amidst the slaughterhouses and tanneries of the Butcher's Burg. He is well known among Drakov's elite Talons for his masterwork swords and daggers. Some of Drakov's more ruthless officers even commission Hildebrand to make blood-blades for them, in order to ensure victory on the battlefield.

Hazlan

The exotic southern domain of Hazlan is up next. This is a land dominated by the doctrines of the Church of the Lawgiver and its strict class division between its two ethnicities - the ruling Mulan and the servile Rashemi. Accordingly, the blacksmiths detailed below have different styles.

Erol's Forge, located just off the Iron Road as you enter from the Nova Vaasan side, in Sly-Var is run by a barrel-chested Rashemi blacksmith who can work in iron or steel. His prices are fair and his work is very well done. His clientele, however, leans towards the seedier elements, including smugglers, thieves, and other assorted rogues.

Dread Possibility

Erol's shop is well known in underworld circles for creating powerful hex-blades. His sister, Erika, is a sorceress of great measure, who has decided to use her gift to help free her people from the control of their Mulan overlords. If a Mulan orders a blade, Erika puts a jinx on it so it will never be used to harm a Rashemi. If a Rashemi order a blade, however, she puts a charm on it to enhance the wielder's strength.

The celebrated Onan's Fire smithy can be found in Toyalis, next door to the infamous Sorceror's Head Inn. It is run by a muscular Mulan (with the typical bald and tattooed head) who loves to work in a very unusual material - meteoritic iron.

It is believed by many scholars that the crater the capital city is built on was created by a large meteor crashing to the earth several thousand years ago. One day, Onan found a rich deposit of this ore and eventually discovered that its unique make-up created startling strong blades.

This prosperous blacksmith counts many of Hazlik's enforcers and several clergy of the Lawgiver among his customers. In addition, he is known to hire and send scouts across the Core when he hears of a newly discovered deposit of the precious material that he loves to shape.

Invidia

One would think that the brewing civil war in Invidia would signal a heyday for blacksmiths in the region, but unfortunately the reverse is true. Lord Malacchio is not known for his generosity, and any smith that can do quality work has already been conscripted into his army or else fled the domain. There is one notably holdout operating in the relatively independent town of Curriculo, however, just down river from the capital of Karina.

Lothario's Hearth can be found in the town's central marketplace, and this swarthy, charming smithy is famous for his masterwork blades made of silver. Indeed, his blades are highly sought after prizes by natives of Barovia and Verbrek (who find them particularly useful against the vampires and werewolves that haunt their respective lands). The persistent tales of werewolves stalking the Vulpwood also keeps customers coming in.

Dread Possibility

Corinthion is a fake. He is an ordinary blacksmith that possesses an enchanted anvil (which he picked up in the neighboring domain of Sithicus) that forges his swords for him when he sings a few key words. His blades are not true cold-forged weapons, and thus the wolfweres that rule the domain do not attack him or his shop. He uses the songforger ploy to drum up customers.

Kartakass

The domain of Kartakass is mostly known for its masterful bards. One smithy, however, does stand out - Corinthion's Hearth, located down the block from the Grand Hall of Song and Dance in Upper Skald. Corinthion claims to have apprenticed with the last great songforger, Kolmy Szesstelyn. His claims are backed up by the fact that several witnesses have seen him shape his swords using just the sound of his own voice. If one wants to see him in action they shouldn't wait too long, lest he disappear into the night like so many other great songforgers before him.

Lamordia

Lamordia is a domain usually known for its more modern marvels such as zeppelins and gaslight lamps. Surprisingly, it is the home of two weaponsmiths of high regard.

The first is known as Snorri's Smithy. Snorri is a member of the hill dwarf tribe that originally came out of Darkon to mine the

Dread Possibility

Snorri's family was actually abducted while they were en route to Lamordia by Falkovnian soldiers on the border during one of the failed battles in the latest Dead Man's Campaign. Snorri eventually escaped Vlad's grip but had to leave his wife and children behind in a Crumbling Hills mining camp. If adventurers pledged to rescue them, Snorri would surely create masterwork blades for them to carry out the mission or as a reward for a job well done.

ore from the Sleeping Beast mountain range. His smithy is found high up on its eastern slope, and is very hard to reach for those unaccustomed to the terrain and who don't know the trails. In addition to arms, he also forges mining tools, working both in iron or steel. He is extremely xenophobic, however, and will serve humans only under extraordinary circumstances.

The second notable smithy is Gutenheim's Metalworks, which lies on the outskirts of Neufretchenberg near that city's many mining operations. This is a large factory that mass produces wheel-lock and flintlock firearms. This one operation is the prime source of most of the Dementlieuse and Richemuloteise pistols and guns that are currently so popular. Oddly enough, Gutenheim's does no business with its neighbor, Falkovnia, even though the two domains are on such good terms with each other.

Mordent

Mordent is another domain that has its fair share of smithies. Again, two forges stand heads above the rest. The first is Stockholme's Anvil, a relatively new business (by Mordentish standards)

established 10 years ago. It can be found in downtown Mordenshire at the end of Cranston Street. Stockholme can make and repair steel blades, as well as work in more exotic materials (mostly by request of the various sailors that visit the town). His fine craftsmanship also attracts the business of several anchorites from the Chapel of Pure Hearts.

Gravecroft's Smithy of Blackburn's Crossing is located one block west of the Gilded Ladle inn in the town's burgeoning trade district. This shop is most noteworthy because of its patented ghost-blades (alternately called spirit-knives), which are somehow able to inflict damage against spectral foes. No one knows how William Gravecroft makes these weapons (some say he uses an old alchemical process that his family discovered), but their effectiveness is without question. He works exclusively in silver and steel.

Dread Possibility

Unbeknownst to all, Stockholme is a pseudonym created by the blacksmith in order to evade his captors from a distant land (which could be anywhere from Pharazia, Har'Akir, or perhaps nowhere at all - in reality his tormentors are all in his head). His newfound success makes him very uneasy, because he fears his former masters will pick up his trail. If his travails turn out to be imaginary, he may even start randomly killing sailors that hail from exotic lands, becoming a psychotic serial killer that the PCs are hired to bring in. If, on the other hand, his hunters are real, he could beg the PCs to protect him.

Nova Vaasa

The expansive domain of Nova Vaasa has a wealth of talented blacksmiths. In fact, each of the five major noble families has their own personal smithy with which to arm them and their loyal attendants. They also have an abundance of ferriers take care of their prized horses. There is still room, however, for a handful of exceptional smithies to distinguish themselves.

The first is Noni's Hammer, which can be found just off the East Timori Road as you enter Egertus. Noni is a unique dwarven blacksmith for several reasons - first, she's female; second, she moved from her home in the mountains of Darkon to the plains of Nova Vaasa; and third, she settled in the burgeoning seaport of Egertus. She is known for her quality work in iron and steel, but can also craft custom jobs out of precious metals like silver or gold. Her shop is considered the best in the land, and several nobles from the ruling houses have approached her offering their personal sponsorship.

Dread Possibilitiy

Paavo is actually an ex-Valachani blacksmith. He is also an infected werepanther (he contracted it after an attack by that domain's dreaded Black Leopards police force that killed his family). He left Valachan to escape Baron Kharkov's attention, and eventually settled in Nova Vaasa. At least here, he can blame his depredations on stray plains cats. Prince Othmar knows of Paavo's true nature, but allows him to continue hunting as long as he supplies his men with cheap arms. Recently, however, Paavo has learned of a cat cult previously active in the area, and is seeking more information on it in hopes of reviving its practice as its high priest.

Next, we come to Paavo's Forge in the River Quarter of the capital city of Kantora. The dark skinned Donengaard is an expert in the creation of all kinds of weapons - ranging from axes, spears, and swords. He can work in iron or steel.

Renault's Armory is just odd enough to warrant a passing mention. It can be found on the west side of Bergovitsa's bustling Traveler's Market and is run by Pierre Renault, an ex-Richemulotiese gunsmith. Pierre is attempting to corner the market on muskets and pistols in the domain. So far his efforts to introduce these weapons have not met with much success. The peasants can't afford the things, and the nobles only see them as amusing little toys.

Richemulot

Moving on, Richemulot is a land that holds many secrets, but where to find a good sword isn't one of them. Starting things off properly is Pomeroy's Forge, which is located one block south of the rather ominously named Inn of the Last Breath in Ste. Ronges. This smithy employs the most famed crafters of legendary Rongiese steel the Core has ever known. Marcus Pomeroy himself can make masterwork swords of exquisite beauty. Many local anchorites and members of the watch companies carry his blades by their sides.

Sidion's Metalsmithing, just around the corner from the l'Estime Capitale in Mortigny, is another famous forge. Sidion is a rare half-elf blacksmith whose true land of origin is unknown. His skills, however, have made his name synonymous with quality work throughout the Core. Sidion and his crew of able-bodied apprentices specialize in collecting, making, and selling enchanted weapons of all types and sizes. He can reputedly work in almost any material.

A notable mention also goes to Borchava's Silvercrafting, on the Plaza of the Stars in Pont-A-Musea. For years, the Borchava family created elegant silverware for the ruling Boritsi family in Borca. After Richemulot's appearance, Vasali Borchava immigrated to the domain in order to stake out his own fortune. Now, he provides the nobles of this domain with his finely wrought stylings. He can, however, be persuaded to make blades out of his silver if the price is right (especially for friends of the Church of Ezra as he is still a devout follower of the Home Faith).

The small, forest-covered domain of Tepest has a single noteworthy blacksmith. Galvin's Smithy, one street down from the Temple of Belenus in Viktal, is run by a grim blacksmith who specializes in axes and spears and works exclusively in iron and steel. Not surprisingly, his shop arms most of the priests of the Inquisition.

Besides that dubious honor, Galvin is also noteworthy for the prized blood-blades that he makes using the blood of the goblins and fey that inhabit the nearby woods. The weapons are highly lethal against whatever creature's blood it has tasted durrin forging.

Valachan

Valachan is a remote, but hauntingly beautiful, domain covered in lush redwood forests. It's common knowledge that the natives have very queer views about the nature of their world. It should be taken for granted, then, that their blacksmiths carry over these strange beliefs into their work.

Rurik's Hammer in Helbenik is a prime example. Rurik is highly esteemed for his crafting of moon-blades. But these are not the legendary werewolf-killing swords; these are blades created by the grace of their dead god Yutow by being forged in the moonlight and blessed by the local moarnako. They

seem to be especially lethal to the panthers and other big cats, however, and thus are very popular with local woodsmen.

Verbrek

Our trip around the Core is almost complete - only the wolf-plagued woods of Verbrek remain. While most human inhabitants of the domain are simple farmers who barter for their tools and weapons from neighboring lands, there is one very special place left to cover.

Known simply as Simon's Pit, this is a small clearing in the Ghostflame Bottoms region with an outdoor kiln. Supposedly created by a powerful druid, it gives anyone brave enough to stay out in the forest on the night of the full moon the opportunity to forge a moon-blade, the most potent weapon a werewolf hunter can carry. It is probably the only documented source of moon-blades known in the Core. Oddly enough, the domain's werewolf inhabitants haven't destroyed the site yet. Some believe ancient enchantments have been weaved into the very ground to prevent the area's desecration. Others say the spirits of slain werewolf victims protect it. No one knows for sure.

Conclusion

That wraps up this first volume of Olerick's Colloquial Guides. Some of you are saying, what about Khamek's Oven in Muhar, or Mason's Gunnery of Paridon? Or, what of the Abber dreamforgers, able to pluck out weapons from their very dreams? Due to unfortunate restrictions on my traveling expenses, I can only afford to cover the Core. (Hopefully, island domains may be added in later editions.) Meanwhile, I hope you find the information I've provided to be of some use on your next trip.

Registry of Monsters

Excerpts from the Register

By Stanton F. Fink

Apokryltaros@gmail.com

The Valserigrav came down from the Heavens to search for an evil spirit. Although it is his duty to find and destroy this evil spirit, he has yet to complete this task.



His fierce demeanor belies his tremendous heart, as he dawdles in his quest in order to help and comfort his foe's victims. Still, one must not underestimate this beast, as he takes great delight in burning those who draw his ire to ashes.

*Moab is the
herald of the
Dark Way,
Daitya Piyao
Piyao.
This horrid
faerie ensures
that his
master's will is
enforced, and
that those who
traffic with the
Dark Way obey
the terms of their
contracts, under
pain of death.*



*Uguz Bahaan is a peculiar demon lord...
Said to be the master and prisoner of the Palazz
ir-Ramel, or "Sand Palace."*

*According to legend, a sorcerer cursed Uguz to be
trapped in the Palazz ir-Ramel,
which, in turn, was cursed
to reform once a year, at
sunset of the night of
the first waning
gibbous moon after
the Winter Solstice.
If Uguz can find
the key to his palace
gate, he can be free to
roam the world once
more.*



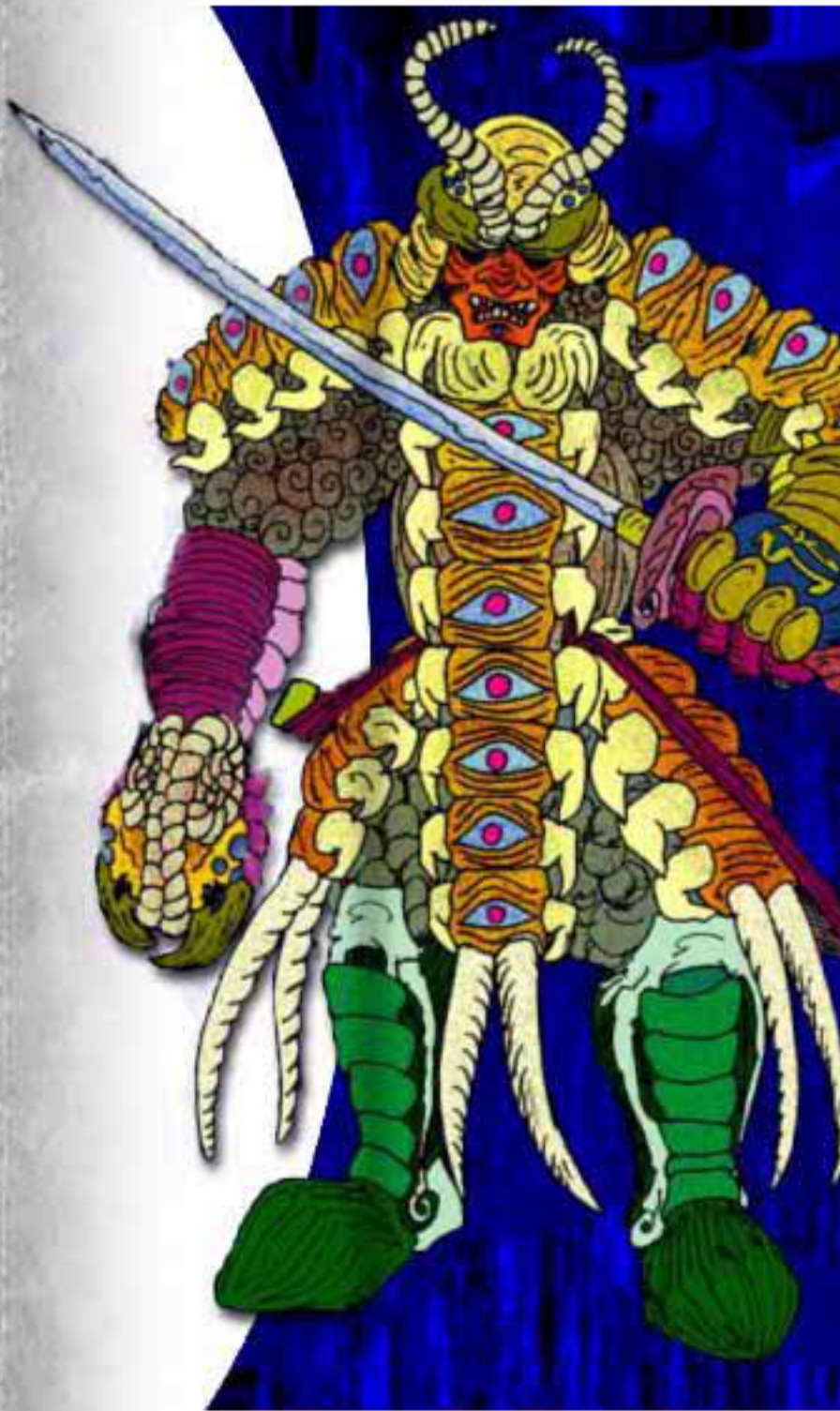
*Daitya
Kukurobaran
was once an evil
faerie, born of
an ogre's
nightmare. It
searches for a
new body, and
often tricks
warriors into
letting it
borrow their
bodies.*



The Deiphon is one of the favorite spies of the Apokrystaros. Some ambitious wizards summon it to spy for them, in order to gain an advantage over their rivals.



The canner wizards summon it to learn what their rivals tasked it to spy over. Few seem to realize that it reports everything it learns back to its Master.



*A centipede spirit
disguised as bushido.*

*It is infamous for
the slavish obedience
it shows its master.*

*On the other hand, it
has no pretense of
honor, and will
eagerly betray allies
and underlings in
order to complete the
tasks its master gives
it.*

*If it will further its
master's goals, it will
resort to duplicity,
and has been known
to even spare enemies
in order to torment
them for its master's
amusement.*



Likkiju Nikkinu is a weird girl who has three eyes. In her more lucid moments, she sometimes claims to be the daughter of the Green Empress. Whether this is true or not, she is one of the Five Iron Faeries, and diligently works to bring misery and suffering to all those around her.

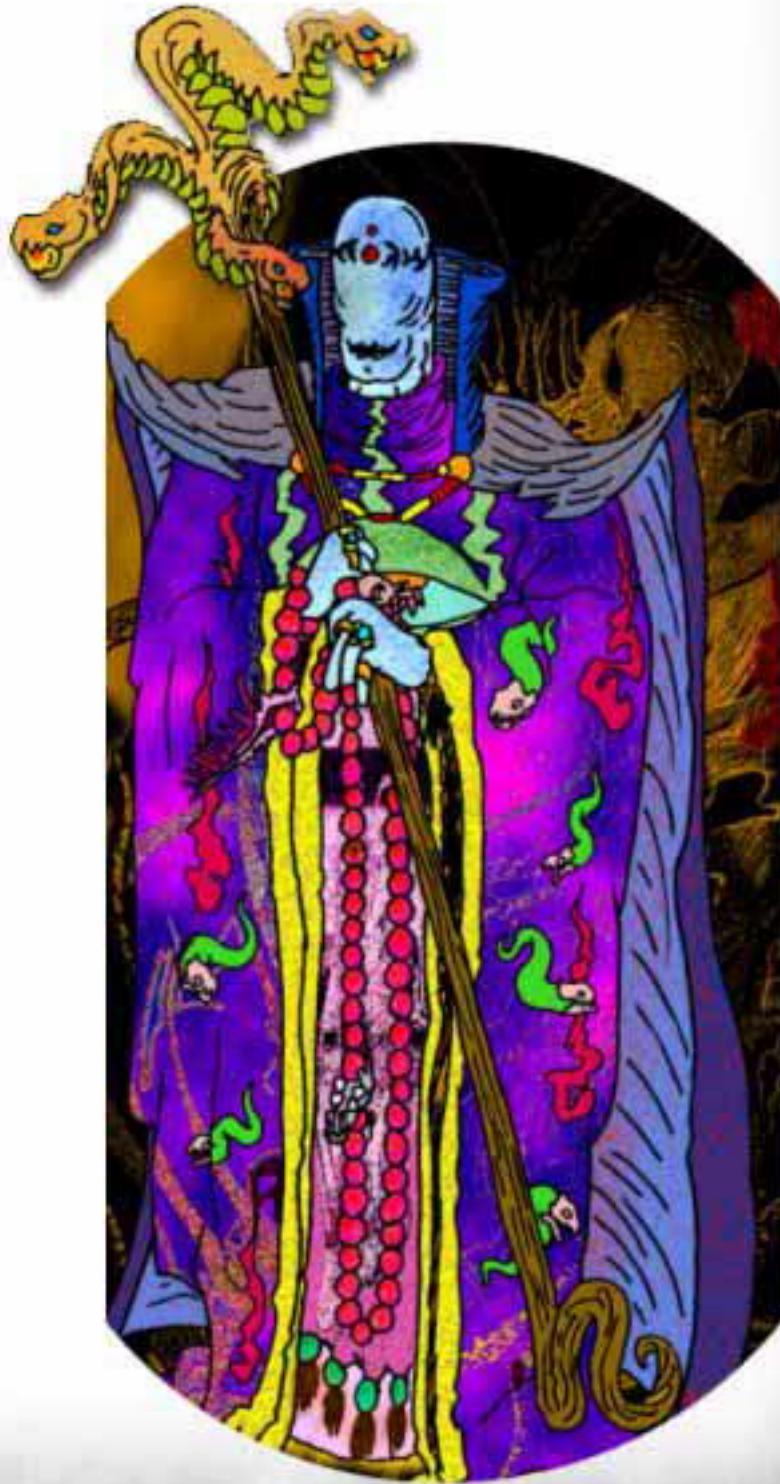
*The 10,000 Li Ghost is one of
the Green Empress' spirit minions.*

*It gets its name because, according to legend,
it can stretch itself to over 10,000 li in length, and
serves the Green Empress by spying and stealing.*



*It serves in the hopes that the Green Empress
will give it a body of its own one day.*

Daitya Baiyakubo is a wicked faerie, and brother to Daitya Kukurobaran. He loves his victims, and delights in granting life to the dead, and nightmares to the living.





Haimon is a spirit that can build its own body out of stolen corpses. It is a servant of the Apokrystaros, and its master can see out of its true eye at all times.



A chittering, giggling spirit that is desperate for a new host body. It can and has possessed people, animals, plants and objects with equal enthusiasm

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Boggy Downs

A New Edge to the Core Races

By Stephen "ScS" Sutton
stephen@fraternityofshadows.com

Let the Past sleep.

- Mordentish saying
Boggy Downs

Boggy Downs

No sense is so tied to memory as scent, and few smells are as refreshing as the coastal breezes of sleepy Mordent. The warm air current over the Sea of Sorrows blows the gentle salt spray east, mixing it with the fragrance of forests, the lingering aroma of chimney smoke, and just the faintest hint of baking bread. Even for foreigners, it is a perfume that brings calm and relaxation.

Sometimes, however, the wind shifts ever so slightly, and the air becomes thicker. The gentle scent is tainted with the subtle stench of stagnant water, mould, and rotting fish. When the stink wafts through the air the Mordentish wrinkle their noses in disgust. Careful observers might even hear them spit a mumbled curse: Boggy Downs.

Boggy Downs is a seeping wound on the face of Mordent. The Downs are a stagnant swamp festering in the hills just east of the

coastal cliffs. The area is known for its fierce flooding when the winter thaws and spring rains send a torrent washing inland from the costal cliffs. These floods soak the earth, which in turn empties into the Downs over the rest of the year.

The Downs are heated by some as-of-yet unknown source. In summer the water is unusually warm and in winter the waters never freeze solid, only having the thinnest skin of ice on cold windy days. Though foul smelling, the waters teem with all manner of fish, amphibians, aquatic rodents and marsh birds. Weeds cling to every shore, as do strange species of wild rice and hitherto unknown berries and melon plants. Indeed, the Downs might be habitable wetland, were it not for the ever-present miasma of decay.

History

Memories are long in Mordent, though few as long as can recall when the Downs were but a common village. Like so many other villages, the Downs was a humble hamlet under the protection of a local squire. Nestled between the rolling coastal hills, the

village maintained a series of dams and reservoirs to nourish their crops and protect their fields from the spring floods.

Though narrow-minded and set in their ways, few grumbled when a Lamordian lord married into their squire's family. Not even the most mulish villager suspected the danger when the squire died and left his estate to Lord Esterhause.

Unsatisfied with the boring life of the Mordentish gentry, Esterhause set out to transform the backwards countryside. Seizing on the villages proximity to the sea, the Lamordian lord devised an ingenious system of locks and canals to bring shipping from the coast deep into the heart of the land and out the Arden River. Backwards and stubborn, the people of the downs wanted nothing to do with the project.

To Esterhause's constant consternation, the intricate lattice of Mordentish laws and leases made his project impossible to complete without the consent of the obstinate tenants. As construction proceeded from the Sea, Esterhause did everything in his power to bribe and bully his tenants into submission. As the years dragged on, the Lamordian lord grew to despise the villagers and plotted to drive them from their homes.

After a particularly bitter winter, the March thaw swelled the lakes and reservoirs close to bursting. Sensing his opportunity, Lord Esterhause undermined the dams and dykes around the Downs. That spring the rains were relentless and little by little the barriers that protected the village approached their breaking point. One miserable night, the storms struck with awesome force. Under the onslaught the dams burst and the entire town was drowned in a horrid black torrent.

Those few who survived the deluge clung to the roofs of their houses and waited for rescue. One by one, the survivors succumbed to cold and exhaustion and sank into the murk. Content in his victory, Lord

Esterhause watched the grisly affair from the comfort of his high perched manor.

As the months past, the Lamordian Lord found his victory hollow. The waters that drowned the village refused to drain. Spring turned to summer and still the waters lay. With so many structures beneath the surface, the brackish waters proved deadly to any but the smallest craft. Mud clogged drainage ditches and all manner of vile weeds strangled the canals. Esterhause hired an army of labourers to finish his project, but all attempts met with disaster. When winter came construction halted and the Lamordian retired to his manor to plot his next moves.

Spring came again, bringing with it the floods, cutting off the Downs from the outside world. When the waters finally receded, no word had come from the Downs. Curious neighbours found no trace of Esterhause and his manor abandoned. Few spoke of the matter, and most believed that the foreign lord had gone mad, driven his servants away, and destroyed his home. But those who found the manor insisted that the house had been barricaded against some outside force; a force that had trampled the wet earth with hundreds of footprints.

The Downs remained flooded, and in time became a dire swamp. The ownership of the land passed back and forth, and currently resides with an aging invalid in Mordentshire. Since Esterhause's disappearance, decent folk have shunned "Boggy Downs". It is said that there is a curse hanging over the brackish waters. Like all Mordentish people, the simple villagers prefer to keep to their own business and to let the past slumber in its murky grave.

Locations of Interest

1. Squatters Point

The reeking fens and ghastly reputation of the Downs ward off all decent folk. Yet, there are some whom would find such isolation appealing. At the Southern edge of the waters sits a dismal collection of tents and hovels. Squatters Point is home to a motley collection of the desperate and the degenerate. Those who are shunned by honest society seek out the shadows and solitude of the Point; indeed, wickedness seems drawn to the Point, as vermin to rotting meat.

The squatters eek out a marginal living by fishing and gathering wild rice from the marsh. Some the bolder denizens occasionally sneak into the outlying areas to rustle livestock or prey on the highways. A few semi-honest squatters sell berries and the furs of animals they trap. The Point also produces a disgusting strain of moonshine made from melons, berries and aquatic plants.

Squatters Point is wretched mire of villainy; there is no law but that of brute force. A few families wrestle for control of the wretched Point. Currently the "Black Donnellys" clan feuds with the Spenser Gang for control of the sale of alcohol. Most of the squatters remain neutral, and patiently wait for one side to destroy the other before they pounce on the weakened survivors. Though the squatters constantly fight amongst themselves they unite to drive off invaders, especially the posses that neighbouring villages periodically send into the Point.

Those who are desperate enough to visit the Point do so armed, and with plenty of back up. Anyone less prepared can expect to be beaten, stripped of all his possessions, and sliced up as bait for fish.

2. The Canal

A disused canal winds through the hills west of the Downs. Construction on the canal dates back to the time when the Downs were flooded. The project was abandoned after Lord Esterhause vanished without a trace.

Dread Possibilities: Lord of the Downs

One year to the day of the flood, an unholy glowing mist wafted over the Downs, bringing with it a legion of the dead. The dripping cadavers besieged the house of Lord Esterhause, and after several nights finally dragged him and his servants from the mansion. One by one, the living were dragged down to join the dead in their murky graves. Yet as Esterhause was pulled beneath the black waters, he did not drown, but was instead transformed.

The hideousness of his crimes had made him into a disgusting reaver, a vile amphibious horror. As a horrible gill-man, he can only survive on land for a short time before suffocating on dry air. For decades the creature that was once Lord Esterhause has lived as an animal, feeding on frogs and fish and wallowing in the disgusting muck. Worst of all, his mind remained as sharp as ever, leaving him aware and resentful of his primitive existence.

The Creature has but one hope; the Canal. If by some means the canal could be completed, the Creature plans swim to the ocean and the freedom beyond. Driven mad by his captivity, the Creature does not understand that he is in fact a fresh-water reaver, incapable of surviving in the sea.

Ravaged by time and the elements, the canal's locks and reservoirs have long since collapsed. The unfinished trench is choked with weeds and silt most of the year, though the passage becomes navigable to small craft when the spring rains raise the water level. The old canal cuts through hills and valleys before emptying into the Sea of Sorrows.

Every so many years some foreign merchant comes across the canal and tries to rebuild. Every attempt thus far has been thwarted by accidents, floods, bankruptcy and personal tragedy. The old merchant families of Mordent know the history of the canal and avoid the curse that hangs over it.

3. The Wind Mill

At the Southern edge of the bog stands a lone witness to the years of woe; an old, decrepit windmill. Though unused for countless years, the structure is still stands as a testament to the workmanship of a people long dead. The blades turn lazily in the breeze, though the canvas is rotted in most places, revealing the wooden bones of the blades. Damp air has left the wooden structure rotted and worm-eaten. Great colonies of mould spot the walls, while the floors are dotted with fungi of disgusting shape and size.

Most disturbing of all is the luminous quality of the rot and decay. At night the windmill glows with yellow-green phosphorescence. So powerful is the glow that it lights the land around it with its sickly radiance. When pressed with drink, some of the Squatters have been known to tell wild stories about the Windmill, and what horrible thing might dwell within.

4. The Churchyard

Just as in other villages, the church of the Downs stood on gentle hill close to town. As the highest structure in town, it alone was left above water. Most of the survivors of the

initial deluge swam here to await rescue. When the chapel began to flood, the refugees took shelter in the church spire. Weakened by cold and hunger they died one by one, waiting for a rescue that would never come.

In time, the floods that destroyed the town receded enough to reveal the fence and tombstones of the churchyard. The grave earth is covered by a foot of marsh and is strewn with the bones of flood victims. The structure of the chapel still holds strong even with the massive rot and erosion. The interior is strewn with worm-eaten pews and other furniture shifted by waters. The stone spire of the church has shifted ever so slightly over the years, and now seems to bend at a disturbingly non-Euclidian angle.

On spring nights, before the thaw and the floods that follow, the old church bell tolls over the black waters. Most claim that it is a product of strong winds and shifting earth, while others whisper of ghosts. Those who have been near the Downs on spring nights say nothing.

5. Sunken Town

The stagnant lake that was once the Downs is a veritable minefield of stonewalls, timber and other debris. Several of the more sturdy buildings still stand in the center of the lake. Many are open to the elements, having partially collapsed either during the deluge or in the years afterwards. Those with shingled roves have mostly remained in tact, and several have attics or second stories that are dry.

Squatters have been known to use the sunken buildings as temporary docks while fishing. Strangely, no one has dared explore the interiors of the buildings, or even stay on the roofs after dark. With a little prying and a lot of alcohol, these boatmen will confess to hearing strange noises coming from within the houses, and seeing dark shapes in the windows.

Dread Possibilities: Playing House

The creature that once was Esterhause inhabits the sunken town. A few of the most despicable Squatters trade with the Creature, and occasionally bring it women. The Creature holds these captives in the attics of sunken houses where the two play out a sick parody of normal life on land. The woman is forced to cook what meat the Creature catches, perform menial chores, and entertain the beast as it desires.

Inevitably, the captive dies; either from disease, despair, or the Creature's unnatural temper. When that occurs, the creature dips into a hidden stash of gold with which it bribes its henchmen to abduct a new bride.

To better play out its demented fantasies, the Creature forces its captives to sew it clothing. The beast wears a black coat and tails, modified to fit its twisted frame. It even wears a top hat, tied to its misshapen skull.

6 Dead Man's Mire

The hills of the Mordentish coast cover deposits of peat and other fossil fuels. When the flood struck the Downs, the peat bogs bled out their petroleum, poisoning the waters. Wave and wind action push most of the peat into an inlet on the Northeast side of the lake.

In the toxic environment, microbial action is slowed considerably. The bodies of flood victims that washed into the inlet have remained extremely well preserved. Many bodies lie just a few feet below the surface, still visible through the black oily waters. What little rot that does occur causes methane and other gasses to continuously

bubble to the surface. These gasses spontaneously combust, creating a dancing corpse-fire above the mire.

7. Boggy Manor

Overlooking the canal is the abandoned mansion of Lord Esterhause. Since the disappearance of the Lamordian Lord, none of his inheritors have bothered to claim the property. "Boggy Manor", as it is known to the locals, is a cavernous mansion house. Lord Esterhause commissioned the imposing building to be built over the humble estate of his predecessor. So consumed was he in his canal projects, that the manor was never completed in his life time. Various tenants since have made renovations and additions, though they too have been driven off or vanished before completion.

The sprawling house is surrounded by high stone walls, now covered by crawling ivy. The grounds are woefully overgrown, though even still one might make out the remains of the gardens and topiaries. A rusting iron gate stands at the entrance, though its lock has corroded off years ago. The road to the house is little more than a weedy path, sheltered by the mighty black oaks that run from the gate to the courtyard.

The building itself is an impressive, if ostentatious, structure built to accommodate the maniacal ego of its first owner. Ivy has crawled across the great stone walls and pillars of the building, all the way to its great gabled roof. Despite the damp climate, the wood and plaster is free of mould and rot. The chambers of house are unusually large and tall, and made all the more cavernous for being mostly empty. Few furniture or linens remain in the manor, either having been thrown out by previous tenants, or looted by passers-by.

In the past several people have tried to buy and rebuild the manor, though none have managed to stay more than a few months.

Dead Possibilities: The Visitor

The first tenants of Boggy Manor were a cult who used the isolation to perform perverse rituals. In one such experiment they attempted to summon a powerful demonic presence. Realizing only midway through that they could not control the beast, they shattered their summoning circle. The nature of the demiplane would not allow the creature to depart to the abyss, nor could the demon manifest physically in the demiplane, so it was trapped in the interface between planes and anchored to the house.

To survive in the interface, the demon requires the sanity and vitality of the living. For every week that a mortal lives within the house, it must make a Fortitude save against a DC 15 or suffer 1 point of drain to Dexterity or Wisdom.

The demonic presence has become a colossal animator and now inhabits the house. Within the walls of the house, the demon is all powerful. The only area it cannot control is the old chapel. The Visitor uses its powers to warp those within it, so that it might use them to perform the rituals necessary to free the demon of its prison.

The demon has found some limited success in posing as a ghost looking for release. Woe be to the investigator that puts a spirit to rest, only to release a much greater horror.

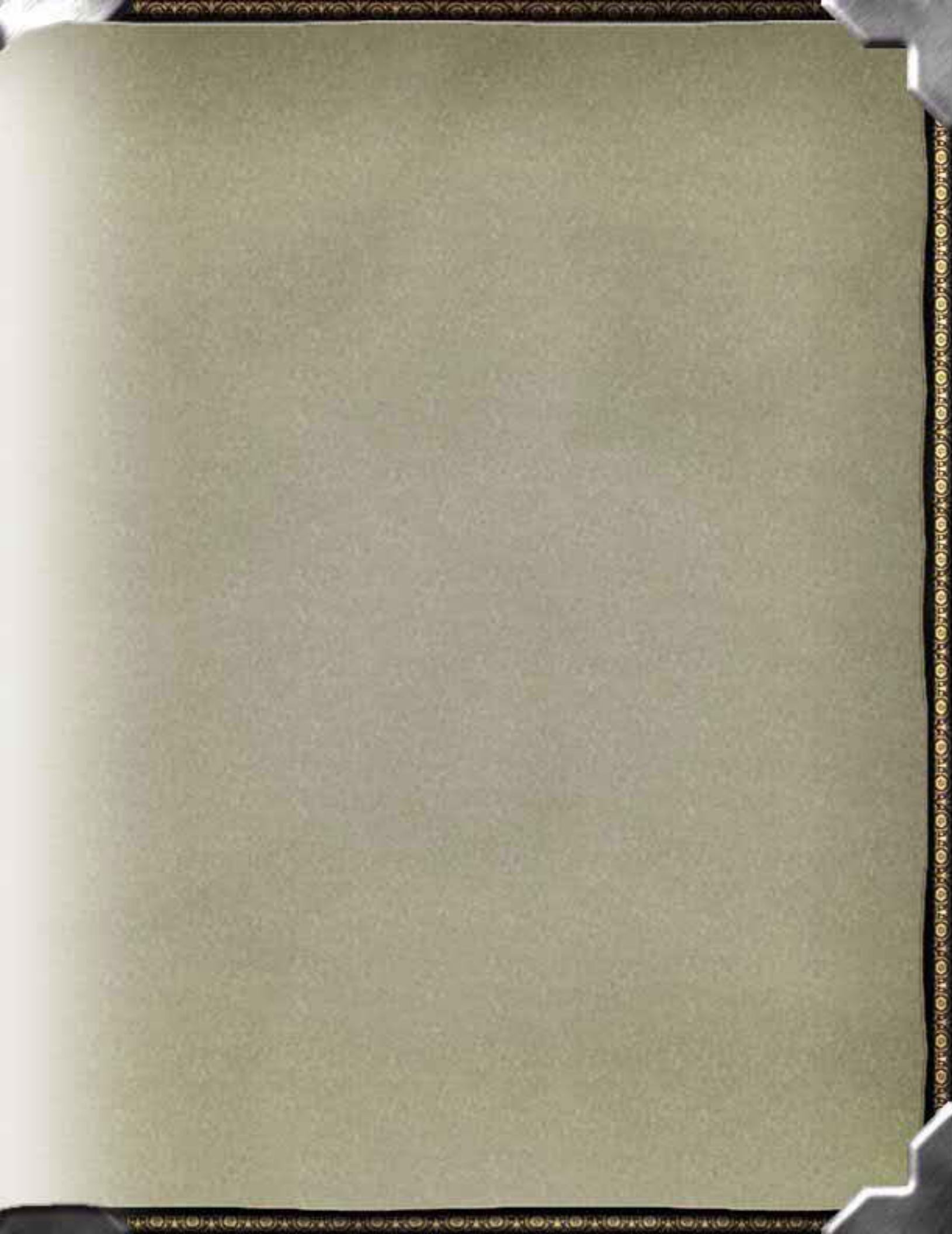
The entire house is permeated by a nauseating alien presence. Strange noises echo through its chambers and the shadows play tricks with perspective in the halls. Those who sleep in the mansion slumber fitfully, their dreams invaded by strange visions of alien vistas. The few people that stay in the house for more than a month begin to deteriorate in body and mind. Vapours from the swamp lead to fevers and debilitating arthritis, while the isolation of the house breeds a peculiar strain of paranoia, whereby people home to believe the house is alive.

Of the original Squire's home, only the small family chapel remains. When Esterhouse assumed his inheritance, he

ordered the chapel turned into a storage chamber and absorbed the structure into his mansion. Even bereft of its relics and crowded with boxes and barrels, the humble chapel still radiates an aura of sanctity.

Adventure Hooks

- A friend of one of the players inherits the estate of Boggy Downs. Faced with owning over such a vile land, the heir calls upon the players to rid his estate of the taint of evil and the horrible denizens that haunt it.
- The Squatters have gone too far! Rustling and robbery have spread across the hills. The neighbouring villagers are gathering a great mob to clean out the Downs, once and for all. Little do the villagers know that a gang of Squatters has made some infernal deal with a powerful creature.
- The players are hunting a villainous character when the trail disappears. It may be that the fiend has taken shelter somewhere in the Downs. The players will have to root their nemesis out, though in the doing they'll cross many of the Down's most dangerous denizens.
- The dead walk! It is the anniversary of the flood that drowned the Downs and the spring floods have once again closed off the hill lands from the outside world. At night, a strange mist wafts over the hills and valleys, bringing with it an army of walking cadavers. Why now do the dead walk, and for what horrible purpose? More importantly, can the players break the curse and send the dead back to their watery graves?



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