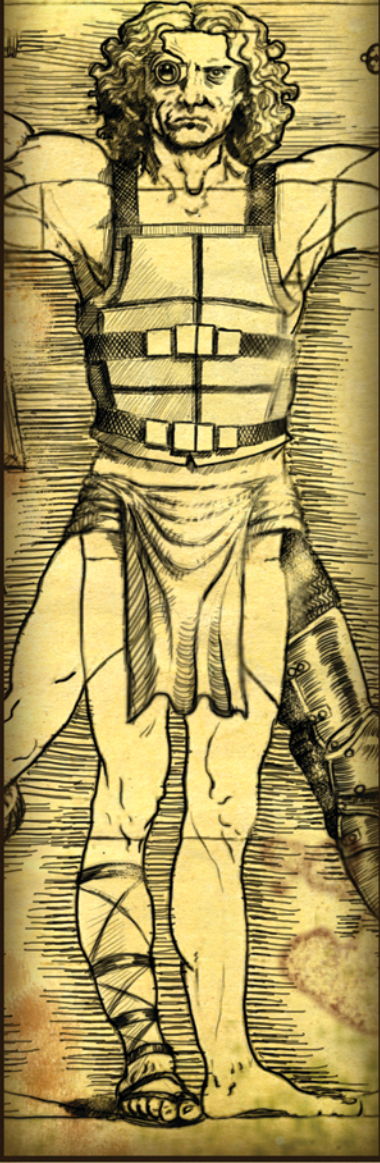


BASIC ROLEPLAYING

**BRP**

MONOGRAPH

#0352



Basic Roleplaying monographs are works in which the author has performed most editorial and layout functions. The guardians have deemed that this work offers significant value and entertainment to our patrons.

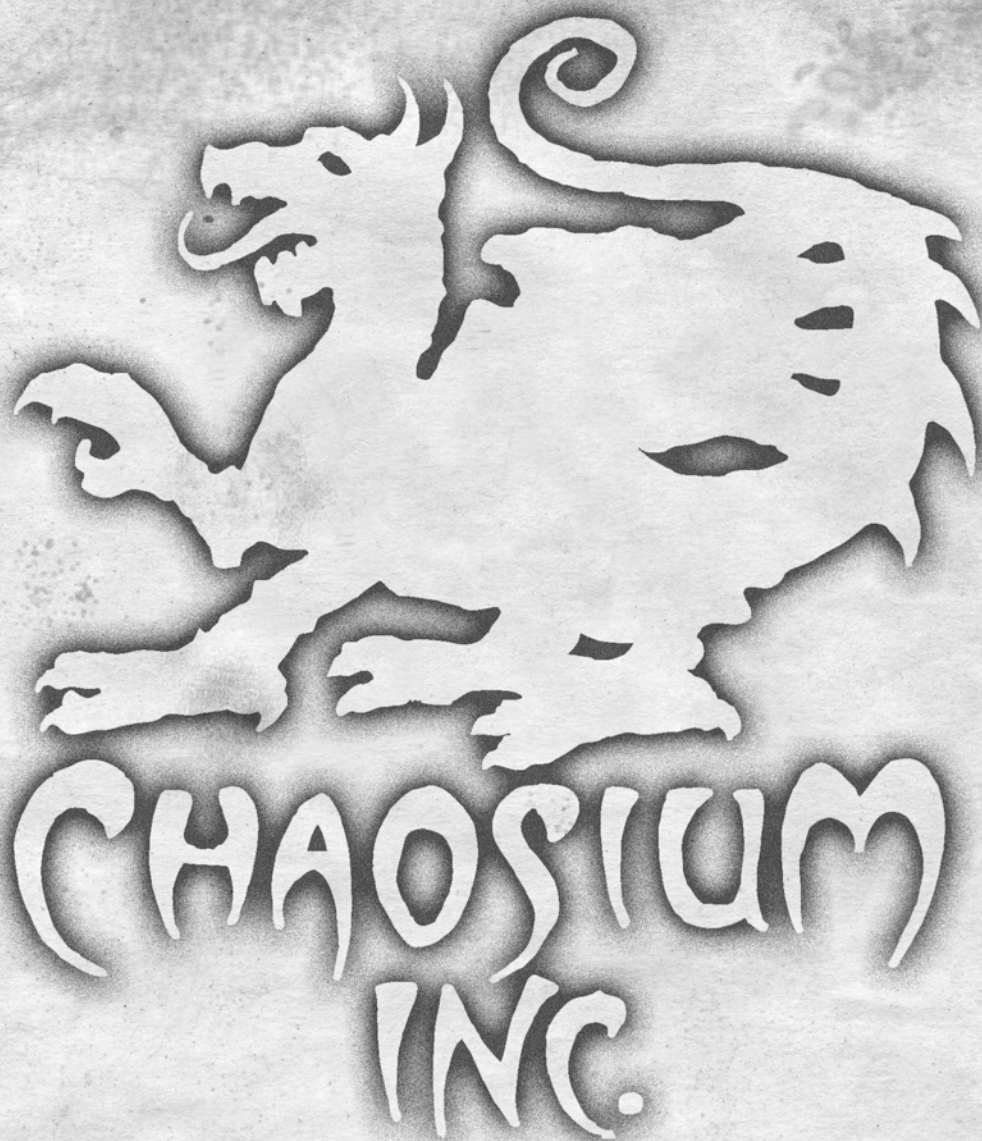
Other monographs are available at [www.chaosium.com](http://www.chaosium.com)

# ASHES TO ASHES



**EXPLORING THE DARKER SIDE  
OF HUMAN NATURE**





**We hope you enjoy  
this Chaosium publication,  
and thank you for purchasing this  
PDF from [www.chaosium.com](http://www.chaosium.com).**

# Ashes, to Ashes



*A Conspiracy-Based, Dark Ages Fantasy Setting, with a Black Sense of Humor and Exploring All Too Real Societal Problems, by Jeff Moeller.* For Chaosium's BRP™ rules set. Basic Roleplaying (BRP)™ is the registered trademark of Chaosium, Inc. Reproduction of material from within this book for purposes of personal or commercial profit, by any means, is prohibited. Permission is granted to copy images and maps for play purposes. Any similarity between characters in this book and persons living, dead, demonic, or fairy tale princess caught between life and death, is entirely coincidental. All images except as noted are copyright free (either U.S. Government created or pre-1922), and are publicly available from the Library of Congress' archive, <http://www.loc.gov>. Maps were created with a variety of shareware programs by the author, all of which permit commercial redistribution of created works. *Ashes, to Ashes* is ©2008 by Jeff Moeller. Feel free to contact the author or ask advice about the campaign by email at [neorxnawang@hotmail.com](mailto:neorxnawang@hotmail.com). A web forum offering support for the campaign can be found at Yahoo! Groups under "ashestoashes". Please join! It's got color maps! See you there!

# ASHES, TO ASHES

A BRP™ SETTING, EXPLORING THE DARKER SIDE OF HUMAN NATURE

BY JEFF MOELLER

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. Introduction</b>	...3	<b>a. Humans</b>	...45
<b>a. Welcome(?) to the World</b>	...3	<b>b. “Demons”</b>	...45
<b>b. Overview</b>	...3	<b>c. Halflings(?)</b>	...48
		<b>d. Elves(?)</b>	...49
		<b>e. Dwarves(?)</b>	...50
<b>2. History</b>	...5		
<b>a. Prior to the Abjuration.</b>	...5		
<b>b. The Demon Invasion</b>	...7	<b>9. Organizations</b>	...53
<b>c. The Abjuration</b>	...7	<b>a. The Heroes of Old</b>	...53
<b>d. What Were They</b>	...7	<b>b. The Paired</b>	...59
<b>Thinking???</b>	...7	<b>c. Coursers</b>	...62
<b>e. It Worked, Too Well</b>	...7	<b>d. Brotherhood of the</b>	...64
		<b>Raven</b>	
<b>3. The Present</b>	...9	<b>10. Gazetteer</b>	...70
<b>a. The Broken World</b>	...9	<b>Fallingstar</b>	...70
<b>b. The Reign of the Demons</b>	...11	<b>The Crannoch</b>	...90
<b>c. Why Don't the People</b>	...11	<b>Eglantine</b>	...98
<b>Rise Up and Kill the</b>		<b>“The Dells”</b>	...115
<b>Demons?</b>	...11	<b>The Majestic Plateau and</b>	...129
<b>d. Why Don't the Demons</b>	...12	<b>Marine Travel</b>	
<b>Kill All the People?</b>		<b>“The Farm”</b>	...134
<b>(Then What)?</b>	...12		
<b>4. The World</b>	...12	<b>11. Points of Emphasis for Role-</b>	
<b>a. Politics and Culture</b>	...12	<b>playing</b>	...136
<b>(Distrust, Isolation and</b>		<b>a. Conflict, Conflict,</b>	...136
<b>Anarchy)</b>	...12	<b>Conflict</b>	
<b>b. Economy, Resources and</b>		<b>b. Welcome to Hell?</b>	...136
<b>Technology (Survival,</b>		<b>c. Grinding Poverty</b>	...137
<b>Scarcity and Loss</b>	...12	<b>d. The Resources Just</b>	
<b>c. Trade and Travel (Or,</b>		<b>Aren't There</b>	...137
<b>Calling Attention to</b>		<b>e. People Are Too Busy</b>	
<b>Yourself)</b>	...16	<b>Surviving To Lead</b>	...137
<b>5. BRP Rule Variations</b>	...21	<b>f. Distrust</b>	...138
<b>a. Professions and Initial</b>	...21	<b>g. The Gods Aren't</b>	
<b>Character Generation</b>	...21	<b>Listening</b>	...138
<b>b. Available Skills</b>	...21	<b>h. The World Is In a Bottle</b>	...138
<b>c. New Skills</b>	...23	<b>i. Prophecy</b>	...138
<b>d. Races</b>	...23	<b>j. Blights Upon Nature</b>	...138
<b>e. Wealth and Purchasing</b>	...23	<b>k. Conflict with the Secret</b>	
<b>Gear</b>	...23	<b>Masters</b>	...138
<b>f. Typical Gear</b>	...26	<b>12. Scenarios</b>	...140
<b>6. BRP Rule Variations—Magic</b>	...30	<b>a. The Lord of Nothing</b>	...140
<b>7. Religion and the “Circle”</b>	...43	<b>b. The Redoubt</b>	...155
<b>8. Inhabitants of the World</b>	...45	<b>13. Some Noteworthy Demons</b>	...172
		<b>14. Index</b>	...177

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## a. Welcome(?) to the World

The World is not a happy place. This BRP™ setting casts the PLAYERS as mavericks in a fantasy World that is losing a war it does not even know that it is fighting. Hidden demons and their mortal minions—many of whom do not even know who their masters truly are—manipulate events from the shadows, experimenting with social control mechanisms to steer the human cattle in the direction that they want them to go. The PLAYERS’ goal is to discover and stop them.

*Ashes, to Ashes* is a role-playing-heavy, philosophy-heavy, conflict-heavy type of game that would be best enjoyed by serious-minded folk. Only portions (one continent and a neighboring island) of the World are described in this work; as will become apparent later, most people have little idea what lies beyond their own village. Feel free to embellish, add additional countries like the ones presented, or work in traditions of your own.

It is also a study of why civilizations “succeed” or “fail”, if “failure” can be judged by modern norms of success (large, sustainable populations with little fear of starvation or preventable death, respect for individuals and human rights, and technological progress). Several of the lands described are based on historical examples of “failed” civilizations, and are plagued with all too real problems: poor adaptation to environment, tribal hatred, an unflinchingly warlike mentality, exhaustion of resources, and stubbornly trying to live in places that are not well suited for human habitation. Those that are “succeeding” are paying prices for their success, both literary (in terms of being in league to one extent or another with demonic forces) and moral (by doing things to survive that the PLAYERS may well consider repugnant).

*Ashes, to Ashes* must, if run correctly, continually force the PLAYERS to face moral dilemmas. Regardless of whether they make a choice, or choose not to become involved, the consequences of the PLAYERS’ actions or inaction need to attach.

For example, in the introductory scenario *The Lord of Nothing*, they will encounter something that countless civilizations over the ages have contended with: a military strongman making people’s lives better in the short term at the expense of individual autonomy. Do the PLAYERS intervene and let everyone choose their own course? Do they do so even if they understand that allowing the strongman to do his own thing might improve the lot of more than it would harm?

If the PLAYERS are arguing among themselves not about what they *can* do, but whether they *should* do *anything*, then you have the hang of *Ashes, to Ashes*.

Over time, and as the campaign progresses, the PLAYERS should begin to see hints that there are hidden puppeteers carefully pulling strings, providing aid, and steering events in a fashion that keeps civilization going, but only at a slow, carefully controlled speed. And that realization, itself, should provoke an argument about what to do about the situation.

## b. Overview.

The World has been broken, broken as a desperate sacrifice to save humanity against the invading demons. 100 years have passed, and it’s still quite broken. The remnants of a mighty, high fantasy civilization litter the World, but civilization is no longer mighty.

Although the reasons why the World was broken have already begun to fade into legend, the stories all agree that the wizards

deliberately broke the World somehow. These stories are true.

What was once a vibrant World of wealth, learning, magic and high medieval fantasy is now a World of poverty, low magic and scarce resources where people struggle to survive, against the World and against each other.

The World is ruined, the weather is cursed, and the gods have fallen silent. The old governments and institutions have collapsed, and most people usually only bother to learn what they need to eke out a living.

Some people struggle to make things better. Many hasten to step on their fellow man to improve their own lot. But most just exist. People in many places are lucky if they can coax the earth to grow enough food, and even luckier if they have any kind of comfort.

Food is scarce, game is scarce, wood is scarce, and iron is scarcer still. Trade is dangerous, and interaction between communities and regions is either extremely limited, or nonexistent.

The stuff of magic still infuses the World, but is itself fractured and spread thin. The traditions of learning and controlling magic are lost in the ruins, and only the most powerful or fortunate Adept has any hope of mastering it without teaching.

A few brave men and women, emulating the heroes of old, wander the World hoping to make a difference. They seek to bring people together, to uncover the ancient lore, and to rebuild the World into something like the stories say it once was.

These are the ones that the demons worry about. The rest are carefully managed sheep.

And lest I forget: This book is dedicated to Jared Diamond, whose wonderful books on why societies fail got me thinking; to Cookie, who keeps improving my layout; and to E. Gary Gygax, who is deservedly the subject of many RPG dedications this year.

*The Yahoo! Group, with maps and resources, is at "ashestoashes".*

Jeff Moeller, Cleveland, OH, April 2008.



## 2. HISTORY OF THE WORLD

The following history of the World is for the KEEPER'S eyes only. Only the demons know the entire story. Bits and pieces of it might be recorded in buried journals, known to a select few, or pieced together from oral histories passed down over generations. However, it is not common (or even uncommon) knowledge in the World in which the PLAYERS find themselves.

### **a. Prior to the Abjuration.**

The World was once a pleasant place to live, as pleasant as a high fantasy, medieval agrarian society could be. Trade was well-developed, and, for the most part, the leaders ruled wisely. Resources were plentiful, medicine was advanced, and the resources of the World were well managed and not particularly abused. Magic was well-understood and not uncommon. The arts, dance, music and poetry flourished, and the common people led lives of hard but contented work. The population grew steadily, and thanks to the efforts of determined heroes, peace prevailed more often than not.

### **b. The Demon Invasion.**

Not everyone is happy in any given society, of course. There are always those who are close to power but who do not have it, and cannot abide that state of affairs. Scaraband was one such.

Everyone had always told him how bright and special he was. He had been taken from his village at a young age based on his keen mind and exceptional magical aptitude with fire, and tutored at the Academy in Fallingstar in the arcane arts. Soon, perhaps too soon, Scaraband rose to become a court wizard, and then Vizier of Magic in the Kingdom of Eglantine, one of the mightiest kingdoms in the World.

Yet Scaraband was not satisfied. He did not feel special any more. People at court put

him down because of his youth. Worse, he felt cheated. He was, singularly, the most powerful man in Eglantine, able to summon fire and bend it to his whim. He was also (he thought) the smartest man in Eglantine, and yet he did not rule. Instead, he played advisor to a 12-year old "king" and his doting mother. The child-king was rude, petulant, and disregarded his advice, often for no reason. He deserved more, he thought, and what kind of system



**Scaraband, the Traitor**

was it anyway, in which governance was determined solely by accident of birth? Never mind that there were bureaucrats, wizards and others who controlled the World's day-to-day affairs, why should some child be paid respect based on who his father was? It was wrong, and worse, it was stupid. And why the child-king's older sister, the princess, would have nothing to do with him because of "his birth" gnawed at him like a hungry rat.

And so Scaraband fomented rebellion. His plans found fertile ground. The child-king's willfulness had offended many with influence, and other nobles questioned the wisdom of a system that made the eldest son of the prior king the new king without further ado. Scaraband had money and a core of supporters. A pretender to the throne, the king's uncle, was co-opted, once his mind was nudged in the right direction by Scaraband's magic.

War broke out, and eventually, in accordance with the prevailing laws of Eglantine war, formal battle was offered and accepted at the Plains of Valor. What the young king and his brainwashed uncle failed to understand, however, was that Scaraband wanted the throne for himself, and was prepared to go to *any* length to achieve it.

As the nobles, some supporting the king, and others his uncle, drew up their battle lines and recited the ancient forms of challenge, the earth split open. Scaraband had also sought demonic allies, and paid a terrible price in blood, and in souls, to open a rift to the Realms Below.

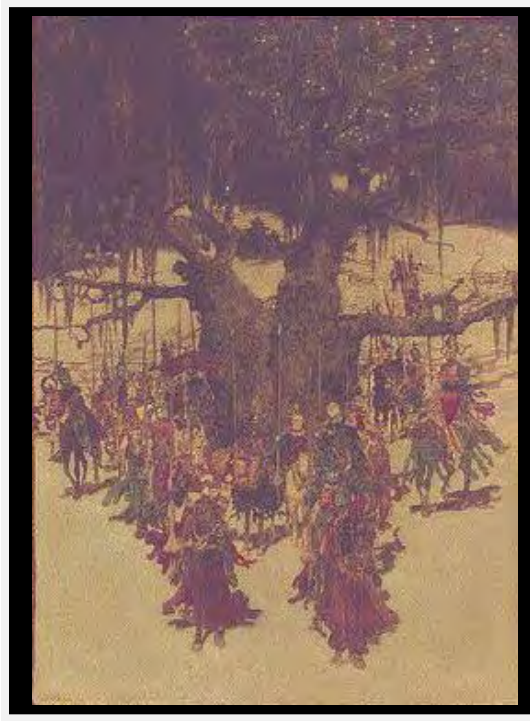
A demon army, truly vulnerable only to steel and magic, boiled forth from the depths of the earth and slaughtered both of the assembled human armies. In the confusion, the princess that Scaraband had so long desired somehow escaped his treachery at the Plains of Valor, and could not be found.

The slaughter did not stop there, however. Although the demons made Scaraband the King of Eglantine, as the pact had called for, the lives of the armies were not nearly

enough; the demons demanded more. They demanded, in fact, everything (and everyone) that they could take.

With Scaraband installed upon the Verdant Throne of Eglantine, the demons solidified their military position and began to plunder and pillage the surrounding counties and kingdoms. The forces of the mortals resisted, gradually falling back, but only slowly, in fits and starts.

As the war dragged on, Scaraband began to wonder, again, what was in the continued war for him. The princess had never been found, by either mortal or demon. Soon, it dawned on him how he had been tricked: because he was mortal, he would eventually lose all of the power that he had gained. And he would do so to the demons, a squabbling, disorganized bunch of monsters, some of whom were subtle and cunning, but many of whom could not even approach his intellect. This would not do.



And so in his thirtieth year, five years into the war, Scaraband pulled aside the general of the demons, Draruzzt, and asked him what Scaraband would have to do for a small favor: immortality. Draruzzt laughed,



and granted him his wish for nothing.

Scaraband was no longer mortal; he could now keep what he had gained as long as he could avoid being killed. He had become an immortal demon himself. And the demons had won, since they no longer had to worry about Scaraband changing his mind, reversing his spell, and sealing the standing rift he had opened to the Realms Below.

### **c. The Abjuration.**

Scaraband had gotten the immortality that he had wished for, but it changed his viewpoint. When he became an immortal demon, he no longer cared about power, fame or glory from a human point of reference. He now wanted only what any demon wanted: power for the demons, and status among the demons for himself. No longer did his human perspective hold his ambition for destruction in check.

He no longer cared if the demons could be made to leave once he had what he wanted. He flung open more standing rifts to the Realms Below, and demons flooded the World. Their first meals were Scaraband's former human soldiers and subjects. From there, they began to spread throughout the World, destroying and ravaging as they went. But still, the princess eluded him. Surely she had been killed! Where was her body? How had she escaped him?.

The combined forces of the humans, Dwarves, Elves and Halflings were now doomed, and they knew it. Their numbers were finite, while the demons could not truly be killed. One might destroy the corporeal form of a demon with magic or steel, but all that this did was to send it home for a time. Unless the standing rifts to the Realms Below were closed, and closed permanently, the World would eventually be annexed by Hell itself.

The demons continued to pour into the World through numerous standing rifts flung open by Scaraband's magic, and hoping to close them all piecemeal seemed certain to fail. Many brave adventurers tried, and some succeeded in closing a rift or two, but

there were simply too many. Prayers to the gods were offered, but seemingly fell on deaf ears.

Something drastic was needed to save the World. That something was the Abjuration.

### **d. What Were They Thinking???**

A great ritual requiring the combined powers of all of the good wizards in the World, the Abjuration cost all of the participating wizards their lives. They knew this, but they also knew that they had no choice.

The plan was to combine all of their energies and close *all* portals to *all* other realms, *permanently*.

The heroes of the World would launch suicide runs against the demons to distract them from the wizards' task. By cutting off the demons' reinforcements and trapping them in the World, it was hoped that they could be killed permanently, and that the war of attrition would eventually shift in favor of the humans and their allies.



**The Abjuration, From Eight Miles Away.**

The wizards' plan worked, but in ways both greater and different than expected.

**e. It Worked, Too Well.**

The rifts to Realms Below were indeed closed by the Abjuration. No more demons could enter the World by any means, nor could they leave. So were the rifts to every other plane of existence, including those to the Realms of the gods. The World was isolated, stuck in a figurative bottle and corked tight.

The initial shockwave shattered society. Mountains ranges were thrown up, obliterating cities. Entire regions collapsed and fell into the sea. The weather went berserk, and stayed that way. The gods, deprived of their worship, withered and seemingly died. The vast majority of the mortal population was killed in the flooding, storms, earthquakes, and general chaos that ensued. The economy collapsed. Civilization itself, in fact, largely collapsed.

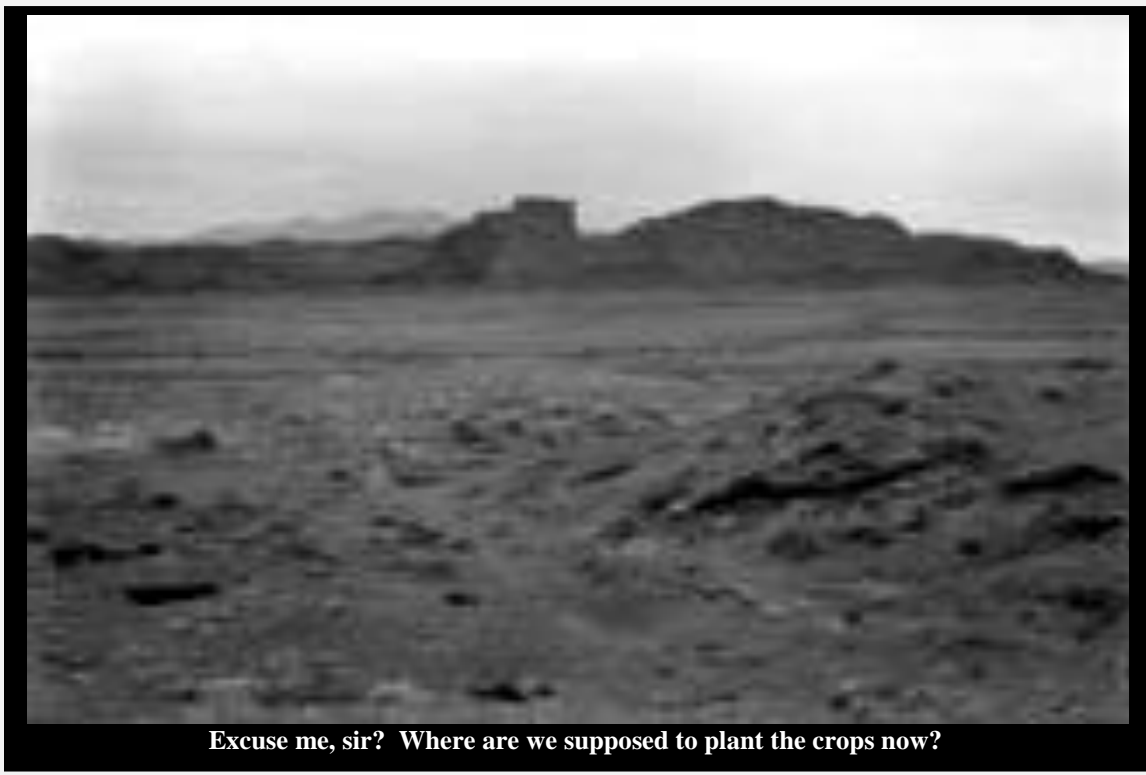
The survivors, used to having magic around to solve their biggest problems, had to rebuild by hand, if at all. The wizards were

all dead, and anyone suspected of being a wizard was quickly killed by angry mobs. Those non-humans whose very existences were tied to the World--the Elves, the Dwarves--had their minds shattered and either died or withdrew.

The demons fared little better. All but a few hundred of them, out of legions of tens of thousands, were likewise slain. Whether Scaraband survived or not is not generally known.

The demons' dreams of conquest were broken, or at least, greatly set back. A few pressed on, hoping to take advantage of the chaos, but these impetuous few were themselves killed, one by one.

Most of the surviving demons withdrew to a new citadel, which they named the Majestic Plateau, and began to plot about how best to make their way in this new World. Death for them was now permanent, and their numbers were now permanently limited.



## 3. THE PRESENT

### **a. The Broken World.**

One hundred years after the Abjuration, things have gotten a bit better from the humans' perspective. But not much. From the demons' perspective, things are on a positive track, but the shaking out process of the past 100 years has limited their numbers to the point of almost crippling them.

The World is still broken. The weather is, by and large, still berserk and unpredictable, making a peaceful living (and even survival) difficult. The World is still largely depopulated, having only recovered in isolated areas, with vast stretches of ruin lying between habitable areas. Huge mountain ranges and vast deserts make contact between regions rare and dangerous.

Resources are scarce. Labor is scarce. Food is scarce. Usable wood is especially scarce, making industry and effective mining even scarcer. The population hangs on in numbers far below what it once was, resulting in mostly abandoned cities and empty fragments of monuments dotting the landscape. The gods are still gone, although new gods may be in the early process of rising.

The people are afraid, and rigid--perhaps even evil--forms of society oriented to survival in hard times have cropped up. Some places are worse than others, but nowhere is pleasant. Neighbor fights against neighbor for food, wood, iron, stone and shelter. All that the demons really have to do to have things go their way is pull the rudder occasionally, and one of them is *very* good at steering the ship from the shadows.

### **b. The Reign(?) of the Demons.**

So, you're a potentially immortal demon. You specialize in chaos, fear, mayhem and trickery. In fact, you are these things incarnate. You want power, and souls, and you had been getting a lot of them. Now a

bunch of presumptuous mortal wizards blew up their own World, just to screw up your plans. Your invading army has been smashed, your avenue of retreat obliterated, and your supply lines cut. The mortals destroyed their World, almost, to get the job done, but they did it.

Now there are only a few hundred of you left, and even this figure uses the broadest possible definition of "demon." In terms of truly powerful beings, there are only a few dozen of you, plus some surviving infernal shock troops, free-willed undead, and strays of various descriptions.

You are more powerful than the remaining humans, one on one. The only things that are real threats to you are magic and steel. As far as you can tell, the human wizards are largely dead, and the surviving Elves and Dwarves have been driven mad by the destruction of the World.

On the one hand, the humans probably could not stand up to you. On the other hand, you and the other demons are all treacherous schemers who know not to trust each other. If one of your brothers or sisters kills you (or, Realms Below forbid, a mortal gets lucky), then you are dead *for good*. For the first time in demonic memory, you are cut off from your home plane. You cannot do what you normally do when "killed", which is ooze back home and come back in a year, none the worse for wear. Hence, it is a time for caution.

And yet, there is opportunity in this chaos. Humans have souls, souls mean power, and power means the possibility--someday--of reopening the rifts to the Realms Below and guaranteeing your own continued existence.

With enough souls, you can also breed true, increasing your numbers. But this many souls—1,000 or so will do per new demon--is difficult (if not impossible) to garner quietly. And to reopen the rifts, if the spell

that closed them can possibly be undone, will require many, many thousands of souls, taking centuries to accumulate. What do you do?

The answer has varied a bit, depending on the demon. The remaining demons who managed to survive the Abjuration have generally adopted three strategies for coping.

Some demons have suppressed their desire to compete against each other, or at least channeled it a bit, into forming a long-term alliance. The Majestic Plateau, as the alliance is known, comprises most of the remaining demons and their human slaves and minions. It consists of about 200 creatures of various power levels and descriptions, with about three times as many human slaves, toadies, proxies and adherents. The Majestic Plateau is based on the proverbial secret volcanic island about 90 miles off the southern shore of the main continent. From there, the demons scheme, send out proxies, or dispatch task forces to accomplish various goals. Several dozen Majestic Plateau demons and proxies also reside, on a rotating basis, at outposts in and surrounding the “Farm”, an area the demons have to pay careful attention to in order to maintain control.

The Majestic Plateau’s long-term goal is to horde souls until they have enough to attempt to reopen the rifts and undo the Abjuration. There is general agreement that this will take a vast amount of souls, requiring hundreds of years to garner in any sort of safe or predictable way.

So The Majestic Plateau plays politics. It operates in the shadows, running a variety of schemes designed to corrupt and control the mortals, recruit new proxies, and slowly garner souls. The Majestic Plateau demons tend to be the more scheming, less overtly violent ones, able to cooperate with one another toward a common goal, at least temporarily and most of the time. They are patient, strive to develop spies and agents, throughout the World, and work to accumulate or squelch magic and prevent

access to sources of steel. They breed hybrids with humans, spending the 100 or so souls needed to do so carefully, thereby creating the soulless Overseers as shock troops, but only in a calculated, resource-conscious sort of way. They also covertly enslave and sacrifice humans, banking souls to fuel experiments into reversing the Abjuration.

Although Zazeer, a fallen angel, is not the nominal leader of the Majestic Plateau, she is the one who has the most direct impact on the World, through her various social engineering experiments and implementation of psychological control tactics.

Other demons have formed much smaller conclaves to pursue a variety of more personal goals. Usually these conclaves are led by one rather powerful demon, who is too arrogant, violent or chaotic to work with those at The Majestic Plateau, and may include a number of lesser, toadying adherents.

These smaller enclaves pursue a variety of strategies, usually local or regional in focus, to garner power on a more individualized basis. They have no ambitions about reopening the rifts to the Realms Below. They instead harbor ambitions about seizing the leadership of The Majestic Plateau, accumulating personal power, exploiting some magical resource near where they have set themselves up, or feeding their baser needs. There are perhaps a half-dozen of these enclaves, each numbering about 10 or so creatures.

Finally, a few of the less deliberate demons act independently, or in very small groups. These are generally interested in overt pillage, murder, and rapine. There were many more of these loose cannons 100 years ago than there are now. Over time, those not able to work together have gradually fallen victim to lucky humans or one another. Each one that falls tends to remind the others of the comparative importance of sticking together, at least for a little while. These low end “free agents” have almost all

been wiped out.

### **c. Why Don't the People Rise Up and Kill the Demons?**

To answer the question of why the remaining people do not rise up against the demons, picture a medieval peasant in a bleak world where next year's food supply is an active worry. Now assume that there are *stories* going around your village about a certain vampire in far off Transylvania slaughtering his people.

Only a *small* percentage of people are going to believe that demons (or vampires) even *really exist*. Almost *none* will have ever seen a demon, since the rifts were sealed 100 years ago. Almost *all* think that they are just children's stories. And while Adepts are generally known to exist, most people have never seen magic worked.

Of the tiny minority who might be inclined to believe in demons, only a very tiny percentage would ever entertain doing something about it. Most people are too busy trying to survive from day to day. Only the occasional restless youth, aspiring hero, or outcast is likely to even want to leave their own village. And where, exactly, is Transylvania anyway (or the Majestic Plateau)? And how would one get there, given the lack of roads and dangers of travel?

And of those who would entertain doing something about it, what could they do in small groups? The demons have created folklore about their own invincibility, and have inculcated a fear of magic in general throughout the World--the rams have been culled from the herd. In some areas, the demons take this husbandry model even further, culling potential leaders or free thinkers from the human herd (such as in the magic-rich region of Fallingstar).

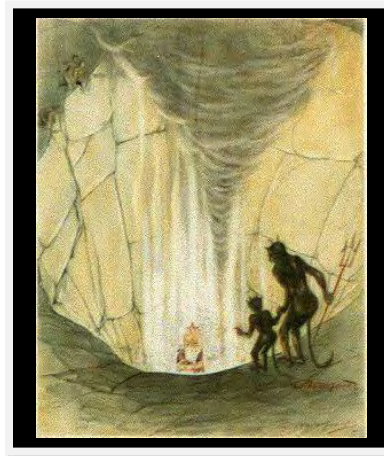
There is, in short, a near complete lack of motivation, unless and until the demons do something direct, overt, and local. Even then, there is a lack of effective capability, because magic, guts and steel are monitored and suppressed by the demons.

### **d. Why Don't the Demons Kill All the People?**

The smarter demons would never dream of killing all of the people. That would be like a farmer killing all of his sheep. The demons eat people. Specifically, they eat their souls. Souls are power. They sustain the demons; without consuming at least one a year, a demon will wither. More souls can be used to work terrible magic, to enable the demons to breed true, to advance in power. Souls are bartered among the demons as currency.

The demons find themselves in much the same position as the humans: struggling to survive in a milieu of scarce valuable resources.

Most of the demons realize that they must carefully shape the herd. Encourage growth, but not too much growth. Cull the humans that are too ornery from the herd. Make sure that the flock does not die out over the winter, but keep the herd too small to stampede. Keep them under control, but do not abuse them to the point where they rise up. And eventually, if and when enough souls can be garnered, perhaps the Abjuration can be reversed.



Some of the demons are not that smart. Most of these have weeded themselves out of the World over the past 100 years, as their stupidity catches up with them. The smarter demons have used these failures as object lessons to the others.

## 4. THE WORLD

To understand the World of *Ashes, to Ashes*, you have to understand how the pressures that affect an historical Dark Ages society, teetering on the brink of resource exhaustion, would impact both daily life as well as society itself.

### **a. Politics and Culture (Distrust, Isolation and Anarchy).**

The population of the World is small and extremely isolated. People live in pockets near what few resource concentrations that there are. The vast bulk of the World has been blasted into unproductive infertility, with fertile areas being the exception rather than the rule. A patch of arable land large enough to sustain a village of a few hundred people counts as an invaluable resource concentration after the Abjuration, and there may be only one such patch every twenty miles or more.

Some places (such as Fallingstar) are better off than others (such as the euphemistically named “the Dells”), but nowhere is what you would call comfortable even by agrarian medieval standards.

“The Farm” is a special case, discussed below.

Agrarian defines the form that society takes in most places, although more of a hunter/gatherer society subsists in some others, such as the Crannoch. Day to day life focuses on production of food and whatever else the nearby land allows. Many communities are exclusively limited to what they themselves can produce locally.

The limited population and isolation of communities has resulted, in some instances, in an utter lack of centralized government. The reins of effective power, community by community, tend to rest with respected neighbors, who hold no true authority other than persuasion or being the head of a clan. The wise older farmer who people generally acknowledge as being fair, the richest man in town, the local priest of the Circle, or the

tough guy who has bullied everyone else into submission; these are the typical day to day leaders of the World.

Regional government has generally not been reestablished, although the military dictatorships in Eglantine have made clumsy steps in that direction, and there is a bickering, nominal regional government in Fallingstar. Defense and justice, with few exceptions, depends upon the hue and cry and how many friendly neighbors and relatives you can muster in support of a cause.

The isolation of the communities, combined with the scarcity of resources, also tends to promote profound distrust of outsiders, particularly those whose motives are unclear. There usually is not enough in any given area to support more people than are already there. Children often starve or succumb to opportunistic illnesses, and one bad storm could mean lives lost over the winter. People are acutely aware of this, and take care of their own first, last, and foremost.

### **b. Economy, Resources and Technology (Survival, Scarcity and Loss).**

In most of the World, the economy is one of medieval agrarianism, leavened with the limitations of small populations, limited production resources, and a lack of trade. Even in the most prosperous regions, a failed harvest means potential starvation and death. And with the unpredictable and freakish weather, harvests fail with regularity. People are focused on survival, from day to day and year to year, and bend their efforts accordingly.

On a day to day basis, this means that people are concerned with growing enough food, figuring out a way to store food, maintaining shelter, staying warm and preventing people from taking what they have garnered by force. Accomplishing anything else presumes that these basic needs have already

been attended to. Depending on the region, this occurs more or less often, but nowhere is truly comfortable. In part, this is due to the isolation of the population centers, which greatly discourages trade. In part, this is due to the scarcity of useful building resources such as wood. The isolation of villages and regions, combined with large areas of wasteland, means that there are always shortages of something.

**Water:** Water will not be a problem near any population center. If there was not a reliable supply of potable water, and enough usable water to grow crops, people would not live there for long. Water may, however, be scarce: after 100 years, the human population near water sources will have made fair progress toward populating an area to its maximum capacity. And in between places where populations are centered, potable water sources may be few and far between.

**Food Production and Irrigation:** People in most areas know how to coax the most food out of their surroundings, and certainly know where the potable water is. Indeed, people will not be found living near anywhere that cannot (at least in theory) produce enough food to survive. They will have moved on, as many have, to places where they can.

In certain particularly desolate areas, the populace is nomadic or semi-nomadic, moving about the region in predictable seasonal migrations chasing food and water sources.

How successful any given year has been will be judged by whether you have more food dried and pickled than you did at the same time last year, and whether anyone starved to death. People periodically do starve to death.

The weather's unpredictability and the comparative inability to trade surpluses (or trade for food surpluses) make harvests unpredictable. When there is a surplus, however, people can focus on improving their lots in other ways. Work hours are

long and hard, especially during the growing season. Wintertime is when people have time for crafts, carpentry, and other pursuits.

**Food Preservation:** Storing perishable food for as long as possible, both to survive the winter and to even out harvest fluctuations, is a critical survival skill when crops are unpredictable. Pottery is often used for food storage, as are cold root cellars dug out of the ground. Salt and pickling herbs are extremely valuable commodities, and most sizable communities will have a salt lick nearby. If they do not, they will be interested in trading for it.

**Heating:** Heating is a challenge in many areas, at least during the winter. In many regions, wood is scarce as the Abjuration scattered and poisoned the topsoil.



People have long since burned deadwood from the ruins, and must carefully manage what timber resources they have. People often burn peat in a pinch, a practice which strips the World of its agricultural potential over time.

**Refrigeration:** People rely either on natural cold or root cellars dug deep enough to lower the temperature to where food can be preserved.

**Light:** Oil lamps (where oil is available), candles (where potash is available) or fires (where wood is available) furnish light after dark. Since oil is largely limited to shoreline areas, potash is limited to where wood is plentiful or mineral alum can be had, and wood must be conserved, after dark tends to be a time to sleep.

Many villages and towns tend to gather around a common house after dark and try to keep that village's communal fire going.

**Metallurgy, Weapons and Mining:** In most places, it never seems that iron sticks around for long, especially quality steel. The Crannoch has adequate bog iron and fuel for its needs, but is a challenge to reach, let alone not die of a fever in. Most other places lack the excess food production or manpower to engage in mining operations.

Metal, as a result, tends to be used and reused again and again. It is seen as dear and it is not uncommon for good bits of steel (or even bad bits of old iron) to be used as a barter medium. The demons manipulate events so as to discourage mining in the mineral-rich Fallingstar region.

People tend to favor weapons that either do not need metal, or need much metal, such as arrows, slings, clubs, tomahawk-like axes, staves, and spears. Daggers tend to be made of flint, stone, or (in volcanic regions) obsidian, as steel is more useful for and tends to be diverted to tools. Where metal is available, people tend to use copper or bronze, as it requires fewer resources to smelt.

Swords and armor left over from before the Abjuration are rare and valuable, and are often wielded as status symbols.

Rumors of ambitious would-be barons near Eglantine who have resorted to rapine and enslavement to garner both resources and a workforce large enough to forge themselves new steel and armor persist, but for the most part, the people are too spread out and disorganized to undertake such a task.

Instead, most serviceable metal that is found goes to its best use in plows, axes and other farming implements.

**Pottery:** The one thing that people have plenty of is dirt. Sun-baked straw bricks, clay jugs and amphorae, wattle and daub construction, and clay trenchers and mugs are all facets of everyday living throughout the World. Pottery will be one of the few

crafts (along with clothing production) that one can expect to find anywhere.



**Shelter:** Not every building was thrown down by the Abjuration, or at least irretrievably thrown down. Where former town or city sites happen to coincide with food and water, such as Fallingstar Town, people will have repaired, and will be inhabiting, pre-Abjuration structures. Otherwise, shelter tends to follow available building resources. In areas with wood and/or buildable stone and lime, new permanent structures might be found.

More common, however, are sod dugout shacks; wattle and daub construction and (in dry areas with little wood) durable tents. Often villages are centered on one building (dating in whole or in part from pre-Abjuration times) that sees some amount of communal use.

**Leather and Clothing:** This is the one other craft that can reliably be found in every region. Leather is durable, available wherever there are hoofed mammals, and can be made with a minimum of resources, if one does not mind treading hides in pits of dung to tan them.

Likewise, wool is warm, easy to spin and available wherever the comparatively commonplace mammals that produce it (sheep and goats) can be found. Other common fibers are linen (flax being weather tolerant and doubling as an oilseed source) and hemp.

**Glass:** Glass is virtually nonexistent; it requires copious amounts of fuel to produce



and only in places which have both ample timber and ample time would anyone be inclined to make it. Lead and sand, where available, might be put to use as pottery glazes, however.

**Animals:** One should put the stereotypical version of the modern dairy farm out of one's mind. Cows are expensive to maintain, require hay and shelter over the winter, and require acres upon acres of pasturage in exchange for comparatively little return. Horses are not the best source of food and milk, and likewise require shelter from harsh winters.

Expect to see neither except in the richest parts of the World, in the possession of the richest people. Far more commonplace are semi-feral animals that can survive all but the worst weather outside and can forage for themselves year round: goats, chickens, half-wild sheep, caribou, and lean, aggressive feral pigs.

These animals can largely feed themselves, need only be offered rudimentary shelter, and are versatile. Goats in particular produce milk, meat, cheese, fiber, dung for fuel, and leather, all in one handy package.

**Roads:** The state of the roads is a major challenge to travel, trade and indeed, survival. With few exceptions, what roads exist are fractional remnants, scattered by happenstance across the World. A few more are strictly local, connecting one village to the next, and may not be terribly improved.

Navigable rivers play a far more important role in traveling, but it takes a bold sort of person to travel often or habitually. Banditry and piracy is, sadly, all too common among those roads and rivers that are usable for commerce.

A road may be broad, straight and well drained for miles and lead directly into a noisome fen, or dead-end into a cliff face that was not there 100 years ago. More likely the "road" that the PLAYERS are riding along is a goat path running in the general direction that they are headed.

Travel between human settlements is slow and hazardous going, with no guarantee of being able to live off the World on the way.

**Wood or other Fuel:** How far advanced most parts of the World are above basic subsistence agriculture tends to directly relate to how much fuel (wood, peat or coal, or in Fallingstar Town, the geothermal energy of the hot spring) they have available.

Availability of fuel is the second most important factor (beyond available water) dictating where people are actually likely to settle. Regions with patchy food and water availability but without fuel tend to encourage a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle.

People throughout the World who do have available wood stands will be exceedingly careful in managing it and exceedingly harsh on those who despoil it, since fire equals survival in the winter. The amount of wood or other fuel available will also tend to dictate the amount of industry that the area (assuming adequate food) might support.

**Soap and Candles:** Both require lye, either from rinsed ashes or from other natural sources. Absent a lucky coincidence of natural resources (waxy shrubs like bayberry, whale oil or olive oil, or a lot of bees), most candles and soap will be tallow based (rendered animal fat).

The smell of burning tallow candles is distinctive (that is to say, foul) and takes a great deal of getting used to. People generally stink.

Lye is also important to the tanning and fulling processes; in early American Colonial days it was actually economical to burn timber just to leach the ash for lye.

In short, only where there is both available ash and available tallow animals (sheep and goats are classic examples) will people have much in the way of soap and candles. Neither ash nor tallow is ever thrown away for these reasons.

**Public Works (e.g., mills, forges, granaries and communal centers such as temples):** Things such as mills, forges, granaries, temples, and the like require a certain level of population and food surplus to sustain them and to justify their construction and maintenance. As a consequence, they are *exceedingly* rare in the World. They tend to exist for one of two reasons.

First, they survived the Abjuration by happenstance, and as a result, the local populace is continuing to use the structure either for its original purpose or for some slightly modified one. For example, the Abbey at Trepminster in Fallingstar has been co-opted into a sort of village apartment building for the local cult.

Second, the region might be large enough, well connected enough and has enough reliable food sources that it can support specialists to operate them. The fledgling palace economy and mill at Fallingstar Town is one of the rare examples of this; the black market town of Crystal Lake in Eglantine is another.

**c. Trade and Travel (Or, Calling Attention to Yourself).**

Free and open trade would solve a lot of the problems that the World faces. If everyone (or, at least, a larger subset of everyone) had all of the basics without worry (enough food, enough fuel, enough metal, enough clothes, enough animals) and could focus on what they do best, everyone concerned would be better off.

As everyone could quit worrying about survival, organization and cooperation would increase, and the World could make strides to recovering its heritage, including a less haphazard approach to magic, government, protection, roads and other infrastructure, and production of steel and durable goods.

Yet trade rarely occurs, except on a very localized scale (between two towns quite nearby which, for some reason, have a natural surplus of different things). There

are three primary reasons for this.



First, in most places, people's lives are too desperate and day by day. There is often no surplus to trade.

Second, even when there are surpluses, travel and trade are risky. With few exceptions, there are no police, no patrolled roads, and no empire to keep trade open or provide for sanctions against thieves and double dealing. The fine folk of "the Dells" will likely suffer little retribution for their double dealing with a trading stranger, given their remoteness. Elsewhere, perhaps the relatives of the hapless traders might start a feud, but more likely this will only in the unlikely event that an opportunity presents itself.

*Third, and most importantly, the demons (regardless of how openly they operate in a particular region) are invested in discouraging trade and human organization. The easiest way to control a herd is to keep it divided and short of the critical mass needed for a stampede.* The PLAYERS might, at some point, rightly question how a World with little trade and little wealth can support seemingly well-fed and organized bandits and Reapers. This is an early layer of mystery, and hints at darker things to come.

As a result, people who attempt to travel and trade between towns are counted as bold and courageous, reckless risk takers, or folk heroes. Often they are all three. Most people have too much to do just surviving to

travel and trade. Those able to look beyond their own immediate locale are often what pass for heroes (or, depending on their actions, villains) after the Abjuration.

Such people are also calling attention to themselves, in a number of ways. They are, almost by definition, less desperate than those they may encounter. Second, they may well be outsiders in places they go. But most importantly, they are one of the few things that are a potential threat to the demons. And as such, they are targets.

Traders and travelers learned quickly to band together into guilds, to set and establish rules, and to jointly sanction those who did them wrong. Examples of some of these guilds (the Heroes of Old, Coursers, the Paired and Brotherhood of the Raven) are detailed below.

Bands of PLAYERS will often find themselves, out of necessity, moving from town to town, region to region, and will be pressured (both overtly and by press of circumstances) into affiliating with one or more such guilds. They offer shelter, cooperation and protection from desperate or dishonorable locals.

### **A Broad Geography Tour.**

**a. Super-regions:** There are three super-regions depicted in this sourcebook: the *Known World*, the *Majestic Plateau*, and *the Farm*.

*1 hex=48 miles* on the World map.

The *Known World* includes *the Crannoch*, *Fallingstar*, *“The Dells”*, *Eglantine*, and *the Sunken City*. Individuals in each area may know little of other regions, and almost certainly have not traveled there, but they may have heard of them (much as a peasant in medieval England might have heard of France). The wise have heard of such places, and surviving books talk of them and may even have a map (no longer accurate). Travel between these regions is difficult, and discouraged by the demons, but people would at least know which point of the compass to follow to get to them.

The map of the Known World only includes one continent, situated at a temperate to sub-arctic northern latitude. It is entirely possible that other continents or islands lie across the sea.

**Fallingstar:** *Fallingstar* is a sub-arctic region located in the north of the World. It is effectively isolated from the rest of the World; it can only be accessed by climbing nearly (but not completely) impassible mountains, or through magic. Its people are (comparatively) well off economically, although you could not persuade them of this fact.

Fallingstar was once a wealthy, advanced kingdom noted for its Academy of magic and industrial base, and had a significant population of Elves and half-Elves. The demons are active behind the scenes in Fallingstar, which is their laboratory for religious and psychological conditioning experiments.

**The Crannoch:** *The Crannoch* is a temperate fen located in the northwest corner of the known World. It is a comparatively simple and primitive area with few resources, and is naturally difficult to gain access to. Apart from the Bogman culture that has lived there for millennia, unchanged by the Abjuration, it is a place of exile.

The demons are comparatively disinterested in the Crannoch; it is unimportant in their plans and has proven difficult to manage anyway because of the horrible environment. They do employ spies to keep an eye on the various exiles in semi-hiding at *the Moot*, in the middle of the bog.

**“The Dells”:** In the southern portion of the World, this was once lush pastoral farmland, home to many humans as well as Halflings. Now it is a blasted desert where life is nasty, brutish and short, the sustainable population is horribly limited, and murder is not uncommon. *“The Dells”* is where the demons study how people turn on one another when faced with privation, and use what they learn to tenderize the people’s

morals. It is also the location of *the Redoubt*, a remote dungeon designed to lure and kill would-be heroes.



**Eglantine:** Once the home of mighty human cities and monuments, *Eglantine* is relatively habitable, though mired in endless civil war and poverty. Because of the flat and open plains that characterize Eglantine, keeping it isolated internally is difficult. As a result, the demons wield their influence by fomenting strife and the most vicious sort of war. Raids, banditry, random violence and the spread of hatred and bigotry are everyday facets of life in Eglantine. It is a land without neighbors, only family, friends and enemies to be exploited.

**The Majestic Plateau:** *The Majestic Plateau* is a secret, in the sense that no one knows what goes on there now. It is part of the Known World, in that old maps refer to a volcanic island known as the Smoking Tower, but it lies 90 miles off shore, and ships that once tried to sail there did not return. It is not difficult to conclude that something is afoot there, since pirates (or undead-laden ghost ships) swoop down ruthlessly on anyone that strays too far offshore. But what exactly that is remains a mystery.

What is afoot there is that this is the demons' fortified headquarters. It is home to the main corps of about 200 "demons", including the demons of the Library, Zazeer, Ba'al-Sheol, the Hooded One, and others. It is the breeding ground for the Overseers and a larder for enslaved humans waiting to be eaten by the demons. Several hundred

human and humanoid lackeys, who have taken a Ritual of Obedience to serve the demons, live here in relative comfort, albeit at the price of their souls. It is a well-stocked, well-fed, well-fortified, well-supplied keep with hinterlands to support the mortals.

**The Sunken City:** Discussed in the Crannoch chapter and under "Halflings", the Sunken City of Doreset was once a mighty port city, used and frequented by all the races. It fell into a giant sinkhole at the Abjuration, killing all who lived there. The highest towers still protrude above the muck, providing a few points of entry. Some of the City thereby remained accessible, albeit sealed off.

The surviving Halflings quietly moved in, turning the accessible parts into communal warrens, with some of the submerged towers connected by tunnels. Now it is their base of operations and breeding grounds. Intruders are driven off if possible by stories, traps and snipers, and killed if necessary. Non-Halflings are not welcome, and as far as they should ever know, it does not even exist.

**The "Farm":** *The "Farm"* might as well be a separate world, and it is not a place that the PLAYERS should even *find about out* until they are ready to take on the demons *directly*. Ancient history books tell of a land to the east of Eglantine and "The Dells" known as Suncove. Suncove was a small seafaring county of fishers and farmers, a minor fiefdom of the Kingdom of Eglantine.



People to the west believe that Suncove was destroyed utterly in the Abjuration, as a great mountain range, the Daggers at World's End, sprung up and formed the

eastern border of the Dells. Passage by land was impractical, and dangerous reefs impede any efforts to sail east near the coastline.

Some, in the early decades after the Abjuration, tried to sail south around the reefs, but they never returned. Some tried to climb the mountains to see what (if anything) lie to east, but never returned. It is fairly certain, from what marine exploration could be undertaken, that the mountains edge right up to the coast. In any case, if there is anything east of the Daggers and reefs, no one has ever returned alive to tell of it, and people quit trying long ago.

If anyone ever did manage to get past the Daggers, they would find nothing but mountains for quite some time. If, however, they were not intercepted by the patrolling ships of the Overseers, and managed to sail about 250 miles north up the coast, they would find *the "Farm"*. The locals still call it as Suncover (now the warring duchies of North Suncover and South Suncover), but it is a land that the Abjuration left comparatively intact, although still relatively depopulated. A few towns still stand, although reshaped in the demons' image.

The "Farm" is the place where humans could live well enough and grow a population sizeable enough—if left to their own devices—to reestablish pre-Abjuration civilization and threaten to finish the demons. For this reason, The "Farm" (the demons' nickname for the region) is the place where the demons concentrate their efforts and take a direct, active hand at subjugation.

All of the tricks and schemes that the demons have carefully developed and keep refining in the other regions to subjugate the humans are used in the Farm as social control devices. The superstition, Darwinian domestication, and propaganda methods developed in Fallingstar; the use of economic privation and psychological pressure employed in the Dells; the

















establishment of a place of "safe haven" to quietly deal with otherwise intractable problems of the Crannoch; and the stoking of artificial hatreds and constant warfare of Eglantine: all of these are used to manage The "Farm". The demons also rule covertly but directly, forming a disguised ruling class, and keep the region a secret from the rest.



By keeping the human populace bred docile, deprived of steel and magic, too poor and quarrelsome to focus on other matters, and at a constant state of war with one another, they are effectively managed. The war in The "Farm" is one that, by design, will never end: the wounded "heroes" are spirited away to the Majestic Plateau to have their souls harvested.





	Impassible		Mountain		Glacier		Tundra
	Hills		Swamp		Scrub Forest		Arable
	Frozen Water		Worst Desert Ever		Bad Desert		Badlands
	Fertile Forest		Scrub Fields		Beach		Ice Cap

## 5. BRP RULE VARIATIONS

In this chapter, we will cover: *professions and initial character generation*; *available skills*; a couple of new BRP skills (*Survival* and *Religion*); available *races*, an *optional Wealth system* that does not require counting pennies; and provide a chart for *typical gear in the setting*.

### a. Professions and Initial Character Generation.

There are no professions per se in *Ashes, to Ashes* to be selected from at initial character generation. Rather, the PLAYER needs to make one simple choice: is he an *Abjuration Adept* (a magic-user); a *wild talent* (a normal person with a bit of unpredictable magic); or does he have no magical ability?

*All Players* roll 4d6 five times, discarding the lowest die, to form a pool. The results are applied to STR, CON, POW, DEX and APP, however you see fit. The Players are heroes and need to be better than average.

Idea, Luck and Know are derived as normal (INT x5 for Idea, POW x5 for Luck, and EDU x5 for Know). SIZ and INT are rolled on 2d6+6.

EDU is rolled on 3d6, taking the highest two; this is not a highly educated World, with rare exceptions.

Assume that a Player with an EDU of 9 is literate and that anyone with an EDU of 6-8 is functionally illiterate. Literacy is not used as a skill; you can read, read a little, or read not at all. Play it by ear.

Beginning characters should be young, but exact age is left to your discretion.

The Allegiance system is not in effect, nor is the Sanity system. However, for shorthand reference, some NPCs and communities are described in general terms as Good, Neutral or Evil, and Lawful, Neutral, or Chaotic.

*Most Players* then select beginning skill percentages from the available skill list. *Most Players get 200 points, plus INT x10, to allocate as beginning skills points as they see fit.*

*Abjuration Adepts* only receive 100 points plus INT x10. If a Player elects to have a *wild talent*, he only receives 150 points plus INT x10.

Note that Abjuration Adepts must have a beginning POW of at least 16. Wild talents may have any beginning POW.

Later, the PLAYERS may have an opportunity to join one (or more) *guilds as a result of in-game induction*. These guilds include:

- the *Heroes of Old* (with a mission of demon hunting and reestablishing law and order);
- the *Coursers* (expert travelers who gain some enhanced knowledge and survival abilities);
- the *Paired* (whose faith in one another manifests itself as miraculous healing abilities); and
- the *Brotherhood of the Raven* (a secret society of experts who gain access to a cabal of fellow experts and intelligence sources).

Special skills and skill bonuses are awarded to PLAYERS in these organizations upon achievement of certain story-line milestones, determined in the KEEPER's discretion.

### b. Available Skills.

The available skill list for beginning PLAYERS in *Ashes, to Ashes* reflects a quasi-realistic Dark Ages setting, in which dark forces have imposed some artificial resource and knowledge shortages. The chart, plus base skill percentages, is listed below:

**Available Skills:** *Accounting* (10%), Appraise (15%), *Archaeology* (05%), Art (05%), Astronomy (05%), Bargain (05%), Brawl (25%), Climb (40%), Command (05%), Craft (05%) (types include: Farmer, Carpenter, Mason, Leatherworker, Cobbler, Chandler, Weaver, Miller, Shepherd, Smith, Scribe), Disguise (01%), Dodge (DEX x2), Etiquette (05%), Fast Talk (05%), Fine Manipulation (05%), First Aid (30%), Gaming (INT + POW%), Grapple (25%), Hide (10%), History (05%), Insight (05%), Jump (25%), *Law* (05%), Listen (25%), Martial Arts (01%), MEDICINE (01%), Navigate (10%), OCCULT (05%), Perform (05%), Persuade (15%), *Pharmacy* (05%), *Pilot Boat* (01%), Religion (new) (10%), RESEARCH (LIBRARY USE) (01%), Research (Streetwise) (25%), *Ride Horse* (05%), Sense (10%), Spot (25%), *Status* (15%), Stealth (10%), Strategy (01%), Survival (new) (40%), Swim (25%), Teach (10%), Throw (25%), Track (10%).

**Weapons Skills:** any appropriate to Dark Ages hand-to-hand or missile weaponry. However, starting skill with *bows* and *swords* should be *rare*.

Those skills noted with in ALL CAPS cannot have any points devoted to them at the outset; it is possible that the PLAYERS will uncover things in the ruins later that might let them “unlock” that skill later.

Some skills in *italics* are available at initial character generation but rare; a PLAYER should have a good, background-based explanation as to why they have them.

By way of explanation for the “locked” and rare skills:

*Accounting* would only be appropriate for someone with a background where the economy required the keeping of formal books, and they were the ones who did it. Examples: a priest of the Circle in Eglantine; a shopkeeper in Crystal Lake;

someone who works in an administrative capacity at Fallingstar Town.

*Archaeology* implies that a beginning character has spent some time pouring through ruins already.

There is not a lot of formal *Law* in the World.

*Pharmacy* would require a background of formal healing training. Someone who knows how to set a bone, bind a wound or deal with the typical ailment is using First Aid.

*Pilot Boat* implies that the PLAYER is from a maritime region, which are scattered.

*Ride Horse* implies that the PLAYER has had exposure to horses. This would be someone very important from Eglantine, or perhaps a Dellsman.

*Status* should be earned, not bought at the outset. In this setting, it should not be checked for successful use but increases should be doled out (and docked) based upon the PLAYERS’ general reputations as heroes. Everyone starts out as general unknowns. Only if for some reason a beginning PLAYER has some positive heroic reputation should they spend points on Status at creation.

People are normally better with slings than *bows*. Good bows are resource intensive and require both manufacturing know-how and access to the right materials (especially the right kind of wood or laminate) before they are more efficient than a good sling. Such bows are only commonly available in parts of Fallingstar or in “the Dells.”

The only plausible explanation for a new PLAYER knowing how to use a *sword* is if they have deserted from the Eglantine officers’ corps, or a barbarian from the Dells (in which case, they may know how to use one but not presently have one).

In terms of “locked” skills, there are no LIBRARIES openly existing in the World. However, the Players might find some later and then be able to start making



RESEARCH (LIBRARY USE) rolls. Likewise, medicine is a nearly lost skill only known to a few.

Finally, the OCCULT skill implies *accurate* knowledge about the state of supernatural affairs. Lots of people think they know about demons, but few actually do. Such skill can be gained through education, however, as described in following chapters. OCCULT can, in this setting, be used to identify a particular type of demon or (on a Critical OCCULT roll) guess at its weaknesses.

### **c. New BRP Skills.**

In addition, the following two new skills are available at initial generation:

***Survival: A critical skill that all PLAYERS should have a goodly amount of, Survival describes one's day to day ability to survive in harsh conditions.*** Base skill for *Survival* in this setting is 40%. *Survival* includes things that would be normally covered by the Natural History skill, plus how to accomplish such basic things as: grow subsistence crops, harvest crops, preserve food, butcher an animal, tan a hide, spin, sew, hunt and trap game, build shelter, protect oneself from extremes in weather, make a basket, forage in the wild, find potable water, tell whether water is safe to drink, and keep moving in a particular direction off of landmarks and the sun.

***At least one PLAYER is going to want to be very skilled at such things, and logically, everyone should have quite a high percentage in Survival in this setting.*** It comes up again and again and again.

***Religion:*** An important facet of life in many places in the World, *Religion* concerns knowledge of feast days, rites and practices; philosophy; and dogma. It also implies basic bureaucratic and administrative capability, since the religion of the Circle trains its priests in these areas. Base skill for *Religion* in this setting is 10%.

### **d. Races.**

***Nearly all PLAYERS are human. All***

***Abjuration Adepts and wild talents are human.*** With the Keeper's permission, and a very outstanding back story, a PLAYER might be a Dwarf or Halfling. Elves and half-Elves are not available as races. If a Player chooses to be a Dwarf or Halfling, use the initial statistics guidelines for those races in the BRP Bestiary chapter.

### **e. Wealth, Money and Purchasing Gear.**

You should disregard starting fund allowances in favor of this setting's optional Wealth rules (described below). Beginning characters can select whatever equipment they like that comports with their initial Wealth score; this will, however, be quite limited.

*Ashes, to Ashes* uses an open form system of wealth calculation and tracking that does not require counting coins, and is designed to keep the focus on storytelling, philosophical debate, investigation and character interaction.

The system also reflects the fact that currency is not in common usage in the most parts of the World. Even if the PLAYERS were to stumble upon a hoard of coins, they would probably make best use of them by studding their armor.

This system is optional; if you or your PLAYERS enjoy keeping careful track of food and supplies, rolling daily Survival checks to forage for food, and bartering between towns, feel free to do so. Remember, though, that currency is not in common use.

**Base Wealth:** Each PLAYER has a Wealth rating of between 1 and 10. A Player is capable of equipping and maintaining himself according to his Wealth rating. A PLAYER'S base Wealth rating is a measure of his ability to generate income *consistently*. It can temporarily fluctuate, indefinitely increase, or indefinitely decrease.



**Temporary Wealth Variations:** A PLAYER's effective Wealth rating can temporarily increase or decrease depending on circumstances. Finding a small treasure, getting a small reward, obtaining a loan from another party member, selling off valuable equipment, concluding a successful trading mission, or the like will temporarily increase a PLAYER'S Wealth rating.

Temporarily higher Wealth might be used to buy durable equipment, paint the town red, pay a special bribe, buy an expensive service, or book an expensive passage, or acquire the means to continue to make money and lead to a permanent Base Wealth increase.

A PLAYER'S effective Wealth rating can also temporarily decrease. Traveling into a particularly bad region where things are more scarce than usual, being unable to find work, being fined or imprisoned, being robbed, suffering a damaging loss of reputation that might impact a PLAYER'S ability to find work, or simply having things go badly for a long enough period to strain the group's resources will temporarily decrease Wealth.

The KEEPER is the ultimate arbiter of whether a PLAYER'S circumstances have increased sufficiently that he can reliably sustain himself at a level whereby his base Wealth rating should be increased. The KEEPER also determines how long, and to what extent, a temporary change in effective Wealth should remain in place.

In *Ashes, to Ashes*, where the economy is fractured and sources of permanent wealth

(apart from productive land, which requires someone to work it) are hard to come by, permanent increases in Wealth should likewise be hard to come by.

When adjudicating the duration of temporary Wealth increases, the KEEPER should ask himself whether the unusual increase of income has been spent, or, if not spent all at once, how long will it maintain an increased lifestyle? (If the PLAYERS hoard Wealth, the result of this would be not to adjust their Wealth upwards accordingly; simply delay the increase in Wealth until the party draws on the resources).

For the duration of decreases, the KEEPER should ask himself what the PLAYERS would need to do in order to get back to their former standard of living: re-equip, heal, find work, move on to greener pastures?

A reputation as a mighty hero (of the kind that leads to more lucrative work), a reliable source of repeatable income (such as a business, steady high-paying work, or productive land), or settling in a wealthier region would be common causes of an indefinite Wealth increase.

Settling or spending an indefinite amount of time in a poorer region where fewer things are available, imprisonment, outlawry, being stripped of your possessions, or any serious, prolonged, unusual expenses might justify an indefinite decrease in Wealth.

But generally, one's Wealth rating can be determined by what one is doing and what resources one has access to in the foreseeable future.

Note, with regard to equipment, the World is resource-poor. *Iron or steel weapons are extremely rare, armor better than studded leather is rarer yet, and such things as horses are playthings of the extremely rich.* Someone riding into town on a horse must be a person of extreme prestige and often, the whole town will turn out to satisfy their curiosity (and to evaluate the possibility of stealing and/or eating the horse).

**Notes on Wealth Categories:**

**1. Penniless:** You have the clothes on your back, the poorest of equipment, little else, and no apparent way to improve your lot. You depend on begging or thievery and live hand to mouth. If you lost your gear, you would not be able to buy replacements. You can only acquire what you can steal or forage. Human slaves in the slave pit of The Majestic Plateau are a good example.

**2. Desperate:** You have the clothes on your back, perhaps a few extra items, and poor equipment. You do not have the tools, employable skills or wherewithal to survive unaided. You have barely enough food to survive, and the supply is not reliable or is dependent on the goodwill of others. People without any particular skills in the poorest regions, or extremely desperate bandits, are a good example. You probably do not have armor, and any weapons you might have would be cheap (slings, stones) or makeshift (clubs). Your shelter may be temporary, makeshift, and/or of questionable quality.

**3. Poor:** You can scratch out an existence on a day to day basis, but any unusual expense beyond providing for your daily needs will require you to sell something or take a great risk to earn more money. If you have weaponry or tools, they are either cheap, makeshift, or a highly prized possession. You might have a well-used set of inexpensive armor depending on your vocation, but probably not. A rank-and-file Crannoch tribesman is a typical example.

**4. Struggling:** Typical of a beginning adventurer in this setting. You might have (and can take at character generation): one decent (not steel) weapon and one decent set of gear. You have enough skills to find work or food without being at all comfortable.

Unusual expenses such as ship's passages, expensive tolls, fines, paying for shelter or having to replace equipment may strain your resources to the point of a temporary Wealth decrease. You will need to find a paying reason to travel in order to afford travel

(such as serving as a courier or guard). You probably have decent shelter of your own, such as a good tent or (if you are stationary) a fairly weatherproof hut.

**Wealth Table**

1. Penniless	Slaves, no assets, brink of death.
2. Desperate	The clothes on your back, reliant on others for survival.
3. Poor	Existing day-to-day, only.
4. Struggling	Basic self-sufficiency, but challenged.
5. Mediocre	Can replace basics without difficulty or engage in occasional travel.
6. Adequate	A beginning adventurer in a normal setting.
7. Above Average	Able to support a family or small number of followers.
8. Comfortable	Stable ongoing source of income.
9. Well-Off	Leader of a well-off enclave.
10. Noble	Apex of large, wealthy organization

**5. Mediocre:** Typical of a more advanced adventurer, a typical resident of a better off area (Fallingstar) or a modest craftsman in area that can support them. You have adequate clothing, adequate food and adequate shelter. You can replace or repair common gear without excessive strain, stay in a common room once in a while, or afford to journey once in a while. Paying for lodging, healing, tolls, small fines or services once in a while is within your



means, but you must generally do things for yourself.

**6. Adequate:** Typical of a beginning adventurer in a typical fantasy campaign, a quite successful person in this one, or a wealthy farmer or craftsman. You have adequate food, clothing and shelter, can afford to journey occasionally, and can consistently pay for lodging, healing, tolls, small fines, repairs and services.

In order for this to be the case, you probably own enough productive land to support several people. You may have a spare decent weapon, or have an important and comparatively difficult to acquire skill (e.g., a skilled guard with a good reputation). You can support a couple of other people without too much strain if they contribute some work themselves. Nonetheless, you would not be able to afford or maintain a horse or pack animal, or possess any significant amount of metal.

**7. Above Average:** You have enough reliable income that you do not have to worry about your basic needs. You have plenty of food, clothing and good shelter, can journey as needed, and can equip yourself and a small number of others. You may have a craft apprentice, squire, dependent NPC, family, or others who you take care of without difficulty. Good sized farmers in a safe, productive area, village chieftains, or travelers with very valuable skills (healers) are good examples.

**8. Comfortable:** This is the Wealth level at which you might expect to have a decent steel weapon, a pack animal, a wagon or small coasting boat, or maybe even a horse. You have a stable source of income, at the level of the tax income of a small keep, monastery or village, a profitable craft business in a quite prosperous area, or command of a successful group of pillagers. You can support a few people (hirlings, guards) of your own accord, and could round up a small posse of friends and hirlings if need be.

**9. Well-off:** Barring becoming the leader

of a sizable, wealthy organization, this is as good as it gets. You do not need to worry about your personal needs, as long as your needs pass the “laugh test” in a poor world.

You run in the upper levels of society, have minions that you can support, probably own or control a goodly amount of land, and probably command and/or are supported by a sizable number of people. The magistrate in Fallingstar, a powerful Adept or high level, famous hero, the abbot of a quite nice monastery, or an emissary of the demons are good examples.

**10. Noble:** You are at the apex of a large organization and can draw on its resources to support you. You might be the king or mayor of a large town, head of a whole clan or tribe, or otherwise have hundreds of people under you. You have everything you need, within the logical limits of the campaign. You may have a horse, a good steel weapon (as a sign of your prestige), a defensible piece of land (castle, keep, redoubt), and have enough infrastructure under you to maintain it. You can field a fighting force for a time in support of your cause, or fund an expedition.

The bottom line is that you can assume that you have whatever gear that is consistent (with the KEEPER’S approval) with your Wealth level.

For beginning adventures, this means one decent set of leather armor, a shield, one decent weapon, other cheap weapons, and a basic kit or craft tools. It does not mean anything better than leather armor, steel weapons, any magic items, or any horses or vehicles. (It might mean a coracle or simple raft).

Magic items should be *great* treasures, even such things as a lowly Potion of Healing. Someone displaying the lore of magic item manufacture would quickly cause the demons to put their internal bickering aside and focus on that person’s death.

#### **f. Typical Gear.**

A sampling of the typical weapons and



armor the PLAYERS will encounter repeatedly follows. Feel free to allow other melee and missile weapons from the Primitive weapons list in the BRP rules set, bearing in mind the shortage of steel.

A *mace* covers a wide variety of bashing things designed to be weapons that one will encounter in every region of the world, including the spiked club, tomahawk, crude non-steel axe, and hammer, as well as an actual mace.

A *club* is any big bashing weapon that has not been specifically designed or adapted to be a weapon (in which case, it is considered a mace).

A *quarterstaff* is a reinforced staff specifically designed to be wielded as a two-handed weapon. It can either attack and parry in a round, or parry twice.

A *“spear”* is a crude thrusting weapon, including fire-hardened, sharpened poles, flint-tipped spears, pointy farming implements, and the like. Actual military spears with metal tips are different (and rare). They are not easily thrown by definition.

A *javelin* is any sort of pointy or sharp hand weapon specifically designed to be thrown.

A *bow* means a highly crafted weapon, such as a longbow or composite bow, such as would be found as heirlooms in Fallingstar or “The Dells”, or miraculously uncovered in a pre-Abjuration ruin. *It also implies steel-tipped arrows in use.*

Otherwise, treat the “lesser bow” as a sling. References to “slings” on NPC Eglantine soldier character sheets may either be actual slings, or bad bows without steel tipped arrows.

Typical armor and shields include:

**Jerkin:** Any form of protective clothing or headgear reasonably said to provide some protection against weapons. This includes hide armor, heavy clothing, or the spare scrap of piecemeal armor. Armor: 1.

**Leather:** hardened or reinforced leather

designed to be armor. Armor: 2.

**Studded Leather:** leather and metal based armor, roughly comparable to a legionary kit. Rare due to the amount of metal needed. Armor: 3.

**Shield, wicker/leather:** A wooden framed shield with wicker or scrap wood weavings and covered with hardened hide. These shields were both fairly common, and fairly effective, prior to the development of powerful bows. Armor: 10, must parry. Treat as a Primitive Shield for attack purposes (Base chance 10%, knockback, 1d2 +db).

**Shield, wooden:** A small, but more chunky wood shield, perhaps with a boss or laminated layers. Armor 12, must parry. Treat as a Round Shield for attack purposes (Base chance 15%, knockback, 1d3+db).

**Helmet:** this is a primitive helmet that adds another +1 to Armor, while reducing perception skills by 5%.

Steel weapons rarely encountered include:

- the actual *sword* (rare), typically seen in the possession of Eglantine military officers, great heroes, or recovered from a ruin somewhere;
- the *Crannoch axe* (a two-handed weapon looking like a wood axe);
- the *Crannoch seax* (a single-edged knife roughly two feet in length); and
- the *steel spear* (a proper steel or bronze headed military weapon).

Weapon Description	Beginning Attack & Parry	Damage	Special	Attacks/Round	HPs Resistance	Failure %	Notes
<b>Mace</b>	25%	1d6+2+db	Crushing	1	20	---	
<b>Club</b>	25%	1d8+db	Crushing	1	22	---	
<b>Quarterstaff</b>	25%	1d8+db	Crushing	1 +parry	20	---	Attack & Parry or 2x Parry
<b>Torch, lit</b>	10%	1d6+lit %	Fire	1	15	---	Fire
<b>“Spear”</b>	15%	1d6+1+db	Impaling	1	15	---	Thrown at -10%
<b>Sling</b>	25%	1d8	80 yards range, Crushing	1	NA	---	Missile only
<b>Sword, steel</b>	15%	1d8+1+db	Bleeding	1	20	---	Rare
<b>Javelin</b>	05%	1d6+1+1/2 db	15 yards range, Impaling	½	10	---	Impales, only thrown
<b>Bow</b>	05%	1d8+1+1/2 db	90 yards range, Impaling	1	10	---	Rare
<b>Axe, steel Crannoch</b>	15%	1d8+2+db	Bleeding	1	20	---	Rare, uses axe skill
<b>Seax, steel, Crannoch</b>	15%	1d6+1+db	Impaling	1	20	---	Rare, uses sword skill
<b>Spear, steel/bronze</b>	15%	1d6+1+db	Impaling	1	15	---	Impales, thrown

# PITY THE SORROWS OF A POOR OLD MAN.

BY THE REV. THOMAS ROSS.

Pity the sorrows of a poor old man!  
Whose trembling limbs have borne him to your door,  
Whose days are dwindled to the shortest span,  
Oh, give relief, and Heaven will bless your store.  
These tattered clothes my poverty bespeak,  
These hoary locks proclaim my lengthened years;  
And many a furrow in my grief-worn cheek,  
Has been the channel to a stream of tears.  
Your house, erected on the rising ground,  
With tempting aspect drew me from my road,  
For plenty there a residence has found,  
And grandeur a magnificent abode.  
(Hard is the fate of the infirm and poor!)  
Here craving for a morsel of their bread,  
A pampered menial forced me from the door,  
To seek a shelter in a humbler shed.  
Oh! take me to your hospitable dome,  
Keen blows the wind, and piercing is the cold!  
Short is my passage to the friendly tomb,  
For I am poor, and miserably old.  
Should I reveal the source of every grief,  
If soft humanity e'er touch'd your breast,  
Your hands would not withhold the kind relief,  
And tears of pity could not be repressed.  
Heaven sends misfortunes—why should we repine?  
'Tis Heaven has brought me to the state you see:  
And your condition may be soon like mine,  
The child of sorrow and of misery.  
A little farm was my paternal lot,  
Then, like the lark, I sprightly hail'd the morn;  
But ah! oppression forced me from my cot;  
My cattle died, and blighted was my corn.  
My daughter—once the comfort of my age!  
Lured by a villain from her native home,  
Is east, abandoned, on the world's wide stage,  
And doomed in scanty poverty to roam.  
My tender wife—sweet soother of my care!  
Struck with sad anguish at the stern decree,  
Fell—lingering fell, a victim to despair,  
And left the world to wretchedness and me.

293 Pity the sorrows of a poor old man, &c.

*Andrews, Printer, 88 Chatham St., N. Y., Songs, Games, Toys, Books  
Motto Verses, &c., Wholesale and Retail.*

## 6. BRP RULE VARIATIONS—MAGIC

### a. Rule Variations.

What would a homebrewed campaign setting be if it didn't try to mess with the magic system? *Ashes, to Ashes* features its own magic system, intended to depict the chaotic nature of magic in the World and the need to learn how to manipulate it by trial and error.

### b. Magic and How to Acquire It (Or, How to Make Everyone Hate and Fear You).

In *Ashes, to Ashes*, there are two sorts of people who can use magic: *wild talents*, and *Abjuration Adepts*. Those who can effectively use magic on a broad scale, the Abjuration Adepts, are scarce. The reason is that after the Abjuration, the organized knowledge of magic has been driven underground, both figuratively and literally.

Literally, the great cities, libraries, academies and wizard's conclaves where magic once was studied have been thrown down and buried. Figuratively, magic is so shunned and hated by most that there is virtually no one teaching it, certainly not in the open where most people live. And since magic is one of the few things that the demons are truly afraid of, they undermine its study at every opportunity.

As a result, people who might, before the Abjuration, have had some chance at discovering how to use magic simply will not know what, if anything, they are capable of. There is no one to show them. The few who will know something about magic, and who have a reason to seek out magical lore, are those who know for certain that they can use it: those who are so talented that even early in life, they can do a few things without discipline or learning.

In a dangerous World, Abjuration Adepts live the most dangerous lives of all. They have a giant bull's-eye painted on their backs, yet more than any others, are potentially the key to humanity's salvation

and triumph over the demons.

### 1. Magic is Difficult to Learn and Control Effectively.

Prior to the Abjuration, magic (both itself and its mastering) was organized. Certain people, known as the Truly Apt, had a natural affinity for it, but just about anyone could be taught a bit of it. It was studied, analyzed, categorized, and well understood. Schools of wizardry existed throughout the World.

Children who displayed the signs of Aptitude were a source of pride, as the rulers of the World encouraged the study and careful use of magic. They would be sent to schools to hone their craft, and often rose to high positions in the World, either as advisers, civil servants or rulers in their own right (where the right of rule was not hereditary).

Now the converse is true. It is not studied, it is shunned. It is not well understood, it is feared. It is not organized, it is fractured and chaotic. Whereas in the past a rare few had great magical aptitude, now more have a fragment of magic, which they often cannot control. Such wild talents are now far more common than the Truly Apt.

### 2. Aptitude for Magic Is Strictly Innate. However, Those with Aptitude or Ability Often Do Not Reach Adulthood, For a Variety of Reasons.

Being an Adept in a World where poverty is crushing and people scramble to survive makes you a valuable commodity. Perhaps you can help grow food, clear land, or simply aid a community in its defense. At the same time, however, it makes you a target. Although in most areas demons are unseen, you are the one thing that the demons are truly concerned about.

Since magic is innate, the demons cannot reliably control its emergence, like they can control access to ore sources, history, or





communications. They can, however, influence society in a way that potential Abjuration Adepts are turned out by their own people. Depending on where you hail from, the demons may have exerted a lot of effort into subtly (or not so subtly) influencing society to ferret you out. Sadly, society in many regions of the World does not need this kind of help from the demons.

### **3. Most People Hate and Fear Magic Users, Especially Strange Ones.**

The strongest lie is always partly true. Most humans hate and fear magic users because legend assigns them the blame for the Abjuration. And the demons have, over the course of time, convincingly portrayed the Abjuration as a bad thing that ruined the World, rather than a terrible price that had to be paid to save the World.

Blaming Adepts for the current state of the World is, of course, partly true. A wizard started the demon invasion, and the assembled wizards of the World brought an end to it. The demons and their agents have overemphasized the role of Adepts in making the decision to invoke the Abjuration, but still there is some truth to it. Adepts find themselves unwanted at best (and often, immediately attacked and driven out) in many communities, particularly ones to which they have no pre-existing ties of debt or kinship.

Many communities prefer to “club first, and ask questions later” when confronted by an overt use of magic, simply out of fear and superstition. Why take chances with the people who broke the World? Many superstitions and false stories circulate around Adepts; much as with medieval witches, they are blamed for everything from blighted crops to deformed babies to bizarre weather. The sad thing is that, thanks to the Abjuration, there is even some truth to these superstitions.

In some regions, Adept children sometimes simply disappear if they manifest magical abilities. And no one talks about it. Whether they are exposed by their parents,

ambushed in the fields by a superstitious mob, or otherwise, it simply is not discussed.

### **4. The Demons Want to Suppress Potential Adepts Where They Are Able, And Use Both Carrots and Sticks To Do So.**

To most communities, demons are bogeymen. There are many stories about them, and maybe a group of riders rumored to be working for the demons came through the next town over once. Stories about a town that somehow sinned (which is how most people think about magic use, in terms of sin) and was crushed by an army headed by a demon abound.

But few people, if any, have actually seen a demon. In regions where the demons are particularly concerned with the emergence of Adepts (e.g., Fallingstar), they resort to both manipulation and violence to suppress its use. In other regions, which because of distance from the demons or because of a reputation for being harmless (e.g., the Crannoch), Adepts are more likely to be primarily threatened by other forces.

As discussed in the Regional Gazetteer, the demons encourage certain regions to sacrifice their own Adepts. In Fallingstar, this takes the form of the Harvest, where rewards and exemptions are offered in exchange for giving up Adept children to the demon's agents for “service to the World.” In other regions, particularly near the lairs of rogue or unsophisticated demons, Adepts are simply delicacies to be eaten in preference to others if they can be found.

### **5. Children Who Display Magical Aptitude Are, At the Same Time, Valuable Commodities and May Be Trafficked, Kidnapped, Or Plundered.**

Some Adept children are perceived as being worth the risk of harboring, not in a loving way, but in a calculated, survival-oriented sort of way. This is particularly true with children with subtle powers, or who learn quickly enough to keep their powers hidden from those who might betray them to the



demons or to rival communities.

Just as in modern society, grinding poverty exerts pressure on the weak and evil to sell their children. Children who can work subtle forms of magic, depending on what they can do, can be quite valuable. A child who can help the crops grow without attracting attention is a valuable addition to any community. A child who can subtly cause things to burst into flame has more specialized uses, as does a child who can detect magic auras, or turn invisible.

Children whose practical abilities are not useful to their community sometimes find themselves trafficked to another one, in exchange for the proverbial cow and bag of beans. Depending on what they are capable of, they may be treated as valuable tools, or abject playthings.

Those whose powers are useful to their community may find themselves plundered by raiders who find out about them. And it is difficult to keep such children a secret, since it only takes one superstitious townsfolk to bring unwanted attention from desperate competitors.

The extent to which children born into a community are likely to be harbored, trafficked, or simply killed varies from region to region, but the important thing to remember is that there is always a tension between keeping or otherwise deriving value from an Adept, and killing or driving them out of fear and superstition.

**6. Children With Magical Aptitude Who Do Survive To Adulthood Learn To Be Subtle, Lack A Fixed Community, Or Often Both.**

These societal pressures tend to result in a few common archetypes of Adepts.

**a. The Fugitive Adolescent.** Your magical powers have just manifested, your parents are threatening to kill you, and your town wants to burn you at the stake. And there is any number of people out there who would like to exploit you. Without a community to hide in, you go on the lam, hoping to learn

how to hide your true nature before you are caught, and to find a place to belong.

**b. The Escaped Victim.** Rather than kill you, your parents and/or community decided to enslave you, traffic you, or just were not able to protect you when the raiders came. Either that, or your keepers have kept you well out of sight, perhaps in squalor. Now you have escaped, but where can you go?

**c. The Lord's Right Hand.** The ways in which you can harness magic are destructive, useful for controlling populations, or for accomplishing some particular community-level task. You have become associated with someone powerful enough to actually keep you alive, someone rival communities cannot simply crush, and that the populace has not yet rebelled against for harboring you.

**d. The Reapers.** Some foul and debased Adepts from Fallingstar or Eglantine, known as the Reapers, submit to a Ritual of Obedience, making them the willing slaves of the demons. They chase down other Adepts and act as enforcers for the hidden demons. In exchange, they get to live a comfortable life and are trained in how to use their powers, although the Ritual prevents them from ever harming a demon. Some see this as a fair exchange. Others are beguiled into this life as children when the demons see someone as a useful, moldable and willing tool.

**e. The Charlatan.** Your abilities are of a sort that makes mundane tasks (like farming, healing or fighting) easier or better. You pose as a particularly successful healer, farmer, mercenary, or other professional, using your powers to quietly bolster your skill. Many members of *the Paired* and the *Heroes of Old* (see Chapter 8) fall into this category.

**f. The Eidolon.** Magic is drawn from the World, and those who have, through sheer talent, learned to wield magic in an imprecise or clumsy way will, logically, have learned to do so in ways which reflect their local survival needs. Magic also tends

to be easier to shape if it goes with the grain of the World, not against it. Cold based magic is naturally easier to wield when the place that you live in is cold, for example.

These regionally connected magic users, or Eidolons, tend to be from communities that are better off from a survival standpoint (since there is less pressure to traffic or lose valuable commodities to bandits), and less under the direct scrutiny of the demons and their proxies. They also naturally tend to have comparatively subtle powers, since their powers are tied to the World; they are, basically, in synch with their surroundings.

Some examples of regional eidolons follow:

***Fallingstar:*** This land was once a beacon of culture, magic and learning. Abilities reflecting light, learning and sensing magic are disproportionately represented.

***The Crannoch:*** The historical isolation and self-sufficiency of the fens is expressed in the ability to remain unnoticed, be inscrutable, and survive.

### **7. Lore That Would Enable An Adept to Better Learn and Control Magic is Out There in the Rubble.**

Tough, often desperate men and women--often seeking to learn how to control (or hide) their own innate abilities--spend their lives cautiously seeking out magical lore, lost incantations, and arcane know-how. Adepts who are not careful end up dead from the unwanted attention. That's not to say that the lore is not out there. Adepts may be willing to teach others forgotten skills--once they gain their trust, and for the right price. Of course, some "teachers" are actually demons, or their agents, or worse--their recruiters. And in the ruins of the World, magic artifacts, staves, crystals, incantations, books, weapons and the like lie hidden.

### **8. An Adept's Career Path in *Ashes, to Ashes, Or, So You Want to Be Burned At the Stake?***

A great deal of care and attention must be given to initial character generation for an

Abjuration Adept. The PLAYER and KEEPER should always bear in mind, when generating an Abjuration Adept, the interrelated questions of how this character has survived this long, and how he learned to control whatever magic he has in the first place. The nature of the setting affects how one can gain skill and training in the use of magical powers, or learn different ones.

Your brand new character, if he has a mind to be an Abjuration Adept, will have potentially strong magical powers that he has little understanding of and little idea of how to control. He will maybe have stumbled onto one or two effective applications. Either way, he will not be the stereotypical rookie magic user, *i.e.*, the fully educated, formally trained young wizard just out of school. The only school available is the school of hard knocks. What does this mean for character generation, in mechanical terms?

In *Ashes, to Ashes*, there is only one profession with full access to magic: the Abjuration Adept (or Adept for short). An Adept's areas of specialization should generally reflect the Adept's home region and especially the character's back story. A character from Fallingstar, for example, might well have learned some proficiency with Cold magic (and hiding from detection) in his early years.

Absent a compelling back story, character generation should also reflect the suppressed, untrained nature of Adepts. A calculating, fire-wielding evoker is out of flavor for a beginning Adept. Someone with spontaneous, uncontrollable fire powers who struggles to stay out of sight of the demons, however, is completely in flavor.

An Adept with obvious, "in your face" types of powers should have a compelling back story explaining why it is that the demons or others have not yet eliminated him as a threat. Perhaps his powers have just manifested, and now the demons and the Reapers are on his trail. In fact, many of the Reapers themselves have these "overt" powers: they got caught at a young age, and



were broken and re-educated into demonic service.

#### **d. Generating an Adept.**

*Starting Abjuration Adepts must have a minimum POW of 16.* As noted previously, unlike the normal starting skill points allocated to a beginning character (200 + INT x5), Adepts receive only 100 + INT x5. However, they have the ability to wield magic. Just stay out of their way until they figure it out.

Armor does not interfere with spell casting in the *Ashes, to Ashes* setting. Spells are cast last in a combat round. Multiple spell-casters break initiative ties by *adjusted POW*, a concept described below.

#### **e. Spell-casting 101.**

Spell-casting is not automatically successful in *Ashes, to Ashes*. But neither is each spell treated as a separate skill with a percentage chance to succeed, Critical successes, and fumbles. That implies too much organization and predictability. Magic here is fractured and wild.

In *Ashes, to Ashes*, you “know” most published spells, from any setting (sort of) and have a varying chance to successfully cast any of them, assuming you have enough Magic Points (MPs). Your chance of depends on how powerful you are; how powerful the spell is; how good you are with that type of magic; and what casting aids (Tools, Incantations, and Items of Power) you have that might help. Any Adept can *try* to do *anything*, but they might well regret it.

*Success in spell-casting is determined by a modified POW check. The Adept checks his (adjusted) POW x3 vs. the MPs needed for the spell x10 on the Resistance Table. If the Adept wins, the MPs are expended and the spell goes off. If it fails, the MPs are still expended and Bad Things Happen.*

As the Adept gains experience, he develops his ability to harness magic and shape it in particular ways. The system reflects an Adept's ability to shape particular kinds of

magic by having the Adept gain bonuses to his effective POW when wielding various types of magic.

*A beginning Abjuration Adept starts play with 10 bonus Aptitude points, which must be divided up among and allocated to the following categories: Fire, Earth, Air, Water, Cold, Light, Darkness, Weather, Locate, Animal, Plant, Body, Heal, Harm, Emotion, Sense/Detect/Divine, Mind, Move, Destroy, Animate, and Resist.*

When the Adept attempts to cast a spell he adds his Aptitude in the *one most applicable* area (GM's discretion), up to a maximum of +10, to his base POW, before multiplying. This figure (plus Tools and other bonuses) is the Adept's *adjusted POW* for that spell effort. Aptitude in any one category cannot exceed +10. (It is entirely possible that a new Abjuration Adept will spend all +10 in one specialty. The practical effect of this is to give the Adept great power and natural affinity in one narrow area of magic, and be utterly incompetent for much of his early career in any other sort).

How do these adjusted POW bonuses improve over time? If an Adept successfully casts a spell involving any one area, they “get the hang of it” sufficiently to increase their Aptitude in that area by +1 if they throw a natural 01. If the spell-casting could implicate more than one area, the PLAYER chooses which one increases. Alternatively, and more safely, the Adept may pick up additional POW bonuses through study.

General POW increases, per the BRP rules, can also occur on a successful POW vs. POW check (21-POW x5, as a % chance of a 1d3 POW increase), or on a Luck roll of 01 (21-POW x5 as a % chance of a 1d3 POW increase).

All Abjuration Adepts have the gift of *Second Sight*. Second Sight permits an Abjuration Adept to Detect Magic, with an automatic chance of success, at a cost of 1 MP. Adepts are naturally attuned to the existence of magic in the World.



A use of the Second Sight ability may, at the KEEPER'S discretion, also provide senses or impressions of any particularly important or traumatic events that may have occurred in the area.

**Spell Selection:** An Abjuration Adept may *attempt* to wield the power of magic to accomplish *any* permissible magical effect, from *any BRP spell list, subject to certain constraints*. This includes the “Magic” rules in the BRP Rules Set, and any other published BRP spell or power. It just has to have a discernible MP cost (or Power Point cost).

Certain magical effects are unavailable as the result of the Abjuration, however. Because the World has been isolated from all other planes, *any spell which involves contacting or accessing another plane of existence is unavailable*. This includes any divination spell involving contacting another non-living entity.

Likewise, *all spells which would summon a (or banish) any creature, entity or thing are unavailable*. No Calling any elder demons, or summoning minor ones. Because of the Abjuration, there is nowhere to summon things from (or, conversely, banish them to). The application of Dispel magic to banishing demons is ineffective, although it might dispel an animated skeleton.

Also, there is no point to casting a spell affecting a BRP mechanic that is not involved in this setting, e.g., Sanity.

Similarly, *any spell that involves travel, other than physical travel, does not work*. Hence, while one might be able to *fly*, one would *not* be able to *teleport*.

Finally, *no one comes back from the dead in Ashes, to Ashes*, at least not after the Abjuration. *Once you're dead, you're dead, and no known source of magic can resurrect, raise, or reincarnate you*. So be diplomatic, and fear for your life; that's part of the game feel in this setting.

That is not to say, however, that mindless, undead mockeries of life cannot be

animated. Sadly, the demons and their minions are all too fond of animating mindless, undead slaves to do their bidding.

Undead which would possess (or be) an otherworldly intelligence (such as ghosts, specters, vampires and the like) cannot be newly created in *Ashes, to Ashes*. Whether there are a few such things trapped in the World and dating from before the Abjuration is another matter, of course, and these tend to fill out the bottom tier of the demons' ranks. However, they cannot spawn new ones. If you are drained to death by a stray vampire, you are simply dead.

**Base POW modifiers:** In order to cause a magical effect, the Abjuration Adept must succeed in a (modified) POW x3 vs. the Magic Points (MP) cost of the spell x10 on the Resistance Table. With appropriate Tools, good focus, and the like, however, an Adept can virtually guarantee success (depending on how big of an effect he is aiming for) and may, under the right circumstances, be able to reach up into +20 bonus range. Modifiers to the POW check for spell-casting are as follows:

**Adjusted POW Bonus Table**

Circumstance	Bonus to POW Check
Lost Art— Higher Mysteries	+2
Tools (wands, amulets, sympathetic items, etc.)	+1 to +5, if appropriate in GM's discretion to spell attempted
Aptitude (e.g., Fire, Water)	+0 to +10
Incantation (Spell-specific knowledge)	+0 to +5
Not Under Pressure or in Combat	+3

As used herein, the foregoing terms are

defined as follows:

**Tools:** A *Tool* is a physical item or circumstance useful in casting spells. Some Tools (such as inscribing a magic circle) are general; others (a bonfire when casting fire spells, casting air spells in a windstorm) are specific. Some things (a wand made from a tree sundered by lightning) might be both general (giving +1 across the board) and specific (giving an extra +2 when casting Weather related spells).

Tool bonuses in the higher end of the range (+4-+5) should involve expensive or hard to come by items, such as eye of newt, 100 powdered spiderlings, or things of that nature, and may involve a temporary Wealth decrease to obtain. Multiple Tools cannot stack; only the highest applicable Tool involved adds its value.

Tools, and the knowledge of what tools work best with what magic, should be comparatively easy to come by; any grimoire will have some of this information, and some of it is a matter of common sense. A lit torch is a Tool that helps cast Fire magic, but an ordinary lit torch only gives a +1.

**Incantations:** An *Incantation* is a series of chants, gestures or the like that pertain to a *particular spell*. They should be difficult to come by, although they can be taught by one Adept to another. They likewise range from +1 (fragmentary information) to +5 (knowing precisely how to cast that particular spell).

**Effects on the Adept of Casting a Spell:** Each spell attempted, regardless of whether it is successful or not, costs the MPs that it normally does. An Adept cannot attempt to cast a spell that he does not have sufficient MPs remaining to cast.

If an Adept succeeds in casting the spell, the only effect is the expenditure of MPs (unless POW is successfully exercised, either generally or by rolling an 01, as discussed above).

If an Adept fails, Bad Things Happen. The

Adept lost control of the magic, and suffers hit point damage in an amount equal 20% (round up) of the amount by which the POW x3 vs. MP x10 check was failed. As a result, novice Adepts who attempt to cast a monumental spell can burn themselves up, quite literally.

If the Adept fumbles the POW roll (99-00), it gets worse. The Adept suffers 1 point of *permanent, irreversible* POW drain (a phenomenon known as *Graying*). Graying is accompanied by distinct physical changes; the caster looks blasted, drained, and generally hideous. Graying cannot be healed by any known means. Note that fumbling the roll on a 99-00 does not mean that the spell necessarily failed; it is possible to succeed in casting a spell on a 99-00 with a higher target number, but the Adept still gets the Graying.

Normally, only natural rest can recover MP expenditure. Rumors of ancient items of power which contain their own "batteries" of MPs, either generally, or for certain particular magical workings, persist. There are also rumors of items which blunt or reduce MP costs, either in general or for particular kinds of magic.

**The Big Picture on Spellcasting:** Pick a permitted spell from any BRP spell list that you have the MPs for. Use your base POW, and total up your applicable bonuses (Tools, Aptitude for that kind of magic, Incantation, time to concentrate, and Lost Art if applicable). Try to use Tools, take a deep breath if you have time, and play to your affinities. Multiply your *adjusted POW* x3 and match it on the Resistance Table vs. the MPs needed x10. Pray you succeed, because failure means that you tried to channel more magic than you safely could, and that's going to leave a mark.

Some spells do a variable amount of damage, or have a variable effect or duration, depending on MPs expended. In such cases, the Adept must specify the MPs being expended prior to the POW check.

The system, in short permits grievous risk-taking through the use of raw power even by a novice Adept, but places heavy emphasis on the acquisition of medium-specific lore and learning, and natural affinity with particular kinds of magic, to increase safe and *effective* power.

**f. Lost Arts:** Over an Adept's career, an Adept may be awarded, in the KEEPER's discretion, one or more Lost Arts. A Lost Art reflects a tangible advancement in the Adept's knowledge of the use of magic, *based on story-line progress*.

Following are the known Lost Arts, and guidelines about when they might be awarded, again, always in the KEEPER's discretion.

### **1. Quantum Alteration:**

Often one of the Lost Arts first acquired by an Adept, this reflects an Adept's uncontrolled ability to subtly, subconsciously, reflexively work magic to swing events in his favor.

This ability is strictly subject to the control of the KEEPER, and should only be checked (by the KEEPER) in dire circumstances. This Lost Art would be appropriate to be awarded by the KEEPER when the Adept is a party to something miraculous, as the stuff of magic starts to "hone in on him."

If the KEEPER decides that the circumstances are sufficiently dire that the Adept, out of fear, desire or fundamental driving principle, might be especially driven to have events come out a certain way, the KEEPER can make a secret Critical Luck check. On a success, the Adept might gain a hint or momentary insight into a favorable course of action.

On a Critical Luck check of 01-05, a random event might occur that benefits the Adept: the weather might change to facilitate escape; a friendly NPC might happen along; a re-roll of a critical die might be granted (secretly); or someone might be discovered to have miraculously survived.

A logical explanation should always appear

for the seeming miracle.

Recently, some Adepts who are particularly devout in their belief in the Circle have claimed that these events of good fortune are the result of their prayers to and intercession by the Circle. These claims assume the existence of the Circle, of course, but who is to say that just because the Circle did not exist at one time, enough faith (especially by those able to work magic) will not either result in the creation of the Circle, or create a state of affairs which is indistinguishable for all practical purposes?

### **2. Higher Mysteries:**

The Higher Mysteries Lost Art represents a broad base of book learning and general knowledge about how magic used to work prior to the Abjuration. It should only be awarded to Adepts who have had enough time and access to ancient books and learning to be fairly said to have a geeky grasp of the "big picture" of how magic works.

(Although it is not written in stone, a typical progression for an Adept would be to gain Dreams and Quantum Alteration as one's first and second Lost Arts, Higher Mysteries as one's third (although an exceptionally bookish person might be an exception) and Terrible Presence last (although evil Adepts are often an exception).

Higher Mysteries gives an Adept an across the board +2 to any adjusted POW check for working magic, reflecting a broad understanding of the theory of magic.

Higher Mysteries also permits an Adept to remember obscure or legendary information, limited to matters connected with spell-casting or arcane. Treat this as an "unlocking" of the Research (Library Use) skill, with the topics of Research being limited to spell-casting and arcane information.

### **Spellcasting Example—Die, Witch, Die!!!**

Jonni the recently-created Abjuration Adept has a POW score of 16, and 3 points of Aptitude in Move. Jonni decides to attempt to cast *Fist of Yog-Sothoth*, for 5d6 points of STR, at a superstitious peasant eyeing her with bad intent. Disregard the SAN cost for the spell; this spell costs 5 MPs.

Jonni has a base POW of 16, +3 for her aptitude with Move (which the Keeper decides applies to the invisible force of the *Fist*). Her adjusted POW is 19. She realizes that the magic might work better if she balls up her fist and throws a phantom punch at the peasant. The KEEPER agrees, and allows this as a +1 Tool. Jonni's adjusted POW is now 20. She's being attacked, and so cannot gain the +3 for concentration time.

To successfully cast the spell, Jonni needs to check adjusted POW x3 (20 x3=60%) vs. the MP cost involved x10 (5 x10=50%) on the Resistance Table. 60% vs. 50% on the Resistance Table works out to a success chance of 60%.

If Jonni rolls a 59%, she succeeds, and proceeds to apply the effects of the spell. She spends the 5 MP.

If Jonni rolls an 85%, she fails. She spends the 5 MP, and takes damage equaling 20% of the amount that she failed by (25% of 25, or 5 points of damage). Ouch.

If Jonni rolls a 99-00, she fails, spends the 5 MP, takes 8 points of damage, and loses 1 POW to Graying. Ouch, ouch.

If Jonni rolls an 01, she also improves her aptitude with Move by 1 point.

Jonni's chances improve if she only tries to throw a 4d6 *Fist* (70%); if she has better Tools or some knowledge of that particular spell; or if she is out of combat (+3 to adjusted POW).

### **3. Terrible Presence:**

Terrible Presence reflects the point of an Adept's magical development where his connection to magic becomes subtly obvious, and can be made overtly obvious at the will of the Adept.

The Adept begins to seem unnatural, and this aura can either be sensed or made overt as a means of intimidation. The KEEPER should consider awarding this to an Adept who has at least 1 point of Graying, and can fairly to be said to have a scary reputation. It only works against targets who know that the Adept is an Adept.

Once per round, as a free action, an Adept with Terrible Presence may force anyone meeting his gaze, and within 30 feet, to make a POW x3 check or be shaken (-10% to all rolls) for up to 10 combat rounds. If the check is successful, the target is immune to further attempts for a day. Successful applications do not stack.

At the will of the Adept, Terrible Presence can impose -10% on out of combat checks for those dealing with Adept (e.g., Persuade, Fast Talk), out of sheer intimidation. (Again, no stacking of repeated applications).

Terrible Presence renders one immune to the Terrible Presence of others.

### **4. Dreams:**

Often one of the first Lost Arts acquired by an Adept, the Adept's active use of magic results in her being tied more closely to the World, and to begin to perceive subtle patterns of events that others would be unaware of. The KEEPER determines when this occurs, which should be whenever the story-line demands it.

The Adept's subconscious will process this flow of subtle information as prophetic dreams or visions. The dreams or visions will be true, but cloaked in obscure symbology or metaphor.

Dreams should not often be handed out by the KEEPER, and when they are, they



should most often be in the nature of hints from prior clues that the Adept has not quite consciously put together.

#### **e. Wild Talents.**

More common after the Abjuration than Adepts are Wild Talents, individuals with an odd and unpredictable bit of magic in one area or another. A Wild Talent can be taken by any PLAYER at character creation, for the price of 50 skill points.

A Wild Talent makes use of magic according to the POW x3-roll based system above, but with the following differences:

1. A Wild Talent receives **5** bonus aptitude points (unlike the 10 received by an Adept), but **must allocate all 5 points to one category of magic** (Fire, Healing, etc.).
2. A Wild Talent may **only** attempt spell-casting that involves the field of magic in which they have these innate bonus points, whatever that is. The KEEPER makes this determination. (Picture the woodland warrior with the odd knack for finding things, or the frightened child able to mysteriously start fires). Any other kind of magic simply fails.
3. A Wild Talent takes double damage (either hit points from a failure or POW loss from Graying) from using magic. So tone it down!
4. A Wild Talent may receive bonuses from Tools that are **specific** to their type of magic, may get the +3 bonus for focusing, and may get the benefit of the lucky 01 roll when succeeding. They may not, however, get any bonus from Incantations, as that implies learning and control.
5. KEEPERS are strongly encouraged to have Wild Talents reflect the region that the Player is from. A Bogman with an affinity for Plants is a good example of an in-flavor Wild Talent.

#### **f. How Magic Items Work.**

There are two sorts of magic items that need to be discussed: *static* magic items, and *spell-casting aids*.

*Static* magic items (such as the proverbial magic sword or *ring of invisibility*) work as normal per the BRP rules. They are just exceedingly rare in this setting. Magic items such as magic swords are (and should be) plot devices in *Ashes, to Ashes*. A magic sword makes you a threat to kill a demon in a way that few other mortals are, and someone's possession of such a thing should drive the plot.

**Generic low-powered magic quarterstaff:** +10% to hit or parry, does +1 extra damage, 25 HP. The biggest benefit is that it is "magic" and therefore bypasses demonic Armor.

**Generic fantasy setting ring of invisibility:** turns the wearer invisible, up to 20 SIZ, at will. Requires concentration, and the character can do no more than walk or speak, or becomes visible until concentration (out of combat) can be reasserted. Attacks against an invisible character are at ¼ normal, and parries require a successful Listen, Sense or Spot roll. A successful Listen, Sense or Spot roll decreases the penalty on the next chance to attack to ½ of normal, vs. ¼.

From a descriptive perspective, *spell-casting aids*--wands, crystals, staves and the like--grease the wheels of spell-casting. Mechanically, they grant bonuses to adjusted POW checks to use all or particular kinds of magic (often substantial); supplement MPs available to the wielder; or provide damage reduction against spell burn (damage from failed spell-casting).

When devising spell-casting aids, you should ask yourself what it does: allow spell-casting to be easier or less draining? In general, or with respect to particular types of magic? Protect the caster against spell burn by grounding excess power?

Some sample items follow, reflecting a variety of power levels.

**Minor:** *Thorn of Pain.* Grants an Adept

+1 to his adjusted POW when wielding any magic that involves Harm. It is not, however, a Tool, and so it stacks with any appropriate Tools.

**Moderate:** *Crystal of Power (Healing)*. This teardrop shaped, luminescent blue crystal, carved with an ouroboros, grants a +3 Adjusted POW bonus to Healing checks (again, stacking with ordinary Tool bonuses), and also and furnishes the first three MPs spent per day on Healing magic, effectively increasing the number of times per day an Adept can wield Healing.

**Good:** *Oaken Rune*. Grants an Adept +4 to his adjusted POW (again, stacking with ordinary Tools) when wielding Earth, Plant or Animal magic, and immunizes the Adept against spell burn from such magic. This item takes the form of an oaken stick which is used to trace specified sigils when casting.

**Powerful:** *Staff of the Elements and Academy Codex*. This ancient gnarled wooden staff bears four inlaid crystals, keyed to each of the four elements, and its use is described in the lost Academy Codex.

The knowledge in the Codex grants +4 to adjusted POW involving the use of Fire, Earth, Air or Water magic. The staff itself is also a +5 Tool for those types of magic, if the wielder has studied the Codex. It furthermore furnishes the first 10 MPs per day for any magic involving Fire, Earth, Air or Water.

**Crazy Powerful Artifact:** *Black Skull of the Death Demon*. The wielder of this horrible device, a demon's skull covered in runes and steeped in many sacrificed Adept souls, can use Animate magic at +5 to adjusted POW. It is also a +5 Tool for any magic geared toward animating the undead, and a +5 Incantation for any spell that animates human skeletons or zombies specifically. (The skull whispers the words to whichever spell is involved). In addition, the Skull provides 50 MPs per day, only usable for animating human skeletons or zombies.

In practical terms, this allows the wielder to

summon up a gang of mindless, undead creatures in a few minutes, without few adverse consequences, and to reanimate them as they fall.

**Minor Grimoire:** *The Testament of Sharra-Dul*. Sharra-Dul was a pre-Abjuration wizard specializing in discerning the truth. His grimoire contains a description of Tools useful in any divination matter (+2), and Incantations that grant the following bonuses to the following spells: Dispel (+2) and Perception (+2).

**Moderate Grimoire:** *A Study of Darkness*. This subject-intensive textbook from a pre-Abjuration academy of magic describes Tools to work Darkness magic at up to a +5 bonus, and provides Incantations for the following spells: Dark (+5) and Muddle (+5).

**For the smart (or experienced) Adept and his Keeper**

When attempting a POW check to cast a spell, you get +3 to adjusted POW anytime your character is not in combat or threatened. So take a seat, assume the lotus position, gather your Tools and books around you, *then* cast that Fly spell.

This +3 bonus also counsels in favor of opening combat from concealment or surprise.

Adepts will quickly learn what spells they can safely get away with, and which ones they are taking a chance with. Most defense, evasion or divination spells—the ones that force role-playing—are low cost.

Finally, remember that anything you choose to introduce into the game that blunts Graying is a bad idea. This is the mechanic that keeps Adepts from running wild, casting magic again and again until their POW becomes potentially ridiculous.

**Major Grimoire:** *The Codex of the Winds*. This comprehensive treatise on Weather



magic instructs on how to acquire Tools for Weather magic up to the +5 level, and has Incantations for all spells that affect the Weather or winds at a +4 level.

#### **f. Two Sample Abjuration Adept NPCs.**

**1. Thora Chandlersdottir:** The two things that people remember about the nice lady who brought those candles are how relentlessly cheerful she was, and how she did not want anything in return.

Thora Chandlersdottir is from Fallingstar, and is a typical Eidolon from that region. Her mother is said to be an off-the-beaten track relative of the ruling house (with an elf far back in their lineage), and both she and Thora come across as slightly dotty as a result. Her father was a chandler; he kept bees and made candles for the town.

The family was popular because they always shared what they had, keeping only just enough for themselves. As a result, when Thora's older sister, Jules, crushed a man's skull with her bare hands when she was 12--quite by accident—when Jules' magic malfunctioned, the town cooperated and hid Jules from the Reapers.

The town cooperated for the most part, anyway. There are always a few, it seems, who would rather make a buck than stick together, and Fallingstar Town was no exception.

Not long afterwards, the Reapers did not come as some expected; rather, a group of rough men did, led by...something that destroyed her house in the night.

Thora knows that there are demons. She saw one kill Jules and eat her. And as the Glathnog's minions scoured the town, committing atrocities on the women and children, and killing or abducting anyone they even suspected of being a potential Adept, they broke Thora's back and left her for dead.

But Thora was an Adept too, and her magic saved her. She hides the emotional scars under a deep wall of cheerfulness and stubborn determination.

For the next few years, she ran her dead father's store, and cared for her mother, whose mind was broken by what she endured from Glathnog and his minions.

When her mother finally succumbed to the diseases that she had had inflicted on her, Thora took her father's candles and materials and set out to figure out what kind of people sold each other out to demons.

She hasn't had an easy time of it. She's not much of a fighter, but she's a survivor, can take a lot of abuse, and she doesn't quit. And everyone seems to like her for some reason.

Thora is in her late teens and is a tall, plain looking woman with long, light brown hair in a braid. She wears green wool and traveling leather and carries a staff. She walks with a noticeable limp.

#### **Thora Chandlersdottir**

STR 11 DEX 12 INT 16 CON 14 APP 13  
POW 18 SIZ 12 EDU 11 Hits: 13 Age: 28.

**Damage Bonus:** +0.

**Allegiance Tendencies:** Good, Lawful.

**Skills:** *Accounting* (10%), Appraise (40%), *Archaeology* (05%), Art (05%), Astronomy (05%), Bargain (35%), Brawl (25%), Climb (40%), Command (05%), Craft (Chandler) (70%) Disguise (01%), Dodge (47%), Etiquette (55%), Fast Talk (45%), Fine Manipulation (05%), First Aid (65%), Gaming (INT + POW%), Grapple (25%), Hide (58%), History (27%), Insight (55%), Jump (25%), *Law* (05%), Listen (50%), Martial Arts (01%), MEDICINE (01%), Navigate (50%), OCCULT (25%), Perform (05%), Persuade (66%), *Pharmacy* (05%), *Pilot Boat* (01%), Religion (new) (25%), RESEARCH (LIBRARY USE) (01%), Research (Streetwise) (55%), *Ride Horse* (05%), Sense (10%), Spot (52%), *Status* (40%), Stealth (45%), Strategy (01%), Survival (new) (78%), Swim (25%), Teach (40%), Throw (25%), Track (10%).



**Attacks:**

Sling, 58%, 1d8, 80 yards, crushing, 1 shot, cannot parry.

Quarterstaff, 56%, 1d8, crushing, can parry twice vs. attack, 20 HP.

**Defenses:** Armor 2 (leather).

Deity: None.

Wealth: 5

Gear: Leather armor, staff, sling, healing kit, candles and candle making supplies.

**Special:** Lost Art: Quantum Alteration; Second Sight.

Adjusted POW Bonuses: Mind +6, Resist +4, Healing +4.

Tools: Thora carries a variety of mind focus Tools and often uses her healing kit as a Tool in connection with her Healing magic. Mind +3, Healing +3.

Incantations: Control +3, Heal +3, Perception +3.

**2 Cormac, son of Cormac and Lara, of the South Camp:**

Cormac, son of Cormac is a young Bogman who was kidnapped at the age of 10 by bandits who heard tales of a boy who could start fires. The bandits eventually formed a bond with Cormac, and he became a cross between a little brother and a mobile artillery piece.

Cormac has, with the assistance of these bandits (who are now trying to legitimize themselves as a traditional feudal lordship) uncovered some Incantations that have enabled him to control his fire (sort of). Cormac bears numerous burn scars, and shows some signs of Graying from overuse of magic.

**Cormac, Son of Cormac**

STR 13 DEX 13 INT 12 CON 14 APP 9  
POW 18 SIZ 12 EDU 6 Hits: 13 Age: 18.

**Damage Bonus:** +1d4.

**Allegiance Tendencies:** Neutral, Chaotic.

**Skills:** *Accounting* (10%), Appraise (15%), *Archaeology* (05%), Art (05%), Astronomy

(05%), Bargain (25%), Brawl (45%), Climb (70%), Command (25%), Craft (Farmer) (45%) Disguise (01%), Dodge (55%), Etiquette (05%), Fast Talk (05%), Fine Manipulation (05%), First Aid (55%), Gaming (INT + POW%), Grapple (25%), Hide (50%), History (05%), Insight (25%), Jump (55%), **Law (05%)**, Listen (65%), Martial Arts (01%), MEDICINE (01%), Navigate (50%), OCCULT (05%), Perform (05%), Persuade (15%), **Pharmacy (05%)**, **Pilot Boat (31%)**, Religion (new) (10%), RESEARCH (LIBRARY USE) (01%), Research (Streetwise) (25%), **Ride Horse (05%)**, Sense (30%), Spot (55%), **Status (15%)**, Stealth (70%), Strategy (11%), Survival (new) (70%), Swim (25%), Teach (10%), Throw (55%), Track (70%).

**Attacks:**

Axe, Crannoch, steel, 56%, 1d8+2+db, bleeding, 20 HP.

Bow, 76%, 1d8+1+1/2 db, 90 yards, impaling, 10 HP.

**Defenses:** Armor 3 (leather and helmet)

Shield, wicker & leather, 65%, 1d2+db, knockback, Armor 10 (must parry).

Deity: Naturist/Crannoch.

Gear: Leather armor & small wooden shield, battleaxe, longbow & 20 Arrows, healing kit.

Wealth: 5

**Special:** Lost Art: Quantum Alteration; Second Sight.

Adjusted POW Bonuses: Fire +8, Light +4, Detect +2.

Tools: Cormac will, if possible, have a fire source available to him as a Tool, granting him (depending on the size of the fire) a variable Tool bonus for Fire or Light magic.

Incantations: Flame +2, Resistance (Fire only) +2.

Item of Power: Wand of Volcanic Glass: Adjusted POW +1 for all Fire spells (stacks with Tools).

## 7. RELIGION AND THE “CIRCLE”

Prior to the Abjuration, the World was much like many fantasy realms, with a large, polytheistic, portfolio-oriented pantheon of gods and goddesses. They had their clerics and otherworldly servants, and regularly interacted with the World from their planes of existence.

The Abjuration shut them down completely. It severed the World not only from the demon's home plane, but from all other planes of existence. The gods and goddesses have fallen silent, and faith in them has utterly evaporated. Whether or not the old gods and goddesses are now "dead" is an interesting topic for debate, but they might as well be. They do not answer prayers, cannot interact with the World, and faith in them has been utterly shattered.

Nonetheless, despite the fractured and isolated nature of the World, one new “religion” holds sway throughout the World, the credo of the Circle. “Credo” is probably a misnomer, however, as the particulars of the religion varies wildly from region to region. A few facts appear in common, however.

The worship of the Circle was introduced throughout the World by wandering itinerants about 80 years ago. These itinerants were very charismatic people, who in addition to spreading the worship of the Circle, often brought communities what they were most lacking (food, tools, know-how), thereby insuring a warm welcome.

In each region, they established a shrine (ranging from the simple to elaborate use of pre-Abjuration ruins), and trained a capable and well-respected local in the basics of how to be a lay cleric. Initially, they emphasized that the priest should be part of the community, should travel throughout the region doing good deeds, and should only perform priestly duties part-time, so as to remain part of the flock (and not come to be seen as a slacker in a tough world). Later, the demons tailored the tenets of the Circle

to the problems posed by each given region.

The priests were taught to read and write, instructed in how to effectively mediate disputes, and trained in how to heal (without magic). They were also taught *not* to try and expand the religion, only to ensure its succession, so that it would be seen as a help and never a burden.

Consistently, simple iconography was provided: a Circle representing continuity, regularity, perfection, natural cycles and unity. In no instance does the worship of the Circle advocate change, individualism, violence (except to protect oneself from “strangers” or known “enemies”) or non-orthodox free thinking (literally referred to as “thinking outside of the Circle”).

Beyond this congruence of basic tenets and approaches, there is tailored diversity from region to region. Some regions have elaborate rituals and feast days; others have none. Regions have grafted on a wide variety of belief systems to this basic framework.

Many stories about the origin of the religion abound, beyond how it came to take root in that area. Some say that it is the old, forgotten gods and goddesses, divinely inspiring new beliefs from their fractured, nearly dead state. Some offer no explanation, proclaiming it one of the great mysteries.

The truth is an ugly one. The religion originated in Fallingstar, as a social engineering experiment by Zazeer, an enterprising schemer of a female demon serving as de facto chief social manipulator for the demons of the Majestic Plateau. Zazeer's idea was to mentally condition the populace into acceptance of their status as comparatively docile sheep through the use of the familiar mechanism of religion. As a result, emphasis was placed on orthodoxy, strength through quiet acceptance, sowing discord through promoting the distrust of

strangers, and promoting the importance of religion in ensuring the survival of the isolated community.

Zazeer recognized that the religion would need to have some benefits for the flock to gain acceptance. In order to create a controlled, win/win situation, her agents trained the early priests in how to maintain peace and preserve communities.

In some regions (e.g., Eglantine) the demons directly select and counsel the highest levels of the priesthood. In other regions, the Circle simply spread of its own accord, with the local human leaders recognizing a good idea when they saw one, one which gave an air of legitimacy to their own social control plans. In still other areas (e.g., Fallingstar), the humans genuinely think that they are doing the right thing, and the Circle has become a largely self-catalyzing reaction.

That the religion has been so successful testifies to the need of the post-Abjuration populace for solace. However, the success of the religion has had some unforeseen consequences. With some particularly devout and strong-willed people, especially some with magical aptitude, the false “religion” has become quasi-real. With these folks, the Circle almost seems to answer prayers, and stories of Circle adherents who seem to be “favored” somehow have begun to circulate.



### **Optional Rule—the Faithful**

As an option sure to annoy the demons and result in a campaign where the PCs are constantly on the run from them, some ingénue might be permitted, either at creation or later depending on story line development, to adopt the mantle of the Faithful. The Faithful are persons whose faith in the Circle is so profound that they begin to channel faith-based magic as a special kind of Wild Talent. A Faithful, like an Adept, makes use of magic according to the POW x3 based system above, but with the following differences.

1. The Faithful can either be taken at creation (for a cost of 50 skill points) or later, by banking 50 skill point increases.
2. The Faithful receives 5 bonus points (unlike the 10 received by an Adept), but must allocate all 5 bonus points to one category of Magic (Fire, Healing, etc.).
3. A Faithful may only attempt magic that is consistent with his faith, *i.e.*, something he genuinely believes that the Circle would want. He is also restricted to magic involving his one category of aptitude.
4. A Faithful takes no damage from failing to use magic, but does suffer Graying.
5. A Faithful may receive bonuses from Tools, but only if they are either specific to their type of magic. The “holier” the Tool to the sincere belief of the Faithful, the stronger it is.
6. Because they do not have control over their gift, thinking it divinely inspired, they may not receive any Incantation bonuses. The +3 bonus for being undistracted is available.

## 8. INHABITANTS OF THE WORLD

### a. Humans

Little needs to be said about human appearance and variety. The people of the World vary as widely as real world humans do, in terms of size, shape and appearance. With the exception of the mixed blood, part-Elven humans of Fallingstar, and the rare mortal/demon Overseer hybrids, mixed species characters are unheard of.

### b. Demons

When the last demon dies, the World will be healed.

“Demons” appear in a wide variety of shapes, sizes and (with restrictions) levels of might. They include everything from small, generally humanoid, weaker soldier demons, to cunning demons that look human to the untrained eye, to out and out slimy, alien monstrosities. Frankly, they can be any type of intelligent or unintelligent monster that you want them to be.

The point, however, is that non-human monsters are not “free-range” in *Ashes, to Ashes*. There’s no dragon in that abandoned dungeon, unless you’ve decided that one of the surviving demons was a dragon, and that he’s there for some reason. The human monsters provide most of the antagonists in this setting.

Barring some magical breakthrough, the demons’ numbers are limited. At present, counting the effect of the Abjuration and the general winnowing out of the less careful demons that has occurred in the ensuing 100 years, there are only about 300 demons left. 200 or so are affiliated with the Majestic Plateau, while the remainder belong to splinter groups or pursue solitary agendas.

Of these 300, only about 20% are what a typical fantasy game would consider a “demon”, “devil” or other significantly powerful, intelligent entity. Most of the rest

are minor, semi- or typically intelligent, foot-soldier creatures like ghouls, barrow-wights, ghouls, shadows, imps and the like. The Majestic Plateau is their “World”, in the sense of being one of the few places where they exist openly, but it is split by political and ideological divisions, much like the real World.

Magic and steel are the only things that can really hurt any surviving demon. They know this, and as a result, removing, controlling and suppressing these things are important parts of their existence. It gives them a reason to hunt mages down, and to thwart industry that might result in steel production.



In terms of game mechanics, any sort of demon, devil, intelligent undead, intelligent monster, or other evil thingy might be fairly included in their ranks. Regardless, however, each “demon” will have the following modifications as a result of the Abjuration:

1. Demons cannot teleport, conjure reinforcements, summon creatures, or utilize any other power or ability that depends upon creating something from nothing or having access to, from or through another plane of existence. For all intents and purposes, there are no other planes of existence any longer.

2. Regardless of what sort of Armor a particular demon would enjoy under published rules (whether better or worse), a demon has Armor 10, ineffective against steel or magic. This is as a function of the Abjuration's isolation of the world. Some may have resistance or immunity to certain things like fire or cold, but in addition to the basic 10 Armor with a big chunk, that is all.

3. Regardless of their normal abilities, demons cannot freely reproduce, create "spawn", or breed new demons. That costs an estimated 1,000 souls per spawn to accomplish. Their numbers are finite. (They can, under the right conditions and with the expenditure of "only" about 100 souls, breed with mortal races, creating the semi-mortal "Overseers", but even this is not easy).

4. All demons must eat. They eat people—souls, to be precise. Each demon must eat one soul per year, or wither and perish.

Other than these restrictions, feel free to trot out your favorites to fill the ranks of the "demons." Some of the better positioned demons span a range of types: Zazeer is a fallen angel; Glathnog is an ice devil; the current lord of The Majestic Plateau, Ba'al-Sheol, is extremely secretive but thought to be an immense fire dragon.

What is the demons' place in the World after the Abjuration? That's the big question, and not all of the demons are on the same page. It's their World too--and they would rather rule than be ruled. The war against the mortals continues from the demons' perspective, but now it is a secret war.

Most of the mortal population has never seen a demon, though they are intertwined with mortal culture. The demons will get you if you don't listen to your parents. Mysterious deaths are blamed on demons. It is very difficult to communicate over long distances in a ruined, low-magic world such as the World, so there may be rumors about a city run by demons who take human sacrifices--but most (who don't live in that city) think it is just a tall tale.

The very few people in the know -- the "wise" of the World-- continue the war against the demons because they know that they can eventually win, but most people are just trying to make it through their own day.

Demonic society is based completely on power. If a more powerful demon tells you to do something, you do it or face the immediate consequences. Lesser demons jockey for position with each other and curry the favor of more powerful demons; more powerful demons jockey for position with one another.

The demons think of the mortal races as cattle to be controlled and used. A few (mostly those mortal slaves at The Majestic Plateau itself) are controlled through brute force, but most are controlled through guile and proxies. All of the demons need to eat humans to survive, and they hate that they depend on the lesser races to exist, but that is the way things are.

The demons are theoretically immortal. They can wait 10,000 years if need be to accomplish any goal. Faster would be better, but they can enslave their herd using dogma and tricks over a hundred generations if that is the best way.

On the other hand, they know that they must force the action with the humans, or eventually die out. Unless the demons do something to change the world, eventually they are doomed, and all but the most stupid know it. Having been cut off from their plane, they cannot run, cannot summon reinforcements, and cannot reliably increase their numbers. And if they get killed, they stay dead. Every time a demon is killed (either by the humans, or by demon on demon bickering), the humans are one measurable step closer to winning.

The demons only hope is, perversely enough, to reverse the Abjuration. The Abjuration will succeed, eventually, in ridding the World of demons, when the last demon dies. In the meantime, however, suffering ensues. The demons are fighting a holding pattern and have been stymied as to



how to reverse the Abjuration.

So what have the demons done in the wake of the Falling to attempt to ensure their own survival?

1. The first priority, all agreed, was to secure their position. The only things that can really hurt them are magic and steel, and now, such things can hurt *all* of the demons, from the lowliest to the mightiest.

All agreed that any pockets of magic and steel must be sought out and suppressed or destroyed, within reasonable parameters of risk. They miss a few pockets, but are always looking.

They know, in an intellectual way, that they should fortify themselves and stick together, but demons being demons, they fight with each other, split off, and vie for power. So while there is a center of demonic power at The Majestic Plateau, several factions (stupidly) split off and tried (or continue to try) to do their own thing, be it rival sects, private projects, or just running amok. Most of the ones who decided to run amok have been killed in the past several decades, so most of the ones who are left tend to be the more thoughtful ones.

2. Second, the demons work to keep the enemy (humans and other mortals) from being a threat. This is accomplished by sowing discord, confusion and isolation in areas that they cannot control directly, and by establishing a few areas (the Majestic Plateau, the “Farm”) where they are in direct control. This is best done by keeping the human sheep in small, isolated pockets, discouraging travel and trade, and crushing (or appropriating) magic when it appears.

The best, and least risky, way to do this is through proxies and propaganda. Use the humans. Make deals with the corrupt ones. For most people, demons are legends, rumors, and superstitions to be used to instigate fear. The fear of magic is probably the most pervasive of these beliefs, which just happens to work out well for the demons. Likewise, fear of travel, of strangers, and of change all work in their

interest. Even if they cannot personally get out there and enslave the humans, they can enslave minds, beliefs, and souls from afar, preparing the way for future days. A village that turns in an emerging young wizard might be rewarded (via proxy) with some seeds and an old goat. Foster distrust among humans!

The demons will usually only get directly involved when necessary, always weighing the pros and cons. That village over there thinks that there aren't any demons and are trying to rally under a banner, huh? Well, send in some mercenaries, but still try to keep the demons out of sight. Only if nothing else works should a demon make an appearance to terrify the populace. But do not do this too often, or it will backfire by galvanizing resistance and deflating the demons' status as myth.

3. Third, the demons sought to secure a long term food supply. This means a steady, safe, uninterrupted supply of human souls, since that is what they "eat". A demon must consume one soul per year just to survive.

For any demon with any ambition or political aspirations, however, mere survival is not nearly enough. Far more souls are needed for foul demon magic (such as breeding, and experiments with how to reverse the Abjuration). As a result, the demons cannot just kill all the humans: there are not enough demons to be certain of success in such an endeavor, and then what would the demons eat? And how would they then power whatever fell magic that will let them escape this World?

As a result, the demons are happy if the humans are alive, breeding, and disorganized. To them, managing the humans is exactly like breeding sheep: you have to manage the size of the herd, and if any of the rams get too ornery, you neuter them. In fact, the one fertile area left in the World, which the demons have put under their direct control is jokingly called the “Farm.” Most of the time, though, you just let the sheep graze, and use hounds to herd them, as long as they don't try to escape the

pen.

4. A subject of considerable debate among the demons is *whether* to figure out a way to reverse the Abjuration. Not all the demons are on the same page in this regard. Some want to reverse the Abjuration so that they can pursue fresh conquest and battle. Some think that they are doing pretty well, and all that they need to do is to figure out a way not to be killable.

The demons are the ultimate threat in an Abjuration campaign. Although they are the primary sources of conflict, a good *Ashes, to Ashes* campaign unravels their existence and motives like a mystery novel. Someone is pulling the strings and keeping the World on a negative track, but who?

### c. Halflings.

Halflings are the only non-human race with any significant visibility post-Abjuration, but even they are extremely scarce.

Before the Abjuration, the Halflings were not an uncommon sight in the World, as itinerant traders, scamps and rogues. However, they never settled outside their home valley in the south, a region known as the Hearth. The Hearth was utterly obliterated in the Abjuration, and a vast desert (the "Dells") now includes the area where the Hearth once was.

The bulk of the Halflings were killed in the Abjuration; the only survivors were those daring the ongoing war to travel, and they were few. Female Halflings, who less commonly traveled than the males, were in particularly short supply after the Abjuration. A few dozen Halflings survived the Abjuration, and only about 10 of those were female.

Given how badly their population base was shattered, Halfling culture has actually done a good job of surviving and adjusting in the past 100 years. Some far-sighted Halfling leaders realized that, as the first item of business, they needed to figure out how there would be more Halflings. This meant establishing a safe, trustworthy place where

children could be raised.

New Hearth was set up in a remote part of the world, on the edge of the Crannoch, in the ruined Sunken City of Doreset. It was accessible by sea, yet remote from other people. Legends and rumors were spread about how it was haunted by spirits, and the Halflings made sure that their secret stayed safe.

Only the (very scarce) female Halflings know where the New Hearth is, and they are indoctrinated from birth to believe that the secret is worth dying for. Female Halflings who are captured almost always commit suicide immediately, to keep the secret safe. People who come too close to the Sunken City are at the mercy of Halfling snipers.

Female Halflings who discover that they are pregnant slip away to New Hearth to bear their children, taking great pains not to be followed. New Hearth is staffed by elderly Halflings who have grown tired of traveling the world; once they retire to New Hearth, they cannot leave, to minimize the risk of being followed.



Male Halflings know that such a place exists, but not where it is. Halfling children, at the age of 1, are led out of New Hearth by their mothers, who give them into the care of their fathers. All Halflings are indoctrinated at an early age never to harm a

Halfling child, as the propagation of their species literally depends on it. If one Halfling kills another, he is honor bound to adopt that Halfling's children. Harming a female Halfling in any way is likewise a great crime against, and among, the Halflings.

Halflings have no industry; their numbers are too scarce and they have no land apart from New Hearth. They wander the World and live by their wits. They are rogues, thieves, tinkers, traders and scavengers, constantly moving, constantly trading, constantly seeking new sources of easy wealth. They care nothing about humans, except as temporary business partners, but can be deeply caring about each other.

Their society has developed a nihilistic, almost racist, "us against them" mentality. Most Halflings that a PLAYER would encounter would be Chaotic and Evil or if the PLAYERS are lucky, Neutral in outlook. Your typical Halfling has had the good indoctrinated out of him by the desperation of his upbringing. Although they can be oddly caring to those they trust, they value secrecy and loyalty and generally only trust each other.

There are now perhaps 500 Halflings in the world, although most that would circulate too far in the World would be male. The closer one gets to the Crannoch, the more likely one is to meet a female.

One thing that you do not have to worry about, if you are in the know, is a Halfling working for the demons (at least knowingly). They hate the demons, if for no other reason than they are not Halflings.

#### **d. Elves.**

If there are any Elves left in the world, they are insane. It has been a very long time since there has been any confirmed sighting of a full blooded Elf.



Prior to the Abjuration, Elves were much as they are in most fantasy settings: Long lived beings, fundamentally good, masters of magic, woodcraft and the arts, tied to nature. They were ephemeral, mysterious, wise, inscrutable, and sylvan.

Half-Elves or families with Elven blood in their veins were not unheard of, and the royal family of Fallingstar was openly part Elven in heritage.

More than any other race, however, Elves were tied to the World, spiritually as well as magically. The Abjuration destroyed them utterly. All of them were driven quite mad, and even those humans with Elven heritage went mad in proportion to the amount of Elven blood they possessed.

Elven civilization is no more, period. Except for ancient ruins and sites of power, it is gone. There are no Elven cities. The closest thing that one can find to Elven culture is some places in northern Fallingstar, where rumors of Elf sightings, roughly comparable to Sasquatch sightings, persist.

It stands to reason that a few Elves, given their longevity of several hundred years, might still be eking out some kind of pathetic existence in the woods, assuming that whatever brand of madness that inflicted a particular Elf did not set him against others violently, or result in his death by starvation. The stories bear a few similarities: disheveled, filthy shadows--sometimes displaying strange powers--with toothy grins.



**e. Dwarves.**

Before the Abjuration, Dwarves were one of the most powerful races in the World. Their dominion of the mountains was unquestioned, their prowess in battle was feared, and their skills with stone and metal were unparalleled.

They spread their knowledge and crafts across the World, stood against the tides of evil, and were the friends of all civilized races. Their contribution to (and losses in) the war against the demons was the greatest of the non-human races.

The Dwarves once possessed an uncanny bond with the World, never forgetting an underground path once tread. A dwarf could visit a cavern and retrace his steps decades later. It was because of this gift that they could navigate the countless paths above and below the mountains without markings. This gift allowed the Dwarven cities nestled beneath the mountains to be accessible only to their own kind - others trying to find them soon found themselves lost.

But when the Abjuration was brought down, two things occurred that fundamentally altered the Dwarves. The first was the sundering of the World, which shattered most of their cities and their underground network. The second was the loss of their ability to retrace their steps.

Mountains that had stood for eons toppled and shifted, crushing most of the underground Dwarven cities outright and stranding those that survived. Long-tread paths once taken for granted either no longer existed, or were suddenly unfamiliar. With their gift gone, it was impossible for the Dwarves to find their way in their own tunnels, which they had intentionally made twisting and unmarked to confuse other races.

A few Dwarven cities close to the surface survived, as did some Dwarves who were roaming the World. But the Dwarven race is now a faint shadow of what it once was. On the other hand, they are in much better shape than the Elves. The surviving

Dwarves tend to be possessed with one of three basic mindsets in the post-Abjuration World:



Most have resigned themselves to the fact that their race is doomed to extinction, but want to go out swinging, taking as many surviving demons with them as possible. The Dwarves tend to be obsessed with their own (lost) history and unity, so tales of the demons are still well known. Unfortunately, there are very few Dwarves left to do anything about it, and they are (mostly) confined to remote areas or isolated underground pockets.

Some have decided that they must try to keep their race alive at all costs, and have secluded themselves. These are mostly females (which account for less than 20% of the surviving Dwarves).

A few blame the humans for their fate. These Dwarves exist only for revenge and spite. It is rumored that some have even joined forces with demons on occasion, with a goal of punishing and ultimately eradicating the humans. (The demons want no such thing, of course, but are happy to make use of a few misguided Dwarves). A few such Dwarves live at the Majestic Plateau, overseeing the other mortal slaves

and serving as palace guards for the demons.

The most likely Dwarven settlement that the PLAYERS might encounter would be that of Hrelgar, self-styled King of the Dwarves. Hrelgar's Kingdom is a subterranean outpost, accessible from a cave in the western mountains of Eglantine. The fact that there are Dwarves nearby is no secret locally in Eglantine, as a few come out to trade periodically.

Hrelgar (male dwarf, Neutral, Lawful) is a stern isolationist dedicated to protecting his people from harm at almost any cost. He has no use for demons (which he believes exist), but has been known to engage in carefully negotiated deals with humans able to work fire and earth (magically or otherwise), and to have few scruples in who he trades with. Most of his people tend to be Neutral or Neutral and Lawful in outlook.

Hrelgar's "Kingdom" is a marginally self-sufficient enclave of about 200 Dwarves. It was once a minor trading outpost of the much larger Dwarven fiefdom of Hammer-Ring. Hammer-Ring may (or may not) still exist somewhere beyond an utterly collapsed tunnel. Hrelgar gave up on excavating the tunnel out long ago, when 200 yards of digging produced no sign of progress, and indeed, started hitting solid rock.

#### **f. The Overseers.**

The Overseers are not naturally occurring creatures. They are soulless, potentially immortal, demon/human or demon/Dwarf hybrids that result from magically-assisted breeding projects undertaken by certain demons at the expense of mortal slaves. Mortals and demons generally do not breed true (at least not since the Abjuration), but early on, demonic experimenters hit upon a formula whereby a viable hybrid could be engineered--with the expenditure of approximately 100 souls. From a magical as well as a resource management perspective, that is a lot of souls to create one being.

On the other hand, a certain number of souls could reliably be harvested from The Majestic Plateau's breeding pens each year,

without losing any demons. In fact, souls earmarked for the large number of stupid demons who died during early the shaking-out of demonic society were allocated to the project.

Although the subject was (and still is not) free from debate, the demons have managed to breed, over the course of 100 years, about 100 hybrids, known as the Overseers. Typically, a female demon and very often, one of the evil male Dwarves residing at the Majestic Plateau, serve as parents, with the pregnancy guaranteed by the sacrifices.

#### **The Overseers**

STR 22 DEX 11 INT 13 CON 16 APP 7 POW 13 SIZ 22 EDU 11 Move: 8 Hits: 19.

**Damage Bonus:** +2d6.

**Allegiance Tendencies:** Evil, Lawful.

**Skills:** Climb (40%), Command (25%), Dodge (50%), Grapple (50%), Insight (55%), Listen (50%), Navigate (50%), OCCULT (55%), Research (Streetwise) (55%), Sense (40%), Spot (50%), Strategy (30%), Survival (new) (75%), Swim (25%), Throw (35%), Track (50%)

#### **Attacks:**

Huge Mace, 70%, 2d6+db, crushing.

Brawl 70%, 1d3+db, crushing.

Sling, 70%, 1d8, 80 yards, crushing, 1 shot, cannot parry

**Defenses:** Armor 5 (ineffective vs. magic or steel).

Large round shield, 70%, 1d4+db, knockback, Armor 22 (must parry).

Because the Overseers can breed true with humans or other mortals (the result being a brutish, deformed, ugly mortal with a soul), they can help fill The Majestic Plateau's slave ranks. Finally, they are either immortal or at least very long-lived (none has died from old age in the 90 years or so since they started being bred).

Statistics given are for base Overseers. They will have additional skills appropriate to their rank, experience and function. These functions include naval patrols and border watches, strike forces, trainers, marines and guards, or even aristocrats (the Dukes at The “Farm”)

Although they do not seem like much (and, in a normal fantasy campaign, they would not be much) of a challenge, the Overseers have proven inordinately valuable to the demons. They give the demons a “stick” to terrorize the humans if it becomes necessary, for a cognizable price of 100 souls each. And they have been taught to leverage their advantages: human-level intelligence, organization, large size, capacity for intimidation, and utter ruthlessness.

The Overseers are large, scary monsters that a peasant is not going to stand up to, while at the same time not provoking the same kind of visceral reaction that, say, something undead or obviously infernal would. In addition, they have inherited part of their demonic parent’s resistance to normal damage. Without steel weapons or magic, even a gang of 100 peasants can be wiped out by a typical task force of 6-8 Overseers.

They serve as the demons’ troopers, guards and elite commandos. If a Reaper needs to teach some particularly difficult humans an overt lesson, a gang of the Overseers is usually the first resort to back him up. And the Overseers delight in teaching these lessons; part of their culture is a standing bet about who can wreak the worst atrocity on the rare occasions that they are permitted to do so.

Overseers are usually between 8 and 9 feet tall, weigh in at about 400 pounds of lean muscle, and look like overgrown Dwarves, with various demonic aspects depending on their parentage. They are well trained combatants, and fight with their brains. They are immune to fear and unafraid of death. They can be killed, but are otherwise potentially immortal.



If someone is actually able to stand up to a gang of Overseers, that serves as a sort of tripwire for the demons to take a human threat seriously.

## 9. ORGANIZATIONS

### 1. General Notes on Organizations.

There are four guild organizations in the World, who partly fill the role of heroes as best they can. These are the *Heroes of Old*, knights-errant who adhere to an old storybook code of chivalry; *the Paired*, stern healers whose faith in each other, in the absence of the gods, empowers their healing; *the Coursers*, wandering performers and traders who dare the roads of the World; and the *Brotherhood of the Raven*, searchers for secrets who work (they think) toward the reestablishment of a center of learning.

Each of these organizations has prerequisites. Each organization also has a few other things in common: a credo, a way of communicating with one another, and a guild structure. Finally, members gain both duties to fulfill and special benefits upon initiation, and may gain additional benefits depending on achievement of storyline goals.

**Credo:** Each organization has a simple credo, *i.e.*, a mission statement, and a set of rules that a member must adhere to, on pain of punishment and/or expulsion. Each requires a formal vow to adhere to the credo upon initiation (one of the prerequisites for joining). The credo may or may not require a certain degree of secrecy of its adherents. Each credo is described in each organization's section.

**Code:** Each organization has a way of recognizing other members. These range from the overt (the Heroes of Old's manner of dress and use of chivalrous titles) to the extremely covert (the birds used by the Brotherhood of the Raven).

**Guild Structure:** Each organization is organized according to variations on classic cell conspiracy models, so as to limit damage should any member of the organization be attacked or compromised. Direct contacts between organization

members are rare in each case, but for different reasons.

The Heroes of Olds' credo generally has them working alone or in small groups to avoid being compromised by the demons. The Brotherhood of the Raven is not militaristic, and encouraged by their credo to work separately. The Paired are extremely scarce. The Coursers, more than any other, enjoy a certain friendly esprit de corps, but they keep moving and are themselves scarce. Only when a member must be silenced for breaking the credo will the top cell of an organization move multiple operatives toward one goal (elimination of that threat).

Each member of any of the organizations in good standing can expect that a fellow member of the organization will help him, within reason and the framework of their mission. The Heroes of Olds' code of chivalry requires that they risk life and limb to help a fellow Hero; the others will generally try to help short of life and limb.

### 1. The Heroes of Old.

The Heroes of Old adhere to what they *think* is the old creed of a group of pre-Abjuration heroes known as the Silver Knights. They are a group of knights-errant sworn to one another, to uphold their code of conduct, and who are devoted to one goal: eradicating the world of demons.

The Heroes are the only truly organized resistance in the World to the demons, because they are the only organization that unabashedly believes, for certain, that they exist. They look for demonic works, and overthrow them when and where they find them. Their credo allows them to take a long view and not throw their lives away needlessly; but they know that ten of their lives are worth one dead demon. As sidelights: they seek out and acquire lore about the demons; seek to promote general order and justice throughout the World; and

try to repair, acquire or promote the making of steel weapons and armor with which to fight the demons.

The Heroes, setting aside Adepts, are the most dangerous threat to the reign of the demons, because they know too much. As a result, from the demons' perspective, the Heroes of Old need to be killed, without exception. As a result of their need to be killed, the Heroes rigidly maintain their cell structure, communicating in secret and only gathering in force when the opportunity to eliminate a demon arises.

The origin of the Heroes is important to an understanding of what makes them tick. While pouring through a ruined library about fifty years ago, the founder of the order, one Polemachus (now St. Polemachus) came upon what he thought was a historical account of a group of heroes known as the Silver Knights. These Knights were brave warriors, clad all in steel, who wielded their shining swords against dragons and all manner of evil beings, preserved by their great faith in the gods.

Polemachus, who was a man of great conviction and one of the earliest (innocent) priests of the Circle, encountered a very minor, and not very smart, demon while searching through these same ruins. He managed to kill it, almost by accident, with a broken sword hilt. Taking this event as a sign, he began to recruit men and women to emulate these knights of yore, passing out bits and pieces of armor and steel he found at a nearby battle site. If he could kill a demon with a broken bit of the good old days, then so could others whose hearts were true. As the gods of old had guided the Silver Knights, so would faith in the Circle guide his Heroes of Old.

Sadly, Polemachus was killed almost immediately thereafter by a more competent demon, but his first squire, Jon (now Polemachus II) took up his cause. Polemachus II is the current head of the order ("Seneschal") today (male human, Good, Lawful), overseeing the Heroes in his dotage from the isolation of the Moot in the

Crannoch.

The Silver Knights never really existed. Polemachus had found a book of children's fairy tales. But this is not important, because the Heroes firmly believe to the contrary.



The Heroes are often, but not always, motivated by a strong faith in the Circle, as well. You could not tell such a Knight that the Circle is a fiction; to them, the Circle is real and among the senior members of the order, their faith has tangible effects.

The existence of the Heroes is an open (though not well known) fact. They do not hide it; in fact, each Hero hopes that by advertising themselves and their mission, the demons will rise to the bait. The demons are not that stupid (for the most part), however. What secrets the Heroes do have are wrapped up in their cell structure, which is zealously guarded. A Hero who is captured by a demon knows that he must kill himself, and quickly.

To join the Heroes, one must take service as a Squire to a senior Hero. One must be pure of heart, truly believe in demons and their existence, and be willing to swear (out loud, verbatim, in a game session) the Hero's Oath:



**The Heroes' Oath:**

-Demons exist, their numbers are finite, and they must be eradicated for the World to heal;

-One must strive to do justice, meaning to treat all fairly and according to his own merits;

-One must be benevolent and strive to help those in need;

One must be brave and not shrink from danger;

-One must respect one's fellow Heroes and do whatever is right and just to aid them, even at risk to one's own life;

-One must be honest, except when dealing with demons or their suspected agents, in which case deceit is acceptable;

-One must not seek glory for one's self, but must further the aims of the Order and purge the demons from the World;

-One must treat one's Squire as one would wish to be treated oneself; and

-One must be loyal to the Order.

Violation of the Oath results in anathema: the Hero is hunted down, stripped of his armor and weapons, branded (figuratively and literally) as a traitor, and cast out into the World. If the Oath is violated by knowingly providing aid and comfort to the demons, the penalty is death; there is no greater crime.

The Heroes are overseen by the Seneschal, who resides in the Crannoch at the Moot. Communications with members are by code and bird, routed down a complicated and roundabout cell structure. Each Hero knows how to send a message up the chain, and down the chain, and (apart from their immediate working group) knows how to contact one other Hero, anonymously. This has saved the organization numerous times, as Heroes are captured, fail to kill themselves quickly enough, and are tortured

for information by the demons or their proxies.

The life of a Hero of Old is dangerous, glorious and often short. They go through Squires like a certain fictitious rock band goes through drummers. One does not have to be a great warrior to join the Heroes; it is sufficient that one be pure of heart, truly believe that the demons exist, and be willing to lay down your life to rid the World of them. As a result, Heroes sometimes get in over their heads in things they lack the skill to handle.

Service as a Squire lasts until the sponsoring Hero deems him blooded. At this point, the Squire may strike out on his own, although in some cases they continue to work together. More often, it lasts until the Squire is killed, or the Hero is killed, at which point the Seneschal typically knights the Squire not long afterwards to take his mentor's place.

All Heroes, once they graduate from Squirehood, are referred to as "Ser" or "Lady." The tales of the Silver Knights included women in their ranks, so the Heroes are quite egalitarian in that regard.

A Hero is expected to put himself where he is most needed, do what is most needed, and strive to do his best. Some settle in an area and try to develop steel production or govern; some wander and fight evil; and some plan and scheme to combat demonic plots (or suspected demonic plots).

For the most part, they are left to set their own agendas, as long as they are generally correct. The Seneschal corrects those who are demonstrably in error, and coordinates members' (rare and dangerous) desires for backup from other Heroes.

**Game Rule Information:**

**Prerequisites:** To be initiated as a Squire, a Hero of Old must be dubbed by another Hero of Old; must truly believe in demons (either from experience or out of sheer blind faith), and be willing to swear the Oath. The Oath is only given to those who are pure of

heart. There are no other requirements, including with respect to skill at arms.

**Alignment:** To be sworn in as a Hero of Old, one would have to behave in a fashion consistent with being Good for a sufficient period of time to convince the sponsoring Hero of Old of one's good intentions. One then enters service with that Hero as his Squire. Sometimes this demonstration can consist of one noble act of chivalry directly witnessed by the Hero, combined with a good reputation. However, the Heroes have no magical means of ascertaining one's true nature, although the most senior Heroes seem to be able to sense evil.

Anyone revealed to be evil in intent is ousted and either declared anathema or hunted down anyway, so the Heroes sometimes err on the side of doubt when dubbing new Squires.

**Organization Benefits.** There are five levels of organization benefits available to the Heroes of Old, dependent on storyline progress: Squire, Knighthood, Senior Knighthood, Know the Score, and Holiness.

**Squire:** A Hero of Old is indoctrinated into the lore and lifestyle of the Heroes. He goes through a period of basic combat training, is taught the rudiments of the Heroes of Old's skills, and then enters into an apprenticeship with a Hero of Old.

The apprenticeship ends when he has proven himself "worthy" of full Knighthood in the eyes of his Hero, or when the his sponsoring Hero dies should he take up his sponsor's cause.

A Squire gains a great many practical bonuses in exchange for his service:

***Weapon and Shield Proficiency:*** A Hero of Old, as part of his service as a Squire, is taught shield use and the use of both the sling and a random martial weapon. This will correspond to any martial weapon bestowed upon them, otherwise, the mace is taught by default, as an easy to build weapon that is effective in the hands of a skilled user. Many Heroes without steel

martial weapons rely on their maces, often built ball-and-chain style with a scrap of iron as the business end. A Squire gains +10% to use of a shield and whatever type of weapon may be bestowed on him (otherwise, +10% in Mace).

***Token:*** A Squire also receives a piece of equipment from before the Abjuration. These are scarce, and only one is given to a Hero of Old during his entire life. The equipment must be sent for from the Seneschal (except in the case where a dying Hero dubs someone on his deathbed to carry on his quest—a not uncommon occurrence—in which case the new Squire receives what the dying Hero had). What turns up tends to be a bit random. Roll a d4, as follows:

- 1: shield (any type from the Shield table, Ancient and Medieval Shields in the BRP Rules Set);
- 2: a good piece of steel armor (but only one part of a suit);
- 3-4: a good steel martial or simple weapon of a random type.

If a piece of armor is received, it may be from any part of the body, but will be sufficient to grant the recipient Armor 1.

If a weapon is received, it will be steel, and probably the nicest thing the Squire has ever seen. (The weapons or gear of fallen Heroes of Old, if they are recovered and not passed on, are borne back through the cell structure, to the Seneschal for redistribution).

Once the Squire progresses to full Knighthood at second level, the Hero of Old is often known by reference to his token equipment (*i.e.*, Ser David of the Axe, Lady Guin of the Vambrace).

This is not to say that a Hero of Old who is lucky enough to garner the resources to make armor and weapons, or who finds armor or weapons, cannot use them. Indeed, they are encouraged to do so. But such treasures are rare after the Abjuration.

***Indoctrination:*** Upon initiation, a Squire

gains 50 additional skill points, which must be spent evenly (5 points) in each of the following skills: Command, Craft (Armor-smith), Craft (Weapon-smith), Etiquette, Insight, History, Occult, Religion, Status, and Strategy. Thus, every Hero of Old is taught something about demons, weapon-smithing, armor-smithing, etc. from day one.

**Knighthood:** Once service as a Squire is complete (determined by the storyline), a Hero of Old gains the honorific “Ser” or “Lady” and is deemed a full-fledged Hero of Old, able to set his own agenda for promoting the aims of the order.

If the Hero of Old’s Token item was a weapon, the Hero of Old gains (through dint of practice) an additional +10% in the use of that weapon. If it was a piece of armor, the Hero of Old gains an additional Armor 1, through developing a fighting style that maximizes its skillful use. If it was a shield, the Hero of Old gains an additional +10% in its use.

**Senior Knight:** A Hero of Old advances to Senior Knighthood when he has, in the opinion of the KEEPER, acquired sufficient Status as a Hero, or when he has killed a demon.

A Senior Knight gains the right to (and is expected to) take on a Squire of his own. A Squire will be administered the Oath by the PLAYER Hero of Old (make the PLAYER read it out loud!), and serve the Hero of Old until such time as the Hero of Old deems him fully blooded (bearing in mind that Heroes are sworn to be fair and honest with the Squire). Each Hero of Old has only one Squire at a time; when one dies or advances, another is to be recruited.

A Squire is a henchman; the Hero of Old must contribute to his upkeep and is honor-bound to treat him well to the best of his ability. The Squire will, of course, receive his own Token from the Seneschal. The KEEPER is encouraged to have Squires join the Hero of Old from the storyline, and to generate their statistics accordingly.

A Squire should not be some schnook

generated just for the purpose of filling the Squire’s boots. The Squire should be someone who is convinced by the Hero of Old to take up the cause. Indeed, advancement to Senior Knight should generally be conditioned upon successfully convincing an NPC to take up the Squire’s cause within the storyline.

**Know the Score:** When a Senior Knight distinguishes himself sufficiently (Status) to call himself to the attention of the Seneschal, a message will arrive from the Moot.

The Hero of Old is required to undertake a pilgrimage to the Moot at the Crannoch, traveling in secret and taking the utmost pains not to be followed, to meet with the Seneschal. The route will be roundabout and will place both problems that the Seneschal wants to be addressed, and possibly a temptation or two, in the Senior Knight’s path. Subsequent messages will lead the Senior Knight on his journey. He must come alone on the final leg of the journey; this is a good opportunity for a solo adventure.

The Seneschal maintains a small fortified house at the Moot, complete with a secret armory.



**The Seneschal’s Hall at the Moot (and Likely, the Nicest Thing the Hero Has Ever Seen).**

A Hero of Old spends a month with the Seneschal learning about the history of the Order, and generally, the Abjuration. After completion of this pilgrimage, the Hero of

Old gains a free, additional +10% ranks in Occult, History and Religion. In addition, a Hero of Old's primary weapon will be blessed by the Seneschal, and thereafter do an additional 1 point of damage against demons *and be treated as magic for purposes of bypassing the demon's Armor, even though it does not register as such to magic detection.*

**Holiness:** At this highest rank, a Hero of Old's faith in his mission and self-confidence evolves to the point where he actually gains quasi-supernatural abilities. The KEEPER, before bestowing this rank, should determine that, within the story, the Hero of Old's faith has progressed to the point where such powers might logically manifest themselves. Ask yourself what miracle the Hero has witnessed to give him faith in victory. Such persons are rare indeed. However, if and when it happens, the Hero gains the Faithful magical ability without the 50 skill point price.

#### **Sample Hero of Old:**

**Lady Ermgarde of the Dagger:** Lady Ermgarde is a true hero: brave, patient, kind, selfless and determined. Originally from the western shores of Eglantine, she became a true believer when a gang of Overseers led by an imp was sent to slaughter her family so as to "discourage" them from their persistent seafaring efforts. Only she escaped. So she *knows*, unlike most, that there are still demons.

Since joining the Heroes, she has focused her attention on the Great Road through Eglantine, seeking to keep it open and right whatever wrongs she encounters. Lady Ermgarde cuts an impressive figure; she wears livery of bright blue (made from dyes from the sea), rides a palfrey horse (something of a nag, but better than nothing), and fights with a blessed, shining steel dirk.

While still beautiful, she bears many battle scars and has a hard look about her. Lady Ermgarde lives a dangerous life, and despite her best efforts, seems to have had poor luck

with her squires. She is presently looking for another.

#### **Lady Ermgarde of the Dagger**

STR 15 DEX 15 INT 14 CON 17 APP 15  
POW 14 SIZ 13 EDU 8 Hits: 15 Age: 27.

**Damage Bonus:** +1d4.

**Allegiance Tendencies:** Good, Lawful.

**Skills:** *Accounting (10%)*, Appraise (15%), *Archaeology (05%)*, Art (05%), Astronomy (05%), Bargain (35%), Brawl (65%), Climb (50%), Command (45%), Craft (Armor-smithing) (25%), Craft (Weapon-smithing) (25%), Disguise (01%), Dodge (55%), Etiquette (55%), Fast Talk (25%), Fine Manipulation (05%), First Aid (55%), Gaming (INT + POW%), Grapple (25%), Hide (40%), History (25%), Insight (45%), Jump (45%), *Law (05%)*, Listen (55%), Martial Arts (01%), MEDICINE (01%), Navigate (60%), OCCULT (05%), Perform (25%), Persuade (55%), *Pharmacy (05%)*, *Pilot Boat (21%)*, Religion (new) (40%), RESEARCH (LIBRARY USE) (01%), Research (Streetwise) (55%), *Ride Horse (35%)*, Sense (30%), Spot (55%), *Status (55%)*, Stealth (40%), Strategy (33%), Survival (new) (70%), Swim (25%), Teach (40%), Throw (45%), Track (60%).

#### **Attacks:**

Dagger, blessed, steel, 86%, 1d4+2+db (+1 vs. demons), impaling, 15 HP.

Spear, steel-tipped, 55%, 1d6+1+db, impaling, 15 HP.

Sling, 56%, 1d8 db, 80 yards, crushing, cannot parry.

**Defenses:** Armor 4 (studded leather and helmet)

Round Shield, 70%, 1d3+db, knockback, Armor 20 (must parry).

Deity: Circle.

Gear: Studded leather armor & wooden shield, spear, sling, dagger (blessed, steel), good quality traveling and camping gear, palfrey horse ("Rodney"), text of advice and sayings of St. Polemachus.

Wealth: 8 (people love her so much that she, her squire or her horse rarely want for anything).

## **2. The Paired**

The Paired are a truly strange group. The prestige class is only available to *two* PLAYERS working in tandem, both of whom must join at the same time.

Magic in the World runs haywire, and if two people who are sufficiently devoted to each other, they can sometimes tap into the stuff of magic and learn to use it to help other people as well as each other. This pair bond may give one, or both, of them a natural empathy for the healing arts. Such Paired healers, when identified, are approached by a “guild” and offered membership. (The Paired “guild” is actually much closer to a mandatory union with zero tolerance for “scabs”).

The guild shares knowledge with its members and (unfortunately) refuses to share it outside the organization. Many in the higher levels of the organization see themselves as “chosen” or “special”, and while the Paired are by definition loyal to those they are Paired with, different Pairs often do not get along. The guild requires that members charge for their services and pay a tithe to the masters of the organization, and it zealously polices and protects the membership.

The Paired work as wandering healers for hire. Their credo is to offer (in exchange for pay) a level of medical knowledge far beyond that which is commonly known in the World. (They are not found in Fallingstar, but are well-known elsewhere). They also seek to uncover lost healing arts and share them—but only within their membership.

Many are all business when dealing with their charges, not wasting time on idle chitchat. It is almost as if the Paired are so devoted to each other that they have trouble with interacting with others. Despite the doors that their empathy opens, the empathy tends to be very focused. As a result, NPC

Paired rarely interact openly with anyone other than themselves. More often, they pitch a green pavilion tent on the outskirts of town to announce that they have arrived, and wait and see if anyone approaches them to secure their services.

The price for a given service is left to the discretion of each Pair, but they are encouraged to make it sting. Depending on the moral outlook of the Pair in question, this heavy-handed approach to the price of healing carries a variety of rationales.

Those of Neutral or Evil outlook (and there are a few of these) justify it in terms of charging what the market will bear for valuable services that they have spent their whole lives developing. Those of Good outlook have a more complex justification for their prices. The more they charge, the more they can travel and focus on their art. The more they travel, the more art they can uncover from the ruins of the World, and the better off everyone is in the long run. And besides, in a truly exceptional case, they have discretion as to how to make the price sting—they can accept service in lieu of payment.

It occasionally happened that someone tries to force a Pair to heal for free, or tries to stiff a Pair on payment, or even tries to enslave or press-gang a Pair. People largely quit doing that when they realized that this only upped the price the next time, or got their entire town blacklisted or, upon occasion, even attacked and burned. Once a Pair blacklists a town, no Pair will visit the town (at least not without risking the wrath of the guild).

The number of Paired is quite small. It is estimated that there are only a dozen Pairs in the entirety of the World, at most.

The Paired have no headquarters, but every other winter solstice, they gather at a central location (agreed to at the previous gathering) and hold a moot to trade knowledge and technique.

There is no hierarchy, but there is one Pair (known as the Healing Hands) who is

appointed to be the point of contact for the others. The Healing Hands are a Pair that has become too old to travel any longer; they tend to settle in a larger settlement where they can receive messages about any outrages committed against a Pair, and distribute messages of blacklisting against any offending settlement. The current Healing Hands reside in Crystal Lake in Eglantine.



To join the guild, one will have to come to the attention of the guild for one's extraordinary skill in healing. A Pair will eventually approach the PLAYER to investigate whether the person is just a good healer, or displays the signs of magical empathy with another that means they are able to make some subtle use of magic and be a potentially miraculous healer. If the latter is the case, they offer membership.

Most healers, by that point in their career, will have heard of the Paired, and few refuse. Those who do refuse may find themselves sanctioned, with sanctions ranging from a cold-shouldered lack of cooperation (from Good-inclined Pairs) to violence and coercion (from Evil-inclined Pairs).

### **Game Rule Information:**

**Prerequisites:** To take a level as Paired, a PLAYER must possess 60% in First Aid and come to the attention of an existing member of the guild. The PLAYER must also have a very strong pair bond (parent/child, close siblings, true love) with another PLAYER

who constantly accompanies them. Finally, the person with whom the pair bond exists must also join at the same time. The companion need not have the requisite skill percentages, but such non-healer companions cannot advance in the organization unless they subsequently acquire the requisite skill set. Both of the Paired must also agree to the credo of the Paired and swear to obey their laws under penalty of severe sanction.

The Paired are by and large a Lawful organization which does not bend the rules except where their self-interest or some lawfully-viewed greater good would dictate. At the same time, many (but not all) have a compassionate streak that led them to healing in the first place. Most Paired are Lawful and either Good or Neutral. Some Lawful and Evil or Neutral and Evil Paired exist; these are the functional equivalent of misanthropic doctors who went to medical school simply to maximize their income. Bickering Pairs nonetheless bound by love or blood are not uncommon.

**Class Abilities.** The Paired have three degrees of advancement: Guild, Expert and Miracle Worker.

**Guild:** Both newly initiated Paired gains a number of benefits.

First, a Paired healer (*i.e.*, one with the requisite skill percentages) gains the right to wield the *symbol of office*. This greatly raises the practical stakes associated with anyone trying to harm or molest her (at least on the part of rational villagers). She gains +30% to Persuade when attempting to convince mortals to not harm the Paired; this does not apply to other Pairs.

Second, the Paired become mystically, *empathically linked* with one another. Each is automatically aware of the hit points, state of physical well-being, and general mental state (happy, sad, mortal terror) of the other. First Aid checks made by one toward the other (only) receive a +50% bonus due to this empathy.

Finally, the Pair (when together) receives a

**Wealth increase to 7**, reflecting their new status and its ability to generate income. (If their Wealth is already at 7 or higher, disregard this).

If a Paired healer's companion dies, they can make no further progress in the organization until they find a new person to be Paired with, and that person takes the necessary oath (and forms the necessary relationship with the healer. It only works if it is genuine).

**Expert Healer:** Advancement to Expert Healer occurs in the KEEPER's discretion, but generally, the healer part of the Paired should have 95% in First Aid. At this point, a Paired healer has become so practiced in the healing arts that anyone under her care receives the maximum possible benefit from her successful attention.

In addition, a Paired healer can use First Aid to treat any poison or disease suffered by her Paired companion, as well as by herself, as though the Medicine skill were in play. (While this is a far cry from immunity to poison, it doesn't hurt, and the Paired generally scoff at most non-monster generated diseases at least, as far as their personal health is concerned).

**Miracle Worker:** While the dead cannot be raised in *Ashes, to Ashes*, through dint of long membership and trading with other Paired, a Paired healer gains a sufficient knowledge of medicine that she can attempt to resuscitate the very recently deceased. The Keeper should hold this advancement back for truly momentous story events, such as the discovery of a lost medical library. In addition, and at a minimum, the Paired must travel to one of the winter solstice meetings and (in game) trade for rare medical knowledge.

When this occurs, the healer gains Medicine at an initial rank of 05%, but the skill is now "unlocked" and can be progressed in.

In addition, First Aid can now be used to attempt to revive a character that has fallen below 0 hit points for up to 10 rounds. Hey, it's better than nothing.



### **Sample Paired:**

#### **Sister Joan, Paired with Ronald.**

"Be quiet now and quit that infernal mewling—this is for your own good."

STR 11 DEX 12 INT 16 CON 13 APP 12  
POW 16 SIZ 11 EDU 12 Hits: 12 Age: 38.

**Damage Bonus:** +0.

**Allegiance Tendencies:** Neutral, Lawful.

**Skills:** *Accounting* (20%), Appraise (30%), *Archaeology* (25%), Art (05%), Astronomy (25%), Bargain (65%), Brawl (25%), Climb (40%), Command (05%), Craft (Farming) (35%) Disguise (01%), Dodge (57%), Etiquette (25%), Fast Talk (35%), Fine Manipulation (05%), First Aid (95%), Gaming (INT + POW%), Grapple (25%), Hide (52%), History (37%), Insight (75%), Jump (25%), *Law* (05%), Listen (50%), Martial Arts (01%), MEDICINE (01%), Navigate (56%), OCCULT (25%), Perform (05%), Persuade (66%), *Pharmacy* (23%), *Pilot Boat* (01%), Religion (new) (28%), RESEARCH (LIBRARY USE) (01%), Research (Streetwise) (35%), *Ride Horse* (05%), Sense (40%), Spot (56%), *Status* (45%), Stealth (35%), Strategy (01%), Survival (new) (69%), Swim (25%), Teach (50%), Throw (25%), Track (10%).

#### **Attacks:**

Sling, 58%, 1d8, 80 yards, crushing, 1 shot, cannot parry.

Quarterstaff, 55%, 1d8, crushing, can parry twice vs. attack, 20 HP.

**Defenses:** Armor 2 (leather).

**Special:** Paired Guild, Symbol of Office, Expert Healer.

Deity: The Circle

Gear: Staff, Leather Armor, Healing Kit, Medicinal Herbs, Pavilion Tent.

Wealth: 7.

**Ronald, Paired With Joan.**

STR 13 DEX 13 INT 12 CON 14 APP 14  
POW 12 SIZ 14 EDU 8 Hits: 14 Age: 39.

**Damage Bonus:** +1d4.

**Allegiance Tendencies:** Neutral.

**Skills:** *Accounting* (20%), Appraise (50%), *Archaeology* (05%), Art (05%), Astronomy (05%), Bargain (65%), Brawl (55%), Climb (50%), Command (15%), Craft (Farming) (32%) Disguise (01%), Dodge (62%), Etiquette (25%), Fast Talk (55%), Fine Manipulation (05%), First Aid (45%), Gaming (52%), Grapple (25%), Hide (42%), History (27%), Insight (45%), Jump (45%), *Law* (05%), Listen (58%), Martial Arts (01%), MEDICINE (01%), Navigate (26%), OCCULT (05%), Perform (Sing) (45%), Persuade (36%), *Pharmacy* (05%), *Pilot Boat* (01%), Religion (new) (20%), RESEARCH (LIBRARY USE) (01%), Research (Streetwise) (65%), *Ride Horse* (05%), Sense (30%), Spot (66%), *Status* (40%), Stealth (45%), Strategy (10%), Survival (new) (79%), Swim (25%), Teach (10%), Throw (25%), Track (40%).

**Attacks:**

Sling, 72%, 1d8, 80 yards, crushing, 1 shot, cannot parry.

Mace, 75%, 1d8+2+db, crushing, 20 HP.

**Defenses:** Armor 4 (studded leather + helmet).

Shield, wooden, 50%, 1d3+db, knockback, Armor 12 (must parry).

**Special:** Paired Guild.

Deity: None.

Gear: weapons, armor, thick hide, lots of patience.

Wealth: 7.

**3. The Coursers.**

The Coursers are a group of trade-oriented wanderers who are devoted to bettering the lot of mankind by reinstating commerce and communication within and between regions. They adopt a variety of guises—wandering minstrel, itinerant preacher, pilgrim, caravan guard, merchant trader—and quietly, subtly, try to provide a means of covert communications between towns and regions. They work closely together, often relaying messages or goods, Pony Express style, in an opaque a way as possible.

They are non-hierarchical; a senior Courser often has a few subordinates reporting to him in a region, but many more loose associates over an extended network. However, cell structure is maintained rather assiduously across regions, to minimize damage in case of compromise.

The Coursers are uniformly Good and well-liked. However, unlike the Heroes or the Paired, their existence as a group is not a matter of common knowledge. They often work in conjunction with the Heroes of Old and the Paired, who are more aware of their nature as a society. But often, local leaders or others who use their services simply know of their local Courser as a reliable guide, guard or message carrier.

Coursers are masters of guile, misdirection, and evading capture. Their credo is result oriented—keep your word, keep your secrets, honor your contracts, and work to bring the World closer together. How you go about these things is your business.

Only benevolent people are allowed to join the Coursers, and anyone behaving in an evil, untrustworthy or disreputable fashion are quickly expelled and/or quietly killed. The Coursers, while benevolent, tend to be a bit fatalistic, and think nothing of killing traitors.

The order has a complex, and non-obvious, secret code which revolves around inflection of voice, hand gesture and turn of phrase.



This enables them to spot one another and communicate in code while seeming to have a normal conversation about the weather or last night's revelry.

The Coursers are likewise a small organization, perhaps numbering a couple dozen across the World, clustered in each region around a senior Courier and operating as a loose network. Coursers exact minimal charges over cost for their services, as they are a mission-driven organization.

Coursers are encouraged to learn a skill that both justifies their wanderings as well as pays their way. Many have some skill as entertainers, especially story-tellers, as a result.

Joining the Coursers is perhaps the easiest of any of the organizations. You simply have to meet a Courier, earn his trust to the point where he confides in you, convince him to show you the ropes, and swear to abide by the group's laws. They are more interested in character and determination; they figure that they can teach you how to do what you need to do. Coursers work closely together and enjoy a close sense of brotherhood; one will readily come to another's aid.

#### **Game Rule Information:**

**Prerequisites:** A Courier must be recommended by another Courier. This will happen if the Courier is impressed by the PLAYER's resourcefulness and good character. The Courier must also agree to the credo of the order and swear to obey its principles.

**Class Abilities:** There are three stages in a Courier's advancement: *Brother*, *Well-Travelled*, and *Famous*.

**Brother:** The newly initiated Courier gains significant advantages.

First, as long as he is plying his trade and can call on the help of at least one other Courier, his effective Wealth will not drop below 4; a Courier can always count on his brothers and sisters.

Second, a Courier gains +2 to his base movement rate, reflecting his ability to efficiently cover distances.

Third, a Courier gains +20% to any skill checks involving rate, distance or duration of travel, as they are accustomed to long days on the road.

Fourth, a Courier can, through using their speaking code, spot another Courier and convey basic information to him in an open conversation, without non-Coursers thinking they discussed anything of any import.

Finally, a Courier gains +25% to any skill check where the purpose of the check is to make it appear as though the Courier is not trespassing or a stranger; techniques for blending in are drilled into their heads from the outset.

**Well-Travelled:** When the Keeper determines that the Courier is well-travelled and well-liked enough to have an extensive network of friends and operatives, he gains +25% to Research (Streetwise) and +25% to Status.

**Famous:** Eventually, if a Courier gains a folk-hero level reputation for tweaking the nose of authority, then the Courier gains +1 to APP, +20% to Fast Talk, and +20% to Persuade.

#### **Sample Courier:**

**Roger of the Plaid:** Roger of the Plaid works the Great Road in Eglantine. He wanders constantly from village to village, entertaining each one he enters with an evening of song and stories for a place to sleep and whatever they will pay.

Roger does not hold himself out as a guide, messenger or carrier—to do so might draw unwelcome attention—but he seems to “accidentally” stumble on or volunteer for such tasks fairly often, because he “happens to be going that way.” He wears checked wool (hence his nickname) and is a young fellow with a scraggly beard and piercing green eyes.



### Roger of the Plaid

STR 13 DEX 13 INT 12 CON 14 APP 14  
POW 12 SIZ 14 EDU 8 Hits: 14 Age: 19.

**Damage Bonus:** +1d4.

**Allegiance Tendencies:** Good, Chaotic.

**Skills:** *Accounting (05%)*, Appraise (55%), *Archaeology (25%)*, Art (05%), Astronomy (05%), Bargain (65%), Brawl (55%), Climb (55%), Command (05%), Craft (Farming) (32%) Disguise (45%), Dodge (68%), Etiquette (25%), Fast Talk (55%), Fine Manipulation (25%), First Aid (35%), Gaming (58%), Grapple (25%), Hide (42%), History (20%), Insight (49%), Jump (48%), *Law (05%)*, Listen (56%), Martial Arts (01%), MEDICINE (01%), Navigate (66%), OCCULT (05%), Perform (Music) (65%), Persuade (58%), *Pharmacy (05%)*, *Pilot Boat (01%)*, Religion (new) (20%), RESEARCH (LIBRARY USE) (01%), Research (Streetwise) (68%), *Ride Horse (05%)*, Sense (37%), Spot (48%), *Status (44%)*, Stealth (65%), Strategy (15%), Survival (new) (62%), Swim (25%), Teach (10%), Throw (25%), Track (34%).

### **Attacks:**

Sling, 72%, 1d8, 80 yards, crushing, 1 shot, cannot parry.

Quarterstaff, 65%, 1d8+db, crushing, can parry twice vs. attack, 20 HP.

**Defenses:** Armor 2 (leather).

**Special:** Brother (Coursers).

Deity: None.

Gear: weapons, armor, bagpipes, traveling gear.

Wealth: 5.

### **4. The Brotherhood of the Raven.**

The Brotherhood of the Raven is the most secretive of the four organizations. You do not find the Brotherhood; instead, they find you. You do not join them; they initiate you, if and when they feel like it.

The Brotherhood of the Raven is (supposedly) a highly decentralized group of academicians and Brothers of obscure knowledge and lost lore. Their credo is to scour the ruins of the World, regain lost knowledge, add to a great Library compiling pre-Abjuration knowledge (including magical knowledge), and make a fair profit on what they find. Each Brother is, by definition, a leading expert on something, be it a region, a person, a particular legend, an art, or a science.

The Brotherhood is also the most conspiratorial of the organizations. The existence of the Brotherhood, and what they do, is considered a secret. Brothers portray themselves as free agent scholars; at best with a like-minded colleague or two some place. Indeed, the only way to join the Brotherhood is to be invited by another member, and the approval for this comes from the top of the organization.

Each Brother has the ability to nominate someone who appears to meet the knowledge qualifications; namely, an expert level of knowledge about a particular subject which no other Brother presently has. This expertise can be on any subject, from

Weather magic, to the history of the Sunken City, to the air speed velocity of swallows.

If a Brother notices you, he must first communicate with the Librarian as to whether you should be approached for membership (without telling you what he is doing). Often, people are refused for no apparent reason (they are carefully vetted and the pros and cons of indoctrination weighed the Librarian, including for one's ability to keep a secret).



*If* the Librarian approves contact, the Brother will explain the rules and benefits to you, and offer you membership. If you refuse, there are (supposedly) no hard feelings.

The problem is that the Librarian is the Hooded One, one of the higher ranking demons at the Majestic Plateau, and the Brotherhood is *really* his largely oblivious, volunteer spy network.

In reality, if you refuse, you are treated like you had refused an offer to join a terrorist organization. The demons may try to stage your death to keep you quiet. Alternatively,

they may decide to take a “wait and see” attitude toward a passed candidate—following him to see what he knows, and perhaps killing him if he blabs about the offer or seems to know too much.

If a candidate accepts, he must supposedly be “confirmed” by the Library. None are refused by the Library at that point, however, because the decision has already been made. But this charade gives the demons an opportunity to gauge how the candidate reacts.

It is not uncommon for someone to be admitted later after being turned down initially, as their store of knowledge increases, or an existing Brother with expertise in that area dies.

The secrets and rules that the Brothers have are absolutely sacrosanct. Violation of any rule is punishable by death, and every Brother is oath bound to hunt down and kill anyone who violates one of the rules. The rules are as follows:

1. A Brother does not advertise the fact that he is a Brother, except to someone he is trying to recruit, and only then after approval from the Library.
2. A Brother is expected to specialize in one particular kind of knowledge and to keep written notes about his research in that area.
3. When a Brother is admitted to membership, he is expected to declare himself an expert in a particular matter, and submit a written summary of what he knows about a particular topic. This must be broadly complete, and cannot contain any deliberate errors.

This summary is more of a resume than an encyclopedia entry; it is intended to give a broad outline of the kinds of things that the person knows within his area of expertise. The Library sometimes asks for a detailed written report on a particular topic; compliance with such a request is mandatory.

4. A Brother is expected to continue to research his topic and submit a report on

whatever new (previously unknown) things he learns to the Library. Failure to report to the Library on new discoveries in one's area of expertise is punishable by death.

5. *Anything* pertaining to magic, be it Incantations, Tools, discovery of ruins of academies, discovery of Adepts, items of power, or anything else, must be reported in detail to the Library *regardless* of one's area of expertise. Failure is punishable by death.

6. Brothers are expected to identify potential recruits to the Library for consideration.

7. Brothers are encouraged to report anything else they deem significant to the Librarian. It is known that, occasionally, the Librarian rewards particularly juicy bits of information or identification of a quality new recruit by issuing a marker, which can be redeemed for the answer to any one question, even on many topics normally off limits.

8. Except as a special reward, one does not ask the Library for information on anything related to magic or the activities of another Brother. Information about magic is deemed dangerous, and its dissemination is, in theory, tightly controlled on a "need to know" basis by the Library.

No one in the Brotherhood knows where the Library is. That question is always, completely, off limits, no matter what and no matter how many markers someone has. A few arrogantly pretend that they know, but in fact, no one does.

The Brotherhood is told that the location of the Library must be kept secret, so that the wise members of the Brotherhood's High Council can ensure that the accumulated wisdom is kept safe from those who would abuse it. New Brothers are also told that the High Council consists of three senior Brothers who are chosen by surviving members of the Council upon the death of a Council member. The Council is headed by the senior-most Brother, known as the Librarian.

Communication with the Library is accomplished *solely* by a trained, preternaturally intelligent raven, which arrives from the Library upon initiation of a new Brother.

New Brothers are also told of the existence of the Proctor, an agent of the Library who occasionally appears when the interests of the Brotherhood as a whole are threatened. The Proctor's orders must be obeyed without question. They are also told of certain Senior Brothers, who speak with the Proctor's authority.



The Brotherhood is an ongoing project orchestrated by the demons of The Majestic Plateau to spy on events in the World, and quietly amass magical and other knowledge. There really is a Library; it is at The Majestic Plateau. There is no Council, only a group of intellectually-inclined demons led by the Hooded One, who trade in information. The Proctor is their field agent, an Adept under the Ritual of Obedience

Any Brother who shows signs of becoming clued in to the true nature of the Brotherhood is at risk for elimination; often such people are identified as having been "elevated to the Council." Unless they would like to swear the Ritual of Obedience and come under the thrall of the Majestic Plateau, of course.

#### **Game Rule Information:**

**Prerequisites:** To be initiated, a Brother must possess 50% skill in some Knowledge field; come to the attention of another

Brother; be literate; and (most importantly) possess information of the sort that the demons might (erring on the side of inclusiveness) want to learn more about. The Brother must also agree to the credo of the Brotherhood and swear to obey their laws.

Initially, Brothers can be of any outlook (Good, Evil, or anywhere in between). Brothers range from kindly sages to ruthless information brokers to eccentric experts in the obscure. At the management levels, they tend to be both Lawful enough to follow orders without much question and Evil enough to do ruthless things to maintain discipline in the Brotherhood.

**Class Abilities:** There are only two stages in a Brother's development: **Brotherhood** and **Management**.

**Brotherhood:** Unwittingly working for the demons has a lot of perks.

**Ravens:** At first level, the Brother gains a raven familiar. The raven imparts +15% to its master's Appraise checks, +15% to Sense, Spot Hidden and Listen if the raven is present, and shares an empathic link to its master, as long as they are within one mile of each other.

The raven's purpose, as new Brothers are told, is to carry messages to and from the Library. A new recruit is taught to feed and care for his raven.

The raven, in fact, is a magical creature that will behave as a normal, loyal familiar unless commanded to do otherwise by the demons running the Library—to whom they actually answer. A raven can unerringly find its master, and unless physical access is totally blocked (something beyond the normal jail cell), they can (and will) reach him and assist in an escape.

**Library Card:** A Brother is required to report on research and discoveries in his area of expertise to the Library, as well as report on potential recruits, magical knowledge, and anything else deemed particularly newsworthy. In exchange, the

raven brings back news that the Library wants that particular Brother to have, and will occasionally bring answers to questions submitted to the Library.

Unless the answer would pose a direct threat to the location or operations of the Library (and other demon operations may or may not do so, given inter-demon rivalries), the information given will usually be honestly given, though possibly mistaken.

Each Brother is only given one raven. In order to ask a question of the Library, the Brother must reduce the question to writing and dispatch the raven. A raven's round trip to the Library takes 1 day in each direction, for each 100 miles away from The Majestic Plateau that the Brother is. (The ravens are tireless magical beings capable of great travel). An amount of information (possibly including more than one question) can be asked of up to 100 written words.

The likelihood of success for any particular question requires a check against a base chance of 90%. In essence, the Library is, well, a library, and the demons make a RESEARCH (LIBRARY USE) check on behalf of the Brother. Apply adjustments as you see fit, and apply Fumbles, Critical Successes, and other appropriate modifiers. The KEEPER may add or subtract circumstance bonuses if the demons or another Brother might have stumbled across the answer previously and reported it; or if no one has uncovered it from the ruins.

The travel time of the raven, and the judicious use of circumstance bonuses, should keep this question-asking ability from being excessively abused, but it is intended as a powerful ability with a steep price in terms of having the demons of the Majestic Plateau keep tabs on the PLAYERS. Answers, like questions, should not exceed a total of 100 words per raven trip.

The Library does not (usually) answer questions concerning the use of magic or the activities of other Brothers. However, the provision of especially valuable information

(which, again, takes one's raven temporarily out of circulation) may result in the receipt of a figurative "marker" with the Librarian. A marker may be turned in for a question about magic (such as a Tool, Incantation, or the like), in the KEEPER'S discretion; a fully researched answer (automatic success if the information is available); or information on the activities of another Brother. The most common ways in which to get a marker are to successfully initiate a new recruit or to, in essence, "swap" new magical knowledge for knowledge already in the Library.

There is, incidentally, no prohibition against a Brother buying, selling, trading, or freely distributing any knowledge—including magical knowledge—with other people. The Library has made a determination that this approach would be counterproductive, and make it seem too much like they had an ulterior motive other than building knowledge stores. As a result, all that they require is that they be dealt in, although particularly troublesome Brothers can always just be assassinated.

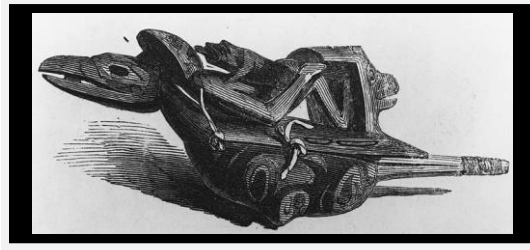
**Management:** When the time comes for a Brother to potentially advance, a Brother will receive an unexpected visit from the Proctor. This is not a good thing; it will generally happen if the Brother develops a ruthless reputation. Someone who is reputed as a dealmaker, who always keeps his word, and is not too squeamish about killing squealers is the sort of candidate they are looking for.

A special, white raven will come, telling the Brother to be somewhere in an amount of time that requires him to make haste to get there from where he is now. He must come alone. The meeting place is utterly random. The Proctor always arrives first.

The Proctor will give the Brother a test, usually involving eliminating a squealer. The demons will watch (secretly). If the Brother performs the way that they want him to (ruthlessly and quietly), then they may deem him worthy for management.

If the Brother is passed to management, the Proctor will bestow upon him an emblem of seniority (a club carved into the figure of a raven), and spend a month tutoring the new Master Brother in how to bypass pre-Abjuration security systems such as locks, secret doors, and the like.

The *emblem*, if displayed, will denote the bearer as a Master Brother and increase the Status of the Brother when dealing with another Brother by 30%.



**Aha!:** A Master Brother has become sufficiently practiced in the art of exploring ruins and places where hidden knowledge is kept that he gains +10% to his Listen, Spot and Sense rolls, and automatically gets a Spot roll to notice a secret or hidden door merely by passing within 5' of one.

In addition, the Master Brother receives 30 bonus skill percentages to distribute between Stealth, Fine Manipulation, and Spot as he sees fit.

Master Brothers are the ones who might be told of the activity of a "traitorous" brother, be given the names of three other Brothers to form a posse, and sent to eliminate the "traitor." The demons only "make" people as Master Brothers that they think they likely can trust to take on this kind of task, and whom they can trust with teaching how to bypass magical traps and then sharing the information found. This means that they are looking for generally lawful people who are not too strongly Good in outlook.

**Vision:** The Brother becomes so adept in exploring the ruins of the World that he gains the ability to see in the dark. In addition, the Brother may re-roll one check per day, involving any effort to Spot something.

**Sample Brother of the Raven:**

**James Atwater:** James is a bandit captain in the northern Eglantine region. A few years ago, while chasing a caravan into some ruins, he uncovered an ancient stairway leading down into the depths of the earth. It turned out to be an ancient temple to one of the gods of old.

James has thoroughly explored and looted the temple and has gained extensive knowledge of the temple complex and religion of this forgotten god. James based his bandit group in these secure and water-supplied ruins, and was surprised to be contacted recently with an offer to join the Brotherhood and trade his knowledge of the ruins for other information. He accepted, and has been fed valuable information about choice banditry targets in exchange.

**James Atwater, Bandit Captain**

STR 15 DEX 18 INT 16 CON 15 APP 14  
POW 12 SIZ 15 EDU 9 Hits: 15 Age: 28.

**Damage Bonus:** +1d4.

**Allegiance Tendencies:** Evil, Chaotic.

**Skills:** *Accounting* (10%), Appraise (35%), *Archaeology* (10%), Art (05%), Astronomy (05%), Bargain (35%), Brawl (55%), Climb (60%), Command (25%), Craft (Farmer) (25%) Disguise (01%), Dodge (55%), Etiquette (05%), Fast Talk (25%), Fine Manipulation (05%), First Aid (35%), Gaming (INT + POW%), Grapple (25%),

Hide (60%), History (05%), Insight (25%), Jump (35%), Knowledge (Eglantine Temple Ruins) 50%, *Law* (05%), Listen (55%), Martial Arts (01%), MEDICINE (01%), Navigate (45%), OCCULT (05%), Perform (05%), Persuade (35%), *Pharmacy* (05%), *Pilot Boat* (01%), Religion (new) (10%), RESEARCH (LIBRARY USE) (01%), Research (Streetwise) (55%), *Ride Horse* (05%), Sense (39%), Spot (65%), *Status* (20%), Stealth (73%), Strategy (21%), Survival (new) (74%), Swim (25%), Teach (10%), Throw (35%), Track (50%).

**Attacks:**

Spear, 62%, 1d6+1+db, impaling, 15 HP.

Sling, 71%, 1d8, 80 yards, crushing, cannot parry.

**Defenses:** Armor 3 (leather and helmet)

Shield, wicker & leather, 45%, 1d2+db, knockback, Armor 10 (must parry).

**Special:** Brother of the Raven.

Deity: Circle.

Gear: Leather armor & shield, various lost religious writings, raven familiar.

Wealth: 8 (controls valuable ruins and self-sufficient bandit camp with about 10 bandits at his command).

## 10. GAZETTEER—FALLINGSTAR

*The thing about gold is, you can't eat it, and it makes a lousy axe.—* Thorgirr of Wexford, Fallingstar Town Magistrate and pundit, on the subject of the paperweight on his desk.

### 1. Overview.

**Population:** ~5,000; humans 99%; demons <1%; others unknown.

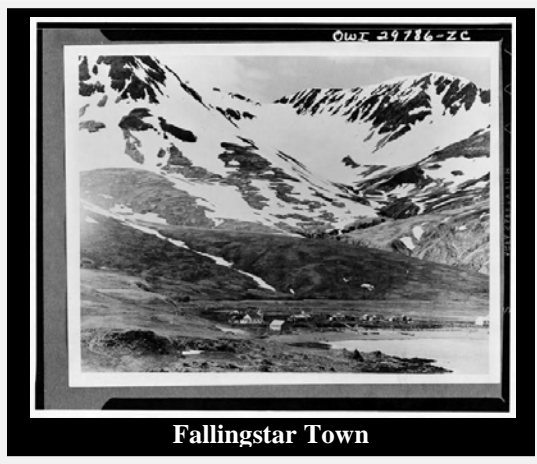
**Government:** Clan-based in most villages; anarchic between villages; magistrate selected by consensus in Fallingstar Town.

**Important Entities:** Sonner Sand, Captain of the Fallingstar Town Guard (Good, Lawful); Thorgirr of Wexford, Magistrate in Fallingstar Town (Neutral, Lawful); Roland of Evenstar, Bandit Prophet (Evil, Chaotic);

**Imports:** None (see below).

**Exports:** Enslaved Adepts (see below).

**General Outlook:** Neutral, Chaotic; more Lawful in Fallingstar Town.



100 years ago, the Kingdom of Fallingstar was a disproportionately wealthy, long-established, stable city-state. Situated in a sub-arctic region in the northwest of the World, it controlled an area roughly 250 miles east to west and 150 miles north to south. Its wealth and stability was owed to its easily defensible position, access to rich

veins of scarce, high-quality ore, and resulting positive trade surplus.

Now things are different. The Abjuration has shattered the kingdom, reversed its fortunes, and turned it the population into a cursed, neurotic, beaten mass of humanity. This, combined with its penchant for producing potential Adepts, has resulted in its status as a laboratory for the surviving demons' psychological warfare experiments.

### 2. History.

The people of Fallingstar are consumed with their own, better past, so a thorough understanding of the World's history from their unique perspective is necessary to understand its present. (At least, that is what they will tell you as they seek your sympathy).

100 years ago, Fallingstar followed a constitutional monarchy form of government, and was a wealthy place where people from across the World studied magic, music, poetry and the arts. Fallingstar's good fortune was thought by many to be due to a Blessing upon the Mortrands, the long-ruling noble house. Legend has it that many millennia ago, Roland Mortrand, the founder of the noble house, married Evensha Fallingstar, an Elven princess. As a wedding present, her father, a great Elven sorcerer, blessed the House of Mortrand as follows:

"Wealthy and blessed shall your people be;  
Evensha and Roland, husband and wife;  
Until the stars rain down from the sky;  
Should ye live a noble life."

The legend is true, and the Blessing was a subtle, magical benefit, working in the background, that kept Fallingstar's fortunes on the right track. Sadly, even such well-intentioned Blessings can have a backswing when the World goes to Hell.

War erupted to the south 100 years ago. The



traitor wizard Scaraband staged a coup in the Kingdom of Eglantine to the south, backed by a huge horde of powerful demons. Fallingstar, as a center of magical study, sent many wizards to combat the invasion of Scaraband's demon horde.

News from the front was bad. The demons were winning, Eglantine had fallen, and history has it that when the most senior wizards at the Academy left to make a final stand against the demons, they did so knowing that they would never return.

Shortly after this, a great cataclysm shook Fallingstar. Sages believe that this was the result of what has become known as the Abjuration, a desperate attempt to isolate the World so that no more demons could invade it. Rivers changed their course, mountains rose, and civilization was shattered.

Most of the populace of Fallingstar died in a mass extinction event, and the Elves who had so long lived side-by-side with the humans of Fallingstar seemingly vanished altogether. Some stories say that some of the stars themselves fell from the sky. What is certain is that the stars now visible in the sky are far fewer in number than those depicted in surviving books of astronomy.

Superstitious folk claim that the well-known Blessing was broken and twisted then, and since the stars have "fallen from the sky," the land is now anything but wealthy. These superstitions are, sadly, correct. In addition to being broken and depopulated, the once vibrant society of Fallingstar is now Cursed. The people (correctly) feel as though they are now living out the bad end of a good wish; the Curse now works subtly in the background to inhibit social progress.

To make matters worse, since the Abjuration "brought down the stars", literally, few places have suffered more at the direct hands of the remaining, cunning demons than Fallingstar. People widely believe that some demons survived the Abjuration, and there are stories that they have been seen occasionally in Fallingstar in the past century. Again, these beliefs are true. The

demons (almost always working through multiple tiers of patsies and proxies) work to keep the populace not just suppressed, but depressed, culling the herd of potential leaders and potential wizards, and disrupting any efforts to reopen the mines and gain ore that might be turned into effective weapons against the demons.

Anyone descended from the Mortrand family (and there are many left) is at least slightly insane. That this is because they all have some minute amount of Elven blood that is now tainted by the destruction of the land to which the Elves were bound is commonly (and accurately) suspected.

There are definitely relics of the past age to be found in the ruins of Fallingstar, but Fallingstar is closely watched closely by the demons and their proxies, the Reapers. This is because it still produces a disproportionately high number of Adepts.

### **3. Geography, Culture, and Daily Life.**

#### **a. Geography and Climate**

Fallingstar is located in a sub-arctic tundra/northern forest ecosystem, although the Abjuration superimposed large areas of frozen badlands over the terrain, to the extent that they dominate the landscape.

The country is subdivided by steep, nearly impassable mountains into the southern Lower Valley and the northern Higher Valley, connected only by the once-redoubtable (and now ruined) Mortrand's Gate, a fortified river gorge and pass providing the only feasible access between north and south.

Even prior to the Abjuration, the weather and geography in Fallingstar were challenging. It was wealthy because of its stability, ore resources and Blessing, not its capacity for food production. It was a highly mountainous region, with large areas of permafrost and willow tundra, and sparse areas of scrubby pine and alder forest. Weather tended to be cool, and the mountains and lack of forestation contributed to temperature extremes. Spring



and fall temperatures typically ranged in the 50s Fahrenheit. In the summer, with the long northern days, temperatures would reach into the 80s, while below zero temperatures were typical throughout the winters.

Arable land was available, but only in a narrow band following the streams and in the Lower Valley. Fallingstar nonetheless had an unnaturally large population, buoyed by exports of rare ores, its status as the site of the preeminent Academy of magical study in the World, and supported by food imports from the south. Fallingstar, in the past, enjoyed a very high standard of living by medieval standards.

Since the Abjuration, the weather has gotten much worse, arable land has dwindled further, access to other countries has become nearly impossible, and the sustainable population level has crashed. Although the weather adheres to its prior pattern in a general way, it now changes quickly and violently, and the extremes are far worse. A summer day can go from a scorching 100 degrees Fahrenheit to freezing in a few hours, accompanied by violent winds and devastating storms. In the winter, people hunker down and just try not to die from the extreme cold and ice. Days of -50 Fahrenheit temperatures are now common in wintertime.



Although the region is quite sizable (the road from Trepminster in the southeast to Normark in the northeast runs 230 miles), the sustainable population now totals only

about 5,000 people. Nearly everyone lives in about a dozen scattered villages, which are situated near what patchy arable land and potable water remains. Between these oases of life lie miles and miles of permafrost tundra, tough scrub willow, stunted alder, and frozen rock where the windstorms have eroded away the soil.

Fallingstar Town, situated near a hot spring, sustains a population of about 2,000 people and the only thing resembling a non-subsistence economy. The scattered settlements of Woestmarket, Trepminster, Risemark, the ruins of the Academy, and the Glade each have about 300-500 inhabitants, while the remaining towns and villages each have two hundred or less. There are also occasional trapper and forester outposts of a few hardy souls.

#### **b. Resources and Know-how.**

If the weather is good, people can reliably (but miserably) survive until next year. But ultimately, the weather will win, and they are if not one, then two, crop failures from utter misery. People lack the resources to keep their buildings in good repair against the constant storms and occasional famines. They lack the resources to travel and trade between towns, although a few souls sometimes try.

Fallingstar now has few readily available resources that anyone outside the region would want, even if they could get there. They have stone, ore and precious metals in the mountains, but harvesting them is extremely difficult--they lack many iron tools, and wood to crack stone by fire is scarce. What spotty forests remain are isolated and primarily alder and birch stunted by the frequent weather shifts. While perhaps suitable for fuel, the wood is not good for building. Buildings tend to be of ancient stone or repaired ruins, thatch, or wattle and daub.

Game exists (in the form of typical subarctic animals, such as hares, caribou, bears, fur-bearing animals, grouse, and moose), but it is scarce. The people have to be very

careful not to over-hunt (which, in many years, means no hunting at all). The people's attempts to domesticate cold-resistant animals (chiefly goats) have met with some moderate success, especially around the hot spring near Fallingstar Town. Grain crops, except for barley in the extreme southeast, simply do not grow; the people mostly subsist on cabbages, goats, onions, starchy tubers like turnips, willow shoots, cold weather squash, birch syrup, goat cheese, berries, and what game they can safely take.

Poachers (any non-local caught taking game) are likely to be killed as a threat to survival. The fish died off long ago. Oddly, stinging insects (wasps, hornets, and bees) have flourished despite the cold and unpredictable weather. They tend to be very aggressive, and tales of travelers stung to death by a swarm of wasps are not uncommon. This does, however, also provide the region with a supply of honey and wax. If trade routes to the south could somehow be reopened, this might provide a further source of trade.

Ruined, crumbling towers, mansions, statues, and rotted or plundered art are frequent sights across Fallingstar. The roads are, in those rare patches where they were not destroyed by the Abjuration, excellent, paved, well-engineered, mile-posted, and flat. Often, however, they are dirt tracks following the destroyed old routes, with odd segments of excellent travel.

Fallingstar built itself on its mineral resources; it has a great deal of stone plus placer gold, silver, and copper. The mines in the northwest produced both iron and tin, making Fallingstar a wealthy exporter of metals. The mines collapsed in the Abjuration, and periodic efforts to reopen the mines have met with sabotage, disappearances, collapses, floods, and other mysterious failures.

These mine failures have been partly orchestrated by the demons, but also partly orchestrated by the Curse that now hangs over the region. While gold, silver, and

copper are still accessible, they are of little use in helping people survive on their own. Copper tools and silver fittings are somewhat useful, but of little use in cutting stunted trees or plowing frozen tundra. Gold is considered scrap, as there is no significant trade surplus calling for the use of currency. A sizable nugget does make a decent sling bullet, people agree.

Even trade within the region is extremely hazardous and impractical, mostly due to distance, weather and lawlessness, but people attempt it anyway. Pack animals such as horses and mules simply do not thrive given the weather, and were largely given up long ago. Travel within Fallingstar is thus attempted either on foot or (when possible) downstream via disposable rafts from the east, north and west toward the south (the timber from the rafts is then sold at market). As a result, the only real regional market is in Fallingstar Town, where the rivers converge.

There is one mill in the region, at Miller's Reach, where the water naturally flows fast. However, since there is no grain production in much of Fallingstar, the mill has been adapted to cheese pressing, limited smithing, and distilling alcohol from tubers.



The main trade route out of Fallingstar headed south to Eglantine, and was once a magnificent road beginning at a stunning gate featuring statues of men, women and Elves reaching toward the stars. It was completely destroyed when a new mountain range thrust itself up at the Abjuration. To reach lands to the south is now a harrowing

journey over bitterly cold, high, and treacherous mountains, known as the Ruined Way. Occasional desperate souls nonetheless flee in this direction, although many die from exposure in the effort. The demons (or their minions) actively watch the "Ruined Way," and discourage refugees by spreading stories through proxies exaggerating the "impossibility" of the crossing.

People in Fallingstar tend to dress in skins (including goat leather) and goat woolens, and are prepared for sudden changes in the weather. Wax is used to waterproof clothing. Clothing is well-made; one resource that the people of Fallingstar do still have is know-how.

Armor is virtually non-existent. Most people who might be involved in a fight might have a willow and/or leather shield, a leather or quilted jerkin, and a boiled leather skullcap as protection. (Armor 2 or 3). A staff or cudgel with copper reinforcements, a Sumerian style cast-copper or stone "axe" head (closer to a tomahawk), a wood-tipped, fire hardened, or copper, stone or silver tipped spear or javelin, slings, and rarely, a "knife" from an old hunk of scrap iron no longer tough or large enough for fieldwork, may be used.

Bows are rare, prized possessions, invaluable for hunting game, and made from laminate, bone and sinew (the wood in the region is unsuitable for serious bow work). Bows belong to an entire clan, are extremely valuable for hunting, and the penalty for stealing someone's bow (including by taking it off of them after a fight) is death. The people tend to be skilled slingers, learning to use them to take birds at an early age, and the sling is a very common weapon.

The people know how to smith, but mostly lack the iron to do it, or the tin to make bronze. What leftover iron is found is constantly re-forged into tools at the smithy in Miller's Reach and redistributed through the palace economy at Fallingstar Town; finding a rusty old iron gate at a ruin and bringing it back to town is considered a huge

reason for celebration.

The people are skilled at weaving, spinning, fulling, and surviving their harsh climate. Most are literate, and families teach their own children the basics of reading, writing and farming, in addition to any family trade. Medical knowledge is quite good, and the village healers understand and equate dirt with infection. Healers are able to treat or at least ameliorate most common curable diseases, infections, and survivable wounds.

People refused to burn the ancient libraries out of desperate, stubborn pride, so many families have a random hodgepodge of old books as prized possessions. Most craftsmen live in concentrations in Fallingstar Town/Miller's Reach or Woestmarket, the only places with a sufficiently consistent food surplus to support dedicated craftsmen.

#### **4. Ways and Traditions.**

##### **a. Culture.**

The culture of Fallingstar bears a resemblance to medieval Norse cultures, leavened with a thick ribbon of failure, depression, poverty and shame, and with a touch of madness to add flavor to the mixture.

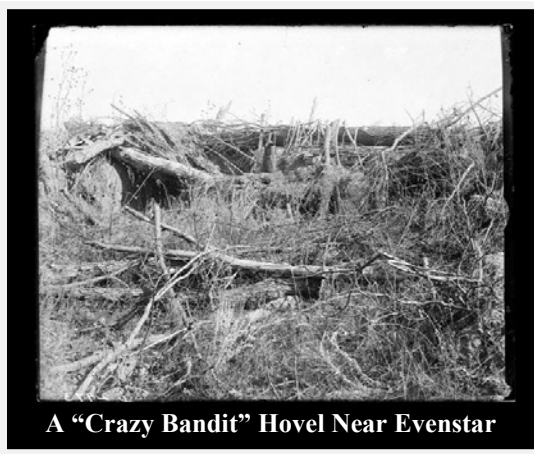
The people of Fallingstar are utterly obsessed with their own history and bygone greatness. The people know how far they have fallen, and they do not like it. If Hell is a state of mind based on a realization of how much better things could be, to the disregard of how good things are now, then Fallingstar is Hell.

Emphasis is placed on values such as courage, self-sufficiency, determination, and generosity. None of these values come easy in a shattered land. Social status is measured by the extent to which one is able to be hospitable and give gifts. Few are able to give gifts comfortably, thanks to the tug of the Curse, the hidden meddling of the demons, and the scarcity of resources. This sticks in the craw of the people like a stale crust of bread. They are ashamed, angry,

and determined to succeed. Yet they keep failing, and this leads to frequent squabbling.

Families or clans stick closely together but feuds tend to erupt between clans, especially over control of arable land and the very limited pasturage. The Fallingstar Town watch spends most of its time trying to keep the farms and pastures operating within the limited length of its effective writ (one day from Fallingstar Town), though it sometimes tries to mediate land disputes outside that area.

Everyone talks about returning to greater things, but this talk usually comes huddled around a smoky fire of dried goat manure, after a third potato vodka and right before the wind blows off some thatch that seemed OK the previous day. The people drink a lot of alcohol, usually vodka from fermented tubers. Many drink entirely too much. The calendar is full of festival days or special observances, which help speed the year along and provide another excuse to blot out the world with vodka.



A "Crazy Bandit" Hovel Near Evenstar

Many of the people are eccentric at best, varying with how much Elven blood they have in their ancestry. Mental illness is a common societal problem. Those outcasts that are unable to behave in a cooperative society are outlawed and turned out into the wilderness, where they usually (but not always) die quickly. Those that tend toward the mean end of crazy may form bandit

groups and raid villages and travelers for what they need. These people are quite disgusting, psychopathic, and would be more dangerous if they were not quite mad.

The people of Fallingstar are, in short:

**Afraid:** Resources are scarce. The weather is deadly. People have to take care of their own. Everyone is a failed harvest or two away from starvation--even though it rarely happens.

**Depressed:** There is no real government or army to protect us. Life is work, with little time to enjoy anything except a drink after it gets dark or when it's too cold to work safely. Best grab what you can while not having your people think ill of you. Have another drink.

**Determined:** Fallingstar was once the greatest realm of all, renowned in song for its architecture, beauty, poetry and art. If only we could get it together, and our luck would turn, we could be again.

**Eccentric:** The King thinks he's a squirrel. So did his father, and his mother. Next holiday, we'll all have a contest to see who can tell the most fantastic story. I know that fermented turnips don't make very good liquor, but I think I can make it work this time.

**Fatalistic:** Everyone dies, it's just a question of when. We are paying the price for the Blessing. That damned fool Thor wants to try and reopen the mines; it is the Circle's way of culling the simple from the herd. Pass the turnips.

**Status Conscious:** "Greetings, stranger. I am Thorgirr of Wexford. We are just about to sup on goat and turnips, please, join us--what, you have trade goods? I assume that you will give your host a fair price...."

#### **b. Religion.**

This is Hell. Just look around. Our once great Kingdom is Cursed, and we struggle to survive. Magic is responsible for the way things are now. Do not worry about the material things; do not fret about what you

cannot change in your lifetime. Live a noble life; survive; and trust that the Circle will reward your nobility after your passing.

That, in a nutshell, is the credo of the Circle as understood in Fallingstar. Eighty years ago, a wandering priest claiming to be from the south, past the Ruined Way, spread this appealing if soporific message throughout Fallingstar. It took root.

People in Fallingstar do not know who or what the Circle is, exactly. There is no creation myth, no dogma, no prescribed rituals, and no iconography (or, if there is, they did not learn of it), simply the Circle. It is a simple philosophy of spirituality, nobility and trust, with a convenient scapegoat: the magically Adept. It helps keep the people calm.

Local vicars (often, in this region at least, innocent and well-intentioned): organize town festivals; say kind words at important points in life (planting, harvest, birth, marriage, death, passage into adulthood); comfort the sick; try to mediate disputes; and keep town records. The High Priest (again, an innocent and well-intentioned fellow) for the region has a “chapel” (a house with a meeting room) in Fallingstar Town, where he recruits, trains and dispatches village vicars.

On the one hand, it is the sort of religion that Fallingstar needs. On the other hand, it is exactly the kind of religion that the demons want: one that eschews material achievement and keeps the population content.

Men and women in their cups like to argue about whether the Circle is real, like the old gods were real, or if someone just made it up. The truth is that no one knows for sure. No one comes back from the dead any more, and when someone prays to the Circle, no one answers like the old gods used to.

But faith, in a World with magic, has value of its own. Some wise men and women have noticed that faith in the Circle allows some magical Adepts to focus their abilities in ways that echo the servants of the old

gods. And perhaps that is enough.

### **c. Names and Appearances.**

The people of Fallingstar are typically be Nordic or Celtic in appearance and tend to have Norse or Celtic-sounding names. Some may appear slightly Elven in appearance, particularly the Mortrands and their close kin.

Sons and daughters of well-known people will go by a Norse-style patronymic (hence, Thora the chandler's daughter would be Thora Chandlersdottir; her brother Sven would be Sven Chandlersson). Members of clans will use their clan affiliation as a surname (hence, Thorgirr of Wexford). The outlying villages tend to be run by clans with the same name as the town; several clans (and members of outlying clans) live in Fallingstar Town proper.

Sample female names: Thora, Freyja, Gerta, Birgit, Lissa, Maire.

Sample male names: Roland, Robert, Sven, Thor, Ulf, Bjerne, Arne

Sample surnames: by town of origin, the Miller, Hill, Sand, Glade, Southmen, Mortrand, Rillin, Gorse, Skyward.

### **d. Other Races.**

There are no other races openly visible in Fallingstar. Many people have some Elven blood in small amounts, and these are easily identifiable by how eccentric their behavior is.

Elves used to live in the region, particularly in the northern community of Evenstar, but they disappeared after the Abjuration. Dwarves, Halflings, and others are simply unknown in Fallingstar, and would tend to be unwelcome for their potential to draw attention.

## **5. Leadership and Governance.**

### **a. Government.**

This is one of Fallingstar's biggest problems--there really aren't any strong, unifying leaders. Society in most places has become clan-based. Clan elders control



each village, with the exception of Fallingstar Town, where each of about a dozen clans is represented on the Althing. The Althing is a council which meets irregularly in Fallingstar Town (usually over drinks on the rare occasions when enough clan leaders are present to bother meeting). The Althing acts only by consensus on matters of general importance and its decrees depend on consensus to be followed.

Consensus is difficult to achieve, often resulting in either inaction or unilateral action by a clan or faction, but the arguments had in the Althing do give some venting to otherwise potentially explosive disagreements.

Everyone pays nominal homage to the King, but since he is quite insane, this homage is truly nominal. To the extent that there is *any* effective centralized authority, it lies in the hands of Sonner Sand, the Captain of the Fallingstar Town guard (Good, Lawful), and Thorgirr of Wexford (Neutral, Lawful), the current Magistrate.

The Magistrate's post is a position which ebbs and shifts with the favor of the Althing, but tends, by consensus, to be given to a learned and trustworthy person who is not tied to closely to any especially powerful clan.

### **b. Palace Economy.**

Fallingstar Town has managed to organize a rudimentary palace economy. Local and traded-in food production generates a sufficient surplus to sustain craftsmen, and a 10% in-kind tithe on all food or trade goods brought in or produced is extracted.

The Magistrate, in addition to being a judge and mediating regional disputes, collects the tithe and uses it to support a warehouse out of which food and goods are redistributed. Manufactured goods are distributed according to a predetermined schedule of value, and each person is only given that amount of a particular type of good that he or his family can use.

(Use the BRP equipment chart to work out

value equivalencies. A truly durable manufactured good that somehow appears in the marketplace, such as a quality steel weapon, a quality iron tool, a load of buildable stone or timber, or a rare consumable luxury, would be extremely rare and would be worth roughly five to ten times what it would be in a normal economy. It also would not be redistributed in kind; if someone brought a steel sword into town for trade, it would go to the watch or be the subject of an argument in the Althing. In addition, things will be valued according to their practical use; a silver brooch is worth the same as a copper one, and a golden axe is worthless).

Thus, if someone brings in x value worth of food, they should expect to be tithed 10% and leave with 90% of x worth of balanced, assorted goods, with some but limited input into how payment is made: they will get some soap, some candles, some oil, some leather, some salt, a balanced assortment of other food, etc. They might be able to wheedle more oil than salt, or some other unbalanced distribution, if they convinced the Magistrate that they need it, and depending on how the stores are running. If you want an extra pair of shoes, you have to convince them that you are in a state of comparative need.



In all, about 200 people are truly supported by the rest in the sense of only rendering services for goods. Things are managed so as to ensure that everyone has what they really need to survive and that crafts are evenly distributed. The skilled craftsmen, guards, Magistrate and other service

providers get modestly more than the farmers and harvesters, but no one lives fabulously.

In terms of what is available, the palace economy supports: one tanner's shop; one clothesmaker's/shoemaker's shop; one fuller's shop; one weaver's shop; a masonry crew; one small temple to the Circle; barracks and manpower for a (foot-mounted) police force of 12 (Neutral, Lawful, armed with spears, leather armor and helmets, slings and clubs); a chandlery; a cooper's shop; a potter's shop; several bakers, butchers and others concerned with food storage and preservation; a decent inn (free for one week, including meals, to those who bring a sizable load of goods subject to tithe); and a (non-magical) healer and apothecary. The tithe also supports the forge/brewery/cheese press at Miller's Reach.

These townspeople tend to be better off than the typical farmer, but wealth is spread rather thinly and equally.



### **c. Law Enforcement.**

The penalty in Fallingstar Town for most serious crimes (any stealing of food or property, poaching, arson, robbery or burglary, or unjustified murder) is death and forfeiture of all property. These matters are considered threats to the orderly survival of the community, and hence are not tolerated.

Lesser crimes are punished at the discretion of the Magistrate, who has to keep the clan

leaders mollified to keep his position. Brawling, assault, kidnapping and other offenses which do not directly threaten the people's ability to survive may be dealt with by fines; outlawry, which allows the offended parties and their friends and families to kill the offender with impunity; sanctioned honor dueling (either to the death or until surrender); and/or the occasional "creative sentence." Magic use is not a crime, although open use of magic will likely get you killed by someone, or run out of town to keep the populace safe.

Elsewhere than Fallingstar Town, the assembled hue and cry serves as judge, jury and executioner, and the open use of magic may well provoke a hue and cry.

Only in Fallingstar Town is there any kind of patrol or organized law enforcement, which responds a day's walk or barge ride in any direction from the center of town and no further. "Law enforcement" beyond the watch's writ is at the whim of the local hue and cry.

## **7. Plot Hooks.**

### **a. Reaction to Magic Use/The Reapers.**

The treatment of magic and spell-casters, and the use of psychological warfare by the demons and their proxies against the populace, are the central focus of role-playing in Fallingstar.

Fallingstar, in part because of the Blessing/Curse and in part because of the high amount of Elven blood in the people, has long produced more than its share of the magically Adept. The greatest school of wizardry in the world, the Academy, was founded thousands of years ago in the remote, northwestern part of the region. Children with magical aptitude from throughout the known World came to study there.

The Academy specialized in the study and practice of defensive and divinatory magic. Even those children who were discovered to only have limited potential were kept and educated in diplomacy and the arts; many of



these went on to become viziers, counselors or other important court figures in this and other countries. Towns that the World sent a child to the Academy would be permitted to attach the suffix "-pride" to their names for 10 years, thus, Crosston might be Crosspride.

The Academy was completely leveled and buried in the Abjuration, although a few ruins remain today. The small, sheltered valley in which the Academy was situated somehow remained unaffected by the Abjuration itself, and the small town which surrounded the Academy remains (although faced by the same challenges as the rest of the region). The easily accessible ruins have long been picked over.



Since the Abjuration, Adepts are still comparatively prevalent in Fallingstar; in a way, even more so. Whereas a tiny fraction of children (perhaps 1 out of 1,000) born in Fallingstar would have displayed magical aptitude before the Abjuration, now it is more like *1 in 10*. Several are born every year. It is as if the stuff of magic was a drinking glass that was dropped, shattering into shards which flew in every direction.

Magic in Fallingstar has always tended to run in families, and this holds true today. However, magical aptitude has become fractured and diluted. Children with great power are rarely seen anymore; rather, wild talents and minor potential Adepts have become increasingly commonplace. And while schools of wizardry are things of the past, still strangers come to take the magically talented away, under the guise of having "selected" them for study elsewhere.

Most communities in Fallingstar that actually, directly feel the presence of the demons feel it in one of two ways: the carrot, or the stick, that they use to ferret out potential magic users.

First, and most often, comes the carrot. Each year, Fallingstar must "tithe" one child for every 1,000 persons in the region to the "service of the Circle" (usually five for the entire region). The process, when it goes forward, is known as the Harvest. The choice is supposedly random; all children are subjected to a lottery. No one knows for certain what happens to Harvested children. Asking the question is discouraged.

Human servants of the Majestic Plateau demons (known as Reapers), skilled in diplomacy, come to collect the Harvest. They are often quite pleasant, and bring random gifts (typically things calculated to keep the local population alive, breathing and docile). Many communities in Fallingstar have Christmas-like festivals to celebrate the Harvest, which occurs at the winter solstice. (Often, the Reapers bring enough food to help the strongest members of the community survive the winter, thereby insuring future Harvests).

Stories abound, of course, about what happens to the children, and what happens if the Reapers are not appeased. The Reapers, if pressed, claim that they are agents of the Circle, and that the Harvest is divinely guided and inspired. Some admit (truthfully) that some worthy, Harvested children go on to become Reapers, whereas others serve the Circle in "other ways."

The Reapers preach the dangers of magic, pointing out (with a grain of truth) that it is magic that is responsible for the sorry state of the World in general, and Fallingstar in particular. The "stain" must be cleansed, for the good of all as well as the children themselves.

The truth is that the lotteries are not random at all. The Reapers, if it comes to it, select children with suspected or demonstrated potential for magic or leadership, to keep the



humans off balance, disorganized and incapable of organized resistance. Usually, these children are eaten by the demons as sustenance.

If the child also demonstrates a potential for evil, they are trained to be Reapers and subjected to the Ritual of Obedience, a demonic spell that twists the child into the willing slave of the demons. Since the recipient of the Ritual must be willing, only children with a predisposition to cruelty end up as Reapers.

The trick is that the Harvest lottery only occurs if enough magically Adept children are not voluntarily turned in to the Reapers for cleansing/re-education each year before the winter solstice. People are led to believe that magically Adept children taken in this way are "cleansed" and relocated for their own safety, to somewhere where they will not be known as magic-tainted and scorned.

People have, for the most part, been so indoctrinated that magic is bad (and, in the case of the all too prevalent wild talents, dangerous) that they actually believe that killing potential Adepts furthers the greater good. This practice provides a perverse incentive to "out" children with magical aptitude to the demons, all the while having the populace think that it is doing the right thing and being rewarded.

This has worked so well that it has been decades since anyone has had to be forcibly chosen by lottery. Magic-using children are turned in, in sufficient numbers to avoid someone having to send some random child away, and the Reapers come by with presents at Harvest time when food is at its most scarce. Ho, ho, ho, and thanks for selling out your own kids. It is all part of herding the human sheep.

The High Priest of the Circle in Fallingstar is not actively involved in these matters. He occupies a role comparable to a local bishop in rural, medieval Spain faced with the activities of the Spanish Inquisition. Nominally they belong to the same Church, but the Reapers are a highly militant,

separate branch of the Church answering only to themselves. He is afraid to quarrel with them, and does not know of any "higher authority" to whom he could ask to rein in their behavior. As a result, he plays along; they do not bother him in his administrative activities, and he does not question their witch-hunting. He does, however, suspect the truth--that such Adepts either join the Reapers or are quietly eliminated for the "greater good."



Second, and quite rarely, the proverbial stick has had to be used. One way in which a community is likely to actually be confronted with a demon, more or less directly, is to hide a child with magical aptitude. Terrible stories abound throughout Fallingstar about communities that tried to stick together and protect a magically Adept child out of a "misguided" sense of love or duty. Those that have been caught are sometimes dealt with quietly, but occasionally, when the demons feel that the humans are getting too uppity, are dealt with in a shocking paroxysm of violence and cruelty, usually by Reaper proxy.

One gruesome story, which "supposedly" took place in Fallingstar Town about twenty years ago, claims that demons ate a magically-Adept child in front of witnesses, and that even the Reapers were powerless to protect them. (This story is partly true. The free-agent demon Glathnog, who personally led a covert expedition to find the concealed child, lost his temper when the child was

able to hurt him, and ate the child in view of certain members of her family. These witnesses had to be eliminated, and there was a certain amount of arson, debauchery and general mayhem accompanying the outburst, particularly toward the family of the girl at issue. The Reapers did not get there in time to deal with the child as usual, and were not about to take on a rogue demon. The Majestic Plateau would like this story suppressed, as it is undermining their passive social control agenda, but the story persists).

Two ways to introduce this facet of life in Fallingstar to the PLAYERS would be:

1. The PLAYERS enter a community which is arguing about what to do with a young girl who has just accidentally manifested her nascent magical ability. The girl's family wants to protect her, some want to lynch her, others want to summon the Reapers to "help" her. The PLAYERS, as strangers, are asked for help in smuggling the girl away. A lynch mob finds this solution unacceptable, and the Reapers are coming.
2. Foreign Adepts will be seen as a threat and a stain that might bring the Reapers (or the Circle knows what) down on Fallingstar. Such people will be asked to leave, and if they do not do so immediately, will be thrown out forcibly, killed, or (depending on the person's connections) reported to the Reapers. All persons within villages and communities may not be of a like mind on this subject, as fear vies with a desire to garner respect through shows of hospitality and the people's slightly barmy preoccupation with past glory.

#### **b. Trading Mission.**

The reaction of most people in Fallingstar to strangers seeking to trade depends entirely on their behavior.

People from elsewhere within Fallingstar are welcome in other communities (unless there is a feud going on that they are involved in). If total strangers have something to trade, and even if they do not, they are welcome as long as they behave themselves and do not

attract attention to the community.

The culture puts great status value on hospitality and gift-giving, so people in a position to be hospitable (and wrangle an advantage) will do so. Gifts are expected in return, of course, or hospitality will quickly dry up.

People will all want to know exactly how someone from outside of Fallingstar managed to get into the region, as they badly want to safely trade with other regions and/or find greener pastures. "Magic", of course, is a bad answer.

#### **c. Social Engineering.**

Everyone in Fallingstar knows about demons. They are real. They exist. They have twisted, brutish minions, which are said to have raided Fallingstar Town a generation ago to slay a concealed, magically-Adept child. They pluck babies from their cribs, have cursed the World, and ruin human endeavor. People have seen them, just not anyone that you could name. The people of Fallingstar are nearly of one mind about this.

All of this is true, on two levels. Physically, there is a cluster of rogue demons that live hidden in the southeastern mountains, led by a moderately powerful, mercurial, quick-tempered ice devil named Glathnog. They raid for souls, and try to capture (and eat) magically-Adept children, but are not all that bright. A very few survivors from Fallingstar Town actually have seen a demon, when Glathnog entered town twenty years ago and hunted down a magically-Adept girl in front of (a few surviving) witnesses.

Sociologically, Zazeer, a fallen angel of the Majestic Plateau with a knack for large-scale societal deception and manipulation, and her proxies, the Reapers, are also busy in this region. Zazeer is constantly trying out various social engineering experiments, trying (and succeeding) to steal away magically Adept youth.

1. *The Shadow over Trepminster:* Zazeer

has been quietly supplying a breakaway “High Priestess of the Circle” in Trepminster with extra food and comfort items in an effort to support her efforts at building a new, charismatic religion that follows instructions without question. The High Priestess uses cult-like mental conditioning to recruit and control the faithful. These brainwashing techniques include:

- Convincing her followers of her ability to work “divine magic” (she is, in fact, a spell-caster);
- constant reinforcement of the “chosen” nature of the community; membership must be approved by the High Priestess. She looks for susceptible, rigid-thinking people and rejects mavericks and free thinkers;
- the use of (and withholding of) sexual opportunities as a reward/punishment;
- rewarding behavior that benefits the group over that of the individual member;
- the fact that life is materially better in Trepminster than elsewhere (both because the cult is organized and because the demons are sneaking them food and benefits);
- the secret killing of dissenters, under the deception that they were free to leave and did so; and
- the demonization of a common enemy, in this case, the alleged but unseen demons. Everything they do uses this fear and is justified as necessary to prevent a “second coming” of the demon horde. (This facet of the program is highly controversial among the demons, but is working).

Only the High Priestess knows that Zazeer is their patron. The program has, by playing to primal fears about the demons, been

extremely successful in steering the herd and generating obedient sheep. The PLAYERS might encounter someone trying to escape the cult, or visit Trepminster to look into a rumor and deduce that things are a bit out of sorts. Ideally, without knowledge of demonic sponsorship, they might debate whether the sacrifice of individuality and personal freedom is worth the improved quality of life, and what to do about it.

2. Someone has decided to reopen the mines, with a view toward somehow later opening trade routes south. They have their cart before their horse, but these concerns are shoved aside. A charismatic young man is rounding up those with potential to lead and known free-thinkers to join in such a venture on shares. The recruiter is a pawn of Zazeer, who is planning another mining disaster as a way of culling these potential threats from the “herd.”

#### **d. Land Feud.**

The people of Fallingstar tend to organize themselves according to extended clans and their allies. Family elders (men and women) tend to be the real power centers outside of Fallingstar Town. These clans tend to feud periodically. The feuds tend to be over valuable land, and be in the nature of running blood feuds and honor duels rather than open warfare (which is extremely expensive and risky). Open skirmishes have flared up within memory.

The PLAYERS might either stumble into such a feud, or (as disinterested outsiders) be asked to accompany and/or assist Sonner Sand in finding a solution. They must travel to the site, endure weather and bandit hazards, and try to find a deal that all can accept. They may learn that some outside interest (the demons) is manipulating events toward continued conflict for their own devices (usually, to keep areas from becoming too peaceful and advancing too far).

#### **8. Sites and Features.**

**Map Key:** *1 hex=10 miles.* A determined, lightly loaded person on foot in good

weather can make 2 hexes per day on the roads or 1 per day off road.

**a. Fallingstar Town**; Neutral, Lawful; Population: ~2,000. This is the most tolerable place to live in the region. It is a small town, once obviously much larger, with entire quarters of the former city in ruins. Only a part of the southwest quadrant is still inhabited and in some semblance of repair, as people huddle near the hot spring to the west and the arable land immediately around it.

The populace of the town is tithed in kind to support a palace economy including a representative sample of craftsmen; a police force of a dozen men, and a magistrate. Although lip service is paid to Fallingstar still being a Kingdom under the rule of the House of Mortrand, the current "King", Basil the 24th, thinks he's a squirrel and is kept comfortably locked away in the public building.

**b. Mortrand's Gate** (village); Neutral; Area population: ~200. The only practical route between the Lower and Higher Valleys leads through this river canyon, which was once well fortified against foot and water traffic. The fortress has crumbled, but it still provides a natural chokepoint, and a few hundred souls scratch out an existence here in the shadow of the crumbling walls.

**c. Trepminster** (village); Good, Lawful (seemingly); Evil, Lawful (leadership); Population: ~500. Once a pilgrimage site for the old gods, much of the populace lives communally on the grounds of an old abbey. This is the only area in the region that can grow any significant amount of grain (barley). A diabolical brainwashing cult, overseen by a breakaway "High Priestess", runs the village. The cult is a social control experiment being run by Zazeer through her "High Priestess" proxy.

**d. Woestmarket**. (village); Neutral, Chaotic, Population: ~500. A sizable goat raising area, there are a few weavers and fullers here in addition to shepherds and farmers.

**e. Sudmarket** (village); Neutral, Chaotic, Population: ~100. A small farming community, most noteworthy for being the first town north of the Ruined Way.

**f. Wexford** (village); Neutral; Population: ~100. Located in dry foothills southeast of Fallingstar Town, the town is dying out, with most of the people having left for Fallingstar Town.

**g. The Glade** (village); Neutral, Chaotic; Population: ~500. In a small, isolated pocket valley in the southeast, this town has both timber and arable land, though little free water. The leadership is cognizant of the issue of sustainable population and, as a result, violently discourages anyone trying to settle there.

**h. The Academy** (village), Neutral; Population: ~500. Centered on the largely vanished ruins of the great Academy of Sorcery, the weather here is less stormy and unpredictable than in other places, allowing for a modest food surplus which is traded to Fallingstar Town. There is a public house with rooms, the only other one in Fallingstar being in Fallingstar Town.

**i. Miller's Reach**. (village), Neutral, Lawful; Population: ~200. The mill is on the other side of the lake from Fallingstar Town; a barge makes regular runs back and forth. Apart from a few farmers, a significant number of craftsmen, including a smithy, cheese press and brewery, can be found here. The village takes advantage of a natural mill race. It is considered part of Fallingstar Town for purposes of the market tithe and under its administration.

**j. Mineton**. (village); Neutral, Chaotic; Population: ~200. A poor town with some timber resources, located at the foot of the mines and the White Tor. Every so often a gang of young fools, intent on delving into the old iron mines, shows up. Their belongings can sometimes be gathered up later and sold at market, after they inevitably fail, so such young fools are welcome.

**k. Evenstar**. (ruins); Evil, Chaotic; Population: ???. This village is, in theory,



deserted. Many of those who have gone barmy, for some reason, often end up here, lurking around the ruined town. Before the Abjuration, Elves dwelled in harmony here with the humans. Those with Elven blood feel a natural affinity to the area.

**l. Crossmark** (village); Evil, Neutral; Population: ~200. Situated at a ford, this is a small farming village. Like the other marks, a significant minority of its children is born with wild talents or magical aptitude, and so the town suffers the attentions of both the Reapers and its own neighbors.

**m. Normark**. (village); Evil, Neutral; Population: ~100. Normark has timber and arable land, but is in one of the most inhospitable and unpredictable weather zones in the region.

**n. Winmark**. (village); Evil, Neutral; Population: ~500. This is one of the few areas in the region with any reasonably consistent supply of game. They do not like people from other parts of the region (let alone strangers) hunting on their grounds.

**o. Risemark**. (town); Evil, Neutral; Population: ~500. The largest of the marks, it is a walled hill fort lying along the road to the east. The Rise clan is large, militaristic, belligerent and unusually suspicious of strangers.

**p. Risemark Bridge** (point of interest). Also known as the Great Bridge, this once spanned a particularly wide and deep segment of river, and was a marvel of engineering. It collapsed in the Abjuration, but fallen statuary and arches can still be seen at the sides of the bank. In its place is a rickety but serviceable wooden foot bridge with rope supports.

**r. Sunmark**. (village); Neutral; Population: ~300. This is a sizable farming village, so named because it lies at the eastern end of the valley. These people suffer the least from congenital barminess, and tend to be well organized and stick together. The demons of The Majestic Plateau are planning to level the place to make an example out of them. This will, of course,

be accomplished by proxy, such as by provoking a clan war.

**s. The Mines** (place of interest). These mines were a rich source of iron and tin, and formed the backbone of the region's trade and wealth. They collapsed in the Abjuration, and periodic schemes to reopen them have failed for a number of reasons, from sabotage, to the Curse, to interference by the demons.

**t. The White Tor** (place of interest). The White Tor was first noticed near the Academy after the Abjuration caused part of the mountain to collapse. It is a windowless, white, round stone tower, about 100' high, with only one, black wooden door. No one has ever been able to enter, or been seen to exit, the Tor, and what it is remains a mystery.

**u. Castle Mortrand** (place of interest); Evil, Lawful. Once the ancestral home of the Mortrand ruling family, it is now home to the Reapers (numbering about a dozen), plus another few dozen farmers and support staff.

These people are all the willing slaves of the demons of The Majestic Plateau in general, and Zazeer in particular, and are materially supported by the demons to the extent that they cannot supply themselves. The Reapers have a small herd of cold weather-adapted horses, the only ones in the region.

People approaching within a few miles of Castle Mortrand are politely turned away, on the theory that it is sacred ground to the Circle and they are intruding on the Reapers' holy solitude. If they persist, they are made to disappear.

**v. The Starwell** (place of interest). This is an ancient site of power in the southern forest. The area around it is known to be sacred, and despite the rare flourishing forest, no one dares take anything more than deadwood from the area. In the center of the forest is a large, deep sinkhole surrounded by menhirs carved with ancient Elven ruins, and an enormous apple tree known as the "Wizard Tree", which bears fruit rumored to

cure any affliction. The Starwell is a powerful astrological divination site for those who know how to use it, and people sensitive to visions will often experience a revelation here. The area is rumored to be home to a few last vestiges of Elves, but no one knows for certain if any remain.



**The Wizard Tree at the Starwell**

**w. The Ruined Way** (place of interest). Once the trade gateway to the south, this road was once adorned with gigantic marble statues of men, women and Elves gazing up at the stars. When the Abjuration struck, a huge mountain destroyed the road, cut the gateway, and made the trip south a problem of climbing a high, steep, treacherous, icy mountain. The passage can be made with difficulty, but many who try perish (either from the climb, or when intercepted by the Reapers).

**x. Glathnog's Lair** (place of interest). Glathnog, a free agent demon not in league with The Majestic Plateau, makes his lair here along with about a dozen minor demons (ghouls, shadows and the like). Glathnog leads here because he is by far the most powerful resident demon, but even in Fallingstar his influence pales in comparison to the social engineering schemes orchestrated by Zazeer.

Glathnog is an ice devil, and not one for deep thinking, subtle plans or activist schemes. He has established a stereotypical ice dungeon in the mountains of southeastern Fallingstar, a good distance away from any human habitations or

### **O.K., So Where Are The Elves, Really?**

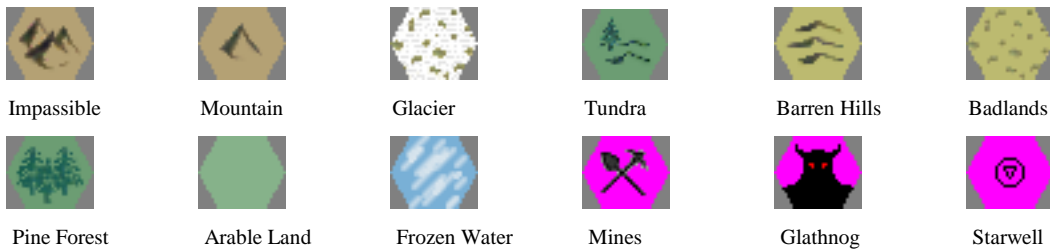
Only a few Elves managed to survive the Abjuration, and they did not fare well. So linked were they to the World that the Abjuration drove most mad. Those few (100 or so) that did remain went one of three ways.

Many of them died of starvation, violence or exposure when they were struck mad. Their bones can be found, if one is lucky, near where they eventually fell. Half-elves like Roland of Evenstar, who only went half-mad, live in hiding in the remote wilds of around Evenstar. They are literally underground, and have begun to degenerate through inbreeding.

About two dozen full-blooded or mostly full-blooded Elves took up residence in the comparatively intact, though small, forest surrounding the Starwell. They found that the lingering magic of the Starwell enabled them to be barely functional, though a shadow of their former selves. These continue to subsist, using all of their magic to hide from humans and demons alike.

They have conjured powerful illusions that make it seem as though the Starwell is abandoned, and are on constant watch to maintain them. They drop them for no one and no reason; it would take a major opportunity to strike a lasting blow against the demons for them to even consider it. They are generally content to let passers-by or casual explorers investigate the Starwell, but fatal "accidents" happen to anyone who tries to settle in the area or harvest its resources.

Finally, there is a lingering rumor that a female Elven warrior, Langulin the Fair, somehow survived the Abjuration and lives in hiding at the Moot in the Crannoch, a magic amulet sustaining her sanity. But who knows if this rumor is true.





routes of travel. He and his motley crew grab whatever souls and magic they can, slowly amassing power and storing extra souls in the Silver Bowl, a repository of power Glathnog looted from the Academy shortly after the Abjuration. The frozen, animated zombie corpses of his victims prowl the area should nosy mortals happen by.

The Majestic Plateau knows where he is, but since he is a powerful entity, have chosen not to directly confront him. Yet.

His raiding is not limited to Fallingstar by any stretch; in fact, he generally only acts in Fallingstar when he feels very threatened or very safe. He does not know what he is going to do long term; he figures that an opportunity will present itself eventually.

## **9. Important People.**

### **a. Sonner Sand.**

Sonner Sand is the Captain of the Guard in Fallingstar Town, a fairly intelligent and personable fellow exempt from the barminess that infects many of the local leaders.

Although most of the guard stays close to town and maintains order there, Sonner has discretion to do as he sees fit in the interest of the “Kingdom”, and as such, is someone that PLAYERS adventuring in Fallingstar will inevitably encounter.

He views it as within his prerogative to use his good offices to try and mediate disputes or sniff out trouble outside the immediate area of Fallingstar Town.

### **Sonner Sand, Captain, Fallingstar Town Guard.**

STR 16 DEX 13 INT 13 CON 16 APP 14  
POW 14 SIZ 15 EDU 10 Hits: 16 Age: 34.

**Damage Bonus:** +1d4.

**Allegiance Tendencies:** Good, Lawful.

**Skills:** *Accounting* (10%), Appraise (55%), *Archaeology* (10%), Art (05%), Astronomy (25%), Bargain (55%), Brawl (65%), Climb

(40%), Command (45%), Craft (Farmer) (55%) Disguise (01%), Dodge (45%), Etiquette (35%), Fast Talk (25%), Fine Manipulation (05%), First Aid (45%), Gaming (INT + POW%), Grapple (45%), Hide (40%), History (25%), Insight (45%), Jump (35%), **Law** (25%), Listen (65%), Martial Arts (01%), MEDICINE (01%), Navigate (65%), OCCULT (05%), Perform (05%), Persuade (55%), **Pharmacy** (05%), **Pilot Boat** (41%), Religion (new) (25%), RESEARCH (LIBRARY USE) (01%), Research (Streetwise) (55%), **Ride Horse** (05%), Sense (24%), Spot (65%), **Status** (50%), Stealth (35%), Strategy (25%), Survival (new) (77%), Swim (25%), Teach (40%), Throw (35%), Track (50%).

### **Attacks:**

Spear, 63%, 1d6+1+db, impaling , 15 HP.

Sling, 70%, 1d8, 80 yards, crushing, cannot parry.

**Defenses:** Armor 4 (studded leather (with old gold and silver coins) and helmet).

Shield, wicker & leather, 65%, 1d2+db, knockback, Armor 10 (must parry).

**Special:** None.

Deity: The Circle (nominally).

Wealth: 6.

Gear: Leather armor, wooden shield, weapons, basic traveling gear, backup.

### **b. Roland of Evenstar, crazy bandit and prophet.**

It is generally accepted that the Elves all disappeared at the Abjuration. Whether Roland of Evenstar is a half-Elf is frequently debated. Regardless, he is quite unusual, even among the eccentric and crazy bandits that seem drawn to the “abandoned town” of Evenstar.

First, he claims to have been born 130 years ago, which would have made him 30 years old at the time of the Abjuration. He does not outwardly appear to be Elven, but that could be because he dresses in rags and has not shaven or bathed in many years.



Second, whereas most crazy bandits seem completely dysfunctional, and Roland is dysfunctional in many ways, he is also surprisingly lucid. He is well-spoken, if filthy, ruthless and decrepit.

Third, he knows things that are difficult to explain. He knows odd and obscure details about the history of the Abjuration War. He knows that some of the demons survived, and sometimes what is going to happen in the future.

It is almost as though Roland had lived through these past events and had the ancient gift of foresight that some Elves were said to possess.

Although he generally is encountered on the roads near Evenstar, there are reliable reports that he has been seen, muttering prophecies to himself, in the south near the Starwell as well.

#### **Roland of Evenstar, Deranged Prophet.**

STR 13 DEX 14 INT 12 CON 13 APP 5  
POW 18 SIZ 12 EDU ?? Hits: 13 Age: ??.

**Damage Bonus:** +1d4.

**Allegiance Tendencies:** Evil, Chaotic.

**Skills:** Dodge (75%), Hide (75%), History (85%), OCCULT (50%), Perform (Sing) (in Elven) (85%), Stealth (75%), Survival (85%), others a matter of conjecture.

#### **Attacks:**

Spear, 42%, 1d6+1+db, impaling, 15 HP.

Sling, 99%, 1d8, 80 yards, crushing, cannot parry.

**Defenses:** Armor 1 (leather helmet painted with a number of weird symbols which he NEVER takes off).

Shield, wicker & leather, 99%, 1d2+db, knockback, Armor 10 (must parry).

**Special:** None.

**Deity:** The old gods of Fallingstar.

**Wealth:** 3.

**Gear:** Weapons, rope, torch, ragged

clothing.

#### **c. Thorgirr of Wexford, Magistrate and De Facto Leader.**

A towering man with graying red hair, a mild and thoughtful manner, and a penchant for explaining his reasoning with stories, Thorgirr is the Magistrate of Fallingstar Town. He is from a very small clan, and so is seen by most clans, most of the time, as genuinely fair and non-threatening. And while he is generally a fair man with a sense of humor, he is not noted for mercy, and is fond of coming up with punishments for non-capital offenses that fit the crime.

He is sympathetic to the plight of oppressed children, including magic-using ones. This is not out of some sense of soft-heartedness, but because he sees them as valuable resources that should work to better Fallingstar rather than being exported or wasted.

Thorgirr suspects that the Harvest and the Reapers themselves are a manipulation of some kind, and would be interested in proof. What he would feel safe doing with such information is another problem, one that he has yet to consider.

#### **Thorgirr of Wexford, Fallingstar Town Magistrate.**

STR 13 DEX 13 INT 16 CON 13 APP 16  
POW 16 SIZ 14 EDU 11 Hits: 14 Age: 48.

**Damage Bonus:** +1d4.

**Allegiance Tendencies:** Neutral, Lawful.

**Skills:** *Accounting* (50%), Appraise (75%), *Archaeology* (10%), Art (25%), Astronomy (25%), Bargain (75%), Brawl (25%), Climb (40%), Command (45%), Craft (Farmer) (65%), Disguise (01%), Dodge (35%), Etiquette (55%), Fast Talk (55%), Fine Manipulation (05%), First Aid (35%), Gaming (INT + POW%), Grapple (25%), Hide (30%), History (35%), Insight (55%), Jump (25%), *Law* (65%), Listen (35%), Martial Arts (01%), MEDICINE (01%), Navigate (55%), OCCULT (15%), Perform

(05%), Persuade (65%), **Pharmacy (05%)**, **Pilot Boat (21%)**, Religion (new) (40%), RESEARCH (LIBRARY USE) (01%), Research (Streetwise) (35%), **Ride Horse (05%)**, Sense (14%), Spot (35%), **Status (60%)**, Stealth (23%), Strategy (31%), Survival (new) (77%), Swim (25%), Teach (10%), Throw (28%), Track (55%).

**Attacks:**

Mace, 44%, 1d6+2+db, crushing, 20 HP.

**Defenses:** Armor 3 (leather and helmet).

Shield, wicker & leather, 45%, 1d2+db, knockback, Armor 10 (must parry).

**Special:** None.

Deity: The Circle (nominally).

Wealth: 8.

Gear: Mace, chain of office, command of watch.

**d. Sample Reaper.**

The following would be a typical front-line Reaper sent in to a village in response to a rumored Adept, or a rank-and-file trooper in a Reaper strike force. Rookies would be less capable, while senior members would be more so. Reapers typically focus on just one area of magic, either Mind oriented (to sniff out trouble) or elemental (to blast it).

**Brother Raymond, Reaper.**

STR 16 DEX 13 INT 13 CON 16 APP 14  
POW 18 SIZ 14 EDU 11 Hits: 15 Age: 28.

**Damage Bonus:** +1d4.

**Allegiance Tendencies:** Evil, Lawful.

**Skills:** Bargain (25%), Brawl (50%), Climb (50%), Command (25%), Craft (Masonry)

(45%) Dodge (60%), Etiquette (35%), Fast Talk (50%), First Aid (50%), Grapple (50%), Hide (50%), History (25%), Insight (50%), Listen (65%), Navigate (50%), OCCULT (50%), Persuade (50%), Religion (new) (70%), Research (Streetwise) (50%), **Ride Horse (35%)**, Sense (30%), Spot (55%), **Status (50%)**, Stealth (50%), Strategy (25%), Survival (new) (70%), Swim (25%), Track (70%).

**Attacks:**

Axe, Crannoch, steel, 56%, 1d8+2+db, bleeding, 20 HP.

Bow, 76%, 1d8+1+1/2 db, 90 yards, impaling, 10 HP.

**Defenses:** Armor 4 (studded leather and helmet)

Shield, Round, 65%, 1d3+db, knockback, Armor 22 (must parry).

**Special:** Lost Art: Quantum Alteration; Lost Art: Terrible Presence; Second Sight.

Adjusted POW Bonuses: Fire +8, Mind +4, Detect +4.

Tools: Brother Raymond will, if possible, have a fire source available to him as a Tool, granting him (depending on the size of the fire) a variable Tool bonus for Fire or Light magic.

Incantations: Flame +2, Countermagic +2, Control +2, Vision +2, Perception +2.

Deity: The Circle (nominally).

Wealth: 6.

Gear: Studded leather armor, wooden round shield, weapons, basic traveling gear, riding horse.



## GAZETTEER—THE CRANNOCH

“*Urrgghhh.....*” Last words (?) of Robert the Brave, Lieutenant of Eglantine’s Army of North Town, as he dies from swamp disease a week after getting lost while looking for the Moot.

### **1. Overview.**

**Population:** ~3,000; humans 95%; Halflings (hidden at the Sunken City) 5%; others only at the Moot.

**Government:** tribal/clan-based with leaders selected by acclaim at Bogman camps; hereditary queen at the Sunken City; anarchic at the Moot.

**Important Entities:** Sara, Wise Woman of the Crannoch (Adept, Neutral, Lawful); Polemachus II, Seneschal of the Heroes of Old (Good, Lawful); The Hidden Queen of the Halflings (Female Halfling, Neutral, Chaotic).

**Imports:** Exiles (see below).

**Exports:** Halflings, the occasional Hero of Old (see below).

**Outlook:** Neutral; Neutral or Evil, Chaotic at the Sunken City; all over the map at the Moot.

The Crannoch is a dangerous place on many levels. First, the environment is dangerous: a vast bog rife with disease, insects, venomous creatures, and natural hazards. Second, the Bogmen do not go out of their way to help visitors; they have little love for anyone but their fellow Bogmen.

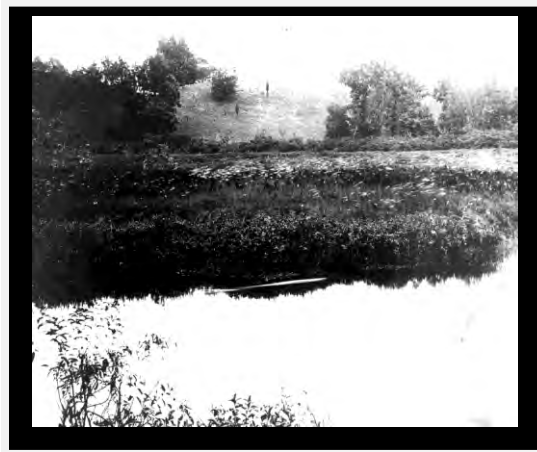
Perhaps most dangerous, however, is the Crannoch’s role as a place of exile of last report. The Crannoch’s remoteness, the harshness of its climate, its inaccessibility, and the fact that the area is so deadly made the Crannoch a traditional dumping ground for deposed nobles, unwanted second sons, dangerous men looking to plot and scheme unmolested, and people who would rather

risk death from swamp fever than be found. Things rarely change in the Crannoch and this is no exception.

The Crannoch is located in a temperate swamp/delta in the northwestern corner of the continent. Portions of the region have always been marshy, but with the Abjuration 100 years ago, a low mountain range was thrust up to the east of the region, creating a bowl delta that now never quite drains.

A couple of broad, brackish, sluggish rivers transverse the area, flowing unusually from the sea to the mountains, providing some means of access through the muck. The land between the sea and the bog is an area of treacherous cliffs and rocky badlands which serve to channel the water and prevent the swamp from draining.

The weather is always, by nature, damp and humid. In the summers, temperatures approach 90 degrees with extreme humidity. In the winter, temperatures rarely go below freezing. Seasonal floods are the primary weather-related challenge facing the Bogmen, as the locals are known. But the weather is the least of their concerns.



The standard of living for the Bogmen has always been very modest, and the cataclysm following the Abjuration did little to impact the region other than to expand it, worsen it

in degree, and isolate it even further. The total population of the region is only about 3,000 people. The Bogmen tend to live in spread out settlements of 100-300 people, on (comparatively) higher and drier ground. Bogmen villages are centered on Iron Age-style motte and bailey mounds. To visualize what the region looks like, imagine an over-the-top, medieval, cinematic version of the Louisiana Bayou, inhabited by small, thin people used to living with snakes, insects and mud.

The Bogmen have the resources to travel between towns, particularly up and down the connecting rivers by raft or coracle. A few cleared (but not paved or improved) trails link some of the towns, and there is one permanent dock at the south end of the road to North Camp (built by the North Camp people coming to the river to fish and trade).

However, each town can, for the most part, access what resources there are in the region locally. Most contact between villages is devoted to arranging marriages and shuffling population, visiting relatives, trade to or from North Camp, or the occasional regional festival; the people have always been very sensitive to inbreeding and take care to avoid it.

Oral genealogies are a popular pastime; a typical Bogman can recite his ancestry going back seven generations. Each village tends to get along well with one another, as there is little competition for resources. Many people have brothers, sisters, parents or cousins in the other camps due to marriages. The Crannoch is seen as the common property of all who do not abuse it, although the Bogmen like to be left alone.

Life in the Crannoch follows a hunter/gatherer, non-agrarian sort of existence, with vegetable gardens around the villages providing backup food sources. The Bogmen do not domesticate animals. People subsist on fish, eels, snakes, crustaceans, nuts, reed flour, and tubers. Larger game includes larger snakes, capybara-sized rodents, and the occasional swamp pig. Oil comes from fish, beavers or

muskrats.

The Crannoch yields plenty of usable timber and peat to build houses, palisades, and causeways, and clay for bricks and pottery, but the hunter/gatherer lifestyle drastically limits the population size. Clothing tends to be waterproofed leather or linen. Iron tools, made from bog iron, are available if not plentiful, but as the people are quite happy keeping to themselves, are rarely exported.

The Bogmen tend to fight with axes or machete-like seaxes, things which double as survival tools in the swamp. Many Bogmen use spears and slings to take fish and birds on a daily basis. The Bogmen know their way around the swamp very well, without exception, and are skilled at survival, stealth, tracking and camouflage.

Apart from the constant threat of flood, disease is a primary threat in the Crannoch. The locals have largely adapted over time to the typical marsh fevers, but the fevers still claim their share of victims—especially outsiders. Various insect-borne diseases should be a significant issue for any stranger to the Crannoch.

Poisonous snakes, crocodiles, aggressive, piranha-like fish and constant, never-ending insects (which the locals constantly guard against with netting and ointments) are always threats.



The people are almost uniformly illiterate, having no need for writing. Medical knowledge is limited; the people know how to set a broken bone, treat snakebite, deal with childbirth, and know what local plants will help draw an infection or help a fever.

Beyond that, life in the Crannoch can be nasty, brutish and short if one is not careful.

There are few craft concentrations or specialists in the Crannoch; people know how and learn how to do everything that they have the capacity to do, including build houses, divert water, weave linen, smelt and cast bog iron, hunt and plant. Some people are naturally better at things than others, and that (plus camp or clan-level surpluses in one thing or another) forms the basis of what trade there is.

Society tends to be tribal in outlook, with "the Crannoch" being the tribe. The penalty for any sort of behavior that is deemed so anti-social as to prevent a person from further living in their village is exile. The outcast is branded on the forehead and turned out into the swamp, where he will either link up with other outcasts or, more likely, die from the elements eventually.

Magic use is tolerated, and indeed, the rare Bogman magic-user tends to be an authority figure. There is no centralized government of any kind, and no kind of patrol or police force.

Trade with the outside world, with the exception of the Moot, is non-existent; the threat of disease or death is not conducive to a trading profit, even if the area was not so remote.

Culturally, the people engage in non-literate activities such as singing, dancing, telling stories, and athletic contests such as footraces and survival contests.

There are two breaks in this uniformity: the Moot and the Sunken City.

One purpose that the Crannoch has historically served is as a place of exile. As far as the Bogmen were concerned, as long as you were not one of *their* exiles, and behaved yourself, the fen belonged to all who could survive there. Since an immense bog is a wonderful place to lose oneself, people did lose themselves there.



This state of affairs has not changed. People on the run--from the demons, or others with a long reach--have gathered in an area in the west of the Crannoch known as the Moot. It is not a village, exactly, so much as a concentration of hideouts in a rare high, dry patch surrounded by an extremely inhospitable section of swamp. There are many secret bunkers, hidey-holes, caches, people living under assumed or forgotten names, and people who just do not want to be found, living here in relative obscurity.

To the extent the Crannoch has outside goods, it is by virtue of trading (food, goods and swamp survival know-how) with new arrivals at the Moot. Exiles and adventurers from every region and walk of life can be found at the Moot, living in a variety of structures or holes.

The Sunken City, by contrast, is something new. When the Abjuration threw up the mountain range at the eastern edge of the old bog, the city and fertile lands just to the southwest fell into an immense sinkhole and were covered by muck. The Sunken City (once rumored to be named Doreset, a major Eglantinian port city and religious center) is now a mystery. The tops of towers protrude from the muck, but the area is rumored to be haunted. The Bogmen stay away, as there is nothing there that would interest them and spirits are said to guard the City.

Adventurers from the Moot have

occasionally ventured out into the Sunken City, but none have returned.

## **2. History.**

Things in the Crannoch have changed little over the past thousand years. It has always been an isolated backwater, self-sufficient in a limited way, with an odd smattering of exiles. It still is.

## **3. Motivation-the people.**

The motivation of the native Bogmen is day-to-day survival and minding one's own business. Life is that simple for the locals.

For the exiles and fugitives at the Moot, they hide, scheme, plot, and dream of greater things.

## **4. Motivation-the leaders.**

Wise elders or Adepts (or both) tend to lead individual camps. They are chiefly concerned with food and resource management, keeping people from killing each other in quarrels, and community survival. They are not particularly hostile or materialistic, as long as their basic survival needs are being met. Outsiders attacking any one of them, however, will find themselves the targets of a mass retaliation.

No one leads at the Moot. Money, power, secrecy and common goals are the only motivators there.

## **5. Regional Personality.**

**a. Quiet.** The Bogmen are shy people who are not looking for conflict. The swamp itself is unusually quiet; even though there are birds, fish and animals, still the place is oddly, eerily silent.

**b. Stoic.** If disease, giant snakes, or man-eating crocodiles do not take you, then people can usually survive in the Crannoch by working together and using what the Crannoch provides, albeit perhaps not in any kind of comfort. The harsh environment has made the people resilient to adversity.

**c. Tough.** The Bogmen are tough fighters, all of whom have lived and survived a challenging existence. And they know how

to make and wield their axes and seaxes.

**d. Simple.** This is not an especially complex society. People do not specialize in crafts, except as an emerging trend in North Camp. They just want to eat, marry and enjoy life the best they can.

**e. Insidious.** Nonetheless, the swamp is everywhere, seeping into cracks and exploiting crevasses. The Moot is a proverbial hive of scum and villainy, full of people who have to hide for some reason from powerful people (or entities). Sometimes residents of the Moot just disappear. Ambush predators such as large water constrictors, panthers, and crocodiles are everywhere.

**f. Names and Appearances.** The Bogmen are generally small, wiry, tough and dark. They tend to wear linen tunics with leather boots in the summer, and leather and furs in the winter. Wood face painting and tattoos are common as well.

Sample female names: Dubhan, Gerta, Shan, Sara, Siobhan, Birgit.

Sample male names: Cirech, Fotla, Fortriu, Fiobh, Jon, Cat, Uist.

Sample clan names: The settlements are small enough that everyone knows one another and surnames are not used. When introducing themselves to strangers, however, they will introduce themselves with reference to generations past: "I am Jon, son of Jon and Gerta, grandson of Merle and Shan...."

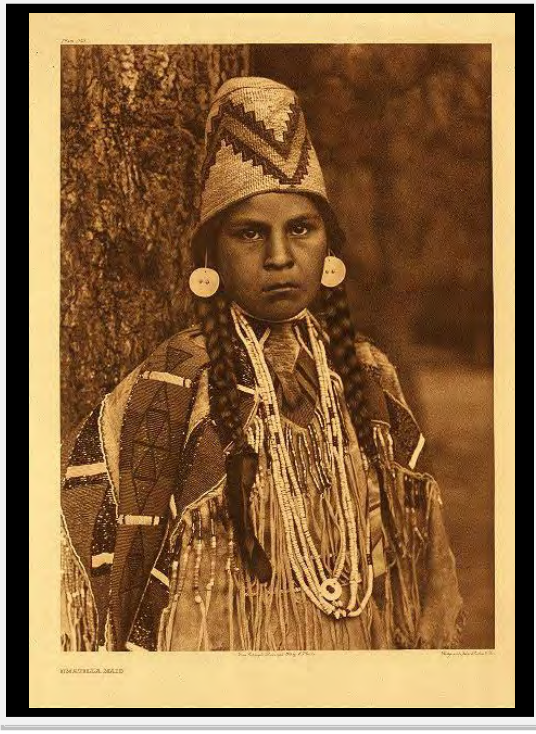
## **6. Outlooks.**

### **a. Magic/Spellcasters.**

Native spellcasters are rare, with perhaps 1 in 1,000 born having any aptitude. These people are almost always groomed for and rise to leadership positions. Yet almost as if by magic, there are always at least two Adepts. If one dies, another is born soon thereafter. Foreign spell-casters are tolerated as long as they do not behave in a threatening or anti-social way toward the Bogmen, in which case they are treated like



any other belligerent strangers.



Most native spell-casters are regional idolons, with powers reflecting the nature of the Crannoch, and most of them possess only a wild talent. The demons consider this isolated region beneath their notice, and seem unaware of the number of fugitives in the area of the Moot. Were the Bogmen to begin exporting tools or weapons, or generally take to the sea, that would change.

#### **b. Strangers.**

Strangers are tolerated as long as they are visitors, traders, or have some other discernible and reasonably temporary purpose, and behave socially. Strangers looking like they wish to stay for long are encouraged (or forced) to settle in the Moot area. Traders from the Moot (or even courtiers of members of the opposite sex) are tolerated, depending on the amount of respect they show and their good behavior. Occasionally a son or daughter goes to live with a paramour in the Moot. Strangers not behaving socially are beaten, plundered and/or killed.

#### **c. Demons.**

Demons are bogeymen and stories to tell to frighten little children. Some of the people at the Moot seem convinced that such things are real, but the Bogmen are skeptical. People do think that there are spirits of some kind haunting the Sunken City, but those spirits leave alone if left alone.

#### **d. Enemies and Conflicts.**

The Bogmen are people with little interest in the outside world. Their enemies are anyone who tries to harm them, or seems intent on doing so. These they kill (such as by burying the offender neck deep in the bog and letting nature take its course) or, if one of their own, exile (a slower method of letting nature take its course).

#### **e. Other Races.**

The Bogmen know of all the other races, but only Halflings (at the Moot) are at all common. Dwarves and Elves have not been reliably reported in the Crannoch since the Abjuration, unless there are some in deep cover at the Moot.

#### **7. Religion.**

The gods quit answering prayers when the Abjuration happened, but the Bogmen have never had much need for gods, anyway. They believe in nature spirits, including of the earth, air, water and trees, and that such spirits can either help man, or harm man if he is disrespectful. Occasionally people have brought stories of new gods, called the Circle, but while they are interesting, the Bogmen see little need for gods. Some of these wandering priests were sent to the Moot. Some went, others behaved badly and were cast out into the swamp.

#### **8. Map Key.**

*1 hex=8 miles.* Travel is difficult because of the sweltering humidity, muck, insects, snakes, and poor “roads”. A determined, lightly loaded person on foot in good weather can make 2 hexes per day on the “roads” or 1 per day off road. The locals can move at double this rate.





High Mountains



Low Mountains



Beach/Scrub



Useful Forest



Bog/Fen



Shallow Water/Brackish



Deep Salt Water



Village



Dock

Poling a barge or coracle down the river is a far superior method of long distance travel, and a traveler can make 4 hexes headed east in a day or 3 hexes headed west (upstream).

**a. The Camps.** There are five camps, each with about 200-300 inhabitants: North Camp, South Camp, Eisen's Camp, Fork, and Morgen's Camp. Each is a palisade-protected village on a patch of comparatively higher and drier ground, with timber causeways leading out into the swamp to various fishing holes and/or iron, timber or peat resources. There is a village elder/chieftain who deals with strangers, arranges trade, and arbitrates disputes, but the society is highly egalitarian. Each family fends for itself, making its own clothes, catching its own food, and tending its own garden. The people barter with each other for what they need, and rarely, with other towns.

**b. The Docks.** North Camp is slightly larger than the others (~400 inhabitants) and slightly more prone to engage in trade with other towns, because the nearby woodlands at the shore of the swamp affords larger gauge timber and additional food sources (such as fruits, nuts and the occasional larger game animal). North Camp (with the assistance of the other camps) built a barge dock in the center of the region, which serves as a regional trading, festival and meeting point (it is an improved campsite, but not a permanently occupied one).

**c. The Moot.** The Moot proper is an ancient, pre-Abjuration basalt pillar rising out of the swamp. The name is also applied to the area, which is (comparatively) drier than much of the rest of the swamp. This is where many people who do not want to be found hide out, in a variety of campsites ranging from tents to caves to permanent stone structures. It is a dangerous area filled with dangerous men and women who want to be left alone and not have outsiders know who or where they are.

**d. The Sunken City.** Buried under the muck, with the top of a tower protruding here and there, the now sunken city of

Doreset remains largely unexplored. The area is thick with disease, biting flies, snakes that almost seem to guard the area, and swamp panthers. A great many unfortunate and often fatal accidents befall people who stray too close to the Sunken City. What is really going on at the Sunken City is discussed in Chapter 8, under the topic of "Halflings."

## **9. Sample NPCs.**

### **a. Jon, son of Jon and Gerta.**

Jon is a 40 year old village elder of the Bogmen, a fairly typical example of a full-fledged but not elite Bogman warrior. He has lived his entire life in the Crannoch and has never been outside of it. Nor does he have any plans to leave. Life is hard, but it is what it is.

### **Jon, son of Jon and Gerta.**

STR 14 DEX 13 INT 12 CON 14 APP 12  
POW 12 SIZ 13 EDU 6 Hits: 14 Age: 40.

**Damage Bonus:** +1d4.

**Allegiance Tendencies:** Neutral.

**Skills:** Bargain (25%), Brawl (45%), Climb (70%), Command (15%), Dodge (55%), Etiquette (25%), First Aid (45%), Grapple (55%), Hide (74%), Insight (25%), Jump (55%), Listen (65%), Navigate (60%), Perform (Drums) (55%), Persuade (25%), **Pilot Boat (39%)**, Research (Streetwise) (35%), Sense (50%), Spot (75%), **Status (25%)**, Stealth (85%), Strategy (17%), Survival (new) (90%), Swim (65%), Throw (55%), Track (70%).

### **Attacks:**

Axe, Crannoch, steel, 62%, 1d8+2+db, bleeding, 20 HP.

Seax, Crannoch, steel, 81%, 1d4+2, impaling, 15 HP.

Sling, 76%, 1d8, 80 yards, crushing, cannot parry.

**Defenses:** Armor 3 (leather and helmet)

Shield, wicker & leather, 65%, 1d2+db, knockback, Armor 10 (must parry).



Deity: Naturist/Crannoch.

Wealth: 5

Gear: axe, seax, sling, leather armor & cap, wicker shield.

### **b. Sara, Wise Woman of the Crannoch.**

Sara is a 55 year old woman who presently leads the North Camp, the latest in a long line of Wise Women; her apprentice will succeed her. She is a popular leader but has a sharp tongue, is a little scary, and has little patience for smart-alecks.

### **Sara, Wise Woman of the Crannoch**

STR 10 DEX 11 INT 12 CON 12 APP 12  
POW 18 SIZ 11 EDU 8 Hits: 12 Age: 55.

**Damage Bonus:** +0.

**Allegiance Tendencies:** Neutral, Lawful.

**Skills:** Appraise (45%), Astronomy (55%), Bargain (75%), Command (55%), Craft (Farmer) (75%), First Aid (75%), Hide (50%), History (25%), Insight (75%), Listen (65%), Navigate (75%), OCCULT (25%), Persuade (45%), *Pharmacy* (25%), *Pilot Boat* (61%), Research (Streetwise) (75%), Sense (60%), Spot (55%), *Status* (75%), Stealth (60%), Strategy (19%), Survival (new) (90%), Swim (25%), Teach (50%), Throw (35%), Track (60%).

### **Attacks:**

Quarterstaff (magic), 61% (includes +10% enchantment bonus), 1d8+1, crushing, can parry twice vs. attack, 25 HP.

**Defenses:** Armor 2 (leather clothing and cap)

**Special:** Lost Art: Quantum Alteration; Lost Art: Dreams; Second Sight.

Adjusted POW Bonuses: Water +2, Light +6, Weather +2, Heal +2, Sense/Detect/Divine +2

Incantations: Countermagic +2, Illusion +2, Invisibility +2, Light +5, Perception +2, Vision +3.

Tools: Water +2, Light +2, Earth +2, Heal +2, Weather +2, Sense/Detect/Divine +2.

Items of Power: Sara possesses a gnarled staff that has been handed down for generations of wise women of the North Camp; the staff prevents the MP cost of the Second Sight ability, and grants +2 to adjusted POW checks involving Weather. There are rumors that her staff is also an enchanted weapon, but these rumors are unsubstantiated. (+10% to hit/parry, +1 damage).

### **10. Plot Seeds.**

a. Most expeditions to the Crannoch will start out as quests in search of someone or something said to be at the Moot. This includes senior Heroes of Old making their pilgrimage to the Seneschal. The last message is often at the Docks.

b. Sara, Wise Woman is one of the few Adepts in the game that mere diligent investigation will lead to. She is not the greatest Adept or greatest prophecy interpreter in the World, but she is one that the PLAYERS might hear a rumor of, as she does not hide. Sara is crabby, enjoys testing petitioners, and is fond of sending them on harrowing journeys just for chuckles prior to even negotiating for her services.

c. Treasure raiding expeditions to the Sunken City of Doreset are likely to find more than they bargained for among the murky, supposedly ghost-haunted ruins.

d. The Crannoch is a good place to send Adepts looking for those really rare Tools or ingredients for a really powerful spell. It is where the fabled Black Lotus, Two Headed Snake of Amphisbaena, or similar, legendary plant or animal would naturally be native to. Less honorable competitors might be found abusing the Bogmen, who might be grateful to those who helped them.



# GAZETTEER--EGLANTINE

*There's no doubt that no good comes of killing other men and taking their goods as your own. The difficulty lies in how you define "other men."*—William of North Town, local Sheriff and pundit.

## 1. Overview.

**Population:** ~20,000; humans 98%; Dwarves 1%; Halflings 1%; others unknown.

**Government:** Regional military dictatorships; anarchic between settlements.

**Important Entities:** William of North Town, Sheriff (Evil, Lawful); High Priest Steven, Center of the Circle (Evil, Lawful); Roger of South Town, Sheriff (Evil, Lawful).

**Imports:** Bandits, and warriors from The Dells (see below).

**Exports:** Bandits, and warriors seeking adventure in nearby lands (see below).

**Outlook:** Evil, Lawful (nearly all leaders and important figures); populace tends to be various combinations of Neutral/Evil and Lawful/Neutral. Good persons are rare but do exist.

Eglantine was once a mighty high-fantasy kingdom that now literally lies in complete and unmitigated ruin. It is a large region, hundreds of miles across, with several small, scattered habitable areas. Due to its proximity to the Abjuration event, magic has all but died out in Eglantine, with only wild talents being at all well-known.

The population is also comparatively quite large compared to the other shattered and depopulated regions that surround Eglantine. Although many areas are incapable of supporting settled life, two areas (North Town and South Town) support substantial populations. The North Town region has a sustainable population of about 7,000 people, while the South Town region supports about 10,000. Other scattered

pockets of arable land and hamlets exist, in addition to a small, independent town at Crystal Lake (population ~500).



**War Without Victory:** Eglantine is a land at perpetual war. The war shapes everything. North Town and its environs (less populous and with less arable land, but better durable resources) has been locked in a bloody struggle with South Town and its region (more populous and more arable land but few durable resources) since the Abjuration.

The war is an off and on affair, but mostly on, with both sides entrenched at a natural gap in the hills, and each side attempting periodic raids through the hills. The demons, of course, touched off the war, and since then have done a great many things to keep it going. Things have to be kept in a state of chaos so that the humans never organize themselves, except against one another. These constant machinations (always through human proxies) include:

- fostering a version of the Circle religion that incites the people to hatred and glorifies war;
- frustrating efforts at peace by keeping each faction uncomfortable and in need;
- keeping war-minded people in positions of authority;

- removing or discrediting influential people who want to stop the fighting;
- keeping the warring factions in near equipoise (which necessitates allowing some traffic between the regions and avoiding any decisive battles); and
- the absolute suppression of magic, which could give one side too much of an advantage and quickly result in a final resolution to the conflict.

The demons realized early on that maintaining an ongoing war was the only way to keep a population the size of Eglantine's subdued and distracted from turning their attention to discovering and eliminating the surviving demons. It has worked marvelously.

Geographically, technologically, and in other ways, Eglantine is in many ways the default description of the post-Abjuration World. It occupies the southwestern quadrant of the Known World, with the Crannoch to the northwest, Fallingstar to the north, and "the Dells" to the east. The sea forms its southern and western borders.

Most of the land is a blasted, dusty waste. The climate is generally temperate but extremely unpredictable, with violent windstorms quite common. The Eglantine River managed to survive the Abjuration, and flows out of the mountains to the north, emptying into the sea on the North Town side of the battle lines.

A narrow strip of fertile land can be found along the river, and that is where the people of North Town and most of its satellites eke out their existence. The people of the North have patches of wood and peat to use as fuel, and ruined cities to plunder for stone, but the size of their sustainable population has hit its maximum without sustainable, large scale food imports from the South.

To the south and west, the people of South Town have plenty of *potentially* arable land, but lack the fresh water to make productive

use of most of it. They also have greater access to the sea, and some fish to eat. Before the Abjuration, massive public works and irrigation canals supplied fresh water from the Eglantine River to water the vast fields that fed a kingdom.

North Town, nudged toward hatred by the demon's proxies, destroyed the dams and irrigation systems that survived the Abjuration, with the result that only those fields near local water sources are in meaningful production. Without more water, or durable resources to build dams and irrigation systems to take greater advantage of water from the hills, their population has also hit capacity.

Ruined cities and titanic monuments of a high fantasy society—now uninhabitable and largely picked over for valuable resources—dot the region. People only live in, and bothered to secure, the towns and cities near enough sustainable sources of food and water to merit the effort.

Even with these resource division handicaps, Eglantine should have recovered in a decade or two. All that Eglantine really needed was a strong leader to take control of the situation and ensure that basic trade was conducted between the newly created North and South sub-regions. Instead, the demons fostered local warlords and had their proxies convince each of them that they could run the entirety of Eglantine. None of them could, and so began the war.

Over time, the demons introduced social mechanisms designed to keep the war going at all costs. Temporary advantages would be given to one side, then the other, when and as needed to stoke the fires of war. One side would have a particularly good harvest, "stumble" onto a cache of (non-steel) weapons, or somehow manage to sneak a strike force through the mountains and commit atrocities behind the lines. Then it would be the other side's turn. By way of example, recently a cache of bow staves and strings from before the Abjuration was mysteriously found in remarkably good condition—almost as if preserved by magic.



This occurred, perhaps coincidentally, over the winter, when the South seemed poised to make a push into DMZ after a bout of disease had swept through the Northern lines. The sudden appearance of the bows deterred the planned Southern attack. (Interestingly, a heroic commando raid of Southern infiltrators who snuck into the North along the Great Road a few months later mysteriously succeeded against great odds, with the result that the Southern lines now boast some quality bows itself—detering a Northern incursion).

Leaders continued to be supported who believed in war without limits: the only war crime in Eglantine is accepting an offer of surrender. Prisoners are not taken (unless they are to be mutilated and sent back to their lines to send a message). Civilians are grossly abused, farms are burnt, children are mistreated, and entire villages are executed. Ten decades of vicious, all-out war have dehumanized the warring factions, both in actuality and in the eyes of each other. The North and the South now see each other as different races (despite the fact that they were one country a scant century ago, and the people are in fact indistinguishable). The warring factions now need little prodding to commit atrocities, although the demons provide it when necessary.

Every spare resource that Eglantine's decently sized population can generate, in short, over and above bare survival, is thrown into the breach: into manning the battle lines at the DMZ, into smuggling through the town of Crystal Lake and along the Great Road, and into intrigue and skullduggery.

Propaganda against the "sub-humans" living in the other sub-region is omnipresent and relentless, drilled into the populace from the time they can walk. Of course, since the people really are not that different, spotting a Southman (or a Northman) can be quite difficult. Unfortunate errors occur with discomfiting frequency.

Except at the front lines or along the Great Road, life in Eglantine is agrarian. People

live near potable water sources, till the fields with grain and vegetables, and raise low-resource animals like goats and chickens.

Fish are taken to a limited degree from the areas near the river and the shore, but the fertile fishing grounds lie several miles offshore. People quit trying to fish any distance offshore long ago, as ships often did not return. (The demons are responsible for the suppression of maritime activity, as discussed in the "Majestic Plateau" chapter, below).

Clothing tends to be rough-spun wool or flax. Metal of any sort is extremely scarce and extremely dear: if it is not being used as a plowshare, then it goes to the war effort. Both in the North and the South, hoarding metal, horses or other war materiel is a capital offense.

As in most of the rest of the World, weapons and armor tend to be resource conscious things like slings, staves, maces and clubs. Everyone, North or South, receives militia training in the mace and the sling at an early age.



In the North, the people live in secure, defensible stone buildings built from salvaged rubble from the great, fallen cities. In the South, the people more typically live in sod huts and build earthen palisades to secure their farms. North Town and South Town themselves survived the Abjuration in reasonable shape and appear much as they did before the Abjuration: South Town was a minor fishing village while North Town was a walled crossroads town situated at the

fork of and a bridge over the Eglantine River.

Armor, as in most other places, tends to be leather, with combatants placing more emphasis on cover, shields and fortification.

Everyone, North and South, receives some schooling. They learn basic literacy (useful for soldiers), basic military strategy, and receive militia training. Depending on whether they are marked for the army, for craftwork, or for the fields, they may receive additional instructions. Officers learn advanced strategy, advanced military tactics, and may receive a classical education.

Priests of the Circle (selected from officer candidates who seem to be both particularly smart and utterly ruthless) also receive religious training. Farmers and craftsmen, apart from rudimentary training, go to work in the fields or as apprentices and may be nearly illiterate. Medical knowledge is good, especially with respect to preventing camp disease, matters of hygiene, and treating battlefield injuries. The priests of the Circle serve as healers.

Each sub-region tries to be as self-sufficient as possible, but the resource situation makes that impossible. North Town tends to have more craftsmen able to work stone, build buildings, and even an engineer or two. South Town has more fullers and leatherworkers. North Town is constantly short of food, cloth and leather. South Town is constantly short of wood and stone, and is forced to burn sod for fuel.

Craft concentrations tend to only be found in North Town and South Town respectively, although maritime specialties (sailing, net making, sail making, *etc.*) can be found in the coastal towns of both regions.

Both North and South are run by hierarchical military dictatorships in which the Church of the Circle plays an extremely important and influential role. The ruler of each side is known as the Sheriff, and each pretends to be ruling the entirety of Eglantine with the authority of the (vanished) King and Queen, at least until the

region can be reunited.



The senior members of the Church of the Circle in each sub-region whisper darkly in their ear, provide bureaucratic support and keep the populace motivated. Each side maintains military discipline within their respective societies, and dispenses justice as they see fit. Usually this means killing troublemakers (or sending them to the worst part of the front lines—nearly the same thing) and corporal punishment (stocks, lashes) for more minor offenses.

#### **Crystal Lake and The Great Road:**

Unless the PLAYERS wish to volunteer for the army of one side or another, the anomalous situation of Crystal Lake and the Great Road will likely be the focus of role-playing in Eglantine.

An island of neutrality in a sea of conflict, Crystal Lake is a small, walled, fortified town of about 500 residents. It is neutral and under the control of neither side in the war. Both North Town and South Town have tried to conquer it, repeatedly, over the decades, but they have repeatedly failed. In addition to being fortified, it is in an easily defensible, high mountain pass. Once, about 50 years ago, North Town tried to quietly divert enough resources from the DMZ to mount a meaningful push against Crystal Lake, but this prompted a nearly successful offensive against their weakened lines by the army of the South.



Both sides—at the urging of the Church of the Circle—have decided that it is better to let Crystal Lake exist as a neutral buffer zone rather than try to take it. (Indeed, from the demons' perspective, having limited trade smuggled through Crystal Lake is invaluable in keeping the populace desperate enough to keep fighting, because it reminds them that better things await).

Crystal Lake was, before the Abjuration, a small, fortified way station guarding a pass in the high hills surrounding the capital. It has a freshwater lake to supply its water needs, and the valley itself has enough arable land to support 300 or so people.

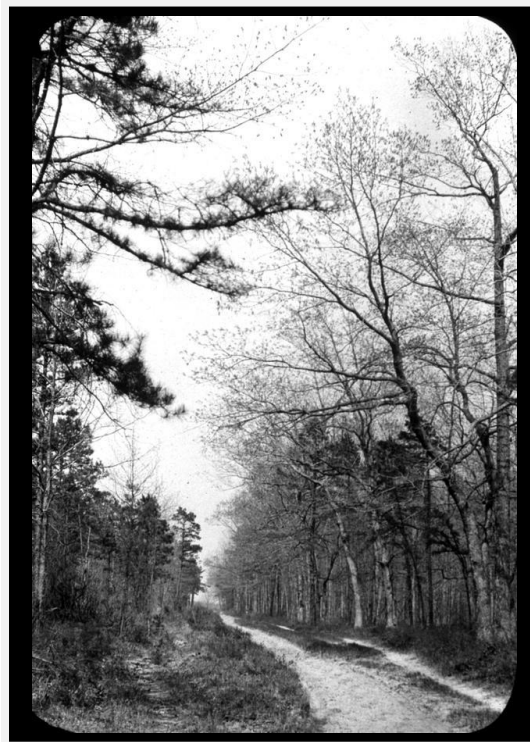
The village survived the Abjuration largely intact. Nowadays, Crystal Lake supports 500 or so people, including a variety of adventurers, merchants, and tradesmen. It even has a couple of inns, including the King's Road and the Queen's Ballad. Foreigners, a few demi-humans (including male Halflings), outcast barbarians from "the Dells", members of the various secret organizations (including the Heroes of Old and the Coursers), and anyone seeking adventure can be found here, keeping a room, owning a shop or operating some other kind of business.

Crystal Lake is the proverbial black market town on the border of two warring states. It is governed by a Council of the local merchants, with the face of the law being the sheriff in their employ, Browning Landscot (Neutral). Browning's blue-liveried guards are charged with resolving disputes, defending the town from North or South aggression, and generally keeping the peace. This writ includes collecting a tenth of everything brought through the gates, dealing harshly with thieves (e.g., public hanging) and keeping an ear to the ground. It does not involve ferreting out the many spies and agents of the North and South that infest the town. Those are taken for granted.

Assassinations, murders, and disappearances are rampant, and bribery (that does not threaten the neutrality of the town) is commonplace. Guards and mercenaries are

always in demand, either to protect a caravan (either sponsored by a warring faction or independent) or to run some kind of mission (sometimes overtly or covertly sponsored by one side; sometimes not).

If something can be had in Eglantine for a price, Crystal Lake is the best place to start looking for it. If it is not secreted under a floorboard in the back room of a merchant's shop, then someone will know someone who will at least claim to know where it can be gotten. For a price, of course, always for a price.



Permission to become a resident and own or let property on a long-term basis is discretionary with the town's Council, which considers the usefulness of the applicants, the size of the bribe they are willing to pay, and how committed they are to neither side in the war. Obtaining permission to live in the comparatively secure walls of Crystal Lake makes a good story thread, both in terms of garnering the wealth needed to satiate the Council as well as doing the favors (perhaps dangerous favors) needed to win over supporters.



People with surplus food, cloth and leather come from the South to deal with the merchants of Crystal Lake, as do people with stone, wood, and looted valuables from the ruined cities of the North. The merchants of Crystal Lake are quite competitive with one another, but tend to do quite well in their roles as the only trade outlet. Nominally, the South and the North rationalize trade headed toward Crystal Lake as trading with a neutral rather than with each other, although the smarter among them know that this is an artifice. A typical, established merchant in Crystal Lake will be among the wealthier people in the World, with a Wealth score in the 7-9 range. They may support several family members, household workers, and perhaps a small group of mercenaries/guards/problem solvers.

*The Great Road* itself is a marvel of the World, and was impressive even before the Abjuration. It is a paved, appropriately sloped, well bedded, well drained, Roman-style road hundreds of miles in length. It was prepared with subtle preserving enchantments that allowed it (as well as Crystal Lake) to weather the Abjuration in surprisingly good shape.

The Great Road is a former royal route running from South Town, through the hills into Crystal Lake, to the “Great City”, North Town and on east to “the Dells”. A fork also runs north to Elf Gate, ending at the mountains separating Eglantine from Fallingstar. It runs right through the gates of Crystal Lake, and the surrounding terrain makes it difficult (but not impossible) for travelers to follow the route of the Road without passing through the town.

Just because the Road is good does not mean that it is easy, however. First, wherever there is wealth passing by desperate people, there is banditry. Banditry is rampant along both the North and South sides of Crystal Lake, on all scales. There are well-organized bandit gangs working both sides of the Road; opportunistic fellow travelers; small time bandits confined to one side or

the other; and even sanctioned or semi-sanctioned privateers looking to disrupt the other side. This is why there is such steady work for guards based in Crystal Lake. The demons want just a little bit of trade to get through, but will choke off any efforts that become too successful.

Finally, just because the Road is as good as it is does not mean that smugglers do not try to cut out or bypass Crystal Lake entirely. They do, especially if they have extremely rare and valuable non-bulk goods that can be concealed from Browning’s customs inspectors or carted through the surrounding, rocky hills.

## 2. History.

The Kingdom of Eglantine was once a mighty realm with a population in the millions, and a royal capital at the “Great City”. It was renowned for its mighty and noble armies, powerful wizards, grandiose court, chivalrous knights, and high standard of living.

Eglantine had, at the time of the Abjuration, been ruled over for thousands of years by the House of Dushane, last represented by the dowager Queen Milesia of (the very minor) House Arborand, her son, the “Boy King” Harold XXII, and his older sister, the Princess Millesse.

Normally, the King of Eglantine would have been expected to marry someone of higher status than Milesia, the daughter of a petty and unimportant Count from the middle of “the Dells”, but the Boy King’s father believed in true love. Some say that the demon invasion was encouraged because of the Queen’s low social status, which tempted Scaraband the Traitor, court vizier of magic, into believing that he had a chance with the Princess Millesse. There may be some truth to this supposition.

In any case, that was then, and this is now. Millions died in the Abjuration; their bodies lie in or under the rubble of the many cities thrown down in the cataclysm. Only a few thousand people and isolated pockets of Eglantine were not utterly destroyed. Court



intrigue and high sorcery have given way to skullduggery and unending war.

### **3. Motivation-the people.**

The people of Eglantine, with the exception of the fortunate few in Crystal Lake, are always on the brink. On the brink of starvation, on the brink of crime, on the brink of dying in yet another senseless battle in a war structured by the demons and their proxies so as to be unwinnable.

The people are motivated by hate and fear. The North hates the South and will do anything it can to assuage its thirst for revenge against the disgusting animals populating its villages. The South feels exactly the same way. Hate and fear are constantly stoked by the priests and priestesses of the Circle, and their preaching has become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The war atrocities committed over the past 100 years have given each side legitimate grounds to hate the other. People in any given village have neither forgiven nor forgotten what has happened at the hands of opposing armies or sponsored bandits over the past century, and they constantly remind their children.

Growing up in Eglantine is tough. Things are scarce and one's life is cheap. One is taught the value of military discipline from the time one can walk; if we do not stick together amongst ourselves, the other side will kill us, or worse. Casualties of torture and battle are kept around, not so much for their ability to work a farm behind the battle lines, but as reminders of the price of failure.

There is no self-determinism. Eglantine, with the exception of Crystal Lake, is an utterly fascist land. The government and the Church of the Circle assess you and set you on your path. The authorities do play fairly in this regard: they are honestly motivated to find the brightest and most talented and put them in the most responsible social roles.

The biggest, strongest, quickest, and toughest young boys and girls are trained as

soldiers and sent to war until they are too old or too injured to be effective, at which point they are sent to work the farms or practice a craft. The smartest are trained as officers or join the clergy. The senior-most military officer becomes the Sheriff and rules their sub-region under the guiding hand of the Church. Others work the farms or practice basic trades.



Eglantine is not without its joys. The authorities allow people to gather (as long as security is not compromised), to drink and sing at local taverns (as long as security is not compromised) and engage in sports and games (as long as security is not compromised).

Both North and South are classic police states, with rewards for informing on one's neighbors and periodic purges of those perceived as disloyal.

### **4. Motivation-the leaders.**

While the leadership, both North and South, fits any reasonable definition of "evil", no one perceives of themselves in that way. They have their behavior rationalized, and anyone who waivers in their rationalization either does not ascend to true authority or suffers an unfortunate accident. In fact, only a handful of people have the slightest idea that the war is a manufactured one, and that any demons at all survived the Abjuration. The secular war leaders are not among those in the know.

The North Town and South Town hegemonies are military dictatorships with

the Church of the Circle (in each case) acting as political, social program and propaganda advisers. Although advancement in the military is nominally open, as a practical matter only those from the right families (surviving members of the old nobility) or those with specific Church backing advance to the highest ranks. Scratch a Sheriff and you find a Count of the old nobility. Each town is commanded by a military officer; each hamlet is commanded by another junior military officer reporting to a town, and so on down.

The motivation of the military leadership on each side is to maintain order, better the lot of their people (but only *their own* people), and to crush the enemy. Each fights the war to win, and is frustrated at setbacks.

Nominally, and except at the highest levels, the Church leaders are at war as well. Most clergy have no idea that the war is a stage production. They stir up fervor at the lower and middling ranks out of genuine hatred, and have legitimate arguments about whether the schism in the Church could somehow be healed.

At the highest levels—a few senior patriarchs and matriarchs on each side—things are a bit more...complicated. These people know the truth, and all have willingly undergone the Ritual of Obedience. They are the willing thralls of the demons and take orders (communicated through magical means or the occasional witch-hunting Reaper) from the Majestic Plateau. They secretly work together—on both sides—to prolong the war, while living lives of opulence.

Indeed, to advance to true, policy-level leadership in the Church on either side of the war, one is screened over one's entire lifetime for ruthlessness and, when the time comes, offered the choice of submission to the demons or immediate death. Almost everyone submits.

### **5. Regional Personality.**

**a. Aggressive.** Everyone (including in Crystal Lake) displays an “us against them”

mentality. They want to know whose side you are on: the North, the South, that of neutrality, or that of minding your own business. If you are determined to be one of “them”, they will try to get away with whatever they feel that they can risk: robbery, cheating, forcible enlistment in the army, or worse.

**b. Xenophobic.** At the same time, everyone is suspicious. You can't tell who “they” are just at first glance, you see. They use spies and infiltrators. Challenging one another to loyalty tests, and stirring up periodic purges, are popular pastimes.

**c. Militaristic.** Everyone receives militia training, and has both been taught and has lived through the fact that they have enemies who will kill them on sight—if they are lucky.

**d. Hateful.** People are focused on winning a war designed not to be won. The atrocities that both sides have committed in a fruitless effort to win cause most to see the other side as sub-human criminals. Read up on classic running, ethnically-based conflicts such as Serbia/Kosovo, where speeches reminding the populace about 1,000 year old battles still stir up riots, or Rwanda, where old hatreds result in sporadic genocide, to get a feel for what Eglantine is like. Another good historical source for inspiration is any movie realistically depicting the Eastern Front in World War II.

**e. Agrarian.** At the same time, post-Abjuration Eglantine is rural, not urban. It is centered on farms and farming villages, with towns being few and serving as military bases. Almost everyone is either a farmer or a soldier. The only truly urban centers are North Town, South Town, and Crystal Lake, and even they are quite small.

**f. Religious.** In both the North Town and South Town hegemonies, most people are fervently devoted to the Circle. Each side in the war invokes the religion as being on its side—despite the fact that it is the same religion. The other side is a bunch of heretics, you see. The war is waged as not

only a matter of survival and revenge, but as a religious duty. People who die bravely in the war are martyrs of the Circle.

**g. Names and Appearances.** Eglantine is Camelot without the glitz. Envision a typical, Dark Ages, Western European farming society. Use French, English, German, or other Western European names, ranks and titles as appropriate. Most people will only have a first name, and perhaps a nickname (John the Stout), trade descriptor (Roger the Butcher) or origin descriptor (Jean from Elf's Gate). A few survivors of Eglantine noble families will still use their family names, but titles of nobility have fallen by the wayside.



## **6. Outlooks.**

### **a. Magic/Spellcasters.**

Native spellcasters are not unheard of, with perhaps 1 in 500 births having any aptitude, but these as elsewhere are often wild talents. Such Adepts tend to quickly be sorted out into one of the typical groups: those who are hunted down and killed by the mob; those who are turned over to the Reapers; and those who learn to hide until they can escape Eglantine. Those able to hide are viewed as commodities, as discussed in preceding chapters.

Although the Reapers are active in Eglantine, they operate differently than they do in Fallingstar. There is no annual Harvest; it is not seen as necessary to control

the threat posed by the comparatively small number of Adepts coming from the region (a score or so every decade).

Instead, the Reapers have organized themselves as small task forces of a half-dozen at the Oracle of the Three in the North, and at the Center of the Circle in the South. When a local priest or priestess reports a suspicion of Adept activity, they investigate, either covertly or by riding into town and gaslighting the populace into surrendering the Adept. Depending on whether they think the Adept can be turned to the service of the demons, they either eliminate the target or spirit him away for re-education.

Many native spell-casters are regional eidolons, with powers reflecting the nature of the land. Most of these possess only a wild talent tied to either water (if from the North) or the earth or sea (if from the South).

Rumors persist of refugee Adepts living and working under some semblance of anonymity in Crystal Lake. It has even been reported that an "Underground Railroad" of sorts, shepherding Adepts out of Eglantine and into exile at the Crannoch's Moot, is based in Crystal Lake.

### **b. Strangers.**

Strangers pose a conundrum for the typical Eglantinian citizen. On the one hand, they are generally desperate and suspicious people. On the other hand, true strangers (people obviously not from Eglantine) might be valuable resources: potential mercenaries, bearers of valuable information or technology, or bearing desperately needed trade.

These competing tensions, both at the popular level and the leadership level, typically manifest as cautious, arm's length dealing with a short fuse for nonsense. That is not to say that someone wandering into a village unheralded and bearing visible wealth is safe. It does mean, however, that people who mind their own business and do not mind being constantly asked by the



watch to identify themselves and state their business can move about without too much difficulty. Discovered Adepts or those displaying magical abilities of any sort promptly provoke a hue and a cry.



Strangers of any kind face open prejudice if they try to settle or seem to have any kind of purpose other than a temporary one in any town or village. Such people will have to go to lengths to convince the local populace that they are “on their side.”

People are generally welcome, though closely watched, in Crystal Lake. It regularly receives travelers and traders.

#### **c. Demons.**

The demons are generally believed to have been wiped out at the Abjuration. Stories of demons occasionally crop up, but these stories always have a foreign origin (the Crannoch, Fallingstar, or the Dells). No locals will have seen a demon; adventurers or well-traveled people in Crystal Lake might well be another matter.

#### **d. Enemies and Conflicts.**

There is nothing that each side in the war will stop at to defeat, punish, torture, or dehumanize the other side. There are no laws of war being observed; each side is utterly brutal, and then decries the “crimes” of the other side.

Conflicts within the North Town or South Town hegemonies might be dealt with

through corporal punishment (for minor offenses) or forced conscription to the most hazardous sort of military duty (for anyone who is fit and can be controlled in a military setting). Conscripts usually die quickly, although if they distinguish themselves, they might be deemed valuable enough to be transferred to another setting.

Persons who are uncontrollable are executed following a short trial before the military official of the region, always in consultation with local Church leaders.

#### **e. Other Races.**

Eglantine is one region where demi-humans are visible to some extent. Halflings are occasionally seen, as traders in Crystal Lake, bandits or wandering rogues. A few Dwarves reside in Crystal Lake, practicing crafts. The entrance to Hrelgar’s underground Dwarven “Kingdom” is in the mountains to the west of Crystal Lake, not far from town (and in the same map hex).

#### **7. Religion.**

Circles have only two sides: you are either inside the Circle, or you are outside of it. Black and white, night and day, sinner or saint, for us or against us; this is the message of the Circle in Eglantine, and it is pounded into society with utter abandon.

Unlike in Fallingstar, the faith of the Circle is not touchy-feely, Gnostic or accepting; it is a rigid social control mechanism. If you fall inside the Circle, things are not too awful for you. You can live a decent life (albeit under the constant threat of war, often in shortage unless you are an elite, and the scrutiny and pervasive control of a police state). If you are outside the Circle, then you are unclean. People traveling between Fallingstar and Eglantine should be shocked at how different the “same” religion is on either side of some steep mountains.

The priests and priestesses of the Circle can be found in every hamlet, village or town on either side of the war. Apart from spreading propaganda, they do perform record-keeping, ministerial, basic life event, and

other clerical functions in each district. Formal worship services are weekly and attendance is mandatory (even for those on the brink of death); this gives the priesthood an opportunity to keep tabs on the population and note anyone who has gone missing.

Priests in the North answer through a militaristic hierarchy to Steven, the (Northern) Center of the Circle (Evil, Lawful) at the Oracle site east of North Town. Steven is a thrall of the demons, an unctuous individual who violently resists any questioning of his authority. Fortunately, most people have learned not to question him. He takes his orders from the Reapers, and occasionally directly from Zazeer.



Steven's equally vile counterpart, Reynard, likewise styled the (Southern) Center of the Circle (Evil, Lawful) holds sway at what he calls the "true Oracle", a church located in South Town. The KEEPER is encouraged to strike as many parallels between Steven and Reynard as possible, down to them even looking like they might be brothers. Reynard reports to Steven, but is likewise in

the know about the demons and what is really going on in Eglantine.

*The Oracle of the Three* is a collapsed and rebuilt shrine to pre-Abjuration gods east of North Town. The stronghold of the Circle and home base for the squad of Reapers, it is a heavily fortified keep. Before the Abjuration, clerics of the Three would commune with their gods here, and deliver cryptic prophecies, which were often true.

Steven and Reynard each possess a *crystal ball* with which they can both communicate with each other as well as their masters at the Majestic. The Circle uses the site's status for authoritative pronouncements and predictions to add weight to its propaganda.

### **8. Map Key.**

*1 hex=16 miles.* Travel ranges from fairly easy to fairly difficult.

Along the Great Road (noted on the map as connecting most of the major settlements), travel is easy along a well-paved and drained road. Travel is at 2 hexes per day on foot for a lightly loaded person who is pushing his speed.

In the plains or along the River Eglantine and its branches, travel is at 1 hex/day. In the badlands or hills, travel is difficult over broken terrain and proceeds at a 1/2 hex/day.

Poling a barge or coracle down the river is again a far superior method of long distance travel on the North Town side of the lines, and a traveler can make 4 hexes headed south in a day or 3 hexes headed north (upstream).

Travel through the DMZ involves sneaking past entrenched battle lines and evading wandering patrols probing the enemy's defenses, and should be a scenario.



High Mountains



Low Mountains



Desert



Arable Plains



Bog/Fen



Shallow Water/Brackish



Deep Salt Water



Wastelands



Fortified Battle Line

**a. North Town & environs.** South Town itself is a town of about 2,000 people, based upon a rebuilt pre-Abjuration castle. The entire town is built of reclaimed ruins and salvaged stone, and is as a result durable and defensible. Food shortages and long lines are commonplace, and the entire town is constantly on edge as a result. (Food goes to the Church and soldiers first, of course). A fair concentration of basic crafters can be found.

The economy is largely barter-oriented, although a system of scrip (paper money) is used for larger transactions, and pre-Abjuration Eglantine currency is used and accepted by some for small purchases.

Like many early Dark Ages towns, North Town's primary function is as the headquarters for the military; taxes and in-kind contributions to the military effort are extracted to support the town and Church.

**b. South Town & environs.** South Town itself is a town of about 2,000 people, based upon a rebuilt pre-Abjuration castle. Except for the castle, however, it is a town of sod huts, dugout cabins, and farmer's crofts, protected by earthen palisades. It is situated at the end of a brackish inlet, and supports a fishing dock and a small number of strictly coastal fishing boats. None dare to venture into potentially richer grounds beyond the mouth of the inlet, given how many have tried and never returned.

The economy is also largely barter-oriented, although a system of scrip (paper money) is used for larger transactions, and pre-Abjuration Eglantine currency is used and accepted by some for small purchases.

Like many early Dark Ages towns, South Town's primary function is also as the headquarters for the military; taxes and in-kind contributions to the military effort are extracted to support the town and Church.

Food is rarely in short supply in the South, but wood, stone and metal are extremely scarce, bordering on unavailable. All such durable goods go to the soldiers and the

Church first, of course.

Again, if the PLAYERS get a chance to visit both sides of the lines, or observe Northmen and Southmen in Crystal Lake, the parallels between them should be played up to the maximum. The people look the same, dress the same, sound the same, and act the same, with only different shortages and the substitution of the words "North" and "South" in their respective propaganda messages to distinguish them.

**c. Crystal Lake.** Crystal Lake (population ~500) is situated at the edge of a mountain lake in a pocket valley along the Great Road. Each entrance to the valley is heavily fortified, but people passing through or having legitimate trading business in town are permitted through with few questions. All persons being trade goods into town are searched by Browning's gate guards and taxed 10% in kind at the gate.

The town is beautiful and picturesque. It survived the Abjuration largely intact. The buildings are of brick and stone; the streets are paved; there are underground sewers and privies in the buildings; and parks, art and statuary (appropriate to a town of its size) are on display. Everyone has enough and some are even wealthy, as it is the only avenue of trade in a region that badly needs some.



In order to maintain its neutrality, persons coming in and out of Crystal Lake are only permitted to trade with licensed, resident merchants and warehousemen. When dealing in ordinary goods, each only takes a





modest margin, and the town government acts as a trade guild to enforce this. However, there is a thriving black market in just about everything; the blue-liveried guards ignore it if it is in things for which there is no large market (such as rare antiquities, books or magic).

The town operates on a system of scrip and books of account; to pay for a room at the inn, one must have a credit. (Unless you want to keep careful track of such matters, use the Wealth system and make broad assumptions about what the PLAYERS can afford).

Since persons from both the North and South come here, there is much opportunity for adventure and skullduggery. People get mugged, knifed, robbed, hired, offered corrupt deals, and run out of town with disturbing regularity.

The Coursers and Heroes of Old are active in Crystal Lake, and both Halflings and Dwarves frequent its inns and shops. The guard views its job as protecting the residents and keeping the peace, not policing every dispute between visitors.

**d. The Great Road.** A Roman-style road whose enchantments helped it survive the Abjuration intact, the Great Road connects all of the major settlements in Eglantine. It is a hazardous place. Each side wants to disrupt the flow of goods coming out of Crystal Lake and headed for the other side. This leads to a thriving banditry business, both state-sponsored, semi-state sponsored, and completely freelance.

There is always work to be had in Crystal Lake escorting caravans back to North Town or South Town. The Road passes by and through numerous (largely picked over) ruined towns, villages and even mighty cities, now uninhabitable because of a lack of ready food and water.

**e. Oracle of the Three.** Population ~500. The headquarters of the rotten-at-the-core Eglantinian Church of the Circle, the town is a fortress directly governed by Steven, (Northern) Center of the Circle. He keeps a

personal elite guard as well as a task force of Reapers on hand. About 300 farmers, a support bureaucracy of about 100 clerics and a garrison of about 100 troopers reside here. Stephen and his ilk even have a stable of horses, which they keep a tight monopoly on, doling out horses only to garrison commanders and high ranking clergy for their personal use, to the Reapers, or for special purposes.

**f. The DMZ.** Trench warfare at its finest is practiced along the DMZ. The armies of the North have formed an entrenched, fortified battle line (complete with watch towers, hidden pits, obstacle fields and diseases of exposure) across a 20-mile wide frontier between the sea and the mountains. The South has done likewise.

Despite the fact that only 7,000 people are sustained by the lands of the North, they keep a staggering and crippling 2,000 troops on the line at all times. The South engages in similar crippling behavior, keeping 3,000 troops out of its 10,000 population on the line at all times. The 40 miles or so of fertile, watered, highly productive land in between the lines is uninhabited and full of burnt-out villages, as well as ruins considerably less explored than elsewhere in Eglantine.

The decades of lack of inhabitation have caused scrub forest to take over the DMZ area, oddly providing a potential boost of valuable resources to each side. Nonetheless, each side covertly patrols the forests and constant skirmishes occur, preventing any serious efforts at resource extraction.

Periodically, one side or the other enters the DMZ in force and dashes itself against the others' fortifications in an effort to advance the lines.

**g. The "Great City".** Formerly the royal capital of Eglantine, it has become grown over and is deserted, except for the Great Road. The Road runs through its middle, past flattened and bombed-out hulks of magnificent architecture and once-soaring

towers.

It takes an entire day on the Great Road to traverse the “Great City.” Despite its size, both the land and water are poisoned as the result of the Abjuration, and nothing lives here. Well, almost nothing.

Occasional adventurers and treasure seekers have occasionally plumbed the depths of the once-mighty capital, looking for lost magic, weapons, or other easily-movable treasure. The easily found is gone, but the “Great City” is vast, overgrown in weeds and brush, and there are doubtlessly hidden vaults and caches of valuables to be found.

Several parties of treasure hounds have failed to return over the years. Reasons commonly attributed to these disappearances include: violence at the hands of other treasure hunters; hauntings; fell traps (magical and otherwise) and the fact that the “Great City” is simply labyrinthine and difficult to navigate.

Were one to add to this list the fact that a *major* demon, Slithlug the Crawler (use typical Shoggoth statistics and description) is magically trapped in the City and barred only from approaching within sight of the Great Road, then this would then be a fair summary of the hazards of the “Great City”.

**h. The “Great Port”.** The Great Port is another sad sight.

Once a mighty seafaring city with a population in the tens of thousands, the Abjuration caused the vast bulk of the Great Port to collapse into the sea. A few odd buildings still remain, outlying areas along roads leading into the town.

The water is clear, cold and very deep, and one can see the rubble field lying under 20 or so feet of water. A few small fishing villages do exist in the area, and occasionally, someone tries to skin dive for treasure.

The Great Port is likely the best place in the World to skim through ruins that actually contain something valuable (subject to the salt water damage of a century), although

the demons long ago went through it and cleaned out most of the magical items. The fact that the Great Port has been largely cleaned out, alone, should pique PLAYER suspicions, since extended exploration of the Great Port would require magical assistance.

Nonetheless, a rumor circulates among the Heroes of Old that a mighty sword, Justice, a relic of the royal house of Eglantine and a legendary symbol of royal authority, lies somewhere beneath the waves in the Great Port.

The demons, for their part, are troubled that such a powerful weapon could not be accounted for after the Abjuration.

**i. Elf Gate.** Historically much less fascist on a day-to-day basis, but still not much better off, Elf Gate is a larger farming village of about 200 people at the northern edge of Eglantine. Here, the Great Road dead-ends into functionally impassible, high mountains, although one can see ruins from what was once a majestic gateway to the North of town, high up on the slope. Before the Abjuration thrust up this mountain range, the Great Road continued North into Fallingstar. The ruins on the slope are what remain of the next stretch of Road.

Nowadays, Elf Gate still feels the heavy hand of the North Town tax collectors and troop levy, but the people are far enough away from North Town that their activities largely go unnoticed. To add to this, both the local garrison leader, Undersheriff Ricken “the Beef” (Evil, Lawful) and the local Church presence, Brother Tomas (Evil, Lawful) are harboring thoughts of secession. Each believes that the war (while the South is undeniably evil) is not to their advantage, since they are as far away from the front as one could be, and capable of self-sufficiency. The scenario *The Lord of Nothing* explores Ricken’s rebellious interest in more detail.

In addition, Elf Gate sees the occasional desperate refugee or foolhardy adventurer en route either to or from Fallingstar, as this is still the most passable (or least impassible)



of the ways between those regions.

### **9. Sample NPCs.**

#### **a. James, Soldier of the North (or South, it really does not matter).**

James is a 16 year old recruit in one of the armies. He is among the luckier ones. Because he is seen as somewhat promising, with the potential of being a sergeant someday, he was not immediately sent to the front. Instead, he has been assigned to garrison duty behind the lines at one of the villages. If he was seen as an average specimen, he would be sent right to the front and have to convince the field commanders of his worth.

With a year behind the lines to mature, Jon will learn a few things about tactics and survival. *Then* he will be sent to the front lines and try to survive his initial year as the assistant squad leader of a patrol of 10 men. If he survives that year, he might get promoted to sergeant, and if he keeps surviving, someday he might get sent back to garrison duty off the lines, train more men, and take a wife. It's a glorious life; his parents really are proud of him.

#### **James, Soldier of the North.**

STR 13 DEX 13 INT 11 CON 13 APP 13  
POW 11 SIZ 13 EDU 8 Hits: 13 Age: 16.

**Damage Bonus:** +1d4.

**Skills:** Dodge (40%), Craft (Farming) (50%), Hide (40%), Listen (40%), Navigate (30%), Stealth (40%), Spot (40%), Survival (new) 50%.

#### **Attacks:**

Mace, 40%, 1d6+2+db, crushing, HP 20.

Sling, 50%, 1d8, 80 yards, crushing, cannot parry.

**Defenses:** Armor 3 (leather and helmet)

Shield, wicker & leather, 65%, 1d2+db, knockback, Armor 10 (must parry).

Deity: The Circle

Wealth: 4

Gear: Mace, sling, leather armor, shield, military kit, youthful zeal.

#### **b. Steven, Center of the Circle.**

Steven is an unctuous, conniving, middle-aged slave of the demons with a slimy manner and honeyed words. He lives a life of luxury and debauched excess as he provides the moral and propaganda impetus for the war effort. Of course, he works out the details via magic crystal ball with Reynard, his counterpart in the South.

His quarterstaff poses an interesting dilemma. On the one hand, it is a traditional clerical rod once used in the worship of the old gods of Eglantine, and still resonates with the populace as evidence of legitimate authority. Appropriate research might lead the PLAYERS to the (accurate) conclusion that it is a magical weapon.

On the other hand, the demons normally do not allow even a high-level thrall to have a magical weapon, since someone might take it away from said thrall and put it to a more productive use, such as beating on a demonic skull. Zazeer prevailed upon some of the other demons to let the Centers of the Circle have them on a trial basis, as a behavioral experiment. She sees value in leaving them out as bait, to see who is tough and daring enough to try and take it off the leader of a powerful human faction.

Note: feel free to use *identical* stats and description for Reynard, Steven's Southern counterpart.

STR 11 DEX 13 INT 16 CON 13 APP 13  
POW 14 SIZ 13 EDU 18 Hits: 13 Age: 29.

**Damage Bonus:** +0.

**Skills:** Accounting (50%), Appraise (55%), Astronomy (25%), Bargain (70%), Command (90%), Dodge (40%), Etiquette (75%), Fast Talk (70%), First Aid (60%), Hide (60%), History (40%), Insight (75%), Listen (40%), Navigate (40%), Persuade (90%), Perform (Sermon) (60%), Religion (60%), Research (Streetwise) (85%), *Ride Horse* (50%), Spot (40%), *Status*

(99%), Stealth (90%), Strategy (75%), Survival (new) (90%), Teach (50%).

**Attacks:** Quarterstaff (magic), 57% (includes +10% enchantment bonus), 1d8+1, crushing, can parry twice vs. attack, 25 HP.

**Defenses:** Does not wear armor. That's what bodyguards are for.

**Deity:** outwardly, the Circle; actually, demonic thrall.

**Gear:** (magical) quarterstaff (symbol of office, topped with silver circle); *crystal ball* (communicates (audio only) with other *crystal balls*, including that of Reynard and one held by Zazeer); light war horse; command of Church hierarchy and numerous Reapers.

Wealth: 10.

### **10. Plot Seeds.**

**You're in the Army Now!** The Army of the North (or the South, like it matters) is always looking for a few good men or women to help in a variety of capacities. Desperate mercenaries are needed to man the lines or patrol into the DMZ. Experienced mercenaries are needed to train raw recruits at boot camp. Even more experienced mercenaries are needed to guard military requisition efforts in Crystal Lake, or participate in spy missions or commando raids behind enemy lines.

No one is too poor or inexperienced to defend the North (or the South, like it matters) from the evil privations of the other side as a new recruit assigned to the battle lines. Enlistment contracts are available for a minimum of one year. You get room and board (the food is actually good, but you live in an improved trench), and a military kit (Wealth level 3).

The conditions at the line are not for sissies (again, a shored up trench), but if you survive the first year, you become eligible for a promotion. Never mind that the mercenaries tend to get the most dangerous assignments, and few of them actually survive a year. But those that are tough and

resourceful enough to survive a year of suicide missions are deemed valuable enough that they usually do get the promised promotion.

More experienced mercenaries (or trench survivors who make a good impression) who get assigned to a training billet might find themselves with a one year contract, sufficient to keep them at a Wealth of 4, living in a barracks environment at the lines or perhaps elsewhere. They have a schedule of training that might allow them some free time, but are always subject to call up for some mad scheme to move the front lines a bit.

The really good mercenaries get tasked with important work, generally well-paying enough to keep them at a Wealth level of 5: caravan duty, sanctioned banditry, guard duty, special assignments, commando raids, espionage missions and the like. They probably have comfortable lodgings at the capital city of their side, and are often allowed to keep a share of any spoils they might obtain.

**The Great City:** Playing the role of the mines in Fallingstar as a killing jar for the reckless and daring is the Great City, haunted metropolis always beckoning to wannabe great treasure seekers. Someone has always heard a rumor about just where to look; it will just take careful planning. A quick in, a quick out, and we'll all be rich. Someone has to keep Slithlug the Crawler fed, after all. Sometimes these rumors are real; sometimes they are honestly mistaken; sometimes the treasure maps are generated by the demons and lead directly to Slithlug's dinner slab.

**By the Gods, An Actual Town!** And should the PLAYERS get themselves situated in Crystal Lake—a "normal" fantasy village on a very small scale—any number of typical fantasy plot seeds can be put into place. Glathnog has long considered risking an overt raid on Crystal Lake for magical plunder.

## GAZETTEER—“THE DELLS”

*That's it, I'm leaving this god-forsaken desert hellhole!!!*—comment of a typical 12 year-old native of “the Dells”.

*Look, “the Dells”!!! We've finally made it!!!*—comment of a typical glory-hungry adventurer.

### **1. Overview.**

**Population:** ~1,000; humans 99%; demons 1%; others unknown.

**Government:** Four clan-based tribes based around four oases.

**Important Entities:** Hassem, leader of the Sand Tribe (Evil, Chaotic); Walif, leader of the Dust Tribe (Neutral, Chaotic); Palla, leader of the Flint Tribe (Evil, Chaotic); Fazoul, leader of the Sun Tribe (Neutral Chaotic); Talboth Redbeard, captain of the Demon's secret watch post (Overseer, Evil, Lawful).

**Imports:** Treasure hunters (see below).

**Exports:** Bandits and young warriors seeking adventure in nearby lands (see below).

**Outlook:** Evil, Chaotic; some kinder people may be more Neutral.

“The Dells” was once the agricultural hinterland supporting the populous cities of the Kingdom of Eglantine. Pastoral villages with waves of grain and herds of contented animals chewing their cud; massive irrigation projects; food production on a large scale; and happy farmers having regular festivals were the way of things in the peaceful Dells.

Unfortunately, the last battle of demon wars happened in “the Dells”, and this was ground zero for the Abjuration. Now it is a crater, *literally*, over one hundred miles across. With the exception of a few oases clinging to the lip of the crater, each zealously guarded by ruthless, tribal clans who have adapted to the harsh environment,

“the Dells” are dead. Not just disrupted or chaotic like much of the rest of the World—totally dead. Blasted to a dusty desert, every ounce of life drained from the land itself. Vast dust swarms swirl and blow, and a complete lack of water in the environment makes 99% of the region utterly uninhabitable.



One might ask why, then, anyone in their right mind would go there, or try to live there? These are good questions, and discussion of “the Dells” needs to be subdivided into two categories: the locals, and explorers.

### **a. The Local Tribes.**

In terms of living there, life is mean but potentially comfortable at the wealthy oases, since it is extremely difficult to access them. They are very isolated from outside threats, but very vulnerable to infighting and “cabin fever”. People grow up tough, but people tend to die young as well, in fights or taking daring chances. Hence, there is rarely an overpopulation problem.

Men (or women not wishing to live traditional lives) who do live to something resembling adulthood, who are not deemed necessary to the continued fortunes of their own tribe, and who do not care to duel to the death for tribal leadership, are cast out. In a show of courtesy rare for “the Dells”, these young people are shown the door with

enough supplies to make it to Eglantine, where they may seek their own fortunes.

So for those born there, the short answer is that, except for extended patriarchal families and their loyal retainers who do not expect or wish to marry, people do *not* live there. They do sometimes *come* from there.

### **b. The Explorers.**

At the same time, adventurers are always trying to go there. “The Dells” are where the demon host assembled to give final battle to the assembled hosts of the mortal races, before the Abjuration blasted and buried both sides. It is *the* place to go to sift through the sand for buried treasure, be it rumored artifacts; steel; lost magic; or other buried secrets. Every so often, someone actually finds something, so daring people keep trying (and keep dying in the attempt).

And finally, there is a good, old-fashioned dungeon in the middle of the dusty wastes: the Redoubt.

## **2. History, Geography and Life in General.**

### **a. The Oases.**

The region now referred to as “the Dells” is the most blasted place in the World. It lies in the southeastern corner of the known World. With the exception of four oases (which are both arable and fairly livable—almost if by magic), “the Dells” are empty desert. Nothing lives in the dead areas, and they are completely devoid of water. It is a cold desert, with summer highs reaching into the 90s but every night being clear and below freezing.

Each oasis supports only 200 or so people at maximum capacity, but does so rather comfortably. This fact completely shapes and informs the pattern of human society in “the Dells”. Rain has not fallen in “the Dells” since the Abjuration; each of the oases are centered on lakes at which there are small (roughly 1 square mile in each case) patches of good farmland and timber.

Each oasis is inhabited by a tribe which has

evolved in much the same way. Mortal survivors of the demon war (those who were tough enough to reach an oasis) fought, bargained, backstabbed, and murdered one another until equilibrium was reached.

### **A Refresher Course on BRP Deserts.**

The desert in The Dells is a temperate, rocky desert with dense rubble. Movement is halved, instead of reduced by 1/3, because of brutal dust storms.

Dust storms are everyday occurrences away from the oases--**50% chance, checked every hour, lasting 1d6 x10 minutes; 10% chance in the badlands around the edge**--and limit visibility to 1d10x5 feet. They impose -50% to Listen and Spot checks, **and do 1 point of damage per storm to anyone caught in the open**. First Aid cannot be used to heal this damage until the PLAYER is out of the crater. Yes, they are that bad.

Also, after the first three days without food or water, all actions are at ½ normal (Difficult). After a number of days equal to ½ CON, any physical action requires a CON x5 check. Failure still allows the action but incurs 1 point of damage. After a number of days equal to CON, any action requires a CON x5 check to avoid 1 point of damage, wounds take twice as long to heal.

So it’s really easy to die out in the crater. The Dell tribes typically carry a collapsible, wicker frame device called a *dust-tent* if they travel out in the wastes (assuming that they are allowed to leave the oasis with one). This device looks like a cross between a kite shield and a tent, and is a collapsible, lightweight portable shelter that blunts the force of dust storms. The *dust-tent*, when deployed, is a lightweight personal shelter that can blunt a sudden dust storm. On a successful Survival check while using a *dust-tent*, dust storm damage is avoided. So get one.



Over the course of the past 100 years, this winnowing process has continued until each oasis has reached the lowest common denominator: run by an extended family. When there is only so much to go around, one undermines one's own family last.

The identity of the ruling families stabilized rather quickly, given that dozens and dozens of miles of land that it is impossible to survive in surrounds each oasis. The micro-societies controlling each oasis have heavily fortified their positions, to the point where no external threat has dared to attack them in decades.

Each oasis is no place for the weak, and society is utterly ruthless. Each oasis is overseen by a supremely Machiavellian patriarch (or, occasionally, matriarch), who does whatever is necessary to keep the family safe. This has resulted in an absolute, top-down emphasis on harmony which is never respected. Rather, disharmony is resolved by tolerating the killing of the weakest party to the dispute (defined as whoever is able to kill the other member, after rounding up whatever political support can be mustered). Nefarious deals are constantly being negotiated and renegotiated. It's like a reality show.

There is no penalty for murder, although if the patriarch decides (with the support of enough of the family) that the murder has called the fitness of the murderer into question, that may lead to his murder in turn. The penalty for any crime affecting the security of the oasis itself (arson, stealing survival tools, selling secrets, *etc.*) is torture and public execution—this is the one thing that everyone agrees on.

All (nominal) authority lies in the patriarch (referred to for simplicity as male hereafter). He can (and does) order the death of sickly babies, sickly children, and anyone else whose spot in the finite numbers of sustainable society might be better taken up by someone else. The only kindness shown is that someone who has not offended the patriarch might be given enough food and

water to theoretically enable them to march out to Eglantine, and are allowed to do so. Of course, one only lasts as patriarch until someone else rises and overthrows you; wise patriarchs know when to step down and accept a lesser role going forward, or when to bide their time. The only real rule is mob rule.

Early on, each oasis realized that only being able to support a small number of people, with no room for expansion, posed a difficult problem in terms of childbearing and keeping the population from becoming inbred. One of the inevitable sources of conflict in close quarters is for two members of one sex to fight over scarce breeding opportunities. Early efforts to have several smaller families live together at an oasis failed for just that reason: which family gets to keep procreating, and which has to stop?

As a result, the right of reproduction had to be monopolized by the leader (or by whoever was most fit, physically, to procreate). Nowadays, there is only one functional adult male in each oasis (usually the patriarch, but if the patriarch is old, sometimes his planned successor). Other males (surviving brothers, nephews, cousins or deposed patriarchs who “graciously” stepped down) undergo voluntary sterilization to remove that source of potential conflict. As a result, the typical demographic for an oasis consists of one functional adult male; a cadre of eunuchs (often including several past patriarchs); a few dozen adult women; and the rest children or old women.

Children are considered to come of age as of puberty. At that point, male children are offered two choices. First, if they are deemed valuable enough (in terms of combat ability, smarts, or useful skills), they can be neutered and stay as members of the tribe. If they are really talented, they may be anointed the heir presumptive to the tribe, and from that point on are groomed for leadership, with the current patriarch stepping aside when they are ready. Second, they can be given enough food, water and

gear (a *dust-tent*) to make it to the border of Eglantine, and leave.

Some young men try for a third option: seizing power, either through bold challenge or by subterfuge. Failed attempts in this regard usually result in the young man's death, although there have been instances where the patriarch was sufficiently impressed by the coup-plotter's gumption that the plotter "earns" a promotion to heir in place of any current heir.

Female children, for their part, are likely to be "traded" to another oasis. Each year, each oasis supplies one of the others with its of-age female children in an informal, rotating arrangement, by turning them out with enough food, water and *dust-tents* to make it to the oasis whose turn it is to receive them. The only exceptions to this rule are female children with a valuable enough skill or talent to be kept, over and above the perceived value of fresh blood and more children (this can include combat ability, smarts, or exceptional command of a craft). Such retained female children do account for about 10% of all children coming of age.

There is a realization that having an entire oasis fathered by one male line is not a good situation from a eugenics perspective. As a result, preliminary discussions have begun to address the potential of trading males between oases and freshening up each oases' gene pool. As with everything in The Dells, this is a highly political and dangerous topic, since it would undermine the entire power structure of each micro-society. It also leads to some interesting experiences on the part of male visitors to an oasis, who are encouraged to, shall we say, contribute to the breeding stock to diversify the gene pool.

The sustainable population sizes of the oases are truly finite. Using Survival to forage in "the Dells" outside of the oases for enough food and water to support one person for a day is *impossible* in the crater (01% required) and requires a Critical success in the badlands around the edges. Exposed

people quickly die of thirst or to the dust storms, and there really is not much out there to find.

Whether or not one could squeeze five more people into a given oasis may be a point of academic interest, but sustainable population levels are not subject to argument. The influential adults at each oasis debate the issue constantly, but rarely do they agree that even one more person than the current consensus can stay.

The standard of living at each oasis is surprisingly decent for those allowed to live there. Each pocket of land that survived the Abjuration is good quality, arable farmland. Each oasis has not forgotten its prudent agricultural practices; a variety of crops (grain, hay, vegetables, oilseeds) are grown communally and stored communally. They raise very efficient animals (chickens and goats) for meat and leather, and each oasis is functions as self-sustaining commune. Each even has a fruit orchard, wood (very carefully managed), and clean water from deep wells. Sanitation and hygiene are immaculate. Woodworking, wool weaving and leatherworking are skilled and available, and there is always someone who knows something of smithing.

The resource that has to be most closely watched given the coercive population planning is fire and fuel. Each oasis quickly moved to a centralized arrangement where there is but one building where one fire is kept, where everyone cooks, and where everyone sleeps (with attendant squabbling, pushing and shoving) when it is cold. This centralized building is fortified and people are trained to fall back to it and defend it communally if confronted with the rare outside threat.

The buildings in each oasis are built of stone, nearly all predating the Abjuration. Everyone of age knows how to fight to some degree. The leader and his cadre of house guards will actually resemble a Barbarian in a typical fantasy game, down to the light armor, steel martial weapons and incredible toughness.



The oases even have enough iron tools like ploughs and axes and carpentry tools; available black iron is not wasted on things like weaponry. A good, burnished flint dagger, spear or sling is sufficient for most, but the people do have a reputation as archers, wielding composite bows and flint-tipped arrows. Everyone goes about armed at all times.

Each oasis will also still have—in remarkably well-maintained condition—an amount and variety of true steel weapons and even leather or chain mail armor(!) that one might associate with a town guard of 10 or so people. These items are what happened to be secreted in the area or on the person of the original survivor/refugees who successfully staked out their claims (plus or minus that which has acquired and traded away over the years, until an equilibrium has been reached of having enough for the military elite, plus replacements).

These quality weapons are generally kept in the possession of the patriarch and his immediate followers: wealth in this kind of society naturally tends to trickle up, as people advance by killing others and taking their things. The demons are uncomfortably aware of this undesirable situation, but have chosen to deal with it obliquely, as discussed below.



Except in daughters, commerce between the oases is non-existent. There were once efforts at it, but too many people died in the desert and/or were treacherously killed upon arrival. Messages are not exchanged except in situations threatening the survival of both villages.

The people are uniformly literate; it is common for people to try and put their internal deals in writing. This is done not because the writing itself means anything or that there is any honest judicial system, but because being able to say that a deal was in writing is politically valuable when a dispute arises.

Medical knowledge is decent, especially with respect to such matters as battle wounds, exposure, childbirth, and proper hygiene.

#### **b. The Redoubt.**

The Redoubt, historically, was a local keep, a minor royal property on the distaff side that like the field at Agincourt, happened to become the site where two great armies elected to give battle to one another. It is also where, with the triumph of the demons at hand, the wizards of the World brought down the Abjuration. Ka-boom!!!

The Abjuration sucked the life out the land for dozens of miles in every direction; most of "the Dells" is literally an immense crater left behind in its wake. But the keep that was at the eye of the storm remained standing, a fifth and final oasis about 50 yards across. The area is littered with the powdered remains of mighty armies. It is possible that, if someone dug long enough through the grit, something interesting might be unearthed.

Never ones to waste an opportunity, the demons have taken advantage of the Redoubt's extreme isolation and intact defenses to turn it into a death trap. They spread stories and rumors about the fabulous treasure and lost lore that can be found there, with the plan of luring the adventurous to their deaths.

At the Redoubt is a task force of demons led by an unusually intelligent barrow-wight, Fangtooth, who volunteered because she/it felt strangely drawn to the place. Every now and then, another group of adventurers dares to seek out the Redoubt, and Fangtooth and her/its crew eat them. The Redoubt is detailed in the "Scenarios" section of this

book.

### **3. Motivation-the people.**

The people of the Oasis tribes walk that fine line between selfish neutrality and ruthless, lawless evil on a daily basis. They are able (with effort) to get along with each other for the benefit of their mutual survival, but it is a life of bullying, social climbing, and figurative as well as literal backstabbing. Everyone at a particular oasis knows how to take care of themselves in a fight, is an expert at desert survival, and knows how to farm.

The only thing that keeps one oasis inhabitant from murdering another, however, is a constantly shifting analysis of the likelihood that someone will retaliate. Things tend to be politically stable for periods of time, but once someone decides to try and move up in society, sides get taken and violence erupts until someone wins.

### **4. Motivation-the leaders.**

The leaders at each oasis are the only intact males allowed to live there. Having risen to the top of the food chain, they ruthlessly maintain the status quo, having been taught the value of ruthlessness from birth. They are constantly appraising the usefulness of the rest of the oasis, and if someone is deemed too much trouble, they are quietly eliminated if possible. If this is not possible, then they are noisily eliminated. Purges occur periodically to keep the status quo in place.

### **5. Regional Personality.**

**a. Suspicious.** Since they would stab one another in the back at the drop of a hat, the tribesmen of “the Dells” assume that strangers would be even quicker to do so. Anyone approaching an oasis will be spotted by a sentry, challenged, and ordered to camp only at the edge of the oasis. People will then come out to them.

**b. Exploitative.** When people do come out to them, they will size the PLAYERS up. If they think that the PLAYERS might be able

to resist force, they may ask what they want and engage in some barter. They have no sense of fair play in this regard; if the PLAYERS are low on food and water, food and water are that much more expensive. Generally, they have enough of everything except room, so it is unique items (magic, weapons, and oddities, anything that might allow the trader to move up or secure his social position) that have the most value.

The tribesmen are used to parties of adventurers looking for food, water and/or assistance in getting to the Redoubt. A typical deal (for a party that looks tough enough to negotiate it) would be enough food and water to make it, one *dust tent* for each PLAYER, and a sleigh that they can all haul water on together, in exchange for something unique: a quality weapon; casting several beneficial spells; or someone with a unique talent agreeing to join the oasis in exchange for someone less unique (forcibly if necessary).

Surreptitious visits to an outsiders’ camp by women looking to diversify the gene pool are not uncommon. The leadership of each oasis turns a blind eye to such matters for reasons of practicality; one cannot consistently raise families with one’s own blood relatives. It is also not uncommon for any backstabbing attacks to come shortly after the conclusion of such affairs, to silence potential witnesses.

Weak-seeming parties are subject to attempts at robbery, pillage and/or enslavement. Even strong parties are subject to such attempts in the night. Only a party containing representatives of the Paired are likely to avoid any risk of attack; they are too valuable and each oasis does not wish to risk the boycott on healers, given the problems that inbreeding poses.

**c. Untrustworthy.** Deals are made to be broken, according to an old Dells saying.

**d. Harsh.** The Dells are the nastiest place in the World, outside of the oases. Play this up. Do not hand-wave dust storm checks, thirst and hunger checks, and the like. Make

people track their food and water assiduously.

There are no encounters to be expected outside of the oases and ring of badlands immediately surrounding them. Nothing lives in the crater. There are no large predators anywhere in "the Dells", since there is not enough food to support them. In the ring of badlands, typical low-resource desert creatures like reptiles, scorpions, small raptors, and rodents can be found, but even then, usually only close to the edge of the oases themselves.

**e. Mercenary.** At the same time, the people of "the Dells" are dealmakers. The youth are restless and it is not uncommon to find them elsewhere in the World, acting as sell-swords or bandits, forging their own way.

**f. Names and Appearances.** The people of "the Dells" are generally Mediterranean in appearance, of average height, thin, wiry, tough, tanned, olive-skinned and weather-beaten. In the oases, they tend to dress much like moderately well-to-do farming peasants: dresses, linen smocks and pants, leather shoes, and floppy leather hats. When venturing out into the desert, they wear linen shifts, goggles, and carry the ubiquitous *dust tents*.

Sample male names: Adrian, Augustine, Yusuf, Jakub.

Sample female names: Khalida, Sara, Maryam, Fatma.

Sample clan names: In addition to one (and often several) proper names, people of "the Dells" will often describe themselves by reference to the oasis from which they came, but only outside of "the Dells" themselves. Hence, a wandering young barbarian of The Dells encountered in Eglantine might be Adrian Yusuf of the Flint Camp.

## **6. Outlooks.**

### **a. Magic/Spellcasters.**

No one born in "the Dells" has been able to work any magic whatsoever since the Abjuration. The magic of the land was

burned out of it. While it is theoretically possible for a birth to occur in an oasis of a potential Adept, the odds are long (1 in 10,000) and it has not happened yet.



As a result, magic is something that is always in high demand at "the Dells". They would love for an Adept to join them, forcibly if need be. Adepts are thus still at grave risk of harm in "the Dells", but for different reasons than usual. They are not the subject of superstitious fear, but rather a scarce resource to be exploited if at all possible.

### **b. Strangers.**

Strangers are tolerated as long as they are tough traders with something valuable to offer. If not, they are targets for robbery or violence.

Strangers looking like they wish to stay for long periods of time are evaluated in terms of whether someone already resident there is worth killing to make room. If a consensus in this regard is formed, the stranger may be invited to kill someone if they can and take their place, or an interested person may strike the target unawares. (Of course, anyone who joins an oasis is subject to similar treatment at the drop of a hat, as soon as the political winds begin to change).

Males are only considered for "citizenship" if they either overthrow the chieftain (which threatens many people's settled expectations) or allow themselves to become eunuchs. Women simply have to be adjudged more valuable by an effective

political consensus and make themselves a spot.

Strangers not behaving socially (thieves, arsonists, raiders or anyone threatening the safety of an oasis as a whole) are beaten, plundered and/or killed, often in horrible ways that release the pent-up rage that boils in each oasis. One particularly popular method of dealing with problems is to strip the person, drag them a day out into the crater, and leave them.

### **c. Demons.**

The people of "the Dells" believe in demons, although none have ever seen one. Stories handed down from their direct forefathers tell of the demon war; the final battle on the plains near the Redoubt; and that the Abjuration was brought down there. They commonly are of the opinion that the Abjuration killed all of the demons, but would not be shocked to learn that a few somehow survived.

This is particularly true since outlanders keep trekking to the Redoubt in search of glory, treasure and answers, but do not come back. The people of "the Dells" know that the Redoubt still stands in the middle of the crater, but none have ventured there in decades. Those who once did failed to return. They do not know why, but would not be surprised to learn that fell magic or surviving demons are responsible. That only makes sense.

The demons, for their part, take a comparatively "hands off" approach to the oases. They do have a little secret, though, with respect to the weather. The oases are the result of the land healing itself after the very fabric of reality was sundered by the Abjuration. They are slowing this process through sorcery conducted at a secret outpost in the southern mountains, near the coast. The Hooded One, the demons' master of magic, annually performs a ritual requiring 100 human souls that prevents any rain from falling in "the Dells" for the next year. This interference has both prevented the oases from growing, as well as provided

controlled conditions for the demons to see how absolutely fixed limits on resources warp the human psyche. The outpost is the site of a magical machine that aids in the Hooded One's weather-suppressing magic, and is kept permanently manned by a group of Overseers as well as some human Reapers.

Disrupting this machine would put a major crimp in the harshness of "the Dells", as rain would fall for the first time in 100 years and the desert would bloom.

### **d. Enemies and Conflicts.**

Everyone is an enemy, and if they are not, they will be as soon as it is to their advantage. This fatalistic view colors the thinking of anyone who lives in "the Dells" of their own volition. Those born there who survive to adulthood, but cannot live that way (essentially, anyone not Evil enough) leaves.

### **e. Other Races.**

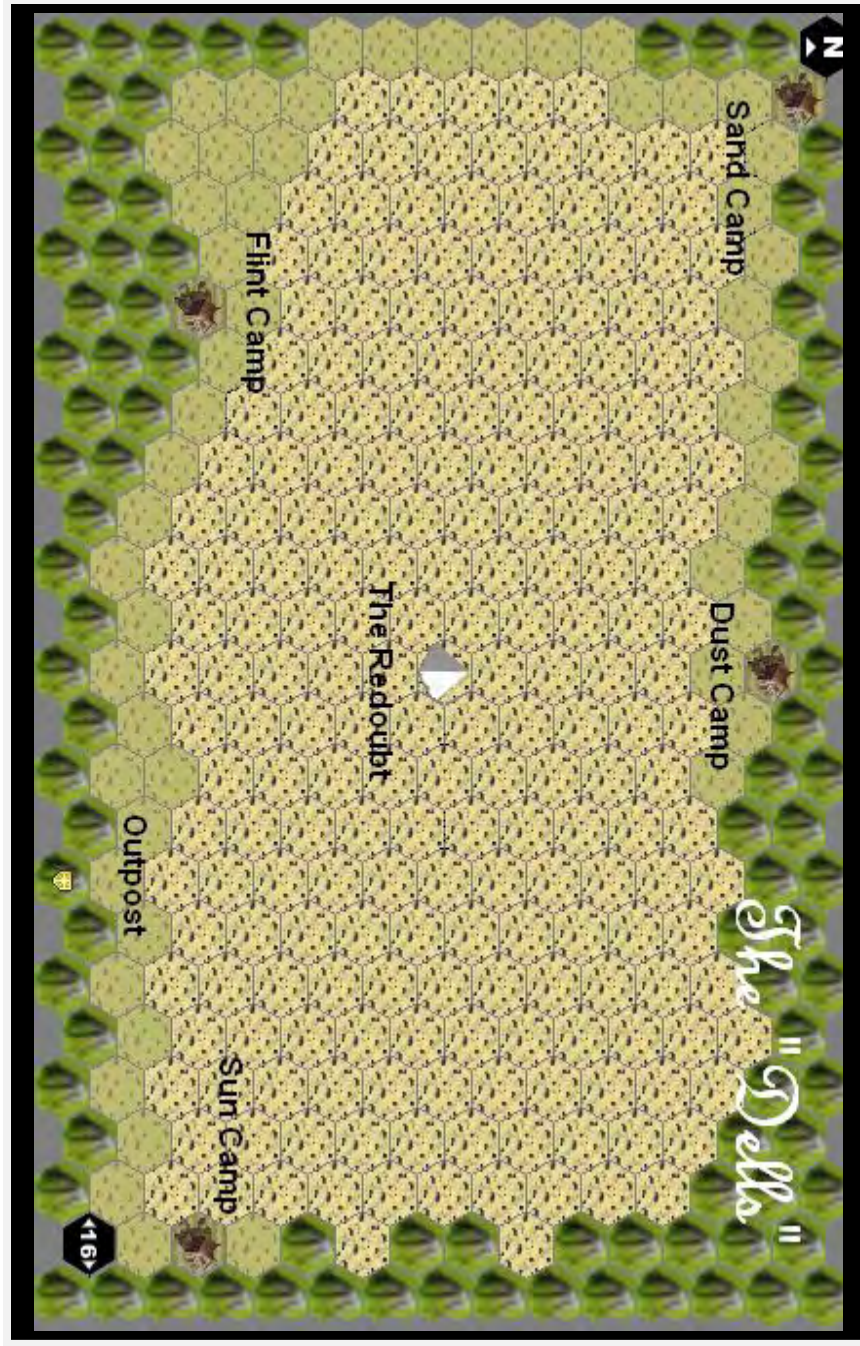
Dwarves and Halflings are occasionally seen as adventurers passing through "the Dells" en route to the Redoubt. All of the long-term residents of "the Dells" are human or demons.



The edge of the crater...

## **7. Religion.**

The people of the oases follow only one religion: their own perceived self-interest. The old gods are roundly cursed as failures. The occasional priests of the Circle who wandered by, attempting to convince them to reshape their society, met grisly ends after they were deemed to be of no value.



High Mountains



Horrible Desert



Bad Desert



Oasis

**8. Map Key.**

*1 hex=16 miles.* Travel in the region is potentially lethal. Foraging for daily food and water in the crater is *impossible* (01%): there is virtually nothing out there. In the transition zone (the ring of badlands around the edges), things are very slightly better for foraging (Critical Survival check required), as the occasional brackish water or stray animal hugs the edge of the arable land, wanders off from it or exists at its edge.

As a result, anyone venturing into "the Dells" must track how much food and water they are carrying with them, and you will have to keep track of encumbrance.

Assuming adequate food and water, a perfect day of traveling in the rocky desert for an unencumbered or lightly encumbered person still proceeds at ½ the normal rate. Dust storms are extremely likely in the bowl area.

Around the badlands ring, allow the PLAYERS to go one hex per day even with dust storms. In the desert crater, count the miles and count the dust storms. Yes, this means that the PLAYERS are unlikely (with a typical dust storm pattern) to even make one hex per day in the crater on foot, at least without magical assistance. Tough.

**a. The Oases.** There are four oases, each as described above and varying little.

**The Flint Camp** (NW) is fairly used to seeing adventurers from Eglantine poking their noses into The Dells, and has a deservedly bad reputation in Eglantine for trustworthiness. Palla, leader of the Flint Tribe (Evil, Chaotic) makes a point of directly negotiating himself with any visitors. He is completely heartless and will not even give a dying man water; in fact, he is likely to kill that dying man and loot his body. Palla's cliffs are a value source of flint and obsidian (the Abjuration fused a few sand pockets), and his people tend to make heavy use of obsidian blades.

**The Dust Camp** (N) in the north is run by Chief Walif (Neutral, Chaotic) and his four

brothers, who have held sway over the camp for 50 years. He is somewhat slower to betray visitors than Palla, simply because he gets fewer of them.

People entering the Dust Camp's oasis are usually headed for the Redoubt, and Walif has a standard deal that he will honor (assuming that he does not believe that he can simply kill the party without risk).



Walif's Bargain (he keeps several scrolls with the deal in writing, ready for signature) is as follows:

1. You will be provided with twelve days of food and water per person, and a (man-hauled) sledge to drag behind you.
2. You will be provided with a *dust tent* for each person.
3. Each man among you must have carnal relations with any woman of my tribe who takes a fancy to you.
4. Each of you must, in exchange, trade something unique to me. This can be a day of skilled craft service that the Flint Camp does not have; a day of spell-casting; a magic item; a unique piece of equipment from another land; or other scarcities. Walif is more interested in things that will increase his prestige than in other things.
5. You must swear to return to the Dust Camp on your way out (*stop laughing, Yusuf, they might make it back!*) and give me the first choice of any booty recovered.

(So far, the willingness of a party to comply has never been tested. However, if someone

survives the Redoubt and does not comply, Walif will find out eventually and from then on, anyone from the Dust Tribe will curse the party's name and kill them at the drop of a hat, even many years later).

**The Sand Camp** (SW) is currently led by Hassem (Evil, Chaotic), a very young man who recently and successfully organized a bloody coup that ousted the prior ruling clique and installed a bunch of young turks.

Hassem's hold on power is quite shaky, as there was no agreement between him and the other youths who joined him about who would get to remain physically intact and take on the alpha male role in the tribe. As a result, the tribe is very much in a state of unease. About 10 of the residents are younger men; about 60 of them are women of various ages; and the rest are children. They lack the experienced, battle-hardened gang of eunuchs that typify an oasis, pending a winnowing process.

Hassem is a dangerous opportunity: willing to strike deals that other camp leaders might not in order to solidify his standing and prestige, but desperate enough to take chances that the other camp leaders would not, too.

**The Sun Camp** (remote SE) is so remote that it has only seen visitors a few times since the Abjuration. Fazoul (Neutral, Chaotic) leads the oasis; he is a crabby old man who nonetheless has something approaching a rough sense of fair play.

He is far more likely to let an offender live, to give a disgruntled coup-plotter a fair chance at survival in the desert, and to not backstab a visitor, than any of his compatriots. In part this is because he is a smart and wise man (INT 16, POW 16) who is able to see the big picture. In part this is because he is secure in his position, because the younger generation is not so desperate to achieve leadership to save their lives. In part, this is because he has a terrible secret: he is in the pay of the Reapers, charged with killing anyone headed east over the mountains. He has to be nice to maintain his

cover.

**b. The Redoubt.** The Redoubt was once a small keep fortifying a particularly lush region of The Dells. Now it lies—disturbingly intact—at ground zero of the Abjuration.

Rumors abound in adventuring circles about the Redoubt, and the KEEPER may wish to go out of his way to drop them at a time when the party is sufficiently accomplished that the demons take a direct interest in getting rid of them.

Difficult History, Research (Library Use) or Research (Streetwise) checks when interacting with well-traveled people, might reveal the following tidbits about the Redoubt (all true):

- The Redoubt was the scene of the final battle between the demons and the armies of Eglantine, and the place where the wizards (curse their names) broke the World with the Abjuration;
- The Redoubt somehow survived the Abjuration intact;
- The Redoubt was the personal property of the Queen of Eglantine at the time of the Abjuration, inherited from her father's family (a local noble) and used by the Eglantine royal family as a countryside retreat (-10%);
- The area around the Redoubt is said to be littered with the corpses of many mighty heroes, knights and wizards (not to mention demons) (-20%);
- Adventurers have sometimes sought to plumb the secrets of the Redoubt, or search the battlefield for treasure, but none have ever returned alive.

Alternative, if the demons determine that the PLAYERS are annoying enough to rub out, but not so dangerous as to pose a direct threat to the Redoubt crew, a carefully

placed rumormonger might entice them into an expedition to the Redoubt.

**A Few Additional Rules Reminders, and Another Point of Spellcasting Clarification.**

Remember the prohibition in the magic system against conjuring up non-existent things? This prohibition includes such things as food, water, and emergency shelter. It does not prohibit magically trying to make it rain, but for reasons discussed below, any efforts to magically alter the weather in the Dells is at -50% from what it normally would be.

And so you do not have to keep looking it up: one day of meager survival rations (jerky and water) for a typical human weighs about 7 pounds (3 liters of water and food).

The shortest way to get to the Redoubt is to strike due south from the Dust Camp. This will be the longest six hexes of the PLAYERS' lives. A one way trip is six days *at best*, plus time there. If one takes 20 days of food and water, then one carries 140 pounds of supplies (6 out of 7 are water). Although there is water at the Redoubt, no one knows this, so taking less is risky.

The PLAYERS may want to have magical means of speeding their travel or increasing their carrying capacity. A friendlier local would suggest that the PLAYERS have the sense to set up way stations and cache food and water in stages, leaving food and water for the return trip. They may also want to make and haul (or buy) a sleigh (which would increase their carrying capacity by a factor of 5).

The Redoubt is a good, old-fashioned dungeon. It (and the tiny amount of land inside its walls) survived the Abjuration because it was in the eye of the proverbial storm. It is a trap for nosy PLAYERS,

where they can be enticed out into desert—days away from re-supply—and ambushed by a skilled and practiced team of lesser demons and their numerous undead and skeletal minions.

The Redoubt is capably managed by Fangtooth (female barrow-wight, Evil(???), Lawful), an odd, charismatic duck of a creature who volunteered for the assignment, and has been carrying it out for several decades. She treats the Redoubt as her home, and has displayed some peculiar, almost human, mannerisms since taking up residence there.

A full description of the Redoubt can be found in the “Scenarios” section.

**c. The Demons’ “Daggers at World’s End” Marine Outpost.** Concealed, both physically and magically, high and deep in the mountains separating “the Dells” from the sea, this outpost serves several vital functions for the demons.

First, it keeps watch on the nearby sea lanes (both physically and magically), with a view toward foiling any ships intent on sailing either to or from the Known World and putting it in contact with the “Farm”.

To this end, the demons maintain a good old-fashioned ghost ship, populated with a variety of mindless, created undead (skeletons and zombies), which sets sail under the cover of sorcerous mist to terrify and destroy any would be seafarers. Sometimes the ghost ship allows people to escape (but only back the way they came), so that they may spread the word not to dare the waters in the area. It sets sail from the base of the cliffs, out of a magically concealed cave. The ghost ship is sometimes directed from the outpost by sorcerous means (including a pair of *crystal balls*); at other times, a Reaper acts as a hidden captain.

In addition, the demons maintain a strike force of a few dozen Overseers here, supported by a few magically-Adept Reapers, who patrol (with magical assistance) the general area and make sure





that no one crosses the mountains.

One clever way to locate the outpost, in fact, is to wait until the demons send out such a patrol (or the ghost ship itself) and stealthily follow it back to base. The patrols are usually cloaked with invisibility as they set out, but this is not foolproof; they make noise, leave tracks, might be magically detected or do something that causes the invisibility to wear off.

The outpost is also a trans-shipment point for demons and minions inbound and outbound from the Majestic Plateau, be it en route to or from the "Farm" or to or from the known World. Someone able to observe the area for a period of time might see the illusions covering the entrances (both the seaside port entrance and the land entrance high in the mountains) momentarily ripple or have to be recast when demons or ships (again, usually magically but not flawlessly invisible) put in or leave.

The outpost is well-stocked with the supplies (magical and mundane) needed to outfit a small, clandestine military outpost, including things such as Overseer-sized weapons and armor, food, captive humans awaiting dinnertime or sacrifice, and magical goodies useful in observing a region and concealing an outpost. The *crystal balls* can also be used to communicate (audibly only) with Zazeer and the Center(s) of the Circle in Eglantine.

Finally, there is a holding pen at the outpost where a certain number of demon captives from various parts of the World find themselves (including wounded evacuees from the wars at the "Farm"). The Overseers have to eat, and the demons need to build up 100 sacrifices in advance of the annual arrival of the Hooded One, who consumes them while casting the ritual that keeps "the Dells" so barren. (It is this ritual that makes the weather stubbornly resistant to change, even by means of magic. It should be obvious to a skilled Adept trying to soften the weather or make it rain that something magical is impeding her efforts).

The outpost should be kept out of play until the PLAYERS are quite powerful. It is an important place for the demons; there are many secrets there and its discovery is both physically and structurally a gateway to adventuring against either the "Farm" or daring the seas to the Majestic Plateau. Records there, or persons who can be interrogated there, will reveal the existence and location of both additional realms.

In addition to the Overseer guards, there should also be 1-2 senior-level demons in residence, a dozen or so flunky-level demons, a few senior Reapers, and a cadre of lower ranking Reapers to contend with, in addition to slaves and the ghost ship with its crew of 50 mindless undead.

Attacking the outpost, or even infiltrating it successfully, should be a major cinematic undertaking.

## **9. Sample NPCs.**

### **a. Chief Walif of the Dust Camp.**

STR 16 DEX 16 INT 14 CON 16 APP 12  
POW 17 SIZ 17 EDU 8 Hits: 17 Age: ??.

**Damage Bonus:** +1d6.

**Allegiance Tendencies:** Neutral, Chaotic.

**Skills:** Appraise (60%) Bargain (75%), Brawl (75%), Climb (70%), Command (55%), Craft (Weapon-smithing) (72%), Dodge (55%), Etiquette (25%), First Aid (48%), Grapple (55%), Hide (54%), Insight (55%), Jump (35%), Listen (65%), Navigate (69%), Persuade (65%), Spot (75%), **Status (75%)**, Stealth (45%), Strategy (57%), Survival (new) (95%), Throw (75%).

#### **Attacks:**

Battleaxe, steel, 90%, 1d8+2+db, bleeding, 15 HP.

6x Hand axe (thrown), steel, 75%, 1d6+1/2db, bleeding, 20 HP.

**Defenses:** Armor 8 (chain mail(!) and helmet).

Shield, round, 90%, 1d3+db, knockback, Armor 20 (must parry).

Deity: None.

Wealth: 8.

### **b. Narya the Fire.**

Narya is an 18 year old expatriate from the "Dells", leading a life of comparatively destitute adventure in Eglantine. She has a profound mercenary streak, but is (like many Dellmen) soft-spoken and matter-of-fact. She comes across as quiet and studious, but very self-assured.

Narya is also a bit paranoid and does not trust people to stick to the bargains that they make. She always has a contingency plan for every situation, including betrayal, although she does not betray people herself.

Narya is somewhat unusual in that she left the Flint Camp despite being asked to stay (she was prized both for her intellect and her leatherworking skills). Her nickname, "the Fire" is ironic: she is actually extremely cool and calculating, though silently vicious and a very dirty fighter.

While she looks for adventuring opportunities, she is able to maintain herself through performing leatherwork and hiring on to mercenary groups fighting in Eglantine.

### **Narya "the Fire".**

STR 13 DEX 14 INT 16 CON 14 APP 14  
POW 14 SIZ 12 EDU 10 Hits: 13 Age: 18.

**Damage Bonus:** +1d4.

**Allegiance Tendencies:** Neutral, Chaotic.

**Skills:** Appraise (35%), Bargain (55%), Brawl (75%), Climb (60%), Craft (Leatherworking) (60%) Dodge (55%), Etiquette (25%), Fast Talk (25%), First Aid (55%), Gaming (45%), Hide (50%), Insight (45%), Jump (45%), Listen (45%), Navigate (45%), Persuade (35%), Research (Streetwise) (65%), Spot (45%), Stealth (65%), Survival (new) (87%).

### **Attacks:**

Quarterstaff, 53%, 1d8 +db, crushing, can parry twice vs. attack, 20 HP

Sling, 70%, 1d8, 80 yards, crushing, cannot parry.

**Defenses:** Armor 3 (leather and helmet)

Shield, wicker & leather, 55%, 1d2+db, knockback, Armor 10 (must parry).

**Special:** None.

Deity: None.

**Gear:** Staff, masterwork dagger, masterwork leather armor, leatherworking kit.

Wealth: 5.

**10. Plot Seeds.** Most adventuring in the Dells will involve one of three things.

First, the PLAYERS will be trying to trade with one of the oases (who do have valuable commodities to trade).

Second, the PLAYERS will be en route to the Redoubt hoping to loot treasure from the battlefield. There is treasure to be looted, it is just very hard to get to.

Third, the PLAYERS will be in the company of a Dellman friend (perhaps met in the Eglantinian army or in Crystal Lake), who is looking to involve them in some political matter back home, either as support for his own ambitions or to help a friend or relative in trouble.

People accompanying such a person as guests will receive the same level of welcome as the returning prodigal. Usually this will be bad, since most prodigals were cast out, but assuming that the prodigal is just visiting or is not perceived as a threat, it could be comparatively pleasant. Or they could find themselves involved in a family feud where murder is considered "by the rules."

# GAZETTEER—THE MAJESTIC PLATEAU (& MARINE TRAVEL)

## 1. Overview of the Majestic Plateau.

*G* told you *NEVER* to call me *THAT NAME!!!*—the Hooded One, just before blasting an insolent demon to dust.

**Population:** About 1,000; humans 60%; Dwarves 1%; Halflings 1%, demons 20%; Overseers 10%.

**Government:** Uneasy equilibrium in which everyone does what Ba'al-Sheol says (when he bothers to say something), and everyone else constantly plays politics.

**Important Entities:** Ba'al Sheol, Lord of the Majestic Plateau; Zazeer, Social Engineer; The Hooded One, Master of Magic.

**Imports:** Slaves and sacrificial victims, magic and steel when it can be found.

**Exports:** Sneaky plots.

**Outlook:** Most of the surviving demons are Evil and Lawful, with most of the Chaotic ones having been killed off or left to pursue their own agenda. The willing human slaves and Overseers are Evil and Lawful or Neutral. The victims awaiting sacrifice may be of any outlook.

## 2. Summary Description—the Majestic Plateau.

The Majestic Plateau is the name given by the demons to their small, volcanic island hideout, located about 90 miles south of the mouth of the Eglantine River. The name derives from the caldera dominating the island (although no one lives up there, it is a seething pit of volcanic mud and sulfurous fumes).

The island, referenced on old maps as the “Smoking Tower”, is a cigar shaped affair

about 10 miles long and two miles across, dominated by the caldera. Once sparsely inhabited by a hunter-gatherer society similar to that in the Crannoch and known as the Imha, the Imha were destroyed utterly in the Abjuration. The surviving demons fell back there and fortified themselves.

Most of the island is temperate forest and uninhabited. Someone stumbling on the north side of the island (closest to the mainland) might think that they have found the Promised Land: the island is forested, there are birds and small game, fresh water and a distinct absence of crazily fluctuating weather.

The demons' hideout is on the south side of the island, although they have several concealed watch posts around the shore to guard against intruders. Their dark citadel is on the shore of a sheltered inlet, with an improved dock hosting several sailing ships. Surrounding the citadel are some pleasant human and humanoid neighborhoods, with well-built stone homes, clean streets, running water and flower gardens.

Looming over this is a glowering, black, cubic fortress where all of the resident demons keep their lairs and offices. The greater demons live in opulence within, the degree of opulence corresponding to their rank; lesser demons who do not care about opulence generally attach themselves to one of the greater demons. No one enters or leaves the demons' citadel itself unless accompanied by a demon; anyone who tries is interrogated and then eaten.

There are no children at the Majestic Plateau (except for Overseers in the process of maturing, or pit slaves). The humans and humanoids resident in the village are all forbidden, on pain of being eaten, from

procreating (at least on the island. What they do on the mainland in their spare time is their business). The demons do not want anyone with free rein of the island if their soul does not belong to the demons. Every human or humanoid resident (apart from the slave pits) willingly undergo the Ritual of Obedience prior to first embarking for the island. Since the Ritual must be willingly undertaken, and this requires the taker to possess his fully developed faculties, children are not permitted.

These humans act as proxies for the demons: spies, infiltrators, skilled servants, Reapers, and others. Together with their respective spouses, concubines, servants, food producers and assistants—all of whom have taken the Ritual of Obedience—several hundred human or humanoid supporters reside at the Majestic Plateau.

At any given time, however, there are another several hundred humans not subject to the Ritual imprisoned in the bowels of the citadel. These people are truly in Hell, by whatever definition one might apply. They are kept as human cattle, and are either eaten by the demons or sacrificed to power some magical working on a “first in, first out” basis. They “live” naked and unshod in a mass, squalid pit full of filth and disease. They fight over food that is tossed down willy-nilly by the Overseers, and have no hope.

These unfortunates come from a wide variety of sources: demon captives who refused to take the Ritual of Obedience; “wounded heroes” from the “Farm”, who sadly never return; anyone who needed to disappear for interfering with a demonic plot; or someone that a demon or one of their mortal slaves decided needed to learn a lesson.

The citadel itself is virtually impregnable. Fiercely loyal and highly focused Overseers and senior Reapers stand guard at all times. The hyper-intelligent demons (especially Zazeer) have developed a number of contingency plans to respond to some sort of

### **The Ritual of Obedience**

The Ritual of Obedience can only be “cast” by a true demon (not a Reaper or Overseer). It is a simple matter: the target *agrees* to let the “casting” demon devour his soul. This voluntary act of surrender allows the target to survive the trauma of having his soul devoured; normally, the shock kills the victim.

Persons who have undergone the Ritual of Obedience feel normal (normal for an evil person who would bargain away his soul, at least). They are readily identifiable at a glance by a demon, who can tell who has a soul and who does not; there is no pretending to have undergone the Ritual.

Submitting to the Ritual prevents the person from ever knowingly doing something that would harm any demon, or from knowingly lying to any demon. Hence, one could not bargain to undermine the demons, agree to help someone against the demons (even to save one’s own life), or even side with one demon against another demon. This, perhaps, is one of the biggest flaws in the Ritual: when one demon gets into conflict with another, their proxies have to sit on the sidelines and may even abandon their ongoing plans. There have even been instances where those subject to the Ritual have killed themselves, seeing no other way to comply with the restrictions of the Ritual in cases of intramural conflict.

The Ritual does not prevent someone from unwittingly lying to a demon, unwittingly undermining a demon, or being careless or stupid. Nor does it prevent someone from executing a strategic retreat if they conclude that this is the best interests of the demons. They have free will and can pursue their own interests and agenda, subject of course to the prohibitions against knowingly harming or lying to any demon.

serious threat (including a mass invasion or assault by powerful magic-wielders).

That is not to say that there are not potential chinks in this armor. The biggest chink is the fact that the demons bicker constantly. If an attack seems to be directed at only one of them, or foiling a plot shared only by a few of them, it is possible, if not likely, that the others will think of themselves first and leave the embattled demon to his own fate. They are not above parleying, stabbing one another in the back, and/or fleeing and regrouping if at all seriously threatened.



Magic and steel are actually rather commonplace on the Majestic Plateau, including the village at large. The demons bring such things here to take them out of circulation elsewhere, and their treasure vaults are replete with quality weapons, magical knowledge and even a few standard magical items.

Since the Ritual of Obedience prevents (among other things) the taker from harming any demon, the demons do not worry about their Ritualized human followers having access to steel and some magic. A gang of adventurers somehow managing to make landfall at the Majestic Plateau and infiltrating the village somehow could, if they somehow escape, come away with huge treasures.

No map or area description is provided for the Majestic Plateau. Candidly, for reasons described below, it is not a place that the PLAYERS should expect to find except through a truly epic and heroic effort in an endgame for a campaign.

### **3. Approaches to the Majestic Plateau & the Hazards of Maritime Travel in the World.**

Given the restrictions on magic, travelling to the Majestic Plateau by non-physical means will not occur. No teleportation spells or similar magic works in this setting.

A party with access to powerful magic (mass flight spells, for example) might approach by air. This is probably how a group of PLAYERS will arrive there, if they ever do. Note that the demons keep watchposts at various points on all sides of the island, but with magical protection against detection, this is a plausible way for a small group of highly powerful persons to get there. Of course, they will have to travel across 90 miles of open water to get there, and do the same to escape.

(This arrangement is a conscious design choice by the author. Since death is permanent in *Ashes, to Ashes*, PLAYERS without that level of magical firepower really have no business reaching the Majestic Plateau, even for a reconnaissance mission. They should not reach the area unless and until they have a decent chance of escaping some angry, extremely powerful demons and the powerful human sorcerers in their thrall).

Less powerful people will probably try to either reach the island or explore offshore by means of (small) boat. Some of the people living in coastal communities have small fishing skiffs (10' in length), rowboats, and the like that they might hire out for appropriate compensation. A campaign arc might center around the PLAYERS discovery of a more substantial vessel, efforts to repair it, or efforts to build one from plans found in a ruin. A pre-Abjuration royal yacht might be one of the oddities to be found in the rubble of "the Dells", or in the "Great City" in Eglantine.

Of course, the demons do not want anyone either finding the Majestic Plateau or engaging in lucrative coastwise trade. As a result, one of their major initiatives is the

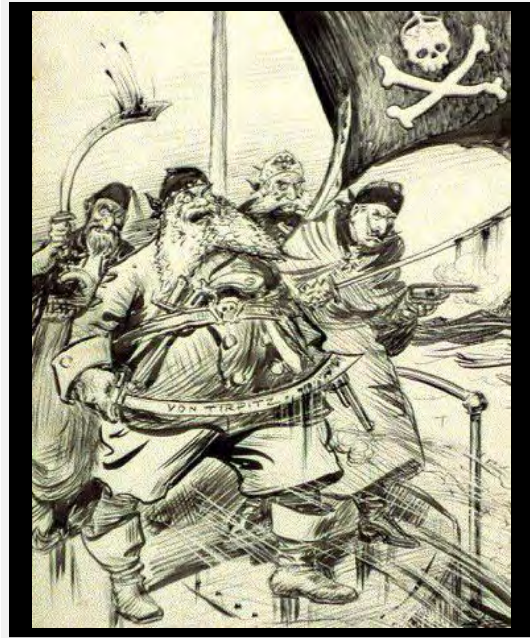
promotion of hazards to restrict marine travel to minimal, near-shore subsistence fishing. The Majestic Plateau's marine hazard initiatives fall into several categories.

**a. Sponsored Piracy.** In addition to the naval base at the Daggers at World's End (see "the Dells" gazetteer entry for details), the Majestic Plateau employs a fleet of about 10 pirate ships. Each pirate cutter is laid out like a Viking style longboat (one deck, no below decks, no wheelhouse), carries a crew of about 20 (including one Reaper) and sports both oars and sails. They are obviously short range craft, although easily capable of the 90 mile journey across the strait separating the Majestic Plateau from Eglantine.

Each member of the crew is under the Ritual of Obedience and has strict orders to kill themselves to avoid capture or interrogation. Typically, the Reaper will stay concealed and aboard the longboat as a fallback measure to "pull the plug" in case the tables are somehow turned on the pirates. The pirates can, upon occasion, be tricked into overconfidence, as it has been decades since anyone put up a stiff resistance. They are skilled sailors and adept at such tricks as taking the wind out a quarry's sails, boarding parties, burning riggings, driving targets into reefs, and the like.

Persons captured by the pirates should expect no quarter. All are treated cruelly. Some are killed on the spot, especially those offering resistance. None, however, are taken captive (as this would prompt questions about where they might have been taken). Those that are not killed are mutilated and set loose on shore to spread their story (and thereby discourage others from trying to sail).

Frankly, the best way for a group of PLAYERS to acquire a quality raiding ship is to turn the tables on a set of pirates and prevent them from scuttling their own ship when unexpected levels of resistance are presented.



**b. Superstition.** The Church of the Circle in Eglantine, as well as general folklore elsewhere, regularly spreads stories about how, as a result of the Abjuration, the seas are impossible to travel and haunted by the ghosts of those who tried.

**c. Unnatural Storms.** The demons and/or the Reapers regularly work to whip up extremely violent and unpredictable coastal storms, apart from those that the haywire post-Abjuration weather patterns accomplish without their help. This without a doubt has been the most effective means of suppressing maritime travel over the past 100 years. Who wants to venture out to sea when a killer storm can spring up literally out of nowhere?

**d. Ghost Ships.** The Majestic Plateau also employs two ghost ships crewed by horrible, blasphemous (though low-end and non-free-willed) undead. Each is (secretly) captained by a Reaper who stays concealed and out of sight, and who controls and issues orders to the skeletal crew. One such ship is based at the Daggers outpost, and is dedicated to blocking all east-west traffic that might reach the "Farm". The other is based at the Majestic Plateau, and puts in periodic appearances throughout the World to terrify the locals from a distance.



**e. Shore-based Interference.** If the demons (or their directly-connected proxies) should become aware that a flotilla is being developed by the PLAYERS, they will steer their proxies (bandits, mercenaries, corrupt priests or even innocent do-gooders) into efforts at sabotage or murder.

**f. But No Artillery Barrages.** The problem with lobbing a fireball across open water is that if someone survives it, then you have confirmed your position.



**4. How the PLAYERS Might Deduce That a Demon Stronghold Exists Offshore.** It is impossible to keep a master villain's volcanic island headquarters a secret forever, and the Majestic Plateau is no exception to this rule.

**a. Old Maps.** Old maps of the Known World depict an island known as the Smoking Tower, 90 miles south of Eglantine. Old history books or sages in ancient history might know that it was once home to a peaceful, primitive tribe known as the Imha, who traded spices and high-quality lumber to Eglantine. Furthermore, although the Imha were seafaring people (Critical History check), no one will have heard from them since the Abjuration.

**b. Rumors.** In heroic circles (especially the Coursers or the Heroes of Old), certain members believe that the demons are trying to conceal organized activities somewhere offshore. (This is an extremely hazardous rumor to spread; spreaders are prone to disappear if word gets back to the demons.

Of course, these suppression efforts are themselves suspicious, and could give rise to a rumor that anyone asking questions about southern geography tends to disappear).

**c. Off-limits Questions from the Library.** Information about the Smoking Tower, the Imha, or other information that shows any interest in what islands might lie south of Eglantine cannot be gotten by a Brother of the Raven from the Library, not even as a special favor. The Library pretends that it does not know. Brothers asking such questions might be encouraged to undertake a mission to find out, and then eliminated.

**d. Inference from Suppression Efforts.** The PLAYERS should rightly find it strange that pirates spring up so quickly and reliably whenever anyone noticeably strays from land. Given how suppressed marine travel is, how is it possible that apparently well-fed, well-supplied pirates, with the nicest ships to be found, even stay in business? Obviously, they are being subsidized, but by whom? Who would benefit from a near-total suppression of maritime activity?

**e. Inference from Absence.** Given how desperate people are willing to take risks, should not someone have made it to an island only 90 miles away in the past 100 years, and lived to tell the tale?

**f. Divination Blind Spots.** Powerful anti-detection magic is kept in place, preventing Adepts from using divination techniques from gaining information about islands to the south of Eglantine. This blind spot might be noticed and appear suspicious.

**g. Getting Someone To Talk.** Good luck. Such a person would have to be convinced to unknowingly spill the beans, since the Ritual of Obedience would prevent them from divulging this information.

**h. Tailing Someone.** Surreptitiously tailing a pirate, a Reaper in transit, a ghost ship, or other emissary of the Majestic Plateau is a hazardous undertaking but a solid plan if the PLAYERS can figure out whom to tail, and then pull it off.

## GAZETTEER—"THE FARM"

With the final stop on our World tour, it is necessary to take a broader and less detailed view. "The Farm" is not at all like the rest of the World. It is both far better and far worse. Many parts of "the Farm" have been left for the KEEPER to fill in as well, so that you can experiment with some of the principles demonstrated in the other regions.

"The Farm" was once the County of Suncove, a small but pleasant maritime fiefdom on the eastern shore of the Kingdom of Eglantine, just east of the Dells. It is the greatest threat to the demons, bar none. Too many people there survived the Abjuration for them to strip it of resources.

The demons realized quickly that they had to isolate and contain "the Farm", and keeping it isolated and contained takes up a great deal of demonic resources and effort. If the demons lose containment (either physically, or by the people of "the Farm" organizing against the demons), then it would be a black day indeed for them. Discovering "the Farm" is intended as an endgame, or at least a major turning point, for seasoned PLAYERS. It brings the realization home that the demons have been perfecting their treacherous craft elsewhere for a discrete purpose: in order to learn how to control a region capable of standing up to them.

"The Farm" is a region about 300 miles in length (north to south) and roughly 40 miles wide (east-west). It is separated from the (nearly impassible) Dells by the (extremely impassible) Daggers at the World's End, a range of miles-high mountains comprising the eastern end of "the Dells" blast crater. Climbing these mountains would be like climbing Mount Everest without oxygen; it will require both a heroic effort and magical assistance. The "impassible" mountains between Fallingstar and Eglantine can be traversed with difficulty; these mountains

are *really and truly* impassible.

To make matters worse, the Daggers and all reasonable approaches to them are heavily patrolled to prevent anyone from trying. The demons are incredibly invested in making sure that no one gets through, and to that end, Overseers, Reapers and even actual demons actively patrol the area. They also maintain a secret naval outpost at the seaside base of the Daggers, closely controlling the area with pirates, one of their ghost ships, and even invisible, flying Reapers.

Anyone caught trying to sail past the Daggers, in either direction, is ruthlessly eliminated if at all possible, at any cost. The demons are, perhaps, almost too paranoid about restricting east-west traffic, to the point where it is obvious to the studious observer that they are protecting something important.

If someone from the west did somehow manage to sail past the Daggers, and about 250 miles north up the coast, they would not believe the rich land that they would find. Although the shortages generally described in this setting apply to Suncove, they all apply rather lightly. People rarely starve, have just enough wood and fuel, and the wealthy actually have some steel and horses. The crazy weather fluctuations still happen, but only in a milder way. Too many people survived the Abjuration for the area to be as abjectly poor as the other regions to the west.

Indeed, demonic population estimates place the entirely human populace of Suncove at as high as 50,000. Both North Suncove and South Suncove have capitals boasting in the thousands, with adequate (by Dark Ages standards) construction standards, public works and infrastructure. All of which survived the Abjuration intact, much to the demons' consternation.

As noted previously, the "Farm" is the place



where humans could live well enough and grow a population sizeable enough—if left to their own devices—to reestablish pre-Abjuration civilization and truly threaten to finish the demons. As a result, all of the demons’ dirty subjugation tricks, worked and reworked in the other regions as laboratories, are brought to bear in Suncove.

**War:** Eerily reminiscent of Eglantine, the secular and religious leadership of the North is pitted in an endless, unwinnable, manipulated war against the South. If the PLAYERS have spent time in Eglantine, the parallels should be made plain to them. Wounded war heroes are spirited away to a rumored place of honored retirement (actually, the food pit at the Majestic Plateau).

**Religion:** Eerily reminiscent of both Eglantine and Fallingstar, the priests of the Circle preach regional unity, hatred of the other side, but most importantly acceptance of the social structure and living lives of quiet contentment. Reaper squads seek out nascent Adepts, who are Harvested (to provide a machine for identifying them) and either eliminated or corrupted (much as in Fallingstar).

**Anti-magic fanaticism:** Adepts are hated and feared at a level rivaling that in Fallingstar.

**Manipulative leadership:** As in Eglantine, both secular and religious leaders are groomed from youth. Children displaying leadership potential are selected and promoted based on their reliable devotion to the status quo, and subjected (if willing) to the Ritual of Obedience as a condition of high-ranking office.

**Sowing superstitious despair:** The Circle promotes the idea (as in Fallingstar) that the Abjuration worked a Curse and that, as a result, a fatalistic mindset is only natural. The annoying thing is that, unlike in Fallingstar, there is no Curse. But the people do not know that.

**Trade prevention:** Trade is ruthlessly restricted, to add to people’s discomfort and

increase the motivation to keep fighting. Much as in Eglantine, there is a natural surplus of lumber and stone in the North and a natural surplus of food in the South. There is even a black market town allowed to exist as a safety valve, so that people do not become so desperate as to either throw themselves into the breach or get forced into peace.

**Encouraging exile of troublesome leaders:** As in the Crannoch, a safety valve for troublemakers is offered: anyone can get out of virtually any crime or problem by agreeing to go to “the Moot”, an offshore place of exile. Rumors and stories persist that life there is not that bad, although exile is for life. It’s all a lie: there is no “Moot”, and would-be exiles end up on the supper table at the Majestic Plateau. (This practice is the source of the demons’ “Farm” nickname for the region).

**Eugenics:** As in “the Dells”, potential leaders with a strong set of morals, or who question the status quo are quietly sent elsewhere (actually, the food pits of the Majestic Plateau). Free thinkers and rebels are thus culled from the herd.

**Psychological and social pressure:** The people are never allowed to get too comfortable. Bandits under the thrall of the demons raid villages just to keep people on edge. Crops are blighted by the demons every now and then just to keep things off kilter. Madmen, driven insane by demonic magic, occasionally run amok.

Added to these dirty tricks, however, is one unique to “the Farm”: **covert but direct demonic government.** Both North and South have “royal families” who have governed since the Abjuration. They are demons or Overseers, in magical disguises, posing as human. Reapers or other humans under the Ritual of Obedience act as generals, high priests, and counselors to the respective seats (the Duchies of North Suncove and South Suncove).

So far, all the careful scheming and manipulation has worked like a charm.

## 11. POINTS OF EMPHASIS FOR ROLE-PLAYING IN *ASHES, TO ASHES*

### a. Conflict, Conflict, Conflict.

*Ashes, to Ashes* is a setting for adults, without being an “adult” setting. This means that the PLAYERS should be constantly, *and explicitly*, confronted with the moral consequences of their choices and realizations.

The overarching theme of *Ashes, to Ashes* is the question of whether, and to what extent, the ends justify the means. In one of the sample adventures, the PLAYERS will find themselves confronted with a group of rebels whose use of press-gang tactics (little better than slavery) has put a discrete part of the World on a track to possibly better things. What do the PLAYERS do? Rescue the victim and crush the rebellion in the course of doing so?

What do the PLAYERS do about the cultist denizens of Trepminster who, while committing all kinds of offenses against normal society, are doing a good job of bringing in crops and who seem to be happy?

What is a devout worshipper of the Circle going to do if she learns that the Circle is an insidious forgery (or is it)? Is perpetuating the lie worth the benefit? Or can the lie be made true?

Craft your adventures with actual role-playing in mind: *give the PLAYERS a choice, and then hold them to the logical consequences of what they do.*

The other thing that the PLAYERS should be constantly confronted by is adversaries. This is a tough world, full of people scratching and clawing to survive. Attracting attention to oneself, as almost any PLAYER will do, means that conflict with potential rivals is inevitable.

### b. Welcome to Hell?

What is Hell, exactly? Is it a place where soulless, conniving demons hold humans in thrall for their nefarious schemes? The Majestic Plateau has that, but the (willing) slaves there are well fed, and only rarely die from the conditions that they are exposed to.

Is it suffering? There’s plenty of that to go around. People in Eglantine are lucky if they don’t starve to death over the winter, and are not killed by the other side’s army. But what if they’ve adjusted, buoyed by their religion and by their realization that this is the way things are?

Is it deprivation? The Crannoch is a festering swamp full of disease and vermin where life is, at best, simple. But the people cope with it, and are only sometimes distressed by it.

Is it a state of mind? By comparison, life in Fallingstar is fairly easy. But the people in Fallingstar are angry and miserable, by and large, because they are obsessed with how much better things used to be, and are constantly frustrated by their efforts to improve their lot.

Is it living in a state of constant hatred? Eglantine has plenty of that to go around. But Eglantine is a society where, if you play your cards right, you can make yourself and your children safe, albeit at someone else’s expense. But isn’t that always the way of things?

Is it Hell if things could get worse (as in Fallingstar)? If they could not get worse without everyone dying (as in the Dells)? If they will never change (like in the Crannoch)?

*Ask the PLAYERS this question at the first gaming session. And throughout the campaign, ask them if their answer has changed.* Ask them in the game, through

the challenges they face, and out of the game, in so many words. And keep asking them.

### **c. Grinding Poverty.**

People are desperate. Most of them don't know if they will survive or for how long. This colors everything that they do. People are slow to share, and slow to lend, but quick to fight. Life is cheap. But at the same time, people are eager to rally around anyone who can make things better.

The result of this, if the game is run well, should be a fairly large cast of NPC adherents. A large part of the reward of the game should be the PLAYERS' advancement in society, and gaining a reputation as heroes. In fact, without paying attention to the PLAYERS' *Status*, many PLAYERS might get frustrated at the seeming lack of reward, used to games that end with the proverbial treasure room.

Treasure rooms are scarce in *Ashes, to Ashes*, but a reputation as a great hero, complete with members of the appropriate gender throwing themselves at the PLAYERS, people composing songs about them, and "gunslingers" looking to make their own reputation at the PLAYERS' expense, should be commonplace. Make NPCs that the PLAYERS care about, or have to care about. Have a few clear villains, in addition to the greyer shades of interaction.

### **d. The Resources Just Aren't There.**

A campaign in *Ashes, to Ashes* should evolve as a combination of a conspiratorial mystery and an extended buildup toward the things that most fantasy campaigns take for granted. Early on, the PLAYERS should be exposed to the fact that things used to be much better in the World, but that something happened to stop a demonic invasion. They should also learn fairly early on that something behind the scenes is keeping society off-balance, keeping it isolated, having things fail.

A campaign in *Ashes, to Ashes* should

involve the PLAYERS traveling from place to place, picking their way through layers of schemes and proxies to uncover who is pulling the strings, rallying the people, and then trying to come up with a way to stop the puppet masters. Stopping the demons involves finding magic and learning to use it. But early on, the resources are not there, either to build an army, or to confront the demons head on. It's a world-building game.



### **e. People Are Too Busy Surviving To Lead.**

This fact has important consequences for the development of a campaign. The PLAYERS, and others bold enough to adventure, will be both rare ducks and the centers of attention wherever they go. Idle youths will want to emulate them; local strongmen may see them as a threat or a resource to exploit.

But most importantly, nature abhors a vacuum, including a power vacuum. If someone is self-sufficient enough to have time to lead a community, then they naturally will. Wealth talks, and if the PLAYERS are successful, opportunities to lead communities or organizations should naturally present themselves.

As the game progresses, the PLAYERS may well rise to be village chiefs, set themselves up as nobles ruling over a region, or be quite famous heroes. At which point, they will come to the notice of the demons as potential threats—right when the demons are appropriate challenges.

**f. Distrust.**

The demons of the Majestic Plateau, however, do not want there to be effective human leaders. As a result, they have gone—and will go—to great lengths to keep the people leaderless. One way in which they do this is to foment isolationism and fear of strangers. To some extent, the desperate straits in which many people find themselves make this a default state of affairs. However, the credo of the Circle likewise subtly colors people's judgment about strangers, and people who do step up to be leaders (and who are not in the pay or under the thrall of the demons) may get assassinated.

**g. The Gods Aren't Listening.**

While there is religion, for nearly everyone in the World there are not any gods. There used to be, but not any more. There is no divine intervention, no appeal to a higher power. The people are on their own. The best that can be said is that some people's faith in the Circle might be giving rise to new gods—or not.

**h. The World Is In a Bottle.**

The flavor of an *Ashes, to Ashes* campaign may well more closely resemble a science-fiction or “wild west” role-playing game than a traditional fantasy campaign. There are no other planes to visit, no extra-dimensional adventures or sources of power, and most importantly, *dead means dead*.

Traditional fantasy campaigns often devolve into elaborate games of treasure counting: a death is only meaningful if the PLAYERS lack the ready resources to get their companion raised, and villains function under the same constraints. *Ashes, to Ashes* is much more finite; life is more precious but at the same time, many mortals are so miserable that they place too little value on it. If your PLAYERS aren't afraid to die, then they may not be role-playing correctly; they will not be coming back from the dead, period.

**i. Prophecy.**

Although magic is a total mess in the setting, the World is nonetheless highly magical. Magic in *Ashes, to Ashes* is a flux of chaos looking to settle into an orderly pattern. As a result, PLAYERS, particularly Adepts, may find themselves fulfilling prophecies as magic latches onto their coattails. In *Ashes, to Ashes*, prophecies tend to be both fairly common and self-fulfilling. And people generally believe in prophecies, almost to the point of genuine faith.

**j. Weather and Other Blights Upon Nature.**

The shockwaves of the Abjuration are still ongoing, and play an important part in the story. Weather is haywire, unpredictable, and changes very quickly. It makes husbandry and agriculture unreliable, and travel dangerous. People who dare the roads garner both fear and respect.

Diseases, plagues of insects, eclipses, and the like are common to the point where the people have grown hardened to them, but they are constant challenges that disrupt long term plans or major projects. Disasters tend to come in waves, but not in predictable waves.

**k. Conflict with the Secret Masters.**

A campaign world as downtrodden as the World presents significant challenges for a KEEPER. A balance needs to be struck between the flavor of the setting and not having a game that is too frustrating. PLAYERS expect rewards and for the

campaign to move forward, and do not like “losing” or stagnation. Yet there are not any “+5 swords” that the PLAYERS are going to find anytime soon. Careful planning of a campaign is the solution to this potential problem.

There are rewards available to the PLAYERS in *Ashes, to Ashes*. They come in two main flavors, **and they need to be doled out regularly**. The first is uncovering clues to the defeat of the ultimate enemy (secrets and magical lore); and the second is developing their reputations as heroes and advancing socially. Following is a roadmap for a campaign that will help maintain a sense of forward progress.

When PLAYERS choose their initial characters, have one of the more active role-PLAYERS take on the role of an Adept. If there are PLAYERS who naturally gravitate toward supporting roles, like to hack and slash, might not regularly attend sessions, or who are more interested in character study, steer them toward other roles in the party. It will be hard to avoid the Adepts being the focus of much of the plot, since their advancement is central to the impact that the party can make on the World.

Initially, keep the PLAYERS moving from town to town and region to region. Take them on a tour of the Known World. Give them a reason to keep moving: pursuing a legend, searching for a particular item or piece of lore, looking for someone who is lost. At the same time, put forward both clear antagonists as well as NPCs who are shades of grey; do not have everyone be grey. Explore some of the themes of the setting: encourage the PLAYERS to ask themselves why things are bad, and whether the solution is better than the cure.

Gradually work in the conspiratorial tones of the campaign: the PLAYERS should fairly early on wonder if there is something working to keep things bad. Leaders and promising Adepts just disappear or are taken away: why? Major undertakings that would help everyone (such as reopening a mine or a major irrigation project) fail predictably

and repeatedly: why?

Get the PLAYERS asking questions, and hint that there are answers: Adepts among them, in particular, may find themselves being watched by shadowy figures, and that certain local leaders seem to have outside sources of support should be obvious.



Once the PLAYERS have a good base of magic and NPC support, they will be ready to be introduced to the idea that the surviving demons are the World’s secret masters. They should come into contact (or conflict) with the demons’ proxies (be it human agents, Overseers, Reapers, or the like), and be tasked with disrupting particular plans. They should also (if they have not already) start on the road toward being socially important: reputed heroes, local or regional leaders, or members of one of the organizations. This rise to hero status should be a struggle, however, particularly for Adepts, as the demons have worked long and hard to alienate the populace from users of magic.

Eventually, the PLAYERS should have enough magical ability, political clout, or both, to merit the direct attention of the demons. The demons try to eliminate (or corrupt) the PLAYERS, while the PLAYERS try to crimp the plans of the demons. The PLAYERS should be important figures: heroes of renown; nobles improving the lot of their folk; organizers.

Structuring the campaign in this fashion, while making sure that the PCs are rewarded with what rewards are available, helps to keep the setting engaging.

## 12. SCENARIO—THE LORD OF NOTHING

### 1. Summary and Overview.

*The Lord of Nothing* is intended as an introductory scenario for beginning PLAYERS. The PLAYERS will be tasked with an investigation: figuring out what has happened to a young craftsman from Crystal Lake with a valuable skill. Although the adventure is set in the perpetually warring state of Eglantine, it can easily be moved to Fallingstar or any other comparatively “civilized” and well-populated region of the World with an isolated village.

Running the PLAYERS through this adventure will help them grasp the tone of *Ashes, to Ashes*. Unlike in some fantasy campaigns, the PLAYERS simply cannot bull-rush or dice-roll their way through to an acceptable solution. They do not have the power or resources to do so. They need to explore, investigate the facts, persuade those they interact with, and be wary of the consequences of offending the wrong parties.

The KEEPER should, in this regard, and because this is the “introductory” adventure, nudge the PLAYERS along the logical course (perhaps with Idea rolls to indicate when they are about to get themselves in trouble for annoying the wrong people, or are handling a situation in a way that, logically, people in their position would not).

**Summary:** Laurence “the Fair”, a talented young leatherworking apprentice at a shop in the neutral, black market town of Crystal Lake, has disappeared without warning. He left all of his belongings behind. His master wants Laurence back, and the Sheriff offers the PLAYERS a reward to find him and return him.

Sounds simple enough, right? Well, it isn’t. Laurence has been press-ganged, but not by

either of the likely suspects, the armies of North Eglantine or South Eglantine. Instead, he has been abducted and pressed into service by “Lord” Ricken of Elf Gate. “Lord” Ricken is the local military garrison leader of Elf Gate, a remote, isolated town at the foot of the mountains separating Eglantine from Fallingstar. Over the past year, with the support of the entire town, he has been covertly gathering resources and fortifying his position in order to stage a rebellion.

Ricken has decided that he and Elf Gate are better off seceding from North Town and ceasing its devotion of scarce resources to the endless war with the South. Elf Gate is far from the battle lines, and Ricken (correctly) believes that the people of Elf Gate would be better off if they were on their own.

To that end, he needs people with skills useful in supporting an independent guerilla fighting force. He has been doing what he can, consistent with caution, to tempt mercenaries and skilled craftsmen to join his planned revolt.

Some of Ricken’s people were in Crystal Lake on a trading mission shortly before Laurence disappeared. They were favorably impressed by his skill with leatherworking and offered him financial incentives to relocate. When Laurence refused, they left town, had a couple of people sneak back in, cracked Laurence over the head, and snuck out of town with him. Laurence is now well on his way to Elf Gate, where he will be put to work for the rebellion, like it or not.

### 2. Hooking the PLAYERS.

The PLAYERS are in Crystal Lake in Eglantine, either as mercenaries, adventurers or general doers of good deeds. Crystal Lake is a border town that engages in controlled, choke point trading with both

North Town and South Town, which have been locked in a stagnant war for close to a century. Neither side in the war is officially allowed in Crystal Lake, but it is common knowledge that each side sends agents and caravans into town to trade and spy.

It is also common knowledge that each side periodically engages in intrigue against the other within town walls. However, it is well known that the residents of Crystal Lake are off-limits and “protected”, if each side in the war wants the town Council to turn a blind eye to their covert activities.

If the PLAYERS have a good reputation as discrete and reliable agents, they will be approached by Browning Landscot, the town sheriff. Browning will offer them an appropriate reward (perhaps enough to work two temporary Wealth increases) to see if they can figure out what happened to Laurence “the Fair”, a leatherworker’s apprentice.

Browning explains that Laurence is an older apprentice, about to be made a partner in his master’s business. His master, John the Tanner, is worried about him. He failed to return to his quarters two nights ago after leaving to “visit his friends” at the Queen’s Ballad inn. The town watch has made a search of the town and found no trace of Laurence. Laurence did not take any of his belongings or tools, so he doubts that he just left on his own. This is out of character for Laurence, who is described as quiet and reliable, as well as a good worker.

Travel reimbursement and assistance will be authorized within reason (horses are never “within reason”). Browning also gives them a writ, bearing the seal of the town Council, identifying the PLAYERS as on his business in the recovery of a Crystal Lake citizen. Browning reminds them that he has no legal authority outside of Crystal Lake (and he suspects that the inquiry will lead them outside of town), which is why he’s asking them to look into it in the first place. The PLAYERS may state that they are acting on the sheriff’s authority in the inquiry,

although that amounts to little beyond political weight outside of town.

### **3. Gathering Information about Laurence’s Activities & Retracing His Steps.**

Browning has already retraced Laurence’s steps and done some initial interviewing. Two nights ago, Laurence finished work at sunset, ate dinner with his master John the Tanner and John’s wife, Susan, and went to the Queen’s Ballad inn for a bit. The innkeeper confirmed that he was there for an hour or two, sharing a pint with his friends, and then left for home. This is the last that anyone saw of him.

### **4. Investigative Interviews.**

The PLAYERS would be well advised to recover Browning’s ground, because while his information is accurate, Browning did not ask enough questions.

#### **a. Laurence’s Family.**

With the exception noted below, people in Crystal Lake will readily answer any question put to them by the PLAYERS if they state that they are in the employ of Sheriff Browning Landscot. Their first stop will probably be the tanner’s shop where Laurence lived and worked.

John the Tanner can relate that Laurence is from North Town originally, but came here as a runaway when he was 14. He was taken in as an apprentice by John the Tanner and his wife, Susan. They have no children of their own, and the three of them lived here as a family. He cannot think of any reason why Laurence would have run off. John (Insight check) seems genuinely concerned and upset for Laurence’s well-being, and to be telling the truth. He believes that Laurence has been assaulted and probably killed, perhaps by thieves or drunkards.

Laurence is now 21 years of age, and John readily admits that he was a talented lad, perhaps a better leatherworker than he is. He was in the process of offering Laurence a partnership in his business, and often

assigned Laurence the more difficult jobs that came in because Laurence has very good eyesight.

John can offer a basic description of Laurence as a very small, skinny young man with a pale complexion, white-blond hair, blue eyes and a broken nose. He can also show the PLAYERS where Laurence's loft was. Laurence appears to have lived simply, if comfortably, and has indeed left behind several sets of clothes, his leatherworking tools and even a small amount of local scrip. If Laurence had run off on his own power, it is extremely illogical that he would have left his valuable tools and clothing behind.

The question that Sheriff Browning neglected to ask is whether anything unusual had happened to Laurence at work lately. If asked, John can relate that he received a very unusual piece of work a few days ago: repairing an old saddle.

Laurence was assigned the task and did a masterful job. John did not catch (nor ask) the name of the saddle's owner, but Laurence made the old saddle shine, and the owner was extremely pleased. In fact, he picked the saddle up the day that Laurence disappeared.

The PLAYERS should quickly realize (Know check) that there are *not* a lot of riding saddles floating around Eglantine, because horses are only held by the elite. A saddle would belong to a wealthy adventurer, a witch-hunter Reaper, a command-level military officer, or a senior Priest of the Circle.

John can relate that the person who ordered the saddle repair did not have the bearing of a priest. He may have been a military man, but assuming that he was, that (as well as which side he was on) is not something that would have been advertised.

John does not know if the saddle's owner slipped Laurence a tip, but it would not be unheard of. Laurence was in a good mood when he left that evening, however.

### **b. Laurence's Friends.**

Laurence's friends are easily found together, in a group, at the Queen's Ballad inn for a reasonable amount of time after sunset. Alternatively, they can be tracked down individually: they are a group of like-aged craft apprentices, both male and female. Laurence was not presently involved in any romantic entanglements, and they can confirm truthfully (Insight roll) that he was a good young man who minded his own business.

The question that Sheriff Browning neglected to ask the friends is who bought the drinks that evening. Laurence did; this was unusual behavior for the sober apprentice. He also seemed unusually interested in Jane, one of the barmaids, that evening, and gave her a tip before leaving. Jane can confirm this, and all can confirm that Jane then worked several more hours. Laurence left early that evening, leaving his friends behind (and with a solid alibi) for a few hours hence.

There are no obvious signs of a struggle on the route between the Queen's Ballad and the leatherworker's shop, which is about a five minute walk. There are several dark alleys, however.

### **c. Military Authorities.**

This will be where the PLAYERS learn their first lesson about being discrete in a World where they cannot just threaten those that they want to interrogate. As noted above, Crystal Lake is neutral, and agents of the North and South are not supposed to operate in town. At the same time, everyone knows that they do.

However, walking into a bar and asking a suspected Northern or Southern agent if they know anything about a disappearance is both poor form and likely to get the PLAYERS killed. The PLAYERS would be accusing them, in effect, of being not only criminals but criminals who violated Crystal Lake's neutrality—which would force the town to react.



The Queen's Ballad inn (where Laurence liked to hang out) is known as a speakeasy for undercover Northern agents, while the King's Road inn is known as one for Southern agents.

The mere fact that the PLAYERS are in the Queen's Ballad retracing the Sheriff's steps is the kind of subtle, and more appropriate, signal that is likely to accomplish something. In fact, this is why Sheriff Browning is having them do it: to send a subtle but not overtly offensive message that he thinks that one of the warring parties may be responsible.

Once the PLAYERS go into the Queen's Ballad, they will start to be watched. If they say or do anything where a skulk might overhear that even suggests that they think Laurence might have been abducted by either army (let alone ask a pointed question to one of the known or suspected sympathizers), they will get a visit from not one, but two, agents: one Northern and one Southern.

The visits, as usual for Eglantine storytelling, should be nearly identical, down to the appearance of the contact. The message will also be the same: "Word on the street is that Laurence the leatherworker's apprentice might have been abducted. Well, that would be an egregious breach of Crystal Lake's neutrality if it were true, and a foolish risk for either side to take—but the other side (whichever side that is) will stoop to nothing."

You might even have these messengers bump into each other on the first one's way out the door.

Both of these denials will pass whatever test (Insight, magical, rational or otherwise) that the PLAYERS care to expose it to. And they are right: it would be a foolish risk for vested interests in Crystal Lake.

#### **d. Hiring Contractors in Crystal Lake.**

Hiring contractors in Crystal Lake can offer that someone, who kept their identity to themselves, was looking for stonemasons for

an extended work assignment out of town. They were offering good wages, and asked that anyone who was interested should meet at the North gate the day that Laurence disappeared. A couple of stonemasons took the hiring party up on the offer.

#### **e. Merchants in Crystal Lake.**

A general round of the merchants discloses that Laurence was seen in several shops the day before he disappeared, looking through better quality things that he would not normally have been able to afford.

#### **f. Resorting to Magic.**

The PLAYERS might resort to magic in an effort to figure out Laurence's location. At the time they are engaged, he is about 60 miles North up the Great Road toward Elf Gate. Later he will be secreted in a basement in Elf Gate. If the PLAYERS sling that much magic, that will help them, but it is unlikely in an introductory adventure.

More likely is that one of the PLAYERS will be an Adept and might try to bring *Second Sight* to bear on the problem. Allow two pieces of information to come from the use of *Second Sight*: a sense of confusion and pain near an alley between the Queen's Ballad and the leatherworking shop; and pain near the North gate out of town.

#### **g. Gate Guards.**

The Gate guards at the North gate on the Great Road have important information.

First, they can advise that yes, a military-looking gentleman (not one they were familiar with as a prior visitor or trader) did leave here on horseback the day that Laurence left. He was in the company of a priest of the Circle and several others on foot. (Idea roll: a priest, a military man on horseback and other men in a group likely means a military detachment. Second Idea roll: they would be a Northern detachment or they would not be traveling North up the Great Road, unless they relished the thought of death).

Second, yes, a couple of stonemasons did rendezvous with this group. One of the masons was overheard to say that he “had never been *that* far north”, and wanted to double-check that he had enough food for the journey.

Third, why yes, a couple of those men did double back, and left the next morning with a large sack over their shoulders. And yes, they suppose that it might have been a big enough sack to contain a slight fellow like Laurence.

In short, the PLAYERS should be able to deduce that Laurence got a job offer that he should not have refused, and was press-ganged. They should also deduce that a military detachment from the North was involved, that the perpetrators were based quite some distance away, and that it may not have been an authorized operation.

The farthest north that one can go in Eglantine (Know roll) is Elf Gate, a small town at the end of the Great Road, far removed from the theater of war or from much of the rest of the population. The town is remote, and (Know roll) any other destination along the Great Road would not provoke a question about being so far north or needing extra food. Elf Gate lies several days’ journey off the beaten path of the Great Road, with miles and miles of desolation to cross. Checking with Sheriff Browning and the others the PLAYERS have talked to confirms that no one knows or has ever met the current military hierarchs or Circle hierarchs attached to Elf Gate.

Take careful note if the PLAYERS do or say something in public that might alert a watchful spy that they are headed to Elf Gate in pursuit of their investigation.

### **5. Overland to Elf Gate.**

The road to Elf Gate is easy but dangerous. It runs through few settlements at all, let alone any of size. The bulk of the population of North Town lies east of the “Great City”; the PLAYERS will be taking the north fork at the “Great City” into

uninhabited wasteland.

Along the Great Road, travel is at 2 hexes, or 32 miles, per day on foot for a lightly loaded person who is pushing his speed. They will reach the “Great City” ruins after a day and a half, and Elf Gate after four days. The journey should be divided into three stages: the Road between the Crystal Lake and the “Great City”; the day-long journey through the ruins of the “Great City”; and the desolate journey north to Elf Gate.

#### **a. Encounters—Between Crystal Lake and the “Great City”.**

While not a heavily populated area by any means (vast stretches of rocky barrens punctuated by occasional fertile patches and small farming towns), the Great Road in this area is still lightly inhabited and somewhat traveled. There will be other people on the Great Road every few hours or so, either stopping for a rest or headed the other direction.

There will be four sorts of encounters that the PLAYERS might expect along this stretch of the Great Road:

**1. Northern Army patrols:** these will be foot patrols of about 6 men (typically not the raw rookies sent to the DMZ, but somewhat more experienced and capable veterans). They will typically be encountered coming from the opposite direction, unless the party happens to overtake an eastbound-northbound patrol, once or twice a day. They will challenge the PLAYERS, ask them to state their business, want to inspect their goods, *etc.* They may have their persons searched. Essentially, have them act as though the PLAYERS were walking through a highly militarized police state constantly on the lookout for spies and traitors.

As long as none of the PLAYERS are known or suspected Southern agents, resist the searches, or display any magic, however, these intrusions should only be a nuisance.

2. *Sponsored Bandits*: There is a chance that the PLAYERS will be accosted by sponsored bandits, *i.e.*, those that operate with the tacit or even overt support of the Northern Army, and generally do what they think the Northern Army would want them to do. Their goal is to identify people who are engaging in trade other than with the Northern forces, and to relieve them of their goods. These are then shared with the Northern Army. If the PLAYERS do not appear to be merchants or especially wealthy, they may pass such a group or see them watching from nearby, but they will not be molested.

If they do look like ripe targets, these privateers (again, typically in groups of 6 or so, and on foot) may block their path. They tend to act like soldiers of the North (and often even dress like them). Typical tactics include a pretense of official sanction for confiscation of the PLAYERS' more valuable goods. If their authority is questioned or if the PLAYERS resist, whether and to what extent they resort to violence depends on how they size up the PLAYERS. Another typical tactic is to have another 4 or so bandits in reserve, who appear when trouble brews to attempt to intimidate the PLAYERS. These fellows are not interested in fighting to the death.

If the PLAYERS let slip (either here or back at Crystal Lake) that they believe that Laurence may have been press-ganged by someone in the far north (the concept of the far north being the critical factor), then they may get an odd reaction from any sponsored bandits.

Once the bandits get a sense of who the PLAYERS are, a whispered conversation may ensue, and they may be told that everything seems to be in order and to be on their way. This should not happen until the PLAYERS are at least a full day out from Crystal Lake. (In this story path, the Northern spies in Crystal Lake have sent a bird to their superiors, who have decided to have an agent meet up with and shadow the PLAYERS to see what they can learn).

### Hey, Have You Seen A Man On A Horse Come By?

This question (*or its functional equivalent, "have you seen anyone matching Laurence's description?"*), will be inevitably asked by the PLAYERS as they go down the road. The answer depends on who they ask.

People in Eglantine, except for high-ranking church officials and military officials, just do not have horses. Period. So remind the PLAYERS, as this is the introductory adventure, that this is the functional equivalent of asking if anyone has seen a very high-ranking person.

Anyone in a position of authority that they ask in a police state like Eglantine is going to want to know why they are asking. Northern loyalists and Northern troopers are going to be suspicious about their motives, and may refuse to answer. (Successful Fast Talk rolls might nonetheless garner an answer). The only man on horseback who has come by was not someone they recognized, but it was obvious that he was a garrison commander somewhere, given the horse, his sword, and the priest who rode with him. And he did have a captive resembling Laurence.

The correct people to ask this question of are non-Eglantinians. They may provide a straight answer. Anytime the subject of horses in general comes up with the Northern troopers, however, there is a decent chance that they will moan about how silly it is that the "brass" keep the horses for themselves. Indeed, it should strike the PLAYERS as silly that, given the usefulness of horses in a war, the army is only making use of them as "general staff cars." Play this up a bit as the PLAYERS travel, so that when they make the discovery in Elf Gate of a cavalry force being assembled, they will glom on to the fact *that Elf Gate is criminally hoarding military resources.*

**3. *Un-sponsored Bandits:*** There is always a chance that some actual bandits (be it desperadoes, highwaymen, or opportunistic fellow travelers) will size up the PLAYERS and decide that they can take them on. Let the PLAYERS win the fight. Note, however, that anyone resorting to obvious/detectable magic is going to provoke a hue and cry (at least, from any bandits who survive and escape). If you do have such an encounter, use it as an instructional session for just how dangerous combat is in BRP: this is a lesson that the PLAYERS need to learn so that they know what they can and cannot get away with.

**4. *Black Barnabas/The Wayside:*** Black Barnabas should be encountered (if at all) at the general campsite just outside the “Great City”. As the PLAYERS come over a hill, beneath them in a large valley, sprawling like a ruined, bombed-out Emerald City with the Yellow Brick Road winding up to it, is the wreckage of the “Great City”. Majestic, largely destroyed, crumbling fantasy architecture dominates a city that looks like it once housed hundreds of thousands or more. Now no one lives there, although at least one *thing* does.

In the afternoon or later, anyone traveling east/north will be pulled up and camped at the top of the hill. As the day wears on, a group of travelers headed south/west will emerge from the ruin, traveling together in a line, and make camp for the evening.

The North keeps a small, bivouacked patrol at this overlook. They will (after searching the PLAYERS and poking into their business) advise them that the “Great City” is generally not believed to be safe at night, and that as a result travel should only be attempted during the day. It will take most of the day, they advise, to traverse the ruins, and under no circumstances should the PLAYERS set foot off of the Great Road while in the ruins.

In actuality, the “Great City” is no more or less safe in the night than in the day, and apart from banditry, as long as the PLAYERS stay on the Great Road, the thing

out in the ruins will not bother them. However, if this is their first time through the Great City, by all means have someone ahead or behind them in the convoy that forms step off the Great Road to relieve himself, and disappear after a muffled scream and a loud crunching sound.

**Typical Bandit, or Typical Northern Army Trooper (Including Elf Gate).**

STR 13 DEX 13 INT 11 CON 13  
APP 13 POW 11 SIZ 13 EDU 8 Hits:  
13 Age: 16.

**Damage Bonus:** +1d4.

**Skills:** Dodge (40%), Craft (Farming) (50%), Hide (40%), Insight (30%), Listen (40%), Navigate (30%), Stealth (40%), Spot Hidden (40%), Survival (50%).

**Attacks:**

Mace, 40%, 1d6+2+db, crushing, HP 20.

Sling, 50%, 1d8, 80 yards, crushing, cannot parry.

**Defenses:** Armor 3 (leather and helmet)

Shield, wicker & leather, 65%, 1d2+db, knockback, Armor 10 (must parry).

Deity: The Circle.

Wealth: 4.

**Notes:** Elf Gate garrison members would also have Ride Horse at 35% and Stealth at 60%. Poorly equipped bandits would lack the armor.

Barnabas may be encountered here if, in the KEEPER’s discretion, a spy either in Crystal Lake or on the Great Road would have taken notice that the PLAYERS are en route to Elf Gate to look for Laurence.

If encountered, Barnabas will be traveling alone. He will portray himself as a wandering minstrel, and can even back up this claim with a song. Barnabas is a short, stout, middle-aged man wearing leather clothing (Armor 2), with black hair, a bushy black beard, and a lead-loaded cudgel. He is

headed the same way as the PLAYERS, following the northern fork of the Great Road.

Barnabas is a spy working for the North Town army. While he would like to travel with the PLAYERS, he will not force the issue. He will just keep heading in the same direction that they are, offer to make camp with them, but move on if they refuse or are hostile. He does not want to interfere with the PLAYERS; he wants to keep an eye on them and see what a group of non-affiliated investigators stumble onto, and then report back.

Given the PLAYERS' indiscrete suspicions, he has a feeling (as do his masters) that something unauthorized by central command may be afoot in the far north, and they have decided that a subtle inquiry rather than a raid is in order for now.

#### **b. Encounters—The “Great City”.**

Unless the PLAYERS are really foolish, there should not be any encounters in the “Great City” itself. Everyone will travel as a convoy, stay nervously together, and not stray off the Great Road (except for any NPCs that the KEEPER decides to make an object lesson out of).

#### **c. Encounters—North of the “Great City”.**

The trip through the ruins takes most of the day. Another campsite (along with another bivouac) is at the south/west end, at the top of the far end of the valley. Here, the “Great Road” forks to the east and north. Everyone other than the PLAYERS and Barnabas head toward the east and the population centers of North Town's hegemony.

The journey from the “Great City” to Elf Gate will take two and a half days at a decent pace. North of the “Great City”, the land is extremely desolate until the PLAYERS near Elf Gate, at which point mountains loom in the distance and a band of arable land clings to their feet.

#### **Black Barnabas, Northern Army Intelligence Operative.**

STR 13 DEX 13 INT 14 CON 13  
APP 13 POW 14 SIZ 13 EDU 11  
Hits: 13 Age: 30.

**Damage Bonus:** +1d4.

**Skills:** Bargain (40%), Command (25%), Dodge (50%), Etiquette (50%), Fast Talk (50%), Hide (50%), History (30%), Insight (50%), Listen (60%), Navigate (40%), Persuade (50%), Perform (Sing/Story) (50%), Spot Hidden (50%), Stealth (60%), Survival (60%).

#### **Attacks:**

Quarterstaff, 60%, 1d8 +db, parry twice vs. attack, 20 HP.

Sling, 60%, 1d8, 80 yards, crushing, cannot parry.

#### **Defenses:**

Armor 2 (leather clothing).

Deity: The Circle.

Wealth: 5.

No one lives in the near-desert and blasted heath that the PLAYERS will be traveling through. Survival rolls made to find potable water or forage for food are halved: there is a little bit out there, but it is hard to find and hard to catch.

The PLAYERS will not encounter any sponsored bandits on this stretch. Nor will they encounter any patrols after the first day. Any patrols that they do encounter on the first day will give them the usual third degree, but not an unusual amount of the third degree. This is true regardless, but is especially true if Barnabas is either with them or just ahead of them.

Unsponsored bandits may well be encountered along this route, since it is so remote yet still occasionally traveled, but these will not be your better sorts of bandits. They will be poorly equipped (no armor,

perhaps a shield) and comparatively desperate. Their comparative desperation makes them that much more likely to attack, however.

Once the PLAYERS pass a day's walk north of the last bivouac (where the patrols from that bivouac turn around and head back), the PLAYERS will (readily) encounter *no one*: no patrols, no privateers, no random bandits.

This is odd, and the PLAYERS might rightly wonder why all of the annoying patrols have stopped; isn't there a town with a garrison that they are heading toward? Barnabas notes the oddity but says nothing. Magic or adroit Insight rolls might reveal that he seems nervous or concerned, but he says nothing. (If things were in a state of normality, patrols marching south from Elf Gate would be expected).

Patrols from Elf Gate are, in fact, active, beginning about a day's *ride* south of town. That is not a typo. The folks at Elf Gate, in preparation for their secession, have been quietly breeding horses for some time, diverting war material, selling craft production on the black market, keeping two sets of books, and engaging in other forms of skullduggery to amass a war chest. The war chest has been used to buy extra food, and the food has been used to breed a stable of (highly unauthorized) horses.

As a result, small mounted patrols (2-3 troopers), from among Undersheriff Ricken's most trusted men, ride picket duty. They stick to cover and high ground and if they see anyone coming this far out of the way, they retreat to warn Ricken. The KEEPER might allow the PLAYERS to spot something off in the distance, moving away quickly, with impressive Spot rolls, but the pickets are skilled at Stealth (60%).

The good stone of the "Great Road" does not leave hoof prints, although horse droppings are another matter. The pickets do police the droppings by burying them if they know someone is coming, but this is not foolproof if they are in a hurry. On the other hand, in this setting, a mere Know

check might not be enough to identify horse droppings specifically, since they are a rare commodity. Barnabas will know, and stop to look carefully, but he again will feign disinterest.

### **6. Elf Gate & State of Readiness at Arrival.**

Elf Gate is a larger farming village of about 200-300 people at the northern edge of Eglantine. It is the only human settlement anywhere nearby. Here, the Great Road dead-ends into nearly impassible, high mountains, although one can see bits of road and ruins from what was once a majestic gateway to the north of town, high up on the slope.

There is a military camp (consisting of a couple of barracks buildings, some storehouses, and two officers' quarters, where Ricken and Tomas live, respectively, with their local wives and children) at the center of town, along with a pub (no rooms) and a small, one room chapel. The buildings are of stone and date from pre-Abjuration times.

Stretching out from the village center are a number of stone, pre-Abjuration farmer's cottages (about 50 in all), with crofts and tofts, all fronting the Great Road. There are also a number of ruins out in the surrounding badlands, suggesting that a small city was once here. However, the patch of arable land supporting the town is only about one square mile.

Elf Gate is so remote and insular that the 30 man military garrison has been able to solidify the populace into a planned rebellion. There is little dissent in town about this; the government in North Town taxes them heavily and levies their youth, but provides them no concrete benefit. The garrison has never had to respond to a military threat from the South in anyone's memory; South Town is just too far away.

The ringleaders of the rebellion are Undersheriff (or "Lord") Ricken "the Beef" and the local Church presence, Brother Tomas. They are in this come hell or high

water, as are their troops. The farmers are less militant, but generally agree that they are tired of being little more than a tax target of North Town.

The foregoing should not be read to imply that Ricken and Tomas are good-hearted patriots. On the contrary, they are both ruthless warlords who will stop at nothing to save their own hides or advance their goals.

The rebellion needs military-oriented labor (smiths, masons, leatherworkers) and while they are content to pay for it, they will (as in Laurence's case) force the issue if they must. They badly needed a saddle maker, and given their timetable (expecting to be caught soon, as they are now building fortifications), felt that they had to take a chance.

#### **a. Town On Guard.**

The town will probably be aware that the PLAYERS are on their way (from the pickets). However, if the PLAYERS were stealthy and cautious (perhaps even paralleling the "Great Road" rather than being on it, using magic, or otherwise being inventive) they may avoid the pickets. In this regard, Black Barnabas (if he is with them, and if he managed to get them to confide in him) might even suggest stealth.

If the KEEPER determines that Elf Gate knows that company is coming, they will take the following steps:

- the horses and other movable horse-related evidence will be rounded up and herded several miles east of town by about half the garrison.
- Laurence (whose presence is not generally known to the populace, as he has been kept locked out of sight) will be hidden in the basement of the military barracks in the middle of town.
- The masonry and other contractors from Crystal Lake will be sequestered in the barracks. They have been read in on the town's

general plans, but are happy with the money that they are making.

- Undersheriff Ricken will send out a *foot* patrol to create an illusion of normalcy.
- There is nothing that can really be done to disguise the earthen moat and palisade that has been erected around the town, the stone watchtower being erected at the barracks, or the clearing away of brush and other flammables from around the central buildings. These, they will explain away (somewhat lamely) as war precautions—Southern raiders have been seen lately and it was time to upgrade the defenses.

In short, they will put a plausible deniability plan into place.

There are holes in the plan, of course:

- The earthworks are pretty impressive, more consistent with an all-out attack being expected than precautions against a few raiders.
- The contractors that the PLAYERS can surmise were coming here are nowhere to be seen. In fact, no one but farmers and military troopers are around. Lots of work, but no evident workers.
- There seem to be too few troopers for the barracks, which the PLAYERS should pick up on if any of them have a background of having been in the Eglantian military (or make a Difficult Idea roll). The camp looks like it is designed to hold 30 or so troopers, but there only seem to be half that number. Depending on whether he thinks it will be to his advantage to prod the PLAYERS toward a confrontation (so that he can see what happens and then try to flee), Black Barnabas might mention this.

- One building in town adjacent to the barracks (appearing to be a storage building) is under constant guard. This is the stable (there is no paddock; the horses are regularly taken out to a meadow a few miles to the east).

### **b. Town Not On Guard.**

If the PLAYERS somehow completely get the drop on town, disregard the foregoing. They will see the masons happily working away on the tower, all of the expected troopers, and maybe even a horse or two coming in and out of the barn. And the flag of North Town will *not* be flying.

### **7. At Elf Gate, Potential Story Paths.**

What happens at Elf Gate really depends on what the PLAYERS do. Ricken and Tomas are not stupid. They know that someday, their rebellion is going to be discovered (probably soon) and they are going to have to defend against an expedition from North Town. Their goal is to buy as much time as possible and put themselves in the best position that they can against that inevitable day. Toward this end, they want to size the PLAYERS up.

Barnabas, being a Northern intelligence agent, is basically going to want to quietly get out of town, in one piece, so that he can raise an alarm. He will do so (if possible) just as soon as he can gather enough information. This scenario is much more fun if Barnabas does not make it out of town alive, however, so he will not.

It should occur to savvy PLAYERS (Idea rolls all around if it does not) that there is no legitimate explanation for a comparatively large quantities of horses in Elf Gate. It is too far from the front to be a logical breeding ground for some top-secret “weapons program”, and there is not enough land around to breed a huge number of horses anyway. Indeed, it is too far from the front for there to be any legitimate military purpose for keeping that many horses here.

If Barnabas is not with them, role-play it out. Let them be surprised, argue about what to do, and then try to escape. They almost certainly will not be able to avoid the horse pickets, which will move to call for mounted reinforcements (*en masse*) and try to ride down and capture *anyone* they see heading *away* from town.

#### **Undersheriff Ricken “the Beef”, the Lord of Nothing.**

STR 16 DEX 14 INT 14 CON 16 APP 13 POW 16 SIZ 18 EDU 18 Hits: 17  
Age: 28.

**Damage Bonus:** +1d6.

**Skills:** Bargain (40%), Dodge (50%), Etiquette (30%), Fast Talk (50%), Hide (50%), History (30%), Insight (55%), Listen (60%), Navigate (40%), Persuade (60%), *Ride Horse* (40%), Spot (50%), Survival (60%), *Status* (55%), Stealth (60%), Strategy (Plan Rebellion) (65%).

#### **Attacks:**

Sling, 60%, 1d8, 80 yards, crushing, cannot parry.

Officer’s Sword, steel, 60%, 1d8+1+db, bleeding, 20 HP.

**Defenses:** Armor 4 (studded leather and helmet).

Shield, leather and wicker, 70%, 1d2+db, knockback, Armor 10 (must parry).

The troopers that they encounter on the road will have made it plain how badly they could use horses. They should already know that the press-ganging was not officially sanctioned by North Town. And Barnabas’ reaction to the horses’ eventual discovery (“we have to get out of here”) should confirm that this is a rogue operation.

### **a. Town Not On Guard.**

What happens if the PLAYERS catch Elf Gate completely by surprise depends on whether they are traveling with Black Barnabas or not.



If Black Barnabas is with them and sees a rebellion afoot (which he will quickly figure out, once he figures out that there is horse hoarding going on), he will try to get back to North Town and raise the alarm. He may well abandon the PLAYERS entirely. Have him be caught, get beaten up by the pickets, and drug back into town behind a horse if this occurs. Then proceed to “Caught!”

Let them fight if they want, and let it turn deadly if it must. They will find themselves pursued by up to 30 mounted troopers who will try to capture them if possible or kill them if necessary. If they are captured, they will be forced to walk (tied up) back into town. Proceed, again, to “Caught!”

If they do not “get it” and blithely wander into a surprised town, they will not be accosted immediately, but the entire town will be on a high state of alert, and they will *not* be allowed to leave. They have seen too much. When they try to leave, or if Barnabas is found skulking around town separately, proceed to “Caught!”

**b. Infiltration, Town Not On Guard.**

It is possible that, once they see very unusual things going on in town, they will sneak around and try to spy on things. Role-play these efforts out. Strangers in town found skulking around the barracks, however, will prompt a hue and cry, and the mounted troops will mobilize. Role-play out the capture efforts, and if they are captured, proceed to “Caught!”

**c. Infiltration, Town On Guard.**

It is possible that, once they see slightly unusual things going on in town, they will sneak around and try to spy on things. Role-play these efforts out. However, if the pickets spotted them, the town will be on a high state of alert and they are quite likely to be “Caught!” Note that that barracks buildings (including the barracks in which the Crystal Lake workers are being kept and Laurence is being held) are under close watch, as is the horse barn. (Even though the horses will have been moved out, getting inside that building would inevitably reveal

that horses are kept there). It’s obviously a horse barn, from a cursory look on the inside.

Another possibility is that the town is ready for their arrival and the PLAYERS march on in, under the guise of being traders, travelers en route to Fallingstar (the Road dead-ends here), or having some other plausible reason for being in town. If so, the villagers try to play it cool and watch.

It is possible, if they are good enough actors, that the PLAYERS might get a look around town and pick up on some of the subtler clues to be found without piquing suspicions. If so, they might actually get to leave with an idea about what is going on, and formulate a plan. (Hopefully, they know that “alerting the Northern army” is unlikely to do anything but provoke a raid in which Laurence might be killed.

**d. Confrontation.**

If they actually try to ask questions about what is up with all the horses, or challenge Ricken or his men, proceed to “Caught!” without further ado. The alarm likewise goes out promptly if they have no plausible explanation for being in Elf Gate.

**e. Freeing Laurence & Getting Out of Town.**

This is not impossible, but it is a tall order.

First, nothing else (including behavior by Black Barnabas) will have to have occurred that will lead to them being “Caught!”

Second, they will have to successfully have a stealthy look around town, which will reveal that two buildings are under constant guard. One is the (disguised) horse barn, and the other is obviously a barracks.

Third, they will have to quietly disable the guards on the barracks (at least two) at a time when it will go unnoticed (probably when everyone is distracted by Barnabas). In fact, if the party is separated from Barnabas and he triggers an alarm, diverting much of the mounted patrol, this is probably their only realistic opportunity to slip in the



proverbial back door, disable the few guards left behind, and find Laurence.

He is not chained, but has been put in a basement in the barracks, where he is sleeping, taking his meals, and making saddles. They keep the trapdoor to the cellar barred at night, and have him personally guarded (in the same room) by two guards in the day. A local lass has been trying to convince him, on a personal level, that he would like it here in Elf Gate.

Laurence knows what is going on: (Elf Gate is rebelling, but has not yet been found out by North Town, and is fortifying its position and trying to keep things quiet as long as possible. They offered him good wages, but when he said no, they ambushed him.

Laurence would like to leave and go back to Crystal Lake, but knows that their chances of making it back down the Great Road far enough is slim, given the fact that Ricken's men have horses and there is so much barren landscape between here and the "Great City." He only has two suggestions: steal horses themselves (he cannot Ride, regardless of whether the PLAYERS can), or head into the mountains and hope to lose pursuit. They may alternatively brave the (nearly impassible) mountains into Fallingstar, in which case, they escape.

### **8. Caught!**

Unless the PLAYERS are stealthy and play their cards just right, they stand a good chance of being confronted by an entire village, consisting of about 30 (potentially mounted) troopers, and about another 150 villagers capable of at least wielding a club. None of these people are going to want them to leave town and rat them out, if things get to that point.

If the PLAYERS get "Caught!", they will be subdued with whatever level of force is necessary. For most people, that means when they give up or are knocked unconscious. The villagers will not be in a hurry to render First Aid to anyone who resists arrest. They will also not go out of their way to kill anyone unless the

PLAYERS kill someone first, in which case, all bets are off. If someone happens to get accidentally killed while resisting arrest, well, that's life in the big city.

Adepts pose a special problem. The villagers will be afraid of anyone resorting to spells and flee. The troopers, by contrast, will try very hard (without risking their own lives) to take such a person alive.

This is one of the role-playing lessons for *Ashes, to Ashes* that, seeing as how this is the introductory adventure, the KEEPER might wish to clear his throat about, if the PLAYERS seem bent on fighting to the death. They cannot take on the whole town in pitched combat. Remind them that there is no coming back from the dead in this setting.

Barnabas will fight as long as he thinks that he can get away, at which point, he will surrender.

Initially, everyone who is "Caught!" will be bound, searched, and hauled roughly but not viciously to the house occupied by Ricken and his family. Give the PLAYERS an opportunity to see that Ricken has a local-looking wife and a couple of small children running about. Several troopers, Ricken, and Tomas will arrive, look through the PLAYERS' belongings, and take a good, hard look at each of them.

Assuming that Barnabas is still alive, they will haul him off separately while about 10 troopers keep an eye on the PLAYERS. This occurs after Brother Tomas looks at Barnabas and whispers something to Ricken. (Tomas recognizes Barnabas as a Northern army operative).

After about an hour (during which time, Barnabas is being tortured in a nearby building--allow Listen rolls to hear his anguished cries), the PLAYERS can see through an open window as Barnabas is led out into the yard and beheaded by Ricken with his sword. Barnabas is not in good shape when this occurs; his legs dangle uselessly, and he is covered in blood. It is obvious that he has been tortured. The

execution is staged deliberately in a place that the PLAYERS can witness it. As Barnabas is led to the chopping block, Barnabas screams that Ricken is a traitor and that he is the “Lord of Nothing, and Less Than Nothing.” Ker-chunk!!!

After about another hour (to let the effect of this display sink in), Brother Tomas and “Lord” Ricken (as the troopers refer to him), come in to chat with the PLAYERS.

### **9. Making a Choice.**

Ricken offers the PLAYERS his view of matters. He does not mince words. Tomas stands in the background, largely remaining silent.

#### **Brother Tomas, Middling Priest of the Circle.**

STR 11 DEX 13 INT 16 CON 13 APP 13 POW 14 SIZ 13 EDU 12 Hits: 13 Age: 29.

**Damage Bonus:** +0.

**Skills:** Accounting (25%), Astronomy (25%), Bargain (40%), Dodge (40%), Etiquette (50%), Fast Talk (50%), First Aid (60%), Hide (30%), History (40%), Insight (50%), Listen (40%), Navigate (40%), Perform (Sing & Storytelling) (30%), Persuade (50%), Religion (the Circle) (60%), Spot (40%), *Status* (40%), Stealth (40%), Survival (60%).

**Attacks:** None over base.

**Defenses:** None over base.

Elf Gate has grown tired of the endless war and now considers itself independent. The people here are taxed by North Town, levied by North Town, and its young people are stolen away by North Town to fight a stupid war that does not really concern them. Elf Gate is self-sufficient and needs nothing from North Town than to be left alone.

The people of Crystal Lake have the right of things: minding their own business and doing the best for themselves. Everyone

justifies the war against the South in terms of what the South will do if they do not keep fighting, but that excuse will never fade, will it?

Of course, a price has to be paid for freedom. The North has drained them of its young people and its resources for so long that they will not gladly permit Elf Gate to step back. They know that the Northern army, or maybe even the Reapers, will come and try to quash the rebellion. They have been quietly planning for years to withstand the North as best they can. Now they have horses, all bred from his and Tomas’ officer’s horses. Never mind where the mares came from.

Barnabas, he tells them, was a known spy for the North. Brother Tomas and some of the other troopers recognized him. They had no choice but to kill him. If he reported back, others would come to investigate. If he escaped, the army would be upon them right away. They plan to dump him far to the south, and make it look like bandits got him. That, they hope, will buy them as much time as possible before something else occurs.

What to do with the PLAYERS is a different problem, Tomas interjects. Elf Gate wants to be left alone to continue their preparations to defend their independence. Barnabas claimed while being “interrogated” that the PLAYERS had been sent by the town Council of Crystal Lake to try and track down the leatherworker’s boy. (If the PLAYERS had their writ on them, this confirms that testimony).

Laurence is quite good with saddles and they need him to ready Elf Gate’s cavalry. They cannot allow the PLAYERS to run back to those Northern despots and raise an alarm, either.

Ricken looks at them and asks them what they would do if they were him? And then he waits for an answer.

The PLAYERS have an opportunity to negotiate for their release. This is the whole

point of the adventure, so play this out in detail.

Do they take a moral stand, insist on Laurence's release, and refuse to negotiate? Do they take a pragmatic approach? Do they try and find the best solution? Do they appeal to Ricken's sense of self-interest?

The PLAYERS actually have the upper hand, although they may not realize it. Long term, Elf Gate does not want Crystal Lake as an enemy. In fact, they hope to strike some kind of alliance. All that Elf Gate really needs out of the situation is for Laurence to finish his work, and for the PLAYERS not to blow the whistle on them (any sooner than it will be blown anyway).

Possibilities include negotiating to leave with Laurence once he has finished assembling their saddles, a process that will take a month. But the one non-negotiable item is that Laurence is not leaving, at least not yet. He's staying here, both to finish his work and as a hostage against premature squealing by the PLAYERS.

Beyond that, they're willing to talk. They'd like it if the PLAYERS joined up, especially if any of them are Adepts or can help with preparing the troopers or military defenses. They're willing to pay.

Of course, Ricken and Tomas are ruthless murderers and press-gangers and may well betray them. Of course, the PLAYERS may also betray them back, sneak off with Laurence in the night, sabotage the defenses,

or attack from the rear once the inevitable Northern attack begins.

If the PLAYERS refuse to negotiate, then they are kept locked up, but they are not killed. That would gain nothing and would only annoy Crystal Lake needlessly. They will be kept for the month or so that it takes for the initial Northern expeditionary force to arrive.

The initial expeditionary force, consisting of about 100 foot troopers backed by a Reaper, is crushed by the cavalry, and the Reaper is killed. At that point, the PLAYERS are turned loose with less-than-heartfelt apologies. Elf Gate pays Laurence what he was promised initially, and the masons ask to travel back to Crystal Lake with them. The PLAYERS do make a positive impression on all concerned for their morals, however, and may check their *Status* for an increase.

How long the North continues to divert resources from the front lines, and whether the demons take a more direct hand in squashing these uppity rebels, remains for future development.

If the PLAYERS manage to somehow kill Ricken, at any point, the villagers lose their nerve and the rebellion collapses. Tomas flees, and the villagers run all non-locals out of their town, hoping that this will spare them. It does not, and the next North Town expeditionary force sacks the town.



# SCENARIO—THE REDOUBT

## **1. Summary and Overview.**

### **a. The Known Story.**

Before the demonic invasion, the Redoubt in the Fields was a small keep that had long been home to a minor, local noble house, the Arborands. The Arborands were unimportant in the greater scheme of things; a few thousand farmers, a small market town to lord it over, and little importance at court.

About 25 years before the Abjuration, this state of affairs radically changed. The then-King of Eglantine, Harold XX, more as a lark than anything else, staged a tournament to which he invited *all* of the “nobility” of Eglantine—not just the usual, powerful nobility used to attending court

A young girl from House Arborand, Milesia, caught the eye of the heir apparent, Harold XXI, at the tournament when she eloquently defended herself against some crude taunts about her social status from some overbearing members of the royal family, showing no fear. (This is the official version of the story. Others say that she just cursed them roundly in front of the royal household).

Milesia became a favorite of Harold XXI’s, started getting invited to court functions, and one thing led to another. Ultimately, after much scandal, tongue-wagging and intrigue, Harold XXI and Milesia were wed and Milesia was crowned Queen of Eglantine. Her ancestral home, the Redoubt in the Fields, became a royal summer retreat.

Milesia and Harold XXI had two children at the time that the demonic invasion broke out. The younger was a son, Harold XXII, 12, the “Boy King”. The elder was a daughter, Millesse, age 14. Harold XXI died young, under mysterious circumstances, and Milesia was serving as Regent for her young son at the time that the demon wars began.

The storytellers say that Millesse had caught the eye of the young court wizard, Scaraband (now known as the Traitor), and that she had rebuffed him because of his common birth. It is said that his fury at being so rebuffed—after all, her father had not had such delicate manners when it came to her mother—is what sent the unstable Scaraband over the edge. There is some truth to this story.

It is known for certain that Milesia and the “Boy King,” Harold XXII, were brutally murdered and eaten by the demons during the invasion. What became of Millesse is unknown, although like Anastasia of the Romanovs, many stories and pretenders abounded for a while.

In any event, and perhaps ironically (or perhaps because the symbolic nature of the place made it the perfect place to attempt such a powerful spell), the Redoubt in the Fields was the place where the wizards gathered and the armies of the World made their final stand. The demons fell into the trap, and when their armies drew up, the wizards brought down the Abjuration, obliterating everything for a hundred miles in every direction and leaving a smoking, dusty crater behind.

### **b. After the Abjuration.**

The Redoubt was at the eye of the storm, and therefore it survived. Everything from its outer walls in, including the land, well water supply, furnishings and appointments remained intact. The only people inside at the time, the assembled wizards of the World and the household staff, sacrificed their lives to work the Abjuration. As a result, only a small, abandoned island remained, looking over a field of shattered bones and dust.

The surviving demons initially gave some thought to making the Redoubt their headquarters. It was a perfectly serviceable keep, and isolated by the blast crater from

the rest of the World. They decided against this, however, for two reasons.

First, they decided that the Majestic Plateau would be even more suitable to their needs, as it was across defensible ocean approaches, and could support a larger population of human chattels. Second, Zazeer realized that the Redoubt had the potential to draw unwelcome visitors. The humans knew that it was the site of the last battle, and treasure seekers would be inevitable. Rather than have them realize that the demons had survived in some organized numbers, Zazeer proposed that misdirection was in order.

It was decided that some demons would be stationed here and tasked with drawing inquisitive humans to investigate. Those that could be killed, would be killed. As to any too powerful to be easily killed, the Redoubt might serve as a kind of stalking horse, both testing their strength and serving as a kind of false headquarters that the mortals might think that they had vanquished. Someone had to staff it, though, and the debate turned to one about candidate selection.

One of the surviving demons volunteered. Nicknamed Fangtooth—because she/it does not remember her/its real name—she/it had drifted into the Majestic Plateau late, a couple of years after its establishment. She/it appeared to be, to all casual observation, just another barrow-wight, one of the “surviving” minor, somewhat free-willed undead that had served as foot soldiers in the invasion. Deeper scrutiny, however, suggested that something more was going on with Fangtooth.

Apparently a slender, teenaged woman who had been turned into a barrow-wight during the war, in addition to being badly beaten and disfigured into unrecognizability, Fangtooth had presented a conundrum for the Majestic Plateau. One of the things that the Majestic Plateau did, as stray demons showed up to join their cause, was to have the more magic-capable demons, including the Hooded One, subject them to a battery of

divinations to find out who they were and how much they could be relied on. The Hooded One could not identify Fangtooth, nor could any other demons. She was somehow, through some very powerful magical working, immune to divination.

Fangtooth was also noticeably more intelligent and calculating than not only the typical barrow-wight, but most of the demons. She/it was agreeable and unusually capable of being a team player. She/it also had a certain...*way* about her/it that had the lesser demons--the feral and difficult to control ones--naturally following her instructions. They flocked around her like forest animals to a fairy princess.

What to do with Fangtooth prompted a huge argument at the Majestic Plateau. The Hooded One, in his typically petulant and paranoid fashion, wanted to kill her/it immediately. Anything that he could not understand was not worth keeping, and was too big of a risk. Zazeer, by contrast, argued that eliminating Fangtooth would destroy any ability they might have to figure out how she/it had become immune to divination—a very valuable secret for the Majestic Plateau to plumb. In addition, her almost hypnotic way with the rowdier, more feral demons was valuable for controlling them.

Ultimately, Ba'al-Sheol spoke up. He decided that she/it was “cute” and that she/it should live—albeit somewhere other than the Majestic Plateau. Zazeer proposed that her/its volunteering for the role of supervising the stalking horse installation at the Redoubt be approved. Almost as if it were fated, the Hooded One surprisingly agreed, and Fangtooth and a detachment of demons have been in place at the Redoubt for close to 95 years, ambushing adventurers and eating them like clockwork.

The Redoubt is a very magical place, and the chaotic state of magic there seems bent on falling into familiar patterns. If the PLAYERS manage to somehow approach the Redoubt and take it by surprise, some

astounding insights into the nature of the World await them.

## **2. Hooking the PLAYERS.**

Many adventurers will have heard of the Redoubt, a small keep supposed to be out in the middle of “the Dells” that supposedly survived the Abjuration. It is fabulously difficult to get to, and supposedly no one has ever returned. Wild stories abound. Periodically, someone with something to prove decides to mount an expedition and never comes back. The PLAYERS may well try.

The demons are master rumormongers, carefully and indirectly dropping information that they want the PLAYERS to find. If they decide to test the PLAYERS, they may drop a rumor in their laps that not only does the Redoubt exist, but something that they are desperately looking for is there. This could be just about anything.

There is a lingering rumor that *Justice*, a greatsword used by the King of Eglantine to mete out state executions in days of yore, was at the Redoubt when the Abjuration came down. This would be a great treasure, especially to a group of adventurers who are looking for an awe-inspiring symbol of authority. While not rumored to be an especially mighty magical sword, it is distinctive and many, many stories of heroism and derring-do surround it. It is said to be impossibly ancient, made of some unearthly material, and to possess the wisdom of the ages. Its potential as a rallying point for the people of Eglantine—who certainly have heard the old stories—is *immense*.

## **3. Gathering Information about the Redoubt.**

There are a lot of stories, rumors and tales about the Redoubt, and research by the PLAYERS can uncover useful information prior to embarking.

History checks, Research (Library Use) checks in pre-Abjuration Eglantinian history archives, or careful questioning of well

### **Justice (the sword, not the concept, although maybe a little of the concept as well).**

The demons think that they are spreading a fantastic lie to entice reckless adventurers to try and recover something that the demons would never, *ever* want found, but their lie is actually true. Fangtooth, while poking through the wreckage surrounding the Redoubt, did indeed find the renowned sword, Justice, intact on the battlefield. D’oh!

To make matters worse, she/it has kept this little tidbit of information from the rest of the demons. She/it is not sure why, it just seemed like the right thing to do. Fate is funny that way. Fangtooth has a lot of problems like this: she/it intuitively does certain things that seem correct, without really understanding why. And worse, since she/it is the only one who knows what the sword is and the rest of the demons cannot “read” her, the Majestic Plateau only knows that some random magic sword was found and kept as “bait” for magic-detecting adventurers to home in on.

*Justice* is a magic greatsword with an INT of 12, +10% to hit/parry, +1 to damage, and a purpose: to be wielded by the rightful King or Queen of Eglantine. It is a highly recognizable symbol of authority, even to a modern Eglantinian (+20% to *Status* in Eglantine). Justice knows that things are a bit of a mess in regard to finding the “rightful” heir at present, and will aid anyone who seems to be on a path to becoming a good, legitimate ruler of Eglantine. It can communicate in binary pulses of warmth (one for yes, two for no). Once per day, in aid of its purpose, it can add +30% to a Persuade check. HP 25.

Justice has been handled by Fangtooth over the past several decades. It does not know *what* to make of her/it; it cannot read her/it either. It does not resist her as it would the other demons, though.

traveled people or adventurers might each reveal the following tidbits about the Redoubt (all true):

- The Redoubt was the scene of the final battle between the demons and the armies of Eglantine, and the place where the wizards (curse their names) broke the World with the Abjuration (successful check);
- The Redoubt is rumored to have somehow survived the Abjuration intact (successful check);
- The Redoubt was the personal property of the Queen of Eglantine at the time of the Abjuration, inherited from her father's family (a petty local noble) and used by the Eglantine royal family as a countryside retreat (successful check at -10%);
- The area around the Redoubt is said to be littered with the corpses of many mighty heroes, knights, and wizards (not to mention demons) (successful check at -20%);
- Adventurers have sometimes sought to plumb the secrets of the Redoubt, or search the battlefield for treasure, but none have ever returned alive (successful check).

Critical successes might also reveal the following obscure information:

- The story of Milesia, Harold, their family, and Scaraband summarized in “the Known Story” (section 1.a, above) might be discovered, although only learned historians or their books might relay it. Roland of Evenstar in Fallingstar knows the story.
- The Princess Millesse would be the rightful Queen suzerain of Eglantine, if she somehow survived the Abjuration. However, that was 100 years ago;
- Early in the years after the

Abjuration, a number of pretenders to the throne, claiming to be the Princess Millesse surfaced, but all were proven to be false;

- The symbol of House Arborand was a simple, square red banner with a white scythe.
- After she married into the royal family, Queen Milesia continued to use her father's colors, another politically controversial matter at court.

There are things that people do *not* know about the Redoubt, no matter who they are. No one knows (except for the demons) that the Redoubt is, in a sense, inhabited. No one knows for sure if there is food and water available there. *No one* knows who or what Fangtooth is (including the demons), but they would certainly pay well for plausible information. (Indeed, while one might theorize that things as smart as the demons might be able to hazard a guess, Fangtooth's immunity from divination *actively* interferes with the demons or their thralls even *thinking* about the possibilities. She/it is just a huge blind spot, so huge that the demons are not even fully aware that there *is* a blind spot).

#### 4. Approaching—the Dells.

As noted in “the Dells” gazetteer section, getting to the Redoubt is a monumental logistical challenge. The Redoubt is in the middle of the blasted zone, at the bottom of the crater.

The nearest (known) source of food and water is at the Dust Camp, which is six hexes (one of badlands and five of the nastiest, deadest desert ever) away, or 100 miles. It is even farther from the other oasis camps.

The PLAYERS are going to be getting there one of two ways: magical travel (*i.e.*, long-distance, long-duration flight spells) or, far more likely, on foot after having made a provisioning deal with an oasis (probably the Dust Camp). What was said in the area



description for “the Dells” bears brief reiteration here:

- Foraging for daily food and water in the desert region is impossible (01%). There is virtually nothing out there.
- In the transition zone (the ring of badlands around the edges), things are very slightly better for foraging (Critical Survival check), as the occasional stray animal hugs the edge of the arable land.
- As a result, anyone venturing into the Dells must track how much food and water they are carrying with them, and the KEEPER will have to keep track of encumbrance. Assuming adequate food and water, a perfect day of traveling in the rocky desert for an unencumbered or lightly encumbered person still occurs at ½ the normal rate.
- Dust storms and even more impeded travel are extremely likely in the crater. Around the badlands ring, allow the PLAYERS to go one hex per day even with dust storms.
- If the Players take 15 days of food and water, a sledge to haul it, and nothing else heavy, they should just make it and have some time to poke through the ruins. (They do not know that there is water at the Redoubt).
- Pack animals are not going to help this situation. They would be ill suited for the dusty nightmare in the crater.

### **5. Overall Census.**

For the sake of completeness and recordkeeping, following is a list of the complete census at the Redoubt, what roles they play, and where they are generally stationed if the Redoubt is in a state of readiness. One small mercy, perhaps, is that none of the inhabitants are spell-casters.

**Fangtooth, Barrow-wight**, STR 20, CON 17, SIZ 13, INT 16, POW 20, DEX 11, Move 8, HP 15, db: +1d4.

Attack: Claw 70%, damage 1d6+db+1d4 STR drain.

SQ: 10 points of *armor* (ineffective vs. magic or steel); *immune to divination or detection magic*; Stealth 90%, Be Oddly Charming for An Animated, Feral Corpse 90%.

Gear: *ring of invisibility*: turns the wearer invisible up to 20 SIZ, at will. Requires concentration, and the wearer can do more than walk or speak, or she becomes visible until concentration (out of combat) can be reasserted. Attacks against an invisible character are at ¼ normal, and parries require a successful Listen, Sense or Spot roll. A successful Listen, Sense or Spot roll decreases the penalty on the next roll to attack to ½ of normal, vs. ¼.

*Token of skeleton animation & Token of terrain illusion*: (these tokens allow anyone to animate the skeleton crew and cast the pit cover illusion on one occasion. They take the form of small, engraved gems that radiate magic and glow slightly. They have no command word; one simply crushes them to cast the spell. These are doled out by the Majestic Plateau only as needed to reset the trap).

Fangtooth acts as the general from her/its vantage point in her/its bed chamber (second level, area 6). She/it will use her *ring of invisibility* and prodigious Stealth skill (barrow-wights are naturally very quiet) and attempt to flee if PLAYERS are winning. All of the other creatures are fanatically loyal to her, without even quite understanding why.

She/it dresses like a noblewoman, in silks, and her *ring of invisibility* is a signet ring of House Arborand. She/it is scabrous, feral, and obviously undead, horribly disfigured and has a voice like Vincent Price on helium, but is still strangely alluring.

**On the Subject of Dungeon Readiness**

Generally speaking, the PLAYERS are going to find the Redoubt in a general state of readiness. Traps will be set, ballistae will be loaded, oil will be in the cauldrons ready to be dumped, and the denizens will be playing possum. However, things will be very different if the PLAYERS somehow catch the Redoubt unawares.

How might this occur? The short answer is in the Keeper's discretion. The longer answer is that the PLAYERS would have to have stealthily crept up on the Redoubt without anyone knowing that they are coming. If the PLAYERS were specifically sent here by demonic rumor-mongering and went to the Redoubt more or less directly, they will be expected. If the PLAYERS approached through the desert openly, or routed themselves through one of the oases, they will be expected. If they are Brothers of the Raven and let their plans slip (including by sending a bird from anywhere near "the Dells"), they will be expected.

If they told no one they were coming, kept a cover, approached stealthily as though the Redoubt was the trap that it is, or somehow swoop down quickly and/or quietly through magical means, disregard the monster placements and traps.

Assuming that they somehow get the drop on the Redoubt, things are quite different as chaos seeks familiar order. The gate is open. Bored looking (undead) guards man open posts. The ramparts are not in a state of readiness. The banner of House Arborand flies from the bell tower. Fangtooth (dressed as a noblewoman) bustles about the keep doing "normal" noblewoman duties (as normal as possible, given that she/it is undead and her courtiers are either mindless undead or demons). In this situation, they might even somehow sneak into the Redoubt, in which case, the sword Justice is in the council room on the second floor.

**3x Quasits**, STR 5, CON 7, SIZ 5, INT 12, POW 18, DEX 18, Move 6/12 flying, HP 6, db: none.

Attack: Bite, 50%, 1d4 + poison POT 16, takes effect in 5 combat rounds.

SQ: 10 points of *armor* (ineffective vs. magic or steel); immune to fire; Fly 70%, Hide 70%, Stealth 70%.

These tiny, red, bat-winged minor (but dangerous) demons act as scouts and aerial observers; harass any would-be fliers or climbers; and pitch in at weak spots, although they are rather cowardly. They can shape-shift into, and may pose as, vultures (see note below as to how this might tip off the PLAYERS).

**1x Hellhound ("Rufus")**, STR 18, CON 18, SIZ 13, INT 11, POW 18, DEX 18, Move 12, HP 16, db none.

Attacks: Bite, 60%, damage 1d8 +1d6 fire.

Fire Breath, 60%, 3x/day, range 30', damage 2d6 + lit on fire.

SQ: 10 points of *armor* (ineffective vs. magic or steel); immune to fire; Spot 60%, Track by Smell 80%.

Rufus (who, much to his consternation, has actually begun to answer to that entirely fictitious name) is Fangtooth's bodyguard of last resort, and stays by her side. He is a huge, jet black canine with demonic accents and burning eyes. He understands human speech but cannot speak himself.

Fun trivia fact: (Critical History check): The last Eglantine royal family had a pet hound named "Rufus."

**1x Vampire ("Captain Helzem")**, STR 22, CON 13, SIZ 11, INT 13, POW 13, DEX 11, Move 8/12 flying, HP 12, db: +1d6

Attacks: Bite, 50%, damage 1d4 +blood drain (stifles all resistance and automatically drains 1d6 STR each round thereafter).

Claw, 50%, damage 1d4+db+1d3 magic point drain (transferring to vampire).

Gaze, POW vs. POW on resistance table, hypnotize and force victim to obey simple,

non-destructive instructions. One thrall at a time, please. Self-destructive instructions from Helzem permit the thrall a roll at INTx5 or less to snap out of it.

SQ: 10 points of *armor* (ineffective vs. magic or steel); *turns to mist* after hit points are exceeded and regenerates *any non-magically inflicted damage* at 1 hit point per round unless reduced exactly to zero. *Destroyed by sunlight instantaneously*; must also be in coffin at daybreak or be destroyed instantaneously. Not bothered by wooden stakes or holy symbols (since the Abjuration). Dodge 50%, Etiquette 50%, Fly 90%, Hide 70%, Insight 60%, Jump 75%, Listen 60%, Persuade 60%, Sense 75%, Spot 75%, Stealth 80%, Track 75%.

Helzem serves as the captain of the guard, completely thinks of himself that way, and actually goes around issuing orders to and conducting inspections of the (mindless, skeletal) guards. He himself is a skeleton, albeit one with blazing eyes, long fangs, and a disconcertingly normal voice. The scariest thing that is the skeletons somehow listen to him.

Captain Helzem obviously does not go out in the sunshine, restricting his practical range. His coffin is in the Lord's chamber (Level 2, area 7). If sorely pressed at night time, he may attempt to flee south to the demons' shoreline outpost, where he has a spare coffin, but will only do so if night has just fallen (otherwise, he would not make it in time). This is a huge but subtle clue if the PLAYERS drive him to do this—he had to go somewhere, but where?

Helzem is a bad dude; the PLAYERS will be hard pressed to do him any lasting damage, other than through magic.

**6x Ghouls**, STR 16, CON 13, SIZ 13, INT 13, POW 13, DEX 13, Move 9, HP 13, db +1d4.

Attacks: Claw, 30%, damage 1d6 +1d4

Bite, 30%, damage 1d6 + worry (hangs on and automatically does 1d4 in bite damage in subsequent rounds; STR vs. STR check to

break free). The ghouls get to attack with a claw/claw/bite routine every combat round (3 attacks).

SQ: 10 points of *armor* (ineffective vs. magic or steel); Climb 85%, Hide 60%, Jump 75%, Listen 70%, Sneak 80%, Spot Hidden 50%.

These act as liveried butlers, wearing the (tattered, stained) livery of House Arborand. Over the years, they have started to think of themselves as butlers. It's all very confusing. During an invasion, they act as a reserve, holding back in one of the stairways between floors until either Helzem or Fangtooth orders them forward.

**1x Slimy Pit Monster**, STR 36, CON 24, SIZ 48, INT 7, POW 11, DEX 4, Move 10 oozing, HP 36, db +4d6,

Attack: Blob Smash! 70%, damage 4d6 crushing.

SQ: 10 points of *armor* (ineffective vs. magic or steel); fire and electrical attacks do only half damage.

The Monster in the Pit has been well-fed by adventurers over the past several decades, as the entire dungeon is geared toward getting someone to fall in the pit and into its waiting maw(s). It is an amoeba-like entity with a crude face and several mouths, roughly 10' in diameter, oozing and grey in color. It just sits there, unable to escape the basement unless someone unlocks and opens the access door (Level 1, Area 3), but fearlessly and aggressively attacks any non-demon that falls into its pit.

**48x Skeletal Guards, servants, ladies-in-waiting, and other "small folk"**, STR 11, CON N/A, SIZ 13, INT 11, POW 1, DEX 11, Move 7, HP 13, db +0.

Attack: various weapons 50%, damage 1d6. They are programmed to parry if it will give more of their fellows an opportunity to swarm an opponent.

SQ: No damage from thrusting weapons unless a Critical hit; immune to bleeding and impaling effects; % chance of a hit

destroying a skeleton=4x damage done (normal HP still lost).

These are simply magically-animated corpses, not actual demons (and so lack the usual annoying armor). When active (*i.e.*, when not lying in wait), they go around the Redoubt mimicking the activities of the range of castle dwellers: some are guards, some are servants, *etc.*

### **6. Exterior Approach--The Field of Bones.**

Assuming that they do not catch the Redoubt completely unawares, the PLAYERS will see a smallish, two-story, rectangular stone manor house, about 75' by 100', and about 20' high. It looks like a small country residence for a nobleman, and appears quite defensible.

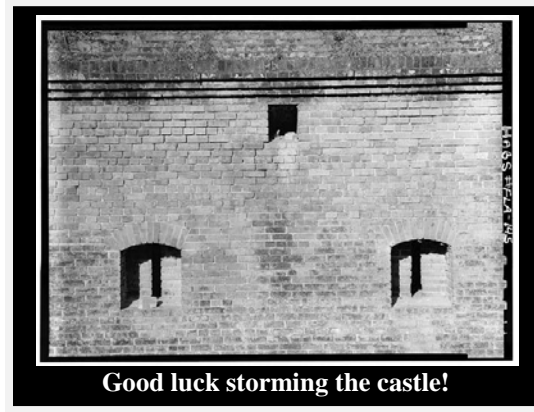
The walls are of thick, gray, mortared stone. The entry doors (opposite, in the centers of the north and south walls) are 15' wide double doors of stout, iron-reinforced oak. An iron portcullis could be lowered to further reinforce both doors, but the gates are raised. The Redoubt is on top of a small hill, giving it a good vantage over the surrounding flat countryside.

The exterior walls are smooth and sloped outward from bottom to top, and there are no convenient handholds, should anyone have a mind to climb to the second floor. Climb rolls are at -50% (still possible with a good rope and grapple, but not at all easy).

The second floor appears to be slightly smaller than the first, with a surrounding walkway and crenellated parapets to enable defenders to fire down from cover on persons storming the castle from below, at any angle.

In the northeast corner of the second floor, on the parapets, is a small, ten foot high bell tower, large enough only for one person to be stationed as a look out. The bell can be seen from the ground. Also visible from the ground are three ballistae slots affording an almost 360° field of fire (the only blind spots being directly beneath them and

directly beneath the bell tower). The ballistae can be seen protruding from the slots.



There are also (as indicated on the map of Level 2) several parapet protrusions that look appropriate as staging areas for dumping boiling oil or molten lead down on attackers.

Unless the PLAYERS have taken it completely by surprise, the Redoubt is utterly quiet. No banners can be seen, and no activity can be seen.

Leading up to the doors on both sides, and for perhaps a mile in every direction, is an immense pile of shattered bones and wreckage about a foot deep. Imagine the scene of a huge bomb blast that occurred 100 years ago and was never cleaned up, not by time, not by weather, and not by animals. These are the remains of the assembled demon and mortal armies. The inhuman remains tend to form a huge outer ring of destruction; the mortal remains form a defensive ring around the Redoubt.

The Redoubt itself is in pristine condition. It is not weathered, it is not dusty, it is as if nothing had ever happened.

**7. Something's Rotten in the State of Denmark:** There are a few incongruities (apart from the pristine condition of the Redoubt, which is magical in nature) that the PLAYERS might (and in some cases, probably should) pick up on.

***Detecting Magic:*** The entire Redoubt radiates a strong, but unidentifiable, aura of

magic. This is probably not unexpected given the rumors, but this will be the most magic that the Adept in question has ever found in one place. That alone should put the PLAYERS on their guard.

**Detecting Evil:** Yes, there's a fair bit of that about as well, coming from inside the Redoubt. (The skeletons do not radiate evil. The demons do. Fangtooth, of course, radiates nothing).

**Where are the Dead Adventurers?** All the bodies surrounding the Redoubt (and there are a lot of them) are pulverized from a bomb blast. None of them are even vaguely intact. So where are all the bodies of the adventurers that came before? For that matter, there aren't even any to be found inside the Redoubt. (Unless you look in the Monster in the Pit's pit, that is). Burp.

**The Picked Over Field of Battle:** One would think that one would be able to find something magical, steel or useful in a battlefield of this size. It isn't going to happen. Someone (i.e., the demons) cleaned the battlefield out of the few useful (i.e., dangerous to demons) things that survived the blast long ago. This took a lot of time, and a lot of divination spells. The mere fact that the battlefield has been so thoroughly looted should tip the PLAYERS off that they are entering a highly manufactured environment.

**The Vulture:** If the investigators tarry outside for any considerable period of time (more than would be consistent with making camp and gathering themselves for a morning exploration), the demons might get curious as to what they are up to and send a scout. A scout, in this case, would be one of the quasits in vulture form.

The quasit/vulture will exit stealthily from somewhere that the PLAYERS do not have under observation, fly a circuitous route, and circle overhead. Smart PLAYERS may wonder about the incongruity of this: there's nothing out here for a vulture to eat, for many miles, so why is it here at all?

Good question, especially since that vulture radiates both magic and evil.

**Why is the Redoubt So Undisturbed On the Inside?** If so many adventurers have been through here, then why does it look like no one has ever looted it? Why are the bodies of the various castle dwellers exactly where they would have fallen? Why aren't any of them scattered or moved? Very odd.

**Why Don't the "Guards" Have Any Steel?** Play-testing has revealed that this is the sprite that the PLAYERS most often notice. If this is the preserved remnants of a royal keep where the Abjuration was brought down, at a time when it was surrounded by a demon army, shouldn't the various guard bodies have steel weapons? You would certainly think so, but instead, they are decked out in tattered leather armor and have leather wrapped clubs as weapons. Very odd.

### **8. The Redoubt as An Organic Encounter (Or, Springing the Trap).**

Although room-by-room area descriptions follow, that is not the right way to run this adventure. Rather, it should be run like one large encounter, with the demons attacking en masse once the party is at its most vulnerable.

The various skeletons will be where they are depicted on the accompanying level maps. The demons (Fangtooth, Helzem, the three quasits, the six ghouls, Rufus, and the Monster in the Pit) will be either hiding, on station or (in Helzem's case) playing dead.

All of the (48) skeletons will be playing dead until the order to attack is given. They are, obviously, very good at this. When the order to attack is given, Helzem and most of the skeletons will converge from their various stations on the PLAYERS and try to eliminate them, led by the fearless Helzem.

Depending on where the PLAYERS are when the attack begins, the skeletons on Level 2 may take up defensive positions with the various siege repelling engines (ballistae and oil cauldrons), which they are

capable of mechanically using to shoot down intruders.

The quasits and ghouls will generally hang back as reserves, but will swoop in and try to exploit any perceived weaknesses. If possible, the demons will herd the PLAYERS toward the (concealed by illusion) pit at Level 1, Area 5 and hope that they fall in to face the Monster in the Pit. You are going to need a lot of skeleton figurines.

Fangtooth and Rufus stay out of the fight if at all possible; Fangtooth will generally try to sneak away if things go badly, and Rufus is her last line of defense.

When is the time to attack? Use common sense. One thing that automatically triggers the attack is if someone falls in the pit on Level 1, Area 5. *It must be stressed that this pit is covered by a very good illusion (that works until someone falls in).* It can only be noticed on a Difficult Spot check (x1/2) specifically directed at “disbelieving” that section of floor, or throwing something ahead and watching it drop through the floor.

The general plan is to get as many PLAYERS as possible into or near Level 1, Area 5, have someone fall in, drop the two portcullises and then send a steady stream of monsters in through the doors leading to Level 1, Areas 7 & 8.

The PLAYERS may poke, or even decapitate, a skeleton or two to see what happens. The demons do not mind this sort of exploration, but if a systematic plan to chop up all of the skeletons begins, or anyone moves to chop up Helzem, then the gig is up and the attack begins.

The attack also begins in earnest if the PLAYERS do not go through the doors on Level 1 and instead manage to scale the parapets. If this occurs, and the PLAYERS then try to force the door into the Level 2 living quarters, all hell breaks loose. All of the demons—even the quasits and the ghouls—immediately and ferociously attack and try to drive the PLAYERS down the

stairs to Level 1 (leaving them avenues of retreat that would allow them to do so). Fangtooth is protected at all costs.

## **9. Area Descriptions.**

### **Level 1:**

**1. Entryway.** One skeleton, dressed as a liveried guard (red with a white scythe symbol) lies here.

The interior of the Redoubt, unless noted otherwise, is grey flagstone floors and walls.

Thick oaken double doors, capable of being barred from the inside, lead outside to the south. Thick oaken double doors lead east and west to Areas 2 and 3.

Area 1 is the south end of the hallway constituting Area 5. It is separated from Area 5 by a portcullis, in the raised position. The portcullis is lowered by a winch on Level 2, Area 2. The Level 2 crew drops the portcullises when the attack begins before joining in.

**2. Right Antechamber:** Four skeletons, in plain servant’s clothes, lie here. The well in this room has an essentially inexhaustible supply of clean, fresh potable water. It appears to have been communal servant’s quarters, all well preserved.

**3. Left Antechamber:** The same as Area 2, but with only three skeletons. The stairs down lead to a barred, iron door (barred from this side). Behind it lies a large, cavernous area in which dwells the Monster in the Pit. If anyone starts to open this door, the Monster will be waiting right there. It can fit through the door, if it is opened.

**4. Kitchen/Day Room:** A day room for guards with kitchen, pantry and cooking facilities. The food (enough for 20 man-days) is magically preserved and still quite edible. Two guards in livery and three cooks and servants lie here.

**5. Main Hallway.** This appears to be an empty sally hallway, with portcullises at either end to restrict access by an invading force to other parts of the keep. There are three skeletons (dressed as guards) to the

north of the pit. *Note again that the pit is concealed by illusion—don't draw it in!*

Anyone falling into the pit drops 10' (1d6 damage) and is then set upon by the Monster in the Pit in 2 combat rounds. This also, in all likelihood, triggers the general attack, as the portcullises come down (in 2 combat rounds) and all the skeletons arise.

The sword Justice lies in Area 5. Although it is depicted on the map as at the south end of the pit, it could be on the north. The demons will position it on one side or the other, depending on which side the PLAYERS are about to enter from, to tempt them to walk across the (concealed) pit to get it.

**6. Chapel:** Helzem (dressed in black as a priest of the old god of agriculture) and three skeletons (dressed as monks) lie here. The room is decked out like you would expect a private devotional chapel (to the old gods) at a royal summer home to be decked out: silver candlesticks, gold fittings, beautiful murals, expensive rugs, wooden pews, a marble altar, *etc.* Discussion of the impact of thoroughly looting the Redoubt is given at the end of the scenario.



**7. Left Stairwell:** Three skeleton guards lie here. The stone staircase spirals up to Level 2.

**8. Right Stairwell:** same as Area 7.

**9. Rear Sally Port:** same as Area 1, except at the north end of the hallway and “manned” by four skeletons: one guard, and three servants.

**10. Left Barracks:** A barracks room with privies, bunks, personal belongings and five chests. And five skeletons.

**11. Right Barracks:** Same as Area 10.

### Level 2.

**1. Ramparts:** The Redoubt's ramparts are 15 feet off the ground and protected by field-of-fire-enabling crenellations 4 feet high. They completely circle the exterior of the second floor of the Redoubt, which contains the stores and private apartments. Access is slowed by a pair of narrow chokepoint hallways, each with barred, thick oaken doors that must be traversed to get from the northern half of the ramparts to the southern half of the ramparts.

A total of 18 skeletal guards are positioned around the ramparts or at the chokepoints, as indicated on the map of Level 2. If given an opportunity, they can and will utilize the ballistae and tar cauldrons.

The three ballistae require one combat round to pivot and aim, and fire at the skeletons' base chance of 50%. Base chance would be 25%. They fire a quarrel roughly the size and shape of a 4' long spear, and getting hit by one of these does 3d6+4 damage, impaling. In a bit of irony, the quarrels are steel-tipped and would do a fair amount of damage to a demon they were turned on.

Fortunately, the skeletons are not up to the task of rewinding the ballistae. There are 10 additional quarrels stashed in the armory, however (Level 2, Area 4).

In addition, each cauldron (two on each wall on projecting platforms) has flint, steel, and large cask of light tar at the ready. It would take the skeletons 10 combat rounds to

ready a cauldron of flaming tar for dumping on someone below. A hit from a cauldron of burning tar (again, at the skeleton's base chance of 50%) does 1d6+2 points of damage per combat round, for a minimum of 3 rounds, and until it is extinguished. It takes a minimum of 3 rounds to stop, drop and roll. Don't forget about loss of APP and CON for severe burns!

In addition, three of the six ghouls occupy a ready spot at the top of each of the two spiral stairways to Level 1.

**2. Great Hall:** These are the luxuriously appointed (by medieval standards) general living quarters of House Arborand. They appear to be in use. The wall hangings and rugs are decorated with the Arborand coat of arms.

The Great Hall can be entered only through the stout, barred oaken double doors at the southern end of the ramparts. These doors will be barred from the inside. The Great Hall connects through an open archway with the council chamber in Area 3.

There will be four active skeleton guards here, who attack any intruders. If anyone gets this far, the charade is over. If the door into Area 2 is forced, Rufus will come charging out of Area 7, while Fangtooth turns invisible and attempts to flee through the one way sally port at the northern end of Area 3.

Doors lead off to the east (Area 7, the Lord's chamber) and the west (Area 6, the Lady's chamber).

**3. Council Chamber:** A large, round table dominates this room, of the sort where a group of military leaders might sit and plan strategy. A map of "the Dells"—pre-Abjuration--reflecting numerous towns, villages, counties, and castles, is picked out in marquetry, with a number of toy soldiers, knights and the like positioned around it. It appears from the setting that some enormous battle was about to occur in the county of Arborand.

Two light duty interior doors are in the

northeast and northwest corners of the room (leading to the armory and storeroom, respectively).

**4. Armory:** Jackpot! As the PLAYERS should be aware, a keep's armory and stores were normally kept at the most secure place in the castle, so that it could best withstand raids and sieges. This is not a big keep, but it was a royal one, and because of the way the Redoubt is, its current lady did not move to get rid of this stuff, even though she/it really should have.

In the armory are:

10x steel daggers;

10x steel-tipped spears;

10x good bows (in good shape) and 200 steel-tipped arrows;

10x suits of studded leather armor (3 points of Armor), appropriate helmets (1 point of Armor) and embossed wooden target shields (15 points of Armor, 1d2+db, knockback, must parry);

10 more quarrels for the ballistae; and

The lord's personal equipment, made to fit a man of SIZ 14: 1x steel, enchanted longsword (+10% to hit, +1 damage), 1x steel, enchanted dagger (+10% to hit, +1 damage), and 1x steel full plate mail (8 points of Armor), plus a crested steel helm (1 point of armor) and a kite shield bearing the arms of House Arborand (22 points of armor, 1d4+db, knockback, must parry).

Trust the author, if you're running this setting right, and the PLAYERS have fought any actual demons, there will be high-fives around the table when then see this seemingly mundane haul. This is why the Redoubt should be used as a transition event toward a campaign that pits the PLAYERS more directly against the Majestic Plateau.

**5. Storeroom.** Chests full of standard (by pre-Abjuration standards) household supplies, all magically preserved: rope, candles, soap, needles, first aid supplies, paper, ink, sealing wax, salt, pepper, food and wine (10 man-days worth), fine



clothing, cloaks, *etc.*—all enough for a royal family of four to have a fully-stocked larder. Jackpot, redux, as the PLAYERS should understand that a haul like this will buy them an important place in the World.

#### **6. Fangtooth's Bedroom/Lady's Chamber:**

Envision a fantasy princess' bedroom, done in red and white. Now envision that a particularly sloppy teenager lives there. Now envision that the teenager is undead. Now envision that the teenager has no idea who she/it is, except for odd flashes and stray impulses that may be accurate, or may only be the result of fractured magic trying to settle into a familiar pattern. Now envision that the putative teenager is, regardless of all else, a demon and has to eat a soul at least once a year. Now envision that like most teenagers, this teenager likes to eat in her/its room.

That's Area 6.

Silks and satins, overstuffed feather beds, beautiful antique furniture, a writing desk, a tapestry with the formal arms of House Arborand on the wall, and the grisly remains of her/its last meal (a wayward adventurer) under the bed, simply because she/it forgot to toss it out; all are here.

Fangtooth her/itself is quite likely to be here if the Redoubt is taken by surprise, doing embroidery, playing an instrument, or writing in her/its journal. There is a one way sally port exiting to the west (*i.e.*, an obvious door designed only to be able to be opened from inside the room. This permits trapped family members to escape out onto the ramparts, but the door would have to be smashed down from the outside).

Her/its journal is a treasure trove, on a number of levels. Jackpot, yet again. It would be too easy if it picked up in the same handwriting as some journal lying around the Redoubt pre-dating the Abjuration, and in any case, Fangtooth's clawlike, taloned hands produce only poor penmanship.

On the other hand, the writing style of Fangtooth's recent diaries (which she/it will attempt to escape with if possible) are

certainly very similar in writing style to those apparently written by the Princess Millesse as a young girl, spending summers in the country.

However, reviewing the more recent journals tells the basic story:

- Fangtooth is more than a bit confused in terms of identity;
- the demons are unsure of who she/it really is;
- she/it seems impervious to divination;
- she/it has a *ring of invisibility*;
- the Redoubt is, in fact, where the Abjuration was brought down; and
- the Redoubt is a stalking horse for an organized group of demons headquartered at somewhere known as the "Majestic Plateau."
- It also reveals that each demon must eat a soul at least once per year, or perish.

Details on where this "Majestic Plateau" is (other than somewhere to the south) are absent, as are details about the demons' other activities. They keep this information compartmentalized.

Even so, the very existence of this journal is a horrific breach of classified information practice, and will confirm the existence of an overarching demonic conspiracy that survived the Abjuration.

**7. Lord's Bedroom.** This room is elegantly but functionally decorated in a knightly motif. There is no bed, but rather a coffin full of foul-smelling earth. There is a one way sally port exiting to the east onto the ramparts. "Captain" Helzem uses this as his quarters, although originally it was the royal bedchamber.

Along the eastern wall is a library of about 200 volumes. The books (all pre-Abjuration, in good condition) bear *ex libris* marks identifying them as the property of either House Arborand or the Verdant Throne of Eglantine. They cover a wide variety of topics, from geography to the

liberal arts to religion to history to science, to topics of magic.

Jackpot, encore. Access to the *entire* library (*which weighs 500 pounds*) will count as access to a library for the purpose of employing the Research (Library Use) skill, in effect “unlocking” it for use in the campaign.

Note again (see chapter 5) that Research (Library Use) cannot be used (even once unlocked) to research anything that would have the effect of adjusting the POW check on a spell-casting roll (no Tools, no Incantations). However, it might be able to give some insight on where to go to find the Black Lotus that an Adept has decided that he needs.

Getting the library out of the Redoubt, and out of “the Dells”, should be a challenge.



The library, once thoroughly studied, however, does contain the following discrete magical knowledge (as well as some ideas on where to find such things):

Tools: Fire +2, Earth +3, Air +2, Water +3, Light +3, Weather +2, Animal +5, Plant +5, Heal +3, Sense/Detect/Divine +4, and Resist +4.

**8. Bell Tower:** A small, 10' high observation tower, with a bell. It is reached by climbing a ladder up a narrow chute, and there is only a small observation platform/crow's nest at the top, with the bell connected to a rope. Usually the roosting place for the three quasits, they sometimes get excited and start ringing the bell when an

attack begins, or as a way to sound an alarm if necessary.

**Sublevel:** Beneath the pit and connected to the stairs down in Level 1, Area 3. It is now empty except for two things. First, there is the Monster in the Pit (which while it cannot escape up through the pit, can escape to Level 1, Area 3 if the door is opened). Second, there is the refuse of 95 years of doomed adventurers who fell in; surviving gear and treasure in the KEEPER'S discretion.

### **10. Rewards, Loot & Follow Up Adventures.**

Vanquishing the Redoubt would probably justify a step of advancement in either the Heroes of Old or the Coursers, and would give the Paired access to enough medical knowledge to grease the way to advancement to Miracle Worker as well.

The surviving PLAYERS will doubtlessly want to loot the place. Looting is best broken down into three categories: specific things; general looting (what can they carry away in one trip); and thorough looting (how much wealth could they drain from the place with enough time and enough trips)?

**Specific things:** The PLAYERS may come away with the sword Justice, a potentially major, campaign influencing treasure.

In addition, in the (extremely unlikely) event that they eliminate Fangtooth, they may capture her/its *ring of invisibility*, another major treasure.

Finally, the armory cabinet off of the great room has the listed, good quality steel weapons and armor that the PLAYERS are almost certainly going to want for themselves. (So will every cutthroat and scoundrel they encounter, however).

**General looting:** Gathering up the wealth that each person could easily carry or sledge out in one trip, without magical assistance, should result in a permanent Wealth increase for each survivor to 7, or one step up to a maximum of 10.

Taking and looting just the contents of the armory and stores closet, plus the books and silver candlesticks throughout, is more than enough portable, usable Wealth, if carefully traded and invested, to set the PLAYERS up with productive land and castle in Eglantine or Fallingstar, or buy them citizenship and a base of operation in Crystal Lake.

It should be a major turning point in the campaign, and something that only powerful characters should be able to accomplish in the first place.

**Thorough looting:** If the PLAYERS are somehow able to loot the Redoubt at their leisure, they would probably be able to pull enough Wealth out to permanently increase to 8 or by one step to a maximum of 10.

However, PLAYERS going back to the Redoubt after sacking it the first time will probably be met by a demonic hit squad from their outpost in the southern “Dells”, and the PLAYERS will definitely have come to the notice of the Majestic Plateau.

**Follow Up Adventures:** Remember that chieftain back at the Dust Camp? The one that you made a deal with to get food, sledges, and for him to not kill you? The part about giving him first pick of anything you found? How about the part about him being interested in unusual things that will increase his prestige and status?

Do you think that he might recognize the sword Justice? Or might want that suit of plate armor?

Aren't you going to have to go back through that place on your way out of here? How are you going to deal with him? Are you going to keep your word and honor your contract? Or are you going to try and stiff him?

What does this say about you? Is this the right thing to do? Is it a necessary evil? Do you think that word will not get back to him through other adventurers or expatriate Dellsmen? What do you think he will do if his honor is besmirched by cheaters?

So you managed to deal with the Dust Camp problem. Now you're back in civilization, and you've won the lottery.

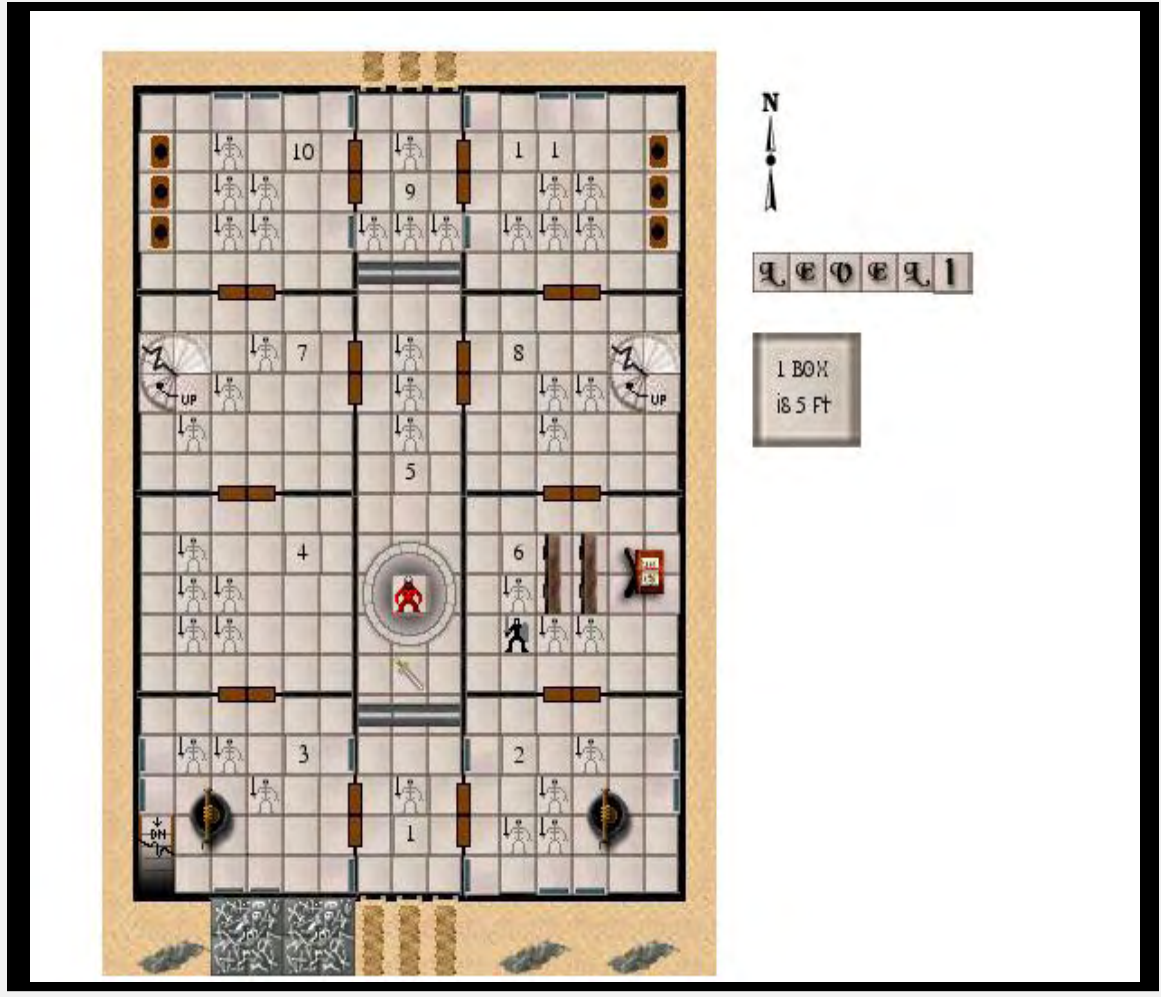
How you are going to protect yourselves? Use the wealth to buy land and set up a keep? Arm a mercenary band? Make a deal for protection with some source of temporal power? If you don't, do you think you that can hold on to your new found goodies?

And what's all this about some organized pocket of demons to the south at some “Majestic Plateau”? And for that matter, how is it that there was a clump of demons working together at the Redoubt, anyway?

And who was that Fangtooth thing, anyhow? And what does this mean for the people of Eglantine?

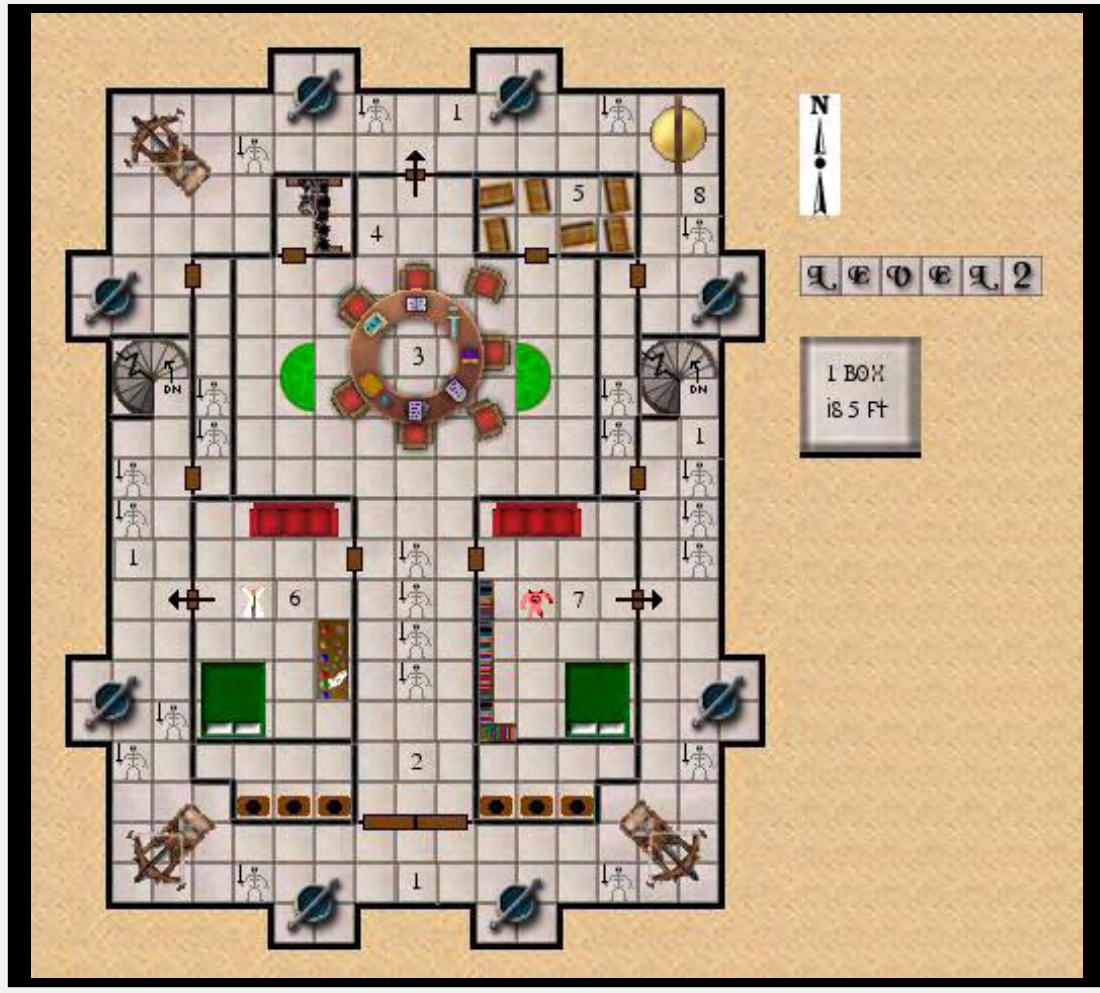
What does the sword Justice think if the PLAYERS clue it in on who they think it might possibly be?





THE REDOUBT, LEVEL 1 (GROUND FLOOR)

- 1: Entryway
- 2: Right Antechamber
- 3: Left Antechamber
- 4: Guardroom
- 5: Main Hallway
- 6: Chapel
- 7: Left Stairwell
- 8: Right Stairwell
- 9: Rear Sally Port
- 10: Left Barracks
- 11: Right Barracks



THE REDOUBT, LEVEL 2—LIVING QUARTERS AND RAMPARTS

- |                    |                        |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Ramparts        | 6. Fangtooth's Bedroom |
| 2. Great Hall      | 7. Lord's Bedroom      |
| 3. Council Chamber | 8. Bell Tower          |
| 4. Armory          |                        |
| 5. Storeroom       |                        |

## 13. SOME NOTEWORTHY DEMONS

Following are some of the more noteworthy or important demons in the World, including: *Ba'al-Sheol, Lord of the Majestic Plateau; Glathnog*, scourge of Fallingstar; *Zazeer*, social engineer and scourge of everywhere; *the Hooded One*, head of the Library and master of magic; and a few other sample demons.

### a. Ba'al-Sheol, Lord of the Majestic Plateau.

It wouldn't be a fantasy game if there weren't a big, bad, red, flying, scaly, fire-breathing dragon at the end. So here he is.

Ba'al-Sheol is the biggest of the bad. He is the definitive ruler of the Majestic Plateau, and by far the most powerful of the 300 "demons" who survived the Abjuration. Many of the other demons at the Majestic Plateau define themselves by how they relate to him.

Ba'al-Sheol is patient and cunning, two things that he was not 100 years ago. He is also remarkably passive and above the fray these days. Anyone stupid enough to directly (or indirectly) challenge his leadership is snuffed out, and indeed, he spends most of his time maintaining his authority and looking for plots to root it out. Other than that, he just kind of hangs out.

Lord Ba'al is pleased with the social control experiments undertaken by Zazeer (they work and he is all about results), but does not concern himself with the details. He is the big sleeping wolf in a yard full of yapping coyotes. He has managed to enslave, intimidate, or co-opt all of the other The Majestic Plateau demons into tithing a part of their soul intake to him, so he takes it easy and interacts little with the rest of the world.

What does he do with the extra souls? Why, he protects his own hide. He is the one exception to the rule about demonic armor: he has his normal 12 points, and it is not

bypassed by steel or magic.

Ba'al-Sheol is in favor of undoing the Abjuration, because he is a creature of destruction and wants the open carnage to resume. That's how he rolls.

**Ba'al-Sheol, Big Bad Dragon**, STR 80, CON 40, SIZ 80, INT 20, POW 20, DEX 11, Move 4/10 flying, HP 60, db: +9d6.

**Attacks:** Bite 95%, damage 3d6+db, impaling.

Breathe Flame, 95%, 4d6+lit on fire, 3 meters in diameter, 20 meters range, costs 1d6 MP.

Claw, 50%, 1d6+db, bleeding.

Tail, 50%, 1d6 +1/2db, crushing, area of effect sweep attack.

**SQ:** *12 points of armor, period*; immune to flame; make 2 attacks/round when on ground (bite or breathe flame + claw or tail, 5 DEX ranks later); Command (95%), Dodge (35%), Fly (100%), Listen (65%), Sense (50%), Spot (60%), *Status* (100%), Track (45%).

### b. Glathnog, Splinter Cell Leader.

Glathnog is an ice devil, and is one of those entities that thinks that he is smarter than everyone else, even though he is not. He and a horde of about a dozen minor demons (nothing anywhere close to his level of power; things like lesser intelligent undead and very minor devils) live in the wilds of Fallingstar, raiding villages throughout the World.

Glathnog and his gang are little more than glorified bandits. They do not engage in long term strategic planning or World shaping, but rather grab what they can get. Glathnog just cannot stand to work with or under anyone. It is just the way that he is.

He is, one on one, one of the most powerful of the surviving demons. As a result, the

Majestic Plateau has allowed things with Glathnog to fall into a state of détente. As long as he does not reveal their machinations or directly interfere with them, they leave him alone.

Glathnog is about 10 feet tall and weighs about 400 pounds. He is vicious, violent, and cruel.

**Glathnog, Ice Devil and Splinter Cell Leader**, STR 34, CON 22, SIZ 22, INT 13, POW 16, DEX 16, Move 10/12 flying, HP 22, db: +2d6.

**Attacks:** Claw 90%, damage 2d8+db, bleeding +2d6 cold.

Ice Blast (breath weapon), 90%, 6d6 cold, 3 meters in diameter, 22 meters range, costs 1d6 MP.

**SQ:** 10 points of *armor* (ineffective vs. magic or steel); immune to cold; *regenerate* 1d6 HP per round unless dead (does not work vs. magic, steel, or fire); *cold aura* (1d6 cold damage/round to any creature within 2 meters); Climb (90%), Dodge (75%), Fly (100%), Jump (75%), Sense (75%), Spot (75%), *Status* (67%), Throw (75%).

### c. Zazeer, Social Engineer

Getting rid of Zazeer would be an immeasurably huge step toward bringing down the demons. If there is a way to “win the campaign”, it would be by eliminating or discrediting Zazeer, since none of the other demons have her level of smarts or skill in herding a populace. Without her, the demons would lack the know-how to effectively implement their indirect control schemes. They would then probably try to assert more direct control, and the humans would probably win the ensuing war (after great casualties).

Zazeer is the smartest, most cerebral, and most scheming of all the demons. She has a knack for long-term planning, convoluted schemes, and getting the humans to do what she wants by making them think it is their own idea.

Zazeer appears as a tall, beautiful, brunette woman, always dressed in blue-colored finery. The only thing to distinguish her from human is her black angel’s wings. She is a pleasant, convivial sort, and masterful at playing factions against one another.

Zazeer is extremely diplomatic, and looks at the World as a complex, entertaining game that she cannot foresee getting bored with. She manipulates leaders, religions, clans, and sociology like chess pieces on a board, and no scheme is too convoluted for her to orchestrate. Among her many little projects are the Circle religion itself, “human husbandry” designed to cull out potential leaders that might organize the humans against the Majestic Plateau, the Trepminster cult, orchestrating the Eglantine war, and the Reapers.

She is content with her position and believes that the demons need to avoid internal conflict in order to maximize their (and hence, her) control over the World.

**Zazeer, Fallen Angel and Social Engineer**, STR 26, CON 31, SIZ 13, INT 25, POW 26, DEX 19, APP 18, Move 10/12 flying, HP 22, db: +1d6.

**Attacks:** Broadsword of Darkness 100%, 1d8+1+db, slashing, target is struck blind on a POW vs. POW check.

Unholy Darkness Blast, 100%, 1/day, 10d6, area effect 3 meters square, range 26 meters.

**SQ:** 10 points of *armor* (ineffective vs. magic or steel); Dispel (as the spell); Dark (as the spell); Command (100%), Dodge (100%), Etiquette (100%), Fly (100%), Insight (95%), Persuade (99%), Research (Library Use) (90%), Research (Streetwise) (99%), Religion (the Circle) (100%), Sense (90%), Spot (90%), *Status* (99%), Strategy (100%), Teach (90%).

**Gear:** *crystal ball* (communicates with proxies).



She also likes to collect books and learning from the past age, and occasionally rewards another demon who can procure something for her. She has no more feeling for mortals, however, than you would have for a hamburger, or an ant farm, or a favorite action figure. Humans are chattels to her, and nothing more than resources not to be *needlessly* wasted.

**d. Red Ralog, mid-ranking officer.**

Red Ralog is a lieutenant level demon. He spends most of his time at The Majestic Plateau, serving as an aide Ba'al-Sheol, and scheming as to how to better his lot. He enjoys torturing the enslaved humans in the Majestic Plateau's slave pit, and serves as a liaison and trainer for the Reapers.

He also passes messages between, and runs important errands for, Zazeer and the Hooded One, always looking to lean toward whichever faction is momentarily ahead. Only about 30% of the demons are at this power level or higher.

Red Ralog is considerably smarter than the typical soldier-level demon, accounting for his survival and success.

**Red Ralog, Lieutenant Demon, STR 18, CON 18, SIZ 15, INT 15, POW 15, DEX 15, Move 8/12 flying, HP 17, db: +1d6.**

Attack: Greatsword, steel, 80%, damage 2d8+db, bleeding, 18 HP.

Bow, composite, 80% 1d8+1+1/2db, impaling, range 120, HP 10.

SQ: 10 points of *armor* (ineffective vs. magic or steel); Dispel (as the spell); Dark (as the spell); Dodge (60%), Fast Talk (55%), Fly (75%), Listen (60%), Sense (45%), Spot (75%), *Status* (50%), Stealth (75%).

**e. The Hooded One, Head Librarian, Master of Magic.**

The Hooded One generally appears to be humanoid in size, shape and demeanor, and

generally has an eccentric, intellectual, demeanor. His (its?) face is always in shadow, and the Hooded One wears a robe engraved with arcane symbols at all times when in humanoid form. His humanoid form constantly floats six inches off the ground. This form is an illusion; in actuality, the Hooded One is an imp with an incredible amount of magical knowledge.



The Hooded One is the secret master of the Brotherhood of the Raven. The ravens answer to him, and he (along with his acolytes and a few fellow demons) keeps the intelligence archives for The Majestic Plateau.

The Hooded One is one of the more successful demons, especially given that he is only of limited physical power. He has a stable power base; is deemed useful to all demons (because he long ago decided to make his intelligence freely available to all in exchange for material support and protection); has the confidence of Ba'al-Sheol; and is content to amass power



without directly challenging other demons. He is, however, petulant, easily frustrated and paranoid.

The only time that any of the other demons have ever seen The Hooded One get violent was when another demon made a joke about The Hooded One being a better name than his human one. The Hooded One fumed that unfortunate where he stood, then walked off muttering something about “the deal.” If anyone else knows The Hooded One’s other/true name, they do not give any hint of it.

The Hooded One is also the master of magic for the demons. No one else in the World has anywhere close to his level of mastery, and he works hard to keep it that way.

In his natural form, The Hooded One stands almost 2 feet tall and weighs in at a whopping 8 pounds.

Like most imps, The Hooded One is not interested in physical altercations. He prefers to avoid interlopers with *invisibility*. If forced to fight, he tends to be overconfident and lash out repeatedly with fire until fire is clearly demonstrated not to work.

The Hooded One is far more likely to resort to his vast magical abilities, from a distance, if inclined to smite an enemy. Often, though, he prefers to talk and try to cut a deal. He acts and carries himself much more like a very powerful, arrogant wizard than some very minor devil.

#### **f. Foot Soldiers.**

About 70% of the “demons” (200+ of the 300 or so that exist) are a motley crew of minor devils (imps), minor demons (quasits), and comparatively low-powered free-willed undead (ghouls, wights, shadows).

Remember, however, that *every* “demon” enjoys Armor 10 (ineffective against steel or magic), making them far more formidable in *Ashes, to Ashes* than they would be in most settings.

**The Hooded One (an alias), Master of Magic**, STR 5, CON 7, SIZ 5, INT 18, POW 30, DEX 18, Move 6/12 flying, HP 6, db: none.

Attack: Bite, 90%, 1d4 + poison POT 16, takes effect in 5 combat rounds.

SQ: 10 points of *armor* (ineffective vs. magic or steel); immune to fire; *invisibility (at will)*; Lost Art: Higher Mysteries, Lost Art: Terrible Presence, Lost Art: Quantum Alteration, Second Sight; Bargain (90%), Command (40%), Fast Talk (88%), Fly (70%), Hide (70%), Insight (75%), Listen (88%), Persuade (90%), Research (Library Use) (90%), Research (Streetwise) (99%), Spot (90%), *Status* (80%), Stealth (70%), Strategy (40%), Teach (88%).

**Aptitude Bonuses:** +10 Fire, +4 Earth, +3 in all other disciplines. He burns things.

**Incantations:** All spells at +5.

**Tools:** +3 in all disciplines easily at hand; knows of the Tools at the +4 and +5 levels in Fire, Earth, and Destroy.

**Items of Power:** Wand of Fire, supplies the first 10 MPs expended on Fire per day; grants an additional +4 to adjusted POW (stacking) in Fire.

#### **g. Fangtooth (Barrow-Wight??)**

Fangtooth has only dim memories of her/its life from before the War, but this is a noteworthy improvement. She dimly remembers being some kind of noble? Then came the Change.

She (and she thinks of herself as such, although others express uncertainty) remembers being betrayed by someone she trusted, someone powerful, and abandoned on a battlefield as a horde of demons advanced. She remembers his last words: that because her soul was empty for him, she did not deserve to keep it. She remembers trying to run, and then the pain.



She was as surprised as anyone when she awoke after the pain, with only the dimmest memories of her life and an endless, gnawing hunger. She joined a horde of her fellows as they ravaged, slew and ate, and then moved on to the next settlement of the warm, warm living. How long this lasted, she could not say; time had lost its meaning.

One day, the World exploded in a shower of fire and lightning and flood. And for the second time, she was surprised when she woke up. Things were different yet again. She was the same, but freer. The hunger was still there, but it did not control her. As long as she ate once a year, she could focus on other things.

Although her memories were still cloudy, she started to remember things that she used to enjoy, like music and singing, and was able to well and truly think for a change.

Fangtooth has sided with those demons at the Majestic Plateau who want to undo the Abjuration, but for her own reasons. Although she is no Adept, she thinks that, just maybe, undoing the Abjuration might restore more of her memories, and enable her to get revenge on those who made her into the mockery that she is today.

Fangtooth is weird, feral, scabrous, but still oddly alluring, with glowing red eyes. She is a mystery to the demons: far smarter than

your average barrow-wight, possessed of actual self-control, and impervious to divination.

She has been entrusted with the project at the Redoubt by Zazeer. She has never asked to be reassigned, and never will.

**Fangtooth, Barrow-wight**, STR 20, CON 17, SIZ 13, INT 16, POW 20, DEX 11, Move 8, HP 15, db: +1d4.

Attack: Claw 70%, damage 1d6+1d4+1d4 STR drain.

SQ: 10 points of *armor* (ineffective vs. magic or steel); *immune to divination or detection magic*; Stealth (90%), Be Oddly Charming for An Animated, Feral Corpse (90%).

Gear: *ring of invisibility*: turns the wearer invisible at will up to 20 SIZ, at will. Requires concentration, and the wearer can do more than walk or speak, or she becomes visible until concentration (out of combat) can be reasserted. Attacks against an invisible character are at  $\frac{1}{4}$  normal, and parries require a successful Listen, Sense or Spot roll. A successful Listen, Sense or Spot roll decreases the penalty on the next roll to attack to  $\frac{1}{2}$  of normal, vs.  $\frac{1}{4}$ .



# 14. INDEX

Abjuration, history	7	Overseers (stats)	51
Ba'al-Sheol (stats)	172	Ravens, mechanics & travel time	67
BRP skills permitted	22	Reaper (sample)	89
Brotherhood of the Raven	64	Ricken, the Lord of Nothing (stats)	150
Circle (religion)	43	Roland of Evenstar (stats)	88
Coursers	62	Ruined Way (Eglantine to Fallingstar)	85
Crystal balls (cel phones of the World)	108	Sara, crabby Wise Woman	97
Crystal Lake (town)	110	Scaraband	3
Daggers at World's End (outpost)	126	Spell-casting example	38
Demons, overview	45	Smoking Tower (island)	129
Demons, dietary requirements	46	Suncove (region) (see the "Farm")	134
Desert, travel penalties	116	Sunken City	96
Eglantine Trooper (stats)	146	Starwell, the	85
Elves (???)	85	The Ritual of Obedience (box)	130
Equipment list	28	Trepminster, mind control cult	81
Faithful, the (mechanics)	..44	Tools, spell-casting (mechanics)	36
Fangtooth (stats)	176	Walif's Bargain (for desert supplies)	124
Fallingstar Town, palace economy	77	Wealth system	23
Halflings	48	Wild talents (mechanics)	39
Heroes of Old	53	Zazeer (stats)	179
Hooded One, the (stats)	175		
Glathnog (stats)	85		
Glathnog (lair summary)	85		
Harold XXII, Boy King of Eglantine	155		
House Arborand, background	155		
Hooded One (stats)	175		
Hrelgar, Dwarven "King"	51		
Imha (island tribe)	129		
Incantations, spell-casting (mechanics)	36		
Items of Power, spell-casting	39		
Justice, famous magic sword	160		
Milesia, Queen Regent of Eglantine	155		
Millesse, Princess of Eglantine	155		



# ASHES TO ASHES

...

**The world is not a happy place.  
It is losing a war it doesn't know it's fighting.  
Hidden demons and their mortal minions manipulate events  
from the shadows, experimenting with social mechanisms  
to steer their human cattle in any direction  
they want them to go.**

ISBN-10: 1568822677  
ISBN-13: 978-1568822679



Find other treasures at  
[www.chaosium.com](http://www.chaosium.com)

