

SWORD & SORCERY

Ravenloft

HEROES of LIGHT™



A Ravenloft Campaign Setting Supplement



HEROES of LIGHTSM

Table of Contents

Introduction: Why Virtue?	3
Chapter One: Creating the Virtuous Hero	11
Chapter Two: Heroic Societies in Ravenloft	49
Chapter Three: Who's Blessed?	72
Chapter four: The Heroic Campaign	102



Introduction:
Why Virtue?

"We're very near the village," Bianca observed, looking back over her shoulder at her traveling companion. "I can see lights up ahead through the trees."

Behind her, Emerald nodded. "It would be good to find an inn and rest these weary bones," he said. "Not to mention those of the horses, for they've had to carry us all this way."

The two travelers urged their mounts along the winding forest trail. Ahead lay a distant glow that promised a hot meal and, if they were lucky, relatively clean beds..

Twilight hovered on the edge of darkness as the pair cleared the forest and saw the small village just beyond the trees. Bianca strained her eyes in the fast-fading light, scanning the nondescript buildings until she found what she sought. "There's an inn," she said, relief evident in her voice.

"Now if only they have rooms," Emerald replied.

"You know, for a bard, you're uncharacteristically pessimistic," Bianca said. "I thought you were supposed to lift our spirits and remind us of just what our noble purpose is."

Emerald shrugged as he urged his horse forward to ride alongside Bianca. His handsome features took on a somber look in the near-darkness. "It's not always easy, my lady knight, to remain hopeful in a land so filled with sorrow and oppression."

Bianca brushed a few strands of dark blonde hair out of her eyes, thankful that her long braid kept most of her otherwise unruly tresses under control. "You feel it, too, then?" she asked, her voice quiet as if hesitant to give voice to her doubts. "Everywhere I go, it's as if something cold and malevolent presses down on me and not just on me, on everything around us."

"You're thinking of what we left behind in the clearing," Emerald said.

Bianca nodded. "I haven't been able to cleanse my mind of the images of those poor souls — a whole family, it seemed."

"But at least we destroyed the monster that slaughtered them," Emerald reminded her. "At least you made certain that it would never kill again."

Bianca finally allowed a slight tinge of bitterness to creep into her voice. "It was probably one of their sons — at least before it became that foul creature we destroyed. Where is the satisfaction in that? We came upon a family of peasants lying in pools of their

own blood — and we ended their line forever by slaying its last surviving member.”

“Who had become a bestial shapechanger and would have inflicted his curse upon the rest of his family, had he not killed them in his rage,” Emeraud said, his trained voice clipping the words so that each syllable struck Bianca like a blow.

She lowered her head, blinking back the hot tears that once again threatened to escape her eyes.

“You’re right, my dear Emeraud,” she said, her voice gaining strength as they entered the village and headed for the brightly-lit inn. “We did what we had to do.”

“And we gave the family a decent burial, too. Don’t forget that last courtesy.”

The lady knight and her companion bard rode up to the inn, gratified to see a boy of perhaps twelve summers coming from the stables behind the inn to take their horses.

As she dismounted and handed off the reins of her mount, Bianca pulled out a coin for the boy, who looked up at her with a mixture of awe and admiration. She became aware of how she must appear, a young woman clad in chain mail and dusty, worn traveling clothes, a sword hanging from her belt and the sweat of many miles and battles clinging to her skin. Then she focused more closely on the lad, and on the aura of innocence that seemed to radiate from him as he took the reins from her and stroked her horse’s neck.

“I’ll take good care of the animals, my lady,” the youth said, his clear voice brimming with joy as Bianca’s horse nuzzled his neck.

She waited until the boy had taken Emeraud’s horse as well and led the pair of mounts into the stable before she turned to her companion, gesturing at the boy’s departing form.

“That,” she said, a smile returning to her face, “is why we do what we do. So that perhaps he may avoid the darkness that threatens to overwhelm us all.” She turned to Emeraud and took his arm. “Let’s see about rooms and a meal.”



I feel and seek the light I cannot see.

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Il Zapolya*

Evil thoroughly infests the Domains of Dread. In other realms, pantheons of good and just gods watch over the innocent and oppressed. In the realms of Ravenloft, the Powers dominate helpless masses of humanity. These dark forces are not completely unopposed, however. Just as there is darkness in the world, there is light as well. Because untainted and incorruptible heroes are so rare, the forces of evil often underestimate their valiant adversaries. Of all the legends of this realm, stories of heroes who fight against overwhelming odds are often among the most heroic — even when they are also the most tragic.

Heroes of Light illumines the world of virtuous heroes, offering a challenge beyond the simple conflicts of “good versus evil” or even murkier conflicts between shades of gray. This is a world where heroism and virtue are not simply arbitrary. There’s more to being “good” than declaring it as your alignment. More importantly, a hero cannot justify his actions simply by declaring his enemies “evil,” particularly in a realm where finding someone’s motivations is not simply a matter of casting a *detect alignment* spell.

Morality is an integral part of **Ravenloft’s** passion plays. The heroes of the Dread Domains must actually demonstrate virtue, not just in thought, but in action as well. More than any single creed or religion, the strongest belief a hero can espouse in this realm is that the seductive lure of evil eventually leads to dire punishments. The world itself tests the virtues of heroes, often leading them astray with offers of supernatural power. Characters become good or evil because of the deeds they perform, and sometimes, as a result of ethical and moral challenges. For heroes who can overcome such challenges, the faint spark of virtue that burns within them can flare into a brilliant flame — one that not only drives back darkness, but burns vile enemies who would extinguish it forever.

The effects of evil are relatively obvious in the Dread Realms. Dark gods suborn their insidious minions, twisting them into base and ignominious forms. The Powers remake men in their own hideous image. Villainous characters succumb to temptation, eventually becoming as monstrous outside as they are within. Like the first signs of moral corruption, the early stages of degeneration

may be easily hidden, but unfortunately for the victim, such secrets cannot be hidden forever. A character degenerating into evil becomes bestial, deformed, or devious, developing dark gifts bestowed by the Powers. In the end, even free will is obliterated, as the hero who once stood against evil becomes enslaved by the darklord of his domain.

The rewards of virtue are subtle, but they are there nonetheless. Virtue is not simply “its own reward,” for when the forces of light reach into the murky depths of the Dread Domains, they empower the heroes who can channel such strength. When the powers of light present their avatars with aid, the distinction between good and evil is not simply one of philosophy, belief, or intent. Just as there is tangible evidence of the existence of evil in this world, there is evidence of virtue as a powerful force in its own right. Virtuous heroes may be quite rare, but when they reveal their true nature, the shadows of evil retreat. Even exemplars of heroism stand little chance of driving all evil from the Dread Realms, but with each victory over darkness, their numbers, like their power, grows.

Fueling the Brilliant flame

This book does not preach any one creed of virtue. We can show the kinds of benefits virtuous heroes receive, but you must decide which heroes are worthy of such accolades. If horror is personal, then so is virtue. No two heroes may define it the same way, and in every case, they pursue it for personal reasons. Some may see virtue as simple innocence or abstinence, but for the “heroes of light” it is the strength to resist corruption. Even if a crusade is ultimately futile or impossible, a doomed hero is no less heroic than one who automatically triumphs over evil. If anything, his willingness to risk and lose all for what is right is what makes him a true hero.

Regardless of the cause, something must fuel the burning ambitions of a hero. There is no one formula for that fuel. Turn to the citizens of the realms, and you’ll hear a vast array of legends and memories. Bards who remember tragic and valorous sagas of the virtuous may draw comparisons between the greatest ones, but heroes come from all realms and races. Alchemists know that as different substances burn, they produce different shades and color of flames, but nonetheless, all heroes blaze with the same intensity. Of course, if you ask a mystical Vistani, he’ll know several archetypes of uncommon heroes — even if he does





interpret their actions as one would the cards of a *tarokka* deck. Throughout all the timeless tales of heroes, a few notable themes recur.

The Exceptional

The largest category of virtuous heroes consists of ordinary people thrown into extraordinary circumstances. Particularly in relatively modern realms — such as the “Renaissance realms” of Lamordia, Dementlieu, Mordent, and Richemulot — they form a legion of extraordinary gentlemen and ladies. These exceptional individuals believe that courage and reason can keep the terrors of the night from overwhelming their domain. Even in less civilized or primitive lands, extraordinary heroes stand up for what is right. For instance, a barbarian from a remote wasteland can show great heroism by opposing the distant darklord who oppressively rules it, particularly if no one else will take up such a crusade.

The Righteous

Protecting the innocent is one of the greatest forms of virtue. Ordinary folk may choose to remain neutral in the struggle between light and darkness, but righteous heroes cannot turn away from those in need. For some, bearing witness to evil, and doing nothing about it, makes any witness an accomplice to evil. Righteous courage doesn't have to mean charging, sword drawn, at any monster that comes crawling toward your home. Caring for the sick or injured, speaking for the oppressed when no one else will, rescuing those in distress, sheltering the needy, and seeking justice are all righteous acts. Warriors who stand up for what is right, ready to do battle while others cower and hide, are simply the most visible of the righteous heroes.

The Luminous

When a warrior cannot destroy evil, a scholar may at least try to understand it. Inspired by the accomplishments of men like Rudolph van Richten, this legion of scholars, metaphysicians, doctors, and occultists quest for a spark of truth in a realm of darkness. Knowing the truth behind the horrors of the supernatural may help explain how they function. By explaining the unknown, a scholar can sometimes calm fears of the unknown. For more martial heroes armed to slay the monstrous abominations of dread domains, knowledge is often their most potent weapon. Knowledge of a villain's weakness can turn the tide of battle far

more effectively than a puissant swordsman or mighty myrmidon. A virtuous scholar does not shy away from the truth, no matter how hideous, monstrous, or damaging to one's sanity it may be. If that means risking his own life to witness his enemies first-hand, so be it.

The Civilized

Although the heroes of some domains may see this next belief as arrogant, citizens of educated, industrious, and technologically advanced domains sometimes see themselves as more qualified to deal with the unknown than their “unfortunate” neighbors. Since backward realms remain isolated by the Mists, they are typically out of sight and out of mind. It is easy to see, then, why they would define civilized heroes as the realm's best defense against the force of evil.

Lawful heroes may come to define those who protect the values of society as inherently “good.” This is often accompanied by a certain faith in the worthies of this society — a belief that in some cases, upper class individuals of proper education, lineage, and background possess the qualities necessary to preserve that society. Comparable to our own world, these delusions may seem almost Victorian in their nature, even in domains where wheel-lock pistols and polearms are the most sophisticated weapons of war.

Heroism and Tragedy

Ravenloft's bards tell tales of great heroism, not just as inspiration, but also as cautionary tales. A few mad idealists believe they can drive the Dark Powers from Ravenloft forever, but most virtuous heroes accept that they will never fully rid the realm of evil. On the rare occasion when a darklord is destroyed, another madman inevitably takes his place. An innocent saved today may fail prey to corruption tomorrow, and, given sufficient temptation, even the greatest of heroes may become greater villains. A frightened populace cowers before the overwhelming force of evil in the world. Does mean that heroism is ultimately futile? Of course not.

The bravest heroes may descend into darkness, but the most idealistic ones stand a greater chance of resisting corruption. Heroes who give up, who submit to what they cannot destroy, often become as impotent and terrified as the masses they once protected. At that point, evil's victory is absolute. Fanatic heroes profess that death is pref-





erable to dishonor, and so gladly give their lives fighting skirmishes in a lengthy campaign against the forces of darkness, one that endures for generation. Despite tragic and often violent deaths, heroes live on in sagas, the treatises of scholars, the children they protect, and the land itself. Virtue is not simply a reward; it is a legacy. Any character who joins with the heroes of light is an inheritor of that legacy, and the powers professed in this book are their rightful inheritance.

Virtue and Corruption

Just as there are shades of darkness in the world, from faint shadows to blackest evil, heroes know of the gradations of light, from the wan illumination of a peasant who resists simple temptation to the brilliant incandescence of the most esteemed paladins. In Ravenloft, there is no way to definitively measure good and evil or even to identify them. From our point of view, however, we can quantify such qualities through game mechanics — including the system described below.

In the *Ravenloft Core Rulebook*, the seven stages of corruption are explained in the *Ways of the World* chapter. In that description, all characters and NPCs exist in one of three moral states: they are either innocent, corrupted, or somewhere in between. For the purposes of this book, there is considerable moral leeway within the third category. To enhance this aspect of the game, the characters of this book belong to one of the following six stages of morality:

Innocent Children begin in this state of grace until they grow up — or see too much. You cannot take this as a feat; it's a special quality.

Blessed The character has taken the Blessed feat, passed a *test of virtue*, or gained the special quality: *Virtue's Challenge*.

Moral Good characters from other realms begin with this stage of virtue.

Penitent Neutral characters from other realms begin with this stage of virtue.

Unclean The character has succumbed to the *Caress*, the first stage of corruption. Theoretically, an evil character from another realm would begin at this stage of corruption.

Corrupted The character has succumbed to the second or later stage of corruption.

In the next chapter, many of the virtues bestowed by feats and prestige classes are only available to the *Virtuous*. That term includes characters who

are Innocent, Blessed, Moral, or Penitent. In other words, a player character who has not succumbed to the *Caress of Evil*, the first stage of corruption, is a *virtuous hero*. When using these terms, the DM will need to make a few additional ethical distinctions, both in rules and in stories.

Innocent: An Innocent has a soul completely free of the taint of evil. An innocent humanoid has never committed any act worthy of a powers check, regardless of success or failure. An Innocent character gains a +3 divine bonus against any spell effect or supernatural ability that requires a powers check or is used by an evil creature; however, the character has a -2 competence penalty to Horror checks and Sense Motive checks. Evil clerics can turn Innocent characters as they would undead.

Blessed: Some characters can take attain this state of virtue by taking the Blessed feat (after meeting its requirements). Others take a vow to protect the virtuous, such as the one mentioned in the special quality: *Virtue's Challenge* (see Chapter One). Any Innocent can voluntarily become Blessed instead.

Blessed characters have none of the benefits or drawbacks of the Innocent, but they receive benefits ordinary people do not possess. For a start, all Blessed characters receive a +1 sacred bonus on Fear and Horror checks. This quality is also a prerequisite for many of virtue's rewards. As an exception to the rules, divination spells can reveal that someone is Blessed.

Moral: A person who has attempted a powers check, but never failed one, is considered Moral. Most ordinary folk of good alignment fall into this category, at least until they are corrupted. Unless the DM decides otherwise, all good characters brought into Ravenloft from other campaigns begin in this state of grace.

This does not mean that ordinary folk do not occasionally compromise with evil, or that they always openly display virtue when given the chance. Good commoners may choose to ignore evil, or they may fear for their own safety enough to refuse help to heroes opposing it. Adventurers who arrive in a town announcing their intention to purge it of evil will probably receive a cold welcome. Villagers fully expect reprisals for helping heroes oppose their oppressors. While they may believe in truth and justice, they lack the moral fortitude to become heroes. A Moral person is simply one who has not been rewarded for an act of evil.





Penitent: Neutral characters brought into Ravenloft from other realms are considered Penitent, as are most ordinary folk of neutral alignment. Penitent characters have a -1 profane penalty on their Fear and Horror checks.

As an optional rule, a Penitent character who has never failed a powers check can become Moral by losing a permanent character level and changing his ethical alignment from neutral to good. Thus, lawful neutral, “true” neutral, and chaotic neutral can make this sacrifice to become Moral.

Unclean: A character who has succumbed to the first stage of corruption, the Caress, is considered Unclean. Evil characters brought into Ravenloft from other realms automatically succumb to this first stage of corruption. It is fully detailed and defined in the **Ravenloft Core Rulebook**.

It is possible, albeit difficult, for a character who has succumbed to the Caress to become Penitent. The anchorite class ability: *absolution* offers one option (see Chapter One). A character absolved of his first transgression loses all the “benefits” of the Caress; he is then considered Penitent.

Under no circumstance can a character become Penitent more than once.

Corrupted: Few beyond the first stage of corruption can find redemption. There is little hope for the poor soul. Unless he consistently and continually seeks to atone for his evil actions (see Chapter Three of the **Ravenloft Core Rulebook**), the rest of his existence becomes an inexorable descent into corruption, madness, and evil.

Virtue Defined

Again, any character who is Innocent, Blessed, Moral, or Penitent is considered Virtuous. Some of the prestige classes in the next chapter have “Virtuous” as a prerequisite; others only allow Blessed characters to benefit. In each of these cases, a character who becomes Unclean or Corrupted loses the benefits of that prestige class, trading in levels of that class for another “default class” listed in the description. The Fall from Grace sidebar in the next chapter has more details on this mechanic.

Playing a virtuous hero presents a different approach to Ravenloft, one where a hero doesn’t compromise with evil, but actively resists it. He





invests years of experience in an arduous struggle for perfection. Should he stray from the straight and narrow path, he may lose all the benefits he has gained. Yet if he can rise to the challenge of remaining virtuous in a world beset by evil, he may grow in power. Some of the greatest paladins even attempt to oppose the darklords. Rewarding that virtue, instead of merely punishing failure, is the purpose of this book.

How to Use This Book

Heroes of Light is the second of two Ravenloft supplements designed to illustrate the conflict between good and evil in the Dread Realms. This volume provides guidelines for players and DMs who wish to create characters with a firm belief in goodness and justice and a staunch determination to fight the powers of evil. Its companion volume, **Champions of Darkness**, offers details for players and DMs who wish to design characters who are determined to walk in the shadows, and who struggle against their own inner darkness.

This book provides PCs with guidelines for bringing new dimensions to the concept of "good" characters, expanding on the principles of virtue and exploring the many ways in which heroes can express their commitment to waging the good fight. The information contained within these pages offers ways for you to create uniquely heroic characters both native to Ravenloft and newly arrived from outside the Mists.

The Introduction: Why Virtue discusses the reasons for playing characters dedicated to the cause of good in a world surrounded by Dark Powers and controlled by doomed and corrupted creatures. A system for quantifying the stages of "goodness" lays the groundwork for creating true "heroes of light."

Chapter One: Creating the Virtuous Hero presents a variety of prestige classes suitable to characters who choose to dedicate themselves to the heroic fight. New feats appropriate for these characters are also detailed.

Chapter Two: Heroic Societies in Ravenloft presents a quartet of organizations that can lend support to heroic characters, providing them with contacts and allies, spiritual counseling or, occasionally, material support.

Chapter Three: Who's Blessed describes a gallery of characters who fit the appellation "heroes of light," including the Wanderers, a group of unlikely heroes who wander the dark lands of Sithicus. Some of these illustrious individuals may be useful in your campaign as NPCs, or as guidelines for players and DMs who wish to build their own heroes.

Chapter Four: The Heroic Campaign discusses themes for running heroic campaigns in the Dread Realms. In addition to a step-by-step manual for campaign creation, this chapter includes a section on how to integrate personal relationships, such as romance, into the lives of your heroic characters.





Chapter One:
Creating the
Virtuous Hero

"Can't you chant any faster?" André called, pulling both his pistols in one practiced move and taking aim at the line of rotted, shambling creatures that approached them from the ruins of the still-smoking village. "We need whatever divine blessings you can give us now!"

Taking aim at the first two soulless zombies, while they were still too far away for close combat, André fired at first one, then the other creature, striking each one solidly in the chest. Bits of putrid flesh splattered from the gaping holes in their bodies.

"That is for Clarice," André muttered to himself. "And for my poor unborn child as well." He tossed the spent pistols to a younger man standing behind him, who caught them deftly and proceeded to reload the matching weapons as André pulled out the first of several gunpowder bombs and lit its fuse.

The chanting stopped, and André felt new strength of purpose infuse his spirit. "Thank you, Father," he said absently, "that was much needed."

Counting to three, he tossed the bomb in a slow, lazy arc, timing his throw so that the weapon exploded just above the heads of another pair of zombies. The smell of charred rotting flesh soon filled the air.

"Your pistols, sir," his assistant said. André opened his hands and the powdermonkey, Guillaume, placed the reloaded weapons in his master's grip.

"Many thanks," André said. Guillaume had come to him only recently, drawn by André's reputation as an expert with powder and shot. Like him, the boy had lost his family to foul creatures such as the ones they now fought. In a few years, if they both lived, Guillaume might become a skilled marksman. For now, he kept André's pistols primed and loaded.

"There are more in the distance," Father Bruno's voice held a tremor of concern. "How much longer can we fight them?" The priest stepped forward to stand beside André, his holy symbol clutched tightly in his hand.

"Hold them at bay, Father," André said. "We fight them until they're nothing but ash."

The elderly priest, a veteran of many battles against the undead, thrust his holy symbol, a golden disc with a rosy hue, toward the zombies. "In the name of the Morninglord, turn aside and trouble us no more."

Father Bruno felt a chill travel through him as he struggled to exert his faith. Each day, it seemed, the powers of evil brought more to bear against those like himself and his friend André, who refused to accept the rule of darkness. A prayer of devotion on his lips, Father Bruno renewed his faith in the Morninglord's hope and felt a surge of power flow through him, driving back the undead host.

"Good," André said. "That gives me more time to shoot. Just keep them where they are and we'll pick them off, one by one."

He fired twice more, praying that his aim would not fail him until the creatures had all fallen back into eternal darkness.



O Duty! If that name thou love,
Who art a light to guide, a rod
To check the erring, and reprove;

— William Wordsworth, "Ode to Duty"

Survival in the Domains of Dread is difficult enough for an ordinary man or woman. Many common folk purposefully remain ignorant of evil in their midst throughout their lives. They take solace in the idea that others stronger than they must undertake the onerous task of healing the land. In weakness, they find absolution.

Even experienced heroes may become complacent about coexisting with evil. While slaying a lesser monster is difficult, destroying a darklord and his minions may appear as an ultimately futile task. Although a typical adventurer may become corrupt, he may rationalize his failure, claiming that he has turned the Dark Powers' gifts against them and their minions. Yet with each failure, he is drawn inexorably under the control of those same powers.

The virtuous hero has higher aspirations. Even if he cannot heal the land around him, he struggles to maintain virtuous behavior in a land beset by corruption. As darkness descends on a domain, the brilliance of a true hero shines even brighter by contrast. Extremists refuse even to obscure their motives, seeing falsehood as a compromise with the corrupt world around them. More pragmatic heroes spend years in hiding, steadily mastering the powers of light until they reveal themselves as avatars of distant and forgotten gods. Attaining rewards for virtue is far more difficult than succumbing to the quick and easy lure of corruption, but those who can resist temptation and survive long enough can achieve feats worthy of legend. Tales attest that exemplars of heroism possess undeniable strengths.

Prestige Classes



any prestige classes represent difficult paths a hero may choose to follow in his life. For instance, some of the most powerful prestige classes represent the obligations and benefits of a religious sect, an order of knighthood, a rarefied approach to magic, a dangerous crusade against the occult, or a life of studious scholarship.

As part of this, a few of the prestige classes listed below have benefits and class abilities that are arguably a bit better than some of the standard classes. In these cases, the character must uphold a higher moral standard, at least as defined in the rules for virtuous heroes earlier in this chapter. Should that prove insufficient, it bears repeating the prestige classes are an entirely optional addition to a campaign, purely at the discretion of the DM.

A few of the paths listed below may not seem particularly moral at first, but they pertain to once ordinary people whose lives are changed by their crusade against evil. Even a fighter who vows to avenge innocents who have been slain holds to a certain code of conduct. Even if his methods are brutal or violent, his need to punish and destroy the wicked changes his life forever.

Of course, a hero does not always need to follow a treacherous path to its doomed conclusion. He may follow the path long enough to take a few levels in a particular prestige class, but once he steps off it, he may never find his way again. In several of the cases listed below, a hero who becomes corrupt loses the class abilities of his chosen prestige class. In these cases, the levels in the prestige class revert to levels of another class; see the Fall from Grace sidebar for more details.





Anchorite Inquisitor

The lawful good sect of the anchorite religion hunts evil in a world dominated by dark powers. The inquisitors of this sect travel wherever the weak are oppressed to investigate their oppressors. Their knowledge of the Mists allows them to travel wherever the bishops of the church might send them. Once the inquisitor succeeds in his quest, his mistwalking abilities can help him escape the terrors he has unleashed.

Through mystical means, anchorite inquisitors give daily reports of the evil that infests the land — and of course, they have a lot to report. The Church of Ezra must carefully consider where and when to send its paladins and anchorites. All too often, the inquisitor himself must face such evil alone, or with a few companions he personally chooses. In addition to Ezra's benediction to protect the weak and care for the sick, inquisitors vow to find truth and fight for justice. Their powers allow them to see the world with eyes unclouded, yet with them come an obligation to act on the truths they uncover.

Hit Die: d8

Requirements

To qualify to become an anchorite inquisitor (Ani), a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Base Attack Bonus: +3

Knowledge (arcana): 8 ranks

Sense Motive: 8 ranks

Feats: Trustworthy

Special: Lawful good alignment

Restriction: Evil Dead and Heavy Metal (see below).

Morality: The character must be Virtuous (see the Introduction). If he ever becomes Unclean or Corrupted, his "default class" is cleric.

Class Skills

The anchorite's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Heal (Wis), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Profession (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis), and Spellcraft (Int). See Chapter Four in the *PHB* for skill descriptions.

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier

Class Features

All the following are class features of the anchorite inquisitor prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Like clerics, anchorites are proficient with all types of armor (light, medium, and heavy), and with shields. However, they must vow to never wear light or

Table 1-1: Anchorite Inquisitor

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells per day
1	+0	+2	+0	+2	Prestige domain: mists, candle communion, <i>light</i>	+1 per level of existing class
2	+1	+3	+0	+3	Detect virtue	+1 per level of existing class
3	+2	+3	+1	+3	Shield of Ezra	+1 per level of existing class
4	+3	+4	+1	+4	Immune to charms	+1 per level of existing class
5	+3	+4	+1	+4	True seeing	+1 per level of existing class
6	+4	+5	+2	+5	Immune to compulsions	+1 per level of existing class
7	+5	+5	+2	+5	Mistwalking	+1 per level of existing class
8	+6	+6	+2	+6	Immune to possession	+1 per level of existing class
9	+6	+7	+3	+7	Death ward	+1 per level of existing class
10	+7	+7	+3	+7	Improved true seeing	+1 per level of existing class

medium armor. Their favored weapon is the longsword.

Spells: The anchorite casts spells as a cleric. An anchorite in light or medium armor cannot cast spells from the Mists domain.

Evil Dead: Although clerics can turn undead, anchorites cannot. Levels of this prestige class do not count towards turning attempts.

Heavy Metal: Anchorite wanderers either wear heavy metal armor or none at all. Those who travel without armor demonstrate their utter faith in Ezra protection, while those who wear heavy armor demonstrate their zeal to act as protectors and defenders of the faith. Messengers of this secret society do not wear armor. An anchorite wearing light or medium cannot cast spells from the Mist Domain or use *shield of Ezra*.

Prestige domain (Mists): See Chapter Two of the **Ravenloft Core Rulebook**. A cleric must learn the Mist Domain before he can take an anchorite prestige class. If he already has it when she takes this class, he can cast *expeditions retreat* once per day, beginning at 1st level.

Otherwise, he can become an anchorite by sacrificing one of his former domains (and the benefit of that domain) for this one. He must then take a vow to protect the weak, care for the sick, and protect

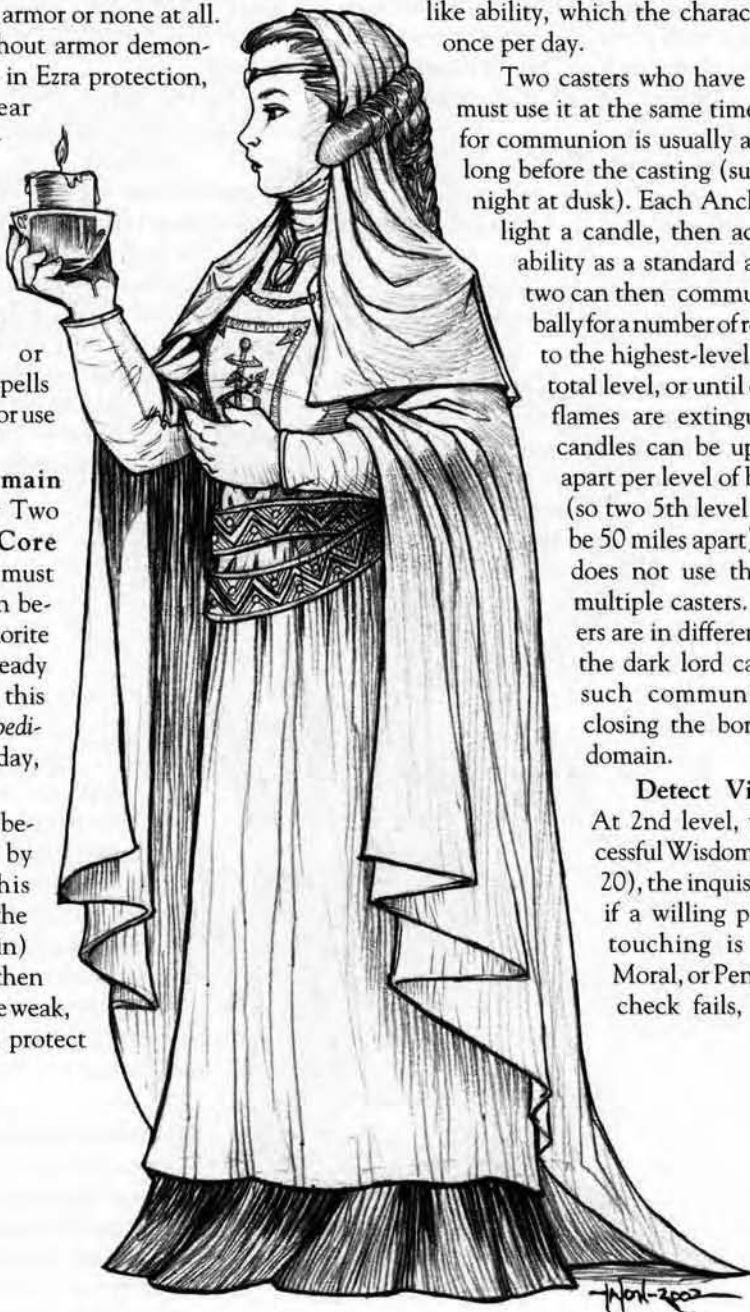
the virtuous from harm. In exchange for this vow, the anchorite wanderer can cast *light* at will.

Light (Sp): At 1st level, in exchange for this vow described above, the anchorite inquisitor can cast *light* at will.

Candle communion (Sp): Once each day, beginning at 1st level, the anchorite inquisitor is required to report his activities to his church. Their most common method is through this spell-like ability, which the character can use once per day.

Two casters who have this ability must use it at the same time. The time for communion is usually agreed upon long before the casting (such as every night at dusk). Each Anchorite must light a candle, then activates the ability as a standard action. The two can then communicate verbally for a number of rounds equal to the highest-level character's total level, or until one or both flames are extinguished. The candles can be up to 5 miles apart per level of both casters (so two 5th level casters can be 50 miles apart). This spell does not use the rules for multiple casters. If the casters are in different domains, the dark lord can sever all such communication by closing the borders to his domain.

Detect Virtue (Sp): At 2nd level, with a successful Wisdom check (DC 20), the inquisitor can tell if a willing person he is touching is Innocent, Moral, or Penitent. If the check fails, the ability





reveals nothing. If the subject is unwilling, this ability automatically fails.

If the inquisitor already has this as a feat when he gains it as a class ability, he gains a +4 bonus to this Wisdom check.

Shield of Ezra (Sp): See the **Ravenloft Core Rulebook**, Chapter Two, for details on this spell. Three times a day, beginning at 3rd level, a lawful good anchorite inquisitor can summon a luminous mist to surround and protect him. This effect lasts one round for each cleric, paladin and anchorite level that the character has. This spell-like ability grants the anchorite 25/+5 damage reduction against metal weapons.

Immune to charms (Su): At 4th level, the anchorite inquisitor becomes immune to charm spells and other powers that simulate spells of enchantment.

True seeing (Sp): At 5th level, the anchorite inquisitor may cast *true seeing* three times per day as a spell-like ability.

Immune to compulsions (Su): At 6th level, the anchorite inquisitor becomes immune from spells or effects that attempt to compel him to act according to the will of another, including all spells with the Enchantment (Compulsion) and Enchantment (Charm) descriptor.

Mistwalking (Su): Once per month, beginning at 7th level, the anchorite inquisitor can travel from one domain to another adjacent domain by walking through the Mists. The anchorite can bring up to four other people with him while mistwalking. For each additional level of anchorite inquisitor, he may bring an additional traveler with him, up to a maximum of 10.

Immune to possession (Su): At 8th level, the anchorite inquisitor becomes immune to spells or effects that attempt to take possession of his mind or body.

Death ward (Sp): At 9th level, the anchorite inquisitor may cast this necromantic spell without a powers check.

Improved true seeing (Sp): Three times a day, beginning at 10th level, the inquisitor can cast *true seeing*, but with a few additional advantages. The inquisitor can see the true form of items and creatures that have been polymorphed, changed, or transmuted, not only through spells or spell-like powers, but also through supernatural or extraordinary abilities. Unlike most divine spellcasters, they can sense the presence of creatures like vampires, lycanthropes, and doppelgangers.

Anchorite Wanderer

Ezra's worshipers interpret her in many ways, and sometimes come into conflict over their beliefs. Ezra is generally worshipped as a healer and protector who sacrificed herself to the Mists to watch over the virtuous. For a modest tithe of ten copper pieces a year, anyone can join the Church of Ezra. Only a few heroes are worthy of becoming anchorites, clerics of the church who study the mysteries of Ravenloft's Mists (and thus, the Mist Domain).

The church has four distinct major sects, each with its own objectives and methods. Each follows a different ethical philosophy (and accordingly, has one of four alignments: lawful neutral, true neutral, lawful good, or lawful evil.) Churches may even vary widely from one domain to another. What is holy in one church may be considered heresy — or even blasphemy — in another.

Anchorite wanderers do not concern themselves with the distinctions of the various sects, remaining neutral in all such conflicts. Instead of answering to the disparate voices of a host of squabbling sects, they regard religious conflict with equanimity. Their highest obligation requires them to travel the domains to seek people in need. While lawful priests of Ezra belong to a highly structured and hierarchical church, true neutral anchorite wanderers belong to a secret society that enables them to travel quietly from one domain to the next. This society works to protect them from persecution — sometimes from other sects of the Church of Ezra.

Like all of Ezra's followers, anchorite wanderers must also follow a strict code of conduct. They are required to protect the virtuous from harm, always coming to the aid of individuals in distress despite personal risk. Ezra demands that they protect the weak, care for the sick, and generally

improve the human condition. Wanderers do not fortify themselves in isolated churches; they actively seek out people who need their help. Religious conflicts do not dissuade them; thus, many excel as messengers and diplomats.

When neutral anchorites answer this higher calling, their deity aids them in their travels by giving them the power to walk through the Mists that separate various domains. Ordinarily, ancho-





rites must become powerful divine spellcasters to overcome these obstacles (usually by learning *teleport without error* as a domain spell). Anchorite wanderers risk the dangers of the Mists long before they can command such powers. During their travels, wanderers develop an extensive knowledge of Ravenloft's geography. Like all anchorites, they are unique to Ravenloft, losing all their powers if they somehow leave the Domain of Dread.

Hit Die: d8

Requirements

To qualify to become an anchorite wanderer (Anw), a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Base Attack Bonus: +3

Knowledge (geography): 5 ranks

Knowledge (religion): 5 ranks

Feats: Run

Special: True neutral alignment; capable of casting third-level divine spells.

Restrictions: Evil Dead and Heavy Metal (see below).

Morality: The character must be Virtuous (see Introduction). If he ever becomes Unclean or Corrupted, his "default class" is cleric.

Class Skills

The anchorite wanderer's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Heal (Wis), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Knowledge (geography) (Int), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Profession (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis), and Spellcraft (Int). See Chapter Four in the *PHB* for skill descriptions.

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier

Class features

All the following are class features of the anchorite wanderer prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Like clerics, anchorites are proficient with all types of armor (light, medium, and heavy), and with shields. Their favored weapon is the longsword.

Spells: An anchorite gains spells as a cleric.

Evil Dead: Although clerics can turn undead, anchorites cannot. Levels of this prestige class do not count towards turning attempts.

Heavy Metal: Anchorite wanderers either wear heavy metal armor or none at all. Those who travel without armor demonstrate their utter faith in Ezra's protection, while those who wear heavy armor demonstrate their zeal to act as defenders of the faith. Messengers of this secret society do not wear armor. An anchorite wearing light or medium cannot cast spells from the Mist Domain or use *shield of Ezra*.

Prestige domain (Mists): See Chapter Two of the *Ravenloft Core Rulebook*. A cleric must learn the Mist Domain before he can take an anchorite prestige class. If he already has it when he takes this class, he can cast *expeditious retreat* once per day.

Otherwise, he can become an anchorite by sacrificing one of his former domains (and the benefit of that domain) for this one. He must then take a vow to protect the weak, care for the sick, and protect the virtuous from harm. In exchange for this vow, the anchorite wanderer can cast *light* at will.

Shield of Ezra (Sp): See Chapter Two of the *Ravenloft Core Rulebook*. Three times a day, beginning at 1st level, an anchorite wanderer can summon a luminous mist to surround and protect him. This effect lasts one round for each cleric, paladin and anchorite level that the character has. This spell-like ability grants the anchorite +10 to all Fortitude and Reflex saves vs. damaging spells.

Mistwalking (Su): Once per month, beginning at 2nd level, the anchorite wanderer can travel from one domain to another adjacent domain by walking through the Mists. The anchorite can bring up to four other people with him while mistwalking. For each additional level of anchorite wanderer, he may bring an additional traveler with him, up to a maximum of 10. At this level, the anchorite cannot mistwalk to islands.

Diplomacy (Ex): The anchorite wanderer receives a +2 to all Diplomacy skill rolls.

Greater mistwalking (Su): As mistwalking, but at a greater distance. The point of departure is typically in one of three categories: Core, cluster, or island. The destination can be in the same category. This ability is gained at 4th level.





Fast movement (Ex): At 5th level, the anchorite wanderer's speed is increased by +10 feet when he is not wearing armor. A character cannot gain the benefits of fast movement multiple times, even if he gets it from multiple prestige classes.

Shield of Faith (Sp): Beginning at 5th level, an anchorite wanderer can cast *shield of faith* three times per day. The anchorite wanderer can only use this spell-like ability if he is not wearing armor.

True mistwalking (Su): As mistwalking, but the wanderer can travel through the Mists from any one domain to any other domain, whether Core, cluster, or island. The character gains this ability at 6th level.

Expeditious retreat (Sp): At 7th level, the anchorite wanderer gains the ability to cast *expeditious retreat* as a spell-like ability three times day.

Ward against metal (Su): At 8th level, the anchorite wanderer has DR 20/+2 against metal

weapons of one of the following categories: swords, axes, or polearms.

Absolution (Sp): At 9th level, an anchorite wanderer can attempt to remove the effects of the first stage of corruption, the Caress, by casting *atonement* as a spell-like ability. The target must attempt a Will save (DC 20) as part of his act of repentance. The target loses one character level (as with resurrection) and is then considered Penitent. The subject is considered to have deliberately committed a misdeed; thus, casting this spell costs the caster 500 xp.

Ezra's Will (Su): If the borders to a domain are closed, the anchorite wanderer can make an opposed Will roll against the darklord to exit the domain. If the attempt fails, the darklord knows the exact location of the anchorite wanderer, and he continues to know it until dawn of the following day. Ezra's Will can only be attempted once per day. This ability is gained at 10th level.

Table 1-2: Anchorite Wanderer

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells per day
1	0	+2	+0	+2	prestige domain: Mists, <i>shield of Ezra</i>	+1 level of existing class
2	+1	+3	+0	+3	Mistwalking	+1 level to existing class
3	+2	+3	+1	+3	Diplomacy +2	+1 level to existing class
4	+3	+4	+1	+4	Greater mistwalking	+1 level to existing class
5	+3	+4	+1	+4	Fast movement <i>Shield of faith</i>	+1 level to existing class
6	+4	+5	+2	+5	True mistwalking	+1 level to existing class
7	+5	+5	+2	+5	<i>Expeditious retreat</i>	+1 level to existing class
8	+6	+6	+2	+6	Ward against metal	+1 level to existing class
9	+6	+6	+3	+6	Absolution	+1 level to existing class
10	+7	+7	+3	+7	Ezra's will	+1 level to existing class





Black Powder Avenger

Skill Points at Each Level: 2+Int modifier.

Heroes from medieval realms purge evil with flame and sword. More modern adventurers have a deadlier weapon in their arsenal: black powder. Pragmatic warriors would consider a pistol or musket a desperate choice for a favored weapon. Not only is it more difficult to load than a crossbow or bow, but the presence of fire (or incendiary spells) is extremely dangerous to any soldier burdened with explosives. Even in the Renaissance realms, a pistol or musket is often seen as a weapon best discharged before a melee ensues. Only a madman would carry multiple pistols or take dire risks with homemade bombs.

The thirst for vengeance can drive a man mad. An avenger fanatically pursues the study of one weapon as the instrument of his vengeance, but the black powder avenger clearly places little value on his own life. The avenger typically begins his career in a mad passion for blood, eager to mete justice against a monstrous or supernatural evil that has caused him pain. A few plot to assassinate high-ranking nobles, holding them responsible for the suffering in their domains. While zeal, revenge, and bloodlust aren't particularly virtuous traits, an avenger who survives his first crusade may become a valued ally to heroes eager to drive back the forces of darkness.

Requirements

To qualify to become a black powder avenger (Bpa), a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Base Attack Bonus: +5

Alchemy: 5 ranks

Feats: Exotic Weapon Proficiency (firearms)

Special: The character's domain of origin must be one with a Renaissance cultural level (CL 9).

Morality: The character must be Virtuous. If he ever become corrupted, he loses the class ability: signature weapon.

Class Skills

The black powder avenger's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Alchemy (Int), Climb (Str), Craft [any] (Int), Craft [firearm] (Int), Handle Animal (Cha), Jump (Str), Ride (Dex), and Swim (Str).

Class features

All the following are class features of the black powder avenger prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Like the fighter, the black powder avenger is proficient in the use of all simple and martial weapons and all armor (heavy, medium, and light) and shields. His favored weapon is usually a pistol or musket, although some rely upon a bayonet as well.

Signature Weapon (Ex): At 1st level, the black powder avenger chooses one particular weapon as the instrument of his vengeance. The character sacrifices one point of Wisdom; from the moment this sacrifice is made, the weapon gains an enhancement bonus to attack and damage of +1 for every three levels the character has in this prestige class (maximum +3). Only the black powder avenger gets the bonus for using this weapon. In the hands of anyone else, the weapons functions normally. If the character loses this signature weapon, he may sacrifice another point of Wisdom to dedicate another one, but the first weapon loses its enhancement if the avenger ever finds it again. Most black powder avengers give their signature weapon a name, and treat it as if their lives depend on it.

As an exception to the rules, if the black powder avenger finds a way to grant an enhancement bonus to his ammunition, it does not stack with the enhancement bonus of his signature weapon.

Bonus Firearms Feats: At 1st level, the black powder avenger gets a bonus feat related to the use of firearms. This feat is in addition to any other bonus feats that the character might normally receive. The avenger gains an additional bonus feat at 2nd level and every two levels thereafter (4th, 6th, 8th, etc.). These bonus feats must be drawn from the following list: Ambidexterity, Far Shot, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot, Shot on the Run, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Finesse (bayonet, musket, or pistol), Weapon Focus (bayonet, musket, or pistol), Weapon Specialization (bayonet, musket, or pistol), Quick Draw.



Create Black Powder (Ex): For the cost of one gold piece in materials and a successful Alchemy check (DC 10), a black powder avenger can make enough black powder for ten bullets in one day. The availability of these materials is up to the DM. Molding the bullets requires a second Alchemy check (DC 10) and a second day. The black powder avenger gains this ability at 3rd level.

The avenger may also create larger quantities of powder by using the Craft rules, and substituting Alchemy for Craft (see *PHB*, Chapter 4). In this way, the black powder avenger can create a gunpowder keg, gunpowder horn, ammunition, or silvered ammunition (see Chapter Two of the *Ravenloft Core Rulebook*). The character gets a +2 insight bonus to these Alchemy checks. Since he isn't actually using Craft, however, the character can't make masterwork ammunition until he reaches 5th level.

Just as a wizard is expected to have material components and a rogue has lockpicks, the black powder avenger has basic equipment for mixing powder, molding bullets, and fixing firearms. When he reaches 5th level, these tools confer a +2 equipment bonus for all Alchemy checks for the class abilities: create black powder and improved black powder.

Create Incendiary (Ex): At 5th level, the black powder avenger becomes particularly good at making bombs and smoke bombs (see Chapter Two of the *Ravenloft Core Rulebook*). The character may use the Craft rules to construct bombs, substituting Alchemy for Craft. He gets a +2 insight bonus to these Alchemy checks.

Craft masterwork ammunition (Ex): This is the improved version of craft black powder. At 5th level, the black powder avenger can create masterwork ammunition.

Powder monkey: At 6th level, the black powder avenger gains an apprentice as a





cohort (see *DMG*, Chapter 2). This is in addition to any cohorts that the character can gain as a result of his leadership score. The powder monkey's starting level is one-half the normal level of a cohort listed in the *DMG*. As long as you treat him fairly, he'll offer to carry your explosives for you. In exchange, you must also train him in the basics of firearms use. Most powder monkeys have the same tragic backgrounds as black powder avengers; thus, they also value vengeance above their own survival. If the powder monkey survives long enough to qualify for this prestige class, the GM may have him fight beside you. Full statistics for the powder monkey are generated by the GM.

Quick Reload (Ex): At 7th level, the black powder avenger can reload a musket or pistol as a move action instead of a standard action. Thus, he can load, fire and move up to five feet in the same combat round. However, reloading a pistol still incurs an attack of opportunity.

Evasion (Ex): As the rogue class ability, the black powder avenger gains evasion at 9th level (see *PHB*, Chapter 3). **Detonation (Ex):** Three times a day, the black powder avenger can "overtamp" the powder in his signature weapon to inflict hellish amount of damage. Preparing the charge and detonating it are each full-round actions. The avenger uses his normal base attack bonus (including all relevant modifiers) with an additional +4 competence bonus to the attack. The threat range for a critical hit is doubled, and the attack deals maximum possible damage (regardless of whether it is a normal or a critical hit). This ability is gained at 10th level.

After using detonation, the avenger cannot use the signature weapon again until he spends an hour repairing the weapon with a Craft (firearms) check (DC 10).

Table 1-3: Black Powder Avenger

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1	+1	+2	+0	+0	Signature weapon
2	+2	+3	+0	+0	Firearms feat
3	+3	+3	+1	+1	Create black powder
4	+4	+4	+1	+1	Firearms feat
5	+5	+4	+1	+1	Create incendiary, craft masterwork ammunition
6	+6	+5	+2	+2	Firearms feat, powder monkey
7	+7	+5	+2	+2	Quick reload
8	+8	+6	+2	+2	Firearms feat
9	+9	+6	+3	+3	Evasion
10	+10	+7	+3	+3	Detonation 3/day, firearms feat



Blessed Paladin

The blessed paladin holds herself to a higher standard of morality than most heroes — dangerously so. She declares herself an agent of a just and good god, even though that deities' influence in the Dread Domains is considerably diminished. Although no commoner would understand the purpose of an esoteric and forgotten god like Heironeous or other lawful good outlander deities, the blessed paladin struggles to maintain a tenuous link with the divine. A blessed order of knighthood may only consist of one or two

exemplars, but the paladin nonetheless obeys the lawful strictures she would in any other realm, and doubly so in Ravenloft. Most heroes of this sort crusade for many years as a cleric or "ordinary" paladin before adopting the strict code of a blessed order.

A blessed paladin takes a vow forsaking all wrongdoing. After she takes this vow, she shines like a beacon to creatures of evil who try to scry or divine her presence. The vast majority of Ravenloft's denizens are obscured in their motives and morality, but the blessed paladin cannot hide her alliance with the forces of light. Her code of honor regards such subterfuge as dishonorable. She no longer wishes to hide, for she is ready to face the worst horrors the world can hurl at her. Commoners state that the candle that burns twice as bright burns half as long — the same principle applies to blessed paladins.

Darklords are keenly aware of the presence of such an exemplar. Most paladins provide a persistent "pain" to the lord of a domain. This disruption is much greater for a blessed paladin. Dreams and visions of the hero's actions may torment the evil overlord by day or night. It is the hero's destiny eventually to face this powerful nemesis in single combat. The Powers themselves demand it.

Hit Die: d10

Requirements

To qualify to become a blessed paladin (Blp), a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

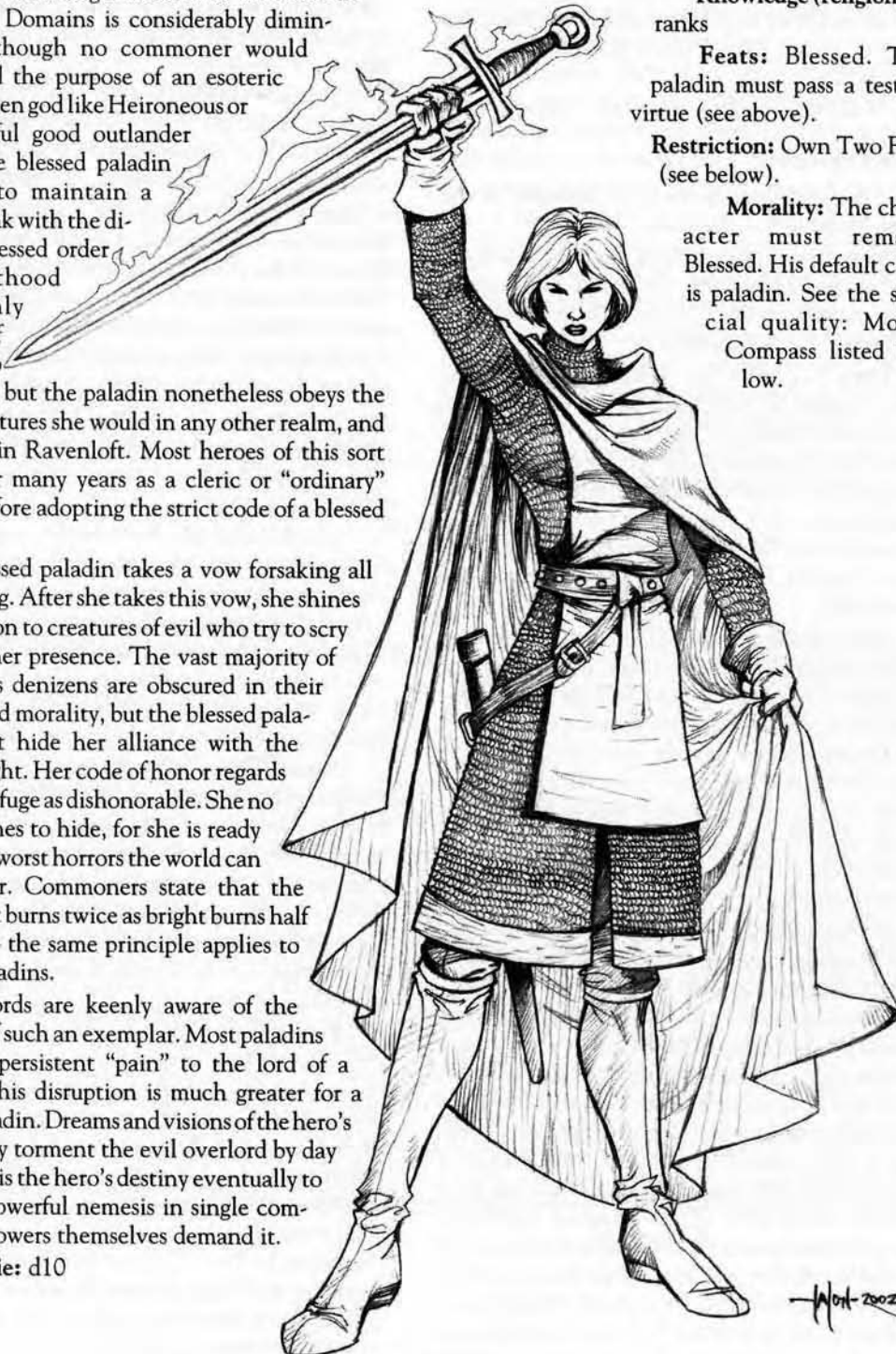
Base Attack Bonus: +4

Knowledge (religion): 5 ranks

Feats: Blessed. The paladin must pass a test of virtue (see above).

Restriction: Own Two Feet (see below).

Morality: The character must remain Blessed. His default class is paladin. See the special quality: Moral Compass listed below.





Class Skills

The blessed paladin's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Profession (Wis), Ride (Dex), and Scry (Wis). See Chapter Four in the *Players Handbook* for skill descriptions.

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All the following are class features of the blessed paladin prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Blessed paladins are proficient with all simple and martial weapons, with all types of armor (heavy, medium, and light), and with shields.

Own Two Feet: The blessed paladin does not gain a mount as a magical beast. Furthermore, levels in this prestige class don't count as paladin levels when improving a mount. Of course, a paladin who has a special mount before taking this prestige class can keep it, as long as he can endure the restrictions Ravenloft places upon these beasts (see Chapter Two of the *Ravenloft Core Rulebook*).

Moral Compass (Ex): The character remains a blessed paladin until he takes any action that requires a Powers check. To keep him on the right path, the blessed paladin develops the ability at 1st level to sense when he is about to stray. As part of this, when the player announces his character is about to take an action that would require this check, the DM should warn him. If the blessed paladin even attempts an action that would require a Powers check, his levels of blessed paladin revert to levels of paladin. (See the Fall from Grace sidebar.) As long as the character obeys this stricture, he can also cast *light* at will.

The DM should note that this class ability has a hidden advantage — under particular circumstances, the paladin instinctively knows whether an act will force a powers check. Thus, he may have some instinctual insight into whether a given subject is evil, neutral, or good. If this becomes a problem, the DM has the option of calling for a Wisdom check (DC 15) to recognize right from wrong in these morally questionable situations. On a failed check, the paladin does not know whether his action will force a powers check. While it may be argued that it is unfair to force the paladin to suffer the consequences of a power check if he

doesn't know whether an action might call for one, a true paladin would never perform an action that might conceivably call for a power check. In other words, if he has to make a wisdom check to figure out if it is evil or not, he probably shouldn't even consider taking the action. If he does do it anyway, he has to suffer the consequences just like anyone else.

Virtue's Challenge (Ex): At 2nd level, the blessed paladin takes a solemn vow to defend the innocent. Once he completes this vow, the DC for a darklord to scry the location of a blessed paladin is reduced (DC = 15 – paladin's combined level of the paladin class and blessed paladin prestige class). However, the paladin can also attempt to scry the darklord's exact location (DC = 25 – paladin's combined level of paladin and blessed paladin).

Although spells cannot be used to detect alignment in Ravenloft, any Divination spell cast on the paladin now reveals that he is lawful good. Obviously, this means that the minions of a domain's darklord will begin to hunt the blessed paladin down.

In exchange for this burden, the paladin's benefits from *protection from evil* improve. That class ability now works against creatures not known to be evil. Just as the paladin reveals his only moral alignment under certain circumstances, so do his evil enemies. (If the GM considers this troublesome, he can require the same Wisdom check specified under the Moral Compass class ability).

Detect Virtue (Sp): At 3rd level, the blessed paladin gains the ability to detect an individual's current state of virtue. By focusing his concentration for one round, the blessed paladin can tell if the object of his concentration is Innocent, Blessed or Moral. This ability, however, does not enable the paladin to determine if a character has strayed from virtue nor the degree of corruption that an individual possesses.

Fervor (Ex): Normally, a character with negative hit points is unconscious and may take no actions, while a character with 0 hit points is disabled, and may take only partial actions (see *PHB*, Chapter 3). Beginning at 4th level, a blessed paladin is considered disabled even if he has negative hit points. He continues to lose one hit point each round until he is stabilized, of course, and he dies when he has –10 hit points. If stabilized, the character will begin to lose hit points again if he performs any strenuous action such as running, attacking, casting a spell, etc.





Holy Ground (Sp): At 5th level, the paladin can cast *consecrate* once per day as a spell-like ability. The spell has additional effects when cast by a blessed paladin. If it is cast in a sinkhole of evil (see **Ravenloft Core Rulebook**, Chapter 3), the effects of the sinkhole are reduced by one rank for one day. If the paladin can dedicate a shrine, altar, or temple to his deity, and defend that location for seven days, the effects on the sinkhole are permanent. As soon as the sinkhole's effects are reduced, the darklord is aware of the effect. No doubt he will dispatch his minions immediately to desecrate it.

Sacred Alliance (Su): At 6th level, the paladin can activate this ability as a free action five times a day. Anyone standing within 5 feet of the blessed paladin receives the benefits of *bless* and *greater magic weapon*. Bestowing this effect upon others is supernatural ability. As long as the blessed paladin is using this ability, he gains its effects as well.

Improved Aura of Courage (Su): At 7th level, the paladin can activate this ability as a free action five times a day. Allies within 10 feet of the paladin gain a +4 morale bonus on saving throws

against Fear and Horror checks. **Hallowed Ground (Sp):** At 8th level, the blessed paladin can cast *hallow* once a day, and the spell has the additional effects of Holy Ground (see above).

Death Ward (Sp): Although this is a necromantic spell, at 9th level, the blessed paladin can cast it three times per day without a powers check.

Last Stand (Su): At 10th level, by permanently sacrificing a point of Wisdom, the blessed paladin can summon the darklord of the domain. The paladin must be standing on holy ground he has consecrated using his Holy Ground class ability. If the paladin leaves this holy ground, the darklord is no longer compelled to travel to it. The darklord automatically knows the exact location of the blessed paladin until the next dawn.

If the blessed paladin engages the darklord in melee combat on holy ground, he gains a +2 sacred bonus to all attacks against the darklord. If he does not have Improved Critical for the melee weapon he is holding when the darklord steps on holy ground, he gains that feat for the duration of combat.

Table 1-4: Blessed Paladin

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells
1	+1	+2	+0	+0	Moral compass	+1 level as paladin
2	+2	+3	+0	+0	Virtue's challenge, improved <i>protection from evil</i>	+1 level as paladin
3	+3	+3	+1	+1	Detect virtue	+1 level as paladin
4	+4	+4	+1	+1	Fervor	+1 level as paladin
5	+5	+4	+1	+1	Holy ground	+1 level as paladin
6	+6	+5	+2	+2	Sacred alliance	+1 level as paladin
7	+7	+5	+2	+2	Improved aura of courage	+1 level as paladin
8	+8	+6	+2	+2	Hallowed ground	+1 level as paladin
9	+9	+6	+3	+3	<i>Death ward</i>	+1 level as paladin
10	+10	+7	+3	+3	Last stand	+1 level as paladin





Blessed Defender

The blessed defender is willing to take a stand against evil in the world, acting as an example for others. His highest obligation is to protect the virtuous, particularly those with the moral fortitude to stand up for what is right. Early in his crusade, he seeks out heroes worthy of his alliance. As they continue to aid him, he trains them to fight as a unit, not by standing behind them, but by fighting alongside them. Together, they hunt the forces of evil with their combined strength.

Unlike the forthright nature of the blessed paladin, the blessed defender spends years building his strength to prepare for his ultimate challenge: a confrontation with the darklord of a realm. Eventually, he is ready to reveal himself to the greatest force of evil in his domain. He takes a vow similar to that of the blessed paladin, but at its conclusion, he names the darklord he is seeking to destroy. As an exemplar of virtue, he is ready for when the most powerful minions of the Dark Domains begin hunting him.

Hit Die: d10

Requirements

To qualify to become a blessed defender (Bld), a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Base Attack Bonus: +4

Knowledge (religion): 5 ranks

Feats: Blessed. The blessed defender must pass a test of virtue (see above).

Restriction: Evil Dead (see below).

Morality: The character must remain Blessed. His default class is paladin. See the special quality: Moral Compass listed below.

Class Skills

The blessed defender's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Profession (Wis), and Ride (Dex). See Chapter Four in the PHB for skill descriptions.

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier

Class Features

All the following are class features of the blessed defender prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Blessed defenders are proficient with all simple and martial

weapons, with all types of armor (heavy, medium, and light), and with shields.

Spells: The blessed defender gains spells as a paladin.

Evil Dead: Although paladins can turn undead, blessed defenders cannot. Levels of this prestige class do not count towards turning attempts.

Moral Compass (Ex): The character remains a blessed paladin until he takes any action that requires a Powers check. To keep him on the right path, the blessed defender develops the ability at 1st level to sense when he is about to stray. As part of this, when the player announces his character is about to take an action that would require this check, the DM should warn him. If the blessed defender even attempts an action that would require a Powers check, his levels of blessed defender revert to levels of paladin. (See the Fall from Grace sidebar.) As long as the character obeys this stricture, he can also cast *light* at will.

The DM should note that this class ability has a hidden advantage — under particular circumstances, the defender instinctively knows whether an act will force a powers check. Thus, he may have some instinctual insight into whether a given subject is evil, neutral, or good. If this becomes a problem, the DM has the option of calling for a Wisdom check (DC 15) to recognize right from wrong in these morally questionable situations. On a failed check, the defender does not know whether his action will force a powers check.

Defender's Edge (Ex): At 2nd level, the blessed defender receives the feat Expertise whether or not he meets the feat's prerequisites. At 3rd level, the defender may use his Expertise to act in defense of a chosen ally within 2 meters of his own location by intercepting attacks meant for that individual. The adjustments to attack and AC increase by -1/+1 every three levels thereafter. Once the defender chooses an individual to protect, he may not alter his choice for the duration of the combat.

Detect Virtue (Sp): At 3rd level, with a successful Wisdom check (DC 20), the blessed defender can tell if a person she is touching is Innocent, Moral, or Penitent. If the check fails, the ability reveals nothing. If the subject is unwilling, this ability automatically fails.

If the character already has this as a feat when she gains this as a class ability, she gains a +4 bonus to this Wisdom check.



Leadership (Ex): Also gained at 3rd level, this ability is still subject to the restrictions on it from the *Ravenloft Core Rulebook*. Fortunately, a blessed defender can test prospective followers with *Detect Virtue*.

Sacred Alliance (Sp): At 4th level, the blessed defender can activate this ability as a full-round action once per day. At the moment this ability is activated, the blessed defender designates everyone within ten feet of his character whom he considers an ally. Each ally receives the benefits of *bless* and *magic weapon* for the next five rounds. The defender does not need to know or memorize these spells; the class ability has the same effects with these alterations to

duration and area of effect.

Inspire Courage (Sp): At 5th level, the blessed defender can pray to his gods, instilling courage in his allies. All allies within a 30-foot radius of the paladin gain a +1 attack bonus, +1 to all skill checks, and a +1 to Will saves (these bonuses are competence bonuses). These benefits last one minute per round of prayer, to a maximum of five minutes.

Defensive Awareness (Ex): At 6th level, the blessed defender gains the extraordinary ability to react to danger before his senses would normally allow him to even be aware of it. At 7th level and above, he retains his Dexterity bonus to AC (if any) regardless of being caught flat-footed or struck by an invisible attacker. He still loses any Dexterity bonus to AC if immobilized.

Improved Aura of Courage (Su): At 7th level, the blessed defender can activate this ability as a free action five times a day. Allies within 10 feet of the defender gain a +4 morale bonus on saving throws against Horror checks.

Healing Circle (Sp): At 8th level, the blessed defender can cast *healing circle* three times per day. Once per day, if the blessed defender is reduced to negative hit points but not killed (in other words, has more than -10 hit points), he casts *healing circle* automatically as a free action. The defender need not be conscious to use this ability.

Virtue's Challenge (Su): By the time he has reached 9th level, the blessed defender has no





Chapter One

doubt spent years amassing a small army of heroes to seek and destroy evil. He is now ready to reveal himself to the most powerful creature in his domain. The blessed defender takes a solemn vow to destroy a darklord. Once he completes this vow, the difficulty for a darklord to Scry the location of a blessed defender is reduced (DC = 15 – defender's level; levels of paladin and blessed defender both count towards this). However, the defender can also attempt to scry the darklord's exact location (DC = 25 – defender's level).

Inspired (Su): At 10th level, the blessed defender gains a sacred bonus to all attacks when he is within 5 feet of someone who is virtuous (he

is "standing next to" that character). He receives a +1 sacred bonus if he is standing next to a Moral character, a +2 sacred bonus if he is standing next to another Blessed character, or a +3 sacred bonus if he is standing next to an Innocent. He can be "adjacent" to up to eight Medium-size characters, but he only gets the benefit for the most virtuous hero standing next to him.

Damage Resistance (Ex): Also at 10th level, the blessed defender gains damage resistance of 5/-. When in direct his chosen dark lord (see above), the blessed defender's damage resistance increases to 10/+3.

Table 1-5: Blessed Defender

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells
1	+1	+2	+0	+0	Moral compass	+1 per level of existing class
2	+2	+3	+0	+0	Defender's edge	+1 per level of existing class
3	+3	+3	+1	+1	Detect virtue, leadership	+1 per level of existing class
4	+4	+4	+1	+1	Sacred alliance	+1 per level of existing class
5	+5	+4	+1	+1	Inspire courage	+1 per level of existing class
6	+6	+5	+2	+2	Defense awareness (Dex to AC)	+1 as paladin
7	+7	+5	+2	+2	Improved aura of courage	+1 per level of existing class
8	+8	+6	+2	+2	Healing circle	+1 per level of existing class
9	+9	+6	+3	+3	Virtue's challenge	+1 per level of existing class
10	+10	+7	+3	+3	Inspired, damage reduction 5	+1 as paladin

Detective

The detective acts as the eyes and ears of the law, enforcing the strictures society demands. He may be an official agent of law enforcement or one of the unofficial counterparts, as in the case of a "consulting detective." His greatest obligations are to truth and justice, as well as the laws of the domain in which he resides. All too often, the worst crimes in a domain are motivated or perpetrated by the seductive lure of evil forces. When the nobility or government he supports must turn a blind eye to a shadowy crusade against corruption, the detective must leave his position of authority, turning instead to fellow adventurers and investigators for aid.

The detective's dedication to law is so great that he must obey the laws of any domain he is in, even if that domain is corrupt. If he consciously breaks the law, he must take a level in another class before he can take further levels as a detective. Even then, he may suffer circumstance penalties when dealing with legal authorities, circumventing some of the distinctive advantages of this profession.

Hit Die: d6

Requirements

To qualify to become a detective (Dtc), a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Base Attack Bonus: +3

Sense Motive: 5 ranks

Feats: Track

Special: Lawful alignment

Class Skills

The detective's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Alchemy (Int), Appraise (Int), Bluff (Cha), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Decipher Script (Int, exclusive skill), Diplomacy (Cha), Disguise (Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Jump (Str), Knowledge (Int), Knowledge [law] (Int, exclusive skill), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Profession (Wis), Search (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis), Speak Language (Int), Spellcraft (Int), Spot (Wis). See Chapter Four in the *PHB* for skill descriptions.

Skill Points at Each Level: 8 + Int modifier.

Class features

All the following are class features of the detective prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A detective is proficient with all simple weapons. Additionally, the detective is proficient with one of the following weapons: longbow, composite longbow, longsword, rapier, sap, short composite bow, short sword, shortbow, or whip. Detectives are also proficient with light armor, medium armor and shields.

Scene of the Crime (Ex): At 1st level, by analyzing the scene of a crime and studying minute clues, the detective can assess the motives or background of a single criminal. This ability draws on the detective's familiarity with the criminal mind. The detective makes a Search check for the entire crime scene; the result determines what he can find.





Determine motive	DC 15
Determine race and gender	DC 20
Determine primary class	DC 25

Knowledge (law) (Ex): Also at 1st level, the detective gains one rank in this unique and restrictive prestige class skill. At first level, he must declare his domain of origin. When he makes a check regarding the laws of a different domain, he suffers a -10 penalty to all rolls. This penalty can be negated if the detective spends at least one month in the other domain, studying its laws and history for at least one hour per day. The detective can make skill checks to learn what actions are legal, what typical punishments for crimes might be, the identities of the domain's most wanted criminals, and answer other legal questions. Other types of information are available at the DM's discretion.

Target Bonus (Ex): At 2nd level, the detective understands his quarry so well that he gains a +1 competence bonus to attack rolls against one specific individual. To receive this benefit, the detective must spy on the target for one day. The detective also applies this bonus to Bluff, Listen, Search, Sense Motive, and Spot checks when using these skills against the chosen target. The detective gains an addition +1 competence bonus at 5th level and again at 8th level.

Chemistry (Ex): Also at 2nd level, the detective becomes a master of analyzing alchemical substances. He gains a +4 insight bonus to Alchemy checks that do not involve making items.

Investigative Feat (Ex): Beginning at 3rd level, the detective gains an additional bonus investigative feat with additional feats at 7th and 9th level. These bonus feats must be drawn from the following list: Alertness, Sharp-Eyed, Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Skill Focus (Sense Motive), Trustworthy.

Uncanny Dodge (Ex): At 4th level, the detective learns to evade many kinds of attacks, retaining his Dexterity bonus to AC regardless of being caught flat-footed or attacked by an invisible foe. He still loses his Dexterity bonus to AC if immobilized.

Ethical Hunch (Ex): At 10th level, after talking to an individual for one full minute, the detective can deduce the ethical alignment of the character with whom he is conversing. On a successful Sense Motive check (DC 25), the detective learns whether the individual is lawful, neutral, or chaotic. A second Sense Motive check (DC 30) can tell whether that character is good or evil.

Table 1-7: Detective

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1	+0	+0	+2	+0	Scene of the Crime, Knowledge (law)
2	+1	+0	+3	+0	Target bonus +1, chemistry
3	+2	+1	+3	+1	Investigative feat
4	+3	+1	+4	+1	Uncanny dodge (Dex bonus to AC)
5	+3	+1	+4	+1	Target bonus +2
6	+4	+2	+5	+2	Uncanny dodge (can't be flanked)
7	+5	+2	+5	+2	Investigative feat
8	+6	+2	+6	+2	Target bonus +3
9	+6	+3	+6	+3	Investigative feat
10	+7	+3	+7	+3	Ethical hunch



Dilettante

With wealth comes privilege. When ordinary people find their way to great wealth, they find the opportunity to shelter themselves from the harsh realities of the "real world." Even heroes may come into wealth, whether through looted treasure, political patronage, auspicious marriage, or the sudden demise of wealthy relatives. Surrounded by luxury, they may soon forget the tribulations of work, want, or suffering.

The wealthy and influential are tempted to remain isolated from those who are less fortunate than themselves. Even the wealthy cannot fully escape from the petty evils of avarice, vanity, jealousy, or false pride. Aristocrats prefer to remain distant from the concerns of mere commoners, but the dilettante continues to meddle in the affairs of others. If she is heroic, she may even strive to use her wealth and influence to make the world a better place.

In the Renaissance realms, male dilettantes are sometimes known as "dandies." Women dilettantes are often courted for their wealth, but their financial advantages grant them freedom and independence few marriages can provide.

Hit Die: d6

Requirements

To qualify to become a dilettante (Dtt), a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Base Attack Bonus: +2

Diplomacy: 5 ranks

Feats: Wealth

Special: The player and DM should explain how the character has suddenly come to a position of wealth and privilege. If both agree, this could become part of the plot of an adventure; upon its completion, the character acquires her first level of this prestige class.

Class Skills

The dilettante's class skills, and the key ability for each, are as follows (see Chapter 4: Skills for skill descriptions): Appraise (Int), Bluff (Cha), Diplomacy (Cha), Innuendo (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (Int), Listen (Wis), Perform (Cha), Ride (Dex), Sense Motive (Wis), Speak Language (none). See Chapter Four in the PHB for skill descriptions.

Skill Points: 6 + Int modifier.

Class features

All the following are class features of the dilettante prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: The dilettante is proficient with all simple weapons. Additionally, the dilettante is proficient with one of the following weapons: longbow, composite longbow, longsword, rapier, sap, short composite bow, short sword, shortbow, or whip. Dilettantes are proficient with light armor, medium armor, and shields.





Chapter One

Spells (Sp): The dilettante even dabbles in magic, gaining spells as a bard on alternate levels.

Provenance (Ex): Once each week, beginning at 1st level, the dilettante can roll a d20 against her level. If she succeeds, she receives a sudden windfall of money. She may choose one of her character classes and roll her "starting wealth" again; the money is in her possession within a week. This class ability replaces the benefits of the Wealth feat.

Dabbler (Ex): At 2nd level, the dilettante may choose a non-exclusive skill she does not have as a class skill. When she take this skill, it becomes a class skill for her. She may choose a second non-exclusive skill at 5th level and a third at 7th level.

Inspire Confidence (Ex): Beginning at 3rd level, a dilettante can use oratory to inspire confidence in allies. To inspire confidence, the dilettante must speak, and the allies must hear the dilettante speaking, for at least one round. The dilettante must make a Diplomacy check with a DC equal to 10 +1 per five allies to be inspired (including the dilettante).

An ally inspired with confidence gains a +1 attack bonus, +1 to all skill checks, and a +1 to Will saves (these bonuses are competence bonuses). The effect begins as soon as the dilettante ends an inspirational speech and lasts for 10 minutes for every round that the dilettante spent inspiring the

allies, to a maximum of 5 hours for 30 rounds of inspiration. Thus, a dilettante who speaks for 6 rounds grants the bonus for 60 minutes. The dilettante may attempt to use this ability once per day. Whether or not the Diplomacy check succeeds, the dilettante may not attempt to inspire confidence again for at least 24 hours.

The confidence inspired by the dilettante increases as the dilettante attains levels. This bonus increases by +1 at 6th level and again at 9th level.

Master Diplomat (Ex): At 4th level, the dilettante gains the bonus feat Skill Focus (Diplomat), with a +3 bonus, rather than the normal +2. If the dilettante already has that feat before gaining this class ability, the bonus increases to +4.

Seen About Town (Ex): At 8th level, the dilettante gains the bonus feat Skill Focus (Gather Information), with a +3 bonus, rather than the normal +2. If the dilettante already has that class feat before gaining this ability, the bonus increases to +4.

Leadership (Ex): At 10th level, the dilettante gains the Leadership feat. The dilettante has found companions who will rally to her aid. This ability is still limited by the restrictions found in Chapter Two of the Ravenloft Core Rulebook.

Table 1-6: The Dilettante

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells
1	+0	+0	+2	+2	Provenance	
2	+1	+0	+3	+3	Dabbler	+1 level as bard
3	+2	+1	+3	+3	Inspire confidence +1	
4	+3	+1	+4	+4	Master diplomat	+1 level as bard
5	+3	+1	+4	+4	Dabbler (2nd skill)	
6	+4	+2	+5	+5	Inspire confidence +2	+1 level as bard
7	+5	+2	+5	+5	Dabbler (3rd skill)	
8	+6	+2	+6	+6	Seen about town	+1 level as bard
9	+6	+3	+6	+6	Inspire confidence +3	
10	+7	+3	+7	+7	Leadership	+1 level as bard.



Knight Errant

The knight errant does not owe fealty to a feudal lord. As a reward for his service, or perhaps as a test of his worth, he roams a domain seeking wrongs to right, evils to chastise, and innocents to rescue. Although he is not obligated to follow the same code of conduct as a paladin, he must be lawful enough to obey the dictates of the local

nobility, even if their decisions are swayed by the local darklord. However, he cannot follow orders that require him to commit evil acts or make powers checks, which is no doubt part of the reason he took up such a quest in the first place.

In the Renaissance realms, these heroes are sometimes known as cavalrymen. Many are former military men who have retired to find their own way in life. Because they have managed to remain uncorrupted by the horrors of war, many are confi-





dent that they are strong enough when that path leads them toward conflict with the forces of evil.

Hit Die: d10

Requirements

To qualify to become a knight errant (KnE), a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Base Attack Bonus: +3

Ride: 5 ranks

Feats: Mounted Combat

Special: Lawful alignment.

Morality: The knight errant must be Virtuous. His default class is fighter.

Class Skills

The knight errant's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Jump (Str), Profession (Wis), Ride (Dex), and Swim (Str). See Chapter Four in the *PHB* for skill descriptions.

Class features

All the following are class features of the knight errant prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Knights errant are proficient with all simple and martial weapons, with all types of armor (heavy, medium, and light), and with shields. They prefer the lance, for obvious reasons.

Mounted Combat Feat (Ex): The knight errant gains an additional bonus feat at 1st, 2nd, and 4th level. These bonus feats must be drawn from the following list: Mounted Archery, Spirited Charge, Ride-By Attack or Trample.

Exceptional Mount (Su): Upon or after reaching 5th level, a knight errant can call an unusually intelligent, strong, and loyal steed to serve her in her crusade against evil. This mount is usually a heavy warhorse (for a Medium-size character) or a war pony (for a Small character). This mount has all the advantages of a magical beast. Like the paladin's mount, it has improved evasion and the ability to share saving throws. The mount also has the benefits of a Bestial Conscience (see the "Feats" section for more details).

A knight errant must be Virtuous to keep this mount; if he becomes corrupted, the magical beast has such a strong sense of virtue that it attacks its former master.

Table 1-8: Knight Errant

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1	+1	+2	+0	+0	Mounted combat feat
2	+2	+3	+0	+0	Mounted combat feat
3	+3	+3	+1	+1	Ride +2
4	+4	+4	+1	+1	Mounted combat feat
5	+5	+4	+1	+1	Exceptional mount



Metaphysician

The student of metaphysics seeks not only to heal the body and mind, but also the spirit of her patients. She struggles to master magic and the study of the supernatural as scientific endeavors. The mysteries of the human mind, the physical sciences, and even reality itself are laid bare by the metaphysician's insight. The metaphysician aspires to be more than human (or "more than a mere humanoid"), holding himself to a higher standard of morals and ethics than those who do not pursue his obscure studies.

Metaphysicians are eager to share what they have learned with other scholars, but sadly, the esoteric nature of their studies makes their discoveries unfathomable to the common man. The metaphysician is willing to lecture others on what he has learned, and his insights make him a master of public speaking. No two metaphysicians can agree on the same terminology, however, which makes such lectures a *mélange* of pseudo-scientific babble and egotistical ravings.

Powerful metaphysicians believe they can transcend the very limitations of reality, eventually ascending to the intellectual purity of the astral plane. By then, egotism, delusions, or arrogance begin to overwhelm the once rational mind. Tormented by the horrors of the realm of Ravenloft, the metaphysician can only find a surcease to his suffering outside the boundaries of the physical world in realms of platonic contemplation. Few have the drive to master this prestige class.

Hit Die: d4

Requirements

To qualify to become a metaphysician (Mps), a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Base Attack Bonus: +3

Sense Motive: 5 ranks

Feats: Trustworthy

Special: The character must know how to cast 0-level arcane spells.

Restriction: Cloud Men's Minds (see below).

Morality: The metaphysician must hold himself to a higher standard of morals and ethics than mere mortals. He must be Virtuous. If he strays from this path, his default class is sorcerer.

Class Skills

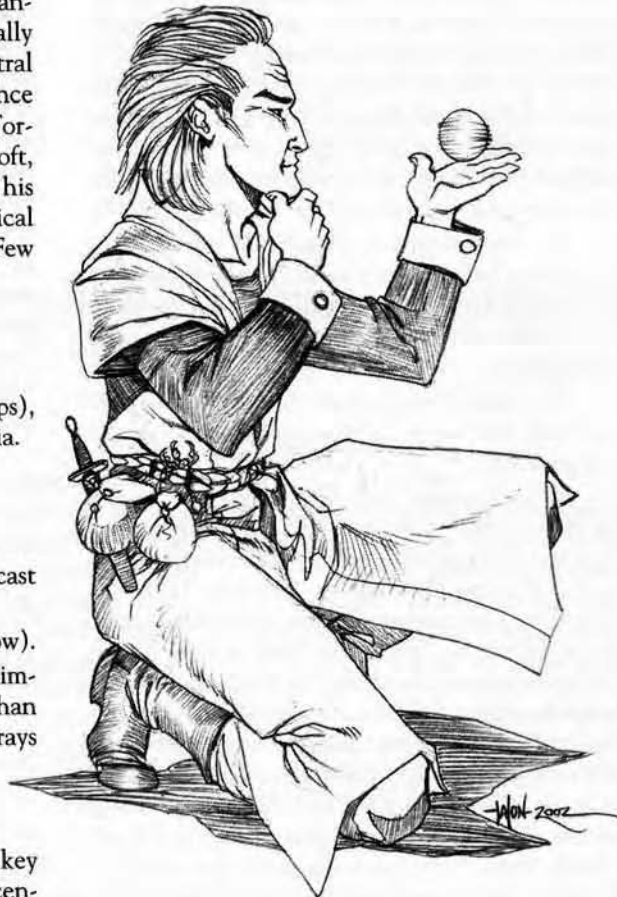
The metaphysician's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Alchemy (Int), Concen-

tration (Con), Craft (Int), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Profession (Wis), Scry (Int, exclusive skill), and Spellcraft (Int).

Skill Points at Each Additional Level: 4 + Int modifier.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Like the sorcerer, metaphysicians are proficient with all simple weapons. They are not proficient with any type of armor, or with shields. Armor of any type interferes with a sorcerer's arcane gestures, which can cause his spells to fail (if those spells have somatic components).

Cloud Men's Minds: *The metaphysician gains spells as a sorcerer, but must choose one school of magic as an area of expertise. He can only learn mind-affecting sorcerer spells and spells from his chosen school.* **Mind Healer (Ex):** At 1st level, the metaphysician begins her study of logic and reason by studying madness. Any character afflicted with Madness gains a +4 bonus to Will saves for recovering from it while under the care of a trained mind healer.





Lecturer (Ex): Also at 1st level, the metaphysician gains one rank in Perform, with “lecture” as his specialization.

Spell Focus (Mind-Affecting) (Sp): At 2nd level, the metaphysician gets the effect of Spell Focus for any spell described as a “mind affecting,” as if mind-affecting spells were a separate school of magic.

Alchemical Healing (Sp): At 3rd level, the metaphysician becomes a master of chemistry and pharmacy. He can craft one *cure light wounds* potion each day with a successful Alchemy check (DC 15). Crafting the potion takes eight hours of work and 20 gp of alchemical supplies.

As a master of chemistry, the metaphysician also gains a +4 insight bonus to Alchemy checks that do not involve making things.

Hypnosis (Ex): At 4th level, the metaphysician gains this exclusive skill as a class skill.

Master Lecturer: Beginning at 5th level, a metaphysician can use his lectures or poetics to produce extraordinary effects on those around him once per day per level. Depending on the ranks he has in the Perform skill, he can *inspire courage* in allies, *fascinate* a creature, make a *suggestion* to a fascinated creature, or help others perform skills better. As with casting a spell with a verbal component (see PHB, Chapter 10), a deaf metaphysician suffers a 20% chance to fail with lectures. If he fails, the attempt still counts against his daily limit.

If a metaphysician already has one level of bard when he becomes a Master Lecturer, he gains a +2 competence bonus on all Perform checks for using *inspire courage*, *inspire competence*, *fascinate*, or *suggestion*.

The metaphysician gains the following Master Lecturer abilities as he increases his ranks in the Perform skill.

Inspire Courage (Su): A master lecturer with 3 or more ranks in Perform (lecture) can inspire courage in his allies, bolstering them against fear and improving their combat abilities. To be affected, an ally must hear the metaphysician lecture for a full round. The effect lasts as long as the metaphysician lectures and for 5 rounds after he stops lecturing, or 5 rounds after the ally can no longer hear the metaphysician. While lecturing, the metaphysician can fight but cannot cast spells. Affected allies receive a +2 morale bonus to saving throws against *charm* and *fear* effects and a +1 morale bonus to attack and weapon damage rolls.

Inspire courage is a supernatural, mind-affecting ability.

Inspire Competence (Su): A master lecturer with 6 or more ranks in Perform can use his poetics to help an ally succeed at a task. The ally must be able to see and hear the metaphysician and must be within 30 feet. The metaphysician must also see the ally. Depending on the task that the ally has at hand, the metaphysician may use his words to lift the ally’s spirits, helping the ally focus mentally. The ally gets a +2 competence bonus on his skill checks with a particular skill (chosen when the metaphysician begins to lecture) as long as he or she continues to hear the metaphysician’s lecture. The DM may rule that certain uses of this ability are infeasible — giving a tirade to make a rogue move more quietly, for example, is self-defeating. The metaphysician can maintain the effect for 2 minutes (long enough for the ally to take 20). Inspire competence is a supernatural, mind-affecting ability.

Fascinate (Su): A master lecturer with 3 or more ranks in Perform can use his lectures or poetics to *fascinate* a creature. The creature to be fascinated must be able to see and hear the metaphysician and must be within 90 feet. The metaphysician must also see the creature. The creature must be able to pay attention to the metaphysician. The distraction of a nearby combat or other dangers prevents the ability from working.

The metaphysician makes a Perform check, opposed by his foe’s Will. If the creature resists the fascination attempt, the metaphysician cannot attempt to fascinate that creature again for 24 hours. If the saving throw fails, the creature sits quietly and listens to the lecture for up to 1 round per level of the metaphysician.

While fascinated, the target’s Spot and Listen checks suffer a –4 penalty. Any potential threat (such as an ally of the metaphysician moving behind the fascinated creature) allows the fascinated creature a second saving throw against a new Perform check result. Any obvious threat, such as casting a spell, drawing a sword, or aiming, automatically breaks the effect.

While fascinating (or attempting to fascinate) a creature, the metaphysician must concentrate, as if casting or maintaining a spell.

Suggestion (Sp): A master lecturer with 9 or more ranks in Perform can make a *suggestion* (as the spell) to a creature that he has already fascinated (see above). The *suggestion* doesn’t count against





the metaphysician's daily limit on metaphysician lectures (one per day per level), but the fascination does. A Will saving throw (DC 13 + the metaphysician's Charisma modifier) negates the effect

Rationalist (Ex): At 6th level, the metaphysician not only has a broad knowledge base regarding the occult, but also a thorough understanding of the supernatural. When the metaphysician encounters a supernatural creature or magical phenomenon that would force a Fear or Horror check, she can give a brief lecture to bolster the morale of her allies.

Every ally listening to the rationalist's lecture gains a +2 bonus to Fear or Horror checks caused by that creature or phenomenon (these bonuses are competence bonuses). The benefits last for one minute per round spent lecturing, to a maximum of five minutes. Unfortunately, some rationalists facing the unknown are so paralyzed by their encounters with the supernatural that they endlessly lecture while their companions actually confront the horrors before them. This ability can be used three times per day.

Ethereal Empathy (Su): At 7th level, the metaphysician's insight now extends beyond the mere limitations of physical matter. As such, he may consider himself far superior to mere mortals, speaking of his inevitable ascent to the astral plane. This feat appears in Chapter Two of the *Ravenloft Core Rulebook*. If the metaphysician already has

this feat when he gains this class ability, he gains a +2 competence bonus on all Wisdom checks to use it.

Ethereal Jaunt (Sp): At 8th level, the metaphysician gains the ability to become ethereal, as in the spell *ethereal jaunt* (see *PHB*). This spell-like ability may be used three times per day.

Skeptic (Su): At 9th level, after mastering the mundane limitations of matter and the mind, the metaphysician becomes so arrogant that he is resistant to the magic of other arcane spellcasters. By chanting a mantra of metaphysical precepts as a full-round action, the metaphysician can shield himself and anyone within 5 feet of him from the arcane spells of others. For the duration of his chanting, he and everyone within five feet of him gains a Spell Resistance of (5 + character level).

Astral Projection (Sp): Normally, this accomplishment is the purview of sorcerers and wizards who are 18th level or higher. At 10th level, the metaphysician can attain this ultimate state of intellectual perfection once per week. Unfortunately, the strain takes its toll on this ambitious intellectual. If his total character level is less than 18, the metaphysician develops a delusion for 24 hours (as defined in the Madness rules in Chapter Two of the *Ravenloft Core Rulebook*). At the conclusion of the spell's duration, the metaphysician's mind automatically returns to the realm of Ravenloft.

Table 1-9: Metaphysician

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells
1	+0	+0	+0	+2	Lecturer, mind healer	+1 per level as sorcerer
2	+1	+0	+0	+3	Spell focus (Mind-Affecting)	+1 per level as sorcerer
3	+1	+1	+1	+3	Alchemical healing	+1 per level as sorcerer
4	+2	+1	+1	+4	Hypnotism	+1 per level as sorcerer
5	+2	+1	+1	+4	Master lecturer	+1 per level as sorcerer
6	+3	+2	+2	+5	Rationalist	+1 per level as sorcerer
7	+3	+2	+2	+5	Ethereal empathy	+1 per level as sorcerer
8	+4	+2	+2	+6	<i>Ethereal Jaunt</i>	+1 per level as sorcerer
9	+4	+3	+3	+6	Skeptic	+1 per level as sorcerer
10	+5	+3	+3	+7	<i>Astral Projection</i>	+1 per level as sorcerer



Scholar

When a hero's higher calling is truth and knowledge, he must often pursue the same sense of dedication as a paladin or priest. Granted, most scholars don't face the same immediate physical danger that heroes do, but some are willing to accompany adventurers on their crusades, taking up the opportunity to do research "in the field." While this may seem reckless, heroes facing the unknown sometimes gain a definite advantage by bringing along an expert. Few scholars openly claim to be masters of the arcane, occult, or supernatural sciences, but many reputable sorts are drawn to such fascinating and forbidden studies.

An insidious DM may grant a party of adventurers the patronage of a wealthy individual or esteemed university in the Renaissance realms, but only on one condition. The heroes must take a scholar with them to observe what they see and experience. Scholars who manage to escape the "ivory tower" of academe learn to apply their vast array of knowledge in whatever profession they pursue.

Hit Die: d6

Requirements

To qualify to become a scholar (Sch), a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Base Attack Bonus: +1

Knowledge (any four): 5 ranks

Special: The character must be literate. If a character cannot read, he can take the Literacy feat to overcome this disadvantage.

Class Skills

The scholar's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Alchemy (Int), Bluff (Cha), Concentration (Int), Craft (Int), Decipher Script (Int, exclusive skill), Diplomacy (Cha), Disable Device (Int), Disguise (Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Innuendo (Wis), Intuit Direction (Wis), Jump (Str), Knowledge (any) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Open Lock (Dex), Perform (Cha), Pick Pocket (Dex), Profession [scholar] (Wis), Read Lips (Int, exclusive skill), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), Spellcraft (Wis), Spot (Wis), Swim (Str). See Chapter Four in the *Players Handbook* for skill descriptions.

Skill Points at Each Level: 6 + Int modifier.

Class features

All the following are class features of the scholar prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: At 1st level, a scholar is proficient with three simple weapons. He is not proficient with other weapons, armor, or shields. However, each time he gains a level in this prestige class, he can learn to use another simple weapon.

Knowledgeable (Ex): At 1st level, the scholar gains four ranks in Knowledge skills. This is the equivalent of have a +2 in two Knowledge skills. The scholar gains another four ranks at 3rd and 4th levels. A character can never have more ranks in a skill than his maximum allowed rank.

Labyrinth of Knowledge (Ex): At 2nd level, the scholar has access to a personal library that can

Table 1-11: Scholar

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1	+0	+0	+0	+2	Knowledgeable
2	+1	+0	+0	+3	Labyrinth of knowledge
3	+2	+1	+1	+3	Eidetic recall, knowledgeable
4	+3	+1	+1	+4	Improved skill focus, knowledgeable
5	+3	+1	+1	+4	True scholar, lifelong learning





be housed in his normal living quarters. The library is not easily portable, and so cannot be taken on adventures without considerable effort. If the scholar has access to his personal library, he gains a +4 competence bonus on any skill check that could benefit from consulting it. Note that if the character does not have at least one rank in a particular Knowledge skill, he cannot make a skill check for that particular information.

Eidetic Recall (Ex): At 3rd level, if the scholar does not have the Eidetic Memory feat (see Feats, below), he gains it immediately. If a character with Eidetic Recall also has Eidetic Memory, he can

take 10 or 20 on checks to remember specific details.

Improved Skill Focus (Ex): At 4th level, whenever the scholar takes the Skill Focus feat, he gains a +3 bonus instead of a +2.

True Scholar (Ex): At 5th level, the scholar gains a +2 insight bonus on all Knowledge checks. However, a Knowledge skill remains untrained for the scholar until he adds skill ranks to it.

Lifelong Learning (Ex): At 5th level, a scholar learns to extend his knowledge to any other profession he pursues. For each level he earns in another class or prestige class afterwards, he gains two extra skill points per level. For instance, a Scholar 5/Bard 1 would have eight skill points instead of six for his first level of bard. This doesn't apply to classes or prestige classes that grant eight skill points, however, such as the rogue.





True Innocent

Any innocent who can survive the perils, temptations, and corruption of Ravenloft untouched has the essence of a hero. The true innocent is that rare individual who can maintain her innocence until adulthood. From an early age, her appearance and demeanor set her above other children, making her seem almost supernatural. Because this unusual background is above and beyond what one would expect for a player character, this is primarily appropriate for NPCs. An adventurous and open-minded DM may allow it as an option for a first-level character, but not without some serious consideration.

A few true innocents are marked in some way at birth, either by distinctive birthmarks, unusual physical features (such as red hair in a village where everyone is blonde), or simple physical beauty. Such children are feared almost as much as they are praised, for the presence of a child with such purity inevitably draws the attention of evil forces. Such adversity makes keeping one's innocence even more difficult. When the girl becomes a woman, or the boy becomes a man, the Innocent must choose whether to accept that destiny or cast it aside. Accepting such a monumental role in a realm ruled by evil changes that person into a true innocent.

If someone — whether a party of heroes, a village, or even a secret society — can keep the fated individual sheltered and safe until adulthood, the true innocent holds the potential to change the world. The cathartic moment when the NPC takes

the first level in this prestige class is often accompanied by a dangerous or heroic event in the domain, one the forces of evil cannot help but notice. Appropriately, true innocents are particularly useful in certain esoteric and evil rituals of sacrifice.

Hit Die: d6

Requirements

To qualify to become a true innocent (TrI), a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Base Attack Bonus: +1

Skill: None

Feats: None

Special: Any Innocent commoner or Innocent character with an NPC class can take this prestige class, provided that individual has enough experience to meet its prerequisites. A character with levels in a PC class cannot take this NPC prestige class.

Morality: Innocent. The default class is commoner.

Class Skills

The true innocent's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Handle Animal (Cha), Jump (Str), Listen (Wis), Profession (Int), Ride (Dex), Spot (Wis), Swim (Str), and Use Rope (Dex). See Chapter 4: Skills in the Player's Handbook for skill descriptions.

See Chapter Four in the *PHB* for skill descriptions.

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier

Table 1-12: True Innocent

NPC Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save
1st	+0	+0	+0	+0
2nd	+1	+0	+0	+0
3rd	+1	+1	+1	+1
4th	+2	+1	+1	+1
5th	+2	+1	+1	+1

Special

Simple faith, inspire courage

Protection from evil

Divine grace

Improved aura of courage

Lay on hands

Class features

All the following are class features of the true innocent prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: The true innocent is proficient with one simple weapon. She is not proficient with weapons, armor, or shields.

Simple Faith (Su): Innocence is a prerequisite of this prestige class. If the True Innocent loses this state of grace, she loses all the benefits of this class. Her default class is commoner.

Inspire Courage (Sp): At 1st level, the true innocent can give a brief *prayer* to instill courage in the Virtuous. An ally inspired with courage gains a +1 attack bonus, +1 to all skill checks and a +1 to Will saves (these bonuses are competence bonuses). These benefits last for one minute (up to a maximum of five minutes) for each round of *prayer*,

Protection from Evil (Sp): At 2nd level, the true innocent can cast *protection from evil*. As with the paladin's ability, this only works on creatures known to be evil. At the DM's discretion, the True Innocent may attempt a Will save (DC 20) in the presence of evil to recognize it for what it is. If the check succeeds, the ability is activated.

Divine Grace (Ex): At 3rd level, a true innocent applies her Charisma modifier (if positive) as a bonus to all saving throws. This is in addition to normal saving throw bonuses.

Improved Aura of Courage (Su): At 4th level, a true innocent is immune to fear (magical or otherwise). Allies within 10 feet of the true innocent gain a +4 morale bonus on saving throws against fear effects. Unlike the paladin's ability, this also applies to Fear saves.

Lay on Hands (Su): At 5th level, the true innocent can heal wounds by touch. Each day she can cure a total number of hit points equal to her Charisma bonus (if any) times her level. She may choose to divide her curing among multiple recipients, and she doesn't have to use it all at once. Lay on hands is a spell-like ability whose use is a standard action. Unlike the paladin, she is too selfless to use this ability on herself. In addition, she cannot use this ability to deal damage to undead creatures.



White Arcanist

The white arcanist possesses great knowledge and power, along with the responsibility that this entails. He dares to fathom the secrets of necromancy, but is careful to preserve the sanctity of his own soul while doing so. The white arcanist not only risks the possibility of corruption by dabbling in the necromantic arts, but also faces the temptations of the powers he commands. Only the very virtuous and morally responsible can walk the narrow path between these two fates. If the white arcanist can complete this dangerous journey, he may overcome the limitations of life and death.

Hit Die: d4

Requirements

To qualify to become a white arcanist (WhA), a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Base Attack Bonus: +2

Knowledge (arcana): 5 ranks

Feats: Spell Focus (Necromancy)

Special: The white arcanist can be a human, halfling, or dwarf. He must also have the ability to cast 1st-level arcane spells.

Morality: The white arcanist must remain Virtuous. His default class is sorcerer. He gains an additional benefit at 2nd-level if he is Blessed.

Class Skills

The white arcanist's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Alchemy (Int), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Profession (Wis), Scry (Int, exclusive skill), and Spellcraft (Int). See Chapter Four in the *PHB* for skill descriptions.

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class features

All the following are class features of the white arcanist prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Like sorcerers, white arcanists are proficient with all simple weapons. They are not proficient with any type of armor or shields. Armor of any type interferes with the hero's arcane gestures, which can cause his spells to fail (if those spells have somatic components).

Spells (Sp): The white arcanist learns spells as a sorcerer, albeit with a few restrictions after 1st level (see Necromantic Focus, below). He also gains one level of sorcerer spell casting ability per two levels of white arcanist.

Spell Penetration (Sp): At 1st level, the white arcanist must choose a school of sorcery as an area of expertise. He immediately gains the spell penetration feat for spells from his chosen school.

Table 1-13: White Arcanist

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells
1	+0	+0	+0	+2	Arcane knowledge, spell penetration	+1 per level of existing class
2	+1	+0	+0	+3	Major arcana (<i>fear</i> , 3/day) Necromantic focus	
3	+1	+1	+1	+3	Darkvision 60 ft.	+1 per level of existing class
4	+2	+1	+1	+4	Major arcana (<i>disrupt undead</i> 3/day)	
5	+2	+1	+1	+4	Resistant to mind-affecting spells	+1 per level of existing class
6	+3	+2	+2	+5	Major Arcana (<i>speak with dead</i> 3/day)	
7	+3	+2	+2	+5	Pale protection	+1 per level of existing class
8	+4	+2	+2	+6	Major arcana (<i>invisible to undead</i> 1/hr)	
9	+4	+3	+3	+6	Major arcana (<i>ethereal jaunt</i> 3/day)	+1 level of existing class
10	+5	+3	+3	+7	Living death	

Arcane Knowledge (Ex): Beginning at 1st level, just as bards pick up stray knowledge while wandering the land, arcanists learn a vast amount of arcane and occult lore while traveling. An arcanist may make a Knowledge (arcana) check with a bonus equal to his level to see whether he knows some relevant information about local notable people, legendary items or noteworthy places.

Unlike the Ravenloft version of the bard, the white arcanist doesn't need to spend time familiarizing himself with a domain he is studying. Instead, he chooses one domain as his "home domain." Count the minimum number of domains that the arcanist would have to travel through to get to the domain that he is studying. Each intervening domain confers a -1 to this check. The white arcanist can add one to his roll for every class level he has gained.

The white arcanist's knowledge base isn't as broad as the bard's however. It only applies to the arcane and occult. This check will not reveal the powers of a magic item, but may give a hint as to its general function. The arcanist may not take 10 or take 20 on this check; this sort of knowledge is essentially random. The DM determines the DC of the check by considering the table for bardic knowledge in the PHB.

As an exception to the rules, a white arcanist who Falls from Grace (see sidebar) doesn't lose this class ability.

Necromantic Focus (Sp): The white arcanist may continue to cast spells he knew before he gained levels in this prestige class. Beginning with 2nd level, any further spells the white arcanist learns must either come from the school he chose at first level or from the school of Necromancy. This means that the 0 level and 1st level spells he

knows are not restricted.

If the white arcanist is Blessed, he can also cast *gentle repose* on other Blessed characters at will; he does not need to make a powers check to cast this spell.

Major Arcana (Sp): Beginning at 2nd level, the white arcanist gains the ability to cast certain spells, collectively known as his *major arcana*. The white arcanist does not need to make a powers check for using the class abilities based upon these spells.

If a white arcanist ever becomes corrupted, all his white arcanist levels revert to levels of sorcerer. As an exception to the rules, he retains these five class abilities if he Falls from Grace (see the sidebar), but he must make powers checks when using them afterward.

At 2nd level, the white arcanist can cast *fear* three times per day. At 4th level, the white arcanist may also cast *disrupt undead* three times per day.

At 8th level, once per hour, the white arcanist can cast *invisibility to*





Chapter One

undead. If an intelligent undead makes his saving throw to see through this ward, or if the arcanist takes an action that ends the spell, he must wait one hour before casting the spell again.

At 9th level, the white arcanist can cast *ethereal jaunt* three times per day.

Darkvision (60 ft.) (Su): The white arcanist gains this ability at 3rd level. If the white arcanist already has darkvision, he can add another 60 feet to its range when he gains this class ability.

Resistant to Mind-Affecting Spells (Su): At 5th level, the white arcanist gains a +6 sacred bonus to resist spells with the mind-affecting descriptor (such as *command*, *hypnotism*, or *suggestion*).

Major Arcana (Sp): At 6th level, the white arcanist may add speak with dead 3 x day to his list of spells from his *major arcana*.

Pale Protection (Su): At 7th level, the white arcanist begins to appear unnaturally pale, and the flow of his blood becomes sluggish. He gains a +6

sacred bonus to saving throws against poison, stunning, and disease.

Living Death (Su): At 10th level, the white arcanist becomes an intelligent undead. Immediately apply the ghost template from the MM, Appendix 3. As part of this, the character effectively has no Constitution, and all his Hit Dice become d12's. He gains the manifestation ability, but does not immediately gain any special abilities. Instead, each time he gains a level in another class, he can gain one of those abilities (including those listed in the **Ravenloft Core Rulebook**). The maximum number of special abilities gained in this fashion is equal to the character's Charisma modifier.

The undead white arcanist remains independent of the will of the darklords until he reaches the final stage of corruption. If he has remained uncorrupted through ten levels of this prestige class, perhaps he holds some faith that he will never face that eventuality.

Fall from Grace

A character that no longer meets the prerequisites for a prestige class loses all the benefits of that prestige class. At that point, some changes in the character are necessary. If you must, remove the character from play long enough for his ethical (and game mechanic) issues to be resolved. The DM should consider the following guidelines in the interim.

The Simple Method:

You lose all the class abilities of that prestige class. You revert to the default class, but don't gain any of its class abilities until you take another level in that class.

The Precise Method:

- When a prestige class reverts to a "default class," the character's attack bonus, saving throws, and hit points do not change. These progressions are the same for the prestige class as they are for the default class.

- Class skills and skill points do not change for those levels, even if the prestige class has more ranks than the default class. After all, a character cannot forget what he has learned.

- The character does not gain the class abilities of the default class, either. If he does gain another level in the default class, he can replace the class abilities of the lowest level of the default class you've gained. For instance, if you lose a prestige class and default to a 5th-level paladin, you do not automatically gain a special mount. When you gained another level and became a 6th-level paladin, however, you would gain that special ability.

- The character does not lose feats or bonus feats. If a feat has Virtuous or Blessed as a prerequisite, he still loses the benefits of that feat, but for different reasons.

- The character's list of spells known does not change. For instance, a sorcerer's selection of spells remains the same. If he had a restriction before, he doesn't have it anymore.

If the character wishes to once again qualify for his lost prestige class, he must exert every effort to atone for past failures, renew his commitment to combat evil and undergo considerable danger and testing on arduous quests to restore his good name and sense of self. Once he has sufficiently atoned (when both player and DM agree that the character has shown remorse and a renewal of himself), he may once again begin advancing in his prestige class. He begins at the bottom of the experience points needed to advance to the next level when doing so. Should he lose his way again, the prestige class is thereafter barred to him.



Feats

Most of the feats listed below are only available to characters who abide by the rules for Virtuous heroes listed in the previous chapter. Remember that a character who no longer meets the prerequisites for a feat loses the benefits of that feat, as well as any others that depend on it. In most cases, if a character improves enough to fulfill the prerequisite again, the character regains the benefits of the feat. If the obligation is dependent on his level of virtue, however, the hero may find it impossible to recover from corruption. Once he reaches the second stage of corruption, the feat he has purchased not only disappears, but can never be replaced, even if the hero should somehow redeem himself. When heroes fall, they fall hard.

Bestial Conscience

If you share an empathic link with a familiar, you are moral enough to attempt to sway its emotions when it contemplates an evil or treacherous act. You can overcome a few of the limitations of a Dread Companion (see Chapter Two of the *Ravenloft Core Rulebook*), but only if you are vigilant.

Prerequisite: Good alignment. Arcane spellcaster with a familiar, or paladin with a mount.

Benefit: Just as a Dread Companion is privy to your thoughts, you are marginally aware of its thoughts and feelings. You can attempt a Sense Motive roll to sense when this magical beast is contemplating treacherous or evil deeds (DC = 10 + dread companion's Will save). Whether the DM allows you to make this check at any time, insists that you wait until he calls for such a roll, or makes the roll secretly is a matter of personal preference.

In any case, when you sense this prevarication, you can make an opposed Will check to dissuade it from doing something you find morally distasteful. If you are Blessed (see below), you receive a +5 sacred bonus to both of these checks.

Blessed

You are not only aware of the existence of evil, but have pledged to oppose it. By attaining a state of grace, you have avoided the Caress of Evil, the first stage of Corruption. If you lose this feat, you lose the benefits of every feat that has it as a prerequisite.

Prerequisite: Special (see below)

Benefit: All blessed characters receive a +2 morale bonus on Fear checks and Horror checks. Divination spells can reveal that someone is Blessed.

How a character takes this feat depends on her alignment:

- An Innocent character can take this feat voluntarily. She simply loses her quality of Innocence and becomes Blessed instead.

- A Moral character must take the Test of Virtue feat as a prerequisite. Taking the feat is a sign to the DM that the character aspires to be Blessed. If the character then passes a *test of virtue*, that feat is replaced by the Blessed feat. See the Test of Virtue sidebar for more details.

- Once a character reaches the first level of corruption, she cannot benefit from this feat unless she become Penitent again. A character who reaches the second stage of the corruption, the Enticement, permanently loses any benefit from this feat. It can never be replaced or swapped with another one. Her sacrifice has been in vain, for she has betrayed her ideals.

Optional Rule: A Penitent character who has never been corrupted — that is, who hasn't succumbed to the first stage of corruption, the Caress — can sacrifice a character level to become Moral. If the character is of a neutral alignment (whether chaotic neutral, "true" neutral, or lawful neutral), she must adopt a good alignment at that time. After advancing one level, she can then attempt another *test of virtue*.

Conscience

Your conscience aids you when you attract the attention of the Dark Powers.

Prerequisite: Blessed

Benefit: Once per game session, you may reroll the "ones" die of a percentile roll for a powers check. You must accept the result of that reroll.

Dabblers

You have the ability to learn many skills usually unavailable to those of your profession or class.

Prerequisite: Your domain of origin must have a Renaissance cultural level, or you must have spent at least a year in a Renaissance domain.

Benefit: Choose a non-exclusive skill you do not have as a class skill. When you take this feat, it becomes a class skill for you.

Special: Each time you take this feat, it applies to a different skill.





Chapter One

Detect Virtue

You are able to sense another person's moral character if she is willing to let you do so.

Prerequisite: Virtue's Challenge (special ability) or Blessed (feat)

Benefit: With a successful Wisdom check (DC 20), you can tell if a willing person you are touching is Innocent, Moral or Penitent. If the check fails, the ability reveals nothing. If the subject is unwilling, this feat automatically fails.

Eidetic Memory

Your ability to tap into your memories is prodigious and you remember even the slightest detail of past events as if you were experiencing them again.

Prerequisite: Int13+

Benefit: Extraordinary gentlemen and gallant lady adventurers often have a highly developed sense of attention to detail when recalling their exploits. A character with this feat gains a +10 competence bonus on any Intelligence check to remember details of specific memories. The character cannot take 10 or 20 on this check, however. The character also gains a +5 competence bonus on any Will save to resist a spell that would alter that memory (such as *modify memory*).

Heroism

You gain inner strength and the will to resist your fears from you past efforts. This feat is only available to a Ravenloft commoner or a character whose current level is an NPC class. The character vows to perform an act of heroism when he takes this feat. If he does so, and survives, he gains the first level of a player character class.

Prerequisite: Innocent or Blessed characters can take this feat.

Benefit: After performing this act of heroism, the character gains a +1 sacred bonus against Fear saves.

Hope

You can inspire others with your faith in their abilities. Some heroes are more confident in their abilities when they know they are aided by the virtuous.

Prerequisite: Blessed

Benefit: Once each day, you can grant another good character a +4 sacred bonus to any one skill. You must state a brief blessing involving the

name of a good deity (from any realm) to bestow this blessing. The subject must be able to see and hear you.

Flaw: On behalf of the Dark Powers, one evil character or creature within one mile can make a Wisdom check (DC = 10 + your level) when you invoke this ability. On a successful check, the evil character knows your exact location at that moment, and it knows that you are Virtuous.

Kiss of Dawn

Your dedication to the light gives you a benefit in preparing your spells.

Prerequisite: Good alignment, arcane spellcaster

Benefit: You regain all of your spells at dawn. When the sun rises, this feat takes effect. Even if you cast all your spells minutes before sunrise, you will regain them with the first rays of the sun.

Normal: Normally, an arcane spellcaster who casts a spell must wait twenty-four hours before she can cast the spell again.

Knowledgeable

You are a quick learner, a true Renaissance scholar. You're driven to dabble in a vast array of scientific and artistic fields.

Prerequisite: Int 13

Benefit: Each time you take this feat, you gain another four ranks in Knowledge skills. (If Knowledge skills are class skills for you, this is the equivalent of two +2 bonuses.) In no case can you have more ranks in a Knowledge skill than your maximum rank.

Library

You possess a collection of books, one that features many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore.

Prerequisite: Literacy

Benefit: Each time you take this feat, it applies to two Knowledge skills. When you can access your personal library, you gain a +2 competence bonus to all informational checks involving those two skills.

Literacy

It is often said that knowledge is the greatest weapon against the forces of evil. Even if you don't agree, you should be able to look up who said it.

Prerequisite: none





Benefit: If you couldn't read before, you can read now. If you can already read, or if you've taken this feat a second time, you gain a +4 bonus when using Search checks to find information in books. (See the sidebar on "Searching for Knowledge" for more details on such checks.)

Resolute

You maintain the faint hope that virtue, by its very nature, can ultimately triumph over evil. Although modest, you believe that you are that virtuous.

Prerequisite: Blessed

Benefit: You get a +2 sacred bonus against Fear saves.

Sanctity

Your beliefs comfort you in your darkest hour.

Prerequisite: Blessed

Benefit: You get a +2 sacred bonus on Horror saves.

Sanity

Because your morality grants you a measure of mental stability, you find it easier to hold on to your sanity in an unkind world.

Prerequisite: Blessed

Benefit: You get a +2 sacred bonus against Madness saves.

Secret Society

You belong to a secret society that provides a tangible benefit to its members.

Prerequisite: You must meet the qualifications of the society in question.

Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus to Innuendo checks when secretly conversing with other members of your society. Once a week, you can consult with another member of the society about a matter relevant to the group. At the end of that week, you can take 20 on a Knowledge check (with a DC set by the DM) to ascertain the answers to your questions.

Test of Virtue

When a character takes this feat, it signifies to the Gamemaster that he is ready to undertake a *test of virtue*. The test lasts for the duration of one character level. More precisely, it begins when the character gains a character level, and lasts until he reaches the following level.

For instance, if Camilla takes the Test of Virtue feat when she reaches 3rd level, the test begins immediately; it lasts until she reaches 4th level. Level drain doesn't change this. If Camilla loses two levels to a wight, she still can't finish the test until she's 4th level.

During that time, the character must try to avoid taking any action that requires a powers check. If he does take an action that requires a powers check, he automatically fails the *test of virtue*. If you succeed at the powers check, you can try the *test of virtue* again after you've gained another character level. If you fail the powers check, of course, you've been corrupted.

The moment a character succeeds at this test, the Test of Virtue feat is replaced by the Blessed feat. He can then benefit from that feat as long as he avoids the first stage of corruption. A character must be Moral (see Introduction) before he can attempt a *test of virtue*.

Prerequisite: A character taking this feat must be Moral.

Benefit: The feat has no benefit until you pass a test of virtue.

Unicorn's Fellowship

Animal companions summoned by a druid are tormented by conflict, balancing their loyalty to the druid against the demands of the local darklord. A blessed druid's virtue is strong enough to resolve such conflict, calming the frenzied urges of animal companions.

Prerequisite: Blessed, Druid

Benefit: Spells subject to the "Animal Companions" rules (see **Ravenloft Core Rulebook**, Chapter 2) are not altered for you. Because your druid is blessed, her animal companions do not shadow or spy on her but instead obey her commands.

University Education

You have the benefits of having studied in a place of higher learning.

Prerequisite: Your domain of origin must have a Renaissance cultural level. If you do not take this feat at first level, you must live for a year in a major city within a domain with that level of technology before taking this feat.

Benefit: All Knowledge skills become class skills for you. You cannot make skill checks for a Knowledge skill until you spend ranks in it, however.



Wealth

Whether through investment, political influence, or the untimely death of relatives, you gained access to munificent resources when you took this feat.

Prerequisite: none

Benefit: Once each month, make a d20 roll against your character level. If this check succeeds, you can roll starting wealth again for one of your character classes. The money arrives within a week by a method chosen by the DM. You must choose a domain when you take this feat; you can only access these windfalls while you are within that domain.

Searching for Knowledge

Generations of heroes have struggled to not only understand the supernatural world, but also document what they have found. Unfortunately, the scarcity of printing presses, public libraries, and universities throughout the Dread Realms limits the dissemination of such knowledge. Even in realms that have access to such advantages, treatises on the supernatural are often seized, censored, or burned by corrupt rulers. The light of knowledge is furtively passed from one luminary to the next, and only the diligent efforts of secret society allow such treatises to see print. Now that Rudolf van Richten is dead, even his infamous tomes have begun to lapse into obscurity, except for those that have passed into the keeping of his spiritual inheritors, the Weathermay-Foxgrove twins or his other admirers.

On the rare occasion when scholars find esoteric tomes on the occult or supernatural, studying them is still an arduous task. In Ravenloft, characters can use the Search skill to find knowledge hidden in any collection of information, whether that's a private library, stack of tomes, collection of correspondence, or hall of public records. Instead of breaking these searches down round by round through five-by-five foot squares, this use of the skill resembles a Gather Information check. Searching a library for information requires a Search check and 1d4 hours of research. A smaller collection, like a stack of letters in a desk, may require a smaller increment of time, perhaps 1d4 x 10 minutes.

Thorough investigators may want to at least skim a book in its entirety to get the gist of its message and contents. For a literate character reading in a language he understands, "skimming" generally takes one hour per one hundred pages. This not only grants a detailed summary of the book's contents, but also grants a +4 circumstance bonus to further attempts to Search through the book for information.



Chapter Two:
Heroic Societies
In Ravenloft

"Marie Rosine, you look positively brilliant tonight!" The gaudily dressed dandy bowed gracefully over the outstretched hand of the young noblewoman whose entrance had caught the attention of everyone at the soiree.

Marie Rosine inclined her head in gracious recognition of the compliment. "And you are Claude Morain, are you not?" she asked, her tone of voice implying that she knew the identity of the young courtier perfectly well.

Claude finished his bow with a flourish and smiled. "We were afraid you might not be able to attend this gathering," he said. He glanced toward the small crowd of strutting lords and ladies and a few ambitious and overdressed merchants who had come together at the house of Lord Bouvard for another insufferable showing of bad paintings and worse sculpture.

"I would not miss this evening for the world," Marie Rosine said. "Has our host made his entrance yet?" Her voice was all innocence, yet her eyes held a glint of amused anticipation.

Claude shook his head, his dark shoulder length curls exuding a faint, woody perfume from beneath his great plumed hat. "No, and many of the guests seem somewhat concerned at his lateness. He's usually quite eager to show off the works of his latest protégé."

Marie Rosine turned her attention to a slim, blond-haired young man who handed her a glass of wine and mumbled some pleasantries to her before she dismissed him with a smile.

"Let us go out onto the balcony," she said to Claude, who offered her his arm and led her across the stiflingly hot room and through the doorway that gave onto a small balcony overlooking a garden of night-blooming flowers.

Shutting the door behind them, Claude removed his hand and shook his curls. "I hate these affairs," he said.

Marie Rosine nodded. "Can we talk now?" she asked in a low, conspiratorial voice.

Claude smiled. "I don't think we'll be disturbed for a few minutes, at least," he said. "Has everything been taken care of?"

Marie Rosine returned his smile. "Did you doubt me?" she replied. "The rumors I started last week have finally reached the ears of those who matter and I do believe our host will be very late in arriving, if, indeed, he manages to attend at all after Inspector Ray finishes his inquiries into Lord Bouvard's conduct."

"Yes," Claude said. "Three artistic protégés, three mysterious disappearances...including the creator of tonight's showpieces. Until now, no one has ever been able to prove that his lordship had anything to do with the disappearances."

"Do you think the inspector will be able to discern that the evidence linking Bouvard to the latest disappearance is fake?" Marie Rosine said.

Claude shook his head. "I think Inspector Ray knows Bouvard has been hiding something and I don't believe he'll quibble about the veracity of the evidence, so long as the law is upheld. Bouvard will be found guilty of at least three murders."

"Yes, but will he escape punishment?" the young noblewoman sipped her wine thoughtfully.

"He might," Claude replied, "but his reputation will be ruined. He will never be able to hold his own in polite society here in Port-a-Lucine again."

"For murdering three barely adequate artists and profiting from their paintings?" Marie Rosine asked.

"No," Claude said. "For getting caught. That is the greatest crime of all."

"I know," Marie Rosine said softly. "Still, we must take what victories we can. Bouvard's predations, at least, will cease tonight. Tomorrow the investigator may be looking for us."

"At least we have tonight's small triumph," Claude agreed. "Shall we rejoin the party before we're missed?"



A hero cannot be a hero unless in an heroic world.

— Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Journals*



With the power of the dark lords ruling their domains and the ever-growing strength of evil in these cursed lands, it might seem pointless, even downright suicidal for good-aligned characters to form organizations to further their goals. After all, one might ask, how can such societies hope to do any good against the absolute might of the darklords, who at any moment could detect the heroes for what they are, then swoop down and destroy them?

In the end, the answer is simply that such societies exist (and will continue to exist) because, despite appearances to the contrary, evil does not hold absolute sway over Ravenloft. That knowledge alone is enough to keep strong and noble souls struggling to combat the evils they see around them. Not all darklords are powerful or clever enough to look into the hearts of everyone in their domain and ferret out all the members of a good-aligned society, especially if those members are clever enough to move subtly and to avoid challenging the darklord directly unless absolutely necessary.

The Blessed Army of Ezra (Mordent)

The Church of Ezra is at once familiar and bizarre to the denizens of the Land of Mists, its origins shrouded in a well-known mystery and its teachings further obscured by the deep theological and philosophical differences that divide the followers of this strange faith. In many ways, it is amazing that the Church is able to function at all, given the vastly different interpretations and philosophies that the different sects have adopted over time. That people are willing to follow it even with such weighty concerns is a testament to the power that a message of hope has in such a desolate realm. For the basic history of the faith, see the **Ravenloft** setting book.

Those willing to dig deeper than that bit of well-known history and common knowledge, however, soon find that there is much to be learned. After remaining fairly static for several years, the Church of Ezra is once again preparing itself for a shift in the balance of power—one which may well alter the religious landscape of the Core forever. For a decade and a half, the eyes of the realm have been following the sect based out of Nevuchar Springs in Darkon, where the teachings of the

anchorites have turned increasingly darker. This sect bears not only a message of hope for those who believe, but of damnation for those that do not. In the time following the great Requiem, such a fire-and-brimstone message is very well-received by many of the struggling souls who have suffered from the recent trials and are searching for some message of meaning and hope to make it all seem worthwhile. Numbers in Nevuchar Springs have swelled considerably, and the converts keep rolling in, as folk both noble and common search for a way to ensure that at least their next life will be better than their current one. Even the Home Faith of Ezra, ostensibly strictly neutral in ecclesiastical matters, has printed congratulatory edicts for the anchorites and other faithful of Nevuchar Springs, praising their ability to draw an increasing number of converts into Ezra's loving embrace, even in such dark times.

However, while all eyes have been on the sect in Nevuchar Springs, another revolution of the faith has been brewing in Mordent, following a series of sensational visions experienced by a humble old anchorite named Lacrese. According to the testimony Lacrese gave to a secret council of his fellow anchorites, he was tending to the small garden by the Chapel of Pure Hearts, the Mordentshire sect's temple, where he grew vegetables for the poor. Suddenly, a ray of blinding, bright white light enveloped him. Though at first terrified of some strange magic, he heard a woman's voice whisper to him, saying: "Be not afraid. Your strength shall now be called upon in the service of your faith. Do you think yourself strong enough to endure this trial?" Without hesitation, Anchorite Lacrese recited a passage from the second *Book of Ezra*: "I fear no night, for Her light is as a sword that cleaves the darkness."

This answer seemed to please the voice. The voice thanked him for his devotion, and then whispered a single, terrible truth in his ear. She told him that the sect of Nevuchar Springs had been infiltrated by a being of great evil and insidious power, who even now was shaping events that would one day cause that sect to turn against their fellow Ezrans in Mordentshire and slaughter them. They would do this in the name of saving their souls from the Nevuchar's own prophesied great calamity. At once Lacrese could hear the screams of the dying and see the army of the other sect marching on his homeland with shields polished and swords gleaming. At the very last, he glimpsed





the shadow of a foul creature flying over the battlefield, shrouding the souls of the dying in its unholy darkness, collecting them for its own nefarious reasons.

"What you have seen lies ahead, not far from now, but not so near that it must be so," came the woman's voice, full of sorrow. "This is your charge – to build a force that will protect those who serve the light of Ezra, and see to it that word goes out of the glory that follows in Her name, for only then will the true light outshine that of the false sun."

Then, as suddenly as it began, the vision was over, the light gone as swiftly as it had come. Shaken badly but not wanting to waste a moment, Lacrese ran to a few of his trusted fellow anchorites and imparted what he had seen. Such was his state and yet so sure of himself did he seem that they had no choice but to believe him.

The only question that remained was what should be done about it. Acting too swiftly or too obviously would alert the fiend in Nevuchar that they were aware of it before they were ready to confront it and send the rest of the sects into confusion besides. Yet doing nothing was similarly unacceptable, when action had so clearly been called for.

As the anchorites deliberated, they called on more and more of the priests in Mordentshire and beyond, though they were careful to go no further than the Mordent border lest word travel back to their new rival. For well over a month they debated fiercely over how to handle the problem without destroying the Church in the process, until finally they arrived at a solution that everyone agreed upon, sealing it all with a solemn vow of secrecy.

They would publicly announce their encouragement of anyone, common birth or otherwise, who wanted to travel the land spreading the truth of Ezra. While these new worshippers still had to submit to the wisdom and authority of the anchorites, they would otherwise be free to do as they pleased so long as they upheld the ideals of the Church. The creation of this extroverted new group of worshippers, called "speakers," would serve as a colorful distraction from the organization's true purpose: the training of a secret military force. Known as "protectors," these militant worshippers would defend the faithful of Mordent from the prophesied attack as well as search for a way to defeat the foul creature at the heart of the conflict. It was a bold idea, and though many of the anchorites were unhappy at keeping a secret from their

fellows in the other branches of the faith, it was finally decided that what the others didn't know wouldn't hurt them.

So while the ordinary, day-to-day face of the Church of Ezra in Mordent hasn't changed a great deal, behind the scenes, a mix of faith, fear and determination exists as these largely peaceful followers prepare for a conflict that might very well tear the structure of their faith to pieces. For all their new secretiveness, the Ezrans of Mordent who make up the ranks of the Blessed Army of Ezra remain at heart a kind and noble people. They have simply been forced into one of the most agonizing situations imaginable and are trying to resolve it in the best way possible. As Anchorite Lacrese himself has said: "The crusade has already begun – the only question now is whether we shall go forward with the shield of our faith, or fall back and hope our enemy does not overrun us."

And for the brave souls of this outnumbered faith, that's no question at all.

Primary Alignment: Lawful Good. Members of neutral good alignment are tolerated so long as they keep up appearances. Those with chaotic tendencies quickly find themselves butting heads with the anchorites if they're not careful. While Ezra welcomes all of good heart, in reality those who cannot be bothered to follow the ordinary rules of the Church are welcome to practice their faith elsewhere.

Organization

The Church of Ezra follows a rather loose hierarchy as a rule. All of the branches show deference to the Home Faith in Borca, but aside from that they are largely left to their own devices. The only established "titles" within the Church of Ezra are as follows:

Anchorite: A general term for a cleric of Ezra.

Bastion: The leader of one of the four sects.

Praesidius (male)/Praesidia (female): The leader of the Church of Ezra as a whole.

Sentire: The overseer of a significant temple (equivalent to "bishop").

Toret: An anchorite in an established temple.

Warden: A wandering anchorite.

Although different domains and even different areas within the same domain sometimes choose to elaborate on the basic system, they do so with the knowledge that any additional titles so created





carry no weight outside of the branch that supports them.

In addition, members of the Blessed Army of Ezra have begun to recognize two additional titles: speaker and protector. Speakers are those who have given themselves totally to the evangelical work of the faith, spreading the truth and glory of Ezra with eloquent speeches and countless hours spent teaching and tending to those in need of aid. Unlike anchorites, however, speakers need not have read the *Books of Ezra* or even belong to the cleric class. Many common folk with a gift for speech take up the mantle on their own, nominating themselves for the position and letting the approval of their peers and the “blessing of Ezra” determine whether or not they are worthy to keep on proselytizing. The other branches have heard of speakers and generally approve of the idea; though some sects distrust giving the common folk this much power to act on behalf of the Church, none can see much real harm in it, as the anchorites remain in the position of power.

Protectors are another story. They are warriors chosen by the Blessed Army anchorites to act as bodyguards and soldiers for the faith, ostensibly due to the persecution the faith suffers from in some domains but in truth to make ready for the prophesied war between the Mordent sect and the sect of Nevuchar Springs. All protectors are trained extensively in the art of combat, focusing especially on sword and shield techniques but also including pike fighting, group tactics and even military history. Units elect their own captains, and are considered sworn to obey any anchorites who command them (though in practice they heed only the Mordent priests who are aware of them). They also receive a great deal of religious instruction, telling them of Lacrese’s prophecy and why they must make ready to do battle with those who claim to be of their own faith. As a result, the Mordentshire protectors make up some of the most devout followers of the Church, having long since laid any doubts they might have to rest in order to prepare themselves to lay down their lives in the name of their faith when the time finally comes. In the meantime, they train away from prying eyes, occasionally accompanying important members as bodyguards but largely staying out of sight, waiting for their true purpose to come at last.

No other sect has heard of the protectors, and the Blessed Army of Ezra in Mordent works hard to keep it that way. Should the other branches learn

of the prophecy of Lacrese and the preparations they have made surrounding it before the time has come, it could further splinter the faith and leave it vulnerable not only to the Nevuchar sect but to outside enemies as well. More sensitive souls lament having to keep fellow members of the faith in the dark this way, but one look at the chilling words of Lacrese is all it takes to make even the most hesitant ones agree that it really is for the best.

Beliefs

All members of the Blessed Army of Ezra follow the basic teachings of the faith, as described in Chapter Two of the **Ravenloft Core Rulebook**. In addition, those who have read the prophecy of Lacrese hold that the sect of Nevuchar Springs has been slowly taken over by an insidious evil force. They also believe that those corrupted by this evil force soon rise up and make war on their fellow Ezrans in the name of “saving their souls.” In reality, however, the renegades will be using the conflict to harvest souls for their master. At this time, the protectors of the Blessed Army will rise up to defend the faithful in a just and holy war, which will end when the glory of Ezra banishes the foul creature responsible into the Mists forever.

Recognition

Most members of the Church do not bother to keep their allegiance a secret, and freely wear the symbol of the faith. In addition, the wearing of white is traditional for all anchorites, and many members wear white to services as well. While worshippers wear white during services, the clergy wears green with white trim. The amount of white visible indicates the anchorite’s position. In recent times, some of the members of the Blessed Army have also instituted slight variations on the traditional symbol as a means of demonstrating their true allegiance. Those who simply wish to show their membership in the Mordent sect outline their shields in gold, while a speaker’s shield is edged in green, and a protector’s shield is trimmed in deep red (when the protector takes such risks at all). Not all of the sect’s members have adopted these practices, but those who are convinced that the time of the prophecy is upon them are only too quick to adopt these new element as a means of knowing each other.

Base of Operations

While the majority of the faithful still use the Chapel of Pure Hearts as their base of operations,





those who wish to discuss the words of Lacrese and wish to ensure that members of other sects do not stumble on their discussions have developed an elaborate code for determining new places to meet in the area surrounding Mordentshire. Based on the color and type of the flowers left outside of the temple each holy day, the code has so far proven a great success, with no one else the wiser and the temple beautified in the process. Most such meetings are small, with less than a dozen people at a time. The typical informality of the meeting gives the appearance of a debate society or discussion group rather than a true factional gathering.

Membership

At present, only members of the Blessed Army of Ezra openly condone the speakers, and they certainly don't trust members from other branches enough to select them as protectors. Other than that, any interested outsider or member in good standing of the Church of Ezra is welcome to take part in their services – Ezra welcomes worshippers of all races, classes and walks of life, after all. No one has bothered to count the number of speakers,

which fluctuates too often for any reliable tally, but the exact number of protectors is well known to the anchorites in charge of selecting them. Currently, the protectors number 30 — three squads of ten each — with more training all the time.

Requirements to Join

To become a member of the Church of Ezra one need only follow the teachings of Ezra. The Mordent branch is strongly Lawful Good in nature, though neutral characters or those of other good alignments are also welcome so long as they mind their manners and respect the dominant philosophy of the sect. Those seeking to become speakers must merely be acknowledged members who declare their intention to become speakers. Protectors, on the other hand, are selected very carefully by the eldest anchorites in the Blessed Army, tested both subtly and overtly to reveal the extent of their courage, strength and devotion to the faith. Only a handful of the most devout are invited to become protectors, and even then the rigorous training discourages some candidates.



Speakers have no true requirements, though most possess a high Charisma and often a high Wisdom. Some augment their speeches with ranks in skills related to their own style of preaching, while others simply rely on their natural aptitudes to convey the glory of Ezra; so long as their fellow faithful consider their work a success, the methods don't matter much.

Protectors must possess the following feats: Weapon Focus: (longsword) and Iron Will, as well as demonstrate a deep sense of devotion, preferably proven over a period of many years of faithful service.

Secrets

Aside from the concealment of the prophecy of Lacrese and the subsequent creation of the speakers and the protectors as instruments of the faith, there is only one other great secret in the Blessed Army of Ezra. They have a spy in their midst. Quite inadvertently, Honarius, a young anchorite apprentice from Nevuchar Springs overheard a gathering of his elders talking about the prophecy, as well as what Nevuchar's supposed role in this turn of events will be. He has since been able to eavesdrop on three other meetings and has written down everything he's heard as a letter to his master, Bastion Raines, the contents of which, if delivered, could deal a crippling blow to the efforts of the Mordent sect. Honarius himself is torn; while he is frightened by the prophecy and what it entails, he feels duty-bound to report what he has learned; he's just not sure that he would be doing the right thing anymore. Like the leaders of the Blessed Army, he feels caught between his faith and his natural duty to his fellow members. One wrong step in either direction could ignite something very unpleasant. If discovered, Honarius will have to be approached carefully, or his deeper need to please his superiors will take over and he will send the letter.

Prominent Members

Two members of note currently have a large hand in shaping the Blessed Army of Ezra. While others certainly have an impact on the day-to-day workings of the Church as well, these three have come to embody the principles of the faith to many Ezrans.

Anchorite Lacrese: Lacrese (it is the only name he will offer, and no one else remembers otherwise) never wished to be at the heart of a religious firestorm – all he wanted out of life was to live simply and tend to the unfortunate as Ezra commanded. Unfortunately, the goddess had other plans, and his visions have ensured that he would never be just another humble anchorite again. Lacrese does his best to live as simply as possible by residing in a small hut at the edge of one of the farming villages outside Mordentshire. He has asked the other anchorites to swear not to divulge its location in return for making himself available to them whenever they ask. This semi-seclusion has secured for him a small amount of peace, but still not as much as he would like. He takes care, however, to keep his patience when the newest batch of scholars with the same questions come knocking on his door. He often stays up late at night wondering if sharing his visions with the other anchorites was the right thing to do. Though he does not doubt their veracity, he truly loves his fellow beings and hates to see the people of his faith arming themselves to destroy each other, no matter how righteous the cause. Though Lacrese's title within the Church is technically "Toret," those who know him refer to him affectionately as "Bailey Lacrese."

Protector Ellias Nowlen: Current commander of the protectors, Ellias is a stout dwarf who is just starting to show his age a bit (though woe to anyone who mentions it to his face, especially one of his recruits). In typical dwarven fashion, he brooks no nonsense from those under his command, regardless of class or expertise. Training under him is excruciating, just the way he prefers it. His favorite saying is: "The more you sweat in training, the less you bleed on the field." He is surprisingly tender outside of his duties, however, and shows a very un-dwarven fondness for human children. He frequently visits orphanages and the homes of poor families with children, offering money and otherwise doing what he can to make their lives easier. The first and last patrol he takes with his recruits before passing them on to the status of full protectors is to have them walk with him on such rounds. He is fond of saying, "If you can't look a child in the eye and feel good about what you do for a living, you haven't got a life worth having."





The Noble Brotherhood of Assassins

Behind the courtly intrigues and class warfare that riddle the nation of Dementlieu, a shadow faction plays its own games with the arrogant noble families and grasping merchant guilds, but those few outsiders who have learned of this mysterious group and seen them in action are often left scratching their heads in puzzlement. Other groups make plays for power, but this one seems only to care about bringing others down. Others build fortunes over the course of generations, while this society gets its hands on all the money it can find, only to throw it away on peasants and outsiders.

Dementlieu thrives on keeping a properly respectable public face at all times, while these mysterious players seem only to care about tweaking the rules of conformity and stability that hold society together. The group's actions have disgraced and infuriated a large number of powerful individuals over the years, even toppled entire families or guilds from prominence, but so far it has managed to elude all serious retaliation by its enemies. Those who would like to confront the Brotherhood simply cannot fathom how the society works well enough to figure out how to strike back.

The society currently known as the Noble Brotherhood of Assassins was founded over 200 years ago by the third son of a once-powerful noble family. As a boy, the individual now known to history as Mad Lord Kalen, watched as his family was slowly destroyed by the intrigues of rival families who coveted their thriving textile operations. His parents were bound by the unbending laws of etiquette to host lavish balls and masques for the very same men and women who were destroying them, even as their own coffers dwindled to nothing. He grew even more sickened as he watched his parents and older brothers, so noble and benevolent when their riches had been assured, stoop to every dirty trick they could think of in an attempt to regain their position and social standing. All the while, his family struggled to keep up appearances as though nothing was wrong.

Lord Kalen looked on in horror as the parents who had taught him to be compassionate to the poor slashed the wages of their workers time and again in order to keep themselves supplied with the necessary funds to continue with their social calen-

dar. These once decent individuals turned a deaf ear to the outrage and suffering that their actions caused. When he finally dared speak out against these injustices, his parents threw him out of their household, declaring themselves "glad to be one mouth lighter in such a time of desperate need."

Furious at his family and the society that molded them into such heartless creatures, Kalen quickly fell into the company of a group of like-minded young nobles who were also fed up with the rampant corruption and the stark disparity between the elite and the rest of the nation. Even with his newfound friends, however, he felt he was unable to escape the stifling confines of Dementlieu society and the strict codes of etiquette it imposed. Before long Kalen found himself contemplating suicide in a room at a cheap boarding house. Even as he held the knife in his hand, he began to laugh, at first softly, then louder and louder until he was rolling on the floor, overcome with mirth. Hearing the noise, his friends rushed in to see what was the matter, only to find their friend standing calmly by the window, looking out at Port-a-Lucine with a wry smile on his face. "I've got just the thing," he told them, still beaming, and he stayed up all night talking to them and laying out the groundwork for what was at first known as the Brotherhood of the Unseen Hand.

Rather than work from without, he explained, they would instead strike at the corruption of the noble class from within, turning their methods to achieve virtuous ends rather than selfish ones. They would use their power and influence to thwart the careers of wicked leaders while promoting and protecting those who worked for the good of the nation. Most importantly, they would direct it all in secret so that their enemies had no alliance to break, no one family to target, only an array of whispers and shadows they couldn't possibly hope to disband. As a society, they would recruit only those of purest heart and keenest intellect, individuals who could master the tools of the corrupters and still be strong enough to wield them only for good, setting aside their power and influence when they were no longer necessary. Those they recruited would in turn pass their knowledge and training on to others, so that they could reshape Dementlieu over time until it was a nation worthy of calling itself "civilized." This daring proposal struck a chord with this dissatisfied group; as one, the friends swore an oath, and the Unseen Hand was set into motion.



During their early years, the Hand members worked to establish a power structure that was both as pervasive and as anonymous as possible. By employing a number of different aliases and as many as four or five middlemen, members insured that any trails leading back to them would become hopelessly tangled. During this time, their leader acquired his title of Mad Lord Kalen, both for the risks he took and his positively uncanny ability to guess the next move any given number of enemies would make in the complicated and often nearly nonsensical web of Dementlieu politics. It was a name he bore proudly right up to his death, and much of the modern Brotherhood's *joie de vivre* stems from the cheerfully reckless attitude exemplified by their founder. To this day, a particularly clever or ingenious plan is said to have the "Mad Lord's blessing" or to be "something scribbled down by the sly lord." Regardless of what came later on, even Kalen's detractors could not deny his gift for manipulating the powerful and corrupt into sealing their own fates nor his tireless devotion to finding and keeping safe and uncorrupted those rare virtuous souls who made their way into politics.

The other immediate goal of the Hand was to better conditions for the country's poor. They are still very proud of their part in creating the philanthropic system that now even the most callous noble must still contribute to lavishly if he wants to maintain the respect of his peers. Indeed, this early success with turning the code of public behavior to their advantage went a long way to helping keep the Brotherhood alive and inspired in its early days. While still far from satisfied with how the lower class is treated, members continue to relish seeing a pompous lord fake a smile as he grudgingly turns over a large sum of his hard-earned gold to aid the local peasantry. Better still is the sight of a once-haughty merchant forced to politely address his new "equals" after a run of curiously bad luck and some unexpected tax bills have reduced him to living on much simpler means. While they did not see themselves as champions of the poor as such, the members of the Hand also realized that turning the powerful against each other mattered little if the majority of the country still suffered. Therefore, they always took care to see that the lower class benefited from their actions whenever possible.

No matter how much good the Hand accomplished, however, it always seemed that little breaks went against them whenever they were on the

verge of doing something truly revolutionary. Messages went astray, important meetings went unattended, key members met suspicious and inexplicable deaths untraceable to any known enemy. As the years went on, Kalen could be found standing by the window, much as he had that first night when he founded the Hand. Those close enough to hear his words could make out the same muttered phrase, over and over: "He's out there, I know he is, I just know it, and damn it all we still aren't close enough to catching him."

Kalen refused to identify his mysterious adversary. Before long, however, the title of Mad Lord Kalen changed from one of respect and admiration to one of suspicion and even derision among the younger members, many of whom believed he had simply played the game for too long and finally lost his mind within it. In the end, Kalen stepped down as Grandfather of the Brotherhood in order to save it from becoming a laughingstock. From that day until his death five years later, the sly lord worked like any other Cousin, not once commenting about his change of station.

In the years after Mad Lord Kalen's death, the Brotherhood fell into a cycle of expansion and contraction as each generation worked hard to improve on the efforts of the last. Each time, the group suffered some setback that kept them from truly achieving what they set out to do. Many things improved under their watchful eyes, but many more did not, and the Hand began to quietly dwindle in numbers as members were either forced out of the game by threat of exposure or simply lost faith in the cause when it failed to produce the results they desired. In the span of the last 50 years, the Hand was reduced to a paltry 14 members, most of them still Cousins in rank. Twelve years ago, a headstrong Cousin named Isabelle D'Aprix decided to turn things around herself, launching a campaign of scandal and rumor like the Brotherhood had never seen before.

Using every means at her disposal, from favors and influence-gathering to old-fashioned gossip, she humiliated and forced out of power six of the most powerful and cruel nobles in Dementlieu in the span of less than three months. Isabelle laid siege to their reputations with whispers, accusations and ugly truths until her targets resigned from public life in impotent fury, their influence shattered and their careers forever ruined. "I'd rather have an assassin sent after me," one merchant was heard to say, after finding himself exiled from the





halls of power following a particularly vicious scandal. "At least then I would have died a noble death."

Isabelle knew a good thing when she heard it, and less than two weeks later a revitalized Noble Brotherhood of Assassins arose from the ashes of the old Brotherhood of the Unseen Hand with a renewed sense of purpose and vigor.

It was a turn of events Mad Lord Kalen himself would have been proud of.

Since then the Brotherhood has grown with astonishing speed. The Assassins have come back into their element: once again their safehouses are secure enough, their network of informers extensive enough and their coffers full enough for them to begin undermining the powerful and corrupt who consider it their privilege to exploit the poor. Members take full advantage of the extensive system of courtly gossip and intrigue to spread rumors, destroy alliances and stir up feuds between various guilds and families. Such actions often reap large sums of money from the events that follow their efforts. The society's members redistribute as much of that wealth as possible to the poor. The very best not only "assassinate" the illicit fortunes and so-called good names of their enemies, but do it with a satirical twist as well, leaving the victims feeling as though they have been the victims of a colossal prank, without any clear source to retaliate against. And that's just the way the Brotherhood likes to keep it, never giving their enemies a target, forcing them to swing wildly at shadows in private while they keep up the polite public face that their laws of etiquette demand.

Primary Alignment: Chaotic Good. While members do their best to work within the system, that doesn't mean they have any real love of the rules it is based on, and gleefully twist them to their own ends whenever possible.

Organization

When he first formed the Brotherhood, Mad Lord Kalen immediately structured it after what he had lost – a family. There are three levels or "generations" of membership in the Assassins, corresponding to how long an individual has been a member and how much he or she has accomplished on behalf of the society. Those newly initiated into the Brotherhood are addressed as "Son" or "Daughter" by older members, and treated much the same way: older members expect and forgive a certain amount of mistakes from them and provide what

advice and other resources when called upon. In return, new members are expected to learn as much as they can and to obey any orders they are given by a superior, whom they refer to as either "Mother," "Father," or "Cousin," depending on the difference in seniority.

Most initiates retain the designation "Child" for a period of no less than two and no more than five years. Less time doesn't provide them with enough experience to be trusted with more authority; more time means they might not really be cut out for the Brotherhood, as slow learners and those overly reliant on others lack what it takes to rise in the ranks of the Assassins. Most new members spend this time watching the great guilds and conspiracies at work, learning the way politics and business work together so that they can eventually use the same tricks to tear them apart.

When a group of new members feel they are ready, they can request a Trial, which consists of a challenge or quest devised by at least three older members. Though all Trials are different, some fairly common elements include sabotaging a destructive political alliance, undercutting the price of some common commodity (thus easing the burden on the poor), or even arranging to have a particularly corrupt leader imprisoned.

Only one Trial may be requested a year. Those who fail suffer no particular scorn or derision from other members. Quite a few Children require at least two tries to pass their Trial, and some as many as four. Even if they fail, Children are expected to learn from their mistakes before trying again. Once they have passed their Trial, they have earned the right to be called "Cousin" by their fellows, recognizing that, although they are not yet ready for the challenges of "parenting" new member, they are no longer dependent on their elders to take care of them.

Cousins form the most active part of the Brotherhood on a day-to-day level, taking the carefully thought-out plans devised by the group's Mothers and Fathers and putting them into action. They are also free to develop and pursue their own strategies so long as they are in keeping with the goals of the society. At any given time, the Assassins are primarily composed of Cousins. Some members have stayed at this rank for a decade or more. A handful refuse to move any higher, so in love are they with manipulating the intricate web of politics, wealth and power to bring down the corrupt and better serve the needs of the people. No small attractive-





ness of this rank is the degree of flexibility it enjoys within the ranks of the society. While Cousins are still expected to perform tasks for their elders when called upon, they have no responsibility to teach new members. In practice most Cousins are left to their own devices, trusted to uphold the goals and ideals of the Brotherhood in whatever manner they deem best.

Although it is a popular rumor among the Cousins that the final test of ascendancy is secretive and brutal in the extreme, in fact there is no particular test at all to acquire the title of Mother or Father within the Brotherhood. The highest ranks are simply bestowed on those who clearly deserve it, as judged by the existing Mothers and Fathers in the area. Indeed, the most typical way Cousins learn of their promotion is when a Child addresses them by their new title in the presence of a senior member, who simply smiles and leaves the "oversight" uncorrected. Once a member has ascended to this rank, he is responsible not only for furthering the goals of the Brotherhood, but also for seeking out potential members to carry on the society's goals, a process which requires deal of time and a highly discriminating eye for character.

At the very highest level of the Brotherhood is the Grandfather (or Grandmother); only one is ever in power at a time, chosen by the Mothers and Fathers in a popular vote among themselves. All of the Children and even some of the Cousins are unaware of the existence of this rank, and are so enlightened only when more experienced members feel it is necessary.

The word of the Grandfather is as close to absolute law as the society allows, and his judgment in the case of any disputes among members is considered final. Much of the Grandfather's time is usually spent coordinating the activities of the Assassins as a whole, ensuring that members do not accidentally foil each other's schemes and taking care that all of the members' efforts are furthering the long-term goals of the society. The individual who occupies this station is the living heart of each generation of the Brotherhood and accorded appropriate reverence and protection by those who know of him. It is said that if all the other members were to be captured and put to death, a Grandmother or Grandfather could keep the society alive and eventually rebuild it; but if the Brotherhood's leader were to die, the entire Brotherhood would be dealt a crippling, perhaps even fatal blow.

Groups of Assassins, known as Families, are still quite rare, though they occasionally form in response to a call for help or to deal with a particularly large or complicated problem. They last as long as necessary, then dissolve back into the body of the Brotherhood, usually within a year at the most.

Beliefs

Initiates into the Noble Brotherhood of Assassins are taught three tenets to live by: justice, temperance and secrecy. They learn that justice is seldom the literal law of the land, for too often laws are written by the corrupt to serve their own self-interest. For the Brotherhood, justice involves seeing that the wealthy and powerful are treated as they truly deserve. Still, the image of the Brotherhood as mere class warriors determined to bring down all forms of nobility and prestige is simply a myth, as they will go to great lengths to aid those in power whom they see as worthy of the position. In the extensive network of power plays and backstabbing that comprises Dementlieuse politics, however, such truly good-hearted leaders are so rare as to be almost nonexistent.

The next tenet is temperance. Drawn largely from the same upper class stock as their enemies and manipulating things from the shadows as they do, it is only too tempting for an Assassin to start indulging in the same things that she is supposedly fighting against. At the same time, when faced with the disparity between the plight of the poor and the rampant corruption of the powerful, it is far too easy to slide from employing good if somewhat underhanded tactics to committing outright evil acts such as murder or theft for its own sake. Brotherhood members must always take care to see that their actions do not harm innocents or accidentally further the cause of wickedness. Humiliating an arrogant noble with a series of satirical speeches may well soften the sway his callous opinion has on local politics. If, however, the frustrated noble returns to his estate and begins taking his anger out on his servants or the local farmers, the Assassin has just created as much of a problem as he hoped to alleviate. To help keep their own intentions noble, many members develop a wry and playful sense of humor as they go about their schemes, trying never to take any one venture so seriously they lose sight of why they started it or what they're fighting for in the first place.



The final tenet is secrecy. The Brotherhood is well aware that if the full extent of their existence were ever brought to light, they would quickly be destroyed by the outraged elite, and all their efforts would have been in vain. Assassins swear a sacred vow to die before betraying the Brotherhood, its secrets or its members. They are expected to go so far as to end their own lives if such an action is the only way to uphold this vow. This oath of secrecy also extends to the ways the Brotherhood pursues its goals. Acts of violence and blatant political maneuvering are seen as too dangerous, the potential of the member's discovery too high. The use of canny bureaucratic strategy, scandal-mongering and even clever thievery to further one's goals is held in high regard. After all, the Brotherhood has been subtly manipulating events for over two centuries now, and see no need to expose its hand with a series of mindlessly violent or foolishly short-sighted actions. Taking risks is one thing; being foolhardy with the secrecy of the society and the safety of one's fellow members is quite another.

Contrary to what those few outsiders that are aware of the Brotherhood might believe, the Assassins are truly uninterested in attaining any lasting power for themselves. While they can and do acquire various favors and influence in the course of their schemes, these benefits serve as a means to their nobler end and are typically discarded when the task is complete.

Likewise, their fearsome name is simply that – the Assassins will not kill save to defend their own lives or the lives of innocents. Members who develop a reputation for enjoying violence of any kind are quickly “corrected” by their seniors. After all, they walk a very fine line between acting as a mysterious force for good and turning into another of the endless self-absorbed conspiracies that dominate Dementlieu politics. All Assassins feel this distinction very keenly. Members keep a close watch on each other for signs that someone has lost sight of the group's goals and has started playing the game for the wrong reasons. Those who stray are quickly visited by their fellows and set back on the right path. Should they stray again, they are abducted by their companions and forced into exile, with a grim warning not to return to Dementlieu or attempt to compromise the secrecy of the sect. No one knows what would happen if an exile tried to return, but it might just be the one time the Brotherhood does violate one of its own rules.

Recognition

The Noble Brotherhood of Assassins recognizes no common symbol among its members, nor does it employ a particular language or code. With so many spies sneaking about in the halls of power, such things would quickly attract too much unhealthy attention. Instead, at least once a year the Mothers and Fathers gather and decide on a motif or code that they are going to use that year, which is then distributed to the members and used until the next cipher is formulated. This can lead to some confusion on the part of newer or more isolated members, but somehow the Assassins seem to know each other when they run in the same circles. Whether this is due to their similar philosophies and training, or just one of Mad Lord Kalen's gifts to his errant children remains unknown at this time.

Base of Operations

Although they have various small safehouses and secret hideaways scattered throughout Dementlieu, their true headquarters and main meeting area lies among the vacant ruins of a once-palatial estate house outside of Chateaufaux. This former bastion of elegance sits quietly rotting in the middle of its overgrown gardens, comfortably far away from the thousand prying eyes of the city. Legend within the Brotherhood states that it was once the family home of Mad Lord Kalen himself, and that his watchful ghost ensures that no spies ever carry away news of their secret meetings. Though no one knows whether the sly lord's shade does indeed haunt the grounds of the estate, or if the estate even belonged to his family, the ghost stories ensure that the nearby villagers stay well away from the “haunted manor.” This state of affairs suits the Brotherhood just fine.

Recently, the Brotherhood attempted to establish another more permanent safehouse in Port-a-Lucine, but thanks to the diligent efforts of the investigator Alanik Ray, the members involved were forced to withdraw or face arrest on a number of charges of conspiracy and sedition. The Brotherhood realizes that they need to move more strongly into that city. At the same time, however, their hands are tied by the presence of Alanik. This persistent investigator has no interest in the Brotherhood's cause but is also clearly undeserving of the group's enmity. For the time being, the Brotherhood is at a loss as to how to proceed.



Other members, primarily younger ones, have opened up the possibility of expanding the Brotherhood beyond Dementlieu to help combat similar repressive regimes in other realms. They rally behind the philosophy that “freedom means nothing while others remain in chains.” While the elder membership has no objection to this in theory (and are secretly pleased at the idealism such an initiative displays), most are still quick to remind their young colleagues that it is their duty to bring justice and liberty to Dementlieu first. One master has cautioned such youthful enthusiasts with the following maxim: “Put your own house in order before traveling abroad.” Faced with a lack of sufficient support and organization outside of the domain, the proposal remains only a suggestion for now.

Membership

Members of the Noble Brotherhood of Assassins are drawn largely from the ranks of the Dementlieu nobility or from some of the powerful merchant guilds that share the upper ranks of society. While open to members of other origins, those not raised in the insular halls of power find it difficult (though not impossible) to understand the game well enough to be able to manipulate it as the Assassins do, and their recruitment reflects this. Still, a few members of the lower class and some foreigners demonstrate an instinctive grasp of the ideals and methods that the society embodies. The Brotherhood happily accepts such members whenever they are found. After all, if the Brotherhood exists to remove the corrupt from power and reward the worthy for their virtue, what better way to begin than by making sure its own ranks represent a triumph of skill and integrity as opposed to a mere accident of birth?

At present, there are a total of thirty-two members of the Brotherhood, with seven Children, eighteen Cousins, four Fathers, two Mothers and one Grandmother (see below). Most are rogues and bards by training, though a fair number of fighters, wizards and sorcerers are also represented, as well as a small but devoted handful of clerics. Paladins and monks typically find the tactics of the group unacceptable, while the more wilderness-oriented classes find the Assassins’ largely urban orientation stifling.

Though its numbers are relatively small, the Brotherhood always remains alert for prospective members.

Requirements to Join

All prospective members of the Brotherhood of Assassins must demonstrate a good grasp of politics, information gathering and subterfuge, as well as the willingness to embrace and promote the society’s ideals. They must also be intimately familiar with land of Dementlieu, especially its history and current political climate, before they will even be considered for membership. Secondary expertise in a particular area that is potentially useful to the society’s goals – disguise, stealth, escape artistry, even artistic performance – is also looked on favorably, though it is by no means a necessity.

Members of the Noble Brotherhood of Assassins are either Neutral or Chaotic Good. Lawful characters simply don’t have it in them to bend and twist the rules the way the Brotherhood requires. A prospective member may be of any class, but must have at least eight ranks in the Diplomacy and Area Knowledge (Dementlieu) skills as well as a minimum of six ranks each in the skills Information Gathering and Bluff.

Secrets

Mad Lord Kalen was a sworn enemy of Dominic d’Honaire, the darklord of the Dementlieu domain, and during his lifetime he dedicated every resource his Brotherhood had against the master manipulator in an effort to liberate the people of Dementlieu from d’Honaire’s endless, poisonous scheming. Only a handful of Kalen’s most trusted lieutenants were allowed to learn of the existence of the domain’s master and his powers. The sly lord had deciphered the extent of the evil he was facing and knew that such knowledge might easily break the resolve of lesser men or even prompt some to turn traitor in hopes of currying the darklord’s favor. These lieutenants have passed on their knowledge of the sinister force at the heart of the domain to a handful of Assassins each generation. Along with this knowledge, they have issued a single chilling charge: that if it an opportunity ever presents itself, the Brotherhood will slaughter d’Honaire and all of his relatives down to the smallest child, in order to ensure that the taint of his evil is swept from the land forever.

The weight of such a terrible responsibility is not shouldered lightly, especially by members of a group that prides itself on achieving its goals without killing. The senior Assassins who know of it pass it down with an appropriate amount of caution, for those who know it never feel quite the





same about the Brotherhood's ideals again. Most justify the idea to themselves by weighing such a bloody deed against the immense suffering and misery that d'Honaire's dark gifts have caused over the years, but at night the doubts surface once more, as their noble hearts grapple with the idea of murder. Although his goal was noble, by planting such a vindictive charge in the heart of his organization, Mad Lord Kalen may very well wind up causing it to disintegrate at the moment of its greatest opportunity.

Prominent Members

Several current members have earned particular distinction within the Brotherhood:

Grandmother Isabelle D'Aprix: Although age is finally starting to slow down Isabelle's body somewhat, her mind is still as sharp as ever, and she enjoys turning the perception others have of her as simply a harmless old woman to her advantage whenever possible. As suits Dementlieu custom, she is exactingly graceful and charming to everyone she meets, noble or common, and her ready wit and rowdy sense of humor has made her immensely popular with her fellow Assassins. Tales of her exploits are second only to those of Mad Lord Kalen himself.

Working from an ever-changing array of safehouses and hideaways, Isabelle guides the Brotherhood with a combination of the love of a grandmother and the discipline of a general. She is careful not to invoke her authority too often or too overtly lest word of her rank reach others before they are ready for the knowledge. Though she won't admit it, privately she worries about the possibility of another setback occurring now that the Brotherhood has regained much of its former glory. She tells herself it is just superstition, but still it haunts her, and she keeps a close eye on her fellow Assassins in hopes of preventing disaster before it's too late.

Cousin Luc Mer-Renard: One of the only Assassins who doesn't conduct most of his work in the cities, Luc has chosen a different territory to manipulate – the ports and shipping houses of Dementlieu. He owns a fast ship, the *Gale Breaker*, whose crew is well paid for their discretion (and cycled regularly so none of them see too much). Mer-Renard maintains the facade of an eccentric and slightly foolish young noble with a penchant for sailing, so no one asks him too many questions even when he departs in the dead of night or during



a roaring gale. Through his efforts at weeding out some of the more grasping area merchants, however, he has not only improved the quality of life for the poor fishing folk along the coast, but also smuggled in supplies for his fellow Assassins. He has even tipped off a ragtag local pirate fleet to a few especially valuable shipments, much to the displeasure of the merchants who had invested heavily in the timely arrival of those cargoes. Should any of the Brotherhood ever require something that involves the ocean, Luc is only too happy to be of service; the only thing he loves as much as the Brotherhood is the call of the sea, and currently he is able to satisfy both with ease.

Cousin Marie de la Ambersalle: Currently, Marie is the only member of the society that has called Port-a-Lucine her home for more than a year. While the other members of the Brotherhood are too paranoid to remain in the city for long, Marie's superb talent as a performer has earned her a noble patron who goes to great lengths to supply her every need and shield her from rumors or accusations of any kind. As such, she is the best source of information about what is going on in the city. Indeed, her reputation for being fickle in romance stems from the "admirers" she frequently entertains at her patron's estate in order to pass along word to the Brotherhood of some new event they need to be made aware of. Although she never intended to be such a vital part of the Brotherhood, she has taken her status in stride and reports what she learns very professionally. Small of stature, with flowing brown hair and soft blue eyes, Marie looks every bit the part of the innocent entertainer. She is quick to use her appearance along with her patron's clout to gain access to all manner of areas and information that would be almost impossible for others to reach. Those who can find a way to smuggle themselves in to one of her performances (or better still, into her entourage) will almost certainly leave with a valuable piece of information.

The Van Richten Society

Rudolf van Richten was an inspiration to many who opposed the forces of the supernatural and occult, or at least struggled to understand them. His handwritten tomes have empowered many "hunters" who seek to destroy evil, though many consider his voluminous correspondence to be a less significant achievement, but it was this very correspondence that helped bring together the people who today comprise the Van Richten Society. His disappearance galvanized this association of intelligentsia into an actual secret organization, as many of its associates have decided to carry on Van Richten's work after his demise. Today, a network of correspondents extends throughout the cities of Lamordia, Dementlieu, Mordent, and Richemulont, with even more tenuous links to neighboring domains.

Primary Alignment: Any non-evil. Anyone who has been proven to be corrupted by the occult is increasingly isolated from his fellow correspondents. Granted, those who become corrupt often isolate themselves from others anyway, and proving actual corruption is difficult. When someone finds proof of an otherwise heroic individual who has been tainted by the Dark Powers, that poor soul may find himself ostracized — or possibly even hunted — by his former associates. There's a good reason for this caution: No one person knows the entirety of the society's membership, but when one fellow of this secret society falls prey to the temptations of the Powers, he typically betrays his closest associates and correspondents first.

Beliefs

Members of the Van Richten Society follow a wide spectrum of beliefs. Their only common — and, indeed, central — tenet consists of a firm conviction that the monstrous creatures that inhabit the realms need to be destroyed. To this end, members share their knowledge and techniques and try to keep alive the legacy of the man whose name graces their society.

Base of Operations

Since the society does not have formal meetings but relies on written correspondence and other indirect forms of contact, it has no one headquarters. The Weathermay-Foxgrove twins generally serve as a spiritual center for the society, though they do not openly refer to the society by name. They merely carry on their relative's work.





Membership

Anyone who has decided to dedicate herself to fighting the dark creatures of the Dread Realms is eligible for membership, though no formal roster of members exists. Members simply find each other through common interests and by word of mouth. Personal references are a major tool in bringing together potential members of the society with existing members.

Requirements

All of the associates of this society share a common interest in the supernatural, exchanging information upon occasion and sometimes meeting in person. Beyond that, no other requirements are necessary except for the desire to fight against the evil that seems to grow stronger with every passing day.

Secrets

Van Richten's legacy is admittedly a somewhat guarded and exclusive society. While members correspond with one another, they do practice a certain amount of discretion and circumspection in order to keep their names from falling into the wrong hands.

Prominent Members

Perhaps the most illustrious members are Gennifer and Laurie Weathermay-Foxgrove. These twin sisters have vowed to carry on Van Richten's work and have instigated correspondence among others with similar intent. (See **Van Richten's Arsenal** for more information about the Weathermay-Foxgrove twins and their associates.)



The Vilushka

Although the Vistani have remained an enigma to outsiders for countless centuries, it is well known that the offspring of unions between Vistani and outsiders are often considered unwanted relatives on both sides of the family, too much like the *giorgio* for the Vistani and too exotic for ordinary human culture. Like many other individuals of mixed parentage, such half-Vistani are frequently found living on the fringes of both cultures, getting by however they can, never truly fitting in with either. Others seek simply to be left alone by everyone, and travel far away from anything that would remind them of their origins. Sometimes they even go to the extreme of refusing to associate with any humans, Vistani or even other *giogoto* at all, preferring the company of other races that have less of a problem with their heritage. However, in recent years scholars and adventurers alike have come across evidence that a growing number of half-Vistani are not content to settle for patronizing acceptance or self-imposed exile. Rather, they have begun an effort to rally others of their kind under the banner of doing right for its own sake.

Early evidence of this elusive group was in the form of signs left behind at scenes of battle, where foul beasts or wicked tyrants had been defeated by forces unknown. Though witnesses were never found, a signature in the form of an eight-spoked wagon wheel was always left behind, scratched into rocks, painted on walls, or (most dramatically), carved into the body of a particularly fearsome creature.

While those knowledgeable in the ways of the Vistani immediately suspected their involvement, they found local *giogoto* families unwilling to confirm or deny such suspicions, deflecting all inquiries without revealing any sign of who might be truly responsible.

After over two years of leaving their mark behind at the site of a number of triumphs great and small, the group responsible for the heroics finally came forward with a series of pamphlets and carefully planned appearances. They called themselves the *Vilushka*, a band of *giogoto* adventurers whose name roughly translated as "the Violet Moon," and they saw it as their sacred duty to help others of their kind, as well as to battle evil in all its forms. While they did not bear animosity for either side of their lineage, they called upon their fellow half-Vistani to stop living in the shadows of other

cultures and embrace their own unique nature as a path to living a virtuous life. Too many others like them wound up living bitter lives at the edge of either society, rather than embracing their own destiny and living life to the fullest. The *Vilushka* came forward as a group to show other half-Vistani that there was a better way, that their unique heritage should be a source of pride and self-reliance rather than a mark of shame or guilt.

Their initial appearance was greeted with a mixture of suspicion and derision across the realms. Those who reacted with suspicion wondered if this was just a Vistani trick, while others made light of the fact that most members still kept their faces hidden or their identities secret from outsiders. To these concerns the Violet Moon responded that they were a separate entity from their full-blooded cousins, and that anyone with eyes could see that in the way the true Vistani responded to them. As for the mockery, it was nothing they hadn't endured before; while they disliked keeping their identities secret, and some few members wore their allegiance openly, for the most part they recognized that there was still too much hatred and mistrust surrounding their heritage to reveal themselves as a whole. Instead they must rely on their deeds to show others the extent of their resolve – fortunately for them, that is one challenge they are more than capable of meeting.

Primary Alignment: Neutral Good. While there is certainly a definite tendency toward chaos in many of the members, as a whole the *Vilushka* are too interested in building something a lasting value to be called truly chaotic, though they are by no means entirely lawful either.

Organization

Despite what many outsiders believe, the *Vilushka* has no true leadership, although in practice senior members are accorded more respect and deference than newer ones. The *Vilushka* forsake the traditional *vardos* of their Vistani kin, traveling in mixed company as they see fit. As a fairly new and informal order, members are currently organized into two groups: the *lestani-inonya*, or "wandering saviors," and the *neranji*, or "rabbits." *Lestani-inonya*, or simply *lestani* as they are commonly known, are formed when enough *Vilushka* members come together to form an adventuring group, whereupon they travel together, righting wrongs until they either choose to go their separate ways or events conspire to put their fellowship at an





end. Sometimes a *lestani* gathers to achieve a particular goal; at other times, members simply travel together for fellowship and protection, gaining or losing members as their wishes dictate or the situation demands.

Fluidity is actively encouraged, since not only does it ensure that these *gigoto* meet more of their kind and share their unique experiences with each other, but it also makes *Vilushka* groups frustrating targets for their enemies. Attackers never know if they'll be dealing with the same group that they fought before. The most experienced and capable member leads the *lestani*, and is known as the *kellire* ("longsword"). Should a dispute arise, it is the duty of the *kellire* to resolve it as fairly as possible, at which time both parties are expected to abide by the decision and put the matter behind them.

By contrast, *neranji* are members who have chosen to stay in one place for a substantial length of time, and who therefore are charged with collecting what information and resources they can. In addition, they provide a safe haven for traveling *lestani* who pass through their area. Some *neranji* are merely temporary residents, waiting for a *lestani*

that they can join up with to pass through. Others, however, settle down in order to watch a person or situation they consider a threat, and will not leave until the threat has been dealt with. Some have even settled down permanently, though they continue to serve the order to the best of their ability. These last are rare, since most Violet Moon members do their best to keep on the road for at least half of the year, if not more. Sometimes injury or personal obligation forces a member to take on a sedentary lifestyle. When that happens, those *lestani* that hear of it drop by and offer gifts to the unfortunate as a sign of their support.

It is rare that there is more than one *neranji* in an area, and unheard of for there to be more than three: any more than that and they will typically form a *lestani* to deal with any problems they have observed, then leave the vicinity for good. As with *lestani*, should the need arise the most experienced *neranji* is responsible for making decisions and passing judgment concerning member disputes.

This loose hierarchy has fostered a curious sense of independence and fellowship (just as the founders hoped it would). Since the *Vilushka* never



know with whom they might find themselves traveling, members are extremely tolerant and open-minded with each other, and soon develop a wide variety of contacts across the different domains.

Beliefs

The core beliefs of the *Vilushka* are quite simple: to take pride in one's half-Vistani heritage, to respect those of other lineages and to do good deeds whenever possible. In this way, the Violet Moon hopes to promote a more positive image of *giogoto* across the realm and to elevate their brethren into a position of greater pride and respect. Order members are expected to uphold and exemplify these beliefs at all times, especially around the *giorgio*, whose ignorance will only be lifted when they see that those with Vistani blood are not mysterious creatures to be hated and feared. Instead, they are individuals much like themselves who only want to live a good life and make the world a better place than it was when they found it.

Recognition

The symbol of the *Vilushka* is a wagon wheel with eight spokes. Note that most members do not wear the symbol prominently, unless they are actively attempting to boost the order's reputation. Instead, it is typically left behind in the wake of some great deed, as a sign that the order was there and that justice has been done. In this way, the prestige of the order is increased without putting individual members in danger.

Members must often disguise their features, especially in lands that are hostile to the Vistani, but must also be able to recognize each other. When a *Vilushka* meets someone who might be a fellow member in disguise, she strikes up a dialogue. Within the conversation, she inserts a thread about a relative who has a wagon with a broken wheel. Should the other respond that he knows where one can acquire eight new spokes at no cost, both then rejoice for having found a fellow member. Members of the order have also developed their own set of trail signs, variations on the *tralaks* of their Vistani lineage, but seldom use them unless the need is great for fear of upsetting any true Vistani who might become angry at the corruption of their language.

Base of Operations

The *Vilushka* maintains no permanent bases, relying instead on the hospitality of its *neranji* and

whatever the resourcefulness of the members can scratch up when it comes to places to rest and regroup. Of course, non-members have circulated any number of rumors about where the "true" base of the order might be, anywhere from a ruined mansion on a cliff overlooking the Shadow Rift to an ancient clearing deep within the wild forests of Sithicus. Naturally, if there's any truth at all to such rumors, the Violet Moon isn't telling; suffice it to say that if this is indeed the case, no one outside of the founding members has yet heard of it.

Membership

At present, there are at least seven full *lestani* scattered all across the realm, including the founding group, and a score of *neranji* gathering information for the order. More accurate numbers are next to impossible to come by, given the wandering habits of the members and their penchant for traveling in disguise. Indeed, one popular story among the new initiates tells of two boon companions who met in the middle of a terrible battle in Falkovnia and subsequently went on many great heroic adventures, always taking care to see to the needs of any *giogoto* they came across. Of course, one was secretly a member of the *Vilushka* in disguise, who agonized over whether or not to invite this *giorgio* member to join the order for many months as they traveled together. Finally one night she couldn't take it any longer, and revealed her affiliation to her friend and extended an offer of membership to him — only to have him laugh and strip off his own disguise to make her the very same offer. While almost certainly apocryphal, it nevertheless showcases how careful the order is about selecting members, as well as the lengths that members will go to avoid casual detection.

Joining the Organization

Although they have recently become more public in their operations, some aspects of this society remain closely-guarded secrets. One such secret is how to become a member. While they do not necessarily turn away individuals who seek them out and ask to join — indeed, those who are clever enough to track them down are accorded a good deal of respect — as a rule the *Vilushka* prefer to spend some time watching potential initiates from a distance. Other times they engage prospective members in conversation under some false pretense, often deliberately baiting them in an attempt to get a feel for their personality and how





dedicated they are to the beliefs of the order. Should the individual uphold the ideals of the Violet Moon, even under duress, an existing member (or sometimes even a whole *lestani*) approaches him with an offer of membership. If the person accepts, he is initiated into the order in a brief ceremony under the next full moon and brought into an existing *lestani* as soon as possible. If he declines, the *Vilushka* never approach him again and ask him not to reveal the details of the meeting to anyone, though this is more of a courtesy than a real threat.

As a general rule, only *giogoto* are approached about joining the *Vilushka*. While it does not formally discriminate against other races, since that would run counter to its core teachings, potential initiates must prove beyond the smallest doubt both their devotion to the cause of good and their willingness to help out *giogoto* in need before they are approached for membership. In the suspicious and prejudiced world of Ravenloft, it is rare to find those of another race who are truly brave and open-minded enough to champion the *giogoto* cause as the *Vilushka* does.

At present, the order has only one member of non-Vistani heritage, a caliban by the name of Niles. While others are not unthinkable, barring some similar great act of heroism, it will probably be quite a while before the order selects another member who is not half-Vistani.

The only other rule of note is that most initiates forsake their previous family name in place of a one they choose for themselves or even one their *lestani* adopts as a whole. While not a strict requirement, this practice is encouraged by the Violet Moon as a means of helping new members forge their own destiny and sense of identity. Although they do not want *giogoto* to forget where they came from, the older members know that too often their younger counterparts have found their divided lineage to be a source of shame and scorn both within and without. Setting it aside, therefore, is one of the first steps toward a better path.

Membership Requirements

Characters must be of good alignment only, a quality usually proven by their actions over a period of time. They must possess at least four levels in any combination of classes. Characters who show exceptional promise at earlier levels might be watched, but the Violet Moon always prefers that initiates have a certain degree of experience and

worldliness under their belt before approaching them for full membership. As indicated above, membership is also almost exclusively half-Vistani in nature, though this is not an actual rule — DM's discretion regarding other races — but characters who are not *giogoto* will have to do a great deal more to prove themselves than those who are.

Secrets

There are few true secrets within this order, save perhaps one: that not only does the *Vilushka* try to promote a positive image of *giogoto*, but it also goes out of its way to punish harshly those who persecute Vistani and half-Vistani alike. Unlike its regular activities, however, the Violet Moon keeps this aspect of the order secret, never leaving a calling card behind after such actions. While the society believes it is doing the right thing, the founders also recognize that there is already enough suspicion of those with Vistani blood. Rumors of "vendettas" carried out against non-Vistani would doubtless lead to a new wave of hysteria and witch-hunts. As much as it pains them to keep these acts of justice secret, most members grudgingly accept as a necessary evil, for now.

If there is another secret with the order, it is their true status in the eyes of the Vistani. No one has yet been able to get the true Vistani to give them a straight answer about the *Vilushka*. Some families dismiss it with a shrug or a laugh, while others merely mutter darkly and even become rather violent if a foolish *giorgio* presses the subject. Regardless of the truth, if the Vistani have a definite opinion of these bastard children-turned-adventurers, they're keeping it characteristically close to their chests. For their part, the *Vilushka* refuses to comment on that half of their lineage. While they do their best to help the Vistani when they find them in need of aid (which doesn't happen often), they seldom stay in their company for longer than it takes to exchange pleasantries, barter for goods and get on the road again. Whether this is a matter of mutual preference or the result of some secret treaty is unknown, but in any event the Violet Moon has made it quite clear that they wish to chart their own course. Apparently the Vistani respect this, or at least tolerate it.

Prominent Members

The founding *lestani* still travels together whenever possible; while they have gone off on any number of separate adventures, their bond runs





extremely deep and they are seldom apart for long if they can help it. Although they gave up the original name of their *lestani* when they first founded the *Vilushka*, the younger members of the order have named them the *Wuerilia*, or simply “the Whirlwind,” a nod to their sweeping and passionate approach to everything from dancing around the fire to battling hideous abominations. When the whole *lestani* is assembled (which sadly has not happened for almost a year), there are few things that can stand before their combined skill and drive.

Unlike many other such organizations, which eventually grow to embody abstract goals and ideals, the *Vilushka* is still very much a product of the original adventuring group that founded it. All the original members are still active, and chances are new members may run across them before too long, giving them a unique opportunity to help shape the future of this new and secretive organization. DMs should assign what powers and skills they wish the *Vilushka* to have, using descriptions given here as guidelines and keeping in mind the adaptability of the group.

Nikoli and Sasha: As the oldest member of the original *lestani*, Nikoli often acts as the group’s *kellire*, and thus by extension the head of the *Vilushka* as well. His soothing voice and worldly perspective help cool some of the hotter tempers in the group; he is also a consummate storyteller, and justifiably proud of his knowledge of legends both *Vistani* and otherwise. He is skilled with armed combat and stealth tactics, and he often augments his battle skills with a dash of sorcery.

Nikoli’s younger sister is in many ways a perfect foil for her elder brother. Sasha is brash, outspoken and full of fire, always eager to take action in situations where Nikoli advises caution and patience. Fortunately, she has more than enough skill with a blade to back up her impetuous streak, and thanks to Nikoli’s efforts has also picked up no small number of other talents as well, making her a dangerous and unpredictable enemy in battle. She’s as likely to sneak around for a shot at an opponent’s unprotected back as she is to dazzle them with magic or go at them toe-to-toe, and often shifts tactics in the middle of battle, destroying her enemies before they have time to react.

Vantes and Mena: If Nikoli is the head of the order in times of peace and deliberation, it is Vantes who takes the lead when battle is called for. A flamboyant cavalier who is never seen without

his belt of coins and signature wide-brimmed hat, Vantes is nevertheless a master swordsman and expert tactician who is fond of using a combination of taunts and his foppish appearance to lull opponents off guard. Vantes plans all of the *Vilushka*’s largest and most dangerous clashes. Under his guidance the order has yet to lose a battle, a feat of which he is quite proud.

His favorite secret weapon in these plans is his sister Mena. Like her brother, she is quite skilled at using her appearance to put opponents off guard; in her case it usually involves convincing them that she is simply a helpless beauty while she picks their pockets clean — or reaches for her knives. She is also a passionate dancer. Together with Sasha and Demitria, she can often earn enough money in one night of dancing for the *giorgio* for the group to live on comfortably for months.

Venshango and Visigoth: Last of the relatives in the original group, these two brothers are noticeably quieter than their companions, as suits their individual callings. Venshango moves through the forest like a ghost, using a combination of patience and skill to avoid detection until the moment he attacks. While skilled in Florentine fighting, he is also a deadly archer who shows similar deliberation in choosing targets, minding his arrows closely so that he rarely takes a shot unless he’s sure his aim is true. Outside of battle, Ven is soft-spoken and kind, always listening but seldom speaking unless he feels he has something important to offer.

Like his brother, Visigoth also has a somewhat solemn demeanor, mostly due to his devotion to Aryana, a little-known goddess said to watch over the realm of life, love and death. Visigoth serves primarily her death aspect, overseeing the relationships between the living and the dead as well as the mourning of things lost; those outside the Whirlwind suspect there is a tragic tale behind his devotion, but so far no one had heard it. Those who believe he is all doom and gloom, however, are often surprised at the depth of compassion he displays when comforting those in mourning, or the tenderness with which he helps those suffering from a broken heart.

Vigo and Aeda: As the order’s resident bards, these two have made it their responsibility to learn of as many exploits of their fellows as possible, embellish them and pass them along to members and outsiders alike. Of course, each has a particular style of expression. Vigo is full of life and energy, friend to everyone he meets. He tends to favor





heroic and humorous ballads that allow him to show off his mastery of the guitar as well as his singing prowess.

By contrast, Aeda prefers poetry and softer songs, drawing her audience into a gentle trance until the performance ends and those present find themselves pondering the message of her tales for hours afterward. Either way, both make sure that the legend of the *Vilushka* continues to grow and their fellow *giogoto* take pride in who they are — while making some gold in the process.

Demitria and Damion: Another senior member of the order and an old companion of Nikoli's, Demitria prefers to wander the deep wilderness. She enjoys speaking with animals and teaching the secrets of the wild places to those who are wise and patient enough to seek them out. When in the company of others, however, she displays a smile that can warm the coldest *giorgio* heart and her dancing can set that same heart afire with desire. She is also an expert on battling undead of all kinds, and hates them with a passion that surprises those who initially see her little more than as a gentle student of the forest.

Her only constant companion is Damion, a skilled blacksmith who forges a good deal of the order's armor and weaponry when he's not busy putting his creations to use against some dire menace. His lively sense of humor and his talent at sleight-of-hand and other prestidigitation belie his strong arms and soot-streaked face, and have made him a favorite entertainer around many campfires. Nevertheless, when battle is at hand, he is one of the order's stoutest fighters, and the arrival of his flashing hammer and gleaming shield have already turned the tide of several battles.

Vasili: One of the order's first permanent *neranji*, Vasili is tall, unusually so for a *giogoto*, a boisterous and jovial man quick with a joke for the men and a flirtatious glance for the ladies. Although he is also a follower of Aryana, the same as Visigoth, he prefers to focus more on the goddess's love aspect, and his weddings are some of the most primal and joyous ceremonies one is ever likely to see in the Dread Realms. Indeed, those who linger at the edge of his rites frequently find themselves with drums or tambourines thrust into their hands,

part of the festivities before they know what's going on, though they seldom regret the experience. It is known that Visigoth was once his student, but that the two parted ways when Visigoth chose to follow a different aspect of Aryana. If questioned, Vasili's normally genial countenance acquires a sad cast, but he refuses to discuss the matter more closely. Currently, Vasili is living the life of a colorful and harmless eccentric in Pont-a-Museau, keeping an eye on the climate there on behalf of the order.

Niles: As the first and currently only member of the order without any Vistani blood at all, Niles deserves special mention. Unlike most hulking and brutish calibans, Niles is small, almost scrawny, with rodent-like features that include prominent whiskers, furry ears and even a thin vestigial tail. He seldom speaks much about his youth, though it is known that he spent some time on the streets of Chateaufaux, where constant bullying about his appearance gave him a nervous disposition that persists to this day. Lest one mistake nerves for cowardice, however, the Whirlwind are only too happy to relate the tale of how Niles held off an entire den of wererats that had cornered Nikoli and Sasha during one of their adventures. Falsely accused of a series of attacks on the city guard, he'd been two steps away from a noose when the *lestani* intervened. Understandably grateful for the rescue, he shadowed the group from a distance and saw the ambush the real ratmen drew them into. At the sight of it, courage surged within him and before he knew it he had waded into the beasts, fighting with strength he never knew he had. Although wounded horribly by the beasts, he continued to fight until Sasha was able to escape and round up the rest of the Whirlwind to destroy the creatures. Only after the battle did they realize that their savior had been the same poor soul they'd rescued from a lynch mob earlier that day. Impressed by his courage and self-sacrifice, they nursed him back to health and offered him membership as soon as he recovered, an offer he eagerly accepted. Since then Nikoli has taken him under his wing, and he is seldom found far from his "boss." He's already seen more of the world than he'd ever dreamed possible, and even his old nervous habits are beginning to fade as he becomes more sure of himself.





Chapter Three:
Who's Blessed?

"Hope keeps us going when nothing else does," Warden Thomas said, settling down before the campfire, carefully turning the spitted hare over the flames.

"So you've said," the outlandishly dressed gnome replied, smoothing her patchwork skirts around her on the ground as she eyed the food hungrily. "Personally, food and sleep keep me going. Hope just sweetens the pot." She fixed her companion with an impish smile and stretched a finger out to touch the sizzling meat.

"Not yet, Kattinker," the young anchorite admonished her. "A few more minutes and we'll both be able to sate our hunger."

"What's that?" Kattinker said, turning her head as an unearthly wail penetrated the silence of the night.

Warden Thomas jerked the rabbit out of the fire and stood up, hand on his holy symbol, the longsword and shield of Ezra.

The darkness formed itself into snarling, humanoid shapes that circled the camp, their eyes forming pinpoints of dull light that focused malevolently on their prey.

"Are they living or dead?" Kattinker asked, her voice shaking a little with apprehension at the possibility of the latter.

"They live," the priest of Ezra replied, "but not, I hope, for long."

"Well, if they breathe and think, then I may have something to help," the gnome replied, reaching into her pouch for some ground mica dust and muttering the words to one of her favorite spells. A burst of glittering particles showered over the creatures, limning them in sparkling light and blinding their vision.

Thomas called upon his deity for protection, then drew his longsword and waded into battle. The little gnome stood with her back to the fire, hoping that the creatures would not come too close to the flames. She readied another spell, this one meant to damage the enemies on the other side of the camp.

"Are we going to live through this?" she asked Thomas, as she brought out more components from her bag of tricks.

"That is for our faith and our skills to decide," Thomas said, moving in front of Kattinker to fend off a claw scrape intended for her. The gnome uttered a brief phrase and gestured with the items she held in her nimble fingers. A crackling bolt of lightning shot from her fingertips and struck the creatures on one side of the camp. The stench of burning hair filled the night as her spell struck home.

Thomas' sword took another creature, but the priest saw that he and Kattinker were clearly outnumbered.

Suddenly, one of the creatures dropped, an arrow protruding from its back.

"Press onward," Thomas cried. "We have help! My thanks to you, whoever you are!"

Kattinker cast one more spell, sending out a ray of cold toward one of the creatures wounded by her lightning bolt, then readied her throwing daggers.

"I'd rather help you than them," a man's voice called out from the darkness behind the attackers.

"You have our thanks," Thomas called, "and Ezra's blessing."

Kattinker only smiled to herself, as she felt the beginnings of hope that they all might live through the night.



Heroes are bred by lands where livelihood comes hard.

— Menander, *Anepthioi*



any individuals come to the calling of “hero,” holding themselves to a higher standard of conduct than normal standard. This chapter presents a gallery of such heroes, people from many walks of life, representative of many of the races found in the Dread Realms (and outside that blasted domain), all of whom have one thing in common: their dedication to fighting evil.

In addition to the singular individuals detailed here, this chapter presents The Wanderers, a group of Vistani dedicated to a cause greater than themselves. Their example provides guidelines for constructing an adventuring group complete with history and internal relationships.

Tragedy, romance, humor and, above all, the will to live with hope rather than despair permeates the stories that follow. Use these individuals as NPCs in your campaigns or create your own heroes following the examples in this chapter.

Patrick Connor

Male human Brb 8/Rgr 5: CR13; Medium-size humanoid (human) (5 ft. 8 in. tall); HD 8d12+5d10+26; hp 126; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 40; AC 15 (touch 13, flat-footed 15); Atk +16/+11/+6 melee (1d6+4/17-20, silver short sword), +16 melee (1d6+2/17-20, silver short sword) or +16/+11/+6 melee (1d8+4/19-20, silver longsword) or +15/+10/+5 ranged (1d4+4/19-20, silver throwing dagger); SQ favored enemy (shapechangers +2, animals +1), rage, uncanny dodge (Dex bonus to AC, cannot be flanked); AL NG; SV Fort +10, Ref +7, Will +6; Str 18, Dex 17, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 15, Cha 10.

Skills: Animal Empathy +5, Climb +8, Escape Artist +5, Handle Animal +5, Heal +6, Hide +10, Intuit Direction +6, Jump +8, Knowledge (nature) +6, Listen +8, Move Silently +10, Ride +6, Search +8, Swim +8, Wilderness Lore +4. **Feats:** Ambidexterity, Dodge, Improved Critical (short sword), Mobility, Spring Attack, Track, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (short sword).

Languages: Balok*, elven, Mordentish

Ranger Spells per day (1; base DC = 12 + spell level): 1st - *entangle*.

Signature Possessions: leather armor, two silver short swords, a silver longsword, 10 silver throwing daggers.

Patrick is a human male with a rather unassuming appearance. He is of average height, with a wiry build, with light brown hair and deep brown eyes. His only distinguishing mark is a prominent scar just over his right eye, the result of a pursuit gone wrong in the deep woods some years ago. He wears primarily the dark greens and browns of a woodsman, though on nights that the moon is high he usually switches to black and soft silver to escape detection more easily. Patrick is never without at least four silver weapons on his person and carries more whenever possible. Those who wish to travel with him for any length of time quickly learn to do the same. His posture and gait suggest a certain similarity to the predators he stalks. Each movement is sure and deliberate, with a suggestion of great power and ferocity always lying just beneath the surface.

Background

Few folk outside of the haunted lands of Verbrek know of the existence of the dreaded Wolf God, and fewer still would dare to challenge the fanatical cult of werewolves and other dread beasts that it claims as its followers. The creatures are too cunning, too powerful and far too well-entrenched in their territory for anyone to hope of ousting them, the terrified whispers say. To think otherwise is madness. However, insane as it might be, one man has indeed begun a quiet crusade against the beasts that feel they can stalk and kill with impunity, daring even to take the fight to the heart of the Wolf God's domain itself. His name is Patrick Connor, and in his mind, the war was already won as soon as someone finally fought back.

When Patrick was a small boy, he was taught both to fear and revere the forest as though it were itself a deity, with hunters giving thanks for the bounty it provided even as they dreaded becoming lost and falling prey to beasts and fouler things. Those who were brave and respectful returned with enough to feed their families for months, while others who got too greedy or whose arrogance led them to think themselves safe seldom returned at all. It was a harsh and brutal existence, and the young men of the village grew up quickly. Those who learned the ways of the wilderness became excellent hunters and foresters, the equal of men





twice their age, while those who did not often disappeared into the wild, never to be seen again.

To make matters worse, beginning in Patrick's 16th year, an unknown enemy started striking at nearby villages with incredible ferocity, appearing from the woods as a howling horde of men and beasts that slaughtered warriors and innocents alike. Sometimes these raiders carried off hostages and valuables, disappearing back into the forest with their plunder, while at other times they simply killed and burned everything they could find. While defending his village, Patrick first came face-to-face with the hated enemy that he would dedicate his life to destroying: a werewolf.

While others ran away in fright or froze in terror at the sight of the rampaging lycanthrope, Patrick found himself oddly entranced, almost hypnotized as it loped toward him, fangs bared for the kill. However, the beast's exultation soon turned to surprise and frustration as Patrick turned aside its attacks. At first the youth barely managed to avoid attacks. As the fight continued, Patrick moved with more and more confidence as his bodily seemed to find a natural rhythm that parried or sidestepped every slashing claw, every snapping bite. He even began returning cuts of his own, and though the wounds did little damage, each successful hit served to spur him on with increasing ferocity, until he was actually driving the creature back simply from the fury of his advance. With a final howl of rage, he brought the hilt of his blade down on the monster's head as it lunged for his throat. The beast crumpled to a heap at his feet, its skull crushed by the stout silver pommel. Seeing their leader slain, the rest of the raiders fled into the forest.

Although his village proclaimed him a hero and treated him to a series of grand feasts, Patrick's mind never left the battle with the werewolf for long. If one such creature had been leading the raiders, he reasoned, then surely more must be out there committing other atrocities, perhaps even slaying some of the hunters of his village when the "forest claimed them." Less than a week after his triumph, he packed up his gear and headed through the forest into Verbrek in search of his new prey.

What he found, of course, exceeded even his wildest fears. The Wolf God held sway nearly everywhere he went, with whole towns full of lycanthropes bending knee to the savage idol. What few non-shapechangers remained were left cowed and helpless, fearing for their lives at the hands of the werewolves. Suddenly Patrick's quest



took on a whole new scope. Rather than scaring him away, the idea of waging war against such a widespread evil only gave him even more of a drive to see it through. On the night of his momentous discovery, his unofficial crusade began.

Since then Patrick has studied his enemy carefully, seeking out signs of weakness and striking whenever an opportunity presents itself. His only constant companion is a quiet, black-clad elven woman named Lynnet Tharel, and he trusts no one else with the full extent of his plans – or to watch his back when battle is joined. Together, they have taken down three whole packs of werewolf raiders in the past two years, as well as a large number of ordinary humans and wolves in service to the Wolf God. Patrick and Lynnet alternate tactics and targets as often as possible, taking great pains to mask their scent and keep their identities hidden to help throw off pursuit. One month they may attack an entire congregation of the Wolf God with a carefully planned ambush, while another month they might content themselves with picking off lone stragglers and sentries of the patrols that watch the borders of Verbrek. To date, their expertise and discretion has been such that the cult of the Wolf God is still unaware that they are being targeted by the coordinated efforts of a single



enemy. Patrick intends to keep it that way for as long as possible.

When the pair comes up against a target too large or powerful to handle on their own, Patrick sometimes offers his services as a guide to adventurers traveling through the region in exchange for their help in dealing with the creatures. After all, just because he prefers operating alone or with a single partner doesn't mean he's foolhardy about it either. While they occasionally come back to "civilization" to re-supply every few months, for the most part the only time either Patrick or Lynnet can be found outside of the wild is when they are seeking assistance in this manner.

Although fixated on the destruction of the cult of the Wolf God with a single-mindedness that borders on obsession, Patrick is not truly narrow-minded or cold-blooded, just incredibly determined. He realizes perfectly well just how much the odds are stacked against him, but it doesn't frighten him. His response is to strategize as much as possible. He picks his fights carefully and is always ready to retreat if necessary. After all, he is used to fighting not only fearsome monsters, but ones that travel in packs and favor ambush and cunning as much as they do a good head-on assault. The experience has made him possibly one of the best small-unit tacticians in the region, and it shows. Patrick speaks quietly but firmly, letting others do most of the talking unless the subject wanders to Verbrek or the Wolf God. Whenever that happens, he speaks often and with great passion.

Secrets

Only two things give Patrick pause on his crusade: the safety of his home village and the lengths he may have to go in order to win this war. As one of the larger and more fortified villages along the Verbrek border, Patrick's home village is reasonably safe from the Wolf God's forces. After their initial defeat, they have never mounted another substantial attack. Nevertheless, the thought that they might one day learn Patrick's identity and destroy his village in retaliation has kept him awake on many nights as the fight drags on.

Patrick's other cause for concern is his gnawing indecision at what to do about the lycanthrope families of Verbrek. While he tells himself that they will one day grow up to be vicious predators like the ones who attacked his village, he still cannot bring himself to go after women and children. It isn't a problem that may ever come up in his

lifetime, as there are still more than enough followers of the Wolf God who deserve death to keep him busy for many years. If, however, matters force him to consider eradicating the line entirely, he's unsure whether or not he could kill entire families. He is equally concerned about what would happen to his soul and his conscience if he found he could justify such a wholesale slaughter.

Patrick is unafraid of contracting lycanthropy. So far he has proven resistant to it and takes care to treat his wounds with holy oils and other curatives in order to keep the risk of contracting it down. He knows, however, exactly what he will do in the event he does catch the disease, a solution that he and Lynnet both swore to when the hunt first began. Both carry a long silver stiletto with the other's name on it with them at all times; should it become necessary, each is prepared to plunge that blade into the other's heart, rather than suffer the horrors of lycanthropy.

Current Sketch

Patrick's goal is the same as it has been since the night he saw the first gathering of the Wolf God's followers: the total destruction of all the vicious lycanthropes and other followers who swear devotion to the Wolf God. He doesn't advertise it openly—that would be suicide—but he never strays from his purpose for long, either. Anyone who offers to help him defeat the cult of the Wolf God or learn more about it (especially its weaknesses) will have an instant friend; anyone else is just passing through. At the present he and Lynnet are trying to devise a plan to stop a bloody sacrificial ceremony they have recently learned will be taking place in a village just across the border in Verbrek on the next full moon. Patrick is thinking of offering an exchange of services to the next group of adventurers willing to help them stop the ceremony.

Combat

Patrick's tactics in combat are as varied as the forest itself. Once he has an enemy at bay, he will pursue them to the end of the forest in order to take them down. A number of foes have learned too late that a hungry wolf has nothing on Patrick when it comes to running his prey to ground. Whether throwing silver daggers, fighting with matched short swords or wielding a short sword and a longsword, Patrick moves with the grace of the creatures he hunts. He uses his spells as adjuncts (or curatives) rather than as substitutes for weapons.





He has trained himself to fight alone or with a partner. His command of small group tactics makes him an ideal leader for a small group of forest-trained individuals. He prefers to attack by surprise if possible, gaining the advantage when he can.

Favored Enemy (Ex): Patrick gains a +2 bonus against shapechangers and a +1 bonus against animals to Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot and Wilderness Lore checks, as well as to weapon damage rolls.

Rage (Ex): During his rage, Patrick has the following statistics: hp 172; AC 13; (touch 11, flat-footed 13); Atk +18/+8 melee (1d6+6/17-20, silver short sword), +18/+13 melee (1d6+6/17-20, silver short sword) or +19/+9 melee (1d8+6/19-20, silver longsword) or +16/+6 ranged (1d4+6/19-20, silver throwing dagger); SV Fort +14, Will +7; Str 22, Con 20. Skills: Climb +10, Jump +10, Swim +10. The rage lasts seven rounds, after which Patrick is fatigued. He can rage 3 x per day.

Cair

Patrick tends to stay in the forest as much as possible. He has no permanent home since he must always remain on the move. He occasionally visits small towns and villages to purchase or trade for supplies, but he is careful not to stay in town too long. While he does not avoid his home village (for fear of arousing suspicions), he tries not to prolong his stay there.

Jacinth Moontide

Male elf Drd7: CR 7; Medium-size humanoid (elf) (5 ft 2 in tall); hd 7d8; HP 40; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 30; AC 13 (touch 13, flat-footed 10); Atk +5 melee (1d6, quarterstaff); SQ elven traits, low-light vision, nature sense, woodland stride, trackless step, resist nature's lure, wild shape (3/day); AL NG; SV Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +8; Str 10, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 11, Wis 17, Cha 14.

Skills: Animal Empathy +5, Concentration +6, Diplomacy +4, Handle Animal +5, Intuit Direction +5, Knowledge (nature) +5, Heal +10, Spellcraft +5 Swim +3, Wilderness Lore +6. **Feats:** Spell Penetration, Maximize Spell, Enlarge Spell.

Languages: elven*, Darkonese

Druid Spells per Day: 6/6/5/4/2/1. Base DC = 13+ spell level.

Signature Possessions: Wooden quarterstaff enchanted with the *ironwood* spell.



Jacinth is slightly taller than average for his race. He is tanned and well-muscled, both unusual for an elf, the results of his long voyages at sea. He has a pleasant voice, not unlike the sound of the waves lapping on the shore, and bright green eyes. This combination has ensured that Jacinth has won his fair share of hearts in taverns along the coast. His most striking features by far, however, are the tattoos on his face: under each eye he has an outline of three fins overlapping each other, done in brilliant blue ink that also seems to absorb the color of the ocean whenever he's at sea. In fact, he seems to have a natural attraction to the color blue, dressing predominantly in clothes of that color whenever possible. Other sailors, used to all manner of tattoos and superstitions as a fact of life, pay these traits no particular mind, though they often attract some attention on shore, and gossip about "that strange blue elf from the sea" has started making the rounds in his wake.

Background

It is an old saying among sailors that the sea never gives up a secret; if that is the case, it would certainly help explain the endless fascination that Jacinth has with the mysteries of the dark oceans of Ravenloft. For though he is sure of his name and his





skills as a druid and a sailor, he remembers nothing else of his life before he woke up on the Darkonian shore almost two years ago. The only other clues to his origins, if they are indeed clues at all, are the curious tattoos around his eyes and the small collection of silver coins he had in his pocket when he awoke, coins that bear a seal unfamiliar to any native domain. Certainly, even by the standards of native elves he is strange, preferring the salt spray and rocking waves of the open ocean to the gentle breezes and soothing calm of the forest, and his few attempts to seek some solace with his people have met with dismal failure so far. Try as he might to acclimate himself to life in the woodlands of Darkon, he is simply more at home with sailors and fishermen than he is anywhere else. Jacinth has learned to bear the curious stares of those unused to seeing an elf so eager to take to the sea, especially the notoriously dangerous and unpredictable oceans of Ravenloft.

Despite his atypical nature, the young druid has not been completely alone since arriving on the shore that cold morning. Sailors who serve with him find him friendly and outgoing, unlike the suspicious and insular elves they are accustomed to, and he has developed a reputation as something of a good luck charm, a pleasant novelty to help chase away the monotony of sea life. His druidic abilities don't hurt either, as he displays an uncanny affinity for creatures of the sea. His sense of attunement to the wind and the waves has given rise to numerous rumors that he is actually descended from some form of merfolk. While his features make it plain this isn't the truth, there can be no doubt that Jacinth more than earns his wages as a sailor, and between that and the mild fame he enjoys, demand for his services is slowly but steadily rising in each port he visits.

And visit many ports he does, for Jacinth still actively searches for any remnants or clues related to his past. Even the barest suggestion of a lead has been enough to lead him on a daunting adventure, and though he has yet to turn up anything substantial, his hopes never dim for long before he's off on another quest. In this fashion, Jacinth has also run into a growing number of fellow adventurers, whose quests often become his own. Provided with a good story or two, the elven druid always does his best to help out, often without asking a thing in return. Whether it's securing passage to a lonely Mist-swept island, arranging a fast ship for a rescue mission or smuggling a group safely out of a hostile

port, if it can be done, Jacinth will find a way to make it happen.

A few groups have even made him offers of membership, impressed by the young elf's daring and resourcefulness. Jacinth, however, politely declines each one — he is too much in love with the sea to ever part from it for long, not when there's the chance that one day it will give his secrets back to him.

Jacinth is friendly and ingratiating to new people, quick to invite them to have a drink or sit and watch the waves with him. He talks a great deal — telling ghost stories and sea legends is a favorite pastime. Nevertheless, he does not let his conversation completely overwhelm his audience. What's more, if it looks like they have a good stories, Jacinth encourages his companions to tell them, listening all the while with slightly wide eyes and asking questions every so often. Everything about the Dread Realms is still new and strange to Jacinth, so he approaches new places and things with enthusiasm and a healthy sense of adventure.

He tends to deflect questions about his personal life and history as well as he can while still being polite. Only when speaking to a close confidant does he allow a side of himself that's more shy and reserved to come forward as he discusses what little he does know about his past. Likewise, while he may flirt and play with the pretty girls he sees, none of them ever seems to really attract him in a serious way, as though his heart has already been spoken for, though he doesn't know how or to whom. He is never happier than when at sea, feeling exuberant and energetic when the shore has been left behind. At time, however, a certain melancholy comes over him while staring into the ocean. It has taken something from him, he's sure of that, and the thought of it makes him feel betrayed as though a old friend had turned his back on him.

Secrets

Jacinth has no secrets, or at least none that he can remember. He at once hunts and dreads his past, eager to learn who he is and where he came from, but at the same time more than a little frightened at what he might find. No small amount of this hesitation comes from the fact that distantly he feels there is some great tragedy in his past, which he thinks almost certainly led to his arrival on these unfamiliar shores and his strange amnesia.





That, more than anything, has kept him from searching as completely as he could.

Unknown to him, Jacinth is actually the true love of the elven warrior Cian Silverleaf; the whole tale of their love is told in her section (below). Should he ever remember it, he would spare no effort or expense to track her down by any means at his disposal.

Current Sketch

At present, Jacinth earns a living as a sailor, traveling the Nocturnal Sea on a variety of ships as jobs come and go. Everywhere he goes, he inquires about his past, but so far no one has been able to give him even the slightest clue about who he really is or what his past contains. Nevertheless, he refuses to give up and does his best to take the setbacks with his characteristic good cheer, never letting it keep him down for long. He is always up for some kind of adventure, and provided a group's goals are noble he'll go to great lengths to help them out.

Combat

Jacinth avoids direct combat whenever possible, preferring to lose pursuers by using his affinity for nature to confuse his trail or impede his attackers' progress. When he must defend himself, he uses his quarterstaff, enchanted with an *ironwood* spell to good effect. If he needs to flee, he employs his ability to change shape to take the form of a seagull and soar away from his enemies' reach. Whenever he can talk his way out of a fight, he chooses to do so rather than come to blows (or spells).

Elven Traits (Ex): As an elf, Jacinth is immune to sleep spells and effects, +2 on saves against enchantment effects, +2 bonus on Listen, Search, and Spot checks.

Nature Sense (Ex): Jacinth can identify plants and animals perfectly, can identify if water is safe to drink or dangerous.

Woodland Stride (Ex): Jacinth can move through natural thorns, briars, overgrown areas, and similar terrain at normal speed, if the area is enchanted this is negated.

Trackless Step (Ex): Jacinth leaves no track, cannot be tracked.

Resist Nature's Lure (Su): +4 to SV against abilities of fey (such as dryads, nymphs and sprites).

Wild Shape (Sp): Jacinth can change into a seagull 3/per day (effects as per *polymorph self* spell).

Lair

Jacinth has no permanent home. Whenever he is on land, he stays at an inn frequented by sailors or fisher folk. His preferred "home" is on the sea, aboard whatever ship happens to employ his services. He hopes one day to acquire his own ship and set up residence aboard it — at least until he can find some clue as to where his true home lies.

Eia Pax

Female human Pal 14: CR 14; Medium-size humanoid (human) (5 ft. 5 in. tall); hd 14d10+28; HP 122; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 30; AC 21 (touch 11, flat-footed 18); Atk +18/+12/+8 melee (1d8+5/17-20, +2 longsword), +17/+14 melee (1d6+4/19-20, +2 shortsword) or +21/+15/+11 melee (1d10+6/19-20, +3 halberd); SA aura of courage, smite evil; SQ turn undead, detect chaos, lay on hands, remove disease, divine grace, divine health; ALLG; SV Fort +15, Ref +11, Will +11; Str 17, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 15, Wis 17, Cha 19.

Skills: Balance +8, Climb +6, Concentration +7, Diplomacy +8, Handle Animal +8, Heal +8, Intuit Direction +6, Jump +6, Knowledge (religion) +6, Ride +12, Listen +5, Move Silently +5, Spellcraft +10, Swim +10, Sense Motive +7. **Feats:** Ambidexterity, Improved Critical (longsword), Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Mounted Combat, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (longsword).

Languages: Mordentish*, Darkonese, Falkovnian, Tepestani

Paladin Spells per Day: 3/2/2. Base DC = 13 + spell level

Signature Possessions: enchanted full plate armor (does not hinder Dex checks), +2 short sword, +2 longsword, +3 halberd, Warhorse with heavy barding and military saddle, light supply horse with supply packs.

Eia is tall and commanding, with penetrating dark brown eyes that assess everyone she meets and a slight smile on her lips, as though she either likes what she sees — or knows she's not looking at a real rival. Her dark hair is typically braided up under her helm, and she moves with the confidence of a warrior as opposed to the delicacy of a lady. She is seldom seen without her brightly polished armor and her twin gleaming blades, or without her valiant white warhorse Bucephalas, who has borne



her through more campaigns than she can remember. (Note: Bucephalus is an ordinary heavy warhorse, not a dread companion, and has stats and abilities accordingly.) When circumstances call for her to be out of armor, she typically wears the simple garb of a follower of the Morninglord, though her swords are never far away no matter where she is.

Background

Though now one of the most powerful and respected paladins in the realm, not to mention the longest-lived, Eia Pax was born to very humble origins in a poor fishing village on the frigid and unforgiving Mordent coast. Her parents died in a terrible storm when she was still a small child. She spent the next several years being raised as the "village's child," doing odd chores for whoever could put a roof over her head and eating what little her current "parents" could spare from their own meager supplies. Nevertheless, despite her uncertain circumstances, or perhaps because of them, Eia had a very strong sense of character, proud of how she was able to earn her keep. Early in life she felt great devotion to the Morninglord for seeing her through her hard times. Though she was still young, she sometimes wondered where her life was heading, if the best she could hope for was to have her own household eventually and live off the slim bounty of the sea like the rest of her village.

All that changed one sunny day when she was eight years old. While she watched in amazement, a woman garbed in the vestments of a follower of the Morninglord rode into her village, searching for her by name. When Eia came forward, half afraid of what the woman was seeking her for, the holy woman smiled and offered Eia her hand. The woman told her that one of their greatest clerics had seen the young girl in a vision, and that she would one day be perhaps the greatest champion of the faith the land had ever seen. All Eia had to do was go with her – the rest had been arranged already.

Although the rest of the villagers eyed the holy woman suspiciously, having never had much faith in outsiders, Eia sensed the honesty and goodwill behind the priestess' words, and with only a moment's hesitation she took the hand she was offered and climbed up on the horse behind her. When she tried to glance back at her village one last time, what she saw instead was the sunlight reflected off the waves, outlining the only home

she had ever known in a brilliant glow, as though the Morninglord himself approved of her decision to depart.

For the rest of her childhood up until her final tests and passage into adulthood, Eia was raised by followers of the Morninglord in a secluded Tepestani monastery. Brother Ashmore, the very same high cleric who had received her name in a vision and who even then saw the tremendous potential within the young girl, oversaw her training. At his direction, her days were spent in exercise to build her body and, later on, in martial training to hone her fighting skills. Her nights were devoted to secular learning as well as to the religious ceremonies of the Morninglord. Eia flourished in this new environment, besting every test her teachers set before her and setting ever higher standards for herself, so that by the time she was ready for her final vows she had become the finest young paladin the clerics had ever seen. Brother Ashmore's last injunction to her before her departure was simply: "Live well, spread hope, and, most of all, bring our light to those in darkness."

In the years that have followed, Eia's legend has gradually spread. Whether from tales of her exploits battling foul undead on the outskirts of Necropolis, corrupt politicians and callous mercenaries in Falkovnia or vicious beasts in Verbrek (just to name a few), both friends and enemies alike have heard of her. Like most followers of the Morninglord, she bears a particular enmity for the undead, and will go to great lengths to track them down and destroy them. She has already instructed many of her followers in the ways of hunting such abominations, and she finds that teaching suits her well. The only problem she has now is that her reputation has come back to haunt her, as her list of old enemies grows and new ones seek to please their masters or make a name for themselves by hunting her down. Still, her devotion is as unwavering as her skill with her blades. If she is to die in the service of her god, then so be it. She has been given grace enough for three lifetimes, not to mention enough adventures for several more; if all that the Morninglord asks in return is her life, then she will be only too willing to accept.

Eia demonstrates supreme confidence in her abilities, which can sometimes come across as arrogance to those who don't know her very well. The fact that she is a bit of a perfectionist who





expects the same high standards from others as she does from herself doesn't help much either.

In truth, she possesses the same deep piety and respect for others common to all paladins. She simply wishes more people tried as hard as they could to achieve their true potential. As it stands, however, she tries to lead by example, which isn't a problem for someone as motivated and competitive as she is. On the field, she acts as a true "general," leading the charge by putting herself at the front of the line, sharing the same dangers as the soldiers under her command. Off the field, she pushes herself extremely hard to be the best at everything she attempts, from athletics and archery to poetry and strategy. Fortunately, she is equally as graceful in victory as in defeat, and others seldom walk away from her bearing any hard feelings. She constantly urges others to do their best and push their limits, taking them by the hand if need be. She tries never to be too pushy or patronizing. She sincerely tries to help people, not bully them.

Secrets

Eia has no particular secrets to hide, although sometimes she wonders if she has done all she can to help spread her faith – that is, if she has spent a bit too much time slaying monsters and battling armies than building temples and helping the poor. Always her own harshest critic, she even questions sometimes if she was truly worthy of the dreams Brother Ashmore had for her, though such doubts are quickly laid to rest in the light of day.

Current Sketch

At present Eia is engaged in training a small group of heroes the church hopes will become its own private force to aid in the destruction of the undead. When she feels they are ready, together they will venture out and find suitable targets to test their skills on. When she is not occupied with such activities, Eia goes wherever the faith needs her most, aiding those in need and working with other heroes to banish grave threats to the realm forever.

Combat

Eia fights as seriously and as purposefully as she lives. She excels in fighting from horseback and is a terror with two weapons, wielding a sword in each hand with little problem. When fighting as part of a group, she generally assumes the position of leader and places herself in the front line where she



can face the same dangers as the men and women under her command. She makes certain that she knows the strengths and weaknesses of those who travel with her and she always attempts to face the biggest threat herself.

Aura of Courage (Su): Eia is immune to magical (but not natural) fear, and gains the effects of the Courage feat.

Smite Evil (Su): Once per day, Eia may add her Charisma bonus (+4) to any attack and her level (+14) to the damage inflicted upon an evil opponent.

Turn Undead (Su): Eia can turn undead seven times per day.

Detect Chaos (Sp): This ability duplicates the effects of the spell *detect chaos* and can be used at will.

Lay on Hands (Sp): Eia can heal 56 points of damage per day.

Remove Disease (Sp): Eia can *remove disease* four times per week.

Divine Grace (Su): The paladin's Cha bonus applies to Fear, Horror and Madness saves, and counts twice when trying to improve relations with good NPCs, but Eia's Charisma bonus is negated when dealing with evil NPCs





Divine Health (Ex): Eia is immune to all diseases except those spawned by darklords and curses.

Lair

Recently, Eia has returned to the monastery where she received her training, taking advantage of its seclusion to build her own handpicked force of warriors. She lives simply, as befits her calling. When she travels, she makes her home wherever she can find lodging, whether at a roadside inn or village hostel, by a kind villager's hearth or in a camp of her own making.

Shih Suren (SHĒE sur-ĒN)

Male Caliban Pal 6: CR 6; Medium-size humanoid (caliban) (6ft. 6 in. tall); hd 6d10+12; HP 55; Init +5 (Dex, Improved Initiative); Spd 30; AC 16 (touch 11, flat-footed 15); Atk +11/+6 melee (1d8+4/19-20, longsword) or +10/+5 melee (1d4+4, spiked gauntlet) or +10/+5 melee (1d8+4, battle axe); SA aura of courage, smite evil; SQ darkvision, turn undead, detect chaos, lay on hands, remove disease, divine grace, divine health; AL LG; SV Fort +10, Ref +6, Will +7; Str 18, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 17.

Skills: Concentration +8, Diplomacy +4, Handle Animal +4, Heal +4, Intimidate +5, Knowledge (religion) +2, Speak Language +2 (Darkonese, Balok). **Feats:** Extra Turning, Improved Initiative, Weapon Focus (longsword).

Languages: Rokuma*, Darkonese, Balok

Paladin Spells per Day: 3/2/2. Base DC = 13 + spell level

Signature Possessions: Studded leather armor, large steel shield, battleaxe, spiked gauntlet

Shih Suren's caliban heritage has made his appearance into a double curse. Not only is he clearly inhuman to even the most casual inspection, but his looks have caused others to assume he is a true weretiger or even one of the dreaded rakshasa. He has often had to fend off more than one adventurer who sought to strike first and ask questions later. Upon seeing him for the first time, however, it is easy to see how such a mistake might be made. Shih is large and muscular, well over six feet tall (making him a giant in his homeland), with a catlike facial structure, prominent fangs and a long tail. A thin layer of fur with orange and black

tiger stripe markings covers his entire body. (The curse of the dying tigress did indeed mark him as one of her own, though perhaps not in the way she had hoped.) A large scar marks the middle of his chest, the result of a horrible wound he received during one of his first adventures on the mainland. In action, he moves with a curious and somewhat unsettling combination of a cat's grace and a samurai's deliberation, and is capable of bursts of great speed and agility that belie his seemingly bulky form. Shih most often dresses in the style of the samurai from his homeland, including a suit of Rokushman armor that he managed to acquire through a proxy, without his family's knowledge.

Background

Shih Suren's story began long before his birth, on one of the elusive islands of Rokushima Taiyoo, where his father served as a samurai in the service of a grand *daimyo*, or warlord. His mother was a beautiful but proud young noblewoman who became enamored of the courageous warrior. Such was their love that they passed from courtship to marriage in less than a year. One day, the young couple had ridden far from their estate and found themselves deep in the heart of an unfamiliar forest. They could feel the presence of the *kami*, or forest spirits, all around them and grew afraid. Ashamed of what she considered weakness, Shih's mother hid her dread with mockery. Instead of asking for help she openly scolded her husband for his fear.

Just then, a tigress crossed their path, carrying a cub in her mouth. Humiliated by his wife's accusations of cowardice, the samurai rode forward and attacked the nearly defenseless female, plunging his sword into her heart. Roaring in agony, the tigress dropped its mewling cub and collapsed, transforming into a human woman before their eyes. Blood dripping from her mouth, the dying weretiger raised a shaking finger and pointed at the two young nobles. "You struck unjustly, harming another to save your own wounded pride," she hissed, while the samurai turned cold with fright. "As you struck down a defenseless one, so too shall you be hunted in your most vulnerable hour. Not another night more shall you sleep without a great beast pursuing you through the forests of your dreams, until you wake up screaming each morning as the beast devours you." And so it was that Shih's father never slept another night without waking half the household with his terrified screams.





"But your crime was worse still," she said, turning her anger on the defiant young noblewoman. "Had you reached out to your husband and trusted your love to see you through to safety, all would have been well. Instead you tried to hide your weakness by covering it with that of another's. In doing so you should have brought the end of my line, but instead I will see that it is the end of yours. I mark as mine your unborn child!" So saying, the weretigress expired, and the two made haste back to the castle. Though she sought every possible means to rid herself of the child, nine months later the noblewoman gave birth to a baby boy. All who saw him shrieked in horror at his appearance. Shaped like a man, he had the face and fur of a tiger, even at such a young age.

It was a scandalous outrage, and finally the *daimyo* declared that he would not allow such an abomination to be raised in his court. Disgraced, the parents resolved in secret to leave the infant in the forest where the curse had been laid, trusting in the wilderness to relieve them of the burden of slaying their only child.

At this time *joss*, or destiny, intervened to save the young caliban, for the *kami* had witnessed the whole scene in the forest. They took pity on the infant and brought him under their protection. They sheltered and raised him until he was old enough to think for himself, then began teaching him the ways of his parent's society, from dancing and folktales to proper etiquette and philosophy. They taught him to feel the life force of the forests, and to use it to heal wounds or repel creatures of darkness. In particular he showed a great aptitude for the path of the samurai. He spent countless hours honing his prowess until his makeshift bamboo weaponry was nearly as deadly as the real thing. When at last he reached the age of independence, Shih told his spirit parents of his desire to seek out his birth parents and show them the noble and honorable being he had become. While the *kami* knew what ill was to come of it, they respected his decision and guided him back to the castle of his parents.

It was an utter disaster. No sooner had Shih arrived on the doorstep than he was called a monster and surrounded by dozens of armed guards. Brought before the court in chains, he had spoken no more than six words before the *daimyo* silenced him. Overcome with anger but unwilling to let them claim victory over him, Shih listened as the nobles in attendance listed their objections to



keeping his "unclean" presence in their court. In the end, his own father challenged him to a duel in order to clear the "stain" on his family's honor.

Bound as he was by the code of the samurai to accept the challenge, Shih accepted the challenge and slew his father. Reacting as he expected, Shih's mother demanded immediate satisfaction for the murder of her husband by this "animal," and the *daimyo* granted her request.

Since he had killed his father as the result of a fair challenge, Shih could not be executed. Instead, he was given a few day's worth of supplies, placed on a small boat and set adrift on the Poison Sea, headed straight into the Nightmare Mists from which no vessel had ever returned. His last thought as the Mists reached out to claim him was to pray to the *kami* that he be spared from abandonment for the second time in his life. He hoped by this to continue to honor his ancestors by upholding the samurai code wherever he might find himself, if he could not honor his living family directly.

Once again, *joss* proved kind. Shih awoke to find himself still alive but adrift upon a strange ocean. As the tides brought him to the unfamiliar shore, he readied himself for what lay ahead. As he quickly discovered, he had traveled to a barbarian land that did not look much more kindly on his





unusual appearance than his homeland had. As for the personal habits of the natives, Shih had never seen anything so unclean! Through all the trials of learning the languages and adapting to the customs of his surroundings, Shih never lost his hold on the samurai code. In time, he even learned to seek out others who shared some of the same ideas about bravery, duty and honor. While such partnerships were universally short-lived, Shih came to accept that maybe there were good things about this land after all and that perhaps here he could find the chance to prove himself and redeem the family honor that he had been denied in his own homeland.

Much as Shih hates to admit it, there really is a roaring tiger pacing deep in his heart, but he always manages to keep it under control. Despite what his family believes, he has absorbed the samurai code of honor better than most men and is determined to live a virtuous and heroic. He does not lie, cheat, strike an opponent from behind or refuse an honorable challenge. Once he has given his word, he upholds his promise at all costs. Shih ignores anyone who attempts to tease or bait him about his appearance unless they turn violent. If that happens, he does not hesitate to subdue his detractors with as much force as necessary. Shih saves the brunt of his rage for the undead and for those who practice necromantic arts. His hatred for them knows no bounds, though he is careful to channel it through the proper avenues of behavior lest he falls from grace. Those who approach him pleasantly must suffer through an early period of aloofness. If they persist in acting friendly, Shih gradually returns the favor. He is not cold, just circumspect. True friends find him both passionate and loyal, even possessing a sly sense of humor.

Secrets

Shih's largest secret is the true depth of his loneliness. While he longs for even just one true friend to help him sort out his destiny, so far much of what he has encountered has been hatred and revulsion. In more than a few instances, people he thought were his friends had actually only been using him for his martial talents, or worse still for the novelty of his freakish appearance. He has met with adventurers and other good people, but his perspective is still defensive. Each time someone disappoints him, he comes a little closer to feeling in his heart that he really is no better than the monster his family believes him to be.

Another secret is Shih's loathing for all things related to the realm of necromancy and undeath. While anyone who travels with him quickly realizes how much he despises the foul things, only an astute judge of character would perceive that deep down he is completely terrified of becoming one of them. This fear stems from his one brief attempt at a romantic relationship since his arrival on the mainland. Shih ended up used and betrayed by a necromantic priestess who used foul magic to wither his heart, rendering him helpless as she prepared to sacrifice him to her dark gods and raise him as her slave. Only the timely arrival of his companions kept him from falling prey to her horrifying designs. He still bears the scar where she tried to remove his heart. Since then his hatred and fear of all things related to necromancy and undeath has grown with each subsequent encounter. He will do almost anything to avoid the possibility of becoming one of the undead.

Current Events

Shih at last believes he has found a purpose for why he was allowed to breach the Nightmare Mists and reach the mainland. He has uncovered the Darkonian lair of a master necromancer, Lord Erexen Winterhand, who hopes to harness the power of Necropolis to create a magic item that will allow him to duplicate the effects of the Requiem on a smaller scale. To attack it alone would almost certainly be suicide. The tunnels are crawling with Erexen's earlier experiments with undeath, and the necromancer himself is a potent wizard. Shih hopes to find a group honorable and worthy enough to join him in cleansing the hollow mountain of its foul master forever.

He has one full season to make his choice, which means that currently he is scouting the land as surreptitiously as possible, investigating reports of heroic activity and watching such groups from afar to determine their worthiness. Should no acceptable candidates present themselves, he fully intends to assault Lord Winterhand's base himself. His honor demands no less, but he has a strange feeling that in this instance *joss* will, for the third time in his life, provide for him.

Combat

Shih Suren fights according to the code of the samurai of his homeland. He does not attack from behind, nor does he fight without offering challenge, unless he does so as part of an attacking army. His mastery of the longsword makes him a





formidable opponent. He shows mercy to honorable foes, but gives no quarter to undead or necromancers.

Aura of Courage (Su): Shih is immune to magical (but not natural) fear, and gains the effects of the Courage feat.

Smite Evil (Su): Once per day, Shih may add his Charisma bonus (+3) to any attack and his level (+6) to the damage inflicted upon an evil opponent.

Turn Undead (Su): Shih can turn undead 10 times per day.

Detect Chaos (Sp): This ability duplicates the effects of the spell *detect chaos* and can be used at will.

Lay on Hands (Sp): Shih can heal 18 hps per day.

Remove Disease (Sp): Shih can *remove disease* twice per week.

Divine Grace (Su): The paladin's Cha bonus applies to Fear, Horror and Madness saves, and counts twice when trying to improve relations with good NPCs, but Shih's Charisma bonus is negated when dealing with evil NPCs

Divine Health (Ex): Shih is immune to all diseases except those spawned by darklords and curses.

Lair

Shih Suren spends most of his time traveling the realm of Darkon, staying wherever he can find a room or a campsite.

Cian Silverleaf

Female Elf Ftr4: CR 4; Medium-size humanoid (elf) (5 ft. tall); hd 4d10; HP 25; Init +7 (Dex, Improved Initiative); Spd 30; AC 18 (touch 13, flat-footed 15); Atk +7 melee (1d8+5/19-20, longsword) or +7 ranged (1d8, longbow); SQ elven traits; AL LG; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +1; Str 16, Dex 16, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 14.

Skills: Balance +7, Climb +4, Intimidate +3, Jump +5, Open Lock +4, Swim +4. **Feats:** Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Weapon Focus (longsword), Weapon Specialization (longsword).

Languages: elven*

Signature Possessions: studded leather armor, masterwork longsword, large metal shield.



Cian is an elven woman of average height. She is exceptionally muscular for her size, which lends her a certain ferocity that often gives much larger opponents pause. She carries a black shield with the symbol of three roses intertwined – one red, one blue and one white – and a sword with that same device inlaid on the hilt. She customarily dresses in black clothes with dark green trim, and she cares very little for frills: most of the time she carries only her weapons and what meager gear she needs to brave the forests of Sithicus. Despite a certain grim intensity to her appearance, she remains quite beautiful – “the marriage of a maiden and a storm cloud,” as one rebuffed elven wit dubbed her – with porcelain skin and long chestnut hair that sparkles in the sunlight. Her only concession to vanity is the fact that she wears her hair in two long braids that nearly reach the ground and seldom puts it up at all, having long since adapted to fighting with it. The sight of her whipping braids and flashing blade is rapidly becoming something of a trademark among the adventurers who patrol the Sithican wilderness.

Background

Although Ravenloft has fostered countless tragic love stories since the first domain was sum-



moned forth from the Mists, not all of the victims of its wicked twists of fate fall quite so easily. Some, faced with the crushing odds and insane setbacks that plague those in search of happiness, actually manage to draw strength from their trials. While Cian may not be aware of the Dark Powers or the sinister game they are playing with the lives of the denizens of this realm, it's unlikely she would succumb to despair even if she were. The love that she bears for her missing Jacinth might very well be enough to allow her to turn aside the Mists themselves if that's what it takes to be reunited with him. Then again, perhaps that's exactly what the Dark Powers want her to believe.

Cian first appeared in the forests of Sithicus almost two years ago, wandering blindly in search of a man that wasn't there and trying to find her way back to a town that no one had ever heard of before. Although at first the elves believed her to be one of her own, it quickly became apparent that she knew absolutely nothing of their culture or history. While she claimed to have fallen victim to some mysterious force while she was traveling the woods, the suspicious folk of that domain still watch her with narrowed eyes, waiting to see if she has been marked by some malevolent force in the wilderness.

At first Cian attempted to win the local townsfolk over, but even as her reputation as a sword-fighter grew and she proved herself fighting all manner of hideous foes, she never felt those eyes leave her back, waiting for some sign that she was something more than she appeared. Eventually she tired of enduring their endless suspicions. Having no luck searching for Jacinth anyway, she left the town alone with its fears, making her way through Sithicus on blind instinct and determination.

Since then, she has gradually learned more about the realm and the people around her, hiding her ignorance behind a tale of being misled and confused by wicked spirits in the forest who robbed her of her memories. What she has learned chills her, for it seems to be a never-ending litany of sorrow and misery. She has found that a local proverb that states: "For every day the light shines, another two the sun goes hiding" is at once literally true and figuratively accurate. Indeed, even the land itself is a puzzling contradiction to her, at once familiar and alien, with forest trails she swears she once walked before under different stars. Having learned full well how suspicious the natives are of outlanders, however, she is careful to keep such

knowledge to herself, at least for now. Instead, to keep those she meets from asking too many questions, she cultivates the persona of a noble but highly dangerous and efficient mercenary. It is an identity that suits her well, not to mention stopped any number of insults or petty fights that other elves are sometimes subjected to. One sight of the entwined roses and her cold stare is enough to convince most ruffians to look elsewhere for trouble.

As she travels, Cian is increasingly confronted with the difficult choice of continuing her search for her beloved, or with staying to battle the ever-mounting number of new evils and injustices that she encounters. She cannot turn a blind eye to the suffering of innocents, but every day she spends riding off on some adventure is one day she is farther away from seeing her love again. The strain of the choice has already begun to wear on her. Even so, she is as capable with a sword and shield as any warrior could hope to be, and the determination to survive that her love gives her is truly astounding. She has weathered no less than three brushes with death simply because she thought of her love and willed herself to live. No matter how dark the realm might be or how far into its wicked heart she may have to travel, Cian will not stop until she has been reunited with her true love again. She will not allow herself to do any less

Cian is a study in intensity and control, never wavering a step from her purpose nor suffering others to block her path no matter what the reason. She is consumed by the need to find her lost love, but she hides these feelings behind an inscrutable mask. She has never liked showing weakness, and this is certainly no time to change that.

The sight of so much evil and suffering fills Cian with an overwhelming sense of outrage. While she cannot bear to tear herself away from her search, she also cannot stand idly by while evil of any kind holds sway. More and more often, she finds herself drawn into an increasing number of battles and adventures against the wicked powers that seem to hold sway everywhere she looks. Like it or not, she is still very much a hero at heart and will do whatever it takes to see to it that innocents are protected and evil is punished. If she cannot leave this realm, at least for the time being, then she might as well do her best to see to it that those who live here have better lives.

She keeps a sharp eye out for anything that might even remotely relate to her arrival in this realm and especially any clues as to where Jacinth





might be. She makes certain that no chance to investigate either mystery slips by under any circumstances.

Individuals who get past her rather brusque demeanor find the same intensity in her private life as well, only instead it softens a bit into a keen wit and a deep love of nature such as only the elves truly know. She takes great care before revealing such a side to others. This new world has so far been a nonstop display of wickedness and horror, and that makes her immediately suspicious of anyone who wants to get too close to her too quickly.

Secrets

Though some suspect it, Cian herself is sure she is an outlander, one not native to the Land of Mists. She has, nevertheless, become trapped here for reasons she doesn't dare begin to fathom. In her mind, she can clearly picture the lush forests and beautiful treetop cities of her homeland. She can experience in her memory the nightly balls and pageants full of beauty and grace, as well as summers spent by a shore with an ocean too blue and beautiful to ever have been a part of this miserable place.

Most of all, she remembers the love of her life, a humble sailor named Jacinth who wooed her during one of those magical summers by the sea, and she weeps each night for the love that she is parted from. Of the actual disaster which brought her here, she remembers nearly nothing, save vague impressions of a midnight trek down a trail shrouded in shadows and mist. As the enveloping mists grew thicker, she and Jacinth called out for each other as they became lost in the endless fog until only her own voice echoed back to her. When she finally came out of the fog, she was in the domain of Sithicus.

In her heart she can feel that Jacinth has come to this awful realm with her, but she hasn't the first idea of how to find him. This frustration both tears at her and urges her to continue searching. Worst of all, she has begun to notice that every day she remembers a little less about where she came from. She fears that soon she will lose all her memories of her past along with the love of her life and any idea of how she might possibly get home.

Current Sketch

Cian's current objectives are fairly straightforward: she wants to get out of Sithicus, find Jacinth and then figure out some way to return to the realm

that they came from. Unfortunately, she still knows little about the different domains or how they relate to each other, and doesn't have the first idea where else she would begin looking. Anyone who could offer their sincere help in this regard would earn her friendship in short order.

Combat

Cian is a fierce and determined fighter in battle. She relies on her expertise with sword and her aggressive moves to batter down her opponents. She tries not to engage in combat unless she has to; unfortunately, the realm in which she finds herself places her in situations where combat seems the only viable alternative.

Elven Traits (Su): Cian has low-light vision, and is immune to sleep spells and effects, receives a +2 on saves against enchantment effects, and a +2 bonus on Listen, Search, and Spot checks.

Lair

Cian currently travels throughout Sithicus, staying in inns whenever her journeys take her into a town. At other times, she camps in the forest.

Robin Stillwater

Male Half-Elf Rgr3: CR 3; Medium-size humanoid (half-elf) (6ft. 3in. tall); hd 3d10+3; HP 20; Init +1; Spd 30; AC 13 (touch 11, flat-footed 12); Atk +6 melee (1d6, quarterstaff) or +6 melee (1d4/19-20, dagger) or +4 ranged (1d8, longbow); SQ half-elven traits, favored enemy (beasts +1), innocence; AL LG; SV Fort +3, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 16, Dex 13, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 15.

Skills: Balance +2, Climb +6, Heal +4, Hide +3, Jump +5, Listen +4, Ride +2, Swim +6, Tumble +2. **Feats:** Endurance, Run, Track.

Languages: elven*, Lamordian

Signature Possessions: leather armor, eating dagger, longbow, 2 quivers of arrows, quarterstaff.

Robin is still in his late teens, with a rather willowy half-elven build made more substantial thanks to long hours spent working on the farm. His fair skin quickly darkens to a deep tan during the summer months. He has his father's short brown hair but his mother's stunning hazel eyes. When he smiles, his whole face lights up and the beautiful features of both races shine through like a spring sunrise. His clothing is plain and tends to favor earth tones, consisting of simple shirts and



pants with a battered old leather vest thrown on over them. Robin tends to sling his short bow over his shoulders as he walks, leaning on his staff for particularly long trips. His eyes constantly search out new things to see and his attention seldom remains in one place for long.

Background

Some small pockets of normality still exist in the darkness of the domains — places where life is almost the same as it would be on any other realm, where goodness actually holds sway and happiness is a way of life, not just a fleeting moment. Most such places don't last long, but are conquered by their more aggressive neighbors or simply destroyed outright by the fury of a domain lord when he discovers their infuriating innocence within his realm. Still, a handful manage to stay safe from the evils of the world for years, even decades, nestled away in a pocket of their own making. In that time, the warmth and love they generate can give rise to the most unlikely heroes: those who have yet to give up hope in this blackened world.

Stillwater Springs is one such tiny hamlet, founded by a retired elven adventurer and her human husband along with a small group of their closest friends as an attempt to be rid of the corruption so common in the other lands. The spot they chose for their fledgling utopia was a small, sheltered valley in the northeastern area of Lamordia, where the hills helped block some of the chill winds and the valley was fertile enough to begin growing crops and raising livestock. As the seasons turned and the families grew, the elders replaced the conventional faiths they had seen too often go astray with a more general sense of divinity in all things. Their children were raised to revere and respect the world around them as well as the living beings that depended on it. All their basic needs were provided for by the valley or the crops and livestock that were raised. Some of the elders traveled secretly to other villages far away to acquire other necessities. Such trips were few and far between, however, as the town did its best to stay self-reliant. Festivals were common, as were games and competitions between the different families. The families relied on consensus rather than law and settled disputes by majority vote.

Robin Stillwater grew up in this idyllic environment learning to embrace life with open arms. From the moment he was able to carry a pail of chicken feed, his days were spent working on the

farm, while his nights and festival times were spent playing and exploring with friends, and listening to the elders' tales. His parents' only admonition was to never leave the valley. Aside from that, he was left to discover his world for himself.

Being an obedient son, he respected his parents' rule about leaving the valley. As he grew older, however, Robin wondered more and more about the world outside. While his friends settled down and started farms of their own, he became more and more of a dreamer, always wondering what strange and extraordinary things lay outside the world he had known all his life.

Eventually, one night he confessed his desire to his parents, ashamed of what they would think of him for wishing to defy them. To his surprise, they encouraged the idea, telling him that while they were sad he wished to leave, what they wanted most of all was for him to be happy. The entire village turned out to see him off and wish him good luck, and the gifts they gave him still make up the majority of his equipment.

With tears in his eyes and a brave smile on his face, Robin waved a last good-bye from the top of the hill overlooking the town and struck out on his own, feeling at once terrified and exhilarated at the prospect of the adventure before him. He hasn't looked back since. While the idea of eventually returning to the valley is still his ultimate goal, he intends to see as much of the world and have as many adventures as possible before he does so. Given the natural affinity for those such as him to wind up facing all manner of evil foes and perilous situations, he is likely to be a long time returning.

Robin is genuinely friendly, warm and caring, treating both friends and strangers with the utmost kindness and compassion. He smiles often and always finds a kind word to say to everyone, even people who aren't so friendly to him. In social situations, he is polite and deferential to men, especially older adventurers, and while he tends to blush and get a bit nervous around women, he does his best to be the very image of courtesy and chivalry toward them. He has a very simple, uncomplicated way of looking at the world. Though not stupid, he is simply filled with an abiding faith that so long as good people do their best to battle evil, things will turn out all right. This belief is generally considered either quite charming or thoroughly exasperating by those who come into contact with him.



Confronted with evil, Robin does his best to strike down those wicked beings responsible. Sometimes he charges into battle a bit too quickly, as the concept of his own mortality hasn't quite fully developed yet. When the dust settles, he tries to tend to any of the injured and comfort those in distress. For him, the business of being a hero isn't only slaying terrible monsters, but helping those who have suffered at the hands of the creatures find their way back to a normal, happy life. Though some more jaded souls disparage this philosophy, Robin knows in his heart that he is right.

Secrets

Robin has no secrets at all. He really is a young farm boy out to see the world, just as he claims to be.

Current Sketch

Robin has only recently left his parents' farm to seek his fortune; at present he is still wandering the wilds of Lamordia, where each day he finds something new to marvel at and he gets caught up in some new adventure seemingly every week. Little does he suspect that some of the areas he has wandered into are places from which no one has emerged from alive in centuries. Whether due to simple luck or some greater force at work, Robin does indeed lead a charmed life, for now.

Combat

Robin's combat style has yet to develop fully. He relies on straightforward tactics, often using his bow to strike from a distance before engaging his enemy with a quarterstaff.

Half-Elven Traits: Robin receives low-light vision, is immune to sleep spells and effects, receives a +2 on saves against enchantment effects, and a +1 bonus on Listen, Search, and Spot checks.

Favored Enemy: Robin receives a +1 bonus to Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot and Wilderness Lore checks as well as weapon damage rolls against beasts.

Innocence: As an innocent (see Chapter Three of the *Ravenloft Core Rulebook*) Robin receives a +3 divine bonus to all saving throws against any spell effect or supernatural ability that requires a powers check or is used by an evil creature. He suffers a -2 competence penalty to Horror saves and Sense Motive checks, and he can be turned as undead by evil clerics.



Lair

As someone new to the adventuring life, Robin has no fixed abode, camping in the wilderness or staying wherever he can find an inexpensive inn or a person willing to give him a space by their fire.

Kattinker Catters

Female Gnome Sor8: CR 8; Small-size humanoid (gnome) (3 ft. 6 in. tall); hd 8d4+24; HP 40; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 20; AC 13 (touch 13, flat-footed 12); Atk +4 melee (1d6, light mace) or +7 ranged (1d4/19-20, throwing dagger); SQ gnome traits; AL CG; SV Fort +5, Ref +4, Will +6; Str 8, Dex 15, Con 17 Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 17.

Skills: Alchemy +8, Concentration +5, Craft +4, Hide +2, Knowledge (arcane) +4, Move Silently +3, Scry +5. **Spellcraft** +5. **Feats:** Brew Potion, Silent Spell, Still Spell.

Languages: gnomish*, Balok

Spells per Day: 6/7/7/6/3. Base DC= 13+ spell level.

Sorcerer Spells Known: 0- ray of frost, detect poison, daze, flare, light, read magic, arcane mark, mage hand; 1st - alarm, spider climb, detect secret doors, identify, obscuring mists; 2nd- protection from





Chapter Three

arrows, glitterdust, Tasha's hideous laughter; 3rd-explosive runes, lightning bolt, hold person; 4th-ice storm.

Signature Possessions: light mace, 10 throwing daggers, spell components.

As her name would suggest, Kattinker Tatters dresses in motley scraps of old clothes sewn together in wild and interesting patterns, lending her a flashy and dramatic appearance. She uses her magic to change her hair and eye color constantly, favoring unusual shades such as amber, violet or bronze (they always match at least one part of her outfit anyway). She enjoys the reactions that her more outlandish combinations generate as she strolls through towns. Full of energy, she bounces from one foot to another and keeps her hands busy playing with anything from a ball of twine to a shiny coin. She never stands still for long unless the situation calls for stealth, in which case she becomes eerily still. Kattinker smiles constantly, even at her enemies, although she reserves a macabre rictus grin for her foes. Her laugh is high and pretty, reminiscent of water trickling down a mountain stream, though she's not above a good cackle or two when a mischievous mood strikes.

Background

Many a person has mistaken the nimble force of nature who calls herself Kattinker Tatters for nothing more than a child at play until they see her call forth one of her favorite spells. Her talent for convincing illusions and innovative enchantments has allowed the gnome to make her own way in the world for some time. In those rare instances where she finds herself faced with a problem that illusions can't fix, foes quickly learn that her command of magic isn't limited to harmless parlor tricks. Worse off are those who earn her enmity and don't immediately realize it, for like many of her kind Kattinker has a gift for elaborate practical jokes and other sophisticated forms of humiliating those who earn her ire. Fortunately for the realm at large, it takes a great deal to get on her bad side.

Kattinker does not know her parents, nor does she have any idea of her birthplace. She was raised by the members of the enigmatic Carnival, and all they would tell her was that they had found her abandoned in the forest as an infant. Several members took pity on her and decided to raise her as their own. She grew up with the whole troupe as her parents, helping out here or lending a hand there, wherever they needed her. Most of the

performers adored her quick smile and sunny disposition.

Kattinker was always precocious, even to the point of renaming herself. Though called Jolina at first, when she was five years old she found a ragged old vest discarded at the fair grounds and paraded around imperiously in it for the rest of the day. Amused by her antics, another performer jokingly asked who she was. "Kattinker Tatters," she replied and from then on, she never answered to anything else. For many years afterward the vest remained her most prized possession; pieces of it are still part of each item of clothing she wears to this day.

As she grew older, Kattinker discovered a natural affinity for magic, which other performers helped develop into a true talent. She went from helping out behind the scenes to being onstage, and she absolutely adored it. Soon her acts drew sizable crowds of their own, and she constantly worked to create newer and more exciting ways to use her magic. One of her favorite tricks is to be bound and gagged at one point during her performance, only to conjure up an illusion requested by the audience. No matter how many roars of approval she gets from the audience, she never rests on her laurels. In her mind, the moment she stops pushing her magic to the limit is the same moment she should retire, and she doesn't intend to ever do that. As a hobby, she also works with basic alchemy, mixing her own concoctions to create colored smoke and other effects for her performances.

Although she enjoyed the life she had with her adoptive family at the Carnival, Kattinker eventually struck out on her own, hoping to learn new tricks and mixtures by throwing herself headlong at the world and hoping for the best. Since then she has been everything from a court magician to a street performer and has gone from the lap of luxury to performing for food and a place to stay at some remote inn. This variation doesn't bother her. She sees it all as part of the great performance that is her life. Any time things get rough, she just reminds herself another act will follow.

Spared most of the morbid sense of humor that haunts many others of her race, Kattinker sees herself as the life of the party wherever she goes. Fortunately, cute features, a gift for magic and a winning personality go a long way toward keeping just about anyone entertained. If those don't work, she gamely tries jokes and puns, starting with a few real groaners and working up to more sophisticated





humor. She is perfectly capable of being serious when circumstances demand it, though few situations fit that criteria.

Secrets

Kattinker didn't leave the Carnival because she got tired of sharing the stage with other performers. In truth, one of the show's Vistani fortunetellers warned her that if she did not leave the troupe, she would wind up destroying the very people she loved so much. For the happy-go-lucky Kattinker, the idea that she could be responsible for such a thing just by staying with them was a new and frightening idea, but unwilling to risk it she bid the Carnival farewell and struck out on her own. Since then, she's become a little worried that maybe the old Vistani woman didn't just mean the Carnival. She fears that *any* group that she joins might be doomed to destruction. While she doesn't give the idea too much serious consideration, it nevertheless gives her pause every once in a while, which for Kattinker is a revelation in itself.

Additionally, the phenomenon of Twisting that transforms the members of Carnival in grotesque and revealing ways (see *Champions of Darkness*) passed over Kattinker. Either her association with Carnival since her young childhood has somehow made her immune to the effect or else she has no deep inner flaw that needs to be made manifest.

Current Sketch

Since leaving Carnival for good, Kattinker searches for another outlet for her peculiar brand of magic and humorous self-expression. Along the way, she's more than happy to stop at a remote town or isolated farming village and use her magic to pick up some money or supplies. Sooner or later, she runs into a settlement that isn't so tolerant of outsiders, causing her to leave town quickly. So far her luck has been good and she's still as cocky as ever. Being on the road has led her into a few recent scrapes and close escapes against a variety of monsters. As a result, Kattinker has become fascinated with the adventuring life, and is looking to offer her skills to a suitable group that's willing to have her come along with them.



Combat

Kattinker is not much for close-up fighting, preferring to remain in the background and cast spells intended to confuse and mislead her opponents. As such, she makes an excellent supporting spellcaster.

Gnome Traits (Ex): As a gnome, Kattinka receives a +2 bonus on saves against illusions, +1 on attacks against kobolds and goblinoids, +4 dodge against giants. +2 on Listen checks, +2 on Alchemy checks, +4 on Hide checks. She can cast the 0-level spells *dancing Lights*, *ghost sound* and *prestidigitation* once per day each.

Lair

Like so many traveling adventurers, Kattinker has no fixed abode. She prefers to stay in comfortable inns when she can afford to, but contents herself with lesser accommodations when necessary. Her true "home" is the Carnival, wherever it may be.



The Wanderers: a Sample Group of Heroes

Heroes come in many forms. The following group of adventurers represents an unusual and, in some ways, atypical collection of heroic characters. Though the Vistani often seem inscrutable and somewhat sinister figures in the Dread Realms, the Wanderers belie that image, proving themselves a solid force for good and a beacon of light in the darkness of the lands of Ravenloft.

History

In the year 720, a young Vistani woman named Magda Ilyanova Kulchevich found herself alone in the wilds of Gundarak. Her family and tribesmen had been slaughtered by the Cursed Knight, a powerful and brutal undead warrior then newly arrived in the Dark Domains. The Cursed Knight spared Magda's life, but forced her to serve as his guide. After harrowing experiences in the castle of Count Strahd von Zarovich and all across the countryside of both Barovia and Gundarak, Magda managed to escape from the Cursed Knight and his newfound ally, the murderous werebadger Azrael Dak.

Gundarak proved only slightly less dangerous for Magda than her time with the Cursed Knight. Both the lord of that unhappy land — the warrior-vampire Duke Gundar — and its beleaguered peasantry found a lone Vistana an inviting target. For almost two years, Magda fled human hunters during the day, Gundar's monstrous minions at night. Her innate powers as a Vistana gave her advantage enough to survive from sunrise to sunrise. The enchanted weapon she carried — the unbreakable cudgel Gard — allowed her to strike back with lethal force whenever her pursuers cornered her.

Over time, Magda gathered around her several other Vistani whose families had been destroyed — a few at first, then more, until her caravan numbered almost two dozen, a group large enough to inspire the peasants and the darklord's lesser servants to turn their attention to easier prey. The gypsies came from all three Vistani *tasques*, and several different tribes. They were fortunetellers and traders and thieves. Though not the oldest in the group, Magda assumed the position of *raunie*. The matter was never discussed; the ragtag band simply understood that the young woman would serve as their leader.

Magda called her patchwork caravan "the Wanderers" in honor of her legendary ancestor, Kulchek the Wanderer. They grew strong, forging a unique set of customs and even a style of dress that was an amalgam of those belonging to all the Vistani tribes represented in their *vardos*. Some of the Vistani they encountered in their travels looked down upon the Wanderers as mongrels. Most, however, had heard the story of Magda's suffering and her remarkable triumphs, and gave her caravan the same respect that they would any other Vistani tribe. A few elders even wondered aloud if the young *raunie* might actually be the heir to Kulchek's fabled greatness.

In a way, Kulchek helped keep the caravan safe; he had been the original wielder of the cudgel Gard — had carved it, if the legends were to be believed, from a tree at the top of the world, from wood only his ever-sharp dagger Novgor could cut. In her ceaseless travels, Magda kept careful watch for that long-lost blade. Her dreams had revealed that a Vistana of Kulchek's bloodline could carve a remarkable legacy for herself with Novgor, even change the history of the Dark Domains themselves.

A member of the Wanderers would fulfill this dream-prophecy, but in ways their *raunie* never could have imagined.

The dagger Novgor eventually found its way into the hands of Magda's daughter, Inza, a scheming and ambitious girl, as treacherous as her mother was brave. In ways both subtle and obvious, Inza had imperiled the Wanderers for her entire life. The pain of her delivery nearly ended Magda's life and trapped the caravan in Gundarak on the very night that domain's darklord met his doom. Her constant screaming as an infant brought more than one deadly night-creature down upon the Wanderers' camp, and her carelessly concealed thefts caused the troupe's hasty departure from village after village all throughout her youth. Magda's love for Inza blinded her to the girl's darker traits. But by the time Inza was 16, the rest of the Wanderers had decided that she was either a monster or a jinx, though their respect for their *raunie* prevented them from doing more than grumble to themselves at each new transgression the girl committed.

Magda's blind spot for her daughter eventually proved fatal. By 752, the Wanderers had moved to Sithicus, the domain-prison of the *raunie*'s old adversary, the Cursed Knight. There, Inza forged a secret alliance with Azrael Dak. The werebadger



had long served as the Knight's seneschal, but now schemed to take control of the domain for himself. The werebadger underestimated Inza, assuming her ambition reached no higher than control of the Wanderers. In truth, she lusted for power even Azrael could scarcely imagine and was willing to do anything to obtain it. She used the dagger Novgor to weaken Gard, then arranged for the phantasmal creatures known as salt shadows to attack the caravan. The seemingly unbreakable cudgel shattered during the fight, and the shadows possessed several of the Vistani and strangled Magda, killing her. The Wanderers who survived that fight were later sacrificed as part of a complicated scheme by which Inza would gain the Cursed Knight's personal protection and thus grant her access to his keep and a chance at his throne. Inza secretly tipped off a mob of ogres about the location of the Wanderers' camp. Only Inza and three of the Vistani survived the resulting attack, though she would have preferred to see all her tribesmen dead.

Though the Cursed Knight eventually lost his throne, it was neither Inza nor Azrael who could claim the victory. The hero Ganelon disrupted the werebadger's plot, in which he attempted to seize control of the shadows of every living creature in the domain. The remaining Wanderers discovered Inza's perfidy and swore revenge. They now recognize Inza in her true form — the secret darklord of Sithicus — but that knowledge gives them all the more reason to work against her.

Along with the giant Nabon — who is himself possessed of a strange blood-tie to the Vistani and a victim of Inza's cruelty — the three surviving members of Magda's caravan of outcasts walk a ceaseless patrol of Sithicus. Their days are spent foiling Inza's secret schemes and battling the minions of Azrael Dak. In the calm hours between fights, they ready themselves for their final confrontation with the treacherous Inza Magdova Kulchevich.

Alexi

Male Kamii Vistana Ftr8: CR 8; Medium-size humanoid (Vistani) (5 ft. 9 in. tall); hd 8d10+16; HP 68; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30; AC 17 (touch 12, flat-footed 15); Atk: +13/+8 melee (1d8+5, +2 longsword) or +10/+5 ranged; SA evil eye; SQ the sight, mist navigation, tracking magic, static burn; AL NG; SV Fort +8, Ref +6, Will +6; Str 16, Dex 15, Con 15, Int 12, Wis 15, Cha 16.

Skills: Appraise +5, Bluff +7, Climb -2, Craft (weaponsmithing) +8, Intimidate +8, Ride +6, Tumble -5; **Feats:** Back to the Wall, Combat Reflexes, Courage, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Quick Draw, Voice of Wrath, Weapon Focus (longsword).

Outcast Rating: 2.

Languages: patterna*, Balok, Sithican.

Signature Possessions: +2 longsword, scale mail, shield (small steel), *scarab of protection* (10 charges).

An austere man of middle years, Alexi is a dedicated warrior and a swordsman whose ferocity in battle more than makes up for his lack of formal training. Over the years, he's faced many of the monstrosities that creep through the Sithican night, and little frightens him. He deals out blows to undead halflings and uncouth human thieves with the same stern efficiency and utter lack of surprise. Though always polite, even to *giorgios*, Alexi is a man of few words. His clothes, like the expression typically found on his weathered face, are dour and gloomy. That makes the ornate, gold-hilted longsword he carries all the more startling — though most who see the weapon unsheathed do not have long to marvel at the incongruity of such a bright blade belonging to such a grim-faced traveler.





Background

Like many of the original Wanderers, Alexi had been left without a family by the butchery Duke Gundar inflicted upon the Vistani in his domain. He joined the newly formed tribe after Magda rescued him from a handful of *giorgios* who had decided to win some favor with Gundarak's lord by hanging a gypsy from a tree near their village well. A boy of 14, Alexi had nevertheless managed to kill or stun a half-dozen of the adults who attacked him, even though the only weapon available to him was a cracked wooden bucket. Magda made quick work of the men the boy hadn't yet brained. When the fighting was over, he left the well at the *raunie's* side, and remained her most loyal supporter until her death.

Alexi followed Magda's orders without question or hesitation. He came to be considered the *raunie's* right-hand man, the never-faltering soldier who crafted the caravan's weapons and kept them safe from the Core's ever-present dangers. Some in the troupe suspected that a deeper emotion than respect bound him to Magda, who was a mere eight years his elder. Alexi merely scowled away any suggestion to that effect, much as he scowled away the advances of the several Vistani women who made their interest in him clear over the years.

After the *raunie's* death, he transferred his loyalty — though not his affection — to Inza. Magda clearly loved and trusted the girl; Alexi felt he could do no less. Still, Inza frightened him and the actions he took in her name troubled his conscience. When serving Magda, he never gave much thought to matters of good and evil, right and wrong. If an act helped the Wanderers and proved expedient, it was good. He never paused to consider why Magda never reveled in another's misery or caused anyone strife they had not earned. And if the path she led the Wanderers down was as free as possible from corruption, it was merely because she had experienced the monstrousness of the Cursed Knight and Count Strahd firsthand — an experience to which few living men or women in the Core could lay claim.

Not so with Inza. Alexi recognized the girl's vicious streak, and found many of the things she commanded him to do, even in the short time she pretended to claim the title of *raunie*, distasteful. Though a relentless opponent in a clash of arms, Alexi considered torture beneath him, something

practiced by the sort of *giorgio* rabble who had attempted to string him up in Gundarak. So when Inza ordered him to help her torment a prisoner, he found himself torn between his obligation to her as *raunie* and the daughter of his beloved Magda, and his personal code. Fortunately, the captive escaped before any real harm could be done to him, but the event made it clear to the Vistana that he was serving the wrong master.

Current Sketch

The revelation of Inza's treachery against the Wanderers relieved Alexi of making the unpleasant choice between his tribe and his conscience. Whenever he thinks of the girl, his expression becomes an even deeper and more tight-lipped scowl than usual, as if he has just eaten something so sour he can't open his mouth again to spit it out. The only thing likely to wash that taste from his mouth is Inza's destruction, a cause to which Alexi is totally dedicated. His hatred for the darklord runs almost as deep as his love for the late Madame Magda.

Alone of the surviving Wanderers, Alexi remembers the caravan's earliest days in Gundarak, when every hour brought a new battle for survival. He accepts the hard life they must live, and knows that it will either destroy them or temper them like good weapon-grade steel. He insists on calling the Wanderers a tribe, though they actually do not function as one; still, to admit otherwise is to allow Inza to claim the place as Magda's sole legacy to the world. Even pragmatic Alexi cannot bring himself to accept that.

Alexi is not the leader of the Wanderers, though he is the oldest and most experienced member. His strength has always been as a second-in-command, and he is much more comfortable allowing someone he trusts to make the decisions about what the tribe should do next. In day-to-day matters, he defers to Nikolas; the ranger has little trouble sorting evil from good and always sides with the latter. Alexi finds nothing strange about traveling with the giant Nabon. The world, he learned long ago, is predictable only in the way it springs surprises upon you. Piotr is more of a problem for him, since the young man does not share his moral outlook and seems motivated by simple revenge and self-interest rather than a deeper-held belief in their cause. The young man's former alliance with the treacherous girl troubles him, too.





Combat

Once combat begins, Alexi assumes his old role as protector of the tribe. No one questions his right to do so; his instincts and leadership in battle have saved them more times than any of them can recall. When blades are drawn or arrows begin to fly, all eyes turn to Alexi for orders.

His fighting style was formed by his experiences with the Wanderers in their earliest days, as a small, beleaguered group of outcasts in Gundarak. He favors a good defense, and will not hesitate to signal a retreat if the situation merits. He will fortify any location the Wanderers choose for a camp, and relies heavily upon Nikolas' scouting abilities to help them avoid unnecessary trouble. Should a fight find Alexi, however, it will likely find him ready.

His weapon of choice is a garishly decorated +2 longsword. The blade was a gift from a group of elven merchants the Wanderers rescued from some of Inza's Chasm-born shadow servants. The elves, though outwardly haughty and disdainful of the humans, recognized the service the Wanderers had done for them. They especially appreciated Alexi's fighting skill and his demeanor. He was polite and respectful to them, without presuming any sort of friendship or alliance based upon the rescue.

In truth, the elven merchants also found the enchanted weapon hideously ugly, and knew that they would have little hope of selling it to one of their own kind. They also appreciated the humorous contrast of the gaudy blade and the grim, gray man to whom they offered it in thanks. Secretly, Alexi shares their appreciation of the gift, and for precisely the same reasons as the elves.

Cair

As their name implies, the Wanderers keep no permanent base of operations. They travel almost exclusively in the domain of Sithicus, and focus their patrols around the Great Chasm, where Inza currently resides. The Wanderers observe a routine of moving their camp every day, as Magda insisted they do while she was *raunie*. In any camp, Alexi will choose a sleeping spot that doubles as a lookout post and will never sleep in any room that does not have at least two potential exits.

Nikolas

Male Equaar Vistana Rng6: CR 6; Medium-size humanoid (Vistani) (5 ft. 11 in. tall); hd 6d10+12; HP 52; Init +3; Spd 30; AC 15 (touch 13, flat-footed 12); Atk: +9/+4 melee (1d6+3, scimitar) or +9/+4 ranged (1d8, light crossbow); SA evil eye, favored enemy (undead +2, beasts +1); SQ the sight, mist navigation, tracking magic, static burn; AL NG; SV Fort +7, Ref +5, Will +4; Str 17, Dex 17, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 14.

Skills: Animal Empathy +9, Handle Animal +11, Hide +7, Intuit Direction +3, Move Silently +8, Ride +8, Search +4, Use Rope +7, Wilderness Lore +8 (+10 avoid getting lost); **Feats:** Tracking, Voice of Wrath, Weapon Focus (crossbow, light), Weapon Focus (scimitar).

Ranger Spells per Day: 2. Base DC = 13 + spell level.

Spells Known: 1st – *alarm, animal friendship, delay poison, detect animals or plants, detect snares and pits, entangle, magic fang, pass without trace, read magic, resist elements, speak with animals, summon nature's ally I.*

Outcast Rating: 2.

Languages: patterna*, Balok, Falkovian, Sithican.





Signature Possessions: Scimitar, light crossbow, leather armor, horn of fog, pipes of haunting, rope of climbing.

A second-generation Wanderer, Nikolas knows less about the traditional Vistani life than he does about the way of the adventurer; he is certain his interest in animals has nothing to do with his Equaar heritage, but comes instead from his own inclinations. He remains cheerful in adversity, and prefers to outsmart his opponents rather than raise a blade against them. He is fully aware of his shortcomings as a great thinker, however, and hopes that the wisdom he has gained in his travels and from Alexi's tutelage makes up for his less than stellar intelligence.

Nikolas dresses practically, with functionality preceding flair. His rugged good looks, ready smile, and muscular physique quickly draw attention to him, though his rustic manners and his tentativeness as a speaker offset some of the benefits his appearance and cheerful attitude might otherwise gain him.

Background

Nikolas' parents were two of the original Vistani to join Magda's new tribe in Gundarak. He was born a decade after the caravan was formed, in a time when the Wanderers had gained enough security for some of the members to start families. Both his parents had been raised in Equaar tribes, and they tried to impart some of their traditions to the boy. Both died before Nikolas reached his fifth year, though, so he was raised, like many of the Wanderers' children, by the caravan as a whole.

He showed an interest in animals from an early age, and has never spent more than a few days without some beast or bird in his care. He is a fine trainer, but is reluctant to sell animals that he's tended, as he knows that their new owners will never care for them to his satisfaction. Better to release a hawk or hound into the wild than chain it to some unworthy master.

The young Nikolas spent a great deal of time in Inza's company, in part because he had been given the responsibility of caring for her mother's faithful hound, Sabak. The girl, four years his junior, never got along well with the happy-go-lucky Nikolas, and often seemed intent on wiping the smile from his lips. She and her constant companion Piotr frequently taunted him about his parents' deaths, though never within earshot of any of the troupe's adults. When those taunts failed

to draw tears from the older boy, Inza would secretly kill one of the many animals young Nikolas had in his care or would instigate a fight between the boy and some older *giorgio*, when one could be found. Inza proved so adept at manipulation, and Piotr ever ready to provide an alibi for her, that her role in these events was rarely uncovered.

That all changed when Nikolas was 14. Some of the workers at the Veidrava salt mine cornered the boy and beat him almost to death, blaming him and "his kind" for the bad luck then plaguing the camp. Inza witnessed the attack, but did nothing to stop it. In fact, she did not reveal what she knew even after the Wanderers began searching for the missing Nikolas. As night fell and the hopes for finding Nikolas dimmed, Inza finally shared what she knew with Piotr — not to prompt a rescue, but to share her delight with the one person she considered a kindred spirit.

Instead, the revelation horrified Piotr. To cause Nikolas strife was one thing; to allow *giorgios* to get away with such a crime against the tribe was beneath scorn. Piotr told Alexi where Nikolas could be found, but not how he had come by that information. Inza quickly turned this oversight to her advantage, telling her mother that Piotr had witnessed the attack and had said as much to her and to a hulking tribesman named Bratu, who confirmed her false story.

Piotr would have been banished from the tribe, or worse, had Nikolas, upon recovering, not pleaded with Magda for mercy. Though Piotr has long aided Inza in tormenting him, he knew the younger boy to be loyal to the Vistani. And Nikolas recognized, too, that Inza was certainly capable of framing her former ally to shield herself from blame. Though the *raunie's* daughter once again escaped punishment for her role in this incident — until her death, Magda believed it was Piotr, not Inza who had witnessed the beating — Nikolas gained in unwavering friend in Piotr. The two protected each other from Inza's schemes as much as possible, and fought side-by-side in many battles.

Current Sketch

Nikolas serves as the Wanderers' leader, though he defers to Alexi on the battlefield. Alexi and Nabon respect the ranger, and trust his instincts and ideas, if not his ability to express them clearly. Because he is so self-critical about his intelligence — or supposed lack thereof — Nikolas sometimes makes himself appear less bright than he really is.





For all his concerns, he is not a stupid man, merely average. Given the extraordinary nature of the Wanderers' situation, though, such self-doubt is not really surprising. Piotr scoffs at the amount of time the group seems to spend helping *giorgios*, a fact that causes some strife in the group, but his loyalty to Nikolas prevents him from making too much of his objections.

Nikolas maintains a cheerful outlook, despite all that has happened. He is convinced that the Wanderers will get their chance to punish Inza for her crimes. Any problems caused by Azrael and his servants are troubling, but actually just distractions and delays along the road to eventual victory over their former *raunie*.

Combat

Nikolas often uses his various skills to scout in search for enemies. The information he gathers frequently allows the Wanderers to pick the time and place of their battles. Once the fighting starts, Nikolas uses his crossbow or scimitar in whatever fashions Alexi directs. On his own, Nikolas prefers fighting in wooded areas, where he can separate his opponents through the use of his pipes of haunting, and then stalk them individually, striking with his crossbow at a distance or with surprise attacks from cover. Nikolas tends to hold back his *horn of fog* for use in the rare occasions when the Wanderers have to retreat from a fight.

Favored Enemy: Nikolas receives a +2 bonus against undead and a +1 bonus against beasts to Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot and Wilderness Lore checks as well as +1 to weapon damage rolls against beasts.

Lair

If Nikolas had his way, the Wanderers would choose camps exclusively in the wild, but he understands Nabon's desire to travel in rocky terrain, and Piotr's interest in more "civilized" luxury. The ranger often has animals in his care, and provides for them as best he can in camp. He does not keep any permanent pets, beyond the lone pack mule the Wanderers use, because of the danger that goes along with their quest for justice.

Piotr

Male Corvara Vistana Rog5: CR 5; Medium-size humanoid (Vistani) (5 ft. 7 in. tall); hd 5d6+10; HP 32; Init +2; Spd 30; AC 14 (touch 12, flat-footed 12); Atk: +5 melee (1d4+1, +1 dagger of

wounding), +4 melee (1d6+1, quarterstaff) or +5 ranged (1d8, light crossbow); SA evil eye; SQ boemian calming effect, the sight, mist navigation, tracking magic, static burn; AL N; SV Fort +3, Ref +6, Will +4; Str 13, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 16.

Skills: Balance +9, Climb +7 (+9 with ropes), Concentration +6, Disable Device +8, Escape Artist +10 (+12 with ropes), Forgery +10, Hide +9, Listen +10, Move Silently +9, Pickpocket +10, Ride +5, Use Rope +8; **Feats:** Simple Weapon Proficiency, Voice of Wrath.

Outcast Rating: 2.

Languages: patterna*, Balok, Mordentish (Low), Sithican, Vaasi.

Signature Possessions: +1 dagger of wounding, quarterstaff, light crossbow, glove of storing, brooch of shielding, leather armor.

Born in 735, Piotr is the youngest of the Wanderers and the one closest to the popular conception of the Vistani male. He is charming, handsome, and romantic, but prone to sudden changes of mood. His clothes are as bright and showy as his patter to the *giorgio* women he seduces and the male "marks" he cons at any given opportunity. His loyalty is to the Vistani as a race first,





Nikolas second, and the Wanderers somewhere farther down on the list. In his mind, *giorgios* were created for the entertainment and needs of the Vistani. It baffles him a bit that Alexi and Nikolas don't share his views on the subject.

Background

Piotr was born a year before Inza, and for the first 10 years of their lives the two were inseparable. Piotr cared deeply for the *raunie's* daughter and loved her mischievous streak and her utter disdain for *giorgios*. One of the pair inevitably caused some sort of problem whenever the caravan stopped near a human or elven settlement, though Piotr was blamed for far more trouble than he actually caused. His parents disagreed with Madame Magda's lax policy toward non-Vistani, so they did not see the harm in much of what Piotr did. They were also loyal to the *raunie*, however, so they let her set the tone for the boy's punishments.

By the time Piotr was seven, Magda had decided that he was a bad influence upon her daughter and did what she could to discourage their friendship. With such a small caravan and so few children for Inza to play with, this proved impossible. Magda eventually settled for meting out harsher and harsher punishments to Piotr. Unsurprisingly, this did little to endear the *raunie* to the boy. His negative opinion of her was only strengthened by Inza's false tales of maternal cruelty.

For all his mischievous and even larcenous activities, Piotr lacked the core of cruelty that formed the heart of Inza's personality. Though he disliked the saintly Nikolas and joined Inza in taunting the boy, he would never aid her in the slaughter of his pets, and would have stopped her from torturing the poor beasts, had he known that was what she did with the hounds and hawks after stealing them. On a practical level, such barbarities earned no payoff. Besides, for all that Nikolas' perpetual good cheer annoyed the fledgling rogue, he was a tribesman. A Vistana just didn't do such things to his own, not without a better reason than a mild dislike for happy people.

The incident at the Veidrava salt mines, when Inza allowed Nikolas to be beaten by a mob of *giorgios*, broke his friendship with the girl, and would have done so even if she hadn't attempted to shift her role in the attack to him. Piotr had no use for a Vistana that allowed outsiders to prey upon her own. He was also overwhelmed by Nikolas' ability to see through Inza's deceptions and plead

mercy for him, when Piotr had done so much to harass the boy. Though he still found Nikolas' good cheer cloying, Piotr realized that his tribesman deserved his friendship and his protection.

When Greta and her family joined the Wanderers, Piotr even began to share his new friend's outlook on life. He fell instantly in love with the blonde — a rarity in Vistani circles — and spent two full years courting her before he finally won her over. They would have been married in the spring of 753, had Inza not betrayed the Wanderers and orchestrated the ogre attack on their camp. Though she fought valiantly, Greta was killed in the battle. Between the fight with the ogres and the Hour of Screaming Shadows, Piotr was wounded, too, losing much of his left hand to an ogre's teeth. Through all the hardship, the rogue refused to abandon the ways of the Vistani, insisting on proper burial rites for his slain tribesmen, even in the midst of terrible danger. To him, there was no point in fighting if to do so meant turning his back on the very way of life he hoped to protect.

Current Sketch

Respect for Nikolas and a desire to revenge Greta and the rest of the caravan motivate Piotr. He balks when circumstances dictate the Wanderers aid humans or elves, and has been known to save an elven merchant from one of the darklord's minions, only to cheat the fellow out of all his money that same night. Piotr also has a hard time accepting the giant Nabon as a fellow Vistani, despite what his instincts tell him about the creature's blood and his purpose as an avenger.

Piotr's damaged hand was healed by Ganelon the Doomed in 753. The human hero utilized the power of the silver blade he received from the legendary Bloody Cobbler to cause the hand to regenerate to full function and normal appearance. It galls the Vistana that a *giorgio* did him such a tremendous service, and his gratitude extends only far enough that he has decided not to actively cause Ganelon any harm.

Lately, Piotr's dreams have been troubled. Inza has appeared to him on three different nights, in her guise as his childhood friend. She has tried to convince the rogue that she turned against Magda and the Wanderers only because they had forged a secret pact with that foe of all Vistani, Malocchio Aderre, and that her plans for Sithicus will make it a haven for all the *tasques*. Never one to be duped easily, Piotr does not believe what the child Inza





tells him in these dreams, but he has not told the others about them as yet.

Combat

In a scuffle of any kind, Piotr utilizes his abilities as a rogue to the fullest. He likes to attack from behind, with either his +1 dagger of wounding or his quarterstaff. He keeps the dagger hidden within his *glove of storing*, which he wears upon his right hand (where it is used in non-combat situations for the theft of small objects). He has a strong sentimental attachment to the staff he carries, as it once belonged to Greta.

Boemian Calming Effect (Ex): Piotr, like all Boemians, radiates a calming effect. Having negative feelings such as anger or hatred in his presence is a difficult thing to do, and requires a Will save (DC 15) each round to maintain such feelings. An individual who has a specific reason to hate Piotr, or all Boemians, gets a +4 bonus to her save and need to save only once to be immune to the effect for the rest of the encounter.

Cair

Piotr prefers a *vardo* roof over his head and a comfortable bed beneath him, both of which are rare in the Wanderers' travels. He has a weakness for such luxuries, and has been known to compromise his own safety to embrace them.

Nabon

Male stone giant Ftr3: CR 11; Large-size giant (stone giant) (11 ft. 11 in. tall); hd 14d8+56 plus 3d10+12; HP 155; Init +2; Spd 40 ft; AC 25 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +11 natural, +3 hide) (touch 11, flat-footed 23); Atk: +20/+15 melee (2d6+12, huge greatclub), +22/+17 melee (1d6+12, *Gard stake*) or +15/+10 ranged (2d8+8, rock); SA rock throwing; SQ invisibility to undead, rock catching, Vistani avenger; AL NG; SV Fort +16, Ref +7, Will +5; Str 27, Dex 15, Con 19, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 11.

Skills: Climb +12, Craft (trapmaking) +6, Hide +0 (+8 in rocky terrain), Jump +12, Spot +3; **Feats:** Combat Reflexes, Dead Man Walking, Improved Unarmed Strike, Jaded, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot.

Outcast Rating: 4.

Languages: Balok*, Giant, patterna.

Signature Possessions: Greatclub, bag with 20 throwing stones, *Gard stake* (as +2 club, +1 to DC of Fort and Will saves against attacks made by Inza or her minions).

At first glance, Nabon appears to be a typical stone giant: a lean and muscular figure, with gaunt facial features, though his eyes are blue rather than the usual black. His hairless flesh is mostly smooth and gray, like weatherworn stone. Only around his ankles and his feet does the flesh color vary at all; there, it is more tan than gray. Closer inspection will reveal stitch marks around his ankles and crisscrossing his feet, the only visible marks that show that his legs and feet were once repaired using form-fitting boots crafted of human flesh.

Nabon is also a Wanderer, in part because of the special properties of those repairs to his feet and legs, but also because of the abuse he suffered at the hands of Inza Kulchevich and the seneschal of Sithicus, Azrael Dak. He is relentless in his pursuit of those hated foes, just as he is steadfast in his support of his three brother Wanderers.

Background

For most of his 400 years, Nabon wandered his home world — a majestic place of towering mountains and near-bottomless chasms, a place very far from the Dark Domains. He was a wayfarer, a traveler with no particular destination. A dozen years ago, he found himself transported by a strange mist to lands very much unlike his home. Still, he





Chapter Three

delighted in walking the secret trails and hidden paths that wound through the Core, ways so desolate that even a giant could walk them unseen. He harmed no one. He asked for nothing but the freedom to travel.

One morning, while making his way through the Fumewood in Sithicus, Nabon responded to a cry for help, only to find himself set upon by the young girl he had meant to rescue — Inza Kulchevich, then only 11 years old. With the cudgel Gard she shattered first one of his kneecaps, then the other. As Nabon lay on the ground, howling in pain, she shattered his legs and beat him unconscious.

The greatest indignity of all was the purpose the assault served. Inza had captured him, crippled him, so she could barter him to Azrael Dak for the magical blade Novgor. Unaware of its true power, Molochio Aderre had given the dagger to the seneschal of Sithicus as a symbol of a recently forged alliance. Inza wanted it, and Nabon was the substantial price she was willing to offer. She had hunted Nabon specifically after hearing stories that lauded the giant's gentleness of spirit. She felt he would make the perfect slave for Azrael's salt mine, strong but pliable; the werbadger agreed.

Nabon found himself imprisoned at the Veidrava mine, where he toiled for five years within a lightless, sweltering engine house, powering the pit's central elevator. Hidden from the human workers at Veidrava, with Azrael visiting him occasionally to taunt him or re-break his legs, Nabon worked and drowsed, all the time dreaming of revenge. In those dreams his legs would be healed, and he would chase Inza until she could run no more. And then he would pay her in kind for what she had done to him.

One morning, in the quiet moments before dawn, Nabon awoke to find one part of the dream had become reality: The pain was gone. The shrieking ache of mangled flesh and broken bones had left his legs. The shackles that had held him pinned to the filthy floor were broken.

This was the work of the Bloody Cobbler, a mysterious supernatural being who worked against injustice in Sithicus. The Cobbler had healed the giant's broken limbs and shod his feet with flesh carved from the corpses of the Wanderers who had died as a result of Inza's machinations. Nabon not only had his freedom back, but had also gained a mystical link to the Vistani. Through the Cobbler's handiwork, he had been given a bond that would

help him to be accepted by the men who would soon become his closest allies in his fight against Inza.

Shortly after being freed from Veidrava, Nabon met up with Alexi, Nikolas, and Piotr. The three recognized their link to the giant, and together they pursued Inza, cornering the girl outside the Cursed Knight's keep. Rather than face them in a direct fight, she leaped into the shadow-cloaked Great Chasm. Since that time, the giant has traveled with the Vistani as an unusual fourth member of their troupe. Like the other Wanderers, Nabon is aware that Inza did not fall to her doom and plots for the time he can meet her face-to-face again.

Current Sketch

Once a carefree traveler, Nabon has been left jaded and sorrowful by his experiences in Sithicus. His hatred for Inza is almost matched by his loathing of Azrael, who he calls the Sorrow of Sithicus. The name has proved popular, much to the would-be darklord's secret delight.

The side effect of the Bloody Cobbler's work on his legs has made the giant an avenger specifically empowered by the fallen Wanderers. He takes that responsibility seriously. And while he does share a strange bond with the Vistani, he does not presume to share their culture or their powers. Nabon likes Nikolas and recognizes in him the joyous love of life he once possessed. He is closer in temperament now to grim Alexi. And while he wishes Piotr did not treat him like such an outsider — the blood in his veins includes some from the rogue's lost love, Greta — he understands why he is cold and distant sometimes. For all that Nabon feels like a Vistani, he knows he is not one.

Combat

Nabon's presence makes the Wanderers a formidable fighting force, capable of dealing with the shadow servants Inza directs at them from the Great Chasm or the more mundane horrors of the Sithican wilds. In their earliest battles together, Alexi used Nabon as a surprise weapon, directing him to hide in any nearby rocks and then startling their foes with his sudden appearance. The creatures in the service of both Inza and Azrael have come to expect his presence, though, so Nabon adopts that tactic less and less over time.

Using his throwing stones, Nabon first eliminates any wizards casting spells from a distance or archers firing down upon them. He also uses the





stones to break up formations of cavalry or soldiers before they can charge. He then brings his greatclub to bear against any adversary closer to hand.

In his role as avenger, Nabon retrieved the shattered pieces of Gard from Magda's grave. He carries the largest fragment, a pointed shard that to him is like a dagger, but is in fact almost large enough to be a club for a human. This weapon grants him some advantage against attacks from Inza or her minions (that is, anyone openly serving her), but he wields this rarely. The stake is, in Nabon's mind, destined for Inza's black, loveless heart.

Rock Throwing (Ex): Nabon, like all adult giants, is an accomplished rock thrower and receives a +1 racial bonus to those attack rolls when throwing rocks. He can hurl rocks weighing 40 to 50 pounds each (Small objects) up to 5 range increments.

Invisibility to Undead (Su): The repairs made by the Bloody Cobbler on Nabon's feet involved the grafting of dead tissue to living. Undead creatures have difficulty recognizing him as a living being. Treat as *invisibility to undead* spell, DC 20, limited to mindless undead or those that are seeking out only living opponents.

Rock Catching (Ex): Nabon, as a giant of Large size, can catch Small, Medium-size, or Large

rocks (or projectiles of similar shape). Once per round, he can make a Reflex save as a free action to catch a rock ready to strike him. The DC is 15 for a Small rock, 20 for a Medium-size one, and 25 for a Large one. (If the projectile has a magical bonus to attack, the DC increases by that amount.) Nabon must be ready and aware of the attack.

Vistani Avenger (Su): Any Vistani Nabon encounters understands on an intuitive level the impact of the Bloody Cobbler's work on him (though not the details of that work). Thus, Vistani recognize the giant as an avenger tasked with righting a wrong against their kind, and treat him with the respect that task is due. Reaction rolls to Nabon for Vistani characters should be rolled as if he were full-blooded tribesman. He also gains the ability to recall Vistani lore once per week; treat as legend lore, DC 18.

Cair

Nabon seeks out the rockiest place close to the Wanderers' camp for his bed each night. While traveling around the Great Chasm, this sometimes means he sleeps a little way down the chasm wall; whenever he does so, he sleeps with the Gard stake in his hand. If conditions allow, Nabon creates traps using stone around both his bed and the Wanderers' camp.



Chapter Four:
The Heroic
Campaign

"Someone has already been here," Anselm said, "the cave is empty." The young knight sheathed his sword and walked to the middle of the cavern, motioning the rest of his companions to follow. A graceful woman dressed in close-fitting dark clothing pulled a small, glowing pebble from a pouch at her belt. She held the stone in the flat of her hand, filling the large cavern with a soft light. A tall man in the robes of a priest of the Morninglord walked toward a dark shape lying against the back wall of the cave.

"There's a body, or what's left of one, here," he said, leaning over to examine the remains of what looked like a young woman with long red tresses. He stepped back to speak a blessing over the body.

"Wait!" Sisely called, moving quickly to the priest's side. "Don't do anything yet. Look at this." The young woman prodded the body with her foot, shoving the corpse's long skirts aside to reveal long, spidery legs. "Are you sure you still want to bless that?"

Father Hals stepped back quickly, regarding the body with new eyes, recognizing it as a red widow, one of the land's deadliest and most seductive predators.

"Yes, I still wish to pray for this poor creature, but the words I speak will be different from the ones I would have used if she had been a victim rather than a predator." The priest brought out his holy symbol and spoke a prayer that his companions recognized as one of warding and protection.

During the rite, Sisely wandered away to investigate the rest of the cave. Anselm stood behind Hals, but his eyes followed the scout's movements.

"I found some bones," Sisely called out. "And there's more over here."

Father Hals finished his prayer and, together with Anselm, went to help their companion unearth the spider-creature's victims.

An hour later, the trio had uncovered the remains of several hapless individuals. Anselm dug a grave outside the cave and he and Sisely carefully placed the bones in the ground. Father Hals called down a blessing over the grave, commending the souls of the red widow's victims to the mercy of the Morninglord.

"There's nothing more we can do here," Sisely replied, "except burn the monster."

Anselm nodded, and re-entered the cave, followed by the others. He and Hals bent to move the red widow's corpse outside into the sunshine.

"Look!" Sisely said, pointing to the wall just behind the corpse. "What's that?"

She focused her still-glowing stone at a mark previously hidden by the red widow's body.

"It looks like a wheel of some sort," Anselm observed. Father Hals bent down to examine the strange marking. "Someone painted this on the wall," he said.

"Maybe it was done by whoever destroyed the creature," Sisely said.

"Most likely," Anselm agreed. "We'll never know for certain."

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From the heights overlooking the red widow's lair, Vigo watched the three *giorgios* build a pyre of dead wood and brambles, then place the body of the red widow he and his *compadres* had slain earlier in the day. He wondered if they had found the sign they had left on the wall of the cave, the eight-spoked wheel that was the mark of the *Vilushka*. And, if they discovered it, if they would ever know what it meant.

Smiling to himself, Vigo withdrew from his lookout and turned to join the others of his company. Perhaps, one day, they would travel in the company of other heroes, like the ones who now stood watching the burning corpse of the red widow. For now, this was enough.



*The powers above, who bounteously bestow
Their gifts and graces on mankind below,
Yet prove our merit first, nor blindly give
To such as are not worthy to receive:
For valour and for virtue they provide
Their due reward, but first they must be tried.*
— John Dryden, “Cymon and Iphigenia”

Building A Heroic Campaign

Congratulations! You’ve decided to take on the tremendous challenge of running a heroic campaign in no less terrifying and wicked a place as the Land of Mists itself. As the DM, you’ll be responsible for creating everything from the rowdy inn where the PCs start their fateful first adventure to describing how the jewel that adorns the evil lich’s sword gleams in the moonlight during the final confrontation at the campaign’s end. Running any kind of game that evokes the mystery, madness and horror of Ravenloft is difficult, but this chapter has been specially tailored to help you run the campaign you want without hitting some of the common problems that can make life difficult for DMs and players alike.

In the Beginning

First of all, you have to decide what kind of heroic campaign you’d like to run – while it’s certainly possible to dive right in and hope things work out for the best, even the most experienced DM generally finds that putting some thought into the underlying themes and ideas behind their stories gives them an emotional resonance that’s hard to come by in more haphazardly planned campaigns. The natural difficulty of orchestrating a campaign for truly heroic characters in Ravenloft guarantees a recipe for trouble if you simply try to run it like other games you might have run in the past. Therefore, before you begin plotting out the events of the first session, take some time and think about what kind of story you want it to tell. The game will be much richer for it.

Theme

Themes are the underlying questions and ideas that give a story shape – the heart of the storyline. Although they can often be expressed in a single sentence, they provide the touchstone for the material of your adventures, allowing you to come

back to the same ideas for inspiration and providing your players with a feeling of continuity from one adventure to another. Within a larger campaign, each story or session might offer some new insight or exploration of the same theme.

Of course, a campaign can have more than one theme at work, although you should be careful not to blend too many motifs together or the players may become confused at the “mixed messages” you’re sending them as the campaign progresses. Likewise, be careful of being too heavy-handed with themes. Use them too often or too blatantly, and the players will quickly become desensitized to them, or worse still start commenting about how every story is always about the same thing. Ideally, the theme should lurk somewhere in the background, only dominating events at critical moments during the campaign.

Some sample themes, the questions they raise and the possibilities for their inclusion in a heroic campaign are listed below:

Virtue – This theme deals with the origins of morality itself: virtue. In the grim reality of Ravenloft, true virtue often shines as a beacon — and a target. Heroic characters, by their very definition, challenge those around them by accepting a code of conduct that demands they perform actions others could not or would not perform in the same circumstances. At the same time, many of the greatest villains are convinced that what they are doing is moral and right in their own skewed point of view. What is virtue? Who decides what is right? Should heroes expect other people to follow their example (and what happens if they do not)?

Love – Romance is hard to come by in the Land of Mists, let alone the enchanted state known as True Love, but many heroic characters are driven by love – and many villains turned to their dark path following some great heartbreak. Campaigns with love as their theme focus on all the difficult questions that come with the emotion that simultaneously empowers us and makes us vulnerable. Can love last? Is True Love really possible, or is it just a poet’s dream? To what lengths will a person go for love? Can love lost ever be regained?

Sacrifice – Sooner or later, everyone loses something they value deeply; however, there are those who choose to give up willingly something they treasure in the name of a greater good — or evil. What drives a person to make such a sacrifice? When is such an act justified, and when is it not? What is worth giving up, compared to what is



Cult of Personality

A character in the party—or perhaps the entire party, if they are sufficiently charismatic—begins attracting a following of common folk in the wake of some great public display of virtue or sacrifice. These followers offer to perform a number of minor services such as taking care of the character's horse or equipment in return for receiving regular “moral instruction” from the character, and continue following the character and watching him from a distance even if rebuked. Events spiral out of control as these followers begin treating everything the character says or does as gospel. At first, the results may seem relatively harmless (even humorous), but more and more serious repercussions ensue as the followers become more fanatical in their attempts to prove their devotion to the character and his “teachings.” What's worse, no matter how irritating their antics might become, the hero is obligated to protect these devotees from harm as well, as they have a habit of following him into dangerous situations, trusting him to keep them safe from evil.

The hero must take on the delicate task of curbing the actions of these would-be acolytes without discouraging them from leading good lives. In addition, he must inevitably confront the ethical problems that arise from being responsible for the spiritual well-being of a number of people.

Should the character come down too hard on them, his reputation suffers (possibly even earning him some lasting enemies). Treating them too lightly, on the other hand, eventually causes its own problems. Most such followings end up as cults, and cults are notoriously unsympathetic to their “leaders” when they do something that the rest of the cult considers off limits (as the PC inevitably will). What's more, local leaders seldom look kindly on the kind of threat to their power that a new organization represents. Nor do they believe a character who tries to tell them she didn't ask for a loyal following. Of course, a retinue that matures beyond its initial infatuation may eventually develop into a true asset for the character, subject to the DM's permission.





gained from it? At what point does the deed go from noble to selfish? Can anyone truly sacrifice purely on behalf of someone else, or are all acts like that really done for the benefit of the person offering them?

Loyalty – Second perhaps only to love, loyalty inspires more great deeds than any other motivation. Oaths of loyalty clearly define a person's character and what they believe in, while a betrayal of such trust ranks among the most despicable of actions. Heroic characters are almost certainly bound to some higher cause or belief, yet even the simple adherence to such a code can sign a character's death warrant. Like love, loyalty has a dark side as well, as can be seen in those instances involving soldiers who commit atrocities under the guise of following orders. What is worth swearing loyalty to? Can a character ever regain his honor after going back on his word, or is it lost for good? What must a character be prepared to endure for the sake of loyalty? Is it worth it?

Plot & Structure

Now that you've got a basic idea of the kind of story you want to tell and some of the events and encounters you'd like it to feature, take a moment and think about the basic elements that will link all of these together.

Conflict

At its most basic level, every story revolves around conflict, whether it's the clash of armies, the struggle to reclaim a lost treasure or even the challenge of keeping a loved one safe from the dangers of the world. Without conflict, there would be no plot and no character development. On the other hand, you must take into account that you're trying to do something fairly out of the ordinary: muster up a group of truly heroic characters and send them headlong into the darkness and horror of Ravenloft.

This focus on noble and decent individuals in such a dark and brooding setting means that you must consider your conflicts carefully, as good-aligned characters won't be able to consider some adventure options that groups of other alignments would enjoy. At the same time, these good-aligned characters might also





feel compelled to act or speak out at times other groups would keep their mouths shut, which can lead to all kinds of unexpected trouble. As the DM, you might know it's not a great idea for the heroes to challenge the wicked baron to a duel as he brutally beats one of the local peasants. He's a powerful villain who will certainly demolish the heroes, but if you don't take into account that the group's paladin simply cannot let such injustice go unpunished, that's a planning error on your part, not the PC's. Likewise, having an NPC invite the group to help assassinate the evil baron isn't going to fly either. While the heroes may want to see him removed from power, chances are that they're won't agree with such an underhanded scheme. If you've planned your next series of adventures around their accepting the mission you're in for some trouble.

Therefore, take care when planning the kinds of battles and challenges you want your campaign to include. While you can't hope to second guess how the players will react to everything you throw at them, you can avoid a lot of potential alignment-related problems arising from complications like the ones outlined above.

If such incidents do happen, resist the urge to punish the players. As far as they're concerned, they were just doing what their characters would do in that situation. Getting annoyed at them for it only discourages them from roleplaying, which defeats the purpose of a heroic campaign.

It's also a bad idea to try to force the story back on track too overtly. Players can tell when you're using the "plot hammer" to bang things back in place, and they seldom enjoy such an obvious violation of their characters' free will. If their behavior does throw you for a loop, take a break for a few minutes and think about how you can work this new development into what you had in mind. This allows the players the freedom to play their characters while at the same time enables you to return to the adventure you originally planned without too much fuss.

A detailed study can give you time to come up with innovative new challenges specially designed for a group of good-aligned characters, rather than simply using old models and archetypes. Give them tests that *only* a group of heroes like theirs could be expected to handle. Make them go that extra mile beyond what is normally expected of an adventuring group.

In short, try to emphasize what separates a group such as theirs from so many adventurers in Ravenloft – their desire to do good for its own sake. After all, any group can go on a quest to rescue a kidnapped prince, but only a heroic group might also be charged with helping him recover from his ordeal (perhaps even win the heart of his love). Any party can tackle lifting an ancient curse from a tiny peasant village, but only a heroic party would feel some obligation to stay and help the town get back on its feet after the obvious menace had passed. In short, any character can triumph, but how many can really become *heroes*?

Scale

The question of scale goes hand in hand with conflict. What is ultimately at stake during the campaign? Will the outcome of the campaign determine the fate of an entire domain, or just the livelihood of one village? Too often, many new DMs make every adventure one of world-shaking significance. Unfortunately, these same DMs quickly learn that always "saving the world" rapidly becomes boring for the players. The DM quickly becomes locked in the trap of trying to offer ever-greater and more spectacular challenges for the players to keep them amused. The players, in turn, lose interest in smaller scale problems and generally take defeat quite poorly as well, since they're used to triumphing over great enemies as a matter of course. When dealing with a group of truly heroic characters, it can be all too tempting to immediately assume that they must be faced with an epic challenge such as freeing an entire domain from tyranny.

In order to avoid such problems, you should have a clear idea of the kind of challenges you wish the players to face over the course of your campaign, and make sure the players are familiar with what you have in mind. It's a fact of life – some players live for epic adventures with far-spanning resolutions, while others are content with "smaller" battles. The design of the campaign determines how players view their characters' actions. A victory over some monumental evil can seem trite and overdone if presented poorly, while rescuing a tiny village from a relatively minor but insidious threat can become the stuff of legends if the DM sets up the campaign correctly.





Mood

If a theme is the big question or idea behind a campaign, then mood is how you choose to phrase that question at the moment. Mood serves two purposes. First, it allows you to put the players in the right frame of mind to relate to the adventures and NPCs you have created. After all, an adventure about a horrible curse afflicting a helpless village simply won't carry the same power if the players are constantly cracking jokes or the NPCs are committing slapstick errors. On the other hand, with the proper invocation of mood, players quickly find themselves caught up in the story, making it easier to relate to what their characters are going through and raising the quality of role-playing for everyone concerned. Second, mood is the tool that allows you to return to the underlying theme without seeming repetitive, since even similar thematic material can be presented fresh each time by the utilization of different moods.

Mood is an especially delicate science in a heroic campaign. The DM must walk a fine line between presenting the dark ambiance of the realm while at the same time not inundating the players so much that they feel their characters have no choice but to succumb to the evil around them.

Temptation is one thing, but constantly feeling that no good can come of anything the characters do is a quick way to turn the players off to your game for good, and that's all too easy to do if mood is applied incorrectly. Just keep in mind that, as with themes, moods are generally all about details and flourishes, rather than heaping on layer after layer. Having every NPC the party encounters throw a punch at them creates an angry mood indeed, but it will also leave the players feeling overwhelmed and frustrated. Likewise, it can be extremely difficult to get the players to settle down to a serious and brooding adventure if all they've dealt with so far is a number of heroic, fast-paced adventures. Remember, it's all right to make the *characters* feel swamped, but making the *players* feel that way is a recipe for disaster.

What follows is a short list of some common moods to evoke in a heroic campaign. With practice, creating the right mood is surprisingly easy, and well worth the time and effort it takes to learn how. Of course, these are by no means the only moods possible. Feel free to make up your own as suits the needs of your campaign; so long as the players are feeling the emotions you're going for, you've been successful.

Terror – A glimpse of something hideous out of the corner of the eye, a scream that abruptly chokes off in the distance, the sound as a door downstairs slowly open when it's supposed to be bolted shut – these are moments when terror stalks the stage of your game. Generating terror involves carefully controlling the information the players receive, so that they have enough not to be confused by what's happening, but not so much that they feel they know everything about the situation. If the party knows about some mysterious deaths and suspects some kind of ghost is in the area, that's a good thing, but if they know everything about the history of the ghost and what the spirit is capable of, the possibility of terror is almost certainly ruled out. Instead, stick with "a little learning is a dangerous thing" as your motto, and give them enough information to frighten them but not so much that they lose their terror through familiarity.

Horror – Close on the heels of terror is horror, or the moment when what's been waiting and stalking in the background finally steps out into the light (so to speak) to confront the players. Horror is built on moments so sickeningly fascinating that you cannot look away: the rotting zombie of an old friend lurching through the cemetery towards you; a shapechanger covered in blood with a severed arm in its jaws; the stench of flesh and brimstone as the demon steps arrogantly into this world bearing a rod of human skulls. Use as much sensory detail as possible when conveying horror. The goal is to make the players feel that what their characters are seeing is as real and as vivid as you can make it (at least without causing a player to lose his lunch). Done correctly, horror makes the fantastic and the terrible believable, and hence even more gruesome to confront.

Rage – In this mood, everyone seems angry; tempers are short, and a fight always seems just a false move or misspoken phrase away. Hostilities of all kinds boil beneath the surface of daily interaction, and even heroic characters have to work hard to keep their tempers in check when faced with the emotions and situations before them.

Madness – Seemingly random events occur in the midst of ordinary activity, people speak and behave in bizarre and inexplicable ways, and sometimes even the setting itself seems to shift and change when the players aren't looking. At other times, things aren't random at all, with characters realizing that all the strange phenomena they are





witnessing is geared towards a specific yet utterly insane purpose.

Excitement – All adventures have some element of challenge and excitement, but stories with this mood are a step above the norm, constantly throwing new challenges and dangers at the characters without giving them much time to do anything except react. Breaks are few and far between, reserved for things that can't be settled any other way, and before long the adventure is back in full gear.

Mystery – An excellent mood for early sessions of an adventure, characters caught up in this mood should always feel that there's more going on than they know, without ever feeling so out of the loop that they give up trying to figure it out. Each puzzle solved leads to another mysterious discovery. Every battle is but a prelude to confronting a larger force or nastier villain later on.

Joy – Perhaps the rarest mood to evoke in most Ravenloft games, joy is a feeling of celebration, of life and laughter and of hope. Everything seems positive, events keep falling the party's way and a good time is always just around the corner. Need-

less to say, such moments are rare indeed in the lives of most heroic adventurers, though no less treasured because of it.

The Party

It cannot be stated strongly enough: close attention to character creation is essential in building a heroic campaign in **Ravenloft**. The Introduction covers the elements and motivations of playing such noble souls in the blackness of the Dread Realms. It is, however, the responsibility of both DM and players to make sure that the characters not only function as a group, but that their group has some sort of purpose aside from simply being a circle of like-minded adventurers. While a heroic party might arise from a group of childhood friends who set out to right injustice, chances are that before long even such a tightly-knit band will have to adopt some greater cause if they wish to survive the long nights of the Dread Realms. As the person who has the clearest idea of what kinds of challenges and situations the characters will face, the DM has the ultimate responsibility to make sure that the party is created accordingly.



Before your players begin rolling dice, think about the type of campaign you wish to run. Discuss possible roles and party compositions with the players so they know what to expect. It's never any fun to spend a lot of time creating a streetwise, "morally flexible" rogue only to find out that the game is going to take place in a wilderness outpost and all the players are supposed to be local farmers-turned-adventurers. Likewise, only a DM who doesn't care to run a game for very long will let a group of players make combat-intensive characters and then immerse them in a campaign centered around political intrigue and courtly gossip. Consider just what kind of heroes you want the party to portray and how they will work in the campaign you're designing.

Some sample heroic party concepts are as follows:

Hunters of the Damned

This party differs from the "standard" dungeon-crawling adventuring group in that their focus lies squarely on hunting down and destroying the kinds of creatures Ravenloft is famous for:

werewolves, ghosts, vampires, and other similar creatures. For most groups, their mission is intensely personal, often driven by some past tragedy involving these creatures. Since such monsters have a much greater natural advantage in Ravenloft than in other realms, the decision to focus on hunting them becomes even more heroic than normal, as all manner of foul beings will soon take note of such driven souls and plan horrible fates for them. Paradoxically, such initially pure motives can also place heroic characters in danger of losing themselves to corruption if they're not careful, as it can become all too easy to justify any number of hideous acts taken against these monsters in the name of justice.

Composition: Each of the so-called "fighting classes" offers their own unique advantages to this combat-heavy archetype, and it's a sure thing that a group without much raw martial power will have a difficult time putting down the various horrors they encounter along the way. However, the role of clerics and their ability to turn and destroy many kinds of undead should never be underestimated. Likewise, the rogues' ability to disarm the elaborate



traps that so often litter monster lairs or the bards' knack of coming up with information about the enemy can prove useful. Likewise, wizards and sorcerers often have spells that can function in a support capacity, striking at weak points, bolstering the party's defenses or magically detecting threats.

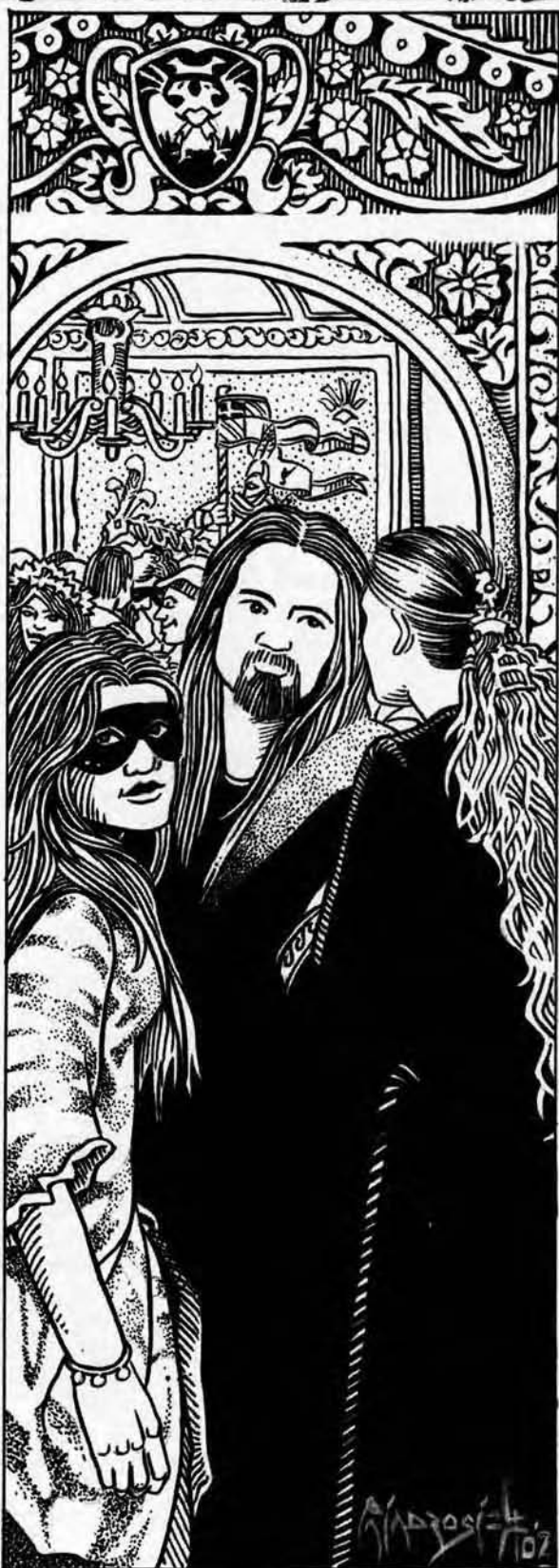
Players of the Great Game

Politics might not be as flashy as some other heroic pursuits, but a group of heroes in a position of power who have the best interests of the land and the people in mind can often do much more to help the unfortunate than a band of monster-slayers who pass through and leave the same wicked king in charge when they depart. Players might represent the last of a noble family, struggling to re-establish their old greatness. Perhaps they're up-and-comers trying to elbow their way into the halls of power in order to make a change for the better. This kind of campaign can be especially fun with heroic characters, as they try to hold on to their ethical values while immersing themselves in the political game—a tricky proposition at best, but full of interesting conflicts for those daring enough to try.

Composition: Obviously, bards and rogues shine at the political game, with bards being best at the public face of politics while rogues move behind the scenes doing some of the less savory (though not necessarily evil) work that needs doing. Having a wizard or sorcerer at the ready adds an element of unpredictability for the character's opponents, while a cleric or druid often serves as a trusted intermediary that the common folk of the realm can relate to when their distrust of politicians becomes too strong. Fighters may grow bored with politics or they may serve as recognizable figureheads to lead a political movement.

Seekers of the Truth

Rivaling the number of horrors in Ravenloft are the number of mysteries awaiting those who brave the night in search of answers. A heroic party can take the pursuit of truth and knowledge as its primary focus, in hopes of defeating a particular threat or even just for the sake of learning more about the sinister domain they dwell in. While many such groups disappear deep in some forgotten crypt or are found raving mad at the edge of





civilization after learning a truth too hideous to tell, those that survive their ordeals and uncover the lore they seek can accomplish the greatest good possible in the Land of Mists — if those who wish such secrets kept silent don't get them first.

Composition: This scenario generally puts more studious heroes such as wizards and clerics in the forefront, as their magical skills and knack for all things mysterious serves them well in efforts to uncover the truth. Following close behind are bards and rogues, who excel at personal investigation and social situations. Warrior classes should not be overlooked, however, as their ability to protect the investigators and put down the various monsters surrounding the mysteries is invaluable if the party wishes to survive long enough to use what it has learned.

Local Heroes Doing Right

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the politically-oriented party is the grassroots group of heroes. These individuals come from peasant or lower-class stock and serve as champions for their particular village or province in the face of mun-

dane oppression as well as monstrous and magical threats. Struggling to lead by example and to resist the temptation to strike back with equal savagery at the forces trying to harm those they care about is the stuff of great heroic stories. The players (and their characters) must deal with any number of ordinary threats as well as with the standard fantasy-horror fare. The characters may eventually move on to positions of power if they become famous enough, transforming their party into a politically-minded group after all, or they may prefer to stay close to home, defending their roots against any who would do them harm.

Composition: Any character class works well with the local hero concept, although different domains may encourage or discourage particular classes within their borders (and players should take care to note such local preferences). As a rule of thumb, such heroes should focus more on ordinary skills and feats rather than exotic knowledge, but again that may vary according to region.



Restoring Order

While adventuring in a suitably remote location (deep cave, abandoned manor, etc.), the heroes stumble into an ancient crypt, seemingly untouched by the passing of time. Searching the crypt reveals that it is the final resting place of an ancient order of knights and heroes, who used to be responsible for the protection of the surrounding area but were eventually wiped out by the arrival of some great and mysterious evil. They left their records and some of their uniforms and equipment (perhaps even a minor magic item or two) behind in the hopes that one day a group of equally heroic souls would stumble across them, and decide to take up their noble crusade once more.

Now that the secret has been brought to light, the PCs must deal with the consequences of such a weighty find. Bearing the crest of such a legendary group certainly gives the PCs lofty goals to aspire to, but it also makes them the target of those who profited by the destruction of such a just and noble group – and in the Dread Realms, that is likely a long list indeed. Even if the party does not attempt to revive the order themselves, it is likely a moot point to try to explain that to the minions of the various wicked factions that come seeking to destroy any chance of the order undergoing a “revival.” In other words, the PCs will still have to fight just as hard as they would have otherwise. Last but not least, they will have to safeguard their find from the usual assortment of amoral relic hunters, overzealous scholars and reckless thrill-seekers without losing their cool ... or their newfound treasures.



The Opening

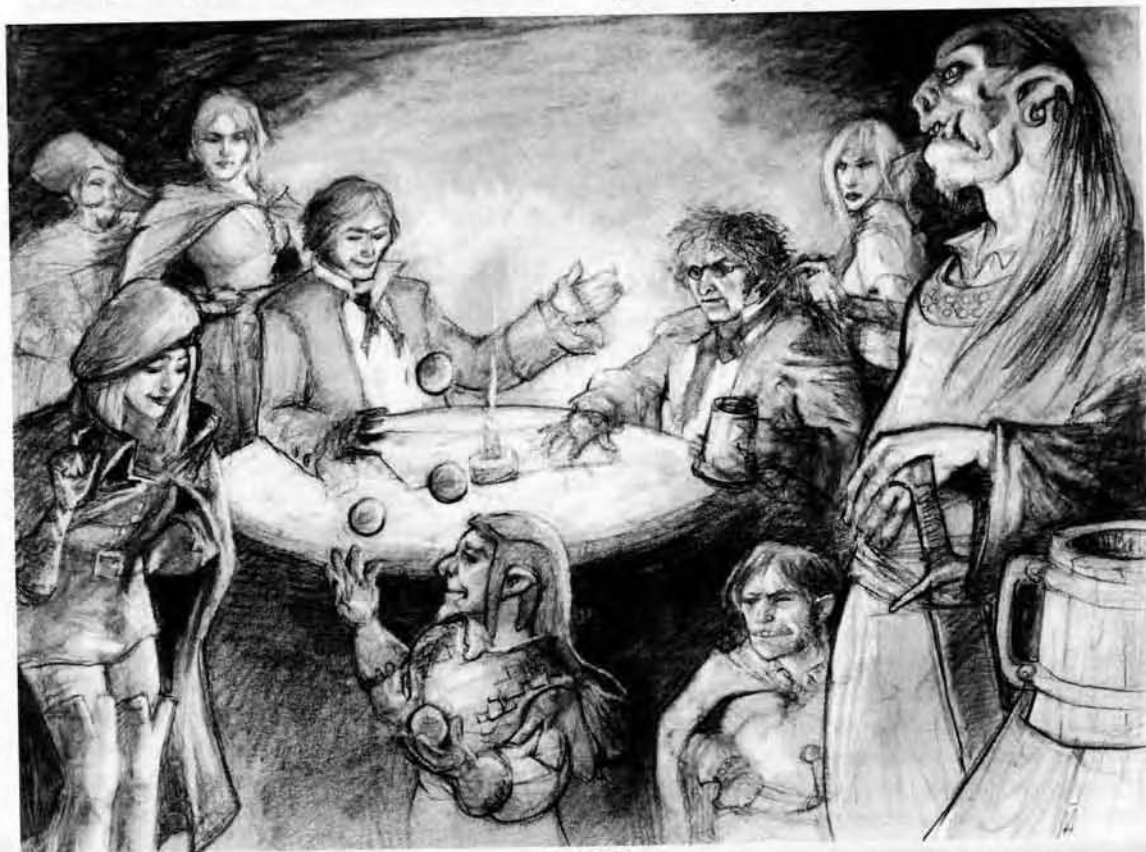
All too often, a campaign opens with the characters sitting in an inn together for no particular reason, just waiting for the mysterious stranger to stagger through the door with a mission for them. While that can certainly work, it can also create a feeling of manipulation or even randomness that the DM has to work to overcome in order to get the players to connect to the adventure he has in mind. Instead, focus on creating an opening that serves to jump-start the action of the game as well as convey some of its basic elements such as theme and mood. The following variations on game openers should give you some suggestions as to which is best for your campaign's beginning.

Static Opening

In this, perhaps the more conventional opening, the characters are waiting for something to happen at the beginning of the campaign. They're not doing anything of any real importance at the moment, and it takes the call to adventure to get them up and moving. Perhaps they're on a routine patrol or sitting at the king's nightly banquet or warming themselves by the fire of their favorite

inn. Maybe they're practicing their ordinary profession — farming, baking, metalworking, etc. — when something suddenly arises that they simply have to attend to. Who knows? They might even be in jail for some minor indiscretion (even good-aligned characters fall prey to bar-fights) or through a case of mistaken identity. No matter where they are, excitement finds them, and before they know it the campaign has begun and they're off on the beginning of their great adventure.

This kind of opening works best when the DM wants to show the contrast between ordinary life and the life of an adventurer. By giving the players a taste of what their characters' lives were like before they embarked on their first quest, he can illustrate what the heroes are really fighting for — or what they're leaving behind. This type of opening also provides an excellent way of charting a hero's progress from the beginning; in time, the players can look back at the opening and wonder at how far their characters have come from such humble, ordinary roots. The static opening also excels at providing a detailed description of the setting and the mood at the opening of the campaign, since the DM has time to bring the players more slowly into it.





However, the same expository nature of this opening can also make it a little too hard to get the action going at first. Heroes may leap at a chance to battle an obvious evil like an attack on an innocent man or the appearance of a fearsome creature; they may balk, however, at following — or even recognizing — a more indirect lead, such as the arrival of a mysterious stranger. DMs may need to coax players to rouse their characters to action if the action is not in their faces. Likewise, you must ensure that the characters are enough of a group or that your hook has some interest to all of them, or you risk having a character wander away from your opening because it doesn't hold anything of interest to him. If designed correctly, though, this type of opening can form a natural and unforced entry into your campaign.

In Media Res

Quite literally “in the middle of things,” this kind of opening drops the characters right in the middle of some exciting activity: fighting a raging battle, being chased by monsters, struggling to survive a terrible storm at sea or otherwise immediately engaged in some extraordinary activity. There's no time to think about what's going on, no chance to refuse the call to adventure. From the outset, the characters are already involved in the action of the campaign and only get more deeply immersed in the action as the game progresses. Everywhere they look, a hero is needed; someone attacks their friends, endangers a village child, or steals a valuable item. Every event is designed to prompt the characters into reacting in suitably heroic fashion. Of course, after the initial rush they have a chance to catch their breath and get their bearings, but for those first few moments they won't have time to do anything but try to act like heroes and hope they survive.

Needless to say, this opening is a wonderful way to kick things off with a bang, since the characters are forced to dive right into their roles and into the adventure that you have designed for them. This is also a great way to open a campaign based around characters starting at a higher level than normal, since it reflects how they're already accustomed to exciting situations. On the other hand, this type of opener can also test the mettle of new heroes. In addition, it's often a welcome change of pace from more conventional openings, skipping the need to find some way of making sure everyone gets involved by putting them all in it together from the beginning. Lastly, this opener

showcases how the characters must trust each other and work together against outside threats as often as possible if they wish to survive. Even if their histories indicate that they've worked together before, nothing makes both players and characters experience group solidarity quite as much as having to rely on each other from the very first second the game begins.

As fun and exciting as it is, however, there are two significant considerations you have to take into account with this type of opening. First there's the question of confusion. You must be sure that you describe the immediate environment and motivations of the characters well enough that the players believe in it and can picture the scene clearly. Otherwise, you will start off with a burst of action only to have it slowed right back down by a barrage of questions about where enemies are, what the characters are trying to accomplish and so on. Drawings and miniatures are particularly useful for this kind of opening, as they allow everyone to learn at a glance what they need to know about the physical layout of the scene.

Second, you have to make absolutely certain that the situation is appropriate for the characters or you'll immediately hear loud (and justified) griping from the players about how their characters would never wind up being involved in the very event you're counting on to bring the party together. So long as those concerns are addressed, however, the *in media res* method of opening a campaign can make for truly memorable opening sessions

Campaign Maintenance

A great deal of the effort of running a heroic game in Ravenloft rests in how the campaign is constructed, as the previous sections of this chapter have covered. With a stable base to start from, most heroic campaigns run quite easily — after all, if acting like a hero in the face of terrible odds isn't one of the reasons why you first picked up *Ravenloft*, this whole book has been in vain.

However, as the campaign develops there are certain problems and concerns that can arise in different campaign structures more easily than others. These concerns are addressed below under the following headings: triumph (campaigns where the PCs are expected to ultimately win the day); tragedy (campaigns where a tragic turn of events is destined to occur); and romance (campaigns that feature love themes as subplots or even main





storylines). The advice contained in these sections may keep your campaigns running smoothly from start to finish.

Triumph

In a triumph campaign the PCs are destined to win. Period. While they may suffer all manner of hardships and setbacks along the way, perhaps even lose a few members to various threats, you as the DM have decided in advance that the party will ultimately be victorious. Chances are you have a final battle scene in mind already, as well as perhaps bit of climactic dialogue and maybe even a scene or two to wind down the action after the battle is over. You intend to make the party work and sweat and bleed for their victory, but in the end it will pay off and the major villain will take a fall. And let it be said here and now that there's nothing wrong with designing a campaign this way for **Ravenloft**, *provided the players don't realize it's what you have in mind.*

Especially in a heroic campaign, it's only natural to assume that good will triumph. If you make it too obvious to your players, however, being good stops being a real roleplaying experience for them, instead becoming little more than what's expected as well as the most convenient way to move the story along. By setting up a good-aligned campaign in **Ravenloft**, you're attempting a challenge of no small proportion. Allowing the group the assumption that they will win defeats a great deal of this purpose of this challenge. Ravenloft is not a campaign setting in which events favor the hero in her hour of need. In fact, it's a world that usually does exactly the opposite, a world where coincidences and natural bias actively conspire to grind truly virtuous and noble heroes into the dust (or worse still corrupt them to serve the forces of darkness). When you enter the Land of Mists, all bets are off. When you choose to take up the mantle of a hero there, the house's odds stack even higher against you. Conveying this ominous and pervasive sense of malevolence is crucial to establishing the realm the players are part of, precisely because it is such a polar opposite of the way so many other campaign worlds and settings are designed. In **Ravenloft**, the Dark Powers are always watching, and heroes serve as some of their finest amusement.

When creating a "triumph campaign," you should remember to keep a firm distinction between what you know and what the players are expecting. Don't ever let them rest on the assump-

tion that they will succeed. Use the realm's reputation to your advantage and remind them that in this place heroism is not the sure path to fame, fortune and power. Instead, heroic actions are often a quick way to attract the unwanted attention of numerous evil and powerful beings who prey on just such noble souls. Let them have their victories, but don't forget to let them feel it when they hit losses and setbacks too.

In short, do your best to make sure that your players work hard to reach their victory, even if they do suspect they're going to triumph in the end. They still need to feel that the outcome of individual stories and adventures along the way relies on their heroism and ingenuity to decide.

Indeed, another key element of running a successful "triumph campaign" consists of allowing possible PC failures to influence your storyline. If the PCs try and legitimately fail to recover an important missing item in the course of an adventure, don't immediately have a friendly NPC show up with it three hours later so they can go on with the adventure they had planned. Instead, work the setback into the story and proceed with the adventure, leaving that plot thread unresolved even if it works against the PCs. Maybe one of the party's hated rivals successfully recovers the item, giving him exquisite gloating rights over the heroes for the foreseeable future. Or perhaps the characters must continue serving as grunt soldiers in the king's army rather than securing the promotion they had been promised if they had recovered the item.

Don't rub their noses in their defeats too hard – a group that constantly fails with nothing to show for it won't be a group much longer – but at the same time don't let them simply shrug off their setbacks. You should give the players enough incentive to try hard and put their minds into roleplaying their characters well rather than simply coasting through adventures doing the bare minimum "good" characters need to do to succeed.

If you succeed at using these techniques to keep players guessing about the outcome of the campaign, the eventual triumph you intend will seem that much sweeter. The players will feel that not only did they succeed at a heroic campaign, but a heroic campaign in Ravenloft, no less. Sure, *you* knew that they had it in them all along, but now, so do they.



Tragedy

While it might seem a contradictory concept at first for a heroic campaign, tragic stories work quite well with a party of pure motives and noble deeds. Some of literature's greatest heroic tales and characters come from tragic sources: the Arthurian legends center around the tragic events leading up to the fall of Camelot. Norse mythology goes one step further to define a hero as someone who knows that evil will triumph in the end and continues to fight anyway, rather than meekly submit to wickedness. Tragedy generally comes in two forms to consider: planned tragedy, where the DM structures the campaign around such a storyline; and natural tragedy, where events in the game head in a tragic direction on their own.

Planned Tragedy

Planned tragedy occurs when design the campaign with a tragic outcome in mind. Generally speaking, nothing the players or anyone else can do will be able to alter the tragic finale. Needless to say, while this can be an incredibly powerful storytelling device, you must be careful how you construct it or the players will feel stifled by the

tragic tale instead of inspired by it. While sometimes simply telling your players that they will be part of a tragic story is enough to get them to play along with the ending that you intend, that kind of direct approach doesn't suit every DM or every group. So how does a DM who wants to craft a tragic campaign but doesn't want to let the players in on it from the beginning still manage to convey all the elements that make tragedy great?

First, remember that the players are still the center of the game. While the world doesn't revolve around their characters, if they feel like their actions are secondary to the tragic story that you're spinning, they'll wonder why they're bothering to play at all. Make sure that if you center the tragic story around NPC characters, the players still play an important role in what's going on and care enough about the principal figures to appreciate the impact of the tragedy when it occurs. Likewise, be cautious if your tragic story centers around one or more (but not all) of the PCs. If the other players feel that their characters don't matter as much as your "leads," they'll lose interest in the game because they'll feel the tragic characters overshadow their own.





Finally, when it comes to planned tragedy, do your best to make sure that you've plotted the game well enough to take the actions of the players into account, rather than simply including their exploits as a sideline to your predetermined actions. You're allowed to make the players in the tragedy fairly blind to what's going on – tragic lovers never listen to those who try to dissuade them from following their hearts. Be careful, however, that the players don't hit the "it's a tragic story, that's why" wall too often or it will stretch their suspension of disbelief too far and make them feel indeed helpless to prevent the outcome for all the wrong reasons.

Make sure you think through as many of the possible answers or alternatives to your tragic ending as you can before you begin, so that you're prepared for how to deal with them if the players bring them up during the campaign. A tragic tale of two lovers separated by death falls flat if one member of the party can simply resurrect the deceased before the end of the first act. A tragic story about a misguided quest for vengeance might be great. If, however, your players manage to confront the crusader with conclusive proof that his vengeance is mislaid, you need to offer the players a convincing reason for the avenger to disregard their proof. Otherwise, the ending will fall flat because the players will feel that the tragedy could have been avoided if your NPC had behaved believably. Ideally you should structure the adventures and encounters in the campaign so that the players naturally and innocently contribute to the events leading up to the tragedy, without forcing them to do something out of character to do it.

For example, don't create an adventure that compels the PCs to release a hated enemy from prison for no real reason other than so you can use him against them later. Instead, plan an adventure in which the players' freedom fighters find out later that their big jailbreak accidentally released the villain along with the countless innocents being held in prison. In this way, they've advanced your tragic plan without being led by the nose and while still doing good as a whole. Or perhaps the players save a wandering monk from bandits one night early in the campaign, only to find out that he later performed the secret wedding that sparks the whole tragic chain of events. Just don't turn their actions back on them in this fashion too often or too openly, or the players will become suspicious and resentful of being used. They should realize the

consequences of their actions later, with a sense of tragic inevitability.

Natural Tragedy

Although it sounds like a contradiction in terms, there are also times when you'll find the campaign is heading in a tragic direction, even if you hadn't planned on it ending up that way. Don't panic – there's nothing wrong with a heroic campaign taking a tragic turn, especially if it's due to actions taken by the players themselves. Ultimately, if a campaign transforms into a tragic tale and you're uncertain of how you want to handle it, the best way to resolve the matter is to talk to your players directly and learn how they feel about it. It's their game too, and if you're unsure of how to proceed with it, their vote is a natural tiebreaker. If you show the players where they're heading, and they tell you that don't mind playing heroic characters in a tragic game, then you can embrace the change and tailor future adventures to suit this new outcome. Don't be surprised – some players enjoy the change of pace that comes with knowing they won't triumph in the end, but must still struggle to do the right thing anyway.

On the other hand, if the players react very negatively to the idea of playing a tragic game, simply put some room in your adventures to give them a chance to put things back on course. This often solves the problem. Just don't hand them a reversal of fortune on a platter. If their actions sparked this shift toward tragedy, they should feel the consequences of their decisions. When you consider it along those lines, a tragic turn of events needn't derail your entire campaign, but rather serve as a way to showcase heroism by contrast.

Romance

Truly speaking, romance isn't generally a campaign structure, but rather a plotline that develops along the way, either by DM design or simply by the path that developing relationships take during in the campaign. However, when it comes to heroic campaigns, romance deserves special mention in terms of how to develop and encourage believable and engaging romances in your games. As with tragedies, romances can be roughly divided into two categories: designed and natural.

Designed Romances

Designed romances are elements that the DM has planned to occur in the campaign, either between two PCs, an NPC and a PC, or two NPCs. No matter who is involved, the DM intends to



bring them together romantically (if they don't begin that way) and to put them through all the trial and tribulations that pursuing such an exalted emotion subjects them to in the Land of Mists. This section deals mostly with romances designed between an NPC and a PC. While no less important, PC to PC romances are largely up to the players responsible to carry out, and NPC to NPC romances are entirely in the DM's control, making them rather easy to manage in whatever way you like.

While both of these types can certainly benefit from some of the information offered below, the primary focus is on bridging the gap between PC and NPC in a romantic fashion, centering on the tricky business of setting up a romance once the game has already begun. To this end, the process of developing a romance plot consists of several stages, from the first beginnings of romance to the end of the relationship.

Selecting Characters for Romance

Allowing a romance to blossom a PC and an NPC as naturally as possible assumes primary importance in a "designed romance." The more stress you place on developing the relationship, the more the player is likely to feel that he has been roped into it, thus stifling any real emotion. In other words, having the handsome gentlemen immediately fall madly in love with the valiant lady who rescues him can certainly work, but isn't the only way you can begin a romantic relationship. The more naturally and easily a potential romantic interest is introduced, the more receptive the player will be to the beginning of a romance.

Dawning of Affection

For those looking for a more subtle romantic hook, begin with small but persistent details to initiate the relationship. Have the handsome gentlemen leave the lady a small bouquet of flowers with a sincere thank-you note for rescuing him, along with a request to come calling on her in the near future. The next time the group is in town to get supplies and take a needed break from their activities, have the gentleman show up and spend a night drinking and talking with her in a friendly (and perhaps slightly flirtatious) manner.

If the party must leave town for long periods of time, have him "just happen" to be sent on a diplomatic mission or business trip to the same destination. Of course he's following the lady of his dreams, but he won't admit it – not at this stage anyway. During this early time, make sure to present

the love interest as fairly as possible. Don't supply too many hints that he is destined as a romantic interest for the chosen character but take care to try to make their encounters as positive and entertaining as possible. Humor is another help. A humorless Prince Charming is a lot less fun and original than a suitor who has quirks such as a talent for fast-talking the city guard, or a penchant for a game of cards.

Ideally, the PC should get to know and like her potential suitor in much the same way as she would any other character, learning about him over a period of time and gradual revelation. Repeat this pattern each time the two potential lovers' paths cross, adding slightly more obviously romantic flourishes each time – from more flowers and small gestures of affection like a hug or kiss on the cheek to such obvious wooing efforts as love notes and serenading musicians. In this way, you can establish the beginning of romance without beating the player over the head with it.

Of course, if the player really isn't into it, you may have to give up on the prospect of pursuing a romantic plot with that character (at least with that NPC). This is why romance can be a tricky element to rely on as part of a campaign unless the player has expressed in advance an interest in such a development. If this happens, accept it and move on to another romance or just drop the element altogether. The last thing you want to do is force such a relationship on a player who isn't interested, as it can only end poorly.

Romance In Bloom

At this stage, the character and the NPC are involved in a true romantic affair, with all the attendant joys and complications. Once again, thoughtful details are generally your best friend, as opposed to large brush strokes. Use them to make sure the love interest is a constant but not overriding presence in the character's life.

Flowers on a pillow, a letter of support when all else seems lost, or a shoulder to cry on after a terrible ordeal do more to establish a feeling of love and support than monetary gifts or snickeringly passionate interludes. Most of all, try to ensure that the player never feels that the romance is more of a burden than a blessing. Try to include at least one good positive scene or benefit for every time you have the character's beloved kidnapped, hit with a terrible curse or otherwise put in a position where the character has to save him (or her). All too often DMs force players to defend their love from threats





at every turn without offering any tender scenes to show the romantic attachment between the two characters. Players eventually grow tired of protecting someone they ostensibly care for but never enjoy any emotional roleplaying with.

Provided you strike a good balance between involving the beloved in the action of the game and allowing the player to develop the relationship outside of a crisis, there really isn't too much concrete advice to heed at this point. Be mindful of what the player (and by extension the character) is looking for in this relationship and try to give it to them without handing it over too obviously or easily. For example, if a character is a devil-may-care adventurer who enjoys a swashbuckling life, take care that she has plenty of chances to rescue her love from peril. By contrast, if the player has a quiet character who enjoys politics and intrigue, see to it that his love life involves balancing a number of alliances and political deals against his personal feelings. Perhaps this involves keeping his romance secret for fear of reprisal from another faction or going public and having to face the trials of scandals, rumors and false accusations that accompany such high-profile affairs.

Never be afraid to throw a curve every once in a while. The course of true love never did run smooth, after all. As a rule stick to the character's strengths. This helps the character bond to her love interest by letting her feel capable of defending her beloved without taking the relationship for granted.

After you've given the couple a good amount of time to cement their relationship, it comes time for the ultimate test of their feelings for each other – the crisis.

Crisis

Now the true strength of the relationship is tested. Take the beloved away from the character and place a seemingly impossible task or choice between them. Note that this need not be an actual kidnapping; in fact, it's usually better if it's not. Try to consider other means, such as threats that cannot be defeated by might of spell or sword. For example, the local ruler finds out the hero is in love with his youngest daughter and demands that the character end his infatuation immediately or be expelled in disgrace from the ranks of his personal guard and banished from the city or town. Let this happen immediately after the character has just discovered the existence of a plot by some of the other guards to assassinate the ruler. If the charac-

ter chooses to end the affair, he will probably be able to stop the plot, but at the cost of never seeing his beloved again. Maybe the ruler would be grateful enough to let the character continue courting his daughter if the plot is foiled, but then again, maybe not. In either case, the player should never be sure which way it will go until after the decision is made. If the character accepts disgrace and banishment, he knows his beloved will be waiting to flee the country with him. Any efforts he makes to try to stop the assassination, however, will be severely hindered by his disgrace, so much so that it might very well cost the ruler – a good man aside from his aversion to courtly romance – his life. Complicate this all by involving the schemes of the country's darklord and the conditions exist for a true dilemma of heart and soul.

What is a heroic character to do? It's hard to say, and that's what makes it good drama. No matter what the character chooses to do, there are hard consequences and rough choices ahead, and success at one or both of his objectives (keeping his beloved and saving her father) is far from certain. A fortuitous outcome is still possible, but so is heartbreak and a very tragic tale, and this knowledge should be enough to keep the players at the edge of their seats.

Naturally, such a crisis works best when built into the climax of a campaign. By integrating the romance with other events, the other characters aren't left with nothing to do. In addition, the characters may have to deal with their own loyalty to their love-struck companion. This can serve as the crux of some powerful and rewarding roleplaying if the players treat it with the gravity it deserves. It is critical, therefore, that you build up the connection between character and his love interest as well and as thoroughly as possible before springing the crisis on him. Do it too soon and he may well abandon his love out of hand, rendering all that careful planning and roleplaying useless.

All that being said, remember it's acceptable if the character chooses his other duties over his beloved. You haven't "failed" if he doesn't place love over duty when the crisis arises. The measure of success lies in how difficult the decision is. If the NPC and the romance have really come to life for the character, the choice won't be easy, unless you've done so well that the PC doesn't even hesitate before choosing love. If that happens, you can smile to yourself at a job well done and then



heap on the trials and setbacks as they attempt to see their love through the challenge at hand.

About the only thing that's off-limits is designing a test where accepting one of the choices would mean the character's automatic death or instant expulsion from the campaign.

Of course, you can also choose to have the crisis be something a lot more low-key, especially if there's simply too much else going on in the campaign. Just make certain that the character eventually faces with a tough choice between his love and something else. After all, the ultimate goal of the crisis is not necessarily to take up several sessions of game time, but to put the lovers' feelings to the test. If they pass the test, they know their relationship is more than just something casual, that it has become a true affair of the heart.

Happily Ever After ...?

Barring some tragic turn of events, the hero should find some way to triumph and reunite with the beloved. Having risen to the challenge and survived a great test of their love, it's time for the lovers to rest and enjoy their feelings for each other. While you need not allow the character a period of total relaxation (especially if the crisis

comes before the campaign's overall climax), it is usually best to give them a small period of time and roleplaying together before racing the hero off on her next quest. Doing so helps validate all that they've gone through on each other's behalf, and makes sure the player knows that all their agonizing choices and heroic efforts didn't go unnoticed. You can also offer some sort of minor reward at this time – an award, some monetary compensation, etc. – but in general allow the lovers to be each other's own best reward, else you make the emotions take a backseat to the prizes that have been won.

From this point you have two choices: let the lovers be, or trouble them once more. Letting them be is relatively easy. While the character should still be able to roleplay with his beloved from time to time and enjoy the benefits of the relationship they worked so hard for, you're not going to put any more great stresses on their relationship. They have earned their happiness the hard way, and now they'll be able to enjoy it more or less untroubled by the events of the campaign.

This is a good option if you don't want the character to feel too tied down as the action of the





campaign moves on to new threats and new horizons. Before long the character will realize that he can go confidently forth on adventures without stopping every five minutes to check and see if his beloved has been abducted by some foul adversary. It is also a good choice if the romance plot has threatened to upstage some of your important plots or the other PCs.

The other option is to trouble them once more. Give them a little time to relax, then start building events toward another romantic crisis. This one should be different from the last, with higher stakes more perilous challenges. Beyond that, your imagination is the limit — after all, some of the wildest adventures ever attempted were done in the name of love, and in the Land of Mists, professing true love can attract the attention of a number of different beings — very few of them friendly to the idea.

Natural Romances

Natural romances follow many of the same steps as the designed romances outlined above, save that they appear without any prior planning on your part. Perhaps a PC decides his character has fallen in love with an NPC or other PC unexpectedly, or maybe you realize that a regular NPC would most likely do the same for the daring PC who saved him from danger.

The key for natural romances, like natural tragedies, is to sound out how the players feel about the way the plot and character development is heading. With romance, however, you must move a bit more subtly than normal, or risk scaring off a character or embarrassing the player. Use small touches and minor details hinting at a romantic theme, and see how the player reacts. If he comes back with nothing but scorn and derision in character as well as out, it's generally best to drop the idea and move on to something else.

On the other hand, if the player actively pursues romance or doesn't shy away from the first signs of it, feel free to build a romance as described above. The only extra advice is to use a light touch when handling natural romances. Even the most mature and experienced roleplayers can be surprisingly skittish about initiating a romantic subplot. Younger or more inexperienced players may not know how to handle a romance involving their characters. The last thing you want to do is discourage anyone from pursuing such a roleplaying experience by making it the center of attention before they're ready to handle it.

Potential Problems

This chapter is intended to provide advice and ideas to help create and run heroic campaigns in Ravenloft as smoothly as possible. Obviously, problems can and will arise, especially when you attempt such a bold experiment as trying to run a game centered around genuinely noble and selfless characters in such a dark setting. This section identifies some common problems to these campaigns and how to settle them as quickly and fairly as possible.

Evil Player Characters

Most of the potential problems presented by evil PCs in a heroic campaign can be handled at character creation, just by saying that you won't allow evil characters in your game. The right character creation guidelines and story elements, combined with game mechanics such as curses and powers checks, should serve to discourage anyone from playing a character of evil alignment. However, even with such checks in place you might find that during the course of the game a character who starts out with heroic ambitions somehow goes astray. Rather than fight it, the player has accepted this change and looks forward to roleplaying her character's descent into darkness. Or it might happen that a character falls under some form of magical influence that begins corrupting his behavior, much to the player's chagrin.

No matter what the cause, the damage that such characters can do to a heroic campaign is quite severe. Before long, it's almost inevitable that either the evil character will exploit the good members of the party, or the good characters will be forced to expel the evil character from the group. The situation may even involve slaying the evil character, especially if he was under some kind of outside influence. Such a drastic turn of events may cause ill feelings among the players, particularly with regard to the player of the evil PC. There are several fairly easy ways of troubleshooting this scenario.

First of all, when a PC begins to show signs of moral deterioration, you can take the player aside and talk to her about the ramifications of this decision. Ask why she has decided to go with such a dramatic character shift and if she truly understands what her character is getting into. Gently but firmly remind the player that this is intended to be a heroic campaign.

If she reconsiders her course of action, work out a way to weave her back into the storyline and fix whatever damage you can. If the player is still set

Chapter Four

on playing a character who gives in to the seductions of the Dark Powers, you have two options. Remove the character from the game immediately (perhaps turning the old character into a recurring villain in the process), or allow the character to continue until her evil is exposed and the other members of the party force her to choose between expulsion or redemption.

Either way, it should be made clear to the player that she will almost certainly be required to create a new character. If she complains that this is unfair, remind her that the other players made characters with the intention of following heroic ideals, and allowing the actions of one character to bring them all down or drag them far off track isn't fair to them either.

PCs who turn to evil as the result of some outside or magical influence are a bit easier to deal with. In the first place, as the DM you have control over most of the ways such curses can be placed during a campaign. If you don't want any alignment-altering items or spells in your adventures, simply leave them out. Sometimes, however, you may find that one slips in unexpectedly. Perhaps a cursed item appears in one adventure and the PCs

wind up innocently keeping it instead of disposing of it as you figured they would. That leaves you with the question of how to handle the item once it's in play. As a rule, if you don't want to deal with a cursed item's effects and it can be disposed of discreetly before doing any harm, just do so. Have an antiques dealer show up offering the party a good price for the item, or have a villain steal it and have it be destroyed along with him when he's finally confronted. End of story, with problem solved and no PC any the wiser of how close they came to disaster.

On the other hand, if the PCs already know an item or character is cursed, getting rid of the item or lifting the curse in an obvious fashion forced. You can decide to let events run their course, especially if the character deliberately took possession of an item known to be cursed or otherwise invited his own downfall. (After all, that's not a very heroic choice to begin with.) Consider it punishment for the character's misdeeds and move the game along. Alternately, some very heroic adventures can be crafted around fighting the corruption of a cursed item or attempting to destroy it (a certain ring comes to mind). While it may





seem to be a time-consuming detour, the rich vein of roleplaying and drama such a turn of events has to offer might easily be worth the effort. Simply sit down and work out a way to incorporate this new quest into your plot structure, then steer the players back to the original quest as soon as they're finished. Done well enough, they'll never know you hadn't planned it all along.

Square-Jawed, Straight-Laced and Boring

On the other end of the spectrum are the players who eventually decide that playing a good-aligned character is utterly boring. These players complain that a good alignment limits their freedom to play their characters or too strictly dictates how they must respond to threats and challenges in the campaign. Most of the time this problem arises in players who have only played characters of neutral or evil alignments and are unused to playing characters who are required to give a damn when they see evil at work in the world around them. Given a chance and some time to role-play their characters correctly, the majority of these players realize that good alignments don't automatically mean they must act like stereotypical white knights in response to every threat.

Likewise, players who doubt that a party of good-aligned characters can be fun to be play need to remember that even characters of similar alignment need not always agree on the best course of action. A good character history and personality are the true factors in creating a fun character of any alignment.

Sometimes a player may get restless with always "doing good," no matter how detailed her character histories or your adventures might be. Don't take this as an insult. Just work up a plan of how to deal with this problem.

Try working with the player to incorporate some new subplots or perhaps even solo side sessions to help her develop a new aspect of the character. Even the sketchiest character history still has a wealth of story hooks in it that you can use to help flesh out a character into a more interesting individual.

If the character used to be apprenticed to a master who taught her everything about becoming an adventurer? Have him call on his former pupil to come home and help him deal with a problem too big to handle on his own. Or maybe the character passes through her old home village and sees the bully who used to pick on her. How does she approach him now that she is an experienced

adventurer? Does she forgive and forget or rub her new status in the bully's face? Maybe an old boyfriend hears how famous his old flame has gotten and decides to track her down to rekindle their affair. Maybe the former lover has a jilted partner trailing after him, or has placed himself at the mercy of some unsavory characters hot to collect some gambling debts or overdue taxes. By introducing a few such minor subplots or short solo sessions for the player, chances are you can show her that good characters can have lives as complicated and interesting as those of neutral or evil alignment without needing to drag the entire campaign off track for them.

Don't spend so much time trying to keep one player hooked that the others feel shortchanged. If it seems like you're simply rewarding players for being difficult, you've set up a bad standard for those who are doing their best to play and enjoy good characters. Beware of players who continuously need this kind of attention in order to stay focused. It's one thing for a player to be a little lost or have some trouble relating to a good character, but it's another to force the DM to cater constantly to a player just to keep her in the game. So long as you make the other players understand why you're doing what you're doing, though, and perhaps offer such benefits to other players who aren't having trouble from time to time, you shouldn't have a problem with this approach.

Another possibility that has promise, especially if it looks like the whole group might be getting a little tired of the all-heroic focus of the campaign, is to make a temporary change in the game itself. This enables everyone to recharge their roleplaying batteries by playing something different so they can return to their old roles with a fresh drive and perspective.

The easiest way to do this is to tell the players you have a switch in mind. If they agree to the basic idea, set up an adventure that begins as normal, but in the middle of the action allow the players to take control of another group of characters also involved in the plot. Good choices for this alternate group are allies working alongside them, squires or henchmen that the party has tagging along, a third party with a totally different perspective on their current conflict, or perhaps even some of the villains that they're up against. This last suggestion is a good choice if the party just wants to let loose and indulge in some harmless recreational evil. In addition, such a situation presents the players with



the unique and often amusing roleplaying challenge of trying to foil the efforts of their own heroes.

Just make sure the new identities are enough of a change that the players can exercise the impulses they haven't been able to in the past. After a session or two of slipping into new roles and relaxing their inhibitions, move the players back into their old characters and continue from where the group left off before.

Players should understand that such role-reversal sessions are a device to introduce a change of pace when the group experiences burn out or needs a break from the pressures of playing good-aligned characters in a setting where all the odds are stacked against them. So long as that is understood, there should be no problem in utilizing such techniques to revive the players' ability to portray noble, selfless heroes who seek to bring light to the Realms of Dread.

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