

SWORD
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Ravenloft

GAZETTEER



VOLUME V

A Ravenloft® Campaign Setting Supplement

GAZETTEER

VOLUME V

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Foreword

*While some affect the sun, and some the shade
Some flee the city, some the hermitage;
Their aims as various, as the roads they take
In journeying thro' life; — the task be mine,
To paint the gloomy horrors of the tomb;
Th' appointed place of rendezvous, where all
These travellers meet.
— Robert Blair, "The Grave"*



reetings once again, my patron. No doubt you have wondered what became of me after I last wrote from Sithicus. Indeed, these past weeks have proven most eventful, and only now do I once again have the opportunity to contact you. Should my patron conduct similar projects in the future, he may wish to contemplate more efficient means of relaying these reports than relying on his brutish messengers.

I have traveled too long in the south. I dislike these backward wilds, and I sense dark shadows gathering around me. Indeed, I have suffered more troubles in the last six months of this survey of the Core than in its first year and a half combined. Not even the five years before *that*, spent evading the undead as I studied Necropolis, caused me such consternation. Much from this recent leg of my journey bothers me still. I have yet to determine how I eluded a grisly end in Verbrek. Naturally, my theories center around the strange bracer you bestowed upon me, but the nature of the so-called “protective” magic locked within your gift remains elusive. More than a year have I worn this device locked around my wrist, Azalin. My annoyance is

countered only by my intellectual curiosity, and that will not assuage me forever.

I must also confess that, although I left Sithicus behind me well over a month ago, the phantasmal guilt permeating that land lingers within me. These shameful thoughts are most unlike the false memories Darkon feeds to our homeland’s newcomers; shedding them is not so simple as leaving the kingdom behind. The memories contain a certain truth — the truth in my daughter’s dying words...

But never mind that. My most recent travails took place just after I last wrote to you, my patron. My schedule required that I cross the Balinoks quickly. As I noted then, I had once more chosen to utilize the mist-walking talents of hireling Vistani rather than submit myself again to that rolling coffin your repugnant underlings call a carriage. As much as I might choke on these words, I must now admit that I would have done well to heed your cautions concerning the Vistani. I assure you, my dear patron, I shall not seek out their services again.

I met with the Vistana I had hired shortly after dusk, and he led me to his campsite. They were a small troupe, just three men and a woman all told. A





ragged lot with a hungry mien, I first mistook them for survivors of Invidia's Dukkar. They were entirely civil, even ingratiating, as the arrangements were made, but as soon as one of them had my back to him, they attacked me as one. Despite the pistols on my belt, despite my blade, despite even my considerable arcane skills, I was scarcely prepared for their frantic onslaught, for they seemed to anticipate my every move. I managed a narrow escape, and I consider myself fortunate to have done so. Though blood was shed on both sides, so harried was my retreat that I cannot even say with any certainty that I killed a single one of the wretched assassins.

The truth becomes humiliatingly clear in hindsight. The gypsies' gaunt features, the fire of madness deep within their sunken eyes — these were *darklings*, lowly and accursed outcasts from the Vistani way of life, and no more trustworthy than a viper. Even so, this was clearly no random act of banditry. As they fell upon me, their deranged ranting revealed that they knew far more about me than a simple matter of battle tactics. These wretches seemed to know *me*, my dear patron, and of even greater interest, they seemed to know of my relationship to *you*. At one point during the fray, the woman managed to pin me against a tree. In that long, dreadful moment before I managed to twist away, she leaned in close and spat these words in my face:

*Tell this to your master when you join him in the grave...
That which is hidden
Must not be found;
That which is chained
Must remain bound!*

What meaning this verse may hold, I cannot yet tell, but this much I can say with certainty: each darkling bore an identical mark on the left palm — six curved scars, radiating outward like a star. Arcane runes? Something akin to Hazlani tattoo magic, perhaps?

I trust that my patron will find these facts of use. Perhaps he could be bothered to tell me what these vicious darklings intend of me? Or perhaps *why* they wish me dead? Somehow I suspect that no answers will be forthcoming. Trust that I will seek them out myself.

Thus it was that I spent the last six weeks trudging north on foot to Borca, and from there due east down the Old Svalich Road, retracing my previous route through Barovia. Suffice to say, Count Strahd's backwater has scarcely changed over the two winters since I first passed this way.

I write to you now from the Weary Horse Inn, a spacious coachman's respite just shy of the Nova Vaasan border. I have seen a number of Vistani skulking about the area, so I must admit to a tremor of relief when your underlings once again found me. Yet I should say, my dear patron: Did you really require all these weeks to locate me? I should hate to think that you had lost interest in your "little scholar" and her toil. Distracted by a new scheme, perhaps?

A final note. As I penned this letter, I assuaged an idle curiosity by asking the innkeeper why he would uphold a home and business here in the sinister and fearful Barovian foothills, when the wide, sun-drenched plains of Nova Vaasa beckon from just a few miles down the Old Svalich Road. The innkeeper laughed; his answer was simple.

"There is much that is wrong in Barovia, that is true," he said. "But here, it keeps to the dark."

Tomorrow, I enter the northern Vaasi Plateau, and my work begins anew.

*So, my suspicions were correct. Hyskosa's kin have indeed entered the fray. No doubt their feeble meddling will grow all the more desperate as their opportunity wanes. Surely their mad little seers know how pointless their attacks must be? Of course, it is *futility itself* that they rail against. That is the flame that draws them in. That is the flame that *burns* them.*





Report format



Due to the overall time required to complete this project, I have taken to prefacing each volume of the *Doomsday Gazetteers* with a summary of my standard practices and formatting. I shall attempt to uphold the regular travel schedule I have maintained these past two years, allotting roughly six weeks to study each country, taking more or less time as required. Although my unexpected trek across the southern Core has put me behind schedule, I already possess a folio brimming with collected anecdotes concerning the Shadow Rift, so I believe I will be back on course by autumn. I shall immediately relay each report back to Darkon upon its completion. When so-called “local color” proves intriguing, I will provide direct excerpts of my interviews with the native populace. For clarity’s sake, I shall present these anecdotes in illuminated sidebars.

To avoid confusion, all reports adhere to the following standard format:

Landscape

In this section, I present a naturalist’s view of each region, focusing on noteworthy features of its landscape, flora and fauna. I also take note of important waterways and trade routes, and describe prevailing architectural styles.

Local Animals and Native Horrors

These sidebars present natural wildlife and unnatural monsters that are particularly well-suited for adventures in the domain; they are not exhaustive lists of all the creatures to be found. Creature lists are divided into “Wildlife” (common, natural animals) and “Monsters” (uncommon, unnatural threats). To make preparing an encounter quickly easier, creatures are listed in order of ascending Challenge Ratings (CR). Any creatures in italics are under the influence of the domain’s darklord (see “Enchantment” effects in Chapter Three of the *Ravenloft Player’s Handbook*). Unless noted otherwise, all creatures can be found in the *Monster Manual*. Marked creatures are found in *Denizens of Dread* (†), published by Sword & Sorcery Studios, or in *Monster Manual II* (††) or *Fiend Folio* (‡), both published by Wizards of the Coast. Creatures marked with a number sign (#) are included in the Attached Notes.

History

As this letter marks the opening of a new *Doomsday Gazetteer*, I should once again address the frustrations of historical study. Objectively speaking, many lands in our world have existed for only a very short time. On those occasions when the Mists have parted, however, the lands they revealed have typically appeared fully formed and fully populated. The inhabitants of these new lands bear full memories of lives well before the emergence of their home. In addition, their historical records often stretch back centuries. In, short, dear patron, these folk believe themselves to be as real as you or I, and in truth I cannot disprove the claim.

Common wisdom holds that these new lands have simply been “revealed” to the world, having existed all along while hidden deep in the Misty Border. Occultists in some circles, however, have posited the existence of other worlds — the supposed origins of the “outlanders” with which my patron is assuredly familiar. These occultists theorize that each of these realms may have been drawn into our Land of Mists from one of these so-called outlander worlds.

I once scoffed at such wild theories, but I now accept them, at least on a theoretical basis. Yet when one probes into the recorded history — or even living memory — of a region before its emergence, such history often proves to be vague, incomplete or even self-contradictory.

This leads me to the disturbing hypothesis that many lands in our world may simply have been created from whole cloth on the day they first appeared in the Mists. Every aspect of the region’s history, memories and lives predating that day may be nothing more than an unfathomably complex phantasm. I hesitate to guess at the power of the nameless forces that would be capable of such creation, but the facts speak for themselves.

For the sake of clarity, I endeavor to establish a “seminal event” during which each land first emerged — or, perhaps, materialized. Following this seminal event, cross-referenced historical documents from surrounding lands confirm the region’s objective existence. I cannot establish that anything before this seminal event actually occurred in any real sense. Therefore, although I include this “false history” in my accounts, I will endeavor to focus only on those historical events that still resonate in the present.

The historical record of some countries reads as a chain of usurpers, one tyrant overthrowing the





next. If one or more of the past rulers of a country proves particularly interesting, I will provide a brief biography in an illuminated sidebar.

Populace

In this section, I present a census taker's view of each land. My survey includes physical characteristics, fashions, demeanor, customs, cuisine and an overview of prevalent religions. I will also present my patron with brief primers on the foreign tongues that I encounter.

The Realm

In this section, I turn my eye to the flow of power and the manner in which it is exploited. First, I provide an overview of each region's formal government, including law enforcement and prevailing opinion regarding current rulers. Next, I turn to economic power, including forms of currency, natural resources and notable industries. Lastly, I focus on matters of diplomacy, examining how each nation interacts with its neighbors.

In addition, my years of Requiem research and trekking across the Core have taught me much about the true nature of power. My patron is of course intimately aware of the legends of what I term "dread lords": vile individuals who mystically bind themselves to their realms in the pursuit of power, receiving dire curses in return. For nearly a year now I have known that my patron is almost certainly already aware of the identities of these dread lords, but I will continue to ferret out likely suspects whenever evidence presents itself for my

own intellectual satisfaction. Though I still suspect that my endeavors have something to do with these dread lords, in recent months I have come to believe that my patron's primary motivation lies elsewhere. Without a doubt, he is searching for something, and I am his proverbial eyes and ears. If my patron would be so kind as to tell me what my quarry might be, it would save us both time and aggravation. I would not feel obliged to pad my reports with unnecessary details, and he would not have to pore over them in search of a single, elusive tidbit.

Sites of Interest

Here I present a brief travelogue of my journey through the significant settlements and other intriguing locales in each nation, including noteworthy structures and inhabitants. To capture the flavor — and at times, annoyances — of my travels, I list communities and sites of more esoteric appeal in the order in which I visit them.

Simply for my own reference, I also include a few notes on food and lodging for each community; to be thorough, my surveys have often required convoluted routes and extensive backtracking.

Final Thoughts

Upon the completion of my survey of each land, I compile my notes and conclude with my executive summary of the region as a whole. For my patron's benefit, I will distill my impression of the land, including potential causes for concern and weaknesses that might be exploited.

How to Use This Book

The book you now hold is an annotated version of the *Doomsday Gazetteer Volume V*, compiled from the narrator's reports and correspondence. The bulk of this text is a travelogue, relating the narrator's experiences and observations during a six-month survey of four domains of the eastern Core: Nova Vaasa, Tepest, Keening and the Shadow Rift.

The narrator's patron, Azalin Rex, may also occasionally remark on the narrator's commentary, perhaps to offer a differing opinion, as can be seen above.

Sidebars such as this one present special game material that should be read only by the Dungeon Master (DM). If you are a player, reading these sections may spoil some of the mystery your DM has in store for you. "Dread Possibility" sidebars in particular present secrets and adventure ideas that may or may not be true. The Dungeon Master should decide whether these scenarios apply to her campaign.

The final section of this book, Attached Notes, is a collection of appendices covering new game rules, magic, creatures, NPCs and locations. Whenever the narrator refers to attaching extra notes at the end of a report, game material on that subject can be found in the appendix. As with sidebars, players should refrain from reading the Attached Notes.





A single copy of each *Doomsday Gazetteer* exists within the game setting, written in Draconic and carefully encoded (requiring a successful DC 30 Decipher Script check to interpret). Heroes can avail themselves directly of the information found within these pages, but first they must obtain the book. This should invariably entail an adventure in itself. Heroes would most likely intercept a *Doomsday Gazetteer* report as it is being delivered to the narrator's patron. Of course, Azalin will seek to recover his property...

While the primary purpose of the *Gazetteers* is to enrich the Ravenloft setting, DMs are just as strongly encouraged to plunder these books for chilling NPCs, locations and concepts for use in any horror-tinged campaign. The Realm of Dread is a jigsaw world, and each element can be easily imported to other settings, including those the DM creates herself.

Domains at a Glance

Each domain report opens with a brief account of the domain's vital statistics, in the following format:

Cultural Level: The domain's degree of technological and cultural development, ranging from Savage (0) to Renaissance (9). See Chapter One of the *Ravenloft Player's Handbook* for more details.

Ecology & Environment: The domain's ecology rating (Full, Sparse, or No) and terrain types (see "Wilderness Adventures" in Chapter 3 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). These factors determine the effectiveness of summoning spells within that domain. (See "Conjuration" effects in Chapter Three of the *Ravenloft Player's Handbook*.)

Year of Formation: The year on the Barovian Calendar when the domain first appeared.

Population: The domain's approximate total population. Undead and full-blooded Vistani are not included in population statistics.

Races: A racial breakdown of the domain's population. "Other" indicates a mixture of standard nonhuman races that are not explicitly cited, as well as a smattering of living, intelligent monsters that can pass for human. When more than one human ethnic group lives in the domain, these groups will also be broken down in descending order of social dominance.

Languages & Religions: Local languages and religions are presented in descending order of popularity. The official or dominant language(s) and religions(s), if any, are labeled with an asterisk.

Government: The domain's officially recognized form of government. In Ravenloft, however, the true, hidden chains of power may take a significantly different form. Not all domains have a centralized authority, and some have no formal government at all. When applicable, sidebars will also include notes and game statistics for typical members of local law enforcement.

Ruler: The domain's publicly recognized political ruler, should the domain have a centralized government.

Darklord: The domain's *true* master. Individual darklords are described in full in the Attached Notes.

The Native Hero

These sidebars offer special notes and advice on creating PCs native to the domain. Such notes include the local role of the standard races and classes, recommended skills and feats that capture the domain's atmosphere, and examples of typical names.

Law Enforcement

For quick reference, each report includes a brief sidebar offering game statistics for the typical member of local law enforcement.

Sites of Interest

Each settlement includes a sidebar presenting full community statistics. (See "Generating Towns" in Chapter 5 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.)





Report One: Tova Vaasa

[A] wise prince will seek means by which his subjects will always and in every possible condition of things have need of his government, and then they will always be faithful to him.

— Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*



beauty, long, long have I searched for thee in the cool, quiet shadows of lonely trees or in the aimless music of dwindling streams. Far, far too late did I think to seek for thee in the wide shadeless grass and the thundering breeze, but with you found the search fades like formless dreams.”

Those were the words of the Mordentish poet and Vassiphile Sir Archer Fleming, written after he saw the grassy plains of Nova Vaasa for the first time. Having traveled the plains myself, I can say with authority that they lack the degree of grandeur Fleming ascribes to them. To find sublime beauty in a miles-wide expanse of dirt and grass is certainly the mark of a simpleton.

Had Fleming written his paean to the plains after seeing Nova Vaasa’s cities for the first time, I would be more forgiving, as the grasslands certainly become orders of magnitude more lovely by comparison. When I first trod through urban Nova Vaasa, I felt certain I was witnessing the darkest, seamiest portions of the land’s underbelly. Only later did I discover that even the squalor hid something worse yet.

Just over a week into my travels through this land, on the nighttime streets of Bergovitsa, I received my first true glimpse beneath the mask of Nova Vaasa, and saw the frightening face that Nova Vaasans keep hidden from others and from themselves. As I walked Bergovitsa’s roads, jotting notes and drawing rough maps of my surroundings, I gradually became aware that a small gang of men was following me. I pretended to take no notice at first, hoping that the street toughs would grow bored and move on, but as their snickers and catcalls grew louder there was clearly little chance of that happening.

In short order I found myself surrounded by five sweaty, soiled representatives of Nova Vaasa’s underclass, who had mistaken me for a harmless — and helpless — diversion. Their crude remarks left no doubt as to their intent, and for a moment I thought that I might be forced to tempt the wrath of Bergovitsa’s religious and secular authorities by using my arcane talents to reprimand them.

I was fortuitously spared this risk, as the distinctive sound of horse’s hooves on cobblestones interrupted the hooting of the men. A loud voice, by the accent that of a nobleman, demanded, “What is the meaning of this?” The cowardly thugs fled as the lone horseman approached.

Nova Vaasa at a Glance

Cultural Level: Medieval (7)

Ecology: Full

Climate/Terrain: Temperate forests, hills, and plains

Year of Formation: 682 BC

Population: 67,700

Races: Humans 91%, halflings 5%, gnomes 3%, other 1%

Human Ethnic Groups: Vaasi 88%, Barovians 4%, Darkonians 2%, Falkovnians 2%, Tepestani 2%, Rashemani 1%, other 1%

Languages: Vaasi*, Halfling, Gnome, Balok, Darkonese, Falkovnian, Tepestani

Religions: The Lawgiver*

Government: Hereditary aristocracy

Ruler: Prince Othmar Bolshnik

Darklord: Malken

My “savior” dismounted, and it was clear that his accent labeled him rightly. His clothing was of rich quality and meticulous care, and his steed was a magnificent creature — tall, strong and ill-tempered. The erstwhile rider walked smoothly toward me, his simpering smile barely visible beneath his bushy mustache.

“I hope those common brutes did you no harm, milady?” he said in the thick, rich tones of Nova Vaasa’s wealthy elite. I said some polite courtesies in return and prepared to be on my way.

“Ah, not so hasty, my lovely,” he said, drawing closer, so that the whiskey on his breath was now clearly detectable. “You wouldn’t leave without showing your rescuer your appreciation, would you?”

I left him sobbing and moaning in a fetal position. I would reflect on that incident often as I traveled through the rest of the land. Whether it is the plains cat crouching in a field of lush grass, or the base lusts of a would-be hero, something sinister always lurks beneath the surface in Nova Vaasa.





Landscape



ome lands in the Core are dominated by a single feature. The mountains of Barovia, the bogs of Mordent, and the thickly forested provinces of the southwest all come to mind. On the other

hand, it could be said that Nova Vaasa is largely dominated by a *lack* of features. Save for the westernmost regions, Nova Vaasa is a large, grassy flatland, the monotony of which is broken up only by monotony of a different sort, as one comes across the joyless peasants toiling on the farmlands that surround the handful of rivers rushing to the Nocturnal Sea. This dry, flat plain fittingly has a dry, flat name: it is known simply as the Vaasi Plateau, or the *Vaasimark*, and it both defines and limits life and culture in Nova Vaasa.

If one is for some reason compelled to make a closer examination, as I was, the Vaasi Plateau is perhaps not quite as uniform as it seems at first glance. Still, the differences from region to region are subtle and the similarities broad. Most storms break on the Balinoks or Mountains of Misery, resulting in an arid climate that tends to keep the grasses short and dry. Continuous grazing by Vaasi horses, both in ranches and in the wild, also contributes to the shortness of the Vaasi grasses. Exceptions do exist; different strains of Vaasi grass have different characteristics, and one strain or another often dominates large swaths of the Plateau. The Plateau can be roughly divided into six smaller plains, each with its own name and its own cosmetic individuality.

The northwestern plains, north of the Borchava River and west of the Dnar, are known as the *Elendighedmark*, or Plains of Misery, due to their proximity to the Mountains of Misery. The fertility of the region belies that name. The disappearance of the Markovian Balinoks with the coming of the Shadow Rift has allowed for a greater degree of rainfall here, and the numerous rivers in the relatively small region do much to keep the plain well watered. As a result, the grasses in the Plains of Misery are long and lush, often growing waist-high if left alone.

The northeastern-most region, north of the Sydlignar and east of the Dnar, is known as Ehrendton, named for the Ehrend family, vassals to the Bolshniks and Counts of Ehrendton. These grasses are short and thin. They naturally tend to be yellow-green in color, but a peculiar fungus often

afflicts patches of the grasslands here and turns them a sickly white. Folktales hold that this *dødmangraes* ("dead man's grass") only grows over unmarked graves. For such a remote and lightly populated area, Ehrendton is surprisingly well known around the Core. I shall elaborate on the reason for that later.

South of the Borchava River and the Vaughn Dnar and west of the Prince's Road is the King's Plain, or *Kesjermark*. The Kesjermark earns its name for two reasons, one historical and one cosmetic. Nova Vaasan history tells that the conqueror-king Højplads first marched into Nova Vaasa across that plain in the morning, made camp there in the afternoon, and won the first bloody battle for this land there in the evening. The plain certainly has an imperial air, thanks to the wide fields of *vingraes*, a short golden grass with royal purple seeds. The Kesjermark is often known by an alternate name, "Højplads's Carpet."

West of the Kesjermark, between the Sydlignar and the Ivlis, is the *Dommark*, the Plain of Judgment. This is the hottest and least forgiving part of the plateau. Between the rivers and the farmlands almost no water can be found, and the grasses are short, dry and brown. In large patches the grass gives way entirely to dirt and stone. A peculiar strain of grass known as *knivgraes* manages to thrive here, warding off the Vaamgaer horse herds with its cruelly sharp blades.

Between the Ivlis and the Saniset rivers, the Vaasi Plateau is known as the *Tordenmark*, or Thundering Plain. The Tordenmark is dominated by *hestgraes*, a knee-high grass with seeds of rich brown and bright white. The ancient Vaasi poet Ansgar, observing the fields of *hestgraes* blowing in the wind, likened it to "a thundring sea of horses ryding wayvs of shyning green." That appallingly confused metaphor gave the plain its name.

The southernmost stretch of the Vaasi Plateau, containing those lands south of the Saniset River, commonly known as the Pommel, is home to the longest strain of grass. This *havgraes* grows as high as a man's chest, and the galloping horse herds trample the sun-yellowed stalks into long, broken trails. Walking through the *havgraes* is a risky proposition; one is unlikely to spot a venomous snake or crouching plains cat until it is too late.

The Vaasi Plateau, while the most prominent element of the landscape, is challenged in importance by the rivers, the source of life and center of civilization in Nova Vaasa. Farmlands stretch for





miles on either side of each of the Vaasi rivers. The grasses beside the rivers have been plowed or burned away and short stone walls erected to separate fields and make a brave show of defense to the more brazen bandits. The peasants who work these farms live in squat, round hovels of stone, with thatch roofs made from the longer plains grasses. They're a grim, stone-faced lot, yielding rich harvests from the soil only to see most of it taken as taxes by the nearest noble lord. Some few of these peasants own the fields they work, but most have been forced to sell them to the nobles to make up for shortfalls in lean years. These unfortunates end up working the land they used to own as "tenant farmers," though "serfs" would be a more apt description. Just beyond the farms are horse ranches, each owned by a noble or wealthy merchant. Because of the threat of theft or raids, workers on these ranches are always armed and aggressively unfriendly toward strangers.

As hard and tiring as the lot of the farmers is, they live in a virtual paradise when compared to the hell endured by those living in Nova Vaasa's cities. Given the wide expanse of the Vaasi plains, I would have expected the Nova Vaasans to lean naturally toward open, loosely packed communities, taking full advantage of the space available to

them. Strangely, the opposite trend developed. Buildings are oppressively close together, streets surprisingly narrow, and virtually no escape is to be found from the press of the crowds. The density of the population combines with poverty to create nightmarish scenes of urban squalor. Throngs of beggars line nearly every street and alley, ditches are piled with refuse and corpses bloated with disease or bloodied wounds. Urban buildings are usually constructed of reddish beige brick and built on granite foundations. Windows are unusually small, almost resembling arrow slits at times. Shingled roofs are brown or golden yellow. Wooden doors are rare and a sign of wealth.

Away from the suffocating cities or life-giving rivers, relatively few people live on the Vaasi Plateau. Attempts have been made in the past to settle the more remote regions of the plains, as desperate peasants driven by the strict laws and harsh taxes of princes past and present sought homes further from their yoke. Crumbling stone ruins are all that remain to mark most of these efforts. Why these "pioneers" thought they could yield a sustainable harvest from the rocky arid plains where so many others failed is a mystery to me, but with the number of ruins now dotting the



landscape from north to south, the lesson appears to have taken hold. Few today try to eke out a life away from the rivers, even with the ever greater burden of taxation.

Some communities do manage to persist, or even thrive, in the middle of the plains, but those that do are usually centered on a freshwater spring, or several such springs, which can be found emerging from caves here and there along the Plateau. Most of these springs are by now occupied by settlers, bandits or plains cats. Plains settlements are by necessity as heavily fortified as they can be, for they are favored targets of bandits, who eagerly take advantage of the absence of law. Ironically, the more successful plains communities must eventually call on the Prince and his lords for protection, as the bandit attacks increase in size and frequency.

The aforementioned rivers flow into Nova Vaasa from nine major sources. The Vaughn Dnar flows from Lake Kronov in Tepest into Nova Vaasa, after which the Trished River joins it from the Mountains of Misery in Darkon. The enlarged Vaughn Dnar then wends its way southeast. From the Vaesen Foothills, the rugged, wooded hills bordering the Shadow Rift, come the Borchava and Little Borchava rivers, which flow briskly and somewhat eerily, oblivious to the fact that their headwaters vanished along with the Markovian Balinoks almost twenty years ago. The Little Borchava eventually flows into its larger sibling, which turns northeast to join the Vaughn Dnar. The Vaughn Dnar then continues east until it passes north of Kantora. At that point, the Dnar River, flowing south from Darkon, joins with it, and the combined river is thereafter known as the Sydligdnar, or South Dnar. The Sydligdnar flows east and empties into the Nocturnal Sea, creating a deepening gorge known as Katsmund Canyon as it goes. The Sydligdnar is the deepest and broadest of the Vaasi rivers, wide enough to accommodate small ships, though the swiftness of its flow can make for difficult navigating. Despite the risks, vessels row up and down the Sydligdnar regularly, trading goods between Kantora and Egertus, and even small sailing ships from the Nocturnal Sea can sometimes be found far upriver. Larger ships load and unload their cargoes on Guldstrand Beach, just south of the Canyon's mouth, using Gedfod horses to carry their goods up and down the rocky trails to Egertus.

The Volgis River also has its phantom source in the Shadow Rift, flowing through the Vaesen



Foothills and dividing the Dyrskov in twain. It flows southeast, coming very close to the border of Barovia, where it is subsumed by the Ivlis flowing down from the Balinoks. The Ivlis flows past Bergovitsa, assimilating the flow of the Ulvand, which runs northeast through the Borderwood from further south in the Balinoks. The gorge created by the Ivlis as it drifts into the Nocturnal Sea is called Storrokke Canyon. Large, jagged spears of rock block the mouth of Storrokke Canyon, preventing any entrance from the sea, but the Ivlis is too narrow and twisting to make sailing feasible regardless.

In Nova Vaasa's far south, the Saniset emerges from Hazlan, just north of the forest the Nova Vaasans call the Skyggeskov, gently making its way into the sea. Further south, a river known as the East Musarde emerges from the Mists and cuts across the Pommel. As its name suggests, locals believe this to be a continuation of the Musarde, which disappears into the Mists south of Hazlan. I am not quick to accept the word of peasants, but the Vistani I spoke with say the same.

Besides the rivers, the only major bodies of water in Nova Vaasa are the Three Sisters, a trio of lakes northwest of where the Ivlis and Volgis rivers meet. The Three Sisters are named for a Nova Vaasan myth telling of the first three daughters of the first man and woman created by the Lawgiver. The largest and northernmost of the lakes is Lake Nielsine, after the eldest of the sisters, the first woman to tame and ride a horse. The second largest and westernmost of the lakes is Lake Jensine, after the middle sister, the first woman to successfully grow crops in the soil. The smallest and southernmost of the lakes is Lake Vibeke, after the youngest sister, who was the first woman killed and devoured by a plains cat. Charming.

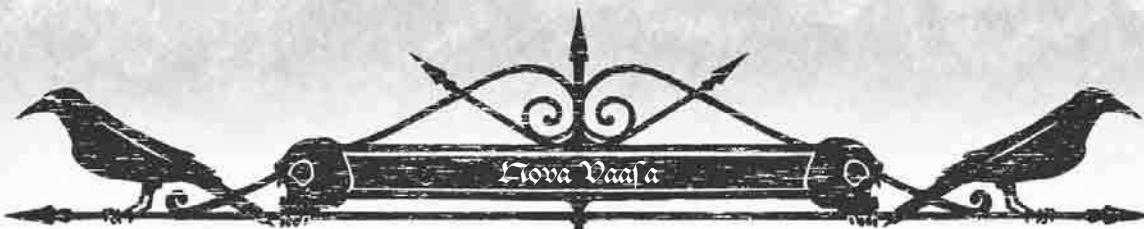
Nova Vaasa's three major forests are the *Dyrskov* ("Beastwood"), the *Graenseskov* ("Borderwood"), and the *Skyggeskov* ("Shadowwood"). Each of the forests could only be considered "major" by Nova Vaasan standards, of course; none is particularly large. These forests all lie in western Nova Vaasa, on the border with other lands. The *Dyrskov*, in northwestern Nova Vaasa, grows on the edge of the Shadow Rift; the *Graenseskov*, in central southwestern Nova Vaasa, spills over the border of Barovia; and the *Skyggeskov*, in south-southwestern Nova Vaasa, straddles the border with Hazlan and recedes into the Mists.

The *Dyrskov* covers most of the southern Vaesen Foothills and has long had an evil reputation. Before the Grand Conjunction, the *Dyrskov* spilled out of the untamed wilderness of Markovia and into Nova Vaasa like an unchecked infection. Slaving, unnatural beasts whispered to be much worse than any plains cat roamed beneath its dark, thick canopy, and those who wandered too close were not likely to have a chance to retreat. With Markovia gone, whatever font was the source of these foul monstrosities appears to have been stopped, and the Nova Vaasans are daring to harvest timber from the *Dyrskov*, which provides the only trees in Nova Vaasa with wood suitable for lumber. Still, the *Dyrskov* is not completely safe. The proximity of the Shadow Rift is disconcerting, and *sortvingebute* ("black fairies") are rumored to beguile lumberjacks and carry them off into the Rift. Tales of other sinister creatures in the *Dyrskov* abound; the creature most often sighted is the Centaur, said to be a ragged, bony horse with a man's head and a human arm sprouting obscenely from either side of its neck. Any time a half-eaten animal carcass is discovered by lumberjacks in the *Dyrskov* the Centaur receives the blame, and the night-fires in their camps are built a little larger.

The *Graenseskov* spills out from the shadow of the Hills of Bleak Vistas in Barovia, called the Howling Hills by Nova Vaasans. The name is apt, as the *Graenseskov* is the most wolf-infested of Nova Vaasa's forests, and the wolves here are larger and more aggressive than elsewhere, perhaps the result of interbreeding with Barovian wolves. The Nova Vaasans have as little to do with these woods as possible; the vampires and werewolves reputed to roam Barovia at night are said to dwell in the *Graenseskov* as well. Since timber cut from the *Graenseskov*'s trees rots quickly, few reasons exist for the Vaasi to brave its rumored dangers.

The *Skyggeskov*, despite its somewhat sinister name, is not as feared as the other two forests. Because of its closeness to both the Saniset and the trade route into Hazlan, Nova Vaasans have a better familiarity with it and its contents than they do the other forests. The *Skyggeskov* is home to wolves, but they are more typical of Vaasi wolves, preferring to avoid humans rather than attack them. Bandits and plains cats are known to wander into the *Skyggeskov*, though, so it would be ill advised to let one's guard down even here.

A few smaller forests are scattered on the Vaasi Plateau, each usually less than a mile square. Such



forests include the Misbande Forest, in the eastern shadow of the Koshka Bluffs; the Briarweed Forest, roughly halfway between Kantora and Egertus, south of the East Timori Road; and the Abentaage Forest, a few miles north of Arbora. Small forests such as these serve as havens for wolves and for men with the demeanor of wolves. Bandits camp in these areas, riding forth at night to raid poorly defended farmlands and homesteads. Most of these bandits lead short, desperate lives, but some have been quite successful and become notorious, even celebrated. Among the most infamous are Dagfinn the Burner, who puts the fields he raids and the peasants who work them to the torch; the Tatters Man, known for tying strips of his victims' clothing to his lances and barding; and the Blood-Cat, believed to be a Vistani outcast by the name of Chezna, who has become particularly feared of late. Her outlaw band, active for almost thirty years, used to operate out of the Briarweed Forest, but a raid by a group of adventurers under the employ of Prince Othmar forced them out of that hideaway. Since then, the Blood-Cat has kept constantly on the move, striking vulnerable cara-

vans with increasing ferocity and abandon. The few surviving witnesses to her attacks describe her as a bone-thin woman in Vistani clothing, riding a night-black stallion. She is also described as having wild hair "as thick and red as blood," as one mutilated survivor put it. Red hair is unknown among the dark-locked Vistani, and this anomaly has served to enhance the Blood-Cat's legend and give rise to her chilling sobriquet.

Just as the forests of Nova Vaasa are concentrated in the west, so are the hills and mesas. The Balinoks and Mountains of Misery make swift, sloping descents as they give way to the Vaasi Plateau, and the resulting foothills are steep and rugged. The foothills of the former Markovian Balinoks are known, as mentioned above, as the Vaesen Foothills, while the foothills of the Barovian Balinoks are named the Howling Hills. The foothills of the Mountains of Misery are identified as the Forgotten Hills. The origin of the name is lost, making it ironically appropriate. It may have been a reference to the unusual changes Darkon wreaks on the memories of those who visit it from elsewhere, or it may be a memorial to the shattered





land of Arak; I lack the time to investigate the matter more deeply.

Not far from the foothills are the Stony Bluffs, three large granite mesas that provide most of Nova Vaasa's building materials. The Koshka Bluffs are a pair of smooth stone hills south of Liara, each one 1,000 feet tall at its summit, standing side by side with a canyon between them. Quarrying of the Koshka Bluffs has revealed numerous rooms and passages within, and many curiosities and antiquities have been found buried inside. Some suggest that the Koshka "Bluffs" were in fact once giant monuments or tombs built by some long fallen civilization. After workers there began vanishing or going mad in 741 BC, Sir Tristen Hiregaard greatly restricted the quarrying of the bluffs and has forbidden the removal of any of their treasures. The wicked spirit causing the disappearances was put to rest by a party of adventurers, but Sir Hiregaard apparently does not wish to risk a recurrence. Even in its currently limited fashion, quarrying the Koshka Bluffs has not proven to be without risk. Plains cats often make dens of the crevices and caves of the canyon, and jermlaines have made a home of the Bluffs' interiors.

The other bluffs lack the colorful history of the Koshka Bluffs. The Altid Bluffs stand imposingly between the Dyrskov and the Three Sisters, with Blacktower Heights, the castle of the Vistins, immediately to their east. Standing 2,000 feet tall, they offer an imposing view to any with the skill and determination to scale them; there were once stairways carved into the granite walls, but they have long since worn away into uselessness. Those who do scale the bluffs find abandoned *forventetaarn*, or watchtowers, facing to the south and west. These were supposedly ordered built by Højplads after his conquest of the land, to watch for invasions from the two most likely directions. The watchtowers have not been manned for centuries. I did not find the opportunity to make the arduous climb to view them myself, but it is said that they still stand as tall and straight as ever. Some go on to say that the last watchmen remain at their posts, undying and ever vigilant.

The Hvile Bluffs lie just south of where the Ulvand flows into the Ivlis, northeast of the Borderwood. The Rivtoffs quarry the Hviles, carving out stone for the walls of their farmlands and for Bergovitsa to the northwest. *Hvile* means "resting," and indeed the weathered bluffs do have a vague drowsy quality to them. Ironic, then, that the

plains around the Hviles were the site of some of the fiercest, bloodiest fighting of the Bucking Epoch, so much so that it is still sometimes known as the *Blodmark*. Perhaps *hvile* has come to mean a different sort of repose. Superstitious Nova Vaasans claim that the spirits of the dead still linger here, fighting and dying at the blades of imagined foes.

Four major roads cross the Vaasi Plateau, each a busy trade route. The Old Svalich Road, which connects Nova Vaasa to Barovia and the lands beyond, terminates just south of Bergovitsa. Nova Vaasan merchants traveling the Old Svalich Road always go heavily armed, perhaps more so than the danger of the crossing actually warrants. Having traveled through Barovia and felt the chill of its air and the thickness of its shadows, I can well understand the desire to gird oneself against imagined horrors.

Bergovitsa is one terminus of two other major roads, the Prince's Road stretching north to Kantora and the Vaere Bange Road connecting to Arbora. Each of these roads crosses miles of lonely plain, and bandit attacks are common on each. To help protect against this threat, each of the Five Great Families offers a contingent of their household guard for service as *handelkonduktørs*, or Trade Guards. Trade Guards can be hired as protection for merchant trains, but the fees for this service are steep. Many merchants turn to mercenaries of questionable experience and repute instead, hoping to maintain a reasonable profit on their trading.

The East Timori Road, which connects Egertus, Kantora and Liara before continuing northwest into Tepest, was once of much greater importance to the Nova Vaasans than it is today, providing quick access to the west for merchants in northern Nova Vaasa. The Shadow Rift has put a stop to that. The East Timori remains important for trade within Nova Vaasa, but for now it is a shadow of what it was.

Nova Vaasa's last major trading route is its newest: the Nocturnal Sea itself. Nova Vaasa's coast is sometimes known as the Fortress Coast, and with good reason. The Plateau drops off suddenly as it approaches the sea, and the sheer cliffs look from a distance like impregnable stone walls. Rocky beaches can be found here and there up the coast, but sailing to them can be dangerous, as spears of rock lurk treacherously beneath the waters. The most popular ports are Guldstrand Beach, near the mouth of the Sydlidgnar River, and Lysening Beach, a few miles north of Arbora.



flora

The dominant plant species in Nova Vaasa are the aforementioned grasses, which cover the plateau from north to south. Besides the grasses, the Vaasi Plateau is home to numerous varieties of wildflower, including aster, spurge, bellflowers, dandelions, sunflowers, morning glories and so on in a seemingly endless parade. These flowers fare poorly during Nova Vaasa's brief but harsh freezing winters, but they always return in the mild spring to sprinkle color on the plateau once more. A variety of shrubs and bushes cover the landscape as well, and in the drier regions cacti thrive. The Vaasi catspaw is a particularly dangerous cactus, as it secretes paralytic venom from its spines. This venom is not fatal by itself, but plains cats are thought to frequent patches of catspaw in hopes of catching a helpless meal. The cats themselves are immune to the ill effects of this poison, more evidence of nature's base cruelty.

Nova Vaasa has its own strains of oak, fir and pine trees, all of which have the unfortunate habit of rotting quickly once cut down. Thus, only native trees are seldom sought for their lumber, with most of those being found in the Dyrskov.

fauna

Any discussion of Vaasi fauna must begin with the horse. The quality, quantity and diversity of the horses in Nova Vaasa are astounding. Nova Vaasans have a saying: "The Lawgiver meant for Nova Vaasans to ride, and He provided a horse for each of us." Though most Nova Vaasans are not wealthy enough actually to own a horse, seeing the vast herds rumbling across the plains, I could not help but feel the ring of truth echoing in that proverb.

The average Vaasi horse is deep black in coat and mane and tall at the shoulder, usually 16 to 18 hands, but distinct breeds among the horses vary from this description. Vaasi horses can be divided into five major bloodlines: *jernryge*, *rødbuge*, *vindhåre*, *gedfode*, and *vaamgaare*.

Jernryge ("iron-backs") mainly range in the Pommel and are the largest of the Vaasi horse breeds. Considered the strongest horses in the Core, they also tend to be relatively docile and thus are suited mainly as draft horses and pack animals. *Jernryge* are taller and broader than other Vaasi horses, usually standing between 17 and 21 hands and weighing 2,000 pounds or more. They have

thick feathering on their fetlocks, and their coloring is typical of the Vaasi horses.

Rødbuge ("red-bellies") are most often found in Ehrendton and the Elendighedmark. Strong, intelligent, spirited and radiating a noble beauty, they make superior warhorses and cavalry mounts. Many who speak of Vaasi horses are thinking of the *rødbuges*. The *Rødbuges* do not get their name from their fiery spirits alone; they have distinctive reddish splotches on their chests and barrels. *Rødbuges* with unusually large or red splotches command higher prices at market. Particularly prized specimens have entirely red chests and barrels. *Rødbuges* usually stand between 16 to 19 hands.

Vindhåre ("wind-manes") run across the Tordenmark and are famous for their speed. They are the most popular horses for racing and are favored mounts for wealthy nobles despite their notorious ill temper. *Vindhårs* often have white markings on their face and lower legs, and may have streaks of white in their manes. A few are closer to blue roan than black. They are average in size for a Vaasi horse.

Gedfode ("goat-feet") are the smallest breed, but also the surest of foot, and some swear they are the smartest and most loyal of the Vaasi horses. Though not as swift as *vindhårs*, many riders insist *gedfode* make better mounts. They are found in the rocky western parts of the Kesjermark and the Elendighedmark. The *Vistani* in Nova Vaasa prefer the *gedfode* for their own mounts and pack animals. *Gedfode* stand from 13 to 15 hands.

Finally, *vaamgaare* ("heat-walkers") range across the Dommark. A rough, rugged breed, they have proven unpopular in the Core since they lack the beauty of the other Vaasi horses, but they are nearly tireless, can go long distances without food or water, and are little bothered by extreme temperatures. Merchants from G'Henna or the Amber Wastes who manage to find their way through the Mistways have paid handsome sums for *vaamgaare*. *Vaamgaare* are colored in a unique reverse bay pattern, with a black body and brown socks, manes, and tails.

While the horse is the cornerstone of Vaasi pride, the plains cat crouches at the center of Vaasi fears. Plains cats are large felines, superficially similar to panthers in appearance. They tend to be taller at the shoulder than panthers, however, and they have a far thicker musculature. Besides their fur, which is almost uniformly midnight black,



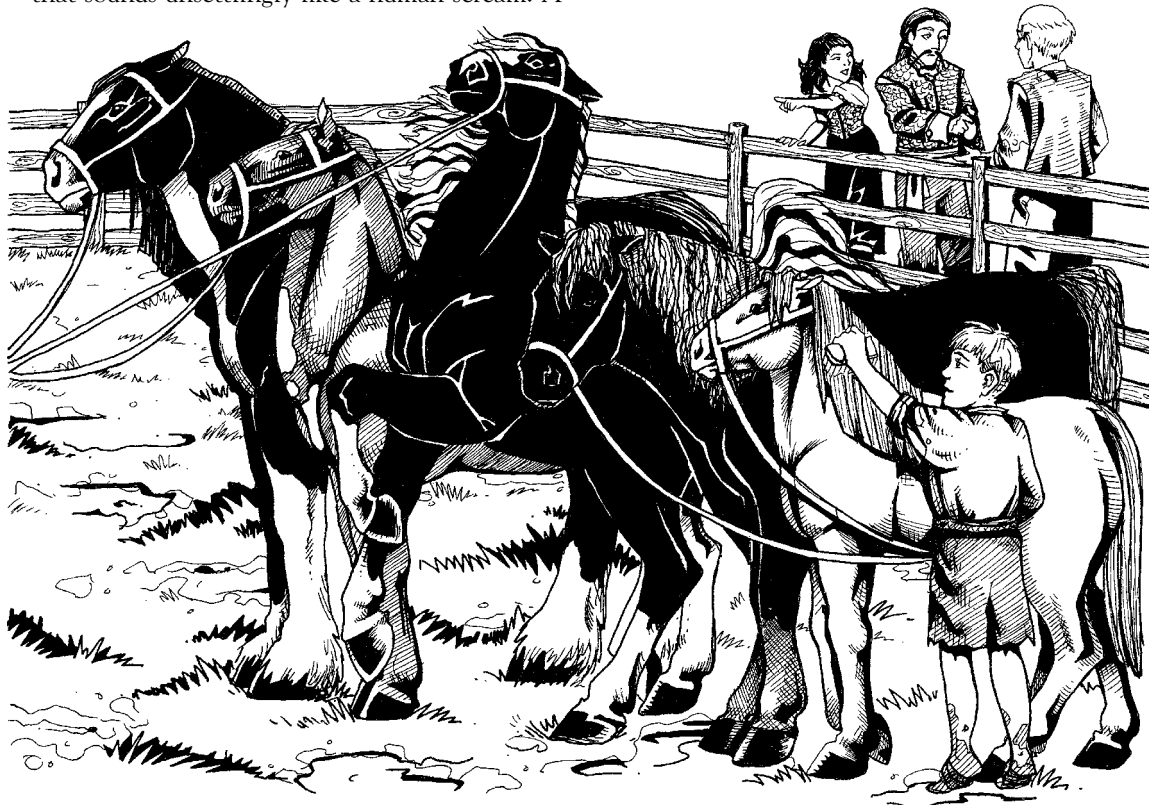
their most distinctive feature is their bobbed tails. Male plains cats can be distinguished from females by their ears; the males have white tufts of fur on their ears that the females lack.

Plains cats are almost completely uniform in coloration. Besides the white tufts on the ears of males, they lack stripes or patches of any color. Only as a cat ages will its pelt start to change color, fading through silvery gray to an eventual white. Plains cats rarely reach such advanced age, and those that do are highly valued by trappers for their rare coloration. Very rarely, a plains cat with dark red fur will be born in a litter. These "blood-cats" are rumored to be larger and stronger than their kin, and some say they can hypnotize prey with their golden eyes, fade into invisibility, or even imitate human speech. I have no doubt that these latter stories are superstitious nonsense, but if the two pelts I saw are representative then the blood-cats do appear to be larger than is typical.

Plains cats prefer to lair in caves by day, emerging to stalk the grasslands at night, when they blend into the darkness. A plains cat shadows its prey silently with amazing patience, waiting for a moment when it appears distracted or unprepared, at which point the cat pounces with a yowl that sounds unsettlingly like a human scream. A

plains cat's leap can carry it an astonishing 30 feet. Needless to say, prey that is fallen upon by a 200-pound cat is not likely to rise quickly, and the cat ends things hurriedly, biting and wrenching at the neck while raking the back or belly with its claws. Plains cats live and hunt alone, save for mother cats accompanying their litters. They generally avoid human settlements, but exceptions are not unknown. A child on a farm or a rural settlement being ambushed and carried off by a starving plains cat is not as rare as one would hope. Even the cities have been known to suffer the occasional attack.

Snakes are the other significant threat to a traveler in the Vaasi wilderness. In fact, snakes are probably a greater danger overall than the cats, as there are so many more of them. Most are harmless or nearly so, but it is a narrow majority. The most common serpent is the Vaasi garter snake, more frequently known as the underboot, a name that should give a sense of how widespread they are. About 18 inches long when fully grown, the underboot is non-venomous and dangerous only to insects and very small rodents. Other harmless snakes include the kingsnake, which is immune to the venom of other snakes and hunts them voraciously; the bluffsake, so called because of its





ability to imitate the distinctive rattle of more dangerous snakes; and the whipsnake, which is as long and thin as its name implies.

More dangerous snakes abound. Nova Vaasa is home to many diamondbacks and sidewinders, both of which use rattles to warn off attackers. Unique to Nova Vaasa, the ironwhip, which appears at a glance to be a harmless whipsnake, is in fact quite venomous; a single bite is severely debilitating and multiple bites can be fatal. The goldenhood, a cobra with scales in black and yellow stripes, is easily the most deadly. A bite from a goldenhood can kill a horse in minutes.

After the above, animal life in Nova Vaasa becomes more mundane. Small, timid wolves roam wooded areas, while jackrabbits, groundhogs and numerous lizards live on the grassy plains. Avian life is typical of the climate.

Nova Vaasans tell tales of many sinister creatures stalking the prairie. Herds of nightmares are said to run across the plateau at night, their fiery manes lighting the darkness around them. Catching a glimpse of them is supposed to herald death or misfortune for the viewer or her loved ones. Another spectre in the night is the *hestdrikker* ("horse-drinker"). These fey creatures are rumored to stalk horse ranches at night, drawing blood from the horses and leaving them ill and dying. I have found no reliable sightings of a *hestdrikker*, suggesting that that these tales are perhaps no more than an ignorant reaction to mundane illnesses among the horses.

More creditable are stories of rampaging werewolves and wereboars striking farms and ranches, leaving unmistakable carnage behind them. Fortunately, these lycanthrope attacks are rare. Swarms of jermlaines live in tunnel complexes within the bluffs or beneath the plateau. They sometimes emerge to hunt when their usual diet of snakes and rodents proves insufficient, but fear of the plains cats usually keeps them hidden. Finally come the *doedridere*, undead horsemen who silently roam the Vaasi Plateau. Doedridere are thought to be the restless corpses of men and horses who died of thirst or exposure on the plains. Tormented by their lonely, prolonged deaths, man and horse rise again, bonded forever in undeath, to wander those same plains forever. The doedridere crave living company, but they are surrounded by auras of such fearful melancholy that no living thing can long stand to be near them. It is best to





avoid them, for those with whom they stop to converse will not be allowed to leave.

Nova Vaasans have many other tales of spectral or malicious horse creatures. *Niksie* pose as beautiful horses, coaxing fools onto their backs after which they charge into the nearest river or lake and drown the unfortunate rider. *Skarphove* are a rumored breed of cunning, flesh-eating horses whose hooves have blade-sharp edges and whose manes and tails are like tangled wire. *Hestskærere* are goblin-like creatures that slit open the bellies of sleeping stallions and climb inside, driving the horse mad and directing it in all manner of mayhem. Strangely, the Nova Vaasans tell few horror stories involving cat-like creatures. Perhaps the reality of the plains cats is frightening enough.

Vaasa seems to fall somewhere in between, and I have trouble saying with authority in which grouping it should fall. The history of Nova Vaasa is, like that of the mistborn lands, vague, indistinct and in some cases almost certainly false. Indeed, one will find very few references to actual dates or individual years in Nova Vaasan history, instead encountering references to the reigns of Princes or the occurrence of significant events. On the other hand, the Nova Vaasans insist that their home was pulled into the Mists from another world, and their history provides a wealth of information about this forgotten land even if the details have been smoothed over. This information suggests that perhaps Nova Vaasa does have its origins elsewhere.

Local Animals and Native Horrors

Wildlife: CR 1/10 — bat; toad; CR 1/8 — rat; CR 1/6 — donkey; lizard; raven; CR 1/4 — cat; owl; pony; weasel; CR 1/3 — dog; hawk; snake, Tiny viper; CR 1/2 — badger; eagle; pony, war; snake, Medium viper; CR 1 — dog, riding; horse, heavy; horse, light; horse, light warhorse; mule; wolf; CR 2 — boar; lizard, monitor; horse, heavy warhorse.

Monsters: CR 1/3 — cat, crypt†; dire rat; skeleton, human commoner; CR 1/2 — geist†; jermaine#; zombie, human commoner; CR 1 — bakhna rakhna†; bat, carrion†; ghoul; CR 2 — dire badger; dire bat; CR 3 — broken one†; cat, plains†; ghastr; lycanthrope, wereboar; lycanthrope, werewolf; shadow; wight; CR 4 — wight, dread†; CR 5 — nightmare, dread†; wraith; CR 6 — bastellus†; CR 7 — ghost; spectre; CR 8 — ghoul lord†.

Reconciling the evidence has proven difficult. It may be that their history has a basis in truth, but Nova Vaasans's pride and their identification with their ancestry leads complimentary myth and legend to be accepted as history, while mundane truths are forgotten and damning ones dismissed as slander. This attitude could perhaps result in the kind of flowing, indistinct history seen in Nova Vaasa. Or, it may be that the entirety was neatly constructed, fanciful imaginings written on a blank slate. Maybe the truth is somewhere in between; I can do no more than speculate. My educated guess, and I stress that it is nothing more than that, is that there is, or was once, a land called Vaasa, and that some or all of the knowledge Nova Vaasans retain of it may be factual. Nova Vaasa, however, I believe to have been a fiction until the day the Core welcomed it.

History



iecing together the history of Nova Vaasa presented me with certain difficulties that I had not yet encountered during this mission. Until now, the lands I'd visited seemed to fall more or less neatly into two categories. There were the outlander realms, such as Barovia or Forlorn, in which the thread of history was easy to discern and record, and which told clearly of the descending of the Mists in a specific year. Then there were the mistborn realms, in which most of the shared history up unto a certain point was clearly a lie, and a poorly told one at that, with the people of these lands assuming that they had always been there, with the details unimportant. The history of Nova

According to history as they know it, Nova Vassans are descended from a people called the *Gammel Vaasi*, or simply the Old Vaasans. The Old Vaasans were a taller, fairer and cruder people than Nova Vaasans of today. Old Vaasans lived a difficult life as cattle ranchers and fur trappers amid the harsh, frozen flatlands of a region known simply as Vaasa, situated in the north of a vast continent on an unnamed outlander world. The Old Vaasans did not begin as a united people, instead being divided into five major and numerous minor clans, each alternating in cooperation and competition with their neighbors. This fractious, ultimately meaningless existence would likely have continued until the Old Vaasans were conquered or exterminated by one of the more civilized kingdoms around them, if not for the rise to power of one man who saw beyond the frozen hills and fields of mud. His





name is variously recorded as Zaanji or Juungi, but he is better remembered today as Højplads, which appears to have been a title or honorific, and translates roughly as “Highly Seated” or “Well Mounted.”

After coming into power over the Bolshnik tribe, he managed to rally the other four major clans to his vision of conquest; the Vaasi Timeline begins with this date, the Unification of the Vaasan nation. The Vaasi Timeline is divided into vague epochs of indeterminate length; all the years before this date together form the epoch of Grazing. The Vaasi Timeline is not in use today, even in Nova Vaasa, as the Nova Vaasans have adopted the Barovian Calendar to ease trade and diplomacy with other lands. Besides, the Vaasi Timeline is horribly confused and almost worthless as an actual time-keeping method, being suitable only for teaching history in the broadest sense.

With the Unification begins the Epoch known as the Ranging. With the major tribes united in alliance, the minor clans quickly fell into place beside them, and the Old Vaasans went to war. They began by invading the neighboring land of Daamark, a more forgiving land toward which they had long cast jealous eyes. The war for Daamark proved difficult and costly, lasting a “great and many” years, but Højplads turned the tide. He cast his eyes upward and pleaded with the heavens, and his god, the Lawgiver, answered. The earth cracked open and hordes of creatures from the Hell of Slaves burst forth, sweeping the Daamark armies aside and then flowing back into the chasm from which they came. This account of “history” understandably leaves me skeptical. With the conquest of Daamark thereby completed, the clans set out in different directions: the Hiregaard to the west, the Vistin southwest, the Chekiv southeast, and the Rivtoff east, each accompanied by dozens of smaller clans. The Bolshnik followed in all directions, to impose Vaasan rule on the conquered. The Old Vaasans proved to be savage warriors when compared to their neighbors, and the ferocity of their attacks together with their Højplads’s ability to command divine intervention made victory a simple matter. At Højplads’s urging, the people of each newly defeated kingdom were treated with severity in direct proportion to the stiffness of their resistance. Soon, the Old Vaasans were able to conquer lands simply by means of their reputation for ruthlessness.

Eventually, the Old Vaasans had conquered as far to the west and south as the oceans would let them; they had no talent for shipbuilding and no knowledge of lands across the seas to motivate them. Thus, all the clans turned east and southeast, where victories had been slowest and new conquests still stretched out before them.

The eastern lands were the most troublesome for the Old Vaasans. Some of the peoples of the east commanded powerful magic, something with which the Old Vaasans had little experience (although one could interpret Højplads’s calls for heavenly aid as the acts of a powerful spellcaster). Others were savage warriors themselves, unwilling to cede a foot of land without first marking it with a Vaasi corpse. The Old Vaasans quickly learned that they could not intimidate these eastern lords, but Højplads remained inexorable, and with his generalship and piety leading the way the eastern lands began to fall in line with the rest. Interestingly, one of the conquered southeastern lands is remembered as *Hathaljan*, and it is written of as a land of “painted warlocks and foul treachery.” One cannot help but be reminded of Hazlan, but the Mulan do not admit to any such war, much less conquest, in their past.

Another of these fallen eastern lands was of particular import. Once known as Tygaam, it could not have been more dissimilar from Vaasa, being a land of arid, grass-covered plains well suited for the raising and ranging of horses. The Tygaami were masterful horsemen, and the conquest of them was dearly won, but it paid handsome dividends, and Tygaam became a jewel in the Vaasi crown for a number of reasons. First, Tygaam served as a junction for several major trading routes. Caravans came to it from the south and west, and the port of Egertus did brisk business with the exotic east. Of even greater interest to the Old Vaasans, though, were the horses of Tygaam, which proved strong and swift, clever and tireless. The Tygaami had not traded their horses with others, holding them in too much reverence to allow such a demeaning activity. The Old Vaasans saw the profit to be made from them and began seizing and breeding them. Then, of course, there were the Tygaami women. Small, dark and fierce, the Old Vaasans considered them exotically beautiful, and breeding of a different sort quickly captured their attention.

The combination of these factors made Tygaam the most favored of Højplads’s conquests, and he declared the Tygaami city of Kantora his new





capital. Tygaam was henceforth known as *Nyvalg Vaasa*, or "Newly Chosen Vaasa," a name that was commonly shortened to "Nova Vaasa." The heads of the other four major clans joined him in settling there; the rest of the now vast Vaasan Empire was divided into spheres of influence, with each of the major tribes and many of the minor tribes claiming a share. Sadly, the Old Vaasans knew far less of rulership than of conquest, and the decision of Højplads to hold court far from the center of his empire would eventually lead to that empire's dissolution.

The empire held until Højplads's death, thus ending the Ranging Epoch and beginning the Breaking. After his death, by Højplads's standing decree, rulership of the realm would be alternated between the heads of the five clans, in what he termed the "Ordained Cycle of Stewardship." While this did much to stabilize Nova Vaasa where the chiefs held court, it did little for more distant lands, which soon began to rise up in rebellion. Before long, even Old Vaasa had revolted, under a new warrior-king who held in disdain the foreign ways adopted by the Five Clans. After a "considerable time," the last territory outside Nova Vaasa threw off its yoke, ending the Breaking and beginning the epoch known as the Saddling.

The Saddling was a period of calm and regrouping, as the people of this orphaned kingdom struggled to find their own identity. *Nyvalg Vaasa* remained firmly under the control of the Five Clans, but it is doubtful Højplads would have found much solace in that, as they quickly began to lose any resemblance to the clans of his day. The Old Vaasans were heavily influenced both by the Tygaami horselords they interbred with and the civilized merchants they traded with. At some point during this epoch the cultures that had formed Nova Vaasa blended to the point of being indistinguishable. This blending served to strengthen the kingdom, however, and the Nova Vaasans now took a fierce pride in their history, their independence and their growing economic might. The epoch known as the Bridling was about to begin.

The rise of the Church of the Lawgiver stands as the most significant event of the Bridling. Prior to the conquests of the Old Vaasans, the Church of the Lawgiver struggled as a marginal religion in Tygaam, dwarfed in power and prestige by worship of such gods as the horse god Tygaa, the cat gods *Sehkmaa* and *Bubahkaa*, and the heroes cult of

Fjodor and Fyldor. The Old Vaasans, beginning of course with Højplads, had encouraged the Lawgiver's church, for its message of submission to those in power suited the conquerors well. The Church thus began a period of steady growth, but it was not until the reign of Prince Gorkyn Vistin began that it truly came into its full influence. Prince Gorkyn was a devout follower of the Lawgiver and made furthering the Church's cause his personal mission. Gorkyn brutally stamped out other religions, turning their lands, properties and incomes over to the Church of the Lawgiver. High-ranking members of the Lawgiver clergy received military and civil offices, and the Church was freed from all taxes. When his reign was ending, Prince Gorkyn then did what no previous Prince had done: he refused to give up power, claiming that his divine mission was not yet fulfilled. With the Church and his family backing him, the other patriarchs were forced to fall in line.

A "short time" later, Prince Gorkyn declared that as the Prince of the Realm, he was also by right Head of the Church. The church leaders, after monetary persuasion, confirmed Gorkyn's theological arguments as divine will, and Gorkyn assumed control of the Church of the Lawgiver. Calling himself the *Himmelsk Naeve* ("Divine Fist"), he then led Nova Vaasa in a series of holy wars with her neighbors, remembered today as the Wars of Conversion. Unfortunately, Prince Gorkyn was overly ambitious, and his Wars of Conversion did little more than drain the kingdom's resources. The Wars had clearly failed, and Prince Gorkyn died of illness exacerbated by his sorrow. With his death, the Cycle of Stewardship resumed, and the Church of the Lawgiver continued with its strength only marginally diminished.

Despite his draconian methods and failures as a general, Prince Gorkyn is remembered today as Saint Gorkyn, Beloved of the Lawgiver, and indeed his cultural impact on Nova Vaasa is noteworthy, even beyond establishing the Church of the Lawgiver as the state religion. Højplads was canonized as the first saint of the Lawgiver by his decree, thereby strengthening the Nova Vaasans' pride in their past and reverence for their history. Much of the symbolism in both state and religious ceremonies in Nova Vaasa today can be traced to Gorkyn, who had a keen eye for ritual. Religious art and architecture in Nova Vaasa enjoyed a golden age during and after his reign, sparked by his lavish patronage. To this day, the head of the Church is





known as the Himmelsk Naeve, although a Prince has held the office only three times since Gorkyn's passing.

The Bucking Epoch, a long period of general unrest, followed the Bridling. Prince Gorkyn was long dead by this time, but he remained an influential icon of authority, and during the Bucking many successive Princes attempted to imitate him by retaining power beyond the mandated five year period. The result was a series of rebellions, civil wars and assassinations that threatened to tear the realm apart. In fact, the realm was once split, when the Chekivs and Rivtoffs declared a new Principality of Sydlig Vaasa. Sydlig Vaasa was short lived as an independent political entity, and indeed the entire Epoch is characterized by impermanence. Despite the effort of the rival lords to lengthen their grip on power, the average reign of a Prince during the Bucking was probably somewhat less than five years, thanks to incessant murders and depositions.

The Bucking finally ended under the strong hand of Prince Jokum Rivtoff, also known as Saint Jokum the Pacifier, who began the Riding Epoch. Jokum brutally crushed all resistance to his reign in a brilliant series of campaigns against his rivals. He had the heads of the other four families executed and went down the line killing their heirs until he reached one in each family he felt he could control. In all four instances, these "chosen" heirs ended up being children, two of them nursing infants. Jokum then allowed the Cycle of Stewardship to resume, naturally declaring himself Regent on behalf of all four of the child lords. Officially, Jokum served two terms as Prince, but he actually held the reins of power for an unrivalled 35 years, as several of his regencies were sadly extended after a few of his wards suffered from unexplained and fatal illnesses. Jokum himself died of a mysterious and sudden illness, but he left Nova Vaasa a stronger, unified realm at the height of its military and economic power.

The Riding Epoch continued after Jokum's death, and Nova Vaasa established a trading empire that stretched south, west and east across the sea. Some felt that the Riding Epoch might last forever, but the peace and prosperity of Nova Vaasa would be shattered again, and more dramatically than ever before. In the winter, during the final reign of Prince Ingemar Bolshnik, the skies over Nova Vaasa reportedly darkened, the earth shook, and a terrifying thunder echoed through the

air. In what the Church of the Lawgiver dubbed the Second Judgment, Nova Vaasans claim their homeland was wrenched from its proper world and cast into hell, with "howling fear to the west, stone death to the north, shapeless nightmares to the east, and nothing but ominous swirling to the south," as Prince Ingemar recorded in his famous journals a year after the Second Judgment. Barovian records first show trading with the "the horselords of the east" in 682 BC, and this is the date generally accepted for Nova Vaasa's appearance in the Core.

The Church claims the Second Judgment was the work of the Lawgiver, done as punishment for the pride and materialism of the people of Nova Vaasa. Given that Nova Vaasa has remained a land of aristocrats and traders, it would appear that the lesson has not taken. In fact, while the first decades in the Core were one of fear and uncertainty, as the Nova Vaasans found themselves with inhospitable neighbors such as Arak and the Nightmare Lands, they quickly adapted and even began to thrive once more.

The most significant event within Nova Vaasa since the Second Judgment has been the rise to power of Prince Othmar Bolshnik. Othmar has held the title since 729 BC, almost 30 years, giving him the tightest grip on power in Nova Vaasa since Prince Jokum. Othmar has proven to be a harsh taskmaster, imposing tax after tax on his subjects and ruthlessly suppressing all dissent. The noble lords grow rich under his rule, and Othmar of course grows richer yet, but the lot of the commoners, as ever, worsens by the year.

A second event worthy of attention has been the rise of another individual to power of a different sort. In 717, long before Prince Othmar's reign commenced, a religious movement began in Nova Vaasa. Calling themselves the Claws of Sehkmaa and claiming to be priests of that ancient cat god, the Claws seemingly dedicated themselves to easing the plight of the poor and disenfranchised in Nova Vaasa. Normally, the Church of the Lawgiver would move quickly to stamp out any such "idolatry," but for some reason the Claws of Sehkmaa were left in peace. The Claws became powerful, wealthy and respected, and their high priest, who called himself Malken, became a figure of awe and reverence, though he was never seen.

Sir Tristen Hiregaard, at that time Captain of the Kantora City Guard, soon uncovered the sinister truth behind the Claws of Sehkmaa. They were not priests at all, but were in truth a wide-





spread criminal organization. Some of their illicit activities included extortion, theft, smuggling, bookmaking, kidnapping and even poisonings. Malken himself ruled at the center of this criminal web, and Sir Tristen made it his mission to oppose Malken and bring him to justice. By the end of the year, he had largely succeeded. The Claws were broken, the worship of Sehkmaa outlawed, and Malken himself was believed killed by Sir Tristen's own hand.

Recently, however, the name Malken is once more heard whispered on the streets of Kantora, Liara and Bergovitsa. A new crimelord has apparently risen in Nova Vaasa, bearing the name of the old. Unfortunately, Sir Tristen is too aged to combat this fresh (or returned) menace, and few enough others have displayed an interest in trying. Some even whisper that Prince Othmar is in league with this new Malken, receiving a cut from Nova Vaasa's illicit economy just as he does from the legitimate.

Finally, though it seems an odd sort of thing to document in the history of the realm, I come to the Signature Killer, who has perhaps done more to shape life in the cities of Nova Vaasa in the last seventy years than any prince or would-be crime master could claim. Striking mostly in Liara in recent years, but also in Kantora and rarely in Bergovitsa, a madman has been intermittently stalking the women of the lower classes, killing and mutilating them and leaving the remains for the city guard to find, along with crudely scrawled taunts. Murders of this sort are an unfortunate fact of urban life, but for a string of such killings to stretch over such a long period of time without ending in the perpetrator's capture, suicide or natural death is decidedly unusual. Fortunately, the killings have slowed since they first began in 682 BC, to about one, and sometimes two, a year. Still, that leaves the killer with over 100 murders to his "credit." The unlikely duration of the killing spree has led to the speculation that there may in fact be a cult of murderers at work, killing women in an act of obscene sacrifice. Others whisper that the killer is a vampire using mutilation to disguise his feedings, or a disembodied spirit driving others to murder to satisfy its dark cravings, or that he is any of a thousand other creatures of the night. Satisfactory answers and explanations have proven impossible to come by, and so the murders and the fear continue.

Populace

Nova Vaasans are strictly divided along economic lines. The wealthy aristocracy holds all the power, while the impoverished peasantry provides the labor. One might look to the Church of the Lawgiver as the third pillar of Nova Vaasan society, but the clergy are all aristocrats, and the actions and teachings of the Church serve primarily to support the interests of the nobles. Instead of forming a third pillar, the Church instead serves as the foundation of the first.

Given the vast separation between the wealthy and the poor, most aspects of their culture and lifestyle must be twice examined, as what holds true for one side may have no reflection on the other. I attempt to delineate the broad characteristics of both the noble and the lowborn below.

Appearance

Nova Vaasans are a rough, rugged people well suited to the plains. Of average height, they tend to be stocky, with barrel chests, wide hips and thick limbs. Their facial features are particularly distinctive, tending toward angular chins, prominent cheekbones, wide, full-lipped mouths and short, somewhat flattened noses with wide nostrils. It is a common joke in Barovia and Tepest that the Nova Vaasans look rather like the horses they tend, a comment that invariably leads to crude speculations about Nova Vaasan ancestry. The slightly bow-legged swagger of the Nova Vaasans is a frequent target for mockery as well. Nova Vaasans are little concerned by these insults, as comparisons to horses bother them not at all, and they take no shame in the gait that marks them as experienced riders.

Nova Vaasan skin tends to be fair and ruddy, though Nova Vaasans with pale olive or sallow complexions are not unusual. However, even lighter-skinned Nova Vaasans are often tanned from long hours working the fields or riding the plains. Eyes are almost always dark green or gray, with the occasional hazel or brown to be found. Hair is commonly dark brown or black, with light brown or dirty blond found as well. Women grow their hair exceptionally long, often past the waist, and young girls work these tresses into two long braids. Men generally prefer to keep their hair cut to just below the shoulder, although some noblemen grow their hair much longer and tie it back





into a tail. All men, noble or poor, grow long mustaches and use wax to shape them into stiff and sometimes elaborate curls. A Nova Vaasan proverb holds that “a man without a mustache is like a horse without a tail.” Given the pride they take in their mustaches, it should come as no surprise that men who wish to humiliate an enemy or a rival will seek to cut his mustache short or shave it altogether. Nova Vaasan men do not grow beards, as they would only serve to detract from their glorious mustaches.

fashion

Nova Vaasan clothing, predictably, varies greatly between the social classes. Commoners' clothing is drab, practical and of poor quality. The clothing of the poor is never dyed, and predominately dirty white or light brown. Brown is preferred, as it helps to hide the stains of the dirt fields or the smears of urban squalor. Men wear long, homespun shirts, with the sleeves rolled up, and sometimes add thin leather vests as a second layer. Trousers are of heavy cotton, tied off with a belt of rope or, rarely, cheap leather. Women wear cotton blouses and culottes, and plain, unadorned kerchiefs cover their heads. Commoners in the cities usually go barefoot or wear cloth wrappings around their feet; few own boots, and those that do never wear them for fear of being robbed. Boots are more common in the fields, but only marginally.

In contrast, aristocratic vestments are brightly colored and cared for meticulously. Males wear ostentatious riding breeches that flare from waist to knee and tighten from knee to ankle; they also don thick, finely tailored coats over shirts of thin cotton or imported silk. Both the coats and shirts are trimmed with lace. Tall black riding boots and brightly colored, intricately embroidered kerchiefs round out the typical ensemble, with older men often adding felt caps. Particularly wealthy noblemen wear garments trimmed in plains cat fur and necklaces made from the cat's teeth and claws. Noblewomen wear velvet riding skirts, billowing blouses and black boots. They favor long, thin scarves trimmed with bells and coins. Gold bracelets and earrings are the most popular pieces of jewelry among the women. Men and women prefer rich shades of red, blue and purple, though any bright color might be found, save green, which is worn only in mourning. Men prefer striped patterns, while women favor swirls and spirals.

Language

Needless to say, the predominant language among Nova Vaasans is Vaasi. Nova Vaasans insist that their dialect of Vaasi is purer than those of Kartakass, Hazlan or Valachan, and none care enough to argue. Nova Vaasans take great pride in their language, and by law it is the only language that may be used in legal proclamations and historical records. The Church of the Lawgiver has similar laws, requiring that all religious recitations and holy scripts be in Vaasi.

While Vaasi is the official language of Nova Vaasa, it is far from the only tongue spoken there. Commerce brings merchants from all across the Core to Nova Vaasa. Balok and Darkonese are the next most commonly heard human tongues, while the Gnomish and Halfling tongues can be heard in the few small neighborhoods and communities dominated by those small folk. Still, anyone planning to spend any significant amount of time in Nova Vaasa had best be prepared to learn at least a smattering of Vaasi.

Vaasi Primer

I again attach a supplementary primer on Vaasi, expanding on those offered during my explorations of Hazlan and Kartakass.

English	Vaasi
horse	<i>hest</i>
horseman, rider	<i>hestmand</i>
cat	<i>kat</i>
crime	<i>forbrydelse</i>
grass	<i>graes</i>
nobleman	<i>ædelmand</i>
commoner	<i>lavmand</i>
merchant	<i>købmand</i>

Lifestyle & Education

An odd duality seems to exist in the minds of Nova Vaasans, expressed in many aspects of their culture and daily habits. The aristocrats, for instance, speak reverently about the responsibility of a noble to his people and a master to his servants, and the importance of personal honor and chivalry. The commoners talk of duty to one's superiors, the sanctity of Law and Order, and the primacy of



the community. In both cases, these appear to be sincere, deeply held beliefs.

Yet Nova Vaasa is a land where the aristocracy taxes the peasantry into abject poverty, beating and imprisoning those who cannot afford to pay. A noble has the legal right to strike a commoner for the crime of insolence, and few think twice about exercising it. Many in the peasantry, meanwhile, throw themselves into every vice with abandon, steal from their neighbors and stare daggers into the back of every aristocrat who passes by. In short, a wide gulf stretches between the professed values of the Nova Vaasans and the lives they actually lead. Suggest this to a Nova Vaasan, however, and you will meet a stone wall of denial.

This gulf seems to go beyond mere self-delusion. Nor does it seem to be a simple weakness of will, a shortfall from a lofty ideal. From my observations, average Nova Vaasans often appear to take a savage joy in the opportunity to flout traditional mores. They act as if the true purpose of their values was not to promote the health and security of the community and the individual, but instead to give their dark side something to rebel against.

Only the constant threat of temporal punishment (among the peasants), the fear of public humiliation or censure (among the aristocrats), and the promise of eternal damnation by the Lawgiver (for everyone) hold matters in check. Even those powerful disincentives do little to stem the corruption and decay in the oppressively crowded cities.

The renowned Nova Vaasan alienist Dr. Gregorian Illhousen most evocatively stated this duality, which he termed the Rider's Dilemma. The late Dr. Illhousen imagined a hunter preparing himself to chase down a dangerous beast. Having appropriately girded and armed himself, the hunter must now choose a mount on which to ride the creature down. He walks out to his stables, intending to saddle his strongest and swiftest stallion, when he sees a huge plains cat sleeping in the sun, and indecision afflicts him.

He knows he is foolish for considering it, for the cat would surely turn and devour him should he attempt to ride it, but he still cannot help but be tempted. The cat is swifter, stronger and fiercer than any horse could ever be. If he could only tame it, rein in and harness its ferocity, no quarry could stand before him. His horse is strong, loyal and dependable... but it is no cat.





This, then, is the Rider's Dilemma: the safety and surety of the "horse," which represents the path of honor and propriety, or the seductive yet dangerous power of the "cat," the path of ruthless and uninhibited self-interest. Illhusen stated that most men choose the "horse," but he believed they do so out of fear rather than genuine preference for that way of life. If the "cat" could be rendered harmless to the rider, Illhusen claimed that nearly all men would eagerly ride it.

It takes a truly clever man to state the obvious in such a convoluted fashion.

Despite its fanciful imagery, the Rider's Dilemma describes the Nova Vaasan psyche well. Of course, one could justifiably assert that Illhusen's scenario describes the condition of all men, not just Nova Vaasans, but here in this land there does seem to be something more to it. A cauldron of repressed anger — or perhaps hunger — quietly churns in the hearts of the people. By day, even in the blighted press of the cities, I could hardly escape the townsfolk's posturing about honor, duty and responsibility, yet by night the ferocity and abandon with which they pursued such vices as gambling, prostitution and beast-baiting took me aback. The nobles would have others believe that only the commoners find refuge in such filth, and they have done a fair job convincing themselves of that same myth, yet I saw many fine black boots and well-tailored gloves amid the noisy masses of carousers and vice-seekers.

Regardless, the truth remains that life in Nova Vaasa is grim, hard and ugly. In the fields and farmlands of the noble families, the lords do as they see fit, with little chance of recrimination or retaliation. Fortunate peasants serve under a lord such as Sir Tristen Hiregaard, who is merely as severe as the law requires, but most lords are not so restrained. The average family labors hard from dawn to dusk, for fear of not meeting the nobles' exorbitant demands, and then returns home at night to nurse their resentments in sullen silence. They do whatever they can to avoid the attention of the aristocrats and their guards, even if that means doing nearly nothing at all outside of work. Those who do feel secure enough to seek diversions play games such as horseshoes, rope-skipping, top-spinning and draughts. Devotions to the Lawgiver are a daily observation, often done in a spirit of avoid-consequence rather than genuine reverence.

In the cities, poverty is even more rampant than in the fields, but ironically the urban peasants have much greater freedom to pursue their personal interests and entertainment. There are too many people to be adequately policed, and the only noble with official power over the cities is the Prince himself, who generally has larger matters to concern himself with than the temperance of the underclass. Thus, in the cities Vice has been crowned Prince, and he rules with a trembling fist in a wine-stained glove. By day the peasants eke out a living however they can, be it via petty crafts, unskilled manual labor or the provision of cheap services. At night they spend their earnings in a whirlwind of self-gratification. Gambling is by far the vice of choice, with bets placed on games of skill and chance, races of horses or dogs, or caged combats between beasts or even men. The consumption of alcohol and narcotics is not far behind in popularity; opium from Hazlan is a particularly valued commodity. Amidst this storm of iniquity, violent crime flourishes. Robberies, assaults, rapes, murders... each are daily occurrences.

Perhaps only in the remote settlements is Nova Vaasan life led in something approaching peace and balance. No Nova Vaasan is beyond the yoke of one of the noble families, but they do not bother to exert much influence on those communities far from their castles. So long as taxes are paid on time and shows of loyalty made, distant communities are mostly left to their own devices. The resulting life is still hard, but far less grim and only occasionally ugly. These communities are generally tightly knit, sharing each other's joys and sorrows. They tend to distrust strangers and fear disruptions to their way of life.

The aristocrats, living in luxury's lap and almost entirely free from legal restrictions, live largely as they please. Their lifestyles are paid for by the labors of the commoners, and while this arrangement frees them from responsibilities, it also leads to a fair amount of boredom and restlessness. A few loose traditions are in place to give young aristocrats some direction. Eldest sons are expected to learn the stewardship of holdings, while eldest daughters are expected to learn the management of the household and to prepare themselves for marriage. Second sons are expected to train for military pursuits or civil service, while second daughters choose between marriage and the Church. Subsequent children are largely left to their own devices. These are only traditions, however, and deviance





from these patterns is as common as adherence. One thing all aristocrats are expected to master, regardless of sex or birth order, is horsemanship. All nobles own at least one horse, and often many more, and numerous sports and games are played on horseback. Races, hurdles, tilts and even jousts and melees are common and the results heavily wagered upon. There are a number of unique Vaasi horse sports as well. In *póllo*, teams attempt to use long-handled mallets to knock a thick leather ball through an opposing goal. Riders playing *hestberere* try to snatch gauzy streamers from their opponents' saddles while losing as few of their own as possible, and in *klæbegribe* riders take turns attempting to pull short stakes from the ground at a gallop without falling from their horses.

A middle class is slowly emerging as shrewd traders, landowners and criminals are able to gather enough wealth to elevate their status and exert influence over those in the peasantry. A few particularly successful farmers, for example, have bought the farms and lands adjoining theirs and employed the former owners as hands and workers, while particularly skilled artisans in the cities have parlayed their talents into successful and profitable businesses. This middle class is currently small and thinly spread, however, and in the eyes of the aristocrats they are still peasants, only with larger tax revenues to provide. A few merchants are trying to remedy this situation, increasing their political power by forming guilds and trading companies, but these efforts have yet to effect any real change.

Marriage among commoners is rarely a romantic occasion. Prospective partners are chosen for responsibility, fertility and a lack of overt querulousness. Marriage among peasants is in many ways a transaction, a mutual agreement that long-term partnership could prove mutually advantageous. This cynical perspective is undoubtedly the result of the hardship the peasantry must endure; most simply cannot afford to make life decisions based on something as intangible as love or attraction. Peasants do not rush into marriage, usually marrying in their twenties or early thirties.

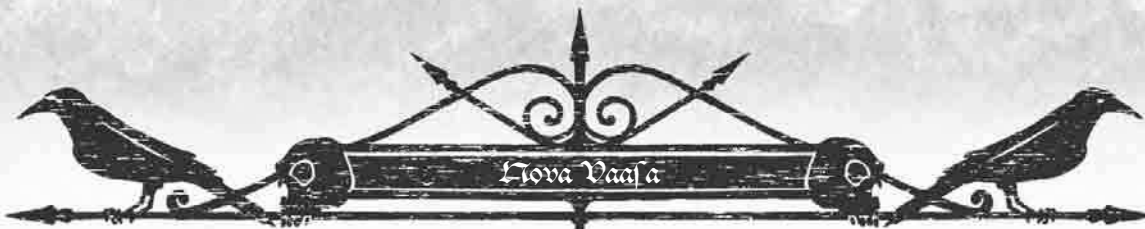
Aristocrats have more freedom to marry for romance, as their economic security is virtually assured. The only restrictions they face involve inter-family marriages; none of the great families want to see any fraction of their holdings going to another through patrilineal inheritance. Thus most noble marriages are between distant cousins. The

richest and most powerful of the nobles will often arrange their children's marriages, rather than risking their honor or possessions. No noble, regardless of feelings or attraction, would stoop to marry a commoner; the embarrassment would simply be too great, and the Church frowns heavily upon that sort of class intermixing.

The Nova Vaasan diet is well varied when it comes to breads and vegetables, and much more uniform when it comes to meats and dairy. Pork, chicken and fish are the staples, supplemented with a variety of breads, fruits, roots and greens. Popular dishes include spiced pork sausages called *kilbaasa*; meat-stuffed cabbage rolls (*golaabki*) or eggs; *pirogi*, pockets of dough stuffed with anything from meats and cheese to fruits and vegetables; and a variety of meat and vegetable stews, such as "rider's stew" (of which there are many variations, usually including pork or sausage). Pancakes topped with jams made from apples, pears or peaches are the favored desserts.

Art in Nova Vaasa is not nearly as developed or beloved a pursuit as it is in western lands. The peasants have no time for art, and the aristocrats rarely have the inclination. Still, the Nova Vaasans are not entirely without artistic traditions. The highest Nova Vaasan art form is the epic poem, epitomized by the many works of the legendary Ansgar, author of such stirring tales as *Fare imod den Aften*, *Den Bjaerkesjer*, and *Haldor og Gudrun*. *Haldor og Gudrun* is considered the greatest work of Vaasi literature and tells the tale of the hero-knight Haldor, the barbarian-queen Gudrun, and their secret and ill-fated love for one another. Forced to command armies against Gudrun by the pressures of family and state, Haldor leads his knights in a suicide attack against the heart of Gudrun's power, hoping that his death will ensure his love's safety. The attack fails, and the surviving knights drag the dying Haldor back to camp. As he lies on his deathbed, an exultant messenger enters, informing Haldor that the barbarian-queen is dead, killed after madly attacking the Vaasi lines for no apparent purpose. Haldor, of course, knows deep down that she had the same purpose in mind for her attack that he had for his, and expires in grief. This tragic tale has inspired many starry-eyed nobles to take pen to paper.

The Church of the Lawgiver has driven the growth of most other art forms. The Church has long traditions of architecture, sculpting and music. Hymns and choral pieces dedicated to the



Lawgiver are the most prevalent forms of musical expression in Nova Vaasa, followed by drinking songs. Instrumental pieces are centered on horns and percussion.

Education in Nova Vaasa ranges from informal to non-existent. Peasants are too concerned about teaching their children practical skills such as farming or stone working to spend time imparting more academic matters. Literacy among commoners is almost unknown. Aristocrats hire private tutors for their children or send them to study in the west. A university stands in Kantora, but it is small and not particularly popular or well regarded. The Church of the Lawgiver provides education to its clergy, teaching them how to read and write and other necessary skills, but otherwise focuses on theological teaching of dubious value.

Attitudes Toward Magic

Nova Vaasans have developed a deeply rooted distrust of arcane magic. Anecdotal evidence indicates that they were far more accepting of it in the distant past, but the Second Judgment changed that. Their early years in the Core were spent with a chaotic wasteland called the Nightmare Lands on their eastern border, where the Nocturnal Sea is today. The terrain of the Nightmare Lands shifted constantly, and travelers there reported encountering horrific creatures born of their deepest fears. Fortunately, the Nightmare Lands vanished in the wake of the Grand Conjunction. Few folk profess to remember the Nightmare Lands today, but they still seem subconsciously to associate arcane magic with the chaos and instability of that wasteland, and they want no part of it. The Church of the

The Nova Vaasan Hero

Races: Thanks in no small part to the influence of the Church of the Lawgiver, Nova Vaasa is an unashamedly racist domain. Nonhuman races are believed to be cursed with degenerate forms for the sins of their past, and thus nonhumans are seen as innately corrupt, both physically and spiritually. Large pockets of dwarves, gnomes and halflings live in Nova Vaasa, mostly confined to racial ghettos in the larger cities. The laws of the land prohibit “fraternization” between races, so inter-racial social interactions are limited and kept as brief as possible.

Classes: Clerics, fighters and rogues are the most common classes in Nova Vaasa. Almost all clerics are devoted to the Lawgiver and receive a high degree of respect and deference. Other clerics are in danger of harassment or imprisonment if their faith is revealed. Fighters and rogues can be found in all corners of the domain, with rogues being especially common in the cities. Rangers are uncommon, but their skills are highly valued; nobles often employ them to help watch over their horse herds or to keep plains cats from wandering into their land tracts. Bards are uncommon in Nova Vaasa due to the general distrust of arcane magic; most artists and musicians in the domain are mere experts. Those bards who do reside in or visit Nova Vaasa focus on recitation and poetry and keep their arcane talents well concealed. Druids, sorcerers and wizards are all equally despised and rarely encountered. Barbarians and monks are virtually unknown.

Recommended Skills: Appraise, Craft (blacksmithing, leatherworking, shipmaking, stonemasonry, weaving), Gather Information, Handle Animal, Intimidate, Knowledge (nobility and royalty, religion), Perform (oratory, percussion instruments, sing), Profession (farmer, fisher, herdsman, rancher, sailor, stable hand, tanner), Ride, Sleight of Hand, Survival, Swim, Use Rope.

Recommended Feats: Animal Affinity, Endurance, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (bolas, whip), Great Fortitude, Investigator, Iron Will, Jaded, Mounted Combat (plus derivatives), Quick Draw, Skill Focus (Handle Animal, Ride), Self-Sufficient, Toughness, Weapon Focus (heavy flail, heavy pick, lance, long spear, morningstar, scimitar).

Nova Vaasan Male Names: Andor, Christer, Erik, Fraanse, Gunnar, Ivaar, Konraad, Mikaal, Olav, Rudolf, Tor, Ulf, Viggo, Warnaar.

Nova Vaasan Female Names: Anja, Dagmar, Else, Grete, Helena, Inge, Lucia, Magda, Marta, Sofie, Thora, Ulla, Vanja, Vita.





Lawgiver in Nova Vaasa has banned the practice of arcane magic as blasphemy, claiming that its spread was one reason the Lawgiver handed down the Judgment. Suspected practitioners are frequently imprisoned.

Divine magic is accepted if and only if it flows from the Lawgiver. When the Church of the Lawgiver deigns to admit the existence of other gods, it places them in subordinate roles, labeling them as servants of the Lawgiver and essentially powerless in their own right. Both Ezra and Hala, for example, are officially codified as the Lawgiver's concubines. Therefore, according to Church dogma, any cleric performing miracles in the name of a god other than the Lawgiver must be a liar and a heretic, drawing his magic from arcane or even demonic sources. Imprisonment is the kindest fate a "heretic" can hope for, so servants of other gods would be wise not to call attention to themselves with flashy displays of divine power.

Religion

The Church of the Lawgiver is the state church of Nova Vaasa and the only religion with a significant presence. The Church is the true glue holding together Nova Vaasan society. Its teachings about law, obedience, and the divine right of rule are ingrained into every citizen at a young age, and without this stabilizing dogma the underclass would assuredly rise against the aristocracy that oppresses it. Church attendance is not legally mandated, but significant social pressure encourages it, and those seen as impious are ostracized and avoided. Given the Church's significance both within Nova Vaasa and without, I have thought it fitting to describe it in greater detail in the Attached Notes.

The Realm



lthough technically a principality, Nova Vaasans often refer to their realm as a kingdom. This is a legacy of the great conqueror-king Højplads, whom the Church of the Lawgiver has elevated to sainted status. Højplads is seen as the realm's Eternal King under the Lawgiver's mandate, with the princes being merely the realm's stewards in his material absence. Unsurprisingly, individual princes have sometimes held dissenting viewpoints.

By tradition, Højplads's authority as Eternal King is recognized in a number of symbolic ways. The *Storsortstenstol* ("Great Blackstone Throne") in the Prince's palace has traditionally been left

empty, with the Prince sitting instead at the head chair of the Council Table. The Whip of Right and Rod of Might, the traditional symbols of Nova Vaasan kingship, have likewise traditionally been left unused except in rare ceremonial occasions. Proclamations are made "in the name of the Eternal King, by the will of the Lawgiver."

Few could question that Othmar views himself as the realm's king in fact if not in name, and no prince in Nova Vaasa's history has dared to openly usurp so much of the Eternal King's symbolic authority. Othmar was not the first prince to refuse to surrender his stewardship of the realm after five years, but no prince ever reigned as long as he has, and he grows bolder with each successive year. Nine years into his reign, all portraits and sculptures he commissioned began depicting him wielding the Whip of Right and Rod of Might. Fourteen years into his reign, he commanded that coins be minted with his likeness rather than the traditional seals of the great families. And five years ago, he took to sitting in the Great Blackstone Throne. This act nearly provoked a revolt by the Rivtoff and Vistin families, but pressure by the other three families, and a decree from the *Himmelsk Naeve* legitimizing Othmar's actions, calmed the dissent. Rumor has it that Othmar has nearly proclaimed himself King on several occasions, only to be talked out of it each time by his advisors. Still, the pattern of his reign suggests that it is only a matter of time, and when that time comes the resulting unrest may not be so easily defused.

Government

As previously noted, rulership of Nova Vaasa is traditionally rotated between the patriarchs of the Five Great Families, in what is called the Ordained Cycle of Stewardship. Taking the title Prince of Nova Vaasa, the chosen patriarch rules for a term of five years, upon which the title is transferred to the next patriarch in line. The cycle occurs in this order: Bolshnik, Rivtoff, Vistin, Hiregaard, Chekiv, and then back to Bolshnik once more. This would appear to be an inherently unstable arrangement. Though it was intended to create unity and a sense of kinship among the Five Families, men being what they are, one would expect resentment and internecine power-struggles. Remarkably, the scheme actually worked, with few hurdles, for centuries. I suspect the stabilizing influence of the Church of the Lawgiver was the invisible hand holding the realm together.





"Invisible hand?" Far too charitable a term! The Iron Fools know nothing of subtlety.

Obviously, affairs of state have stopped proceeding according to this plan. Othmar has reigned as Prince for 28 years and thereby become the first Prince to maintain the title for a full Cycle. Were the Ordained Cycle still being observed, power would rightfully be in Bolshnik hands, but only until the end of this year, after which Rivtoff would traditionally assume power. As the year continues, renewed pressure is mounting from the Rivtoffs and Vistins for Othmar to step down and let the Cycle resume, but Othmar shows no signs of being moved to acquiesce. It appears that the current state of government will persist for the foreseeable future.

The tradition of the Ordained Cycle left Nova Vaasa with a strong aristocracy by necessity. Each of the Five Families has significant power within their region of the principality, powers that are retained whether the patriarch of the family currently holds the title of Prince or not. Most importantly, each family has the right to tax those living within their sphere of influence. Of course, much of this income must in turn be given as taxes to the Prince, but any revenue that exceeds royal taxes is the families' to keep. The families therefore attempt to pass as much of these taxes as they can onto their subjects, bleeding them dry in order to fill their own coffers. Only the Hiregaards are notably more lenient in this regard, and that family's fortunes have been diminishing for decades.

Besides the right of taxation, the Five Families also have the right to maintain standing militaries and to conscript citizens into these household guards in times of war or rebellion. Conscription is a rarely exercised power in modern times, though occasionally a family will gather together and arm a group of peasants to assist in hunting down bandits. The families also have broad judicial powers over their lands, with the right to arrest and punish lawbreakers, though the Prince has the right to reverse these decisions. In practice he almost never bothers, so the Families enforce the law with near absolute freedom. The families have other broad executive powers within their lands; they are almost autonomous states.

The division of the realm among the Five Families is accomplished by parceling the realm

into five duchies and giving each family authority over one of them. The Vaasi rivers have largely determined the centers of these duchies, since settlements in Nova Vaasa are tied closely to the riverlands. The Borchava Duchy, ancestral territory of the Hiregaards, consists of all farmlands watered by the Borchava and Little Borchava rivers, and by the Vaughn Dnar River up to the fork where the Borchava and Vaughn Dnar meet. The southern boundary of the duchy extends south to the edge of the Dyrskov. After flowing past the fork, the Vaughn Dnar becomes part of the Heartland Duchy, the largest duchy and the territory of the Bolshnik family. The Heartland Duchy extends east to the Nocturnal Sea; the Prince's Road marks its southern border as it runs east-west. The Altid Duchy, governed by the Vistins, consists of the Altid Bluffs and lands watered by the Volgis River, and is bounded in the north by the Borchava Duchy and in the east by the Heartland Duchy. The Ivlis Duchy, home of the Rivtoffs, is centered on the Ivlis River and is bounded in the north by the Heartland Duchy. Its southern border is the northern border of Hazlan, extended east to the sea. The Pommel Duchy consists of all those lands south of the Ivlis Duchy and is the territory of the Chekivs.

Technically, the five largest settlements are each under the direct control of the Prince. The Prince appoints the mayors of each city, and they respond directly to him. In practice, though, much of the power in each city lies in the hands of the nearest Great Family, as the mayors are almost always chosen from their ranks. For instance, the Mayor of Kantora has almost always been from a branch of the Bolshnik family, and the Hiregaards have long provided the Mayors of Liara. Power in Bergovitsa is hotly contested between the Rivtoffs and Vistins, with mayors often selected from either or neither; this struggle is the source of much of the bad blood between the two families. The smaller settlements, Egertus and Arbora, are even more thoroughly controlled by nearby families: the Bolshniks govern Egertus with a free hand, and Arbora is almost entirely the domain of the Chekivs.

Settlements that exist outside the nobles' immediate sphere of influence have their own weak governments, with a mayor or council of elders making decisions and enforcing the laws. These civic governments stay in place only as long as the nobles permit, so they are careful to govern in a fashion that will not draw undue attention.





The Council of Lords deserves a brief mention, I suppose. This small body is meant to advise the Prince. Traditionally, it consists of twelve members: the four Dukes; the mayors of Kantora, Liara, Bergovitsa, Arbora, and Egertus; and three other luminaries chosen at the will of the Prince. The twelve member council convenes annually in Kantora to discuss the state of the realm and suggest policy to the Prince. The weight given to the Council's recommendations has waxed and waned over the years. Currently, under Othmar's reign, they are virtually ignored, and each year nearly half of the Council neglects to attend the meeting. The three "extra" council members are currently Poul Ehrend, Count of Ehrendton; Lord Rangvold Alriik, Othmar's spymaster; and Mathias Bolshnik, the aerkebiskop of Kantora.

The Five Great Families

Given that the Great Families control the government of Nova Vaasa, this seems a fitting time to examine each family in greater detail.

Bolshnik

Prince Othmar Bolshnik rules the Bolshnik family, the Heartland Duchy, and all of Nova Vaasa from his stout keep Stonegard, just north of Kantora on the opposite bank of the Dnar river. Stormy in countenance, word and deed, Othmar commands the fear and respect of his people, not their love. He ruthlessly clamps down on any signs of dissent or independence in his realm and is known for his explosive outbursts when angered. Contrasting with his dark moods are his bright and ostentatious costumes, always made of the finest materials found in the Core, and sometimes beyond.

The previous patriarch of the family, Kethmar, was revered by the people and his fellow lords as honorable and just. His sudden death near the beginning of his second reign in 729 left the realm in shock and grief. Othmar had just turned 21 at that time and was prepared to succeed his father as prince, but by Kethmar's deathbed command he was not permitted to take on that responsibility. Instead, Tristen Hiregaard was asked to serve as his regent until Othmar reached the age of 25. Coincidentally, this period would have marked the end of Othmar's first reign. No doubt Kethmar knew what sort of son he had made and hoped to spare the realm from his "stewardship" for another 20 years. Unfortunately, Kethmar could not have

imagined that Othmar would subvert the entire Nova Vaasan system of government.

Othmar maintains his power through fear and has established three organizations under his control to aid him. His personal guard, the *Storkaskete* ("Black Caps"), are well known as dangerous and fanatical men. Their number is set at fifteen, and anyone seeking the honor of serving with them must first challenge and slay an existing member in personal combat. This ritual has insured that the men of Othmar's guard are both fearless and ruthless. They meet any threat or insult to Othmar, real or perceived, with drawn steel. Only Othmar's command can stay them — a command given rarely.

Even more sinister are the *Slangetunge*, Othmar's network of spies and informers. The members of the *Slangetunge* receive generous payments to serve as Othmar's eyes and ears, and they can be found in any of the realm's major settlements, and many criminals and dissidents are put to death by their reports. They are universally despised, and lynchings of suspected *Slangetunge* are not unknown. An accurate estimate of their numbers is impossible, but there must be a few dozen at the very least. The master of the *Slangetunge* is Rangvold Alriik, Othmar's distant cousin and close advisor.

The worst of the three are the *Straffers*, Othmar's personal police force. Perhaps inspired by Azalin's Kargat or Vlad Drakov's Talons, the *Straffers* officially exist to "supplement" the city watch. In truth, they have much broader powers than any watchman, with freedom to arrest, pass sentence and execute criminals who fall into their clutches. They have a reputation for sadism and depravity; tales of cannibalism, demon worship and lycanthropy among their officers are widely whispered. The other lords have politely requested that the *Straffers* be kept out of their territories, out of respect for their sovereign judicial rights, and thus far Othmar has acceded to that request, but in Kantora and Bolshnik lands the *Straffers* have free reign. Fortunately, their numbers are few, and thus by necessity they keep their focus on accused revolutionaries and traitors to the crown. The leader of the *Straffers* is Nikko Hetch, who serves double duty as Othmar's court executioner. Little about Hetch is known, but much is whispered.

Besides the *Storkaskete*, Othmar's standing guard is estimated at 100 foot soldiers and 50 mounted soldiers. He can also call upon the Kantora





city watch on short notice, swelling his guard by another 200 men. If he were to summon all his strength and bannermen, Othmar could field perhaps 800 soldiers without having to call on the other families.

Major branches of the Bolshniks include the Tavolys, the Ehrends, and the Laars, who have provided the last five mayors of Kantora. The arms of the Bolshniks depict a black snake twined around a silver axe on a field of green. The family motto is "Unity from us, power for us."

Chektiv

Duke Tunch Chektiv governs the Pommel Duchy, the least populated and most distant of the Nova Vaasan duchies. This remoteness lets the Chekivs enjoy an even greater degree of autonomy than the other families; rarely does the Prince or his officials make the journey south to take a direct hand in matters. In the past, this distance had also left the Chekivs poorer and less powerful than the other families, but the appearance of the Nocturnal Sea is changing that rapidly. Increased trading opportunities have also meant increased tax revenue for the Chekivs, and even the underclass in Pommel is seeing a small increase in prosperity.

Though the distance from central authority has given the people of Arbora and the surrounding land a sense of increased independence, Duke Chektiv tends to tow the Prince's line. Somewhat ironically, his relative freedom from the Prince's control has given him a vested interest in not rocking the boat, and thus he tends to exercise very little of that theoretical freedom. He works particularly hard to stamp out signs of discontent or rebellion, fearing that the Prince may decide to send his Straffers to settle matters if he cannot keep revolutionaries contained.

Duke Chektiv has a standing guard of 40 foot soldiers and 15 mounted soldiers. He has established a small watch in Arbora that could lend another 20 swords if needed. At full strength, the Chekivs could perhaps deploy 200 men.

The family's significant branches include the Norivs and the Pomaars. The Chektiv arms depict a white sword on a red and green field. Their motto is "Gripped in warning, drawn in anger, raised in triumph."

Hiregaard

From Faerhaaven, a mighty fortress overlooking the Little Borchava river, Duke Tristen

Hiregaard keeps the Prince's peace in the Borchava Duchy. Tristen became patriarch of the Hiregaards after the tragic suicide of his father, Romir Hiregaard, in 671 BC. Romir, who was Prince of Nova Vaasa at the time of his death, killed himself in sorrow after his wife died of a sudden illness, leaving eleven-year-old Tristen as both an orphan and as Prince of the Realm. His uncle Sergei served as regent during young Tristen's first reign. Tristen reigned twice more as prince, from 694–698 and again from 719–723, and served as regent from 729–733, making him the last man to rule Nova Vaasa before Othmar. Like his father before him, Tristen gained a reputation as a fair, honest and even-handed ruler, and he is the most loved of current patriarchs, though that is damning with faint praise.

Duke Hiregaard, who prefers to be known by his knightly title of "Sir Tristen," or simply "Captain" in recognition of his time as head of the Kantora city guard, has been the closest thing to a champion the underclass of Nova Vaasa can claim. He continuously argues for lower taxes at the Council of Lords, but his fellow lords are not so willing to see their incomes decline. Though he appears to regret the hardship these taxes place on the shoulders of the Nova Vaasan people, he does not stop from scrupulously collecting every last copper piece the crown claims. This attitude has led some to see him as a hypocrite, though in his defense he, of all the dukes, imposes the smallest taxes over and above those of the crown. His mercy has left his family in somewhat poor straits; the former jewel of Faerhaaven is in notable disrepair, and the family's household guard is at its smallest numbers in decades.

Though in rather astonishing health, it must be assumed that Tristen will not live much longer, as he is already over ninety years of age. Upon his death, his eldest son Yorgi will become patriarch. By all accounts, Yorgi has been well groomed for his role as successor, though there are some indications that he would like to see the family returned to its former wealth. When Tristen does finally die, the poor of Nova Vaasa may likely no longer have a voice.

As noted, Duke Hiregaard's forces are at low ebb; in their prime, they were nearly as large as the Bolshniks'. Currently his standing guard consists of 60 foot soldiers and 20 horsemen. Given enough time, he could summon the Liara city watch, adding another 100 soldiers. If he were to summon all





the swords at his command, he could field around 500 men.

Major branches of the Hiregaard family include the Tuegaards, the Boragaards, the Laruchs, and the Tryggaars. The arms of the Hiregaards depict a golden griffin flanked on either side by a white rose, against a field of sky blue. The family motto is "Duty from without brings honor from within."

Rivtoff

Duke Søren Rivtoff is the current head of the Rivtoff family, and oversees the Ivlis Duchy from Castle Everwatch near the center of the Tordenmark. Duke Rivtoff is strong, handsome and very, very bitter. His anger over Othmar's continued reign is well known. In the past, his adviser and former regent Lord Adal Keirin was able to calm him and keep him from openly speaking against Othmar, but Lord Adal's death ten years ago removed that stabilizing influence. Duke Rivtoff has since been loudly critical of Othmar, and it can only be a matter of time before his lack of discretion brings consequence. I suspect the Duke is trying to force a conflict, hoping that an open attack by Othmar will bring the other families to his side. This seems unlikely at best, as the Hiregaards and Chekivs are firmly behind the Bolshniks, and the Vistins and Rivtoffs despise one another. Strategic planning does not appear to be Duke Rivtoff's strong suit.

The Rivtoffs have been keeping themselves prepared for potential conflict, and besides the Bolshniks they currently have the largest standing guard in Nova Vaasa, with 80 foot soldiers and 40 horsemen. At full strength, those numbers could swell to nearly 600 soldiers.

The major branches of the family include the Keirins, who have often served as regents for young Rivtoff princes, and the Ladzlins. The arms of the Rivtoffs depict a black fist gripping a human bone against a yellow field. The family motto is "The death of our enemies is the seal of our authority."

Vistin

The seat of Vistin power is Blacktower Heights, a fortified tower beside the Altid Bluffs. The current "patriarch" is Duke Grigor Vistin, a two-year-old infant, who succeeded upon the death of his father Bevis last year. Grigor's regent and mother, Lady Lara Vistin, holds true power in the family. Lady Lara is known as a harsh, uncompro-

mising woman, and her struggles with Duke Rivtoff for power and prestige have shown her to be every bit as competent a leader as her late husband. Still, because of her "femininity," Lady Lara does not enjoy the unquestioned support from her vassals and soldiers that Bevis commanded. The old Duke was much respected, perhaps more for his old friendships with Kethmar Bolshnik and Tristen Hiregaard than for any accomplishments of his own. Lady Lara has thus far managed to cajole and command the obedience that is her right as regent, but it seems she must reclaim it anew with every order and initiative.

Bevis's loathing for Prince Othmar was a poorly kept secret; he was a loud voice of opposition to Othmar's retention of power, and though his complaints softened as Othmar's hold on the realm tightened, his dissatisfaction was clear. Lady Lara has not yet spoken or acted against Othmar overtly, so her attitudes toward the prince and his regime remain a matter of conjecture. She has shown a vindictive streak, though, so the idea of her harboring her late husband's grudges is not at all far-fetched.

The household guard of the Vistins stands at 50 foot soldiers and 20 horsemen. Lady Lara could potentially field up to 500 men, but there is some question as to whether all of her vassals would answer the summons.

Major branches of the Vistin family include the Volgaars and the Harstins. The family arms depict a combatant hound and plains cat on a field of purple. Their motto is "Faithful no matter the risks."

Economy

It should surprise no one to learn that the Nova Vaasan economy is centered on the horse. Vaasi horses are renowned for their strength, speed and intelligence, and are highly desired as riding horses, warhorses and status symbols among the wealthy all across the Core. Since there is no shortage of horses on the Vaasi Plateau, the Nova Vaasans are all too willing to share their most valuable resource with others, at a tidy profit of course.

Nova Vaasan law states that any male Vaasi horse sold to a foreigner must first be gelded; the Nova Vaasans are very protective of their monopoly. This condition has made the outside demand for Vaasi stallions very high, both to horse breeders and to soldiers or noblemen who desire more "spirited" mounts. The high prices these





stallions command has accelerated the growth of the black market for Vaasi steeds.

The Vistani in Nova Vaasa have a unique part to play in the horse trade. While Nova Vaasan horse trainers are often highly skilled, the best of them pales in comparison to the better Vistani trainers, and the Nova Vaasans grudgingly realize this fact. Thus, the Vistani are permitted to take and raise horses from the Vaasi Plateau, the only foreigners so privileged. This privilege comes with a restriction, however: the Vistani, by law, are permitted to sell horses of Vaasi bloodlines only to Nova Vaasan merchants. Under this arrangement, then, the Vistani pull horses from the plains, raise them, train them, and then sell them in Nova Vaasan markets for princely sums. Though much of this revenue must be paid to excisemen as the Vistani leave the market, they still reap a fair profit from the transactions. The merchants then sell these Vistani-trained horses at even higher prices to nobles both inside and outside the domain. Since noblemen usually despise the Vistani as thieves and beggars and are loath to deal with them directly, having Nova Vaasan merchant middlemen benefits both sides greatly. Though undoubtedly some Vistani caravans flout these laws, most choose to obey them rather than risk souring a profitable situation. In fact, at least one Equaar caravan, the Twin Waters, stays almost exclusively within Nova Vaasa, rolling through a slow circuit of the land while gathering and selling horses.

Besides the horses themselves, byproducts of the horse have also become important elements of the Nova Vaasan economy. Horses that are too old or infirm to be sold, bred or worked are slaughtered, and their constituent parts are sold toward various ends. Some such parts, such as horsehair, can be regularly harvested from healthy animals. Horsehair is dyed and woven into baskets, bridles, ropes and similar items. Horsemeat is sold as food for the hounds of the rich or the children of the poor. Horse hooves are valuable to "chymists" for the creation of adhesives. Organs such as the heart, liver, eyes and testicles are powdered and sold as medicines or aphrodisiacs to the gullible or as spell components to the wise. Horse dung is gathered and sold as fertilizer at markets up and down the four rivers. But it is the hide of the horse that presents the most opportunity. Nova Vaasan leatherwork is among the most prized in the Core, both for the quality of the horsehide leather itself

and the skill of the Nova Vaasan artisans. Saddles, boots, gloves, jackets and other goods made from Vaasi leather can be found in lands throughout the Core. In the western realms, pistol holsters and scabbards made from Vaasi horsehide have become *de rigueur*; in fact, I believe my own holsters are made from Vaasi leather, though in all honesty I pay little heed to such matters.

It will perhaps be more surprising to discover that the feared Vaasi predator, the plains cat, is also a significant element of Nova Vaasan commerce. The pelt of the plains cat is actually quite soft and fine, and garments trimmed with plains cat fur fetch handsome sums. The silver and white fur of an aged plains cat is even more in demand, but none is as valued as the fur of the blood cat. The claws and fangs of the plains cats are prized by Nova Vaasan noblemen as pieces of bracelets or necklaces, and this cultural fashion trend is catching on in adjacent lands such as Darkon and Barovia. Ear tufts are valued as lucky charms, while powdered organs are even more valued than those of horses.

From an agricultural standpoint, Nova Vaasa is quite wealthy, with wide expanses of farmland along the banks of the realm's three major rivers. Grains, especially wheat, barley, oats and rye, make up the majority of the crop, but a variety of other foodstuffs are grown as well. Orchards of apples account for most of the fruit produce, followed by pears, peaches and plums, though local plums have slowly fallen out of favor with the import of more flavorful Barovian varieties. Cabbages, potatoes, beets, carrots, onions, turnips and beans make up the majority of their roots and vegetables. Nova Vaasa also has rich yields of fiber crops, including hemp, flax and kenaf, which contribute to the burgeoning textiles and paper industries.

Livestock consists mostly of chickens and hogs, with sheep and cattle being relatively scarce; the Nova Vaasans are reluctant to take ranging space from their horses. The Nova Vaasans instead import most of their red meats and cheeses from Darkon and Tepest. This is all supplemented with steady fishing of cod, herring and mackerel in the Nocturnal Sea, and smaller catches of pike, trout and bass from the Three Sisters.

Granite is the most prevalent mineral resource, quarried from the rock bluffs in the southwest. It is likewise the most-used building material. Demand very nearly meets the supply and thus little ends up as export. Besides granite, the few minerals found in quantity include amber,



gathered from river beds; limestone, gypsum and chalk, found in the same rock mesas as the granite; and salt, mined from deposits in the foothills of the Mountains of Misery or harvested on the shores of the Nocturnal Sea.

Despite the wealth of its resources, Nova Vaasa is by no means a self-sufficient kingdom. Vaasi timber is of dimly poor quality and sparse quantity. Thus imports from Barovia, Tepest and Darkon are vital, more so now than ever with the growth of the Nova Vaasan navy. Metal resources are also scarce. The foothills around Bergovitsa and Liara yield small amounts of iron and copper ore, far too little to meet the kingdom's demands. Imports from Barovia, Borca and Darkon make up the shortfall.

Nova Vaasan coinage is becoming an increasingly common sight in lands throughout the eastern Core, and merchants and townsfolk will usually accept it in even exchange with few reservations. The gold piece is known as the bridle; the heads side shows a horse head in profile, looking to the observer's left. The silver piece, the spur, shows a rider's boot, with the toe pointed to the observer's right. The copper piece, the horseshoe, shows exactly that, a horseshoe with the open end pointed downward. The tails sides feature two common designs, one for those minted before Othmar's reign and one for those after. Before Othmar, each coin bore the crests of each of the five great families, arranged in a pentagonal design. By Othmar's command, coins now bear his likeness. He is shown seated on a throne, head turned to the observer's right. In his left hand he holds a whip, and in his right hand a rod, the two traditional symbols of Vaasi kingship. Because the older coins are melted and repressed when taken as taxes, Othmar's coins have become far more common.

Diplomacy

Nova Vaasa has regular contact with other lands. Merchants travel to and fro by all available routes, and young Nova Vaasan aristocrats often garner their education abroad. There are few civilized parts of the Core where a Nova Vaasan is nowhere to be found, and thus many relationships have been established and opinions formed of other lands.

Barovia: Barovia is viewed mainly as a stepping stone to the riches of the west. While demand for Barovian timber, spirits and metals does exist, trading for them unfortunately involves dealing

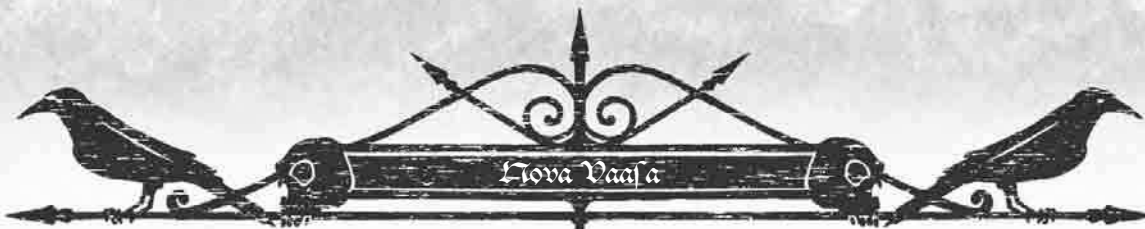
with Barovians, something that few Nova Vaasan merchants savor. Barovians remind Nova Vaasan traders of the lower classes they avoid at home, with the additional unpleasantness of superstitious atheism thrown in. The secularism of the average Barovian greatly bothers most Nova Vaasans who encounter it, and the few religions that do have a foothold in Barovia bother them even more. The Cult of the Morninglord is seen as particularly pernicious; its message of temporal hope for the downtrodden is as opposite to the dogma of the Lawgiver as anything could be.

Darkon: Though the ties between Nova Vaasa and Darkon were only recently forged, Darkon has already become one of Nova Vaasa's most respected neighbors and the latest focus of its mercantile pursuits. When the lands of the Core shifted in the wake of the Great Upheaval, the Mountains of Misery no longer barred all traffic between the two lands. Nova Vaasans were eager to take advantage of this new opportunity for trade, and it has paid handsome dividends on both sides. Nova Vaasan aristocrats also admire — dare I say, envy — King Azalin and his firm control over so widespread and varied a kingdom.

Feh. The opinions of the masses mean little to me, especially when the things I should most be praised for remain hidden to so many.

Hazlan: Nova Vaasans aren't quite sure what to make of the Hazlani. The commonalties of language and religion would seem likely to draw the two peoples together, but the Hazlani culture is too alien to be easily overlooked. Indeed, the few similarities between the two cultures appear only to accentuate the differences. The Himmelsk Naeve would like nothing more than to increase unity between the two realms, which would increase the Church's influence, but despite his efforts it seems unlikely that the two lands will ever become more than uncomfortable neighbors and lukewarm trading partners.

The Nocturnal Sea: Egertus and Arbora were wealthy ports before the Mists rose, and the disappearance of the sea had left them as shadows of their former wealth. When the Nightmare Lands vanished after the Great Upheaval, the sea reappeared, but the mists did not recede. Intrepid Nova Vaasan mariners boldly attempted to sail and chart the enshrouded waters, with few successes and many tragedies. When the mists finally did recede



and reveal the waters of the Nocturnal Sea, it was seen as a miraculous blessing, a reward from the Lawgiver for the good faith and service of His people. Though neither port is anywhere close to as powerful as they once had been, each has begun to boom with the return of marine commerce. Egertus carries on a brisk trade with Nevuchar Springs on Darkon's coast and with the island of Liffe to the northeast, while Arbora does the same with Graben Island.

Though the Nocturnal Sea is treacherous and turbulent, Nova Vaasans continue to view it with a certain fondness, their own special gift from the Lawgiver. There is no shortage of volunteers for trading vessels or for the Nova Vaasan Navy, and the Nova Vaasan reputation for riding the waves is slowly growing to match their reputation for riding the plains.

Tepest: Tepest is something of a thorn in the side of Nova Vaasan merchants, who are always seeking to increase their trading opportunities with the western lands. The wild and fey creatures of the untamed Tepestani forests make for a perilous journey for merchant caravans. In an effort to improve matters, Nova Vaasans would like to see the East Timori road extended north into Keening, with the hopes of eventually meeting the Darkonian Strigos Road and thereby hastening the completion of the trade route. Plans have been laid to construct guard outposts along the way; that this is an egregious violation of Tepestani sovereignty has been pointedly ignored.

This has thus far been a doomed effort. Every labor team sent into Tepest for this purpose so far has disappeared, even those under armed guard. Such events have increased the frustration of the merchants, and support is growing for a campaign to invade and "civilize" Tepest. A recent build-up of royal troops in the north suggests Prince Othmar may be taking heed.

The Tepestani themselves are considered barely worthy of notice, as they have little interest in fine horseflesh. Their "pagan" zealotry does little to help. It is mainly the vast stores of Tepestani timber that keep Nova Vaasan merchants coming back. What other barter occurs is usually of an agricultural bent.

Sites of Interest



My travels through Nova Vaasa began in Arbora. Once there, I felt closer to the edge of the world than I had ever desired to be. As disconcerting as that feeling was, I suspect I may look back upon it with nostalgia before this long survey ends.

Indeed. This world has more boundaries than any natural one should, and all of them press too close. You have not yet begun to feel their chafing.

Arbora

Arbora's townsfolk refer to it as "the far corner of the world," a statement not made without a certain element of pride. The origins of that description are not hard to discern. Arbora is the southernmost settlement of note in the Core, and the most physically isolated as well, save perhaps for those at sea. Not only do the Mists surround Arbora and nearby lands on three sides, but it is distant from most large population centers. The closest major settlement to Arbora is Sly-Var in Hazlan, and while relations between the two towns are cordial, cultural differences keep them from drawing too close. Because of this relative isolation, Arborans have developed a very independent, self-sufficient attitude and prefer to make their own way as much as possible.

Physical isolation has resulted in political isolation as well. Prince Othmar Bolshnik, like many princes before him, cares nothing for the region so long as his taxes arrive. Thus the Arborans have felt relatively little of the burden of centralized authority since 728 BC, the last year a Chekiv sat the throne. The current Duke Chekiv dutifully collects Othmar's taxes and supports his decrees, but exercises little of his own initiative.

Where to stay in Arbora

The World's End Inn (common quality rooms, good quality food) is of mediocre appointments but wonderful fare. I particularly recommend the *pirogi*; nowhere else I dined in Nova Vaasa had as varied and flavorful a selection. The beer, however, was disappointingly weak and rather cloudy.

Arbora (large town): Conventional; AL N; 3,000 gp limit; Assets 691,500 gp; Population 4,610; Isolated (humans 96%, halfling 2%, gnomes 1%, other 1%).

Authority Figures: Mayor Torina Pomaar, female human Ari5; Aerkebiskop Bearnt Chekiv, male human Clr7.

Important Characters: Lukas Duremke, male human Clr6 (heretical priest); Astrid Chekiv, female human Ari2/Brd 4 (revolutionary philosopher), George Weathermay, male human Rgr9/Avr4 (Mordentish expatriate).

Bergovitsa

From Arbora I backtracked the long journey up the Vaere Bange Road to Bergovitsa, attaching myself to a small merchant caravan to make the trip less perilous.

A feeling of danger simmers in all of Nova Vaasa's cities, thanks to the widespread crime and general discontent, but Bergovitsa has an extra element of chaos added to that already explosive mix. The Rivtoffs and the Vistins have long vied for influence over the city, and this struggle for power and status has boiled over into the streets. Of course, one rarely sees the aristocrats themselves suffering for it. Instead, gangs of thugs, hired by one of the noble families, harass and assault innocent commoners or merchants whose only fault is that they in some way represent (or are thought to represent) the interests of the rival family. During my stay here I witnessed a craftsman in a tannery owned by the Vistins dragged into the street and beaten by Rivtoff henchmen, who cared not at all that their attack had witnesses. No one moved to call the watch, and from what I have seen I doubt the watch would have responded anyway. In fact, I suspect that the watch has been instructed to take no notice of these incidents. The Bergovitsa city watch is subject to the commands of Mayor Araam Tavolys, a cousin of the Bolshniks, and it would not surprise me to learn that Prince Othmar has commanded that the conflict be allowed to continue. It certainly helps to keep the two families distracted from other concerns.

Bergovitsa is an important waystation in the trade between Kantora and the west, and as a result is the most cosmopolitan of Nova Vaasa's cities. Most of the Core's languages can be heard spoken in Bergovitsa's markets and goods of all styles and descriptions found in its shops. Though many come

to Bergovitsa from other lands to trade, few end up deciding to stay. Bergovitsa is as dismal as the rest of Nova Vaasa's cities, and it makes a far better place to visit than to lay roots. The result is steady traffic in and out of the gates, as caravans arrive, sell their goods, buy replacements and leave in short order.

Places of interest in Bergovitsa include the Crimson Citadel Fane, a walled religious community on the northern edge of the city and the seat of Pave Lod Ragnaar; the Traveler's Market, Bergovitsa's bustling commercial center, in the western part of the city; and the Ansgar Museum, the former home of the ancient poet converted into a shrine to his life and work. The Avener's District, in northeastern Bergovitsa, is probably best avoided despite its popularity. It is the site of the greatest horse races in Nova Vaasa, but crime is rampant. I also collected recent reports of a "shambling mud-monster" stalking the District at night, attacking those who stumble across it. No verifiable deaths or injuries have been attributed to this mud-man, so it is likely an urban myth sprung from the other, very real dangers to be found in the Avener's District.

Where to stay in Bergovitsa

The richness of the appointments of the Inn at Bergovitsa (good quality rooms, good quality meals) contrast with the simplicity of its name. A favorite destination of visiting merchants, it is not difficult to see why. The meals are exquisite; I especially recommend the roast quail with Barovian plum sauce and the stuffed figs. The innkeepers have long enjoyed an honest reputation, and ever since persons unknown robbed Sir Tristen Hiregaard here in his sleep decades ago a small, discrete group of hired guards have made this the safest inn in Nova Vaasa.

Those with lighter purses in need of a quality meal would do well to try the Clever Gray Mouser (no rooms, good quality meals), a cheerful tavern with a solid reputation. That reputation did dip somewhat in 682 BC when the Signature Killer chose a barmaid from the tavern as his first victim, but no such misfortune has visited the tavern since. Interestingly, the tavern was once known as the Clever Gray Malken, but after the scandalizing of the Claws of Sehkmaa and their high priest the name was changed to minimize any perceived association.



Bergovitsa (small city): Conventional; AL LN; 15,000gp limit; Assets 4,980,000gp; Population 6,640; Isolated (humans 90%, halfling 4%, gnomes 4%, other 2%).

Authority Figures: Mayor Araam Tavolys, male human Ari4; Pave Lod Ragnaar, male human Clr13.

Important Characters: Beyta Vistin, female human Ari2/Rog3 (well-connected noblewoman); "Mad Mikaal," male human Clr2 (homeless doomsayer).

Kantora

Kantora strikes visitors as either an awe-inspiring example of urban splendor or a horrific morass of urban decay — perhaps both at once. The city changes dramatically as one passes from the heavily patrolled, meticulously kept aristocratic and government districts into the boroughs of the paupers and tradesmen. Where the presence of the city watch is felt, Kantora is safe, clean and at times even beautiful, but this is a very small section of the city, and those who clearly do not "belong" in these areas will quickly find themselves ejected or arrested. The rest of the city is largely left to fend for

itself, and living conditions there are among the worst in the cities of the Core.

Running east-west through the middle of Kantora is the High Road, dividing the city in two. At the center of the High Road and Kantora is the Prince's Palace, the ceremonial seat of Nova Vaasa's government. It is readily apparent that the Palace was constructed with grandeur and opulence in mind rather than practicality. The Palace is a breathtaking sight, tall, proud and sprawling, but its fortifications are woeful. The outer wall is thin and short, the gates too wide, and the towers placed cosmetically rather than strategically. Were Nova Vaasa invaded, the Prince's Palace would surely be abandoned as indefensible. For that matter, the Prince's Palace is nearly abandoned in any case. Prince Othmar stays here when he has business in the city, but he prefers to rule from Stonegard, leaving only a detachment of guardsmen and a handful of stewards to occupy the palace.

The palace may be the physical center of Kantora, but the Horse District is its true heart. Covering the southwestern quarter of the city, the Horse District is dominated by the Great Corral, a



wide, open-air market where horse ranchers and trainers display their wares. Here, and here alone, the Vistani are kings, proudly displaying their magnificent and expertly trained steeds to a throng of clamoring merchants and traders. In the north is the River Quarter, another bustling trade district, but with a much less savory reputation. The Merchant's Quarter, in the southeast, is less prosperous than its name would suggest. It is dominated by struggling shops and unemployed laborers, and beggars line every street.

On the eastern edge of the city is the Mausoleum of the Elect, a walled tomb where those princes who have died while in office are interred. The Church of the Lawgiver holds that princes who die or are killed during their terms are chosen by the Lawgiver, elected to reign beside him in the Iron Paradise, and those so "blessed" are laid to rest in the Mausoleum, a high honor. Of course, the Church has reversed itself on this point when politically convenient, declaring that specific princes, the unpopular or liberal, were actually struck down by the Lawgiver to remove them from office and barring them from the Mausoleum. Princes who commit suicide, such as the late Prince Romir Hiregaard, are also denied honored rest.

Where to stay in Kantora

The Maiden's Scarf (good quality rooms, common quality meals) is a homey, comfortable inn in the Merchant's Quarter, with friendly and eager staff. The Hungry Tyger (poor quality rooms, common quality food) is another popular destination, thanks to the wide variety of diversions available. It is one of the busiest gambling halls in Nova Vaasa, and the ale is serviceable, but the rooms have little to recommend to those not seeking temporary companionship.

Kantora (large city): Conventional; AL LN; 40,000gp limit; Assets 33,040,000gp; Population 16,520; Isolated (humans 89%, halfling 4%, gnomes 4%, other 3%).

Authority Figures: Mayor Ulrik Laars, male human Ari7; Himmelsk Naeve Pieter Jergaar, male human Clr16.

Important Characters: Viggo Snyggar, male human Rog2 (Slangetunge informant); Dommer Johan Bolshnik, male human Clr3/Rog1 (Church inquisitor).

Egertus

From Kantora I purchased passage on a river ferry down the Sydligdnar to Egertus, a much swifter method than going by foot or wagon, if perhaps not quite as safe. The Sydligdnar's flow is at times dangerously rapid, and there are enough sharp turns and looming rocks to nauseate and enervate the most jaded traveler. Fortunately, the ferrymen on the Sydligdnar are remarkably proficient, and rarely are boats actually lost.

The ferry docked at Guldstrand Beach, near the mouth of the Sydligdnar. Though Egertus is high above the Guldstrand, with the looming cliffs of the Fortress Coast separating them, the beach has become the most vital part of the town, for it is here that merchant ships from the Nocturnal Sea dock to unload their cargo. On the opposite side of the Sydligdnar is the Skibbygger Beach, which has become the center for shipbuilding in Nova Vaasa.

Nova Vaasans claim that Egertus was once a city nearly as large as Bergovitsa and Liara, and that it was the greatest port of the Old Vaasan Empire. Tragically, the Judgment laid waste to the city, in a manner that is not entirely clear. Some say that large parts of Egertus simply disappeared when the Mists rose, just as the sea the Egertusians once sailed vanished. Others say that the Judgment physically shook the city, causing buildings to collapse and crushing people beneath them. Egertus was further diminished by a mass exodus, as peasants fled first the looming curtains of mist and later the chaotic madness of the Nightmare Lands. This rapid population decline has produced some positive results on the village. Though its structures are as densely placed as those of any Nova Vaasan settlement, the population density is much lower, and thus Egertus is actually a relatively clean, unblighted town. With the appearance of the Nocturnal Sea, though, there has been a flood of immigration, as Nova Vaasans seek to take advantage of this new source of opportunity. In the near future, Egertus will likely become as filthy and crowded as its sister settlements.

In the recent past, Egertus was little more than an appendage of Kantora, sending most of its resources west to satisfy the needs of the bloated city. That situation has begun to reverse, as huge quantities of hemp, flax and imported timber are sent to Egertus to aid in the growth of the Nova Vaasan Navy and satisfy the needs of maritime traders. The increased importance of the town has given Egertusians an inflated sense of pride, and they



tend to be quite condescending toward visitors and immigrants. I found them insufferable.

Other than the aforementioned beaches, few destinations are of particular interest in Egertus. The only building of intellectual importance was the Clinic of the Mentally Distressed, which was founded by the famous Dr. Gregorian Illhousen. The Clinic served as a hospital and sanitarium for the mentally ill and was one of the most celebrated of those institutions in the Core, rivaled only by the Asylum for the Mentally Disturbed off the coast of Lamordia. Dr. Illhousen was particularly respected for his innovative research into the nature of dreams and how they impact mental health. Strangely, the inhabitants of the Clinic, both patients and physicians, disappeared without explanation in 749 BC, leaving the Clinic abandoned.

Prince Othmar ordered an investigation, as one of the missing patients was his elder brother Talgaard. Talgaard had suffered from severe mental illnesses for most of his life, but in 720 BC they took a violent turn. He began stealing away from Stonegard on stormy nights and strangling innocents with a garrote of barbed wire. The "Kantora Strangler" killed dozens of people over the next six years before being captured and institutionalized, becoming one of the Clinic's very first patients. He was still undergoing treatment when the disappearances occurred. Despite a long search by both the town watch and watchmen from Kantora, no trace of Dr. Illhousen, Talgaard, or any of the other missing residents was ever found. The whereabouts of Nova Vaasa's greatest native scientist remain unknown.

Where to stay in Egertus

The Sailor's Hearth (good quality rooms, common quality food) is one of the better kept inns in Egertus, and the meals are filling if not flavorful. The chokka herring stands out, and the beers are excellent and inexpensive. The impoverished could no doubt find a resting-place in one of Egertus's many abandoned homes, though they will no doubt find competition from rats and beggars.

Egertus (large town): Conventional; AL N; 3,000 gp limit; Assets 591,000 gp; Population 3,740; Isolated (humans 93%, halfling 4%, gnomes 1%, other 2%).

Authority Figures: Mayor Kaia Bolshnik, female human Ari4/Exp2.

Important Characters: Captain Maja Ovesdatter, female human Exp6/War1 (ship captain); Red Rolf, male human Rog4 (smuggler).

Dread Possibility: The Clinic for the Mentally Distressed

The staff and inmates of the Clinic of the Mentally Distressed were pulled into the domain known as the Nightmare Lands, which sat on Nova Vaasa's eastern border prior to the Grand Conjunction. After the Conjunction, the Nightmare Lands broke free from the Core and currently exist as a huge pocket domain, floating through the Mists. A land where dreams shape reality and the boundary between waking and sleeping is blurred, the Nightmare Lands are ruled by a sinister group of dream-masters known as the Nightmare Court. The Court draws both delight and sustenance from tormenting others with horrid and psychically draining nightmares. Dr. Illhousen uncovered the existence of the Nightmare Court in his work with his patients, many of whom had been driven to madness and despair by these invasions into their dreams.

Dr. Illhousen did what he could to combat the Nightmare Court, but a Dr. Harrod Tasker betrayed him to the Nightmare Court, which had contacted him in his dreams and turned him against Illhousen. With Tasker's aid, the Nightmare Court was able to draw Illhousen and his patients into the Nightmare Lands, where they remain today in a mad duplicate of the Clinic.

The abandoned Clinic in Nova Vaasa is a rank two sinkhole of evil, with a Taint of Fear. Bastelli sometimes haunt its empty halls, but there is a greater threat. The Clinic acts as a Mistway to the Nightmare Lands, and those who fall asleep there while the moon is waning will awake in that forgotten domain. Fortunately, the haunted Clinic is not an inviting place to find rest, and thus few fall prey to its hidden clutches. This Mistway, the Unending Sleep, is a one-way Mistway of excellent reliability.





Ehrendton

After leaving Egertus, I headed north to have a look at the plains of Ehrendton, which have a notoriety entirely out of proportion to their actual significance. In 695 BC, a Nova Vaasan knight by the name of Sir Armand Rivtoff, better known as Armand Ironhand, wrote the famous saga *The Beast of Ehrendton*, a fanciful embellishment of his efforts to root out a would-be bandit king calling himself the Black Duke ten years earlier. In the novel, the Black Duke is cast as a literal demon from the pits of Hell, intent on conquering first Nova Vaasa and then the rest of the known world. Though Ironhand's prose is unpolished and at times awkward, the winged, whip-wielding Duke makes for a memorable antagonist, and the events depicted are impressively disturbing in places. It has been suggested that *The Beast of Ehrendton* was actually meant as a political commentary, with the Black Duke representing the Church of the Lawgiver; the imagery of the whip is particularly intriguing when viewed in this light. I am skeptical, however, as Ironhand foregoes many opportunities to develop the metaphor, and I expect he had no greater ambition than telling a tragic horror story.

Sir Armand's popular tale made Ehrendton one of the better-known regions of Nova Vaasa, an honor it most assuredly does not deserve. The previously referenced rebellion of the Black Duke and his Brotherhood of the Whip, culminating in the razing of the village of Drataan, is the only event in living memory worthy of mention. Drataan was once Ehrendton's largest settlement; that questionable honor now falls to Haaldam, a hamlet of perhaps 200 peasants. It is said that the screams of the dying can still be heard echoing in the ruins of Drataan. I heard nothing unusual in my visit there, but neither did I find a reason to linger.

The Ehrend family governs Ehrendton in the name of the Bolshniks. The Ehrends are a small branch of the Bolshniks, created when a second son was granted the lands that now comprise Ehrendton in order to stave off a struggle for succession. As Counts of Ehrendton, the Ehrends have a great deal of latitude in its governance, but little enough is there to make it a power worth exercising.

Liara

Liara could almost be counted as two cities, so dramatically does it change as day fades into night.

During daytime hours, Liara is the safest and calmest of Nova Vaasa's cities, no doubt thanks to the intervention of Sir Tristen Hiregaard. The mayor of Liara, Ulf Tryggaar, is a distant cousin of Tristen's and by all evidence is firmly under his influence. Through Tristen's intercession, the Liara city watch has been well trained, well equipped, and as cleansed of corruption as could reasonably be expected. Thanks to their dutiful patrolling and integrity, the incidence of open crime on the streets of Liara is significantly lower than that of Bergovitsa... during the day.

After dark, the mood of the city changes. For decades the Liarans have been living in anxious fear of the Signature Killer that stalks their nighttime streets. In defiance of that fear, many Liarans have become aggressively exuberant, almost manic, in their pursuit of the night's illicit diversions. The fear still crouches within them, though, and can be heard in the hard edge of their laughter and seen in eyes that stay cold while their faces leer. Inevitably, the fear breaks free in some of them, in a flurry of anger and violence. The powerful Liaran underworld, controlled by the mysterious Malken, adds kindling to the fire. It is unwise to walk the nighttime streets of Liara unless one intends to find trouble, or be found by it.

It is perhaps fitting that each of Liara's two most significant structures embodies one side of the dichotomy. The *Passeslot*, a strong, squat fortress of stone, is the barracks and training grounds of the city watch, complete with an armory and stable. By day it rings with the sound of wood and steel as those watchmen not on patrol run through practice drills. By night, it is much quieter, though it never sleeps entirely. Watchmen walk the walls at all hours, hoping that all those who left on patrol at sunset will return at sunrise.

The dark twin of the *Passeslot* is the Staggering Stallion, the center of nighttime activity in Liara. A large brick building with a deceptively plain exterior, the Staggering Stallion offers its patrons the opportunity to quench thirsts of all kinds. Other than the obligatory spirits, most of which are brought in from Barovia and Borca, the Staggering Stallion provides opiates, prostitutes, gaming and beast baiting. None of these distasteful activities is actually illegal in Nova Vaasa, but the delights offered by the Staggering Stallion do much to increase the violence and danger of Liara. The Staggering Stallion is owned and operated by Canute Dorisz, an insincerely jolly fat man of



questionable hygienic competence. It is widely believed that Dorisz is merely the public face of the Staggering Stallion and that most of its profits find their way into Malken's pockets.

Where to stay in Liara

The aforementioned Staggering Stallion (common quality rooms, poor quality meals) is a lodging option for the truly desperate, but the chances of awakening with one's purse intact are slim. Of better repute is the Green Grail Inn (good quality rooms, common quality meals). The Green Grail accepts no lodgers after nightfall, and none of the more illicit entertainments are offered within its walls, making theft or violence a rarity. This also makes it relatively unpopular, so those who arrive early enough to gain admittance should have no trouble securing a room. The rider's stew at the Grail is superb, and the pear brandy more than satisfactory.

Liara (small city): Conventional; ALLN; 15,000 gp limit; Assets 5,692,500 gp; Population 7,590; Isolated (humans 90%, halfling 5%, gnomes 4%, other 1%).

Authority Figures: Mayor Ulf Tryggaar, male human Ari6; Captain Stig Andor, male human Ftr8 (captain of the city guard).

Important Characters: Canute Dorisz, male human Rog3; Thyra Torsdatter, female human Exp6 (horse merchant).

Castle Faerhaaven

As I traveled through Nova Vaasa, I attempted to gain audiences with the heads of the Five Families, only to be rebuffed or ignored, as the aristocrats of Nova Vaasa have little interest in academic matters. In several instances, I considered using magical means of persuasion to get past the guards and manservants that invariably blocked my way, but considering the prevailing hostility toward the arcane in this land I thought better of it.

Restraining yourself out of fear of your inferiors? How disappointing! I had thought you had more of the will to power in you than this, my little scholar.

Fortunately, as my survey of this land was drawing close to an end, one of the patriarchs did finally agree to meet with me, and a small contin-

gent of guardsmen escorted me from Liara to Castle Faerhaaven.

Faerhaaven is an impressive structure, its strong walls of stone surrounded on all sides by a wide moat. A stout barbican guards the only drawbridge, and two turrets loom menacingly over the castle gate. Faerhaaven was clearly constructed with function over form in mind, and the brightly colored pennants swaying from the turrets and towers do little to make it seem friendly or inviting.

Sir Tristen Hiregaard himself proved both friendly and inviting, almost suspiciously so. I believe he was trying to seduce me, which would certainly be in keeping with his reputation. While he may be robust and handsome for a man of his advanced years, I found him to be smug and self-satisfied. Still, he was forthcoming enough about Nova Vaasa's history and politics, at least when he was not attempting to steer the conversation toward his ambitions or my appearance.

When I attempted to question him about the infamous Malken, his shadowy nemesis, his mood darkened, and his responses to my question became clipped and recalcitrant. I believe mentioning the crimelord wounded Hiregaard's pride, as Malken's influence continues to increase despite the best efforts of Hiregaard and the watchmen of Liara to capture him. Afterward, it soon became clear that Hiregaard had tired of my presence, so I gracefully excused myself and returned to Liara.

Final Thoughts

It would be the height of understatement to say that I had grown weary of Nova Vaasa by the time my travels through it drew to a close. The dusty scent of the plains clings with a persistence that almost matches that of the foul stench of the cities. The people were no better, and it was with a great sense of relief that I left them and their seething emotions and simmering discontent behind.

I am now tantalizingly near to completing my survey of the mainland, but first I must cross yet another wretched land of bewitched forests and further perils beyond. Mindful of the challenges ahead, I stopped briefly at a local poorhouse before leaving Liara and made an inexpensive purchase that should ease my passage, so to speak, carrying the whimpering infant out in a bundle under my arm.

As short as the journey from Liara over the border of Tepest is, it did not feel nearly short enough.

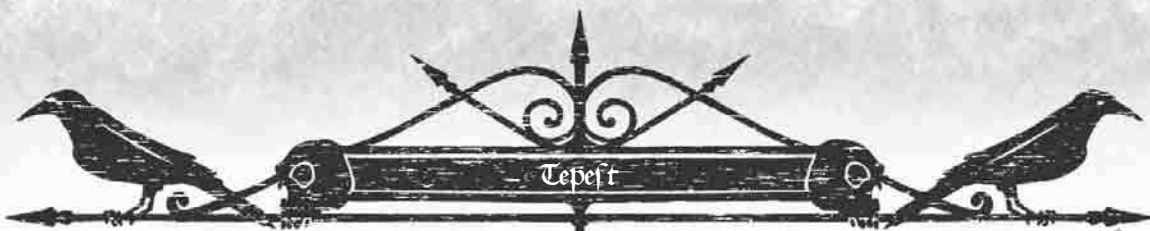




Report Two: Tepest

*The inferno of the living is not something that will be:
if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where
we live every day, that we form by being together.*

— Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*



left Hiregaard's demesne, following the East Timori Road northward from Liara. Just before departing, I had spied a most interesting contraption in Liara's marketplace: a bassinet that could be secured to the back of a saddle, across the top of the saddle bags. The price was reasonable, and it very quickly paid off. The rhythmic motion of my steed lulled the baby, which I purchased before leaving Nova Vaasa, to sleep far more quickly than I think would have been possible if I had tried to carry it in a saddlebag.

Less than a five minute ride out of the city, I encountered the last of Sir Tristan's tax collectors, and behind them rose a dark wall of ancient trees — the wooded lands of Tepest. After taking my coin, the older of the two officers warned me, "Them woods ain't no place for a lady and babe to travel. Dunno what's worse — the screwy priests or the goblins."

I told him that I was only going as far as Kellee, and that I should reach the town well before nightfall. He warned me to stay on the main road and to not trust any signs that might say otherwise. I assured him I would.

I thought his warning a bit strange until I came upon a leaning, weathered signpost after riding through the deepening forest for about half an hour. A sign carved with words in Vaasi and Balok pointed toward a narrow, partly overgrown trail and read "To Kellee." Another sign, likewise in two languages, pointed ahead on the road and carried the legend, "To Wormwood Hollow." While only the most naïve traveler would believe that leaving the main road would be the proper path to Kellee, someone was obviously tampering with the road signs. I double-checked my pistols, just in case I was forced to deal with "screwy priests or goblins" before the day was out.

Two hours later, after stopping once to feed the baby, the unfortunate cost of safe passage beyond Tepest, I crested a hill and looked down upon a crossroads and a bridge across the South Dnar River... and a pair of wolves that appeared to be feeding on the carcass of some black animal. The dark and twisted forest had already reminded me of Verbrek, so I wasn't amused by the appearance of the wolves. I drew my pistols and fired both of them, one after the other. The shots struck the ground near the wolves, my first shot making them jump and the second sending them fleeing in terror.

Tepest at a Glance

Cultural Level: Early Medieval (6)

Ecology: Full

Climate/Terrain: Temperate forest and hills, with tiny pockets of magically induced permanent spring, fall or winter

Year of Formation: 691 BC

Population: 15,500

Races: 98% Human, 1% goblin, 1% other; various breeds of fey and shadow fey

Human Ethnic Groups: 99% Tepestani, 1% other (Darkonian, Nova Vaasan)

Languages: Tepestani*, Darkonese, Goblin, Sylvan, Vaasi

Religions: Belenus*, Ezra, the Lawgiver

Government: Aristocratic and theocratic independent settlements

Ruler: None.

Darklords: The Three Hags

Ignoring the wakened and screaming baby, I spurred my horse onward down the hill. At the crossroads, I noticed yet another clumsy attempt to mislead travelers: The road sign had been twisted around so the arrows reading "To Kellee" and "To Liara" were pointing where the ones reading "To Wretchwood" and "To Wormwood" should be.

A single glance at what the wolves had been feeding on revealed that I was in error with my first conclusion. It was not the carcass of an animal; it was a blacked, burned humanoid corpse. I dismounted, tied the horse to the signpost, and examined the area. Growing weary of the baby's wailing, I took it into my arms and made soothing noises.

Just off the path leading into Wormwood (or to Kellee, if the sign could be believed), I found a shallow grave. The body's charred head was still within it. The site had not been uncovered by animals, but was neatly exhumed with a shovel. Returning to the body, I noticed that its hands were missing and that its ribcage was cracked open and its heart removed. The cuts were clean, however — the wolves had simply been feeding on what was left behind.

Preliminary research during my final evening in Liara had already told me that the superstitious, backward woods-folk of Tepest were led by priests of





Belenus who spent their days hunting imagined evils and their nights burning at the stake those they deemed wicked. However, looking at the state of this body — exhumed and mutilated in a way that could only indicate someone was practicing the darkest of magic — made me wonder if the evils hunted by Belenus's faithful were all that imaginary.

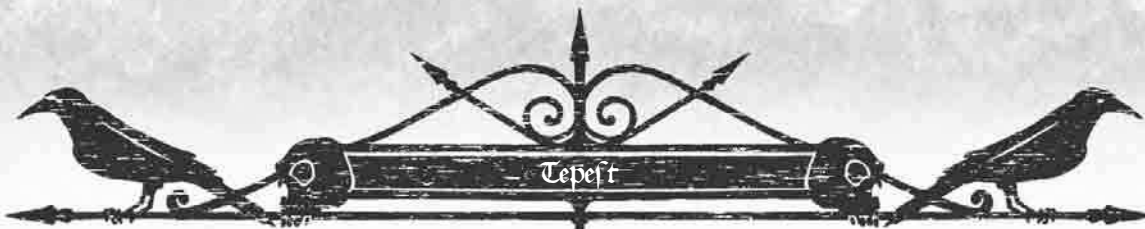
Landscape

Tepest is a land of ancient forests nestled in jagged, rocky hills of the Timori Pass, rising from Nova Vaasa's northern province toward the Mountains of Misery in the west; the barren, abandoned haunt of the legendary banshee Tristessa in the north; and the yawning chasm where once the central Balinoks rose with the realms of Markovia and G'Henna. Most of the land is between 500 and 800 feet above the level of the Sea of Sorrows, but a single peak rises to nearly 1,500 feet in the north. Winters and summers in this land are short and mild, with the spring season separating the two by weeks of uninterrupted rain. Autumn comes early in Tepest — the leaves were already turning red and gold when I arrived — and is slow to relinquish

itself to winter. The slow decent into winter allows crops the time needed to ripen. The long fall season is also marked by unpredictable weather, particularly along the Blackmist River, south of Lake Kronov. Here, the clash of warm winds from the Nova Vaasan plains and cold air streaming down from the Balinoks where the Shadow Rift narrows can cause violent storms to explode upon the hillsides with little or no notice. This same clash of temperatures causes the eternally overcast skies.

Two of the three most important settlements in Tepest, Briggdarrow and Viktal, are located on the southern shores of Lake Kronov. This large, clear mountain lake is either fed by or feeds all the white-water rivers that rush through Tepest. The Tepestani claim the lake is home to a monster they name the Avanc. I collected six different descriptions of the creature from bards and two additional and very different ones from what passed for a library in Kellee. One must assume that either Lake Kronov is the most monster infested body of water in the Core or several different beasts migrate to and from the lake via the rivers. Or the multitude of descriptions of the Avanc is a symptom of the shaky relationship between the Tepestani and the concept of historical accuracy.





While Tepest looks to most outsiders like one big forest that features minor breakpoints marked by impassible gorges and rivers, the Tepestani see their land as containing many different forests.

North of the South Dnar and Lynn Kathryn Rivers and reaching to the mountainous frontier with Darkon is Wretchwood. The majority of the realm's thorps and tiny hamlets can be found here. Between the South Dnar and Lynn Kathryn Rivers and Lake Kronov is Tanglewood, one of two areas in the land where cloudberries — which are used to make a highly valued wine — are grown.

West of the Crying River, north of Lake Kronov and stretching to the barren slopes of Mount Lament lies the Goblinwood, with the Wytchwood immediately to the south. A series of barren ridges and the East Timori Road separate these two forests. Few human settlements exist in these woods, as they are home to the largest number of goblins and fey.

The forests south of the South Dnar River have dangerous reputations among the Tepestani. From the headwaters of the Vaughn Dnar River to the thinning forest that gives way to the grasslands ruled by Tristan Hiregaard, the forest is known as the Wormwood. It serves as home to Vaasan outlaws, goblins, and enclaves of Hala's witches; it is also home to the singularly vilest

creature I encountered during my time in Tepest. South of Viktal, between the Vaughn Dnar and Blackmist Rivers is a forest the Tepestani call the Blackwood, though it is noted on most maps by its Vistani name, *Brujamonte*, which translates roughly as Sorceress' Wood or Hag's Wood. Some say even goblins hesitate to enter, and humans stay close to Viktal and the hills along the Blackmist River. Brujamonte is rumored to harbor creatures so twisted and evil that even the Vistani will not enter it.

One curious note about the Blackmist River is that prior to the Great Upheaval, it fed Lake Kronov from a spring that existed within the Brujamonte. Now the river flows *from* Lake Kronov, spilling into the Shadow Rift as a great waterfall. The water level in Lake Kronov has not appeared to change, though. I attribute this phenomenon either to the appearance of the rocky tor named Castle Island, or perhaps the spring that was once in the Brujamonte has moved to the bottom of the lake, as Markovia was reportedly moved to the far reaches of the Sea of Sorrows. The direction of the river's flow and the lack of impact on Lake Kronov may bear further study and analysis at a later date. I doubt it is something that will be of much interest to you, my patron.





The puzzle of the Blackmist River may relate to "our" quest, little scholar, but you are correct in dismissing it as something that you can address later. As informed as you are becoming, you still cannot relate to the forces that manipulating the destinies of us all. And those forces do not act without cause.

The easiest and safest way to reach the important settlements in the realm is to travel along the East Timori Road, which is patrolled regularly by rangers from Viktal and militiamen from Kellee. The Timori Road once stretched unbroken from Lekar in Falkovnia to Egertus in Nova Vaasa, providing a major alternative to the Svalich Pass through Barovia, despite the goblin bands that often raided caravans. The Great Upheaval severed that trade route. Now the East Timori Road just leads off the edge of the Shadow Rift, ending in a folly called the Descent. (See my report on the Shadow Rift for specific discussion of this area.)

The road winds its way repeatedly across the South Dnar. The bridges are high stone structures that date from ancient times, built over gaps where cliffs lean in close to each other. Copious tales speak of creatures lairing under the bridges and emerging to exact tolls from travelers. I encountered no such monsters during my travels, although I did dispatch a particularly pathetic bandit who thought he had found an easy target in a woman traveling alone.

The settlements of Tepest are not much to look at. They consist of scattered collections of tiny one- and two-family homes, the simplest of which are sod huts constructed over shallow pits. The largest and nicest homes are whitewashed, wooden structures with thatched roofs, though they are rarely found outside Kellee, Viktal and Briggdarrow. One can usually tell what a family's main source of income is by the presence of pens holding sheep or goats, fishing boats, or racks with recently skinned pelts near the house. Virtually none of the structures have more than one story. The occasional barn, temple, the inns of the three major settlements, and the compound that houses the leaders of the Inquisition in Viktal rise above the low profiles. The mostly roofless temples (so that

Belenus may attend services devoted to him) are typically the only stone structures in a community.

What passes for goblin settlements have even fewer features worth noting. For the most part, the goblins live in caves enlarged with tunneling and surrounded with well-hidden traps. The cave and tunnel complexes are usually home to three or four extended families, and all feature at least two exits so the residents can escape in case wild beasts or more dangerous predators get past the traps. On rare occasion, built under direction of the chief himself prior to his death, the goblins have constructed crude cairns for powerful tribal chiefs. Cairns often feature more elaborate traps, as well as two entrances like with dwellings. They are usually built from large stacked boulders that are then buried.

Goblin Traps

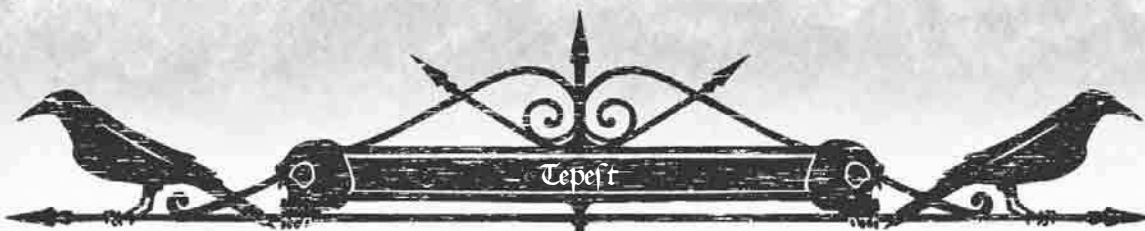
One of the major risks of traveling off the main road through Tepest are the many traps set in the woods by the goblin tribes. They are built either to trap game or to defend the goblins' homes from attack. The following list features the types of traps the goblins commonly construct. For details, see the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Common Wilderness Traps: **CR 1** — basic arrow, camouflaged 10-foot pit, poison dart, poison needle, rolling rock, spear, swinging log (as block); **CR 2** — camouflaged 20-foot pit, javelin, large net, spiked 20-foot pit, tripping chain, well-camouflaged 10-foot pit filled with water and leeches, well-camouflaged 10-foot pit; **CR 3** — hail of needles, poisoned arrow, spiked 20-foot pit; **CR 4** — collapsing tree (as column), poisoned dart, wide-mouthed spiked pit; **CR 5** — swinging spiked log (as falling block).

Scattered throughout the countryside, either on the edge of the pastures where Tepestani run their sheep during the day or deep within the most overgrown parts of the forest, stand austere single- or two-story stone structures. Decaying and overgrown, these structures once served as keeps for the axelords who ruled Tepest in ancient times, and this type of architecture died with them. The Tepestani studiously avoid these buildings — to the point of pretending they don't even see those that stand near their sheep pastures — and the remoter ones have become lairs for the more powerful of the goblin clans or for fey.

Near several of these structures, I found ancient standing stones, the tallest of which stood over six





feet in height. They all radiated faint magic of the abjuration school, but I was unable to discern anything about what their purpose or function may have been. At one time, the stones all featured runes that I assume were magical in nature, but they are all defaced by crude representations of humanoids and game animals and are now indecipherable. Tepestani bards claimed that the stones once ensured the blessings of the gods upon the homes of the axelords, but they lost their magical power when the fey brought ruin to the land some 500 years ago.

flora

Tepest is covered with thick, ancient forests that consist mostly of hardwoods (predominately oak, beech and hazelnut), punctuated with the occasional, towering evergreen (spruce or pine). Although the trees are of varieties common throughout the central and south-central lands, they grow in a unique fashion that lends Tepest a sinister identity completely its own. The trees grow in strange and bent fashions, with every oak and beech tree having gnarled trunks and branches twisted like the arthritic hands of an ancient peasant. Even the pines appear oddly warped.

Despite the tortured appearance of the trees, they grow strong and healthy. Their crowns are thick and tangled overhead, preventing what sun that breaks through the ever-present cloud cover from ever reaching the forest floor. In this eternal gloom, a wide variety of mushrooms and mosses flourish.

Every so often, wide clearings break the gloom of the forest. In the spring, the clearings are explosions of color. Strangely, in some of these clearings spring and summer seem to last longer than in the forests around them. I witnessed one such clearing where flowers bloomed even as the leaves on the surrounding trees were golden and the ground beneath them gleamed with early morning frost. The Tepestani believe these clearings are home to the fey and refuse to frequent them until they have been "cleansed" by priests of Belenus. Once this cleansing is accomplished, however, such clearings become popular places for herders to graze their sheep and goats. I saw no evidence of fey in the clearings, nor could I detect any residual magical energies in the clearing I visited that might explain the anomaly.

Three noteworthy types of plants grow only in the hills of Tepest: the cloudberry, fairy stools, and *Witchingourds* (also called witching gourds).

*Cloudberry*s grow on low, prickly bushes found in small patches throughout Tepest. Difficult to

cultivate, its only successfully farmed plantings thrive on the steep hillsides along the Blackmist River. Otherwise, the plants grow on the edges of small bogs in the southern woods and along the southern shores of Lake Kronov. Every autumn, small groups of Tepestani visit the scattered patches to harvest a few pails of berries. Originally used in a wine traditionally consumed during fall festivals, the berries have become a valuable commodity over the past twenty years owing to the increasing popularity of fruity cloudberry wine with the nobles of Nova Vaasa.

The tiny hamlet of Linde, which controls the only concentrated cloudberry farms, is steadily gaining fame for cloudberry wine. Most of the community's output is sold to Vaasan merchants. I believe that if Linde was easier to access, it would already rival the importance of Viktal and Briggdarrow. There would probably also be more cloudberry patches planted along the Blackmist River if not for the many dangers involved in harvesting them in the fall. As I mentioned previously, the hills along the Blackmist River are legendary for the severe storms and unpredictable windblasts that each year blow three or four villagers off the steep slopes and into the icy, fast-flowing river far below.

Fairy stools are small, red-speckled, tan mushrooms that grow quickly in circles, lines or spiral patterns when exposed to arcane magic. The Tepestani are convinced that the mushrooms only grow where fey have practiced their corrupt spellcasting, but my experiments indicated that a single fairy stool multiplies and sprouts into dozens within mere hours of exposure to any magic from the conjuration, divination, enchantment and transmutation schools. The mushrooms grow in spiral or circular patterns in response to spells which cover an area, form into straight lines along the path made by a precision spell such as *magic missile*, and in a combination of the two general growth patterns when spells that affect an area are cast well away from the caster.

Amusingly, the Tepestani also believe the mushrooms grow where fey have danced or traveled, springing from the ground in order to give them places to rest. The Inquisition looks for the presence of fairy stools near homes to determine who in communities may be consorting with the fey. They also use shallow trays containing fairy stools as slow, inaccurate *detect magic* devices, passing them back and forth across a prone subject. If more fairy stools sprout in the tray, the subject is assumed to be either under the sway of the fey, an ally of the fey, or perhaps even a fey himself.





Wichtingourds are small gourds filled with seeds that mature in early fall. They grow throughout Tepest's forests, and the Tepestani believe that they also appear where the fey have been. However, the Inquisition does not use them as "fey detectors." Instead, the common folk turn the wichtingourds to practical purposes. They dry them out and use them as rattles — highly effective ones at that, as I witnessed several crying children be soothed to sleep with but a few shakes of these "witching gourd" rattles. The people also believe that the rattles can offer protection from fey; if a gourd is broken open and its seeds scattered, any fey who comes upon them must stop and count all the seeds.

I examined both live and dried wichtingourds with *detect magic*, and I detected very faint enchantment magic on the plant. I did not detect any magic in the ground near the wichtingourds, nor in any nearby water sources or other plants. Perhaps there is some truth to the Tepestani belief that the plants are somehow related to fairy beings, but that is pure speculation. I gathered several samples of the plant so that I can research it further when I once again find myself with time and a decent laboratory. There may well be hidden magical applications in these humble-looking plants. As mentioned above, I observed that infants were calmed extremely rapidly by wichtingourd rattles — and I think that I felt myself relaxing in their presence as well. More research is needed, however. I will send you some samples of this mysterious plant, my patron.

Quaint minor magic, nothing more. I hope you don't allow intellectual and arcane curiosity to sidetrack you too much from your real task — and that you refrain from shipping me too many additional presents in the future.

fauna

The forests of Tepest support the standard range of wildlife one expects to find in a region of this type. Game animals are plentiful, with deer and ermine being most common. Lake Kronov teems with sturgeon and pike, and a fair percentage of the residents of Briggdarrow and Viktal survive through fishing. Many other Tepestani maintain small herds of sheep and goats, keeping them in pens close to their homes during the night where they can easily defend them from the many predators that lurk in the woods.

Fairy Stools and Wichtingourds

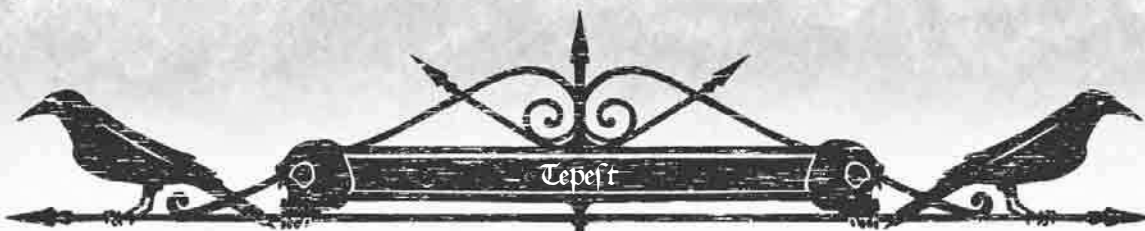
Fairy Stools: These mushrooms are extremely sensitive to arcane magical energy from the conjuration, divination, enchantment and transmutation schools; even the presence of beings who have the ability to shapeshift — for example, certain kinds of fey, undead, and all lycanthropes — cause the mushrooms to accelerate their growth patterns. Fully grown mushrooms double in size, while 2d8 additional fairy stools appear for every 10 feet of an area of effect spell's radius, and/or along the line between where the spell was cast and where it took effect. The mushrooms sprout in 2d4 hours.

Additional mushrooms sprout when dirt containing fairy stools is held near beings who can assume more than one shape (such as lycanthropes or pakas) or who are natural spellcasters (such as sorcerers, or any creature that possesses spell-like abilities) for 2d4 minutes. This also happens if beings fitting the description above spend more than 2d4 minutes stationary within 2 feet of fairy stools.

Wichtingourds: When dried and used as rattles, the mild magic inherent to wichtingourds calms living creatures to the point where they may fall asleep. Anyone, including the user, within a 5-foot radius of a rattling wichtingourd must roll a DC 8 Will save or be fatigued for 1d4 rounds; if already fatigued, a successful DC 8 Will save is required to avoid falling asleep. A new saving throw must be rolled each round. Creatures who cannot hear are immune to the effect.

Wichtingourds also have an odd effect on any fey or outsider. If a gourd is broken open and its seeds spilled in a 10-foot line or 5-foot radius circle, any creatures of the above mentioned type must pick up and count all the seeds (DC 15 Dexterity check to pick up all the seeds and DC 15 Concentration check to make an accurate tally) before they can cross the area.





Predators in Tepest include a variety of cats and snakes, as well as wolverines, wolves and bears. More remarkably, Tepest is home to particularly twisted sub-breeds of normal predators. Whatever causes the trees of Tepest to appear so tortured and misshapen, it seems to impact the meat-eating wildlife as well. The Tepestani call these animals alternatively “autumn beasts” and “goblin beasts.” The goblins seem adept at training them and use some of them as mounts or guard animals. I detail my observations on the “goblin beasts” in the Attached Notes.

Avians are also well represented, both predatory and otherwise. Hawks, sparrows and ravens seemed particularly plentiful.

As for unnatural creatures, Tepest has more than its fair share. Like other lands that border on the Shadow Rift, an ever-increasing variety of fey call the forests home, adding to an apparently already larger-than-normal fairy population. Fairly

inoffensive fey such as sprites and nymphs can be found here as in any other wild forestlands, but dangerous fairies such as boowrays and bakhna rakhna may also be encountered. I assume that these and other fey are the ones who first gave rise to the many legends that the Tepestani whisper to one another in fearful tones. I think only within the last decade or so has the influx of creatures from the Shadow Rift raised the threat posed by fey to anywhere near what the Tepestani imagine it to be.

History



inpointing when Tepest appeared is an easy matter, as this event is well-documented by the peoples of both Darkon and Nova Vaasa, yet everything but the most recent events in the land are thoroughly entangled in superstition, religious beliefs and pure imaginative storytelling.

The most significant difficulty with untangling Tepest’s true history is a near total lack of written records. Until the past decade, the Tepestani were generally illiterate and kept no written history. I relied to a large extent on crumbling murals in the abandoned homes of the axelords and on songs handed down from bard to bard over the generations. The pitiful little libraries in Kellee and Viktal were absolutely no help. While the Inquisition is now striving to spread literacy, it will be a long time before there are any records of use to scholars.

Tepestani history begins with their creation myth. They believe that their gods created the world one season at a time, starting with Spring, and populated each season with its own beings. Some versions of the story say that each season was originally an attempt by individual gods at making separate worlds and that eventually the gods combined their creations into one world. The traditional Tepestani calendar starts in Spring as well; they only adopted the Barovian calendar some three decades ago.

Regardless of the version, the creation starts with Spring. Along with Spring, the gods created the Children of Spring — the fey. These immortal nature spirits neither knew nor experienced death, so to this day they have no respect for life or death. In the versions that state each season was the work of different gods, Spring is credited as the work of Daghda (goddess of fertility and the forest), Diancecht (god of healing), and Lugh (god of magic and secrets).

Local Animals and Native Horrors

Wildlife: CR 1/10 — toad; CR 1/6 — donkey; raven; sheep; CR 1/4 — cat; goat; owl; pony; weasel; CR 1/3 — dog; hawk; snake, Tiny viper; CR 1/2 — badger; snake, Small viper; CR 1 — deer; dog, riding; horse, heavy; horse, light; mule; wolf; CR 2 — bear, black; boar; wolverine; CR 4 — bear, brown.

Monsters: CR 1/8 — monstrous centipede, Tiny; CR 1/4 — goblin; *goblin rat*; *goblin toad*; leech, witchbane†; monstrous centipede, Small; monstrous spider, Tiny; CR 1/3 — goblin; CR 1/2 — badger; geist†; *goblin cat*; *goblin centipede*, Medium; *goblin owl*; *goblin weasel*; gremishka†; CR 1 — bakhna rakhna†; changeling (fey kin)†; *goblin badger*; *goblin dog*, riding; *goblin eagle*; *goblin snake*, Small viper; *goblin spider*, Medium; plant, fearweed†; satyr; sprite, grig; sprite, nixie; CR 2 — plant, crawling ivy†; ravenkin†, skin thief; CR 3 — arak, teg†; baobhan sith†; boowray†; doppelganger, dread†; drowning†; dryad; *goblin bear*, black; *goblin boar*; impersonator; lycanthrope, wereraven†; CR 4 — arak, powrie; ettercap; hag, sea; plant, lashweed†; CR 5 — arak, shee; arak, sith; *goblin bear*, brown; hag, green; loup-garou, lowland†; odem†; paka†; sprite, pixie; CR 6 — hag, annis; troll, dread†; shambling mound; will o’ wisp; CR 7 — grim†; nymph; wolfwere†; CR 8 — plant, treant; rushlight†; CR 9 — plant, undead treant†.

Note: Italicized creatures feature the goblin beast template detailed in the “Attached Notes.” The Three Hags control all goblin beasts.

Report Two

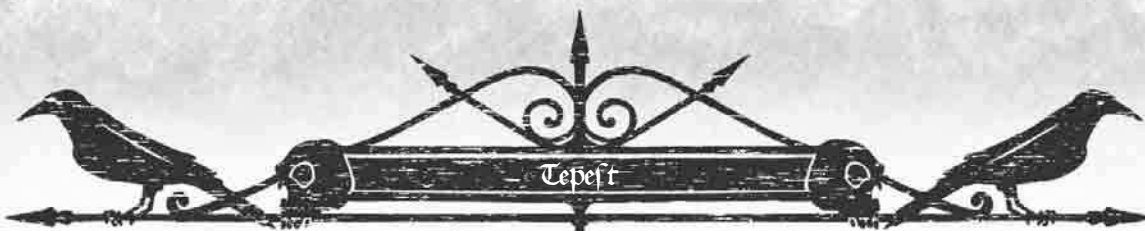
Summer and Summer's Children came next — mortal men and women, and natural animals. All versions agree that the gods felt giving the fey immortality was a mistake and therefore created Summer's Children with a limited life span. Since Summer's Children experience all facets of life and death, they develop an appreciation and understanding of the joys and the pains that make life what it is. The Tepestani consider summer's children to be the only "trustworthy" type of spirit. The versions that credit seasons to individual gods say that Belenus (god of the sun) was the main architect of Summer and of men and women, while his consort Brigantia (goddess of nature, industry and agriculture) and her brother Manannan mac Lir (god of the water and aquatic creatures) created the animals and helped with defining how mortal beings moved through their life-spans.

Autumn and Autumn's Children followed. This season came about because some of the gods felt they could improve upon Summer but failed miserably in their effort; none could match the splendid creation that resulted when all the gods worked in consort. The creatures of autumn are all inferior and twisted reflections of Summer's Children — goblins, hags, lycanthropes and other monstrous beings. In the "separate worlds" myth, Autumn and its children are

the creation of Arawn (goddess of death) and Morrigan (goddess of discord and war) because they were jealous of Summer and felt they could create a superior world. Unfortunately, the fundamentally vile natures of both deities seeped into their creation, making it a place of death populated by unnatural, hate-filled creatures.

Last in the order of creation was Winter, as well as Winter's Children. Interestingly, all creation myths credit this creation to Math Mathonwy (god of dark magic and secrets), apart from the rest of the gods. Most commonly, it is believed that he initiated his creation as an expression of spite toward the other gods, because none of them consulted him during their efforts. Other interpretations suggest that Math Mathonwy was attempting to perfect Spring and Spring's Children, but that his own cold and evil nature tainted his creation beyond any ability to support life, or that he was creating the ultimate repository for the evil magic and secrets that he wanted to preserve. To this end, he had snow blanket Winter and created the undead and elemental beings — strange reflections of Spring's Children, eternal as well, but utterly devoid of life. (An interesting note about the Tepestani is that, unlike many other peoples of the world, they do not worry much about the undead;





they tend to be of the opinion that if the undead are left alone, they won't trouble the living.)

In the "separate worlds" version of the Tepestani creation tale, Belenus visited all the various creations and decided that if the gods combined their worlds into a single place, it would be a more perfect creation — a place where Summer's Children in particular could flourish. All the gods agreed, and so the world was born. In both versions, the gods agree that in order to avoid the problems that arose with the Children of Spring on a cosmic scale, their world would eventually die. The Tepestani believe that subsequently all of history follows the course of a single "year," as seen from the vantage of the gods. The world will follow the course of that single year, and then it will end.

According to the Tepestani, we currently live in the Autumn of creation. Untold eons ago, the fey reigned without challenge and kept mortals in fear with chaotic and unpredictable magic. Eventually, mighty heroes arose among the mortals and forced the fey into the wildest depths of the forest. As the fey retreated, magic became more orderly, and humans became increasingly more powerful and important in the world.

With the retreat of the fey, the Summer of the World began — and it is likewise at this point that I believe the chronicle of the Tepestani moves from myth into false history. There is little difference between myth and false history in this culture, however, as no written records exist aside from murals within the decaying structures once inhabited by the now-extinct ruling class of the land. Still, the combination of the structures, murals and copious bardic songs adds up to *something* that passes for a historical record, muddled and false as it may be.

During these earliest chronicled times, the Tepestani lived in numerous clans, each ruled by a *tuatiarna*, or clan lord. The title literally means "axelord," after the ornate weapon a clan head wields, much as a king holds his scepter; yet unlike kings, a *tuatiarna's* power seldom extended farther than the reach of his weapon. The axelords were feuding constantly, with their clans gaining and losing power quicker than the seasons changed and accomplishing nothing of lasting consequence.

Under the axelords, the Tepestani lived in a rigid, strict society. The clans did not mix, and the sexes had specific roles and duties from which no deviation was tolerated. Among the common folk, men hunted, fished and tilled the fields, while women tended to home, hearth and children. The

tuatiarna were all male and charged with making war: it was their place to protect the clan by defeating its enemies and expanding its power, drafting common men into armies during particularly troubling times. Their wives did not rule; instead, they convened with the gods, providing spiritual advice. These clerics were called *cailleaigh*, which translates into "wise women."

This culture permitted no social mobility and held absolutely no doubt regarding what roles the sexes had. Sons and daughters were equally important to both the rulers and the peasants, because each had important duties to fill in the community. Yet the society would never allow a woman to rule, nor would it tolerate a male who claimed to communicate with the gods.

Unsurprisingly, a society so inflexible was also brittle and doomed eventually to crumble. What is remarkable about Tepest is the totality with which their ancient society seems to have been completely erased by the passage of time — all that remains are the murals and the structures inhabited by the axelords and their families. Modern-day Tepest has a far looser social structure, with men and women both serving as clerics. Men may be somewhat stronger physically and generally prefer fishing and hunting, while women make natural choices to care for children. Yet there are no social restrictions on who can serve the gods as clerics or who may sit on the Council of Elders that passes for leadership in most Tepestani settlements and towns. The only obvious echo that seems to remain from the time of the axelords can be found in the courtship rituals of the land (more on this subject below).

Tepestani bards tell that the ancient order was brought low by the Seduction of the Fey. Trying to ruin humanity and reassert their dominance over the world, the fey crept back from the deepest, untamed wilds and secretly approached the *cailleach* of each clan. The fey promised each *cailleach* that they would teach her how to tap into the raw magical power of the Weave, manipulating it without the shepherding of the gods. With this vast power, they would be able to crush their family's foes and end the feuds forever.

The Tepestani agree that all but a few of the *cailleaigh* refused the temptation, knowing no good could come of it. How many wise women accepted the offer differs in the telling, but in most versions it's three. Those women did learn the magic of the Weave — which, in my analysis, largely resembles



arcane magic in the tales — but the power was too much. The *cailleaigh* could no more contain the power of the Weave than a child's dam built of pebbles and mud could hold back a flash flood. The power of the Weave was relentless, all-consuming. The *cailleaigh* did indeed become mighty, but they also became hideous crones, their bodies warped by the merciless power of nature. The corrupted *cailleaigh* retreated to the forests. Today, the literal translation of "cailleaigh" has been abandoned for a new meaning: *witch*. It is also the word that the Tepestani use to describe the monstrous humanoids known as *hags*.

An intriguing detail to note is that the Weave is not a term typically used when discussing magic, particularly not magic of the gods. Occult scholars tend to refer to a theoretical energy web that is the very fabric of reality as the Weave, and the Witches of Hala claim that they are manipulating this Weave when working their magic. Furthermore, Hala's followers and hags are, by all accounts, mortal enemies. We are clearly seeing elements of what are recognized facts in our world, so there is a remote possibility that the corruption of the *cailleaigh* is the seminal event that marks the true origin of Tepest. However, I believe this event is far too distant chronologically from the first external records of Tepest's existence; the Tepestani mark the Seduction of the Fey as having occurred 20 generations — roughly 500 years — ago. There are reports of domains existing in isolation for centuries (such as Barovia), but I consider the lack of references to immense and ever-present fogbanks around the edges of the land to be evidence that the Tepestani did not experience such isolation.

Despite my doubts, I must acknowledge that the Tepestani tales grow more specific from this point forward and that there are even more signs that the realm's true history perhaps did start five centuries ago. First, the Tepestani believe that with the elimination of the *cailleaigh*, the fey managed to draw the world from Summer into Autumn, where it remains today. Second, the Tepestani also believe that the forests around them started to change at this point. In the beginning, only a few isolated trees in a handful of groves took on eerie, twisted appearances. As the seasons wore on, however, more and more trees transformed, and soon all the forests of the world were blighted and hideous. Third, new and hideous creatures emerged from the transformed forests: goblins, goblin beasts and worse beings — Children of Autumn, all. Initially, the hostility of these beings was focused on the three clans whose *cailleaigh* had

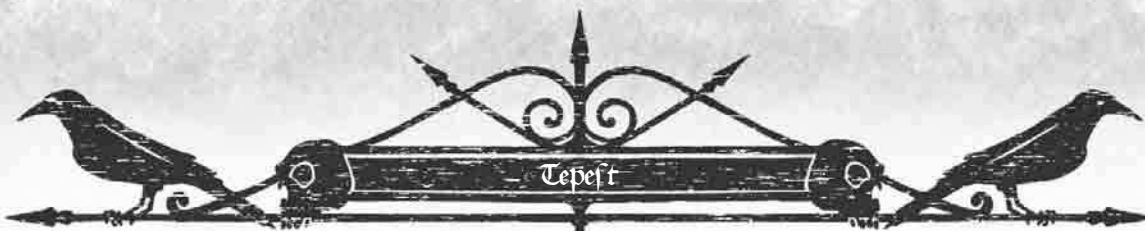
resisted the fey. Within weeks, those clans were exterminated and the Children of Autumn turned to attack the rest.

As ever more monsters beset the clans of Tepest, the old feuds faded away as the axelords were forced to band together in order to survive. New centralized communities grew up along a more easily traversable path through Tepest that would evolve into what is now called the East Timori Road. The old ways faded in the face of a new reality, the power of the axelords waned, and slowly, over the course of generations, modern Tepest came into shape.

Unlike most other realms I've visited, I could find no clear moment, no seminal event that the people of Tepest recognize as their joining with our world. The people had been under siege in their communities with only the barest minimum of contact with their closest neighbors. This situation lasted for so long that the only way to determine the internal timing of the land's emergence lies in the recollection of a toothless, borderline senile old woman I spoke to in Kellee. She remembered an autumn nearly seventy years ago when the harvest was ruined as the ripe fruits and vegetables suddenly burst open with worms and flies. A similarly aged but somewhat more coherent herdsman in Viktal told how he remembered a season as a child when many goats gave red milk or went blind and that the livestock's young were born deformed. This season of horror seems to coincide chronologically with the recorded appearance of Tepest in 691 BC, so I assume that these events were a kind of metaphysical birthing pangs of a great as-of-yet-unseen evil in Tepest, as if nature itself recoiled from its emergence. Perhaps this is the evil that dwells within the shadows of the *Brujamonte*? Whatever it may be, I could not find any specific reference or evidence of its existence... although I did encounter a candidate for who it might be. More on this female later.

As for the Tepestani, they feared that the awful events of that fall signified their world had entered its Winter. The threat of starvation, however, forced them from their homes to seek food sources. That is when they discovered the lands beyond their forests. Nobles and commoners along the borders in Darkon and Nova Vaasa provided food and other assistance during that winter. The Vaasi lord Tristan Hiregaard was particularly generous in providing aid to the Tepestani, and to this very day the people in and around Kellee ask their gods to bless him in their daily prayers.





Despite their continuing gratitude to Lord Hiregaard, the winter and spring of 691–692 was the first and only time the Tepestani showed any real interest in their neighbors. Even when their land became host to a popular northern trade route when the realm of G'Henna formed, the Tepestani remained in their huts. They were glad to accept coins and bartered goods from the merchant caravans that rumbled through their land, but they were far from welcoming to these strangers. However, this development opened opportunities for industrious business people to build inns along the East Timori Road to serve the many travelers.

The cross-Core trade through Tepest reached its peak around 720. By then, merchants had discovered the land contained dangers as severe as anything they had to deal with in Barovia to the south, and the increasingly erratic nature of the G'Hennan theocracy was also threatening trade. Traffic through Tepest soon balanced out with that along the southern route across the Balinoks, and the boom in Tepest settled in to what may well have become quiet, backwater obscurity of the kind enjoyed by most of the people of Invidia. Then came the Great Upheaval.

In 740 BC, the cataclysm that struck our world on both the physical and metaphysical levels brought several months of terror to the Tepestani. When the initial chaos of the Event passed, the simple woodland folk were horrified to discover that their western and southern neighbors, G'Henna and Markovia, had vanished. Entire lands and all their inhabitants were destroyed, with a gaping chasm full of roiling mists left in their place. To the Tepestani, this was a sign that the world's Winter had finally arrived.

One citizen disagreed. In Viktal, a priest of Belenus named Wyan saw the appearance of the Shadow Rift not as the end of the war, but as the devastating first strike in a resumed campaign by his people's eternal enemies, the fey. The fey, Wyan believed, had succeeded in drawing the world from Summer to Autumn and now were trying to force it into Winter, but they had not yet succeeded. He preached that there was still time to save the rest of the world, if the people of Tepest would join him in resisting the immortal evil of Spring's Children. Quite unintentionally echoing his axelord ancestors, Wyan declared war on the fey and established the Inquisition of Belenus to drive out the foul spirits of the forest before they could seduce more souls or take more lives.

Wyan held his first trials in the spring of 741 BC. The Tepestani, who had huddled behind barred doors and shutters by night, were predictably hesitant at first, reacting to the fiery-eyed inquisitors with unease. Yet one by one, they saw the Inquisition drag supposedly evil fey and those who consorted with them into the light, drawing confessions and performing swift executions. Gradually, they were convinced. By 743 BC, the Inquisition had taken root in the hearts of the Tepestani, and for the first time in generations, the people felt they had a hope of defeating the evils arrayed against them.

The severing of the northern trade route made Tepest nearly useless to its neighbors in Nova Vaasa, and the sound of rumbling wagons that had grown common in the summer became rare. When Wyan's Inquisition began to harass any and all foreigners as potential allies of the fey, what little merchant activity remained came to an end. The only exception was in the town of Kellee, which had come under the leadership of a Falkovnian transplant named Gerald Ferrier in 733. He and his family had opened an inn in the town five years before, and he had set himself the goal of making Kellee more open and welcoming to merchants and other visitors to Tepest. With the rise of Wyan's Inquisition, he redoubled those efforts, moving both to weaken the presence of the Church of Belenus in his town while encouraging the presence of priests of the Lawgiver from neighboring Nova Vaasa. Ferrier was not, in his words, going to allow a bunch of superstitious peasants to destroy the future he had worked so hard to build.

A brief power struggle between the faithful of Belenus and Ferrier ensued, but Wyan ultimately judged Ferrier to be righteous (if a bit wrong-headed). Ferrier's organized militia was clearly a boon for all the people of Tepest, as the goblins were attacking shepherds and travelers on the roads with increasing frequency now that the caravans no longer passed through. The mysterious fire that destroyed the local temple of Belenus (with two priests inside) may also have convinced Wyan that any attempts to strong-arm Ferrier and his family were a proverbial bad idea. Ferrier, for his part, muted his criticism of Wyan's Inquisition slightly, but he continued to forbid the Inquisition to act in his town without his express permission. He rarely forbade their investigations, and he only blocked them from moving against foreign visitors to the town.



In the decade from 741 to 751, the Inquisition was the supreme power in Tepest, beyond the boundaries of Ferrier's Kellee. Wise foreigners took to avoiding the place, particularly if they were non-humans. Elves, half-elves and especially halflings were certain to draw the attention of the Inquisition — and they were nearly as certain to be burned at the stake as fey. The same was true of wizards and sorcerers. From the tales I've collected, I believe that no fewer than 23 innocent men and women were burned alive for being "fey" or for "consorting with fey" during those years. Close to 20 others suffered a similar fate, but in those cases, Wyan and his followers properly punished those they defined as guilty.

Despite being the master of a violent religious movement grounded in hysteria and superstition, Wyan can be credited with bringing a certain level of scholarship and effective record keeping to Tepest. Whether inspired by Belenus (as Wyan claims) or by the example of Ferrier's management of Kellee (a far more likely explanation), he has kept written records of every investigation and trial his Inquisition has conducted since the beginning. He has proven as militant in his insistence that the priests of Tepest be literate and keep careful records (of who attends services, who lives in their communities, and who has been sick and healthy) as he has been about rooting out and destroying the insidious fey. The result has been a clear, if biased, record of the realm's most recent history.

The Inquisition reached its most feverish pitch in 751, with the entire domain engulfed in religious fervor. Even the calm enforced by Gerald Ferrier's heavy hand was threatening to crumble as Wyan raised questions about the Falkovnian transplant's loyalty, whether it lay with the fey or with the righteous. Then, a sudden and surprising turn of events caused the faithful of Belenus to pause.

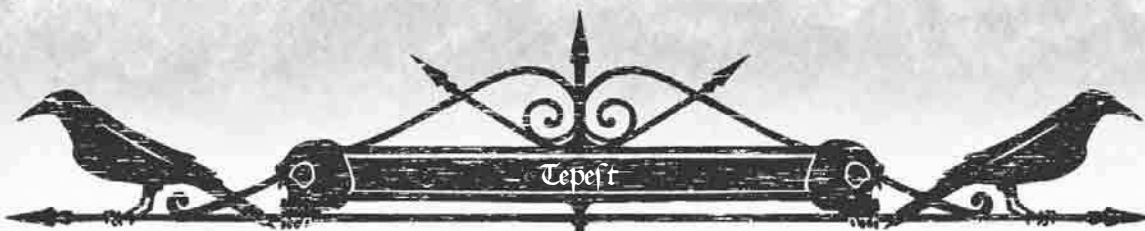
In the early autumn of that year, Wyan's own daughter Lorelei appeared to become the victim of a girl who consorted with fey. During the ensuing trial and investigation, however, it ultimately came to light that Lorelei had consorted with fey — or rather, had been manipulated by them. She had fallen under the influence of a boowray, and the vile creature had subsequently twisted her mind to the point of psychosis and caused her to accuse falsely an innocent girl... a girl whom Wyan had almost executed, and who was spared only through the intervention of outsiders.

Wyan's faith was shaken to its very core. He spent the next two years in near-total isolation, rarely venturing from the compound housing his home and the Temple of Belenus in Viktal. Here, he focused most of his attention on praying for guidance, mercy and healing for his daughter's shattered mind. During this time, he rejected all requests by other Inquisitors to preside over trials of suspected fey and their consorts, but instead released nearly every suspect brought before him.

Despite the best efforts of Wyan's chief lieutenants — primarily a hulking young man named Finn — to continue the hunt for fey and to keep the people fired up, the Inquisition's power started to fade. The Inquisition might well have become a thing of the past, if not for a series of events late in 756 BC.

The rebirth of the Inquisition has its roots, ironically, within Kellee and Gerald Ferrier's bastion of order. In early spring, the widowed Ferrier had taken a second wife; significantly, his bride was the long-time priestess of Belenus in his town. That winter, she gave birth to their first child, but, one night as Ferrier was in Liara on business, she was violently murdered (and partially consumed) together with Ferrier's oldest daughter and a number of residents at the inn he operates. The infant vanished. Swift action on the part of the militia and Ferrier's remaining two children tracked and cornered the murderous kidnapper. Records indicate that the hunters came upon the creature as it was changing forms from Ferrier's barmaid to a hideous, gray-skinned monster and was about to sacrifice the baby under the full moon. They slew the creature on the spot. Inquisitors from Viktal were summoned, and Wyan attended personally to an investigation for the first time in years. His judgement was that the fey had struck back in a fashion so monstrous not seen since the Great Upheaval. He stated that he felt personally responsible for the death of the innocent people in Kellee, primarily the woman who had devoted her life to Belenus. As the year 757 BC dawned, the Inquisition began prowling the communities of Tepest with renewed vigor.

Today, even Kellee offers only limited protection to outsiders in Tepest. Although Ferrier still resists Inquisition activity in his town, the death of his wife has made him less hostile to their efforts. Ferrier and his children, however, question whether it was a fairy creature that was responsible for the butchery at their inn, and I tend to support their conclusions. The descriptions of the creature make



it sound more like a type of doppelganger than one of the fey. The ritual it was about to perform remains mysterious to everyone, and I could not gain any details about it.

Populace



Two major population groups reside in Tepest: the human Tepestani and the goblin tribes. Caliban births occur occasionally (spontaneously or caused by fey curses, according to the Tepestani), but the hideous babies are drowned in the land's rivers and lakes.

I discuss both populations, focusing primarily on the Tepestani, as there is little to say about the goblins except they are debased and foul creatures.

The Tepestani

Humans native to this realm, who are ethnically and linguistically a monolithic group that stands apart from every other population of the Core. Some similarities appear in the gods worshipped by the druids of Forlorn and those worshipped by the Tepestani, but the differences outweigh the similarities. There may be some distant link between the Tepestani and the Forfarrians, but it is one lost deep within either people's false history.

Appearance

The Tepestani have fair skin, more often than not heavily freckled. They burn easily in the sun, even under Tepest's perpetually overcast skies, so wide-brimmed hats are commonly worn by shepherds, fishers and farmers alike. They tend to be shorter than average, with stocky, muscular builds. The most common eye colors are blue or green, and hair colors range from auburn to shades that share hues with boiled carrots, reddish-brown being seen the most.

fashion

Clothing styles for both sexes are simple and basic, with browns, tans and other earthen colors being common. Adornments and embroideries on the clothes are unheard of, except for vests worn by men during fall festivals or wedding ceremonies. Men wear loose-fitting shirts and trousers, while women wear blouses with long skirts. Cloth cords are used to secure clothes rather than belts, straps or fasteners. During colder seasons, both men and women wear heavy furs or thick, woolen cloaks.

Soft boots are worn by both sexes during winter, but most, regardless of age, go barefoot when the weather is warm. The Tepestani rarely wear jewelry or other accessories, though both sexes occasionally wear bronze armbands, earrings or nose rings. Wealthier Tepestani occasionally use silver or bronze brooches to secure cloaks and capes; imports from Nova Vaasa are particularly popular.

Hair styles vary widely between men and women. Men tend to wear their hair shoulder length, but cut it shorter during especially warm summers. The majority of men wear full, long beards and mustaches, which they often keep braided. Women grow their hair to extreme lengths, rarely cutting it past their tenth year. Long, healthy hair is equated with maturity and fertility. In winter, they often wear their hair loose, but it is usually braided during the warm spring and summer months. While I usually find my own long tresses to be a source of frustration when spending time in primitive areas such as Tepest, they served me well here. I discovered that complimenting a woman on her hair was a perfect way to pry an opening in the wall that Tepestani put up between themselves and strangers. By speculating whether or not I should cut off my hair invariably initiated a lengthy conversation that I could direct toward more interesting topics.

Language

When listening to Tepestani — the name of the people is also the name of their language — one might be tempted to think that everyone in the land has bad chest colds, because they are constantly clearing their throats. This, however, is not the case. The phlegmatic sounds are merely part and parcel with the tongue they speak, a language unrelated to any others of the Core.

As mentioned above, Wyan encourages his Inquisition to keep written records. Until he did, there was no written Tepestani language, so he single-handedly developed one. It is a patchwork of the Balok and Vaasi alphabets, applied to the Tepestani tongue with strictly phonetic spellings. There are no formal spelling or grammar rules for this newly created writing system, but there is (at this stage) not much need for them, as the writing system is used to maintain court transcripts. Wyan and other Inquisitors work hard to make sure the Tepestani can read the transcripts and so better learn the Inquisition's teachings. Wyan himself



has been using the writing system to create a series of books on the fey and how to hunt them, but he relies almost equally as heavily on illustrations. If the Inquisition (or merely the priests in Tepest) remains dedicated to spreading the writing system throughout the population, I predict that the Tepestani will have a full-fledged written language within two or three generations. I have attached a transcript from one of the trials, so you can see how it functions — or not, depending on your outlook.

As it appears nonsensical to anyone without knowledge of Tepestani or that the confused jumble of characters and runes are strictly phonetic representations of that language, I see potential for a code even more useful than Draconic. Not to worry, my little scholar. I will not force you to write your future reports in Wyan's home-splun writing system.

Lifestyle & Education

One truly remarkable aspect of Tepestani society is its near-total egalitarian nature, at least as far as natives go. While much respect and deference is given to elders in individual families and

communities, and while priests of all native gods command the awe and respect of the population, the society has no fixed nobility or lower class. A handful of families can trace their lineage back to the old axelords. Although these families tend to be among the wealthier Tepestani (mostly represented by large flocks of goats and sheep or by ownership of cloudberry patches along the Blackmist River), they do not possess any political or other type of authority to force their will upon the rest of the population. These families tend to be the ones who engage in what little business activity is still conducted with foreigners, but other than that, they are no different than their neighbors on a social level.

Most Tepestani do not use family names (not surprising, given the lack of concern for social status), instead distinguishing themselves by their birthplace. It is proper to address a man as “Goodman”; a woman is “Good mistress” if single and “Goodwife” if married. When greeting an acquaintance or family member in situations in which some small degree of protocol is required, using the familiar form of the address, “Goody,” is acceptable. Thus, Ellis from Viktal would be “Young Goodman Ellis of Viktal.” Those Tepestani who make use of family names usually have some foreign ties in their family and have adopted some alien customs.

The Tepestani value hard work and without fail take pleasure in physical labor. All but the youngest and most elderly, the most senior mem-

Tepestani Primer

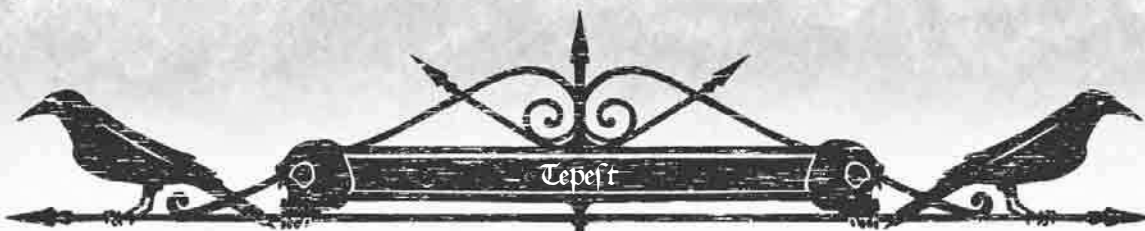
English

gods save you (common greeting)
goodbye
yes (I will / it is / I am)
no
help!
go away!
witchcraft, arcane magic
witch / warlock
trial

Tepestani

déicht duit
slán
beicht / is líom / is ea
aon, níl
fóir!
imigh leat!
draíocht
cailleach / draíodóir
tástáil

The newly developed writing system must be taught from scratch. Characters who can read and write both Balok and Vaasi and who are fluent in Tepestani can discern the meaning of written text with a successful DC 12 Decipher Script skill check. If a character knows only one of the languages, the Decipher Script check DC is 18.



bers of the Inquisition, and ranking officers in the Kellee militia spend time either working in the fields, tending livestock or fishing in Lake Kronov. A few community members are skilled trappers, smiths, weavers or shipwrights, but they too can be found in the fields during the planting and harvest seasons. Although individual families own fields, orchards or livestock, everyone in a community pitches in to help with everyone's harvests or tending of flocks. A near-universal attitude holds that the gods smile upon those who work hard and who care about the well-being of their neighbors.

Concern for the well-being of neighbors is also a key factor in decisions relating to marriage. While the Tepestani acknowledge and respect the power of romantic love, parents do not allow young people to enter into marriage on the grounds of "love" alone. Young men are expected to ask permission of a girl's father before courting her, and before a marriage can occur, all parents and siblings in a family must give at least tacit approval to the union. Whenever a couple is married, each family gives it land or livestock with which to start life together. Each family is expected to provide an equal portion of the starting resources for the married couple. Thus, if a boy from a poor family wishes to marry a girl from a rich family, the father of the girl may bar him from courting his daughter. Such a marriage might prove embarrassing to the boy's family (they will not be able to match the mutual dowry without bankrupting themselves and then not be able to provide for the rest of the family). Conversely, the couple would be starting from a severe disadvantage (because the richer family would provide a dowry as small as the poor one). The end result is that families tend to encourage their children to marry those who roughly match their own families in levels of wealth.

The concern for community is also evident in how Tepestani raise their children. A child is not so much the responsibility of just his two parents, but is looked after by everyone in the village. As they grow older, children usually enter an apprenticeship or are given ever-increasing levels of responsibility tending their family's livestock or fields. With the exception of apprenticeships for future blacksmiths, weavers, hunters and priests, Tepest has no formal education system in Tepest. Children learn what they do from their parents and other adults.

Paradoxically, while the Inquisition spreads literacy among the Tepestani, it also strongly en-

courages the people not to trust any information that doesn't come from the Inquisition or from community elders. Thus, although most Tepestani are often preoccupied with the fey and *think* they know a lot about them, most of what they know is only so much superstition. Further, any exploration of ideas or information not already part of Tepestani culture is frowned upon, because the Inquisition believes that any new ideas are more likely to be lies spun by the fey than useful information. To keep the people safe from corruption by the fey, the Inquisition must keep them from safe from the outside world... and must keep society from developing any further. In fact, I think that if anyone but Wyan had developed the Tepestani writing system, the Inquisition would have rejected it, and he would have faced trial for consorting with the fey. Even my conversations with bards and members of the Inquisition, during which I asked questions in attempts to clarify the murky details of what they believe to be their ancient history, made Finn and other leading Inquisitors suspicious of me. On my last day in Viktal, Finn quizzed me about my motivations, and I am certain that if he or anyone else in the town had known that I have mastered arcane magic, I would have found myself experiencing a Tepestani trial first hand.

After a hard day's work, Tepestani like to gather with family in homes or with larger groups of friends in common rooms of inns to sing songs and drink weak barley beer and pear cider. A bard usually leads the songs for the larger gatherings, and he or she often performs solo as well. These songs constitute the primary source for history lessons of young and old alike.

Tepest is another land about which I can say very little positive concerning the native cuisine. Daily fare consists of cheeses, sausages, mutton and venison, potatoes, turnips and bland sauces. Pies containing a mix of pork and venison meat are among the foods traditionally served at weddings and at the many holiday festivals scattered throughout the year. Sturgeon and caviar harvested from Lake Kronov are also commonly reserved for festivals, although fishers and their families also use fish in everyday meals.

The largest festival of the year, the three-day Harvest's End festival in the fall, features cloud-berry wine, a bittersweet beverage made from the fermented berries. This same festival also involves a ritual sacrifice to ensure that the communities hunt well during the winter and receive lush crops





come spring. The highlight of the ritual is the immolation of a living goblin in honor of the gods. A type of pie, prepared only by married women and served only on the festival's third day is said by many Tepestani to contain flesh from the sacrifice. Other Tepestani told me that the pie contains a mix of pork and mutton and that the notion it is made from goblin meat is something believed by children based on a humorous song.

Attitudes Toward Magic

Most Tepestani are reluctant to discuss magic, and priests of the land grow very suspect when asked about it; members of the Inquisition became outright hostile. Wyan was most willing to discuss the topic, and review of written materials in his small library gave me a clear picture of Tepestani attitudes.

Both common folk and priests believe that magic and nature are intertwined in what they call the Weave. They consider all magic as originating with this Weave, and, like nature, magic is uncontrollable and inherently dangerous. Only when priests use magic can it be considered safe for mortals, as the gods have tempered it. Other kinds of magic are sources of temptation and will invariably lead those who use it down the path of evil. Interestingly, the Tepestani share some beliefs with the followers of Hala, even if they would most likely reject these mystic spellcasters as allies of the fey. I tried to discuss the similarities between the beliefs of Hala's witches and Wyan's, but the term "witch" ended that line of questioning. He is adamant in his belief that anyone who refers to themselves as "witches" is flaunting their evil natures.

In the eyes of the Tepestani, the vilest magic of all is "witchcraft." Most Tepestani don't really know how to define witchcraft, so they treat all magic as if it is witchcraft. Members of the Inquisition limit their definition of "witchcraft" to the magic wielded by sorcerers or to supernatural talents innate to certain races, considering wizards and others who use books and scrolls to prepare spells as misguided fools tampering with forces that may ultimately consume them.

The fear and outright hatred of sorcerers, other natural magic users, and "witches" has its root in two sources. First, Tepestani associate beings with inherent magical powers with the fey, and they assume that anyone who can cast magic without spellbooks or through other unusual meth-

ods must somehow be in league with the fey. Second, there is the fact that the Tepestani word *cailleach* is now applied to both witches and the race of evil, cannibalistic humanoids known as hags. It is a symptom of the fact that superstition passes for scholarship in Tepest that even the most learned among them can't keep magical practices and races with inherent magical abilities straight.

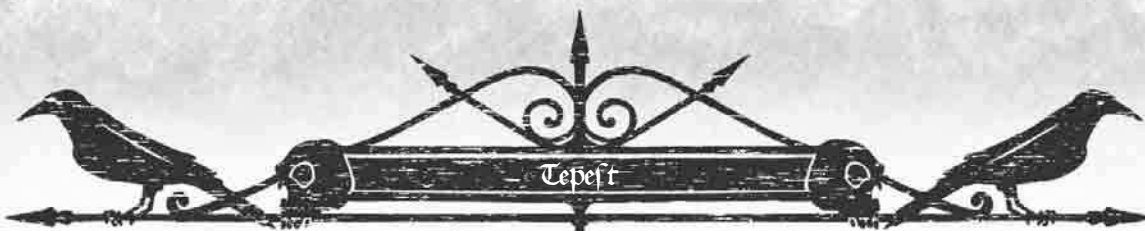
Religion

The Tepestani honor and worship a small pantheon of native gods, as well as acknowledge the existence of other deities such as Hala and the Lawgiver. On the surface, they appear to worship the same pantheon as the Forfarrians of Forlorn (described in my first *Doomsday Gazetteer*). The gods have the same names, and they are generally called upon or placated for the same reasons, but there are differences.

In Tepest, Belenus is revered as the "god of gods." He is viewed as the organizer of their ranks, and without him, the world we know today would not have existed. In some tales, he is the prime creator, while in others he created our world by combining the singular creations of the gods into a coherent whole. He is also considered to be the god who cares most about humans and who is their greatest ally in the struggle against the fey. All Tepestani worship him, and each community has at least a small temple devoted to him.

Brigantia and Manannan mac Lir are described as brother and sister by the Tepestani. They are Belenus's best friends among the gods, his frequent collaborators in matters of Creation, and the other two main deities in the Tepestani faith. Brigantia is considered to be Belenus's consort, and she is a goddess of the wild forests and beasts, as well as the domesticated animals and cultivated fields. She is also said to bless hardworking artisans. Manannan mac Lir is the master of all lakes and rivers, as well as the creatures that dwell within them. These deities are honored by all Tepestani on their holy days and are actively worshipped by some farmers, fishers, hunters and artisans.

In Tepest, Lugh, Daghdha and Diancecht are considered dark and somewhat simpleminded reflections of Belenus, Brigantia and Manannan mac Lir. They are cast as the creators of the fey and are therefore seen as the patrons of these enemies of mortals. This patronage is not attributed to malice, but rather to a misguided love for their dangerously flawed creations. Lugh is the god of the moon and



arcane (and fey) magic, while his consort Daghdha is the mistress of wild growing weeds and untamed wilderness. She is also a fertility goddess, and women call for her blessing when seeking to become pregnant. (In other cultures, Daghdha is portrayed as male.) Her brother Diancecht has a nebulous position in so far as he is called upon when the Tepestani wish to cure or protect themselves of illnesses or to ensure a healthy childbirth for a woman. Diancecht is credited with creating all illnesses in the world, but he is not thought of as evil like a god with his portfolio might be in most faiths. Instead, he is merely misguided. He is credited with being the only one of the trio who is trying to make amends for the mistakes he visited upon the world; hence, although he created illnesses, he is also the one who is most adept at curing mortals. These three deities are typically only honored on their holy days or in services held with specific

intentions in mind. Some shrines and temples dedicated to Belenus also reserve a small corner for Diancecht so he can be called upon easily.

As is the case with most cultures, the Tepestani don't so much worship the evil gods as they desperately attempt to placate them. The relationship the Tepestani have with Arawn (another figure seen in some cultures as male rather than female) and Morrigan — goddesses of death and conflict respectively — are what one might expect. They are not worshipped, but honored with occasional sacrifices designed to keep the unnatural creatures of Autumn from plaguing communities.

Finally, there is Math Mathonwy. The Tepestani almost universally ignore him, and in so they mirror the gods in their tales, except in certain funeral rites for Outlanders who die within Tepest. These rites are intended to call upon Math



Belenus Revisited

In Tepest, Belenus is honored in noon-time services. This is also the time of day his priests pray for spells. Aside from these details, Belenus worship matches what is described in the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**.

As the Inquisition has gained strength in Tepest, priests serving the other gods in the Tepestani pantheon have become increasingly uncommon. Subsequently, worship of other gods starts to fade. The Inquisitors are not actively discouraging devotion to the other gods of the pantheon. Rather, their strong, very visible stance against the evils that menace the Tepestani make Belenus appear to be the only god who truly looks out for the endangered Children of Summer.

Table 2-1: The Tepestani Pantheon

Deity	Alignment	Domains	Symbol	Favored Weapon
Arawn	Neutral evil	Death, Evil, Repose	Skull wearing antlered helm	Scythe
Belenus	Neutral good	Fire, Good, Sun	Sunburst	Sickle
Brigantia	Lawful good	Animal, Good, Protection	Woman holding a hammer	Warhammer
Daghdha	Chaotic good	Good, Plant, Trickery	Cauldron	Club
Diancecht	Neutral good	Good, Healing	Leaf	Dagger
Lugh	Chaotic neutral	Chaos, Knowledge, Magic	Eight-pointed star	Mace
Manannan mac Lir	Lawful neutral	Animal, Law, Water	Fish	Trident
Math Mathonwy	Lawful evil	Knowledge, Magic	Iron scepter	Quarterstaff
Morrigan	Chaotic evil	Destruction, Evil, War	Crossed swords	Greatsword



Mathonwy's mercy so that he doesn't cause the deceased evil person (because all Outlanders are by default considered evil) to return as one of Winter's Children but instead remain peacefully in the ground.

The Tepestani Inquisition

The most visible and most powerful religious institution in Tepest is Belenus's Inquisition. Overall, this group of militant priests and lay people has good intentions and is trying to do what it genuinely believes to be Belenus's will: saving the world by destroying the fey attempting to corrupt and ultimately destroy it. However, these priests and lay people are operating from a foundation of ignorance, and as time goes on this ignorance will only grow. They believe that everything related to fey is inherently corrupting, therefore studying the fey can only corrupt the would-be scholar. They distrust direct evidence and rely instead upon their own suppositions, existing folklore and forced confessions.

The knowledge of their enemies displayed by the "experts" among Belenus's Inquisitors make even the most wildly speculative screeds penned by Rudolf van Richten in his more emotional moments look like intellectual brilliance. Only one Inquisitor I dealt with makes any serious effort to record and organize what information the Inquisition does collect about its foes. Wyan has created several books he intends to serve as guides to the Inquisitors and second only to the wisdom of Belenus himself. His chief assistant, Finn, is dubious about this effort, but Wyan insists that his books are the only safe way for Inquisitors to learn. Simplistic descriptions of fey, what the Inquisition thinks are their habits, and an equal mix of baseless folklore and practical application of priestly magic to uncover fey abound. With diagrams and illustrations of fairy stool patterns and the most effective methods of forcibly extracting confessions from suspects and the convicted, Wyan's books resemble picture book versions of *Van Richten Guides*. I had to suppress a smile every now and then, especially when I encountered particularly blatant ignorant conclusions (such as the "fact" that dryads hibernate in winter, so this is the time when they should be sought and destroyed). I suspect these books are about as complicated as the simpleminded Tepestani are able to wrap their minds around.

Trials don't usually begin with Wyan's clumsy attempts at scholarship. When an Inquisitor un-

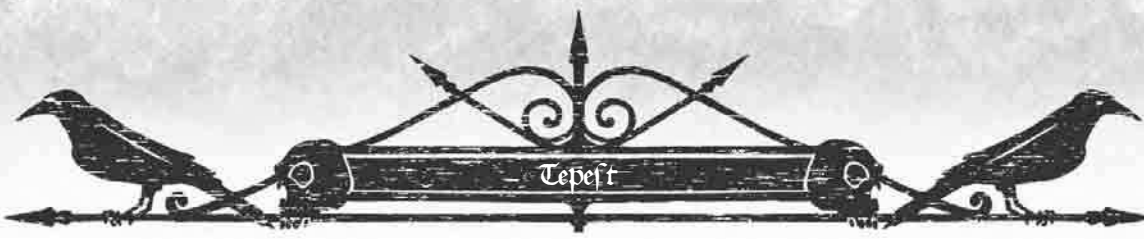
covers some bit of gossip that indicates someone is in league with the fey, and the inquisitor deems the claim credible (purely a judgment call), he has the accused rounded up and imprisoned in preparation for trial.

The Inquisitor then collects evidence against the accused. Evidence ranges from anomalies that the Inquisitor observes in areas where the accused would spend a lot of his time — such as an abundance of fairy stools — to tales regarding the accused from every wagging tongue in town. Observations and anecdotes are carefully recorded in the Inquisitor's ledger book. No timetable is set for the investigation, but it usually takes a week. The Inquisitor is, of course, supposed to be impartial, but there's nothing in place to ensure that impartiality, and I suspect that more than just a few Inquisitors have used their positions to settle scores against old loves, rivals or anyone they just don't like. During the investigation, other folk are free to act as the "advocate" of the accused. They investigate on their own, gathering evidence in the accused's defense, but leaping too eagerly to the defense of one under suspicion may also lead one to fall under similar suspicion. Friends of the accused will often scrape a few coins together and hire independent investigators — folks from a distant village, or even foreign adventurers... in other words, folks who can more safely run for the hills if the tide turns against them.

Meanwhile, the accused is pressured to confess to his "crimes," which often involves torture, but the tastes of individual Inquisitors differ. Confessions are drawn so the Inquisition can expand its knowledge base of the fey's methods.

Once a confession is extracted from the suspect, the Inquisitor takes all his findings and the full text of any confession to Wyan. Wyan compares the findings to all known "facts" about fey and discusses other explanations with the presenting Inquisitor and other leading priests of Belenus. He also usually has the accused brought before him so that he may question him or her personally. This process can take anywhere from a few hours to several days. At the end, Wyan decides whether the suspect will be tried or set free.

When the Inquisition tries a suspect, at least three of its members act as judges. Trials are typically held in the community that is home to the accused, and usually two of the three judges are local Inquisitors, with the third being a ranking member. It's not uncommon for one judge to over-



shadow completely the other two, and this is definitely the case in trials presided over by Finn or Hanton, two Inquisitors almost equal to Wyan in the power and respect they command.

All evidence is presented before the judges, just as it was presented to Wyan, even if he is one of the presiding judges. The inquisition presents an accuser, and either the accused or his advocate presents a defense. “Prosecuting” evidence generally consists of little more than gossip or the rants of prior accused undergoing torture, but such hearsay is often damning. However, if evidence is presented that *clearly* proves the accused to be innocent, he or she usually *does* get off.

Rulings and results boil down to one of four possibilities:

- **The accused is innocent.** Doesn’t happen often, but it does happen. The accused is free to rejoin society and is openly accepted. If resentful over their treatment, those accused generally keep their mouths shut.

- **The accused is *bheicht faoihk ráocht* (“bewitched”).** The accused did the deed for which he is charged, but he was ensorcelled by the fey. (This is the sentence that Wyan passed upon his own daughter several years back.) The bewitched

are not in control of their actions and thus not responsible. The bewitched are generally chastised, given light punishments, but ultimately allowed to return to their lives. They forever after are viewed with suspicion, however, as they are proven to be susceptible to fey seduction. The upside is that the accused gets to *live*. To obtain a “bewitched” ruling, it’s pretty much inevitable that the *actual* guilty party must be brought to light. It’s thus highly advantageous to find and defeat the fey responsible before the trial, or, failing that, to finger someone else.

- **The accused is a *fealltóir* (“fey consort”).**

A fey consort is a mortal who has been seduced — who willingly serves the fey and has thus turned to evil. If a fey consort is found guilty, and if it has not yet been done, a full confession is extracted, by torture if necessary. That done, the despised traitor to humanity is swiftly executed by whatever means is most convenient — hanging, stoning or drowning. The Tepestani bury the corpses of those so executed at crossroads, believing that doing so prevents the guilty spirit from finding its way home. (The body I encountered outside Kellee was one such person, and I witnessed a burial of another outside of Briggdarrow.)



• **The accused is actually one of the fey (a true fey, a hag, and so forth): a creature of darkness.** To achieve this ruling, the Inquisition needs to prove that the accused has supernatural powers. Any creature with innate spell-like abilities is pretty much guilty, and if you're a wizard who casts a noticeable spell in town, you will have a hard time proving that it's not something you can do at will. The fey are forced to confess, as above, and are then burned at the stake. Although the Tepestani truly despise the fey, they burn these folk not out of malice but necessity. The Inquisitors know (rather, they are relatively sure) that the fey cannot truly die, so they use the flames to utterly destroy the fey's body, praying that this will prevent it from ever returning. Does it work? Who knows? Tales I collected from bards seemed to indicate that a rushlight haunting the community has followed several such gruesome executions, but the Inquisitors have successfully destroyed each evil fire spirit shortly after it appeared. Whether vengeful ghosts of the wrongfully executed or disembodied souls of immortal fey, one cannot dispute that *some* of the executions have troubling after-maths for the Inquisitors and their flocks.

Other faiths

None of the prominent religions in many other realms enjoy noteworthy presences in Tepest. Without fail, the three other major religions of the world have at best a tenuous status with the Tepestani.

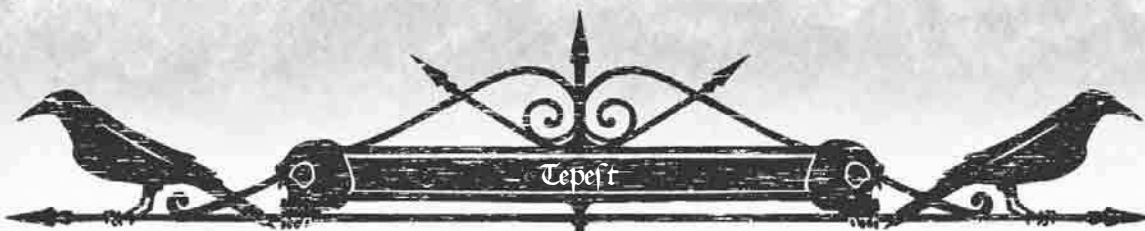
Ezra: Ezra worship is limited to two traveling anchorites, although they like to pretend they hold services only in the room they maintain at the Hawk's Perch in Kellee. The anchorites are a married couple originally from Mordent, and they have lived in Tepest for over 20 years. They have made every effort to gain the friendship of the Tepestani, including mastering their language, but the Church of Ezra has suffered a bad reputation in Tepest in recent years because of the Darkonian sect (see the *Trade and Diplomacy* section in "The Realm," below), and whatever inroads they had made are completely undone. There is no open worship of Ezra, aside from occasional services conducted in Kellee for visiting foreigners.

Hala: This religion remains problematic as far as addressing it in these pages. It is omnipresent throughout civilized lands — even those that are barely so, such as Tepest — but it claims no stable power base and, with the exception of isolated

hospices in Mordent and Falkovnia, no public places of worship. I have finally decided to devote some space to the faith here, not because Hala is widely worshipped in Tepest, but because of the opposite: Hala is *reviled* in Tepest. Where she is considered a merciful goddess of healing and beneficial magic in just about every other land, the Tepestani view her as a patron of the fey and a protector of those who consort with them. Inquisitor Finn of Viktal promised me that worshippers of Hala unmasked by the Inquisition would be executed after only the most perfunctory of trials. Members of covens will be burned at the stake, Finn assured me, because they are fey in human guises.

The hatred toward Hala and her followers comes from three sources, arising from the lack of concern about historical and intellectual accuracy that typifies the mindset of so many Tepestani. First, there is an epic of ancient Tepestani heroes questing against a woman named Hallah, who attempted to usurp the gods and seize control of the destiny of all mortals by spinning magical threads that represented each mortal life. By weaving these threads into tapestries, she dictated fates, and by cutting threads she ended lives. Second, the Inquisition believes that Hala may have been one of the three original corrupted wise women or that she may be the fey creature who seduced those women. The Inquisition dismisses any suggestion that the version held by Hala's followers is anything but lies to shroud their evil natures. Some more recent bardic tales have merged modern beliefs with the ancient epic song and cast Hala as one of the fey who originally seduced the Tepestani wise women and who continues to spin deadly magical threads that corrupt all who become entangled in them. Finally, there are the aforementioned facts that worshippers of Hala refer to themselves as Witches and Warlocks and that the Tepestani translations for those titles imply inherent evil. Tepestani logic dictates that anyone who goes out of their way to describe themselves as evil *must* be evil.

Although I found no evidence of active covens in Tepest, and despite being assured by Finn that there were none, I suspect there must be several covens operating in the land. The general Tepestani view of magic and its place at the foundation of the world meshes perfectly with the views espoused by Hala and her followers. Further, crypto-zoologists and monster-hunters know for certain that several powerful hags dwell within Tepest's



forests. Hags and Hala's followers are dedicated foes of one another, so where one can be found, the other eventually appears to destroy them. Unlike the Tepestani hatred of Hala, the animosity between Witches and hags is not something that grows from misunderstanding or ignorance. Rather, it grows from the simple fact that hags forge their spells from the same magical source used by the servants of Hala: the mystical Weave that binds all reality together. Witches and Warlocks of Hala hunt hags with the same zeal that the Inquisition hunts fey. If not for the willful ignorance and bigotry of the priests of Belenus, the two would be formidable allies for one another.

Or not! Fate, or perhaps a more physical force, has always seemed to resent covens that make themselves too visible. I believe we will discover the reason for this when I send you to more remote parts of the world. For now, Hala and her followers remain question marks.

Gaining knowledge about Hala's church is difficult. There is no central power structure, and so far no scholars have undertaken a serious study of the faith and its adherents. Rudolph van Richten had begun such a study, but I believe that he was far from finished with it at the time of his retirement. The "book" published by the self-declared heirs to his legacy, the Weathermay-Foxgrove twins, as part of their luridly titled series *Van Richten's Monster Hunter's Compendium*, raises more questions than it answers and contains several glaring omissions.

With no central authority to dictate doctrine and modes of worship, and most covens emerging and operating in secret, one can be certain that very few traditions are shared by all faithful. Witches who operate the hospice in Mordent might not even realize the Witches in Tepest are worshipping Hala. The only consistency of which I am aware is that all Witches wear woven clothing items to acknowledge their respect for Hala's Weave. This custom is more obvious in lands where Hala's Witches are generally accepted — the Mordentish and Falkovnian adherents cover themselves completely in cloth, even wearing veils and considering it sacrilege to reveal themselves. In places such as Tepest, a Witch is likely just to warm herself with a simple, woolen shawl over her shoulders. (Of course, *all* Tepestani women warm themselves with simple woolen shawls.) Warlocks similarly wear woven clothes, although I have the distinct impression that the doctrinal requirements for such garments are less stringent for men, growing from the fact that Hala is female and women must emulate her more closely.

The Lawgiver: The Tepestani dislike the openly bigoted and arrogant clerics of the Lawgiver who often accompany Nova Vaasan caravans looking to make converts, and the animosity is so strong that the Lawgiver does not even have a semi-presence in Kellee similar to the Church of Ezra. It is a strange state of affairs that the dominant faith in the nation that claims the most interaction with Tepest since the land was formed has not obtained even the smallest foothold. Until either the priests of the Lawgiver change their attitude or the Tepestani become less prideful — neither of which will happen — the Lawgiver's authority will never extend past the northern extremes of Lord Hiregaard's holdings.

The Tepestani Hero

Races: Tepest's population is from a near-total homogenous ethnic group, with the exception of a tiny number of half-Vistani on the outskirts of the settlements and a small number of Nova Vaasan woodsmen and their families on the edges of the forest.

Classes: Fighters and rangers are the most common heroic classes in Tepest. Fighters are typically devoted to defending their families and communities, while rangers focus mostly on hunting, trapping and protecting loggers or members of the Inquisition as they move from settlement to settlement. Tepestani rangers usually choose goblins as their first favored enemy, with a type of fey being their second choice.

Since the beginning of the Inquisition, a growing number of Tepestani have entered the service of the gods, so an increasing number of clerics dwell within Tepest's forests. Most of them serve the mighty Belenus, although a few serve other deities in the pantheon. A smaller, extremely militant arm of Belenus's clergy has emerged in Kellee in the last couple of years: paladins. Still uncommon, they are quickly gaining respect among the common folk and the Inquisition alike. There is also a small, extremely secretive coven devoted to Hala living in a tiny community on the far shores of the Blackmist River. They are devoted enemies of



the hags that menace Tepest. Small churches devoted to Ezra and the Lawgiver have been founded in Kellee within the past decade. While they are headed by an ever changing selection of experienced clergy from Nova Vaasa and parts more distant, the tiny flocks are starting to produce local clerics of the deities as well. The clergy of Ezra has fairly good relations with the Inquisition of Belenus, while the Lawgiver's priests scoff at the ignorant peasants and their foolish superstitions.

By tradition, at least one bard and his or her apprentice live in each of the domain's major settlements. The bards are responsible for maintaining an oral history of their community. In recent years, clerics of Belenus have encouraged the bards of Tepest to focus their efforts more on chronicling the deeds of the domain's holy warriors and the misdeeds of the fey, saying that these are the only events worth passing down through the generations. As in most domains, however, Tepestani bards tend to be free spirits, so as the clergy tries to force more control upon them, apprentices quit their masters' tutelage and seek freedom and livelihood in the alien lands beyond the forests of their birth. The Inquisition grows ever more suspicious of bards, particularly those who augment their performances with magic; if these bards weren't allies of fey, wouldn't they be more dedicated to preserving a record of the Inquisition's deeds and the defeat the fey suffer at its hands?

Sorcerers are rare in Tepest, and they fall almost exclusively into the category of Redheads, while wizards are practically unheard of. Those Tepestani who feel a pull toward the magical arts tend to leave their homeland and seek their fortunes elsewhere. If they return, it is only for short visits, for every spellcaster who isn't a priest of Belenus or other gods from his pantheon, or a well-known local bard, is viewed with potentially violent hostility and is automatically suspected of being one of the fey in human guise. Natural sorcerers, such as Redheads, are often found in the ranks of the Inquisition these days. A rare few of them also sometimes live as hermits in the forest, occasionally becoming allies of the Witches of Hala in the southwestern part of the domain.

Rogues do not find Tepest a welcoming place. Those of larcenous bent discover that there is very little worth stealing and that the penalties if caught are so severe it's not worth the risk. Rogues who tend to stay on the right side of the law find even less to do in the domain as rangers fill their traditional roles far more effectively in the wild woods and primitive settlements.

Recommended Skills: Bluff, Craft (blacksmithing, carpentry, weaponsmithing, weaving), Handle Animal, Heal, Knowledge (local, monster lore, religion), Listen, Perform (dance, song) Profession (brewer, farmer, fisher, herbalist, herdsman, lumberjack), Sense Motive, Spot, Survival, Swim, Use Rope.

Recommended Feats: Alertness, Animal Affinity, Back to the Wall*, Blessed***, Ghostsight*, Great Fortitude, Hope***, Indomitable**, Redhead*, Run, Sanctity***, Self-Sufficient, Skill Focus (Knowledge [local history]), Skill Focus (Knowledge [nature]), Sworn Enemy**, Test of Virtue***, Toughness, Track, Warding Gesture**, Weapon Focus (throwing axe).

* Denotes feat described in **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**.

** Denotes feat described in **Van Richten's Arsenal**.

*** Denotes feat described in **Heroes of Light**.

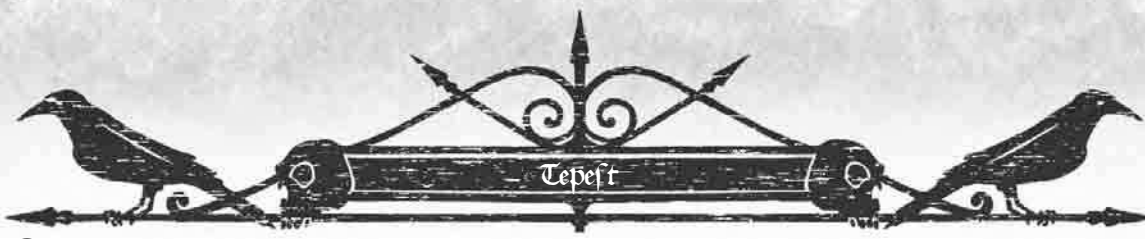
Tepestani Male Names: Ellis, Cobb, Cuinn, Fian, Finn, Hewith, Nashe, Onghus, Rafe, Torin, Whitten, Wyun.

Tepestani Female Names: Aisling, Breda, Bryonna, Derval, Fiona, Hespra, Jocelyn, Melissa, Nessa, Rathnait, Sondra.

Outcast Ratings in Tepest

Tepestani consider elves, half-elves, halflings and all creatures with innate magical abilities, including gnomes and sorcerers of any race, to be fey. Such creatures have a "predatory" reputation in Tepest, increasing their OR by +2.





Goblins

Common lore among many folk holds that if the vast forests of Verbrek and Kartakass were somehow to disappear, the wolves that roam the Core's wilds would vanish along with them. Likewise, it is commonly accepted that the gnarled woods of Tepest are the font from which flow the Core's goblins. As with so much folklore, this notion does not hold up to scrutiny; records mention goblin tribes in Darkon's hinterlands long before Tepest appeared in our world.

Still, goblins are indisputably more plentiful in Tepest than anywhere else in the Core. Their large numbers have done nothing to improve their state of existence, however. Like everywhere else they're found, the goblins in Tepest can barely be considered more than clever animals.

Some years ago, I had a discussion with a now deceased Darkonian scholar on the subject of goblins. He was of the opinion that they were not necessarily barbaric and evil, but that if given a place to live in peace they would develop into beings not unlike halflings or elves. During my stay in Dementlieu, I found other supposedly intelligent people with similar delusions about goblins living there. They need to visit Tepest to see that strong goblin communities are just as debased and pointless as weak ones. While single goblins can become civilized — some of the data in this section was gained from a goblin in Kellee — as a whole they are irredeemable.

Appearance and Fashion

Goblins usually stand between three and four feet tall, though a rare few can grow as large as a human. They have stooped postures, long, gangly arms that hang down to their knees, and their heads, hands and feet seem oversized for their bodies. They are nonetheless nimble and deceptively strong for their size. Their skin is mottled with reds, browns and oranges — the colors of dead leaves. Their blood is oily and black. They have a sour scent, purposefully made worse by their habit of smearing themselves with animal musk and blood.

They have flat, mashed faces, with large, expressionless black-on-black eyes that reflect yellowish light in the darkness, and large, twitching, pointed ears. Mainly nocturnal, their night vision is far superior to that of humans. Their wide mouths are filled with sharp, yellow, snaggleteeth.

Goblins rarely create their own clothing, tools and weapons, preferring to steal or loot it from humans. When they do fashion clothing and arms, such works are little more than scraps of poorly cured animal hides and sticks with sharpened rocks mounted on the end. Most goblins usually resemble little scarecrows, dressed in torn and crudely re-sewn garb.

As a society, goblins have not mastered metalworking. Thus, metalwork is almost always stolen from others — generally, the occupants of isolated farmsteads or travelers butchered on the roads. While many Tepestani tales present their ancient heroes facing goblin armies wielding pikes and swords, real-world goblins are more likely to attack with rusty meat cleavers, nail-filled clubs, pitchforks and sharpened shovels.

Language

The Goblin tongue has no proper name. It is a harsh and guttural language that few human throats can reproduce, combining high-pitched squeals with sharp consonants and deep, phlegm-filled clicks. As such, the vile chitterings of the Goblin tongue are sadly beyond my ability to transliterate.

Aside from a few obscene symbolic runes used to mark territory, leave warnings and defile the creations of nobler folk, goblins have no written alphabet.

Lifestyle & Education

Goblins are divided into semi-nomadic tribes; during my stay in Tepest, I identified four different groups. The local bards told me there are at least five dozen of them. They also told me that a Goblin King lurks in the forest, ready to strike and conquer all, so one has to consider the source.

The strongest member rules each tribe. Leaders are inevitably male and are often freakishly large and powerful. Females are considered to be good for nothing but breeding, and breed they do. Many Tepestani believe that goblins crawl full-grown from bogs or piles of rotting leaves and refuse, but this is not the case. Goblin infants have a gestation period of four months, and an average female is pregnant twice a year. Goblins teach their offspring nothing. Goblin children learn by observing their elders or die in the process.

The only goblin females who are treated like more than just breeding stock are those who are "touched by the spirits" — becoming adepts or



clerics — and rise to the level of “dark mother.” They are thereafter viewed with fear and respect.

A goblin’s life is filled with thieving and cruelty from the moment it is born to the moment of its (usually violent) death. They are vicious, but cowardly, gladly slitting a man’s throat as he sleeps, gnawing the flesh from his bones and stealing his trinkets, but they flee from any concerted opposition. Goblin raids are fiercest in the fall, as the goblins try to prepare for the lean days of winter.

Goblins have virtually no creative spark. They build almost nothing of their own and take great delight in destroying what others have built. They love glittery, shiny things and hoard whatever coins or jewels they come across, even though they have no real use for them beyond flaunting their riches. They cultivate no music and no art. The only exception is in the area of trap making, something at which they excel.

Goblins feel no true love for anything but themselves and are devoid of pity or remorse. They gladly sacrifice each other to benefit themselves, engage in cannibalism and often eat their young.

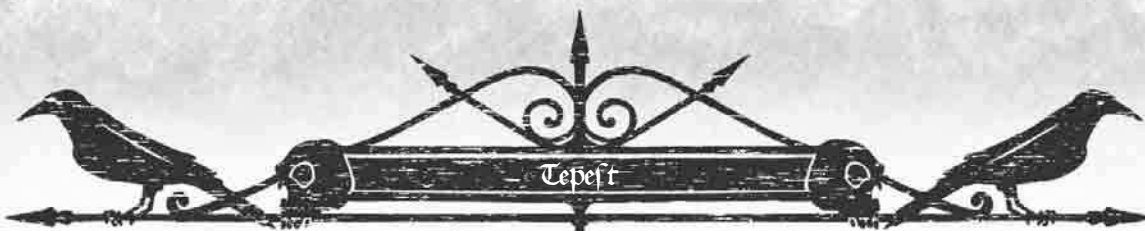
This mindless cruelty does much to keep their numbers in check.

They eat whatever they can get, but prefer meat and carrion. Child flesh — both human and goblin — is considered a delicacy. When not raiding or crawling before their betters, they entertain themselves with crude games such as rolling knucklebones, admire their stolen riches, or get drunk on spoiled wine and their own vile brews.

Attitudes Toward Magic and Religion

Goblins worship the power seeping from what loosely translates as “the dark places of the earth.” They believe that all supernatural power flows from these places, and anywhere the sun cannot reach is considered a sacred spot to them. As such, what passes for burials among goblins involve haphazardly stuffing the gnawed bones of their dead into caves, burrows, dark clefts, and under houses, so the nameless powers can tend to them.

Goblins believe that shaman-like “dark mothers” control this black power from the earth. While goblins refer to their female spellcasters as “dark mothers,” these are not the *real* dark mothers. The *real* dark mothers are believed to be creatures of great



height that are far more powerful. Goblins worship these monstrous spellcasters out of fear and respect, and whenever the dark mothers appear, they obey them without question. If goblins see a female casting obvious magic, they hesitate for at least a moment, wondering whether she might be one of their dark mothers. If they decide she is, they often flee in terror, hiding themselves from her wrath.

I briefly toyed with impersonating a “dark mother” to gain more knowledge of the goblins. My source in Kellee told me that such pretence was likely to get me killed, as I would undoubtedly draw the attention of the true dark mothers. While I initially scoffed at his concern, I later encountered some beings within the deep recesses of the Tepestandi forest that made me think his warning sound.

Dread Goblins

Goblins and hobgoblins are members of the same race in Ravenloft. Hobgoblins are rare, the goblin equivalent of calibans, but they inevitably end up in positions of power.

Goblins in Ravenloft receive a +2 racial bonus to Craft (trapmaking), rather than Ride.

Ravenloft goblins have an affinity for goblin beasts and are among the few who can work with them, though certainly not “tame” them; a worg and its rider might well turn on each other at any moment, if it serves them to do so at the time.

Most goblin spellcasters are female adepts, though a few clerics can be found. The Hags terrify the goblins, but develop and teach new spells for the goblin adepts to learn to gain their services. Of course, the Hags as often as not eat a few goblins in each encounter, so it’s very much a love-hate relationship.

The Realm

Not since Forlorn have I visited a portion of the world so ill-deserving of being described as a “realm.” Even Verbrek, once one understands the true power lurking within its shadow-draped woods, shows more political coherence than Tepest. The human populace is united only by racial stock, their worship of Belenus and related entities, and their fear of the fairy creatures they believe hide under every rock and in every brook. Each village is ruled in its own fashion, so assuming that what is acceptable in one village may also be acceptable in the other can prove dangerous.

I am, as I have mentioned already, unable to establish with any certainty who is Tepest’s “dread lord.” Wyan is certainly a prime candidate, but his actions are contrary to what I have witnessed in other powerful figures who fit the role. Although he has created an important movement, it is one that he has worked to keep from growing all-powerful. Wyan has done everything he can to limit the Inquisition’s political power, a behavior that I do not think resembles what I have come to recognize as the personality trait that unifies the “dread lords.”

Another suitable candidate can be found among the deeply evil hags I encountered during my last days in Tepest. However, these creatures dwell deep within Wormwood, and they seem to have only minimal contact with anyone but the land’s goblins. Again, they do not seem to fit the profile that I have recognized among other “dread lords.”

Finally, there are two mysterious evils, one dwelling within Brujamonte and the other on an island in Lake Kronov. I could not learn the exact nature of either of these beings, but as they are both even more reclusive than Mordenheim’s creation Adam, I do not think either can be the “dread lord” of Tepest.

Perhaps Tepest doesn’t have a “dread lord”? Maybe the presence of such a figure isn’t a metaphysical necessity as I had started to believe? Maybe, my patron, this is a mystery worth delving into again at some later date.

Maybe you shouldn't have let your nerves get in the way of thorough research. I have given you protection, and you should rely upon it. Don't shirk your duties too much, or I will replace you.

Government

Tradition states that each community, even those that consist only of one or two extended families, should take its guidance from a council consisting of the three wisest elders. In theory, these councils guide the communities until the axelords re-establish themselves, but since that will never happen, Tepest will remain a place ruled by aging peasants who are respected for their ability to elaborate on old wives’ tales. The only positive note I can make regarding the way communities are run here is that they are serious about ensuring that every person in a village has shelter and enough to eat. Other citizens even take care of those who cannot work due to illness, and neighbors or other





family members always take in orphans. On the flip side, laziness and thievery are punished with ostracism and maiming or disfigurement of the guilty.

While each community sets its own laws, Belenus's Inquisitors have brought a certain amount of uniformity to the villages and hamlets. They insist that certain procedural steps and specific types of written records be maintained with regard to crimes that may have their origin with fey manipulations. Since discerning which is just a "normal" crime or an example of a person trying to abuse the community is difficult, many councils keep records of all their meetings and concerns. Since the Inquisition typically teaches literacy to younger members of communities, the councils of elders are more and more relying on the younger generation to assist in managing the community. I believe that in a few years, the Tepestani will be implementing formal rules to specify how the individual councils conduct the business of leadership. The added bureaucratic duties imposed upon the councils have already prompted those in the larger communities of Viktal and Kellee to appoint a Mayor to assist them. These functionaries are chosen from interested (and literate) citizens, and elected by the council, local priests and merchants. Too many complaints from other villagers over how the Mayor runs the community, however, can cause him to be removed.

Another elected position in the larger communities of Viktal, Kellee, Linde and Briggdarrow is that of Constable. These men are typically recruited from the town's hunters or from outsiders who have impressed the town with their bravery and dedication to justice and order. The council of elders, local priests and merchants are responsible for electing a Constable. Just as the Mayor can be removed from his position because of public dissatisfaction, so can the Constable.

Despite the fact that the Inquisition is the single most powerful group in the domain, Tepest is not in danger of transforming into a hagiocracy any time soon. Wyan, the Inquisition's leader, has steadfastly resisted (and outright refused) any suggestions or requests that members of the Inquisition become directly involved with local politics. Until this past year, he himself turned down annual offers to join Viktal's council of elders. Reportedly, he only accepted this year because another Inquisitor appeared ready to assume the seat. Wyan firmly believes that the Inquisition must be denied formal political authority, or the fate that befell G'Henna will visit Tepest as well. Inquisitors such as Finn are growing increasingly hostile to this position. I

Law Enforcement

The only community in Tepest with a professional militia is Kellee. Usually, law enforcement consists of whatever volunteers the local Constable can round up, as well as hunters and priests protecting other towns. The wandering clerics of Belenus who serve the Inquisition are also increasingly viewed, both by themselves and by average citizens, as spiritual and physical protectors of towns and hamlets. Outsiders behaving in a suspicious or threatening manner are just as likely to be challenged by a Constable's militia as by an Inquisitor.

Kellee Militiaman: Human War1; CR 1/2; Medium humanoid (human); HD 1d8+1; hp 5; Init +1; Spd 20 ft; AC14, touch 11, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +1; Grap +3; Atk +4 melee (1d6+2/19–20, short sword); Full Atk +4 melee (1d6+2/19–20, short sword) or +2 ranged (1d6/x3, shortbow); AL LN; Fort +3, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 15, Dex 13, Con 13, Int 11, Wis 10, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Handle Animal +4, Intimidate +4, Listen +2, Spot +2, Swim +6; Alertness, Weapon Focus (short sword).

Possessions: Short sword, dagger, shortbow, 20 arrows, leather armor, handled bell.

Inquisitor of Belenus: Human Clr1; CR 1; Medium humanoid (human); HD 1d8+1; hp 5; Init +1; Spd 20 ft; AC14, touch 11, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +0; Grap +1; Atk +1 melee (1d6+1, staff); Full Atk +1 melee (1d6+1, staff); SA spells, turn or rebuke undead, greater turning 1/day (domain power); AL CN; Fort +3, Ref +1, Will +3; Str 12, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 11, Wis 13, Cha 12.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +5, Diplomacy +5, Knowledge (religion) +7, Listen +3, Spot +3; Alertness, Skill Focus (Knowledge [religion]).

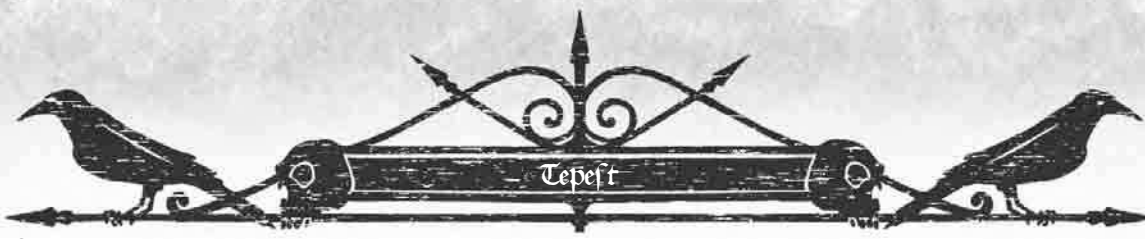
Typical Cleric Spells Prepared (3/2+1; save DC 11 + spell level; Sun domain): 0—*detect magic, guidance, resistance*; 1st—*cure light wounds, doom, endure elements*.*

*Domain spell.

Possessions: Sickle, staff, vestments of Belenus, silver plated shackles engraved with symbols representing Belenus.

believe it is only a matter of time before someone within the Inquisition successfully challenges Wyan for the right to lead the movement, and therefore I believe that it is only a matter of time before the Inquisition becomes the only authority worth mentioning in Tepest.





Economy

Tepest exists on a barter economy. Gold means virtually nothing to the citizens beyond Kellee and Viktal. While there might have been a time when a more evolved economic system emerged in the land, the destruction of the cross-Balinok trade route stopped that development. Traders who wish to purchase lumber and cloudberry wine must bring durable goods, not coin.

Trade and Diplomacy

To describe Tepest as having diplomatic relations with its neighbors would be a gross exaggeration. Only Gerald Ferrier's presence in Kellee causes the town to have any interest in making accommodations for Nova Vaasan merchants. What international ties do exist can easily be summarized.

Darkon: The Tepestani are aghast at Darkonian society, in which magic and elves are openly accepted. They consider Nevuchar Springs a seat of evil, and since King Azalin allows it to exist, they consider him in league with evil. Further, when the Tepestani learned that the Darkonian sect of Ezra is based in Nevuchar Springs, they drew the conclusion that the Church of Ezra (no matter where it can be found) must also be evil. While a few rutted back roads lead from Tepest to Darkon, thus allowing for some small lumber operations, the treacherous terrain discourages most mercantile efforts. I think perhaps the most telling fact about the future of relations between Tepest and Darkon is that Azalin Rex has chosen the more difficult task of reopening the Rawboned Road through the Mountains of Misery rather than building roads and establishing an easier route through Tepest's forests.

Keening and the Shadow Rift: There are no beings in this land with whom any diplomatic relations are possible. Even if there were, the Tepestani would pointedly ignore them. Most of the people do not even like to acknowledge the fact these areas exist (which led to a couple of surreal conversations during my stay in Briggdarrow), and the priests of Belenus consider them constant reminders of why the Inquisition must succeed.

Nova Vaasa: Lord Tristan Hiregaard of Nova Vaasa is considered a friend to all Tepestani due to his generous aid during the famine in 691 BC. This relationship, and the presence of Gerald Ferrier in Kellee, has ensured that Nova Vaasa remains the Tepest's only trading partner. Nova Vaasan mer-

chants, as well as the Borca-based Boritsi Trading Company, cart manufactured goods into Tepest and take timber, goats, cheese and cloudberry wine back to Nova Vaasa in trade. The relationship has stalled since the demise of the East Timori trade route, because the Tepestani resent the unsubtle pressure of the Lawgiver's clergy to convert. This situation has cooled any interest in diplomatic ties beyond their friendship with Lord Tristan.

Sites of Interest



As I traveled into Tepest, its forests were solidly in the grip of autumn. Yellow and red leaves dropped from the trees as I followed the East Timori Road through the heavy shadows of the realm. Luckily for myself and anyone else who may choose to visit Tepest, most of the noteworthy settlements can be found on the trade road. The only exception is Linde, and only those with an extreme interest in cloudberry wine would have any reason to visit the place.

Kellee

Kellee is the first Tepestani community most visitors encounter. Like the other towns, it is a haphazard collection of small dwellings and barns, loosely clustered around an open space that functions as a town square.

The people of Kellee live in simple, one-story, one- or two-family dwellings. Like the homes in the other major settlements of Tepest, most have thatched roofs and whitewashed walls that feature gaily painted pictures of flowers under each window. A few of the homes, those belonging to Tepestani who have made it their business to deal with Vaasi merchants, have wood-shingled roofs.

All homes and barns are scrupulously maintained, and young boys and girls can be seen collecting animal dung in the sheep pens twice a day for distribution on the town's small fields to the north. The town militia patrols the streets and the East Timori Road between Kellee and Viktal, on foot or on ponies. They admonish citizens who let their homes show even the slightest bit of disrepair, and they administer swift justice to those who prey upon travelers and aid those who need it. The exception to pristine appearance of Kellee is a rundown cottage that belongs to Leobe, the town's foremost trapper. Anti-social is a mild term for this man, and I got the feeling that he lets his dwelling fall into disrepair simply to annoy Ferrier. Certainly, his traps and tools were all in excellent condition.





The temple to Belenus in Kellee is its newest structure, and it is the grandest of temples in Tepest. For years, Ferrier blocked the Inquisition from building a new temple in Kellee after the original one burned to the ground. Only when Ferrier fell in love with the local priestess of Belenus did he finally support the construction of a new temple. The two were married in the grand, roofless worship area at the front — most temples to Belenus are constructed without roofs so the god can count his faithful. Reportedly, Wyan came to Kellee to join Ferrier and Tala in early Spring of 756 BC, their marriage being the first such ceremony in the new temple. Tragically for Ferrier, his wife was to die mere months later during a mysterious slaughter that claimed the lives of all the guests at Hawk's Haven.

The Kellee militia is the only truly organized armed force maintained in Tepest; the Inquisition may be armed, but its organization varies greatly. The militia is led by Xeleen, a solidly built Tepestani man with an icy stare that can put fear in even the most depraved highwaymen.

Kellee is also home to one of Tepest's best storytellers. Most of the myths and legends I recorded, I gained initially from him while in the town; he also presented them in by far the most

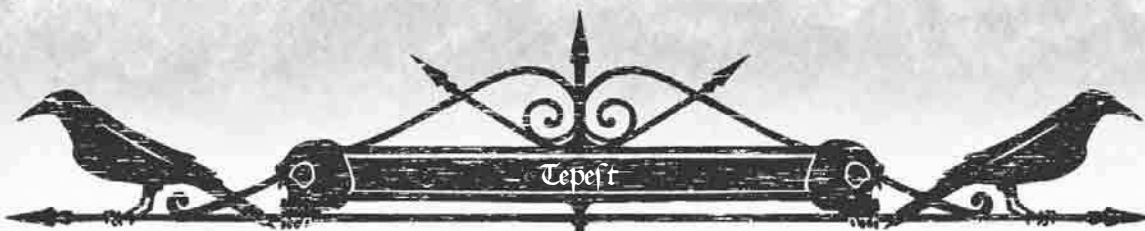
coherent and almost believable fashion. A scrawny human named Karsten, he also introduced me to the very unfriendly Leobe, and the pair of them took me to several axelord ruins, including the only two I visited where the murals portraying Tepest history were mostly intact and free of goblin defacements.

Where to Stay in Kellee

Hawk's Haven (fine quality rooms and meals) is a large, two-story structure. It has eight guest rooms that can comfortably house two travelers each, and a larger common room with ten beds that can sleep two each. Its stables can hold ten horses, and there is an enclosure for drafts animals and additional horses. A fenced and gated courtyard holds merchants' wagons. The horses and ponies belonging to the militia are stabled at the Hawk's Haven.

Hawk's Haven is a large and efficiently staffed hostel owned by Kellee's mayor, Gerard Ferrier. Even after the slaughtering of guests and staff within recent memory, it is a place where citizens of Kellee are happy to work, and the only place where merchants from Nova Vaasa rest their draft animals and people. The rooms are kept scrupulously clean, and the food is a unique blend of





Vaasi, Tepestani, and Falkovnian traditional dishes. The cook is another ex-Falkovnian, and he arrived in Kellee with Ferrier. Travelers can be thankful he was spared the night of horror, as he has his own residence separate from the Hawk's Haven — Manzel Hannert is a true culinary artist. If he wasn't such a loyal friend to Ferrier, he could be a star in any Vaasi noble's court.

Hawk's Haven is very reasonably priced. Ferrier charges 1 gp per resident per week in the private rooms, or 2 sp per single night per resident (payable in advance, no refunds) for a bed in the common rooms. Meal prices vary, depending on the complexity of the dishes wanted, but nothing costs more than 2 gp.

Kellee (large town): Conventional; AL LN; 3,000 gp limit; Assets 555,000 gp; Population 3,700; Isolated (human 99%, other 1%).

Authority Figures: Mayor Gerald Ferrier, male human Ftr5/Exp6; Constable Xeleen, male human Ftr5; Chief Inquisitor Haps, male human Clr4.

Important Characters: Leobe, male human Rgr4 (hunter/trapper).

Viktal

East and slightly north along the East Timori Road lies Viktal. Located on the shores of Lake Kronov, its primary sources of income and sustenance are fishing and sheep herding. Small fields to the west of the town provide a variety of tuber and grain crops. The homes and barns of the town resemble those in Kellee, but sheds where boats can be stored and repaired and the fish netted in the lake can be processed dominate the riverfront. On most days, many of the town's ten small fishing boats ply the lake's placid waters under the perpetually overcast sky.

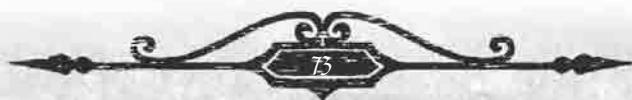
The most remarkable structures in Viktal are the temple of Belenus and the home of Wyan, founder of the Inquisition. Both are located within the same walled compound. They are of an architectural style more reminiscent of the ancient stone dwellings of the axelords than the small cottages of modern day Tepest; they are also two of the few buildings with two levels and more than two rooms in the town.

Where every other temple of Belenus is open to the sky and does not have anywhere for worshippers to sit, the temple in Viktal is covered by a steeply pitched roof with a row of stone symbols of Belenus along its highest point. A further difference is that its inside features rows of pews for the faithful. The inside of the temple is also unique in

that the main altar to Belenus is flanked by smaller shrines devoted to Brigantia and Manannan mac Lir, so that worshippers essentially pay homage to all three deities at once. Even stranger is a large eight-pointed star mounted on the wall behind and above the altar of Belenus. Although the symbol is usually associated with Lugh, Inquisitor Finn assured me during my first confrontation with him that the symbol was not a star but was a representation of Belenus's face — the sun. Wyan later informed me that the wooden carving was often mistaken as representing Lugh, and that he suspected the fey had carried corrupted tales of Belenus to the lands beyond Tepest.

Wyan's home is a small, two-story manor house. He told me that it is the traditional home of the High Priest of Belenus, a tradition that dates to the time of the axelords. He is quite proud of his home and even prouder of the small library he has accumulated of his own texts, as well as a small selection of foreign books on monsters and religious practices of some humanoid races. Wyan shares the house with three acolytes — who act as his servants and assistants — and his daughter Lorelei. When I told Wyan that I was in Tepest to do research on the land, the Inquisition and the threat of the fey, he invited me to stay in his home. It was Wyan who first told me of his daughter's tragic abuse by the fey, and even now she seems to carry a sad and hollow air about her. She clearly never fully recovered from that experience and I think the wounds remain fresh through the cold-heartedness of the second-most powerful figure in the Inquisition, Finn. It's a shame that Lorelei is so cowed she rarely leaves Wyan's compound; she is a very beautiful young woman, and I think she would make an excellent mother based on how gentle she was with the baby I brought with me.

Aside from regaling me with a series of misconceptions about magic, how to defend against it and the nature of the fey, Wyan helped me piece together how the two distinctly different creation myths Tepestani bards like to tell fit together — or rather, *don't* fit together. He told me the Inquisition prefers the "one world" version, as it places Belenus firmly at the center of creation, but that they aren't denying the other version. When I later spoke with Finn, I got the distinct impression that he wanted the "different creations coming together as one" origin myth to fade from memory. My long conversations with Wyan also left me with the impression that he is more open-minded than other leaders of the movement he started; he even showed an interest in discussing the





accuracy of his writings about the fey. I was careful not to let on that the knowledge I had on the subject came from anything more than simple scholarly research. Someone discovering that I was a spellcaster would have made my task much more difficult and dangerous — and I only dissuaded him of his most ridiculous misconceptions.

Where to Stay in Viktal

Fisherman's Rest (common quality rooms, good quality meals) is the only public house in Viktal. It is a rustic two-story building with an attached stable. The second floor houses four simple rooms with narrow beds that barely fit one adult human comfortably. They rent for 1 gp per week, payable in advance and non-refundable. The common room on the ground floor can fit about 30 people, and it is a favorite evening hangout for fishers and herders alike. An apprentice bard named Webb comes and goes throughout the day, dispersing and collecting gossip.

Speaking of gossip, the owners and operators of Fisherman's Rest are a monstrosously obese couple named Greabo and Maria. The only thing larger than the couple's girths is their mouths. They gossip non-stop, and I think I heard more nonsensical fey rumors and accusations about Viktal residents secretly being fey from them than I did collectively from everyone else in the area. If it wasn't for the fact that their healthier son, Am, helps run the place, I doubt the upstairs rooms would ever be tended. The stairs would either collapse under their massive weight or they'd run out of breath halfway up from trying to talk while engaging in physical exertion. Am also tends to the small stables attached to the inn, and does so very well, as I kept my horse there, even while staying at Wyan's home.

The food at Fisherman's Rest, however, is excellent. Maria does all the cooking, and in her case, the Barovian saying "You should always eat where the cook is fat" holds true. The prices are reasonable and hover around 2 sp for a full meal.

Viktal (large town): Conventional; AL LN; 3,000 gp limit; Assets 540,000 gp; Population 3,600; Isolated (human 99%, other 1%).

Authority Figures: Constable Wistan, male human War3; Wyan of Viktal, male human Clr5/Tlq2.

Important Characters: Mikhail Kraznik, male human War6 (retired Constable); Greabo, male human Com2 (innkeeper); Finn, male human Clr4 (senior Inquisitor).

Linde

While at the Fisherman's Rest in Viktal, listening to Greabo ramble and trying to separate nonsense from possible fact, Webb popped in and asked if I wanted to go with him to Linde. He promised to show me some axelord ruins along the way. He also mentioned that the Blackmist River and its cloudberry patches were a must-see for visitors to Tepest. Greabo asked Webb to remind Hanrin to set aside twenty bottles of cloudberry wine for him.

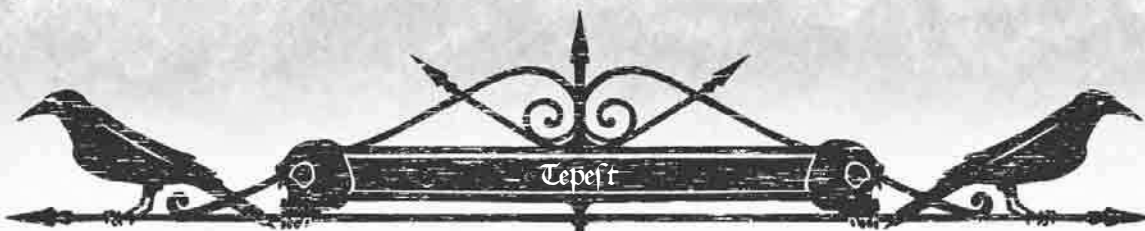
I accepted Webb's offer to travel with him to Linde, which lies to the southwest of Viktal, above the Blackmist River. Lorelei promised to look after the baby until I returned. Webb made good on his offer to show me the axelord ruins, but they had all been thoroughly defaced by goblins. (I fared far better with Karsten and Leobe when it came to visiting ruins.) Webb also proved to me that he is indeed a walking stereotype; like so many bards, he considers himself a gift to all womankind... and I had repeatedly either to pointedly ignore "compliments" or outright remind him of properly gentlemanly behavior. I think his attitude said more of his self-absorption and lack of class than my womanly wiles. At least he was more playful than forceful. It would have been unfortunate to reveal myself as a spellcaster by visibly responding with some stinging magical riposte!

A well-traveled dirt road leads to Linde, a tiny hamlet that I probably would not have bothered to visit except for the fact that the place is the center of cloudberry wine production. It consists of maybe a dozen structures, including a couple of warehouses that were constructed during the boom years before the formation of the Shadow Rift. One is still used to store bottles of cloudberry wine brewed for trade to foreign merchants and other communities within Tepest, while the other has mostly fallen into disrepair and is used as a stable for the local inn, The Nocturne.

Linde consists nearly entirely of whitewashed, thatched-roofed buildings, with the aforementioned warehouses and the temple of Belenus the only exceptions. The temple is a recent addition to the settlement, and it stands in the middle of the village square. It is the simplest of the Belenus temples I visited, consisting merely of a ring of standing stones, each carved with the symbol of the god.

The town abides because of the ease with which cloudberrys may be cultivated here. Every family in the community tends to the patches





around the town and on the nearby cliff-face above the Blackmist River. Every family has also lost one or two members to the sudden windstorms that come rushing across the Shadow Rift during harvest time, either when trees fell on them or when gusts flung them from the cliffs and into the Blackmist River below. Every family also brews some of its own cloudberry wine, but the majority of the wine is manufactured communally at The Nocturne, where it is traded to other Tepestani or sold to foreign merchants.

Linde's Constable, Mayor and leading religious figure are one and the same person: a large, dark-haired, bear-like man named Mannen. A woodsman turned priest of Belenus and Inquisitor, he was the most likable cleric I dealt with during my sojourn in Tepest. When I told him I was a scholar and of the attitude exhibited by Finn of Viktal, he actually launched into a tirade about the closed-mindedness and willful ignorance of many of his fellow priests. Webb was obviously troubled by Mannen's rant, and the bard avoided him for the rest of the time I spent in Linde. I didn't mind, though, because it kept him from making any more clumsy passes at me, and I learned that Mannen, like Leobe in the south, could direct me to abandoned axelord longhouses more impressive than any Webb knew about.

Where to Stay in Linde

The public accommodations in Linde are satisfactory if one takes into account the size of the community, but they can otherwise only be described as abysmal. The Nocturne (poor quality rooms and meals) is a long, one-story structure with the common room at one end and two drafty, communal guestrooms at the other. There are guestrooms for either sex, and each has six beds. A kitchen that doubles as a brewery for cloudberry wine is attached to the back. The food consisted of bland sheep stew both for the morning and evening meals, although the breads were an impressive effort of whole wheat augmented with cloudberry. The worst part of staying at The Nocturne is the stench of yeast always hanging in the air, rising in the bread and bubbling through the brewing ale. The fact that the fruity aroma of fermenting cloudberry wine was mixed in made the experience worse.

A young couple named Samus and Vette runs the inn. They inherited the establishment when Vette's mother passed away last year. Samus originally hails from Viktal, and when he heard of my purposes in Tepest, he

asked if I knew the secret to Castle Island. I replied that I had heard nothing of this place. He related details, which I will convey below.

Linde (hamlet): Conventional; AL N; 100 gp limit; Assets 2,500 gp; Population 300; Isolated (human 99%, other 1%).

Authority Figures: Inquisitor Mannenn, male werebear (natural) Rgr5/Clr3.

Castle Island

In Linde, Samus had asked me about Castle Island. No one in Viktal had mentioned it, and on the return trip Webb strongly encouraged me not to bring it up with anyone. Samus said that over ten years ago a tiny island appeared in Lake Kronov about halfway between Viktal and Briggdarrow after a particularly foggy night. I had noticed the island and its little ruined keep, but had just assumed it was another abandoned axelord stronghold. Samus told me that it was home to a fey temptress. Anyone who attempts to visit the island is never heard from again. Webb added the additional details that fishers have named the temptress the Lady of the Lake, and that if one ever hears her singing while sailing upon the waters, one needs to start praying loudly to Belenus or fall under her spell. Mannen encouraged me to seek out Old Man Kraznik at the Viktal Constabulary if I wanted a straightforward, superstition-free account of Castle Island.

From Webb, I learned that Kraznik was once Viktal's Constable but that old age had forced him to stop seeking reelection. He still lived in the constabulary, though. Upon reaching Viktal, I stopped long enough at Wyan's home to check on the well-being of the baby and to fulfill the requirements of being a gracious guest, but then headed straight to see Kraznik. I passed some excited Inquisitors on my way out — it seems a citizen in a nearby village had recently been found guilty of consorting with the fey and would be executed. I tried to glean information from them, but they glared at me suspiciously and told me the matter was none of my concern.

I found Kraznik to be a decaying wreck of a man whose mind nonetheless remained sharp. He confirmed the tale that Castle Island had appeared from the fog in 744 BC. At least twelve people are known to have traveled to the island and never returned. At best, their boats were found drifting empty on the lake. Nine of the vanished were outlanders in search of treasure, but three were fishers lured to the island by the Lady's beautiful voice.

Report Two

By the accounts offered, I am fairly certain that the Lady of the Lake is a sirine, which means that the Tepestani may have an honest-to-god fey on their hands. I was intrigued by the way the island had appeared, as I have not heard of any geographical feature as small as Castle Island coming into existence as the realms of the world have. I was fully aware that visiting the place could possibly be very dangerous, but I trusted in my own intellect and magical prowess to defeat any charms with which the fey might attempt to snare me. Further, I have the magic trinket my patron so generously outfitted me with to preserve me in more violent situations. Sirines aren't the most threatening of creatures if one knows how to deal with them. I was hoping that if Castle Island is indeed home to one of the theoretical dread lords, I might confirm the existence of such personages. After all, if there were such a dread lord on Castle Island, it would have to be the sirine who lived there.

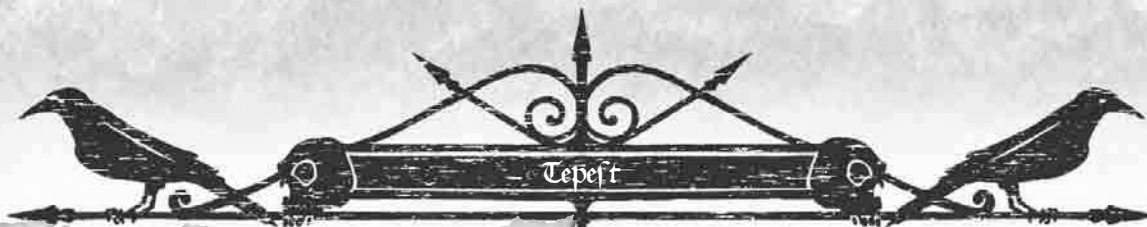
The next morning, I attempted to convince one of the fishers to take me there. They all refused. I offered to buy a boat, but they refused me that as well. As I considered magical means, Finn and two other Inquisitors approached me. Finn told me point blank that he was suspicious of my inten-

tions. He further claimed that during my first stay in Viktal, two citizens had reported the appearance of fairy stools by their doors, and that this morning a goat had given sour milk. He finally informed me that the Avanc had attacked a fishing boat yesterday, on the very day I returned to Viktal. He claimed that at least one visitor to Wyan's home thought they had heard my infant speak, something which it appeared entirely too young to do. He ended this list of vague accusations by wondering if perhaps it was time for me to witness the workings of the Inquisition first hand. I briefly wondered if perhaps I should show Finn the workings of magic first hand, but decided that Castle Island wasn't worth fighting over.

Moreover, at the time, I thought that maybe I could convince someone in Briggdarrow to take me there. As things turned out, I never visited the island, nor did I even get to hear the song of its supposed mistress. It probably would have been a waste of time, as I doubt any land so small could house one of the theoretical dread lords.

Eventually, I believe you will come to see that the prison fits the punishment, scholar. If I don't dispose of you, that is, considering your disappointing efforts here.





Castle Island at a Glance

Cultural Level: Savage (0). The ruins indicate a Dark Age (5) outpost.

Ecology: Full

Environment: Temperate aquatic

Year of Formation: 744 BC

Population: None

Government: None

Ruler: None

Darklord: The Lady of the Lake

Castle Island is the smallest known domain in the mainland Core, its borders stretching just a quarter-mile in any direction past the island's shores. Pocket domains, a strange and uncommon type of domain, are often smaller but are defined by their ability to drift from place to place; Castle Island is rooted to Lake Kronov. Castle Island's darklord is detailed in the Attached Notes.

Briggdarrow

Seeing that I had outstayed my welcome in Viktal, I strapped the horse-back bassinette with the baby onto my mount and trotted westward toward the tiny village of Briggdarrow, the fourth and final noteworthy settlement of Tepest.

Located at the west end of Lake Kronov, Briggdarrow was a one-time border stop where forests gave way to rocky, barren slopes that climbed to the isolated land of G'Henna. Like Kellee and Viktal, it consists of a jumble of homes near a temple — this one dedicated to Manannan mac Lir — with additional homes scattered around nearby pastures and fields. Most of the outlying homes are abandoned and have fallen into ruin. The village survives mostly on fishing activities, but when the first explorers left G'Henna in 713 and descended to Briggdarrow, its Council of Elders showed a level of initiative and commercial vision virtually unheard of among Tepestani.

They secured funding from a wealthy family from Falkovnia's Morfenzi (who wished to expand trade across the Balinoks and divert money from the Borcan merchant families into the war chests of Vlad Drakov) and used it to build a large, luxurious inn. It was a sensible gamble, although the stand-offish nature of the rest of the Tepestani and the increasing fanaticism of the G'Hennan worshippers of the dread

god Zhakata soon limited the growth of trade from the east. Even before the creation of the Shadow Rift during the Great Upheaval, though, it was obvious to all that Briggdarrow would never achieve the stature that its elders or the Morfenzi investors had hoped. Gerald Ferrier's efforts in Kellee made it unnecessary for many merchants even to deal with the taciturn, paranoid citizens of Tepest. The elimination of the cross-mountain road merely cemented the certainty that their dreams for Briggdarrow would never reach the richness they had hoped. The Great Upheaval and formation of the Shadow Rift doomed the dream completely, and Briggdarrow remains a forgotten afterthought on the trade-road.

Most of the outlying homes and barns stand abandoned and are falling into ruin, as much of the village's population left for other parts of Tepest following events in 751 BC. Many folk claim that fey flittered up from the Rift and stole the souls of every inhabitant in a single night, and only by an epic quest were the souls recovered. (I am unclear how much of what I learned of that night is bardic hyperbole and how much is fact, as I collected three distinctly different descriptions of what occurred, who undertook the quest to rescue the inhabitants of Briggdarrow, and whether or not the quest was successful.)

What is certain is that Briggdarrow's proximity to the Shadow Rift makes the area a hotbed for fey activity — or so the Inquisitors claim. They say they encounter more fey here than in any other part of the land and that the citizens of Briggdarrow are far more likely to consort with them.

While I saw no fey, nor anyone "consorting" with the fey, I witnessed other peculiarities in the village that I can only attribute to the Shadow Rift. First, the area is plagued by strange weather — I witnessed fall, winter, spring, summer and then a return to fall all in the same day, with the unseasonable seasons each lasting less than an hour — and many of the villagers remain erratic. They carry faraway expressions, as if they have just woken from a pleasant dream and can neither forget it nor quite dispel it from their minds. The Inquisition believes citizens in this state have souls corrupted by fey and that it is only a matter of time before they are revealed as enemies of all that is right and good. While I think the Inquisition is overreacting as is typical, I wonder if this is something that will be limited to Briggdarrow, or if soon the people to the west of the Shadow Rift will be experiencing bizarre, localized weather and strange changes of





personality. Perhaps this is something you should send additional agents to look into, my patron?

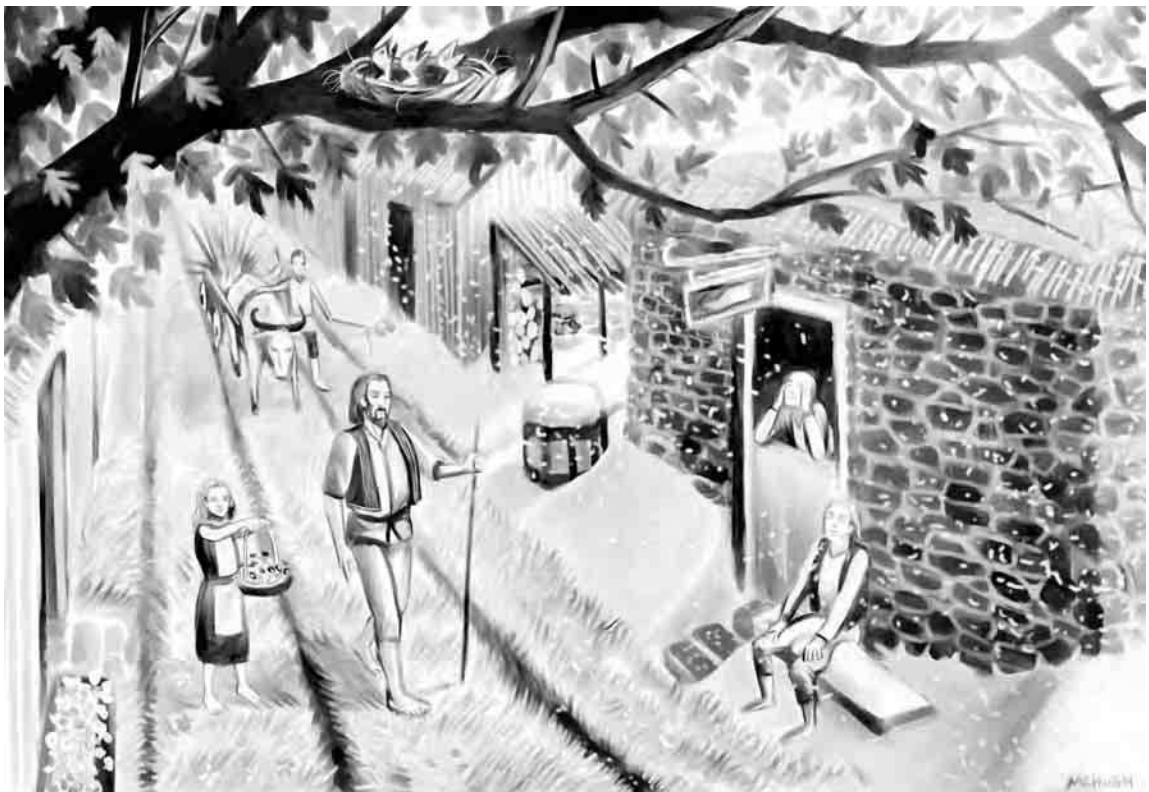
The thought has some merit, but I think the tax it would impose upon my subjects may be higher than is worth paying. You will learn this when you enter the Rift, my dear.

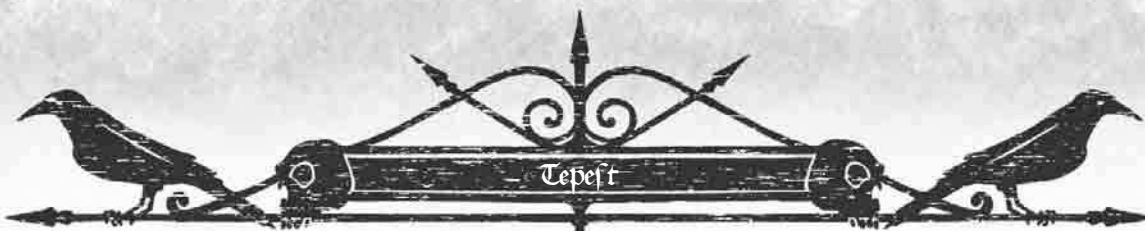
Brother Hanton, the former ranking Inquisitor in the village, believes that this is possible. He surmises that the state of Briggdarrow and its citizens will soon be typical for all those who are too close to the Shadow Rift. The greatest service I could perform for the world, he said, would be to tell the lords and ladies of the great cities in the lands to the west about what I have witnessed here. If those who are "fey touched" are not contained, he asserted, they will spread a taint across the land. He bitterly complained that the Inquisition needed a greater presence in Briggdarrow, so the "mind-addled, fey touched" could be controlled. From what I heard in Briggdarrow, the entire town would be walled off if the fey-touched there were to be so restricted. *Everyone* from the village has at some point or another been seen wandering about with

a dreamy, dazed look on their faces or has done and said things they could not recollect when asked about it later. Even locals who have joined the Inquisition have fallen victim to such spells.

On my second day in Briggdarrow, I cautiously revisited the possibility of having fishers take me to Castle Island. Instead of starting with the common people, I brought it up with Hanton. He was as uncooperative as Finn, but not as threatening. He made it clear that none of the citizens would take me to the island, particularly not now that the Avanc was prowling again. He said that he might consider arranging for a trip to the waters near the island in a few days, but not until after the execution of a fey consort.

With the promise of witnessing the ultimate conclusion of one of the Inquisition's trials, I put aside my desire to visit Castle Island for the time being — not realizing that I would never really return to that desire again. The mentioned execution was of a young man tried and found guilty four days prior to my arrival (possibly even the same case Wyan had received a dispatch about while I met with him). Hanton would not discuss particulars with me, however, stating that I could watch the execution with the rest of the villagers if I





wished, but that he had neither the time nor the interest to go into details with me.

The execution took place as the sun rose in the east, beneath an ancient oak tree that towered on the very edge of the Shadow Rift. The accused arrived on the back of a donkey with his hands tied behind his back. Hanton offered a prayer to Belenus as the noose was fastened around the condemned's neck, asking the god to cleanse the tainted soul. I was at once impressed and bemused by the icy calm with which the man faced his death; he showed no emotion whatsoever. I asked the local priest of Manannan mac Lir if those who were executed here were somehow sedated first, and he responded sadly that the young man's demeanor was as clear a testament to his corruption as anything the Inquisition had uncovered during the investigation. The man kept his calm even as the rear of the donkey was given a hard slap and it ran out from under him, leaving him dangling and swaying until the weight of his own body snapped his neck.

When the twitching stopped, the body was cut down. The noose was left around the neck and an iron nail hammered into the chest, reportedly to keep the corpse from getting up and walking around. The priests present entreated Belenus and Manannan mac Lir to take the purified soul into their heavenly homes. The body was then carried through town, in a procession at the head of which was Hanton, offering yet more prayers — these ones asking that the villagers would be granted strength to turn away the temptations of Spring's Children. On a small rise overlooking Lake Kronov, where a north/south-bound trail crossed the East Timori Road, a shallow grave was dug and the body deposited within it. Another iron nail was driven into its chest, more prayers were offered — ones designed to keep the now-soulless body from rising to menace the living — and then the grave was closed. By now, it was early afternoon, and the villagers returned to their homes to prepare their evening meals. I understood why Ferrier continued to resist these types of executions being performed in Kellee: an entire day's work was lost whenever one occurred.

As I followed the villagers back to town, I realized that I had gained more this day than the opportunity to witness questionable justice being meted out. I remembered the charred body I had seen outside Kellee, the mutilated one the wolves had fought over. It dawned on me that no such mutilation had taken place here. My initial conclusion that someone was harvesting bodies for components of

the darkest magic was proven to be accurate. Now, with another body in the ground, I had the opportunity to discover who was doing the harvesting.

After sundown, I arranged for someone to care for the baby, and I returned covertly to the burial site. I hid behind some boulders and waited. Having learned from my experiences in Verbrek, I also concealed myself with magic, casting not only a spell of invisibility, but also utilizing a new spell I'd been working on mastering during my stay in Nova Vaasa, one that masks my scent.

Well after midnight, several small figures separated from the night shadows and crept toward the grave. From their bent postures and the stench carried on the wind, I knew they were goblins. They set quickly to work, exhuming the fresh body. One of them drew a large knife, while another unfolded a ragged piece of parchment that contained drawings of a human body and certain internal organs. Following the drawing, the goblins cut open the corpse and removed several organs. They then cut off its hands. They put the body parts in a leather sack that had arcane symbols stamped upon it and tied it tightly. They then faded into the shadows again.

Cloaked by my spells, I stole after them, knowing they would lead me to the dark person whose bidding they were doing. Little did I know that I would have not one but two encounters of great mystery as a result.

Where to Stay in Briggdarrow

That Briggdarrow never gained prominence as a trade center is a social injustice. Many-a-merchant and caravan master would have sung the praises of The Spider House (excellent quality rooms and meals). Although it is starting to become a little worn around the edges, its airy, well-lit common room is nicely appointed, and the beds in its ten second-story private rooms (I was told each room was identical) are by far the most comfortable I'd slept in since Karina. The stables were just as spacious, and Keirwyn, the sallow-faced innkeeper, treated my horse to meals that it probably found just as excellent as the ones that Marian, his bony wife, fed to me.

The Spider House is the only public house in Briggdarrow, but the lack of competition, and even the lack of regular guests, has not diminished the pride Keirwyn and Marian feel in the level of the hospitality they offer. Marian confided in me that she still holds out hope that she will be able to bear a child and pass the inn along to him.



Briggdarrow (hamlet): Conventional; AL N; 100 gp limit; Assets 1,500 gp; Population 300; Isolated (human 99%, other 1%).

Authority Figures: Mayor Nesta, female human Ari4; High Priest Dylahn of Manannan mac Lir, male human Clr3; Inquisitor Hanton, male human Clr5.

Important Characters: Keirwyn, male human Com5, and Marian, female human Com3, of Briggdarrow (operators of The Spider House Inn).

Cottage of the Sisters Three

The goblins led me to the final place of note I visited in Tepest. I admit up front that I chose not to confront the inhabitants, and I am certain that my patron will agree I was wise in taking the path of discretion. The magical bracer I wear might not have saved me, and it might have ended up in the wrong hands.

Over the next several nights, I trailed the goblin grave robbers through more of the gods-forsaken wildernesses that cover so much of our world. I had to consume those awful iron rations on which self-described adventurers and brigands sustain themselves on, for the goblins seemed to be collecting every cloudberry and non-poisonous mushroom they encountered, and every settlement we came near was abandoned and looted.

On the second night, I feared that I was woefully unprepared and that I might have to wait for another opportunity to discover who was collecting the body parts. For a time, it appeared the goblins were heading into the shadows between the twisted trees of Brujamonte. Fortunately, they skirted around its edges — even the birds that gazed down at me from the trees seemed to have evil gleams in their eyes.

On the third night, the goblins crossed paths with a second band. A brief, heated exchange occurred. I understood little of what they said to one another, but when one of the group I was following said they were on an errand for the “Sisters Three,” the other group immediately stopped hostilities. They let the group I was following continue on its way, and I detected a tone of reverence in the grunts and growls that were issued as goodbyes.

The goblins continued deeper into Wormwood, eventually following the near-undetectable game trails to a ramshackle cottage in a clearing. At first glance, the many skins stretched on frames around the structure and the bones hanging from the porch-awning caused me to assume a woodsman lived here. Then I noticed the bones scattered about on the ground near a fire and a massive, bubbling cauldron; some of the bones were human and humanoid skulls.

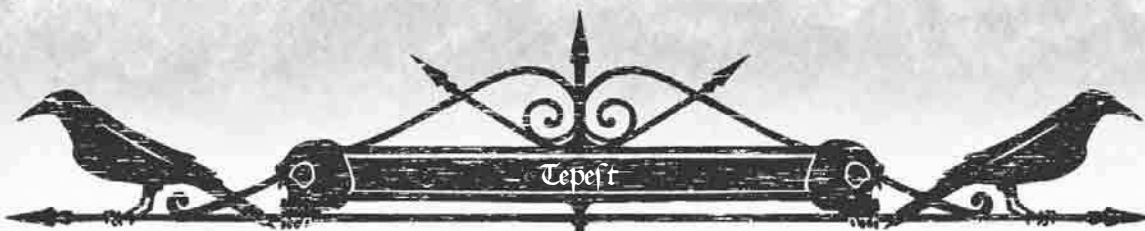
The goblins hesitated at the edge of the clearing and engaged in a brief discussion. Then, three of them wormed across the clearing on their bellies, crawled up on the porch and knocked on the door. It opened, and a towering green hag emerged. I am no coward, as you well know, my patron, but the sight of this creature — without question one of the most powerfully evil and magically mighty beings to haunt our world — made my blood freeze. It was as if the evil of her soul was manifest around her, so strong was the stench of death that wafted across the clearing when she emerged.

The cowering goblins presented her with their sacks of body parts. The hag examined the grisly contents as a housewife might inspect fruit at a market. As she did, I heard two distinct hoarse voices call out from within. She responded to them curtly; I did not recognize the language in which the exchange took place.

After inspecting the “wares” of the goblins, the hag provided payment. From a pocket in the bloodstained apron she wore, she handed one goblin a stoppered bottle containing a viscous liquid. For the second, she drew a wicked black blade from her belt and offered it to him hilt first. The third looked at her with obvious greed and after a moment’s consideration, she reached down and wrapped her massive talons around his head and crushed it like an overripe pear. She then stuffed the twitching corpse down her throat, swallowing it with but one or two chews. The act brought a mixture of laughter and outraged howls from the two beings still within the cottage... and paralyzed the two remaining goblins with terror.

The green hag then presented the goblins with a new piece of parchment, another mission. It did not have a diagram, but instead looked to be a portrait of a young human woman. The hag sneered something in the guttural Goblin tongue, which I think was “Bring me this pretty one for more gifts.” The command was echoed from within, along with more cackling.

As the goblins started to crawl back to their comrades, it looked like the green hag was going to say something else, then she stopped and sniffed the air. That was the point at which I decided to withdraw, perhaps even to flee. While I know my spells are sure protections against most beasts, monsters and men, I do not know enough about the powers of hags to be so confident as far as they are concerned. Further, I am certain that the goblins were doing trade with a hag covey, and I believe that you are familiar enough with the unpredictability of hags in trios that you can appre-



ciate why I had to withdraw. I also believe that this is the first time in my life where I could actually *feel* the aura of evil crawling across my skin.

Could one of those “three sisters” be the dread lord of Tepest? Perhaps. I am certain, though, that they are at least in part the root of the goblin legends of “dark mothers.”

Another example of cowardice on your part, little scholar. Will you really force me to replace you just halfway through our endeavor?

Final Thoughts

After witnessing the “exchange” between the goblins and the hags in the southern forest, I decided I had learned all there was to know about Tepest. The identity of the domain’s dread lord remains nebulous, but Wyan is the most likely candidate, with one of those hideous crones in the forest being the obvious second choice, and whatever creature is master of Wytchwood as a third.

You disappoint me. With all the insight you have gained into the nature of our world, you still cannot identify those who are at once its masters and slaves, even as you stare upon their faces.

But before I would make my way to Keening, there was one more encounter in store for me, one I am certain that you, my patron, will find most interesting. And I do hope you pay attention, because it contains a message for you.

I found my way back to the trail that the goblins had taken to the cottage. Unfortunately, I failed to notice the pit trap that we had circumvented the first time, and I plunged through the flimsy covering to the packed dirt floor some twenty feet down. How long I was unconscious from the fall I cannot say, but I awoke flat on my face and in severe pain.

After ascertaining that I wasn’t impaled and that nothing appeared to be broken, I slowly turned over and slipped my pack off my back. The pit I was in did not contain spikes like the other goblin traps. Perhaps someone created it other than the goblins. Perhaps this was a pit intended to capture fresh meals for the hags in the stone cottage?

I was thinking such thoughts and cursing myself for not bothering to prepare any spells of levitation or flight for the day when I noticed movement at the top of the pit. I immediately readied a spell of holding, hoping to immobilize whatever was up there and

then finish it off with a pistol shot, but when the figure came into clear view, I hesitated.

“You look like you are in a spot,” came a man’s voice, in Darkonian with a cultured accent and an amused tone. A human form was outlined against the dim daylight above. “I am more than happy to lend a hand. You have but to ask.”

Vowing to keep my tongue in check until I at least was out of the pit, I replied, “Yes, please lend a hand.”

And there my memory grows hazy and confused. I recall the man leaping into the pit, but I also recall climbing — or being lifted — from it. I have even dimmer memories of being wrapped in what seems like a large leather cloak and rushing through the shadowed woods as though flying.

The next thing I am certain of is sitting in the common room of the Spider’s Web in Briggdarrow, in a fresh set of clothes. Next to me at the small table sat an exceedingly handsome man, with aquiline features, night-black hair pulled back in a ponytail, and wearing tan trousers, riding boots and a black surcoat. Age-wise, he was somewhere in his twenties. He cradled the baby I acquired in Nova Vaasa in one arm, gently bouncing it, while he turned the final page of my current notes with his free hand. My other folios and notes were stacked on the table.

“You have been on a most fascinating journey. I don’t know that words can express the admiration I have developed for your powers of observation and deduction, as well as your abilities as a scholar.”

He looked up at me with the most brilliantly green eyes I’ve ever seen. A slight smile appeared on his lips, and I found myself looking away, because I’d never encountered anyone who possessed as much... beauty before. I could feel myself blushing, and I started to grow a bit irritated with myself, but then he put his hand on mine. I looked back into his eyes.

“You shouldn’t feel embarrassed over truthful compliments. I think it is one of the greatest shames of this world that women are expected to serve either church or home and leave scientific endeavors to the male of the species. If more people paid attention to what resides in the mind rather than the shape of the flesh, you’d be standing at the head of the Fraternity of Shadows, not traveling to every obscure corner of our lands.”

I found myself filling with a joy and warmth I hadn’t felt in a very, very long time. As I looked into his green eyes and smiling face, thoughts of a decidedly carnal nature crept into my mind. My breath caught in my throat as he leaned closer to me.

“But I have one question,” he said in a silky tone. “What do you want with my children?”





I shifted my eyes to the baby in his arm.

“No, this is not one of mine. Cute, but not mine.”

I told him I didn’t know what he meant. That was the only child I had touched since my own daughter.

“You really don’t, do you?” One of his perfect eyebrows arched high on his forehead as an intrigued tone entered his voice. “Yet within your notes I recognize no less than *five* of them.”

I suggested that he share more details about his children with me, and I assured him that whoever they were, whatever my notes said about them, they were not the reasons for my studies.

His hand tightened on mine, squeezing it. His green eyes narrowed and seemed to flash with barely contained anger. His handsome features became as hard as stone. “Your master should not meddle in things beyond his ken. Perhaps I should ask *him* what he wants?”

The elation from moments before had turned to stark terror. My breath caught in my throat as the dark stranger leaned even closer, but for a very different reason this time.

“Tell your master his little puppet show will come to an abrupt end if it continues along its current script.” His lips brushed against my ear as he whispered his words, and I shuddered. “Tell him that if I’d wanted you, you would have been mine.”

There was a sudden rush of air, a rustle of papers and a loud bang. I screamed and pitched to one side, off my chair. From the floor, I looked around, my heart racing with terror.

The stranger was gone, vanished in an instant. I was alone. My notes were flying through the air about the room, spinning toward the floor in spiral patterns like leaves falling from trees. The inn’s front door was wide open, but a breeze from outside caught it and slammed it shut. I rose to my feet, my knees weak. On the table, I saw the baby, sleeping blissfully with its fist in its mouth.

Moments later, the sallow-faced innkeeper emerged from the back room, startled to see me and full of apologies for not noticing my return. Later, his apologies turned to suspicion and within another day, Hanton was asking me questions about my sudden and unnoticed return to Briggdarrow. I decided that rather than risk extensive delay due to incarceration and possible torture by the Inquisition, it was time to leave Tepest behind.

Of course, now there is another mystery before me, one that relates to you, my patron. The mysterious gentleman’s message has now been delivered exactly as it was given. I do not know whether he is simply a powerful spellcaster, or whether he is something far greater — although I strongly suspect it’s the latter, for I doubt he came upon me in that pit by accident. I also do not know what (or who) he recognized in my notes. Five of them, he said. This implies there are more than five of these “children” out there. This research isn’t about potential future conquests or even potential future threats to Darkon, is it? There’s something else you’re looking for. These “children.” I promise you, my patron, before I am done, I will find out why you have set me on this journey.



Report Three: Keening

*Death found strange beauty on that cherub brow,
And dash'd it out. There was a tint of rose
On cheek and lip; — he touch'd the veins with ice,
And the rose faded. — Forth from those blue eyes
There spoke a wishful tenderness, — a doubt
Whether to grieve or sleep, which Innocence
Alone can wear. With ruthless haste he bound
The silken fringes of the curtaining lids
For ever. There had been a murmuring sound
With which the babe would claim its mother's ear,
Charming her even to tears. The spoiler set
His seal of silence.*

— Lydia Howard Sigourney, "Death of an Infant"



To overlook the boundary where Tepest ends and the accursed land of Keening begins is difficult. As I traveled north beyond the Goblinwood, the dense forests gave way abruptly to sparse corpses of dying trees, black and gnarled. The chirps, buzzes and rustles of nature faded to silence, broken only by groaning winds. The air itself seemed thick with a pall of melancholy and the sunlight faded to a feeble wintry glow. I pushed onward, and the skeletal thickets quickly dwindled, leaving only a stony wasteland of withered grasses.

It was then that the central feature of Keening rose into view, no longer a half-glimpsed shadow through the trees but a granite spectre clad in mist. When I gazed upon the tortured shape of Mount Lament, I could barely suppress a shudder. Even more unsettling, my bundle — the orphaned infant that I had purchased in Liara — gave a sudden and pitiful wail. The other notorious peaks of the Core tower arrogantly, but Mount Lament hunches like the proverbial nightmare on the breast of the landscape. The sight of the mountain lurks in my mind even now, surfacing at odd moments like an old sorrow suddenly remembered.

There are many tangled strands in this cobweb, my little scholar. Threads of slavery and exile, sacrilege and sorrow, damnation and blind love. See to it that you do not lose sight of the spider lurking at the heart of the web.

Landscape

Old maps scribed in Balok or Mordentish are the sources in which one is most likely to find the appellation “Keening.” The term is an almost dismissive label, stuck upon this land by Mordentish explorers sometime after the Scourge of Arak. They understood the terrible force that set Mount Lament and its surrounding lands apart from Arak and dubbed it for the wailing that echoes down the mountains at night.

Keening is a blasted land, bereft of life and loveliness. The natural surroundings of neighboring realms fade quickly as one crosses into Keening, the flora growing twisted and stunted, the creatures

Keening at a Glance

Cultural Level: Ruins suggest that Keening was once a Chivalric (8) domain. The Scourged undead of Marbh-Cathair have technology that ranges from Stone Age (1) to Medieval (7).

Ecology: None. Although undead can be found in Keening, they cannot be summoned with conjuration magic.

Environment: Temperate hills and mountains.

Year of Formation: 588 BC.

Population: 970 Scourged undead exist in Marbh-Cathair. Unknown numbers of other undead creatures dwell throughout the domain.

Races: Humans 90%, halflings 4%, gnomes 2%, half-elves 1%, elves 1%, dwarves 1%, other 1%. These figures represent the Scourged undead of Marbh-Cathair.

Human Ethnic Groups: Darkonians 91%, Arakans 8%, other 1%. These figures represent the Scourged undead of Marbh-Cathair.

Languages: When they bother to speak, the Scourged undead of Marbh-Cathair primarily speak Darkonian. Other undead creatures speak the languages they knew in life, usually the tongues of surrounding domains. Widderribhinn speak Arak or Sylvan.

Religions: None. The widderribhinn perpetuate the worship of the Spider Queen.

Government: No formal government.

Ruler: None.

Darklord: Tristessa.

kept at bay by a nameless dread. Tepest’s forests shrink first into scattered copses of trees, then into patches of thorny scrub. The western foothills of the Mountains of Misery change from scenic highlands into a broken landscape of squat ridges and hummocks, crowned with yellow grasses.

Gradually, even these features recede. The dry, gritty soil beneath the traveler’s feet vanishes, leaving a bleak tableland of stone. Scattered pebbles, cobbles and boulders abound in the wasteland that rings Mount Lament, and travel on foot is arduous



on the ankles. Lichens of pale yellow, green and blue encrust the stones, lending the region an otherworldly vividness amid the surrounding grey. Many stones were apparently arranged deliberately in vague patterns, although the significance of these arrangements eluded me. The Tepestani believe that each rock is a tombstone for a fey soul that now slumbers in Mount Lament, hence their name for the wastes that surround the mountains: the Boggart Graveyards.

The Graveyards surround and segregate Mount Lament from the Mountains of Misery. Darkonian dwarves hold that it once stood to the east, sister to the volcanic Mounts Nirka and Nyid. When the Scourge ravaged Arak in the sixth century, the Mists are said to have uprooted Mount Lament and set it down far to the west. The Tepestani, meanwhile, speak of Mount Lament rising from the earth overnight like a festering boil, an upheaval unleashed at the hand of the evil faerie queen, Tristessa. These two accounts are not mutually exclusive. I believe that the Tepestani are merely attempting to account for the sudden appearance of a mountain near their borders. My own rudimentary study of Mount Lament's natural history suggests that it is geologically similar to the Mountains of Misery.

Although the Darkonian dwarves dubbed Keening the Cinderwitch Mountains, to describe the realm as a *range* of mountains is disingenuous, for Keening has but one precipice. Beyond the Boggart Graveyards, the landscape rises to the solitary peak of Mount Lament (4,730 feet). The ascent is tortuous, as I can attest from firsthand experience. Even at the foot of the mountains, the journey was a breathless, labyrinthine hike over barren stone. I clambered on hand and foot across steep rock faces; jagged ridges and sheer crevasses appeared suddenly in my path as though out of spite. Eventually, any pretense of a journey on foot alone vanished, and the ascent became a grueling test of mountaineering skill. Blocked by perilous cliff faces or fissures, I was forced to retrace my steps several times during my ascent, squandering precious hours of daylight.

Mount Lament itself is eerie, a jagged ridge that rises eastward to an unspectacular, blunt summit. Wisps of white fog crown the peak, heedless of the weather. Long, vertical black streaks mar the ashen stone, as though marking where rivulets of tears once streamed down the slopes.

A few rivers flow through Keening. Although they are clear and swift, they carry a sterile lifelessness that does not invite the traveler to drink from



or bathe in them. The River of Tears cuts north to join the Corvus River in Darkon, the Crying River flows south to Lynn Kathryn in Tepest, and the Kryder River flows west, vanishing as it plummets into the Shadow Rift. All are featureless waterways whose waters rush swiftly over banks of smooth pebbles, as if eager to escape Keening.

Natural hazards abound on the mountainsides. Rockslides of dusty gravel are not uncommon and can prove fatal when triggered beneath the boot of a traveler. Brittle, chalky depositions, which Darkonians dub “bone powder,” occur throughout the slopes of Mount Lament. These areas appear as normal outcroppings of rock to the untrained eye, but crumble away into white dust when an unsuspecting hand or foot finds purchase there.

Bone Powder

Spotting bone powder requires a DC 20 Survival check. A character who uses bone powder as a handhold or foothold during a Climb check must succeed at a Reflex save (Climb DC + 10) or fall.

The notorious “groaning winds” of Keening are a constant presence in the mountains. The winds carry an unnatural chill year round, and the sound as they whip across the mountain slopes varies from a low dirge to a shrill shrieking. The strength of the winds and the accompanying din grows as one ascends toward Mount Lament. Near the summit, the violent gusts threaten to tear a climber from the peak. Surrounded by the maddening winds, those who maintain their hold on the mountain’s face usually pray for death before long.

Keening’s weather is grey and featureless. The temperatures are chill, the sky perpetually overcast. Miserable drizzles sometimes break through the clouds, but they are brief and unaccompanied by thunder or lightning. The seasons are detectable only as a slight shift in the length of day, a lightening of the leaden sky or a rise in the occurrence of rains just before sunset.

flora

Keening boasts no verdant forests or grasslands. Nothing but stone lies here; on such harsh terrain, only pale lichens and mosses can thrive, nurtured by the feeble sunlight. These withered specimens cling with primeval tenacity to the

cobbles and boulders. Even they vanish as one ascends higher into the mountains. Despite the remarkable nature of these plants, surviving as they do without any obvious nutrients, none have appeared in any botanical guide that I have perused. Of course, one can hardly blame the naturalists of the Core for neglecting Keening.

During my time in Darkon, I did glean some scant botanical lore from a haunted dwarven explorer who had ventured into Keening and returned to tell the tale. He warned me to be wary of a few unassuming hazards, such as the waspsting moss. Embedded in this soft, pale olive plant are thousands of tiny needles, formed from minerals extracted from the surrounding rock. When mature, the moss’s yellow and black spore capsules can be squeezed to produce a bitter goo that staves off hunger. Another dangerous plant is trollflesh, a lichen that even savvy wilderness travelers may overlook. Occurring in stone-gray wrinkled mats, the plant releases spores when touched. Those who breathe these spores begin to suffer from a panicked delusion that sunlight will turn them to stone.

Waspsting Moss and Trollflesh

Waspsting moss deals 1d2 points of Dexterity damage to any living creature with no natural armor bonus that touches the plant with bare flesh. Each Tiny patch of the moss holds enough spore capsules to sustain a Medium creature for one day. Waspsting goo is one of the few edible substances in Keening. Survival checks to find food have a DC of 20 in Keening.

Spotting trollflesh requires a DC 20 Survival check. Each Small patch of trollflesh can release a 5-foot cube of spores once per week when touched. The spores act as a poison, affecting any creature normally susceptible to poisons. However, they inflict madness rather than ability damage or drain. Victims who fail their Fortitude save are convinced that they will be turned to stone if sunlight touches them.

Trollflesh Spores: Inhaled, Fortitude DC 17; initial damage none; secondary damage madness (delusions; see Chapter Three of *Ravenloft Player’s Handbook*). The Open Mind feat provides its bonus to this Fortitude save.



fauna

Keening has no native animals; I saw not so much as a single beetle during my stay. Even the creatures from neighboring realms stay far from Keening, avoiding the border as though dangerous predators lurked beyond it. I performed several small trials to observe the reactions of animals brought forcibly beyond the border. All ended quite unpleasantly, as the creatures succumbed quickly to frenzied panic.

Undead are the only creatures encountered with any frequency in Keening, and they comprise three separate groups. First come the undead that have wandered into Keening from surrounding lands to make their lairs here. The lifeless nature of Keening suits their twisted tastes, and more rapacious undead find that it makes an excellent staging ground for raids on other realms. Second are undead of the village of Marbh-Cathair, those souls trapped within Keening when the Scourge ravaged Arak. These creatures rarely leave their cursed village, which I will describe below. Finally are the undead fey, the spirits of nature that have, for some reason, lingered in the living world and found their way to Mount Lament. The Tepestani call such fell creatures the *Widderribhinn*. I entered Keening dubious as to the existence of such ghostly faeries. How could a creature that was never truly mortal flesh and blood, a spirit of the land itself, ever return as one of the undead? Such a possibility seemed contrary to my own extensive understanding of undeath. What I saw in the twisting passages beneath Mount Lament, however, leaves little doubt as to the truth of such legends.

Occasionally, monsters from other lands may wander into Keening, but these creatures rarely linger long. Even unnatural beasts seem to sense the forsaken pall prevalent here.

History



elving into the history of Keening is problematic, for the land has no living populace to plumb for knowledge, and only the most fragmentary physical evidence. The folk who dwelled in Keening

prior to the Scourge were primarily Darkonian settlers, as well as a smattering of native humans from the vanished land of Arak. Little is known of this latter culture, whom I dub Arakans to distinguish them from the Arak of the Shadow Rift. The Arakans apparently arrived along with shadow elves when the realm first emerged from the Mists in 575 BC. Darkonian history speaks of the Arakans as a simple people. They mined the mountain slopes and herded sheep and goats in the green, foggy dales that surrounded Mounts Nirka and Nyid prior to the Scourge.

Following Darkon's emergence, explorers and settlers from Mayvin, Sidnar and Tempe Falls quickly encroached on the scattered Arakans, who tolerated the presence of the new arrivals. The Arakans feared the approach of sunset as much as any Barovian. Beneath the serene mountain peaks and valleys, the natives claimed, lurked the *Niurin Scaa*, or Shadow Nether. This was a kingdom of strange creatures that feared the sun and ventured to the surface at night to feed on the mortal souls that gave them sustenance. Arakans called these fell creatures the *sneeuane feallagh*, or gossamer folk, and feared their frenzied nocturnal hunts more than death itself. The Arakans were quickly subsumed into Darkonian villages over the next decade, until the Scourge annihilated the settlements and the remaining Arakans with them.

The Scourge itself heralded the appearance of Keening, and it follows that the land's seminal

Local Animals and Native Horrors

There are no animals or other mundane creatures in Keening. Animals, including animal companions, must make a DC 16 Fear save when they enter Keening. Regardless of whether an animal succeeds at this initial save, it must continue to make the save every ten minutes as long as it remains in Keening, although the DC rises by 2 with each mile it draws closer to Mt. Lament. The creature continues to make these saves until it leaves Keening, usually after becoming frightened or panicked. A character with the Handle Animal skill can use the "push" action at DC 25 to settle her animals for the time being. Vermin automatically flee from Keening if forced to enter the domain, with no chance for a Fear save. Vermin flee as though frightened, fighting to defend themselves and using special abilities, although they do not become shaken.

Monsters: CR 1/3 — skeleton, human warrior; CR 1/2 — geist; zombie, human commoner; CR 1 — ghoul, Scourged#; CR 2 — crimson bones†; CR 3 — allip; ghoul, ghastr; shadow; wight; CR 5 — odem†; wraith; CR 7 — ghost, 5th-level human fighter; spectre; CR 8 — bodak; shadow fiend†. *Widderribhinn*#.





event is connected to that cataclysm. Given that those who endured the ravages of the Scourge are unforthcoming about the experience, I am forced to turn to the accounts of outsiders.

The Tepestani have dubbed Keening *Tir Cadal*, or the Land of Sleep. They regard the mountains as the resting place for those fey spirits who, slain by violence or magic, are unable to move on. Tepestani legend speaks of Tristessa, the Queen of Black Tears, a faerie monarch of such foul evil that, when a paladin cut her down in battle, her soul refused to die. She lingered on as a mere shadow of a spirit and fled to her enchanted barrow beneath Arak. There, she began to gather the souls of other fey around her, calling to those who, like her, had withstood the Fading that normally claims fey at death. Her might grew along with her loyal host of undead fey, until she had the power to raise her barrow into a mountain of cold stone. The creation of this mountain fastness demanded a sacrifice, however, one that would attest to Tristessa's ultimate betrayal of her fey nature. With a terrible spell, she ravaged the whole of Arak with a sandstorm, scouring the land of every trace of life and sealing her pact with nameless powers. The Tepestani believe that Tristessa rules from Mount Lament to this day.

Darkonian dwarves tell another tale, a tale that explains one of their appellations for Keening: the Cinderwitch Mountains. The dwarves speak of a race of malevolent elves, dubbed Dark Elves, who committed some betrayal against forgotten gods. In retribution, the gods banished these Dark Elves deep beneath Arak and scorched their flesh as black as midnight. These corrupt elves scabbled through the lightless underworld, nursing a seething hatred for all other races, but especially for surface dwellers. Even among such craven creatures, however, some crimes were held to be unforgivable. One of the Dark Elves, a wicked and powerful sorceress named Tristessa, consorted with fiends in unthinkable ways, hoping that the child she bore would one day rule his race. When Tristessa's kin learned that her babe had been born a twisted monster, they executed her for this blasphemy, burning her and the unholy child alive. Tristessa screamed a hideous curse as the flames consumed her, and a vicious sandstorm blew up to ravage Arak. Dwarves do not venture into Keening, for they believe that Tristessa still wanders Mount Lament, thirsting for revenge.

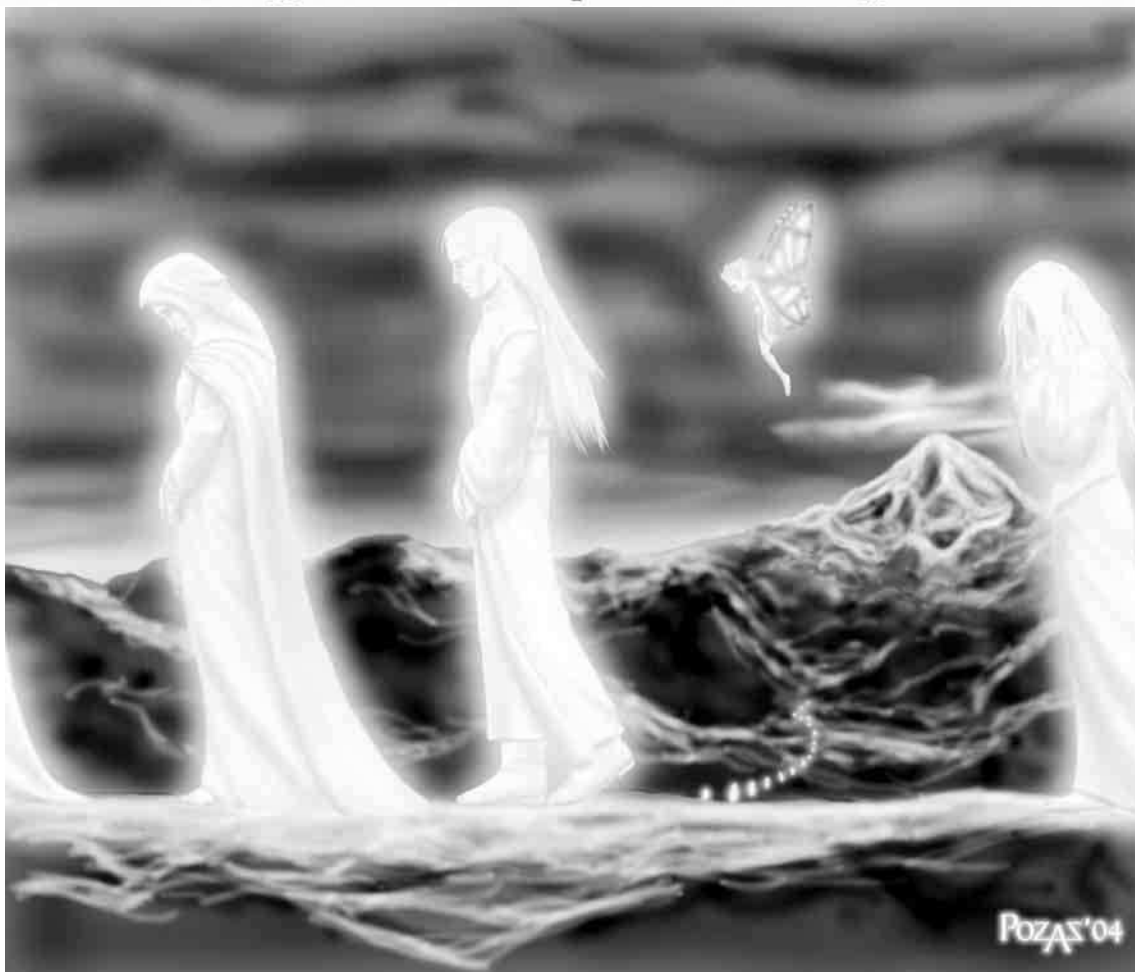
These disparate legends — those of the Arakans, the Tepestani, and the Darkonian dwarves — are likely separate threads of the same history. None of the legends speaks the truth entire, and they seem contradictory on the surface, but each holds clues to the land's history. Given the dearth of historical evidence, I trust my patron will humor me if I posit a theory that may seem speculative. Rest assured, my firsthand experiences in Keening have only strengthened my conviction that this theory is correct.

I have little doubt that the "gossamer folk" the Arakans once spoke of are the shadow fey that now inhabit the Shadow Rift. The name for their race, after all, is also the name for the land that birthed Keening. They are probably also synonymous with the Dark Elves of dwarven legend, albeit muddled by the outlander myths that creep so frequently into the Darkonian consciousness. I believe that the broad sweep of the dwarven tale is accurate. In 588 BC, a powerful shadow fey spellcaster named Tristessa was executed, along with her child, at the hands of her own kin, ostensibly for some heinous crime. Such an occurrence seems a probable seminal event for the formation of Keening, although the specifics are murky and the event's relation to the Scourge is unclear.

The Tepestani legend, meanwhile, provides additional insight, although I believe its chronology and details are faulty. I suspect that Tristessa did indeed survive as one of the living dead and that this event triggered or signaled a rise in the appearance of undead fey throughout the Core. In the years since, many of these piteous creatures have journeyed to Mount Lament, drawn to the strength and wickedness of the first of their kind. The Tepestani speak of Black Troopings, processions of fey ghosts marching towards Mount Lament on moonless nights. Tristessa, the undead shadow elf reputed to dwell beneath the mountain, is almost certainly the dread lord of Keening.

Discerning, little scholar, but your analysis is wanting. Undead spirits yearn for the lost, not mere power for its own sake. So, to what purpose do the fallen fey gather around their queen?





Black Troopings

Since the Scourge, undead fey known as *widderrìbhinn* have begun to appear throughout the Realm of Dread, but particularly in lands close to the Shadow Rift. Both Arak and standard fey may become *widderrìbhinn*, usually when slain suddenly by brutal violence or powerful death magic. In undeath, *widderrìbhinn* are compelled to travel toward Mount Lament. If a *widderrìbhinn* cannot reach Mount Lament within a fortnight of its death, it is destroyed, consumed by ghostly fire at the next sunrise. When numerous fey die in a massacre or arcane catastrophe, the result is a Black Trooping, as the *widderrìbhinn* march in single file toward Keening. Black Troopings carry a nearly palpable aura of melancholy. A rank two Sinkhole of Evil with a despair taint extends 30 feet from the procession in every direction.

The *widderrìbhinn* template is described in the Attached Notes.

In the years since Keening's appearance, several explorers from throughout the Core have ventured into this land, often seeking the mineral wealth that lies hidden in Mount Lament. Such explorers have succeeded only in widening Keening's notoriety, as the few that return speak of maddening winds and fearsome undead.

Populace



ince Keening has no living populace, I can expound on little here. Some conjecture might be possible from scattered evidence in the only standing village of old Arak, Marbh-Cathair. It would be a challenging task to untangle the culture of the Arakans from the Darkonian culture that quickly absorbed it based on such fragmentary data. Regardless, I am loathe to agonize over the minutiae of a culture long since turned to dust, particularly



when it has so little relevance to the present era. Clearly, the origin of Keening unfolded far beneath Arak, in the strongholds of the shadow fey. I regard the Arakans as ultimately forgettable, little more than hapless bystanders and the first victims of Keening's damnation.

The Realm

No realm claims Keening as its own. The surrounding countries are not so foolish as to dispatch organized expeditions into its blasted wastes. The Darkonians who occasionally make the journey to Mount Lament are, as a rule, solitary explorers and fortune seekers with more courage than sense. No law rules this land, save the foul and fickle mood of its dread lord.

The only resource of consequence in Keening is the mineral wealth that rests within Mount Lament. The untapped hoard of copper, lead and gypsum draws greedy Darkonian dwarves and humans now and then. Mining expeditions rarely survive more than a night or two on the mountain's slopes.

Sites of Interest

My journey through Keening followed a looping path, as I first skirted the eastern edge of the Shadow Rift after emerging from the Goblinwood. I ventured into Marbh-Cathair before turning southeast to ascend Mount Lament and delve into its heart. Following this harrowing journey, I turned southeast again toward Tepest and Nova Vaasa beyond.

Although the countless wandering undead of Keening present a challenge to the unprepared traveler, I had not come unprepared. The varied legends of Tristessa have one commonality. All speak of the ghostly creature's search for an infant child, although they differ on the root of this yearning. Darkonian dwarves say that she searches vainly for her own lost child, while the Tepestani believe that she requires a pure mortal vessel to return to the world of the living. I did not know when or how I would present my offering to Tristessa, and I despaired at having to silence the mewling child with spells for the duration of my journey.

Fortunately, my concerns were eased during my first night within Keening's borders. Although I had muffled the child's screams and taken steps to

ward my campsite against intrusion, I awoke at dawn to find the infant gone. It was with a twinge of relief that I realized that Tristessa — or, more likely, her undead minions — had spirited the child away in the night. It was a grisly offering, to be sure, but one that bought me weeks of unmo- lested access to one of the most hostile lands of the Core. I thought, for a moment, of the memories that have troubled me since Sithicus, of the last words of my dying daughter after the ghoul had torn into her. She begged me to let her rest in peace; begged me not to drag her into the Shroud of Necropolis. I acted then to spare my daughter — spare her the destruction of her mind — and in that I cannot say whether I succeeded. Now I pondered whether I had not repeated my error and handed yet another young life over to death in vain.

No, this was no error. This child had no future; a Nova Vaasan foundling would be lucky to live out its first year. This was a price I had been prepared to pay all along, and I saw no reason to refrain from reaping the benefits.

Whom are you trying to convince, little scholar? I hope I am not sensing a twinge of guilt. Such softness would be disheartening.

Marbh-Cathair

For over a century, Darkonian dwarves and gnomes have spoken with a shudder about the City of the Dead, a village in Keening where the undead walk in silent mockery of life. When the Scourge ravaged the surface of Arak, it annihilated the settlements and mining camps that ringed Mounts Nirka and Nyid. One village still stands, offering a morbid tableau of that morning in 588 BC.

Marbh-Cathair was a modest trading hub nestled at the foot of the mountains, where a handful of Arakans rubbed shoulders with Darkonian merchants, miners, artisans and soldiers. Commerce along the road to Sidnar fueled the village's prosperity, as did the wealth of the mountains. Unfortunately, Marbh-Cathair rested in the shadow of Mount Lament, and legends of the shadow elves were a part of village life. Darkonians remember that a pall of dread hung over Marbh-Cathair, as though her citizens sensed the fell events unfolding far beneath the earth. The Arakans often warned Darkonian miners to heed strange accidents and memory fugues as signs that they had



tunneled too deeply, reaching into places mortals were not meant to go.

When the Scourge struck, all living creatures in Arak met an agonizing end, as searing sand flayed the flesh from their bones. The unholy sandstorm reduced every other settlement in Arak to flinders and rubble, yet Marbh-Cathair remains. I suspect that the village's proximity to Mount Lament preserved it. Tristessa undoubtedly perished on or within Mount Lament itself. When the mountain was ripped asunder and flung to the west, Marbh-Cathair went with it, its structures battered but standing, its citizens slain but clinging to the world of the living.

The approach to Marbh-Cathair follows a rutted road of clinging black mud that leads east from the edge of the Shadow Rift. Here the gritty soil of vanished woodlands and meadows persists as one approaches the mountains. Not far from the Shadow Rift stands a gatehouse of crumbling stone

and rotten timber. It was the first sign I had come upon that people had ever dwelled in Keening. Unfortunately, I gleaned nothing more from the place than corroded fragments of armor and the smell of moldering bones.

When the mountain slopes began to press closer, I at last received a taste of Marbh-Cathair. Vast fields of ashen dust appeared along the road, the fine soil swirling and billowing in the groaning wind. I spotted a solitary figure moving through the grey haze of dust, hunched over as though hard at work. Nearing the man, I saw that he was undead, but despite our proximity he seemed completely unaware of me. His nearly fleshless hands gripped a worn and splintered shaft, and he brandished it earnestly as though hoeing a field. As I watched, he halted his strange labors for a moment to pull a threadbare rag from his neck. He mopped his brow and then gazed heavenward, as though savoring the warmth of the obscured sun, then returned to





his hoeing, minding little that he had neither hoe, soil, nor crop. Such a scene is, in essence, what Marbh-Cathair has become — a parody of life, a grim echo of a day over a century and a half past.

The dust fields that surround the approach to the village were once the outlying farms that supported Marbh-Cathair. As I journeyed on, the outer walls of the village itself emerged from the gloom. Walking corpses patrolled the battlements and stood guard at the gates, but the challenge I expected never came. To be sure, the undead guards that peered down from the gatehouse tower seemed to eye me warily, but they never made any attempt to stop my entrance. One guard even gave me a polite nod, as though wishing me well on my marketing.

This pattern repeats itself throughout Marbh-Cathair. The whole of the village bustles with activity, but it is a gruesome, shuffling mockery of daily life. Farmers peddle their wares in the marketplaces, craftsmen labor at their forges and workbenches, and nobles and commoners alike travel to and fro on numerous errands. Most seemed oblivious to my presence, although some responded almost reflexively, moving out of my path in the streets or looking up expectantly as I opened a shop door. Some of the citizens stood or sat rigidly in one place, as though waiting for someone or something that would never come. The undead do not speak while they go through the motions of their living days, although they gesture and pantomime at times. None responded to my greetings or questions, though they seem a remarkably benign breed of undead. Physically, they resemble animated zombies in various states of decay.

Although the foodstuffs the undead villagers haggled over and prepared endlessly were shriveled and gray, they should rightly be dust after over a hundred years. Indeed, a strange supernatural preservation seems to have settled of Marbh-Cathair, as perishable objects — food, leather, rope, wood — seem worn, but hardly exhibit over a century's worth of decay. Living animals did not suffer the same as the citizens of Marbh-Cathair, but their remains have not rotted away entirely. I saw grooms-men halfheartedly coaxing horses that had long collapsed into withered flesh and bones. Undead children crouched over their slain kittens in the streets, patiently prodding them as though they were merely sleeping.

The structures in Marbh-Cathair exhibit some wear from the Scourge, but otherwise appear unharmed. Paint has been stripped away to a few flakes here and there, and the stonework is smooth and weathered. Despite its modest size, Marbh-Cathair boasts both outer and inner walls, the latter crumbling in places and surrounding the oldest quarter of the village. There are numerous marketplaces and several luxuries that likely catered to wealthy merchants, such as a bathhouse and amphitheatre. What was once an elegant manse stands at the center of the older quarter. The guards that stand watch there, unlike their counterparts at the village gates, raised their weapons and moved with grim resolve to block my approach to its gates. I took this threat as my cue to leave the estate to its presumably undead master. I was not curious to learn if the whole of the village's population would turn on me once I unsheathed pistol and spell against one of their own.

I spent the better part of a day wandering the streets of Marbh-Cathair, observing the undead residents and searching the musty storefronts and homes. I have included some sketches and notes on these creatures in the Attached Notes. I found little that prompted me to stay another day. I did, however, on more than one occasion, catch a glimpse of someone ducking down an alley or around a corner, moving far too fast to be a native of Marbh-Cathair. I suspected that my observers might be living folk such as myself who had braved Keening and entered Marbh-Cathair out of curiosity. However, I thought it more likely that I had glimpsed an undead creature more malevolent than the citizens, perhaps biding its time until sunset. Accordingly, I set out toward Mount Lament as the dim sunlight began to wane.

I would be remiss if I failed to mention a strange occurrence the following morning. I spent that night in a cramped cavern on the mountainside, compiling my notes by arcane light. I awoke with a start the next dawn to a horrid wailing that echoed through the cave. Seizing my pistols, I scrambled to my feet and then to the mouth of the cavern, for the scream had originated from outside. The western sky was still the shade of blackened iron, but I could discern the outline of Marbh-Cathair below. The sound faded quickly, rolling over the mountain, but it was clear that it had emanated from the village. Although I could discern no explanation for the scream, I elected to press on toward the summit of Mount Lament.





Walking Among the Dead

Since the Scourge, several living creatures have braved Marbh-Cathair and settled in the village. Marbh-Cathair is, in some respects, an excellent sanctuary. The forbidding nature of Keening and the village itself dissuades outsiders from venturing within, and overlooking one living soul among the bustling undead villagers is easy. The widderribhinn and other undead of Keening avoid Marbh-Cathair and never molest its residents. Of course, the living must venture into the foothills of southern Darkon at regular intervals for food. However, the village is otherwise a secure, if eerie, refuge for those who wish to vanish from the world outside Keening.

Few of the living residents of Marbh-Cathair remain in the village for more than a few months. At any time, there are usually 2d6 fugitives and outcasts lurking in the village, most of them loners who are unaware of or unconcerned about other living residents. Most are paranoid and desperate at best, and outright mad or malevolent at worst. Other occasional visitors may be treasure-seekers, hoping to loot the untouched wealth of the village from under the noses of the Scourged.

Only one living soul has dwelled in Marbh-Cathair for more than a year. Unwald Rottennail (NE male gnome Abj4/Clr4/Myt6) was once a renowned sentinel of the Eternal Order. Fearing that the City of the Dead posed a threat to Mayvin, he ventured into Keening in 743 with a contingent of clerics and knights loyal to the church. Widderribhinn slaughtered Unwald's companions to the last before they even reached Marbh-Cathair. The massacre splintered Unwald's mind, and he now believes that the Scourged are his devoted parishioners and he their watchful shepherd. He will attack anyone who threatens the undead or suggests harming them. Unwald is not terribly lucid, but he can provide a rambling tour of the village if coaxed, and he knows much of the widderribhinn and Tristessa herself.

The Scourged template is described in the Attached Notes.

The Dawning Scream

Dwelling in Marbh-Cathair has one severe drawback. At sunrise, the Scourged return to the exact spot where they stood on the morning of the Scourge in 588 BC. When the first rays of the dawn strike the village, the Scourged raise their voices in a shriek of agony, reliving the moment of their torturous deaths. Although each voice is harsh on its own, the sound of nearly a thousand undead corpses screaming in unison is nigh unbearable. Creatures within Marbh-Cathair or within 100 feet of its walls at dawn must succeed at a DC 24 Fortitude save or be permanently deafened (see the DMG, Chapter 8: Glossary, "Condition Summary"). Scourged that were spawned from other Scourged join in the Dawning Scream as well, returning to the spot where they were slain. The living who dwell in Marbh-Cathair usually pass the night on the outskirts of the village, returning once the Dawning Scream awakens them. Unwald Rottennail, however, was deafened decades ago, and now joins his flock in their morning ritual, screaming as loud as his cracking voice can muster.

Mount Lament

I have already related just how tortuous the ascent of Mount Lament proved to be. In all honesty, I did not know what I was seeking as I climbed the mountain slopes. Legend and intuition told me that Tristessa laired somewhere beneath the mountain, in the old warrens of the shadow elves. I suspected that an entrance to this netherworld was concealed somewhere near the mountain's summit.

I spent several days traversing the mountain's face by day and laying low by night to avoid the attention of wandering undead. Eventually, I came upon the black maw of a cavern in the middle of a sheer cliff face. I reached this portal after a grueling climb and struck out into the lightless tunnels that stretched ahead.

The passages wandered, but they ultimately led deeper into the mountain's heart. Initially, the tunnels were featureless, twisting corridors of liv-



ing rock, a labyrinth seemingly formed by natural processes. Soon, however, I stumbled upon chambers that were clearly occupied by shadow elves prior to the Scourge. They were not grouped together in any way that suggested a sane, mortal mind. I would turn a corner and suddenly find myself in a cavernous antechamber, sumptuous dining hall, arcane laboratory, or cramped succession of horrid dungeon cells.

Every room suggested a natural rock formation, with walls and vaulted ceilings that rose in elegant arcs, exhibiting no sign of hammer or chisel. Smooth black stone replaced the cool grey granite of the upper tunnels. In some chambers, whorls of opalescent color played across the walls, ghostly fire flickered along the columns, and livid minerals glittered in ornate clusters.

The relics of the shadow elves were remarkably preserved. Their strange, almost sinister beauty entranced me. I saw many curious weapons, tools and *objets d'art* which suggested no humanoid analogue. Nonetheless, I resisted the urge to take any object, or even to touch one, contenting myself with copious notes and sketches. I had no inkling how much longer Tristessa would allow me to pass untouched through her demesne or if my offering had bought me the privilege to disturb the relics in her lair. Nothing looked as if it had been touched for well over a century, and I did not wish to tempt fate.

Indeed, fleeting, ghostly forms were watching me carefully as I wandered through the passages. I suspected that these were the widderribhinn, the undead fey that serve Tristessa, and likely the same creatures that had accepted my offering on behalf of their mistress. They shadowed me from afar, allowing me a glimpse now and then to remind me of their presence. The warning was clear, and I knew I would be vastly outnumbered should I offend them in some manner.

I noted several strange sites as I ventured deeper into the old chambers, although regrettably I lacked the time to study them in any detail. I felt a compulsion to keep moving, to descend ever deeper, as though some crucial rendezvous awaited me in the bowels of the mountain.

Within a stark, vaulted chamber that may have been used for ritual magic, I found a vast pool of gleaming quicksilver. Its surface rippled and swirled, emanating a murmuring so soft I could not discern the tongue. One cavern held what I estimated were thousands of varieties of mushrooms,

Dread Possibilities: The Pool of Memory, Imago Toadstools and the Riddle of the Locust King

The *Pool of Memory* contains not mundane quicksilver but the very memories of the shadow elves given physical form. It once served as a historical record, stretching back to when Gwydion drew the ellefolk into the Plane of Shadow. Every event of significance in the history of the Arak can be found in the Pool, from their enslavement through their confinement in the Realm of Dread prior to the Scourge. Although a mortal cannot simply pluck a memory from the Pool, cunning use of magic might allow a particular memory to be pinpointed and removed for study elsewhere.

Imago toadstools are an extremely rare fungus once cultivated by the shadow elves, now found only in remote chambers deep under Mount Lament. The spores of the toadstool produce a mild euphoria and colorful hallucinations in fey, but in mortals the effect is more striking. Any humanoid that consumes a freshly picked imago toadstool experiences a vivid but fleeting phantasm of his own parents in either a benevolent or menacing light — depending on the character's childhood. Strangely, if the character has no memory or knowledge of his parents, the phantasm reveals their true identities. Even more remarkably, if the character's parents are deceased, the phantasm will answer three questions, as *speak with dead*, regardless of the time since their passing or the location or condition of their remains.

The *Locust King* is an ancient artifact. Even the Arak barely understood it. Thought to be the work of a race from a distant reality, it was uncovered in the Plane of Shadow eons ago. The shadow elves recognized its power and consulted it only rarely. Some say that it was through the idol that Arak the Erlking discovered how to bind his sword to the Obsidian Gate and secure the liberation of his race. When touched, the Locust King poses a perplexing riddle heard only in the mind of the supplicant. If the supplicant answers correctly, the Locust King will answer a single question truthfully in return. The question can be about any topic, for the statue seems to possess godlike omniscience. Of course, no creature has successfully answered the Locust King's riddle since the Scourge, so the statue's answers may now be distorted or even willfully malicious. The supplicant who answers incorrectly suffers a horrid curse, as spectral locusts devour him alive at the following sundown.



puffballs, slime molds and other weird fungi. Some quivered or wheezed gently, and many glowed with florid phosphorescence. The air was so thick with musty spores that I could not linger more than a few minutes. Perhaps most unsettling was the bizarre idol I stumbled upon, tucked into a cramped chamber. Cut from lustrous onyx with bands of black and lavender, the statue depicted a massive insectile creature sitting as a humanoid would. Feeling an overwhelming and unnatural urge to reach out and touch the weird statue, I hastened from it at once.

I wandered the passages for what seemed over a day, delving ever deeper into the mountain. Eventually, when I had descended so deep I thought I might stumble upon a flow of magma, my ear caught a baffling but undeniable sound. Strains of gentle music flowed from the chambers ahead. I move quickly but cautiously to find their source, and as I rounded a corner a strange sight greeted me. A ghostly creature sat upon a pedestal of smooth black stone in the foyer to a vast cavern. It was unmistakably fey, a thin and knotty creature with the horns and cloven feet of a goat — a satyr of legend. It plucked at an ephemeral harp with its spindly, translucent fingers, seemingly oblivious to my presence. This creature, I surmised, was one of the widderribhinn, an undead fey.

I approached guardedly, unsure if the creature was a sentinel or merely a musician lost in ghostly reverie. As I took a few steps into the antechamber, it turned slowly toward me and spoke in oddly accented Darkonian, its voice cracking and wheezing. My hand crept not toward my pistol, but toward the pouch that held my spell components.

“Welcome and a Good Death to you, mortal. You stand where few have stood before.”

The creature’s compliment did nothing to diminish my unease. “Indeed. Who are you?”

“Rutternettle, some call me, and so may you, for a time. Trinkets of memory, baubles of music, trifles of legend, these are my trade.”

“You are a minstrel?”

“Aye. If such a thing exists in this place.”

I hesitated, not knowing if my words would provoke the creature. “You serve Tristessa?”

“That name means little here, mortal. But she is indeed our mistress.”

“She rules over all of your kind then?”

“Our paths led here when the Fading did not come. Her salvation is ours, so we serve her for now.

When she walks again in Nature’s sweet embrace, so shall we.”

I looked toward the vast cavern that lurked ahead, glimpsing strange shapes and flames of flickering violet and pearl through the gloom. Unsettlingly, I thought I heard the pained squeals of infants in the distance. “What lies in that chamber?” I asked, taking a few steps toward it.

The creature put its harp aside, and crouched with an eager grin on its rock. “That place is not meant for your eyes, mortal. It is the unholy of unholies, the sanctuary of the Spider Queen. She would have us take those pretty eyes of yours, were you to defile her altar with your presence.”

Puzzled, I asked, “The Spider Queen? And who—”

Suddenly, a horrid wailing filled the chamber. It was like the piteous sobbing of a widow, with an echo of a demented scream. It emanated from a nearby passage and seemed to grow closer with each passing second.

The creature grinned even wider. “Ahhh. The mistress comes. Sleep approaches for you, mortal. Best to hush your protests and savor its chill caress.” Figures formed of mist and shadow, all possessing eerie beauty, emerged slowly from the walls. They flitted about the edges of the antechamber, trailing wisps behind them. Before I knew what had happened, undead fey had surrounded me.

I was determined not to allow panic to overtake me. “What of my offering? She accepted it, did she not?”

The ghostly satyr cackled shrilly. “Your offering bought you only time, mortal. And your time has almost run out. Flee if you wish, while you have the mistress’s favor for a few moments more. Perhaps she will let you return to the world of men this day; Perhaps not. She has not favored us with a mortal soul in some time....”

I needed no further encouragement. I fled without looking back, and although the widderribhinn permitted me to pass, the laughter and wailing continued to echo behind me. I wove enchantments as I ran, hoping to conceal my flight from any pursuers. Tristessa’s moaning sobs seemed to follow me, rising and fading for hours as I scrambled through the twisting passages. Only through my own keen memory and arcane enchantments did I find my way back to the surface, where an overcast night sky glowered down at me.

Rutternettle, Minstrel of the Widderrìbhinn

Rutternettle (CE male 8 HD advanced satyr widderrìbhinn, Brd6) has dwelled in Keening longer than most undead fey, being one of the first non-Arak widderrìbhinn to journey to Mount Lament. For reasons that are not clear, Tristessa seems to favor him and has charged him with recounting her tragic tale to her every night. Madness wears at Tristessa's memory, and she relies on Rutternettle to remind her of the truth of her past. Although the other widderrìbhinn resent Rutternettle's honored status, he seems to remember the vitality of life more than his fellows, and for this reason his skill with song and story is valued. Rutternettle is thoroughly wicked, but he has a taste for demented humor and morbid stories, and may refrain from slaying characters if they tickle his fancy.

Final Thoughts



Keening is best left to Tristessa and her undead minions. Admittedly, the lost secrets and wealth of the shadow elves present a tantalizing treasure. Unlike the Shadow Rift, Keening is not fatal to

those who would pass through its borders, and the relics seem to be ready for the taking. However, not all seekers have my resolve, and may balk at the sacrifice needed to pass unmolested through the realm. Even those who make the requisite offering would likely perish beneath Mount Lament long before they could surface with the wonders of the Arak. Why I was allowed to escape, I care not to speculate. I shall accept for now that it was through resourcefulness and wits — and perhaps a touch of luck — that I emerged unscathed from Tristessa's lair.



Report Four: The Shadow Rift

*The bright sun was extinguished...
Morn came and went — and came, and brought no day,
And men forgot their passions in the dread
Of this their desolation.*

— George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Darkness*

*The woods decay, the woods decay and fall...
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,
And after many a summer dies the swan.
Me only cruel immortality
Consumes... Left me maim'd
To dwell in presence of immortal youth.*

— Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Tithonus*



The Shadow Rift is perhaps the one feature in all our lands that needs no introduction. Peasants and nobles alike from Arbora to Martira Bay speak of the lightless chasm in no more than a whisper, and the tales they tell are hair raising legends of gateways to hell and malevolent spirits. The Vistani, normally eager to gossip when they see any chance of making a coin from it, refuse to speak of the Rift at all. Whenever it is mentioned in their presence, they quickly make a protective gesture and change the subject.

In the midst of these fearful legends, uncovering any truths about the Shadow Rift is difficult. Although doing so is not impossible for a researcher of my skill, even then the information I have garnered must be treated as somewhat suspect. It galls me to present it here as fact, but with no way of getting firsthand information, I can do nothing else.

Legends about the Shadow Rift fall into two groups. The first maintains that the Shadow Rift is simply a monstrous crevasse, with no intelligent inhabitants and no bottom — a wound in the fabric of our world. The second maintains that beneath the black fog that fills the Shadow Rift, a dark and malevolent world exists. While this is the most common belief, one will find that the tales differ in all but the broadest details. Some maintain that the Rift is an enormous gateway to hell (or the Grey Realm, or the Land of the Dead, or a thousand other variations, depending on who tells the story). Others (most notably the Tepestani) maintain that the Rift contains the sunken and destroyed realms of Markovia and G'Henna, now haunted by undead and the fey. Still others claim that the land beneath the Rift is actually a pathway to the mind of the Dark Powers, a shadowy, alien place of malevolent insanity.

I believe that all these sources have gathered part of the truth. My research, involving both legends and a handful of eyewitness accounts, suggests that the Shadow Rift is Arak, an ancient domain thought eradicated in 588 BC by a colossal sandstorm. Several trustworthy reports mention that time moves at a greatly increased rate in the land beneath the Rift compared to the surface, and ancient tales of the mines of Arak suggest the same thing. The humans of Arak had hundreds of legends of the fey and “dark elves” who allegedly lived beneath them, and comparing their tales to modern accounts from the Rift’s neighbors reveals

many similarities. Finally, less than twenty years ago, fey were almost unknown outside Tepest and the southwestern Core; some notable scholars claimed that they did not exist at all and were simply confused references to incorporeal undead. Now, however, everyone has heard of them, and many people claim to have seen them or spoken to them. Most of these folk live around the Shadow Rift. These fey must have come from somewhere; thus, there is a land beneath the Shadow Rift’s fog, and that land is Arak, home of the shadow fey.

My patron will have noted that I claim to have met eyewitnesses, and no doubt he will wonder why I have given them precedence over the other madmen who claim to have been visited by the fey or descended into the Shadow Rift. My first witness was Jilliavere tin Moran, an elf adventurer I met in Nova Vaasa who claimed to have personally entered the land beneath the Rift several years ago. I cast several truth finding spells on her and never detected a lie. Another three witnesses were Jilliavere’s companions, who were killed in the Rift but buried in Tepest, letting me speak to them with necromantic magic. Finally, I relied on the testament of the fey themselves. One was a revolting powrie (more commonly called a redcap) that I managed to capture and interrogate. I was led to the other by tales of an oracle I heard of in an almost deserted hamlet in the shadow of Mount Baratak. I made my way to the cave overlooking

The Shadow Rift at a Glance

Cultural Level: Medieval (7).

Ecology: Full.

Climate/Terrain: Temperate forest, hills, plains, mountains, swamp.

Year of Formation: Arak formed in 575 BC and became the Shadow Rift in 740 BC.

Population: 24,000.

Races: Arak 40% (teg 7%, powrie 7%, brag 7%, muryan 6%, shee 4%, sith 4%, alven 2%, fir 2%, portune 1%), changelings 25%, other 35%.

Languages: Arak*, Sylvan*, Balok, Darkonese, Mordentish, Tepestani, Vaasi.

Religions: None.

Government: Hereditary aristocracy.

Rulers: Maeve the Faerie Queen, Loht the Crippled King.

Darklord: Gwydion the Sorcerer-Fiend.





the Shadow Rift where the oracle supposedly lived and found an incorporeal creature that called itself the Keeper of Secrets. In return for sharing a secret known only to myself, the Keeper told me much, although its constant whispering nearly drove me to distraction. If its information is trustworthy, the Keeper would make a useful ally, although its hunger for secrets could easily escape control. The creature apparently only appeared in Barovia a few years ago, and Count Strahd has not made any attempt to control it. He may not yet have learned of its existence.

Landscape



he Shadow Rift, as it appears to normal eyes, is a vast crevasse where the countries Markovia and G'Henna rested until the Grand Conjunction of 740 BC. The Rift's true depth is unknown; after approximately 200 feet of vertical descent, the sheer, black cliffs bury themselves in an impenetrable layer of churning ebon mist. These shadow vapors conceal whatever lies at the bottom.

Unlike most normal chasms, the edges of the Shadow Rift are crisply defined and uncannily smooth, as though the land that was once there has simply crumbled into nothingness. Here and there, caves open onto the exposed cliff, their edges as crisp as the Rift's. The rock seems to resist weathering. Sometimes, pale misty forms and flickers of flame can be seen beneath the cave's glassy surface.

The most impressive features of these cliffs are the Cascades, a series of great waterfalls. The northernmost, the Hidden Cascade, marks the death of some underground river that runs from Lake Kronov in Tepest to the Shadow Rift, exploding into view some 100 feet below the lip of the chasm. The other five Cascades are surface rivers. The Great Cascade springs from Tepest's Blackmist River, the Little Borchava emerges as the Twin Cascades (the river is split by a small island at the Rift's edge), the Volgis becomes the Deadfalls, and Borca's Vasha River becomes the Mourner's Veil.

The final feature whose existence is more than hearsay is the Descent. A young Tepestani noble, Trevor McClour, commissioned a staircase to be built at the point where the East Timori Road ran into the Shadow Rift. The stairs eventually reached the mists below, but work halted when the laborers discovered that anyone who entered them vanished without a trace. The remains of the staircase still cling like a vine to the cliff side.

The Mists of Shadow

The Shadow Rift's constant fog forms the true borders of the domain. The borders are always closed and will remain so for as long as Gwydion remains trapped within the Obsidian Gate. For every 10 feet of travel through the mists, the traveler loses 10% of her corporeality, becoming foggy and transparent. Thus, 50 feet into the mists, the character is 50% nonexistent, and after 100 feet, she ceases to exist entirely. Nothing can save a character who suffers this fate, though if she turns back before 100 feet she regains full corporeality.

The Mists of Shadow permeate the rock of the Shadow Rift, so anyone who tries to enter the Rift by tunneling also begins to fade away. The only safe way to enter the Arak's realm is to travel through a Fracture.

However, my powrie captive assured me that many paths between the surface and the fey realm exist, although all are unsafe and many are only accessible transiently (at particular times of the year, or to people carrying the right key). Only one is used with any regularity. This "Fracture" leads into southwestern Tepest, accounting for the high number of fey plaguing that area. Despite my best efforts, I could find no trace of the Fracture, which apparently appears as a cave. Those who pass through it lose all memory of doing so — while the fact that the journey has been made isn't forgotten, the details of the journey are. This memory loss affects mortals and immortals alike. Another alleged route is the mineworks under Mount Lament, although there is no evidence of anyone ever completing the journey here in either direction.

Inside the Rift, perpetual twilight reigns. The eternal cloud of inky vapor prevents the sun from shining, and the realm's close ties to the Plane of Shadow smother most artificial light. Generally, vision is no better than during twilight, and the radius of light sources (including magical ones) is halved.

The land can be divided into two regions of very different character, the Northern Rift (*Alwaina*, the Greenlands) and the Southern Rift (also called *Blamaug*, the Stonedowns). The Greenlands are a relatively flat plain interrupted at times by large plateaus, home to the eerie civilization of the shadow fey. The Greenlands end abruptly in the





Precipice (*Ainavym*), a 500-foot drop into the Stonedown's warren of plunging cliffs, windswept valleys and almost unclimbable peaks. In the space of a mile, the average depth of the ground here can vary by 1,000 feet or more.

Everything in the Greenlands is preternaturally alive. Blades of grass move in rippling waves without the help of wind. Tree branches dance in slow, complicated patterns, and the wind seems to speak. Needless to say, this activity quickly becomes alarming. Jilliavere told me of grass that cried out when trod on, trees that bled and threw apples, branches that crawled like worms to escape a campfire, and food that came alive and desperately tried to fight its way back up her throat when swallowed. Trees shuffled slowly aside to reveal them to Arak searchers.

Three of the five plateaus in the Greenlands are home to the shadow fey's rare permanent cities. Before the Grand Conjunction, what is now the Northern Rift was a single colossal cave beneath the Mountains of Misery, and these plateaus were massive columns supporting the roof. Now, they end between 5,000 and 8,000 feet above the Greenlands. The tops of the plateaus are covered in scrub forests and dense undergrowth. Here and

there, mysterious ruins emerge from the brush; the Arak have no record or memory of who built these ancient structures, but believe that they are haunted by spectral creatures as alien to the Arak as the shadow fey are to mortals. The matter has rarely been investigated; a band of gale-force winds covers the entire Northern Rift 4,500 feet above ground level, making flying or climbing to the top of the plateaus impossible. The Brag and Fir have suggested digging to the top, but the schemes have never been taken seriously enough for work to begin.

The rest of the Greenlands is an expanse of rolling hills peppered by swaying grasslands and temperate forests. However, describing it in more detail is impossible. While specific landmarks do exist, since the Great Upheaval they have wandered around seemingly at random, as though the plain were composed of jigsaw pieces ceaselessly trying to find the right conformation. Other features appear too transiently or irregularly to be called landmarks at all.

The only truly stable feature is Loch Lenore (called *Loson Lenore* in Arak), formed where the Hidden Cascade crashes into the ground from the murky clouds above. Although the path of the



Falling River (*Vyrn Teuwa*) changes with the other features of the Greenlands, the constant barrage of water from the surface ensures that the Loch stays in the same place. The massive waterfall churns the lake into a veritable froth, and the currents it creates make the lake dangerous for boating and lethal for swimming. Beneath the churning surface, stories variously claim the existence of deadly predators, a whole fiefdom of aquatic fey, a font of water so pure it can wash away any sin and heal any wound, and an unimaginable treasure.

Of course, given the chaotic nature of the Greenlands, several or even all of the legends are potentially true at different times, and many aquatic fey are also deadly predators. The Falling River meanders south and west from Loch Lenore until it reaches the Malachite Palace then heads back eastward with increasing speed until it plunges over the cliffs into the Southern Rift. The river takes its name not from its final cataract, but from the hundreds of tiny cascades (including some where the water falls *up* a hill in defiance of gravity) all along its length. Several tributaries exist, some of which flow with more esoteric fluids than water, like boulders, fire, blood, slime or molten silver.

Hundreds of paths crisscross the Greenlands, linking the various sites together. Even temporary camps somehow spawn a meandering network of paths. It would be quite unsettling to make camp in a wilderness and awaken to find oneself in the center of a crossroads, particularly if one wishes to keep one's presence a secret. The paths vary enormously in their quality, which has no apparent relation to their frequency of use. Most vary from muddy animal tracks to intricately joined tessellating bricks. Others are even more unusual, where the way is marked by a streamer of mist or a road made of ice bricks, or gold foil, or thousands of live frogs embedded in the earth. Some paths are said to speed the passage of some travelers but not others — a bard or someone carrying a shee's token may take half as long to walk the road to Esmerth as some member of another, equally mystical and obtuse category. Most paths resent being used by mortals who have no business in the Shadow Rift; those without permission to use them may find guards pursuing them at four times their speed.

The Stonedowns differ greatly. Instead of night-blooming gardens and disturbingly alive fields, it is composed of rocky badlands, acrid swamps and dangerous beasts. The air smells flat and dead like

that contained in desert tombs, and the wind bites like a saw. In most ways, the Southern Rift is a perverted reflection of the Northern. Where the Greenlands are vibrantly alive, the Stonedowns are dead, a tortured expanse of cracks, fissures, cliffs and outcrops almost devoid of plant life. The Hidden Cascade plunges from the mists above to form Loch Lenore. In turn, the Falling River courses over the Precipice to form *Pouuloson*, the Biting Tarn. Like Loch Lenore, the Tarn is a churning cauldron of dangerous currents, but the Tarn's currents throw up the vile mud on the lake's bottom. This mineral-rich filth makes the Tarn a stinking, caustic place, and the creatures that live in it are as unpleasant as their home. The Tarn splits into two rivers, each as vile as its parent and becoming more so as it picks up garbage along its course. The northern Nightrush (*Muryanvo*) flows only a few miles before joining the Black Marsh. Its sister, the Grimfey Flow (*Sithfaer teuwo*), travels east and then south to join the swamp.

The Black Marsh (*Anvpowlen*) is a salty bog that fills the warren of canyons and cliffs on the eastern side of the Shadow Rift. The Great Cascade and the three Nova Vaasan falls supplement the Marsh's waters with their own mud-heavy flows and billow out a thick, cloaking mist at their bases. Some areas of the Marsh are choked with vegetation, while others are as barren as the rest of the Stonedowns. It is said that the Black Marsh drains hope and vitality from those who pass through it, replacing those emotions with despair until travelers simply lie back and let the mud close over them. Their shattered spirits rise from the marsh as ghosts to walk the earth trying to ease their pain by draining the life from living travelers.

Near the Nova Vaasan border, a vast mountain rises from the Black Marsh: *Anvomaura*, the Darkenheights. This peak (2,500 feet) reaches from the Black Marsh, 3,000 feet below the mists of shadow, to just underneath them, and is clearly visible as a black smear on the horizon from anywhere in the Rift, despite the otherwise concealing darkness. The jagged, nearly vertical sides of the monolith look like titanic shards of glass, melded together with their razor edges and needle points exposed. At the very peak of the Darkenheights, surrounded by a globe of darkness, is the Obsidian Gate.



Dread Possibility: The Marsh of Melancholy

For every hour that a living being remains in the Black Marsh, they must make a DC 15 Will save. On the first failure, the character becomes subdued and withdrawn, suffering a -1 penalty to all rolls. On the second, he becomes Depressed, as the Madness effect. On the third, he sinks slowly into the mud, making no effort to save himself, and drowns. This is a mind-affecting effect. Characters can make another DC 20 Will save every day after leaving the Black Marsh to recover from the melancholy; a successful save indicates that they regain a level of emotion (that is, depressed characters become subdued and subdued characters return to normal).

Ghosts created in the Black Marsh often have the Aura of Despair salient ability (see the *Ravenloft Player's Handbook*, Chapter Five), or the Drain Spirit salient ability.

Drain Spirit (Su): The touch of a ghost with this ability deals 1 point of Wisdom and Charisma drain if a Will save is failed (DC 10 + half ghost's HD + ghost's Cha modifier). Each point of drain inflicted by this attack represents growing apathy, hopelessness and despair. Should either ability score be halved by this attack (from either the same or different ghosts with this power), the victim's alignment changes to neutral.

The ghosts of the Black Marsh become satiated for 24 hours once they have drained a number of points from each ability equal to their Hit Dice.





Climbing the Darkenheights

The DC for Climb checks on the Darkenheights varies from 5 for ordinary slopes to 15 for steep areas and 25 for sheer cliffs. Should a climber fall, as well as suffering falling damage, he has a 20% chance of landing on a sharp edge, taking another 5d6 points of damage. The character can make a DC 24 Reflex save for half damage. Most falls are 10d10+100 feet long. Finally, the obsidian quickly wears away ropes and flesh alike. Unless precautions are taken, anything in continual contact with the slopes (such as rope or hands) with a hardness of less than 4 takes 1 point of damage per 100 feet ascended.

Overall, the whole Shadow Rift is a temperate realm, although the specific weather patterns tend to be influenced by which Court is in power. When Loht, ruler of the Unseelie Court, holds the Malachite Palace, the weather tends toward cool and dry, with occasional periods of cold, drenching rain. When his more passionate sister takes the throne, the weather is far more tempestuous, alternating between hot, dry periods and violent storms. Snow and ice are unknown at any time.

flora

Understandably for a fey realm, the Greenlands are home to a staggering variety of plants. Curiously, the plants survive — indeed thrive — despite the lack of the sun. Examples of almost every type of plant in the Core can be found — oaks, ash, beech, pine, poppies, holly, eucalyptus — growing side by side in disregard for their normal climatic requirements. Flowering or fruiting plants are particularly common. Carnivorous and dangerous plants are also quite common. Although their ferocity to mortals is unabated, they seem not to harm the fey. I believe gardens full of bloodroses tended by tendrili are not uncommon, and the alven and alvenkin use lashweeds as guards.

Other plants, unknown even to well traveled druids, also grow in the Greenlands. Some are strange variants of mundane species: chestnut trees whose fruit falls from the tree and rolls away on its

own, buttercups with flowers made of real butter, oaks whose fallen leaves fly from the ground and reattach themselves to the branches. Others are unknown outside the Rift. *Shadow bunyans*, for example, are carnivorous plants that attack mortals with nooses of inky blackness and throw their strangled victims onto their exposed roots for fertilizer. I have heard that plants matching this description have been seen on the Plane of Shadow, but I have never heard of them in more mundane lands, so the Arak may have brought the bunyans with them from the Plane of Shadow for some unknown purpose. Another unique plant is the *starweed*, a tiny dandelion-like plant with a crystalline flower that sparkles enchantingly in any light. Another tree grows large translucent flowers that glow a phosphorescent blue to attract insects, while a reed-like plant makes ethereal music when the wind blows through it. The *lotus tree* grows heavy, sweetly scented blossoms filled with soporific, addictive nectar. The nectar is quite popular among satyrs, nymphs and shee, and sleeping fey with lips and chins stained red by the nectar often surround the trees.

The only plant common in the Stonedowns is a dark gray moss, which has hundreds of needle-like spines hidden inside it. Apparently, the moss is used to brew a poison quite popular among the powrie.

fauna

The Shadow Rift is a haven for all manner of nocturnal creatures: owls, bats, wolves, red and silver foxes, badgers, wild cats, gremishka, rodents and their giant equivalents to name just a few. Like everything in the Rift however, these animals are often altered in macabre ways. One hamlet in the Greenlands is inhabited entirely by animals, able to walk and live like humans but otherwise still wild beasts. They reacted to Jillivere's party as wild animals would when defending their territory and killed one of her companions.

Giant vermin, especially spiders, are also common. The Arak seem to detest spiders and spider-like creatures such as head hunters, phase spiders, red widows and aranea (giant spiders that transform into humanoid shape, as wolfweres do). These creatures have been driven to the most isolated parts of the Stonedowns but frequently bubble forth to bother the Arak or escape to the surface.

Also inhabiting these areas are *saugh*, or undead. The Black Marsh is haunted by incorpo-

Plants of the Shadow Rift

Because the fey are unharmed by most plant poisons and other dangerous flora, almost any type of medicinal herb or poison can be found in the Shadow Rift; see past **Ravenloft Gazetteers** for examples. Feel free to create other strange plants to impress the unearthly nature of the Shadow Rift on your players.

Poison	Type	Initial Damage	Secondary Damage	Price
Applewort	Ingested (Fort DC 25)	Death	—	1,000 gp
Lotus tree nectar	Ingested (Fort DC 18)	Sleep	1 Wisdom	200 gp
Stonedowns moss	Injury (Fort DC 14)	1d6 Con	1d6 Dex	300 gp

Applewort: Usually found on battlefields and in cemeteries, applewort is a type of mistletoe found only on trees growing on corpses. Its fruit looks like large, juicy red apples, though observant characters may notice its leaves have a strange coppery sheen. Applewort fruit is poisonous to members of the race whose bodies it grows from. One growing in a human cemetery, for example, will produce fruit deadly to humans but harmless to everyone else.

Heartrose: Heartroses are mystical plants that reflect the health of those to whom they are attuned. They become attuned as seeds; if a seed is planted with a drop of a person's blood, the plant that grows is bonded to that person. Unbonded seeds grow into normal roses.

The health of the bonded creature is reflected by the health of the plant: the plant thrives while the creature is well, withers when the creature falls sick, and dies if the creature is killed. The heartrose grows white flowers if its bonded creature is of pure spirit and velvety black roses if the creature is evil. Neutral creatures' roses display a beautifully mottled black and white pattern. If the rose is uprooted, the character is unharmed.

The heartrose can act in place of the character as a target for spells. Spells cast directly on the plant may succeed if they can affect either animals or plants; spells that affect only plants affect the character as their nearest equivalent where possible. Thus, a *cure light wounds* cast on the rose would heal the character. *Charm plants* would affect the character as *charm person*, while *awaken*, which has no equivalent, doesn't affect the character at all. Spells that aren't targeted at the plant must be able to affect plants to affect the character as well. A *fireball*, which can damage plants, cast on the area around a heartrose would injure the bonded creature, while *major image*, which can't affect plants, would have no effect on either. *Cost: 1,000 gp.*

Lotus Tree Nectar: Affected creatures sleep for 1d6 hours, during which time they have wonderful but bizarre dreams. If they are woken during this period, they return to sleep 1 round later. When they awaken naturally, characters can make a recovery check for any Horror effects they are suffering as the dreams reinvigorate and uplift their spirits. However, they must make a successful DC 20 Will save or try to drink more nectar. Creatures must make an additional Will save each day, but the DC drops by 1 for each day that has passed since the last drink of nectar. Those so affected must make a DC 15 Fortitude save as well or suffer terrible nightmares from withdrawal.

Shee's Kiss: This vine has tall spines covered in hundreds of tiny yellow flowers, each thick with pollen. Those who inhale the pollen must make a DC 15 Will save or fall ardently in love with the next humanoid they see. At the DM's discretion, natural rolls of 1 may involve falling in love with animals or inanimate objects. If the save is successful, the character is forever immune to pollen from that plant and can gather the pollen if she wishes. Each vine can supply 3 doses.

Starweed: When light is shone through a starweed, it creates a scintillating pattern of colored light. This has the effect of a *hypnotic pattern* as cast by a 3rd-level sorcerer. If used as a material component in spells involving summoning or the simple manipulation of light (like *hypnotic pattern* or *light*, but not complex illusions like *minor image*), the spell is empowered, without the increase in spell level. *Cost: 600 gp.*



real undead such as wraiths and vampiric mists, as well as the despairing spirits called *gossamers*. Drier regions of the Southern Rift are home to axe-wielding wights called *dearg-due*, crimson bones, zombies, ghouls and skeletons. Undead shadows are understandably found everywhere, including areas of the Greenlands where the sith are common. After Loht was crippled by the Twilight, the Unseelie Court tried to eradicate the saugh from the Stonedowns, but despite early successes, the saugh have begun responding with greater cunning. Some fear this development is a sign that the Twilight is extending his influence beyond the Obsidian Gate once more.

The Northern Rift is the seat of the Arak civilization, and all manner of fey and creatures of shadow live there. Dryads, satyrs, sirens, harpies, baobhan sith and quicklings live alongside the Arak, occasionally serving as companions or servants, while shadow mastiffs, nightmares and ecalypse are used as mounts. I find it hard to believe that some of these fabulous creatures exist, but with no firsthand experience I must report only the incredible stories I have heard.

One final category worth noting are the *lee-due*, or surface-born. This term encompasses those mortals who have found their own way to the Shadow Rift as well as

those who have been brought by the Arak. Shadow fey are well known for their fascination with mortals. Stories abound of babies being stolen from cradles so the fey can raise them. Sometimes these mortals are allowed to live naturally. Others — usually those tempted into the service of the Unseelie Court, but potentially anyone — are *shadow crafted*. The Arak twist these poor creatures into demented mockeries of their previous forms to better serve the purposes and aesthetics of their masters. Finally, the *lee-due* also includes the elf-shot, also called changelings or, most evocatively, the shadow-reft. Changelings are created from mortals who (willingly or unwillingly) eat faerie food. The transformation is usually bestowed as a “gift” for those who particularly impress a shadow fey with their talents. After eating the faerie food, the mortal falls into a deep sleep. The Arak then lights a magic candle beside the body, which burns for 5 hours. While the candle burns, the victim can’t be awakened. The fey then sprinkles the sleeping human with black dust and slices away her shadow with a silver sickle. If the fey enters a Fracture before the candle is snuffed, the shadow becomes a changeling and the sleeping mortal becomes a mindless automaton to carry out the mundane, repetitive tasks of everyday life. The shadow transforms into a changeling in the shape and appearance of the shadow’s former owner. The changeling’s creator assigns it a task, which it performs

Local Animals and Native Horrors

The Shadow Rift is infused with the dark energies of the Plane of Shadow. As such, all shadowy creatures (underlined below) have maximum hit points when encountered and heal naturally at twice the normal rate. (The shadow crafted template is in *Van Richten’s Guide to the Shadow Fey*.)

To keep players on their toes, be sure to give any familiar creatures used (such as goblins or merfolk) an eerie and disturbing twist; the shadow creature template from *Wizards of the Coast’s Manual of the Planes* offers a good approach. Even benign creatures should make the PCs uneasy, and nothing should be exactly like anything encountered before.

Wildlife: CR 1/10 — bat; CR 1/8 — rat; CR 1/6 — monkey; raven; CR 1/4 — cat; owl; pony; weasel; CR 1/3 — badger; dog; hawk; snake, Tiny viper; CR 1/2 — baboon; eagle; snake, Small viper; CR 1 — horse, heavy; horse, light; hound, mastiff†; wolf; CR 2 — bear, black; boar; snake, constrictor; wolverine; CR 4 — bear, brown.

Monsters: CR 1/4 — leech, witchbane†; monstrous spider, Tiny; CR 1/3 — gremishka†; *skeleton*, Medium; CR 1/2 — *geist*; giant bee; locathah; merfolk; monstrous spider, Small; plant, bloodrose†; *zombie*, Medium; CR 1 — bakhna rakhna; changeling; dryad; fungus, shrieker; *ghoul*; lizardfolk; monstrous spider, Medium; sprite, grig; sprite, nixie; plant, fearweed†; CR 2 — *crimson bones*†; dire bat; dire badger; dire weasel; giant ant; giant praying mantis; hearth fiend†; monstrous spider, Large; plant, crawling ivy†; ravenkin†; satyr; shadow asp†; skin thief†; vargouille; CR 3 — arak, teg†; aranea; assassin vine; baobhan sith†; boowray†; broken one†; centaur; drowning†; dusk beast*; fungus, violet; giant owl; giant wasp; head hunter†; hell hound; plant, bloodroot†; shadow; unicorn; wight; CR 4 — arak, powrie†; dire wolverine; fenhound†; giant beetle, stag; hag, sea; harpy; imp, assassin†; monstrous spider, Huge; plant, lashweed†; satyr (with pipes); shadow unicorn†; sprite, pixie; CR 5 — arak, shee†; arak, sith†; cloaker, resplendent†; cloaker, shadow†; cloaker, undead†; hag, green; paka†; phase spider; shadow mastiff; wraith; CR 6 — grim†; hag, annis†; nightmare, dread†; nymph; shambling mound; tenticulos; troll, dread†; will o’ wisp; CR 7 — dire bear; drider; monstrous spider, Gargantuan; CR 8 — ogre mage; shadow fiend; treant; CR 9 — ecalypse*; plant, death’s head tree†; tenebris†; undead treant†; CR 10 — plant, quickwood†; umbral bunyan*.

* Creature presented in *Wizards of the Coast’s Manual of the Planes*.



with obsessive concentration and devotion for the rest of eternity. Changelings are dull, passionless creatures interested only in their tasks.

History



Studying the history of the Shadow Rift is made even more complicated than one would expect from my inability to enter the fey realm by the *temporal fugue*. This phenomenon was first recorded hundreds of years ago, when the vanished domain of Arak initially appeared from the Mists. A large proportion of humans native to Arak were miners on what is now Mount Lament. They discovered that, as they burrowed deeper into the earth, time passed faster and faster for them compared to the surface. Although this feature made the mines extraordinarily successful (the miners could produce ore far faster than mines in other realms), it understandably perturbed the miners and their families. The deeper tunnels were finally abandoned in 585 BC when a spelunking expedition into an unusually deep fissure returned on the same day that it left, with the explorers claiming nearly three weeks had passed for them. The humans then stayed as close to the surface as possible.

This temporal fugue also seems to exist for the Shadow Rift: for every fortnight that passes on the surface, a year goes by in the Rift. More than anything else, this convinces me that the Shadow Rift is the lost subterranean civilization of Arak. The consequence, however, is that the true history of the Shadow Rift is thirteen times longer than even Barovia's, and the false history extends even further.

The false history begins centuries, even millennia, ago on the Plane of Shadow. At the heart of this dark realm was an alien being of horrific power and great evil that the Arak refer to only as the Twilight or the Sorcerer-Fiend. As my captured powrie told it, the Twilight was barely one step down from godhood and desperately wanted to make that last leap. I can only assume this claim is an exaggeration born of fear.

If not, it suggests my tormentors are even more powerful than I had anticipated. No matter; I shall not be cowed now.

The Twilight decided to create a race to serve him. He drew the ellefolk from some distant plane and forced them to work as slaves for centuries in his

shadowy palace. Under his ever-watchful eye, they lived and died, toiled and wept for the glory of a creature dark and evil beyond their understanding. As a "gift" for their service, the Twilight infused them with the essence of the Plane of Shadow, transforming them from mortal creatures into the immortal shadow fey. On the same day, twins were born to the fey's leader, Arak the Erlking, and his wife Finngalla. These infants, Loht and Maeve, were the first true shadow fey. Their mother died in childbirth.

When the twins were fifty, the Twilight tired of his demesne in the Plane of Shadow and decided to conquer new worlds. He directed Arak, his seneschal, to begin construction of a magnificent portal to send his shadow fey armies forth to conquer.

Unknown to the Sorcerer-Fiend, the shadow fey had sought for centuries to escape their master's crushing rule. They hungered to regain their freedom and repay the Twilight for the terrible wrongs he had done them. In the Obsidian Gate now being constructed, Arak finally saw a means for escape. Word began to spread that the time for flight was at hand.

The Twilight empowered the Obsidian Gate with a fraction of his spirit, allowing it to pierce the dimensional boundaries to our land. The vast army of shadow fey poured into the new world, but gradually the Sorcerer-Fiend noticed the force was too big for the elite warriors his plan had called for. The entire race of shadow fey, and many of his other shadowy minions, were fleeing into the gate. Enraged, the Twilight charged after them, plunging into the Gate at the heels of the fey.

Arak confronted the Twilight in the tunnel between worlds, trying to hold the fiend at bay long enough for the shadow fey to escape. He wore a number of powerful artifacts — the Regalia of Arak, crafted over the centuries to embody the dreams of the shadow fey. Although they saved him from instant annihilation, the rebel was relentlessly beaten back. Yet he slowed the Twilight enough for his people to escape. Arak himself could not; when at last he turned to run, the Sorcerer-Fiend blasted him with a bolt of magical energy as he reached the far end of the tunnel. Arak was vaporized instantly and his Regalia blasted into the new world, landing at the feet of Loht and Maeve. Loht was paralyzed with fear, but his sister retained enough composure to close the Gate before the Twilight could escape. The fiend was trapped in the space between dimensions, and the land of Arak appeared to Barovia's north. The year was 575 BC. I believe the exodus marks Arak's seminal moment.



The shadow fey renamed themselves and their land in honor of their fallen leader and quickly made a home for themselves underground, far from the lethal sun. As Arak's heirs, Loht and Maeve ruled jointly. Maeve took the title of Faerie Queen. Loht became the Prince of Shadows, not wanting to call himself king out of respect for his father.

After a few years (by their reckoning), the Arak began venturing back to the surface to explore and there encountered the humans who lived on the surface. The humans began to spread tales of these occasional encounters. In all these ancient tales, many of which have become separated from their factual origins and turned into fables or horror stories, the Arak are mysterious and powerful. In most they are evil, or at least don't care about mortal lives, killing or spiting away victims for their own entertainment. These encounters had a profound effect on human culture, making them something like the Tepestani of today, but the effect on Arak culture was even more traumatic. The shadow fey became deeply divided between those who saw the humans as vaguely interesting and useful animals, but animals nonetheless, and those who saw them as something more like themselves. Those who saw mortals as lesser beings and gleefully tormented them formed the Unseelie Court, led by Loht. Maeve became the leader of the Seelie Court, the fey who had a patronizing but benign attitude to mortals. Despite their differences, the two Courts managed to coexist for more than 4,000 years, with Maeve and Loht ruling jointly from the Malachite Palace.

In 577 BC, human records note that a trio of dark skinned strangers with pure white hair arrived in Arak. They called themselves drow, and the tales they heard of the shadow fey had convinced them that the Arak were also drow. Although they were on the surface for only a few days, their sadism and casual betrayals ensured they quickly entered folklore. They became confused with Unseelie fey and the true nature of the Arak was forgotten. For centuries, mortals believed the hidden denizens of Arak were drow or "dark elves."

The three drow found their way to the Arak's hidden cavern and were made welcome by the Unseelie Court. They quickly gained positions of influence, and their leader, an outcast priestess, introduced the worship of the Spider Queen. The religion spread among the more degenerate fey, who treated it as an amusing decadence. In about 583 BC (more than 150 years as they saw it after the

drow arrived), the last of the original trio was killed, victim of a long string of assassinations, and the fey who later became known as Tristessa assumed the role of high priestess. Alarmed by the cult's growing disrespect for the Law of Arak, and perhaps distrusting its growing power, Loht took steps to suppress the religion. This effort quickly became a major power struggle, from which Loht finally emerged victorious in 588 BC. Although the details were unknown even to the Keeper of Secrets, this struggle resulted in Tristessa and her baby being staked onto the slopes of Mount Lament. Jozell, Loht's second-in-command and leader of the powrie at that time, was allegedly responsible, but darker rumors held that Loht himself was the murderer. Jozell was punished with Shunning; Loht escaped without penalty, although the seed of mistrust ate at Maeve for centuries until finally their joint rule crumbled... and Tristessa became the ruler of Keening. On the day Tristessa died, a great sandstorm, the Scourge of Arak, scoured the Mountains of Misery of all surface life and moved Mount Lament to its current position.

Nothing more is known of the Arak until 740 BC. Apparently, the Obsidian Gate had been buried deep within the earth, the Twilight trapped within, ever since Arak appeared. During the Grand Conjunction, the Sorcerer-Fiend tried to escape, an effort that tore the fey's civilization from its bed beneath Arak and dragged it to where it now lies as the Greenlands. A macabre reflection, the Stonedowns, appeared south of it with the Obsidian Gate at its heart. G'Henna and Markovia vanished, and the Shadow Rift was created.

In his cage, the Twilight found he could force his mind into our reality. He began sending dreams to Loht, appearing to him as Arak the Erlking. The Twilight convinced Loht that Arak was alive and trapped in the Gate, having driven the Sorcerer-Fiend back to the Plane of Shadow. Loht began an 11-year search of the surface lands for the Regalia of Arak, which had been scattered in the Great Upheaval and was needed to reopen the portal. He managed to assemble most of the Regalia, and then tricked a group of mortal adventurers into getting the Crown of Arak from Maeve. Then he opened the Obsidian Gate.

Exactly what happened at the peak of the Darkenheights is unknown. The Twilight almost managed to escape and was only prevented from doing so by the same mortals Loht had used as pawns. Loht was crippled by the Sorcerer-Fiend,



every bone in his body broken. The Unseelie Court went into eclipse as the other fey realized the depths of Loht's credulity. Its disgruntled members started roaming the Core in far greater numbers, searching for ways to ease Loht's pain and escaping the disapproval of the Seelie fey. This development seems to account for the far larger presence of the shadow fey in the lands around the Rift over the last seven years, when before the Great Upheaval they were almost unknown.

Populace

The Shadow Rift is shaped by the Arak, or shadow fey. Although many other intelligent creatures, especially other fey, make their homes in the Greenlands (as discussed above in the Fauna section), the Arak have influenced the Rift the most. Strangely, Arak culture itself is a composite, cobbled together from all the mortal cultures Arak or the Shadow Rift has bordered. Thus, mortal visitors may find fragments of Darkonese, Barovian, Nova Vaasan, Falkovnian, Tepestani, Borcan and the dead Arakan human cultures all mingled together. Far from being reassuring, this feature serves only to make mortal visitors even more uncomfortable. Our cultures have been reproduced — mimicked — by a race that can no longer remember why such things as houses, fashions and governments are important. As such, they appear subtly wrong, as an illusion cast by an inept wizard doesn't quite seem right. The familiar elements are juxtaposed with elements from understandable (if not familiar) cultures as well as completely alien ones, making even clearer that the race that makes the Rift its home is completely unlike us. Different as we are to elves and dwarves, we at least share some elements: the need for food and shelter, the knowledge of death's inevitability, and so forth. We have no such link to the Arak; they find us amusing curiosities, a means to avoid the boredom eternal life brings. Nothing more.

Appearance

I'm sure that my patron will have heard tales of the Rift's inhabitants: shapeshifters, ghostly humanoids, demonic berserkers and myriad other horrors. According to my powrie captive, these creatures are all Arak, a single race of uniquely diverse appearance and abilities. Hard as it may be to believe, they can all interbreed, and all young Arak look similar. It is only as they grow older that

their forms differentiate. Their final appearance, called a Breed, reflects and is shaped by their personality. An Arak that is interested in death and decay would join the Breed of sith, all of whom are slender, pale and morbid. An Arak that was interested in arcane magic would become a gwyttune, while one who resented mortals for the meaning death gave to their existences would become a waff. If an Arak suffers a great change in its outlook, it can even change Breeds part way through its life, although this transformation is rare. Arak personalities differ as much as mortals' do, and so I can detail their appearances no more than this. If my patron is interested in a poorly researched and overly sensational description of a few of the more common Breeds, I believe that Van Richten's pretenders have also been scouring Tepest for interviewees. I can only offer thanks that I didn't have to meet them here; avoiding them in Mordentshire was enough.

fashion

The Arak's clothing is one of the many things they have copied from mortals. Some Breeds prefer particular styles or colors: the dancing men are always seen in long, flowing cloaks and kilts like the Forfarrians wear, for instance, while the powrie are infamous for their red caps, dyed with human blood. More generally, however, the Arak only reproduce human fashions. Given the long lives of the Arak, these fashions could be from almost any era in our history, and the designs are often altered to suit a fey's individual tastes. Loht, for example, apparently favors Borcan court wear from 50 years ago, while Maeve wears the current Dementlieu fashions, but both exclusively wear silk of white (in Maeve's case) or black and grey (for Loht), even when the template for their clothing was some other fabric or color.

Language

The Arak have their own language, closely related to Sylvan and, curiously, to Tepestani. The language is fluid and soft, giving it a strange, ululating sound, as though it were spoken by the wind or a river, not a normal throat. Many of the sounds can't be reproduced by mortal throats, and approximate matches such as "z" or "t" are substituted. Even the foul-mouthed powrie can make it seem a beautiful language.

Sylvan and a number of mortal tongues are also spoken in the Rift. Most Arak are at least conversant in every major language of the Core, so





intruders will be able to speak their native languages. Finally, some Breeds have their own, usually animalistic languages. The brag, for example, communicate with nickering and snorting, and the teg hiss, grunt and howl.

Language Primer

English	Arak
hello	<i>por orad</i>
goodbye	<i>sa por</i>
yes	<i>am</i>
no	<i>zell</i>
help!	<i>jo lin!</i>
go away!	<i>sa lion!</i>
night, darkness	<i>anvo</i>
immortal, fey	<i>faer</i>
mortal	<i>lee-due</i>
surface	<i>lee</i>
magic	<i>gwy</i>

Lifestyle and Education

As I have stated, the Arak's lifestyle is a hodgepodge of elements plundered from humans and altered to suit their own needs or desires. I suspect that mortals are so fascinating to the Arak because, unlike them, we are so fragile, our lives so easily lost. A single mistake — one momentary lapse in concentration — and that life is gone forever.

A tear, little scholar? This does the object of your sudden guilt no good and serves only to irritate me. I had hoped for more fortitude in my servants.

We must sleep and eat, and we often fall victim to disease or accident. This looming fate shapes and gives meaning to our lives. In contrast, the Arak are immortal; only sunlight or necromancy can permanently destroy them. Other "deaths" only inconvenience them for a while, and they rise refreshed at a different time and place. Under normal circumstances, their lives can't be lost and so have no real meaning. Ours do, and that makes us fascinating. So, the Arak mimic mortals to pass the time and try to find some purpose in their existences.

Shadow fey, like all fey, gain all the sustenance they need from their ties to the earth; the shadow energies that fill the Shadow Rift sustain them completely. However, they continue to eat solid food

(usually fruit, although the powrie and teg take particular pleasure in raw flesh) despite having no need of it, purely for the sensual stimulation taste brings. This, I believe, is the Arak lifestyle in a nutshell. They live only for pleasure and only do the things they find pleasurable. For the alven, this is gardening; for the teg, hunting; for the fir, tinkering with clockwork and engineering strange devices. Unselie fey boil forth to torment mortals not because they need to feed on blood like vampires, but purely because they enjoy torture, murder and mayhem. Although they are at no risk from exposure to the elements, many build houses as we do, simply because they enjoy the process of creation, maintenance, and then watching it decay. A fey may pursue a single activity for a century, but then stop without hesitation the moment she grows bored.

The Arak also replicate our cultures for a more noble reason: to preserve the aspects they appreciate from destruction at the hands of time. Changelings are a clear example — the Arak find persons of great beauty or courage or talent, and spirit them away to preserve their unusual ability for eternity. Incredibly, they see this as a reward rather than a cursed of an endless, empty existence as half a person... another example of how their view differs so greatly from mortals'.

Attitudes Toward Magic

The Arak are steeped in magic; it is part of their nature, as much an instinct as breathing, and they use it as freely. All Arak can cast spells, often to a moderate level of proficiency, and some choose to study further, expanding their talents to phenomenal levels. However, they don't seem to be impressed by mortal magic. Perhaps because it is so much a part of their nature, the subject holds no interest for them. They rarely make mages into changelings.

Magic in the Shadow Rift

The Shadow Rift is permeated with energy from the Plane of Shadow, promoting spells that use this energy and deadening light-based spells. Spells with the shadow descriptor or that cause darkness are cast as though they were prepared with the Maximize Spell feat, although they don't require higher spell slots.

Spells that use or generate light are much weaker. A spellcaster attempting to cast a spell with the light descriptor must succeed at a Spellcraft check (DC 15 + spell level) or the spell fails with no effect. Also remember that the area of effect of these spells is halved.

Religion

Shadow fey do not as a whole worship any gods. While the Arak do accept that gods exist, they do not believe they have any power over the shadow fey or any place in their lives. The Twilight was their god and they escaped him. Other gods belong to mortals.

A few fey occasionally take up the trappings of a religion, but this choice is motivated more by the desire for entertainment than by faith. At some point or another, the Arak have adopted any number of religions, although sun gods such as Belenus or the Morninglord are understandably avoided.

The Spider Queen: The Arak completely revile only one religion: the cult of the Spider Queen. Only the most decadent and deranged worship this goddess, and when they are discovered by their transformation into zellcrow they are mercilessly driven from the Greenlands. The cruel rites of the Spider Queen and the loneliness caused by their isolation drives these creatures to insanity, and they become a threat to mortal and immortal alike. My powrie captive had never heard of one breaking the Law of Arak, but some come closer than even the powrie are comfortable with.

The cult of the Spider Queen has very little hierarchy; all of her priests are considered equal in the eyes of the church. The only exception is the high priestess, who speaks for the Spider Queen herself. However, the Spider Queen is the patron of greed, deceit and spite. The murder, even of the high priest, is a legitimate — if not desirable — way to gain worldly power and advancement in the church. By the dictates of the church, if one kills another priest, one can claim all the victim's possessions (including congregations). Rather than celebrating martyrs, the cult of the Spider Queen celebrates cold-hearted killers, those who lie and cheat to get ahead, and those who seek their own pleasure at the expense of others.

Druids: Many, especially the teg and alven, have a druidic reverence for nature, but this reverence is not personified as a god and worship is not organized into churches. The fey druids are ideologically divided into three factions. The alven and the few portune who become druids favor the first, which has a basically benevolent aspect. They see the natural world as something of a garden; plants should be induced to grow and produce fruit to feed animals, which thrive until they in turn nourish the plants. The fey, according to this faction, are caretakers. Their duty is to ensure that the cycle of

The Church of the Spider Queen

Symbol: A stylized black widow spider.

Alignment: Chaotic evil.

Portfolio: Spiders, decadence, torture, spite, greed, deceit.

Domains: Animal, Evil, Greed (see the *Book of Vile Darkness*), Pain (see the *Book of Vile Darkness*), Trickery.

Favored Weapons: Net, razor.

Clerics of the Spider Queen pray for their spells at midnight. They rebuke undead, and they often multiclass as assassins, rogues and court poisoners (see *Ravenloft Gazetteer IV*). Worship services are rare, as worshippers are expected to show devotion by their actions and not by attending services, but all worshippers must pray all night on midwinter's night, the Night of Obeisance.

Note that special rules apply to Arak worshippers of the Spider Queen; see the zellcrow prestige class in the Attached Notes.

Dogma: Pleasure is the only goal worth pursuing, and it must be sought ceaselessly and without thought for the consequences. Take what you want. Other people do not matter; they exist only as objects of or hurdles to your satisfaction. If they are hurdles, they must be dealt with harshly, and dealing with them is itself a source of pleasure. Murder, deception, hatred and pain are all art forms, and the Spider Queen favors those who master them. Spiders, who live only for themselves and kill their mates once satisfied, are the perfect animals. You must be as selfish, deceptive and sadistic as they are. The Spider Queen helps those who help themselves.

life continues smoothly for eternity, which includes taking steps to prevent any one species from coming to dominate.

According to the first faction, the world is like a great, well-oiled machine, with each piece turning in synchrony. The second, however, maintains that nature has no structure or order; the natural state of the world is chaos, and anything that attempts to impose order upon it is unnatural and therefore must be disposed of. These fey, which include satyrs, teg, and some muryan and alven, attempt to remove order from the world. These actions frequently bring



The Shadow Rift Hero

This section presents information potentially useful in creating PCs native to the Shadow Rift.

Races: The Arak are obviously the Shadow Rift's dominant race, but they are quite powerful and potentially make poor PCs. DMs must consider carefully before allowing a shadow fey PC. However, the Arak frequently take mortal lovers and kidnap people of all races, and the Shadow Rift is home to a number of races that are suitable for PCs. See **Van Richten's Guide to the Shadow Fey** for half-Arak and fey-touched characters. Calibans can be used for those mortals kidnapped and warped into forms more pleasing to the fey eye.

Classes: Rangers and druids are common because the fey appreciation for nature is passed to mortals from the fey who raised them; likewise, all fey love riddles and music, so mortals who wish to train as bards are encouraged. Mortals with fey blood often find their unusual heritage manifests in sorcerer abilities. Because the Arak worship no gods and sneer at learned magic, wizards and clerics are rare, although the sith sometimes raise necromancers. The few mortals the muryan raise become fighters or barbarians; the powrie raise rogues, and the brag raise monks.

Recommended Skills: Balance, Climb, Craft (clockwork, stonemasonry), Diplomacy, Handle Animals, Heal, Disable Device, Hide, Intimidate, Jump, Knowledge (arcana, engineering, the fey, history, nature, the planes), Listen, Move Silently, Perform (act, comedy, dance, oratory, sing, string instruments, wind instruments), Profession (farmer, fisher, gardener, guide, healer, herbalist, herder, hunter, servant), Ride, Spellcraft, Swim, Tumble, Survival.

Recommended Feats: Ancestral Legacy, Blind-Fight, Cold One, Dodge, Greater Supernatural Immunity, Improved Supernatural Resistance, Iron Will, Lunatic, Muse, Nine Lives, Open Mind, Portents, Psychic, Redheaded, Skill Focus (any skill from the Recommended Skills list), Warding Gesture (fey, undead).

Male names: Aen, Amiri, Arlen, Cedma, Eruera, Etui, Halea, Havisha, Iele, Jaiya, Joloht, Malu, Pono, Tama, Tipene, Turi.

Female names: Alani, Aroha, Calliagh, Edena, Iriwa, Irianpor, Jaen, Leilani, Leyla, Mahuru, Marika, Omaka, Palila, Pania, Saenliss, Tama.

Outcast Ratings in the Shadow Rift

Mortal Outcast Ratings provide a penalty to Gather Information and Diplomacy checks when interacting with natives of the Rift. They don't apply to Perform, Intimidate or Bluff rolls. The fey are unconcerned by differences between mortal races or strange and unusual abilities. To them, all mortals are the same: clever pets or objects with which to amuse themselves.

them into conflict with more orderly fey and with mortals. They make no attempt to preserve the balance of species; they believe that life itself is valuable, not that diversity is.

The final faction is dominated by the teg. They believe intelligent mortal life is an aberration and must be removed; only animals, plants and immortals should exist. Of the three factions, they are most active on the surface, although this activity is always destructive and malevolent. They attack travelers, ravage small communities and spoil harvests to punish mortals. Slaughtering livestock and ruining crops may seem unusual for druids, but they see the destruction as the casualties of war — the plant and animal

populations will recover, but once eradicated, intelligent life will not return.

The Realm



oht and Maeve, the twin heirs of Arak the Erlking and heads of the Two Courts, have ruled the Shadow Rift for the past 5,000 years or so. For the most part they have ruled without opposition; the only power struggle I learned of in their history was 4,400 years ago, and it led to the creation of Keening. Now, of course, Loht and Maeve have enjoyed another four millennia to cement their



power bases, so any attempted coup would be even bloodier than the last. Also, I think the fey have come to believe that a change of government would be impossible without shedding Arak blood, and even the most power hungry are not prepared to break the Law of Arak to depose the twins.

Despite all my research, I could not identify the true ruler. Rather, I encountered a surplus of candidates. Loht is an obvious choice. He already has a position of power, which he holds tyrannically — even crippled he is the absolute master of the Unseelie Court. Perhaps his command over them is a gift that comes from ruling the Shadow Rift. If I can read the subtext of his battle with Tristessa properly, some even suspect that he executed the priestess, not Jozell. If so, not only has he broken the Law of Arak, he is also vile enough to implicate the chief whip of his court in the crime so he can escape punishment. All this speculation creates a compelling case, but from 740 BC to 751 BC, Loht also traveled the surface searching for the Regalia of Arak. Although my patron may correct me, I believe the dread lord cannot leave his realm. Thus, Loht cannot be the true lord of the Shadow Rift.

Who, then, could be? Another candidate is the Twilight, apparently still trapped between di-

mensions in the Obsidian Gate. However, this imprisonment is precisely why the Sorcerer-Fiend cannot be ruler of the Shadow Rift: he is not actually *in* the Rift, and never has been. He is certainly powerful and evil enough to deserve to be, but again, the fact that he is effectively outside his realm — outside our world, even — means that he cannot be the dread lord. This fact is so compelling that I mention him only out of completeness and because his evil is so great.

Another candidate is Maeve, although I believe she is less likely than my other two suggestions. Although she is described as amoral, tempestuous, perilous and often cruel, I don't believe that she is evil enough to earn her place. She, too, has apparently left the Shadow Rift in the past, although as my powrie captive could not say where she went or what she did, she was possibly hiding in the Rift instead.

To conclude, my research suggests only three candidates who I believe could be the dread lord of the Shadow Rift, but all three (with the possible exception of Maeve) have left the domain at some point. Although I personally scoff at the idea, I must inform my patron that some arcanists believe the Shadow Rift is a vacuous domain, awaiting a lord of sufficient power to claim it as his or her own. This





state would explain why no obvious candidate for the true lordship can be found. However, I personally believe that the Rift has a ruler, albeit a well hidden one. I have included details on the conundrum, including my three suspects, in the Attached Notes.

Government

The Shadow Rift is ruled by a hereditary aristocracy. As I have explained, the Arak are an incredibly diverse species, which is separated into numerous Breeds. Nine of those Breeds are particularly common and influential, composing the Two Courts that rule the Rift. The Nine Breeds are the alven, brag, fir, muryan, portune, powrie, shee, sith and teg. Although technically any member of these Breeds can enter the Malachite Palace (while other Breeds cannot), only particular families within the Nine Breeds are allowed to speak without leave. The government is therefore separated into four distinct tiers: the rulers, Loht and Maeve; their courtiers, members of particular families within the Nine Breeds; other families in the Nine Breeds; and the other Breeds. Noble families gain the right to speak in both Courts; rather than being closed circles, the Courts are actually loose, fluid groupings. True politicians can stay in court all year, but the very different nature of the Two Courts ensures that only a few do this. Most fey find the flavor of the opposing Court too dark or too frivolous for their tastes. I couldn't discover why only nine Breeds were selected for power, or why those specific Breeds. Most fey, however, have no interest in politics, so their partial or total exclusion from Court doesn't trouble them overly; almost all of the brag, for example, have been granted access to the Courts but rarely ever attend.

Each Court rules the Rift for half a year (as those in the Rift experience it). During this time, the ruler of the reigning Court resides at the Malachite Palace. The ruler's word is law and dispensed to every corner of the domain by quicklings and air elementals. Like any ruler, the twins deliver judgement over criminals, pass laws and decide issues of import. On the two days a year when the Palace changes hands, Loht and Maeve hold court together. When Maeve is in power, Loht broods in his dark palace in Belivue. On the day before he returns to power, his litter bearers take him to the very edge of Precipice, where he spends hours examining the Darkenheights. When Loht is in power, Maeve either entertains in her castle in Esmerth, or troupes around the Greenlands, stopping to hold court wherever the fancy takes her.

Law Enforcement

Most guards are muryankin, the change-lings of warriors whose skill was so great the muryan stole their shadows and charged them with defending the Shadow Rift. More rarely, the muryan themselves patrol the Greenlands, looking for intruders to fight. In times of emergency, the muryan ride dread nightmares.

Muryankin Patrolman: Muryankin War1; CR 1/2; Medium humanoid (varies); HD 1d10+2; hp 7; Init +4; Spd 30 ft.; AC 14, touch 14, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +1; Grp +4; Atk +4 melee (1d6+3/18–20, scimitar); Full Atk +4 melee (1d6+3/18–20, scimitar) or +5 ranged (1d8/x3, longbow); SA rage (+4 Str, +4 Con, +2 morale bonus to Will saves, –2 AC; as 3rd-level barbarian); AL CN; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Wis +2; Str 17, Dex 18, Con 14, Int 9, Wis 13, Cha 12. *Skills and Feats:* Jump +7; Dodge.

Possessions: Scimitar, longbow, arrows.

Muryan Special Patrol: Shadow fey War1; CR 7; Medium fey (shadow fey); HD 7d6+1d10+18; hp 43; Init +5; Spd 30 ft.; AC 21, touch 15, flat-footed 16; Base Atk +4; Grp +8; Atk +8 melee (1d6+4/18–20, scimitar); Full Atk +8 melee (1d6+4/18–20, scimitar) or +9 ranged (1d8/x3, longbow); SA dance of despair, sapping aura, spells, spell-like abilities; SQ darkvision 120 ft., low-light vision, *disguise self* (3/day; caster level 5th), evasion, uncanny dodge, alternate form, daylight vulnerability (2d4 damage/round), cold iron vulnerability, immunity to electricity and wood, damage reduction 10/mithral, spell resistance 17; AL CN; SV Fort +4, Ref +10, Will +6; Str 18, Dex 20, Con 14, Int 9, Wis 13, Cha 15.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +10, Hide +13, Jump +12, Move Silently +13, Perform (dance) +7, Spot +9, Tumble +13; Dodge, Mobility, Spring Attack.

Sorcerer Spells Known (6/6/3; base save DC 12 + spell level; caster level 4th): 0—*daze, dancing lights, flare, ghost sound, touch of fatigue, mage hand*; 1st—*color spray, jump, true strike*; 2nd—*flaming sphere*.

Spell-Like Abilities: 1/day—*entangle, haste, invisibility, pass without trace, sleep*. Caster level 12th.

Possessions: Scimitar, longbow, arrows.

Note: For details on muryankin and muryans, see **Van Richten's Guide to the Shadow Fey**.

The laws the rulers create are chaotically enforced by the muryan, who act as both police and guards for the Shadow Rift. It is commonly understood that most laws, especially those that spring from the Seelie Court, are guidelines rather than absolute strictures. The fey are expected to obey when the sith, shee or muryan are watching, but otherwise don't have to. (Of course, more orderly fey such as the portune and the sith obey the laws



regardless). This attitude has been changing in recent decades. Loht has always been a tyrant, although when he ruled jointly with Maeve or his attention was focused on opening the Obsidian Gate, his commands were taken with a grain of salt. Now, however, he is taking complete control in order to prevent the Twilight from gaining influence in the Greenlands. Muryan enforcement patrols are far more common, and his punishments for those who found disobeying his laws are becoming harsher. The other Arak are learning that Loht means what he says. So far, obvious discontent is rare, but it is becoming more common, and with it, Loht is steadily relying on the sadistic powrie as enforcers more than the muryan guards. Where this development will lead is uncertain, although the powrie certainly approve of their increasing importance.

The Law of Arak

The only law that is always universally obeyed is the Law of Arak. Prior to their exodus from the Plane of Shadow, the Twilight mercilessly tormented the Arak (as, ironically, many now torment mortals), harming them and pitting them against each other for sport. Just before the Arak escaped the Sorcerer-Fiend's rule, the Erlking laid down the law that now bears his name: no shadow elf shall kill another shadow elf. This Law was broken only once in 5,000 years. While changelings may war to settle Arak disputes, no Arak will deliberately murder another. Even those who *harm* other Arak or are *suspected* of murder (such as the zellidrow) can be found guilty of breaking the Law.

The penalty for breaking the Law of Arak is shunning. Suspects are dragged before Loht or Maeve and their cases heard. If found guilty, their names are written onto a piece of parchment and dropped into the eternal flame at the heart of the Malachite Palace. This act mystically alerts all the shadow fey in the Rift that the individual is found guilty. From that point, no other fey will ever speak to, touch or interact in any way with one who has broken Arak's law. Such offenders tend to sequester themselves in the wild regions of the Shadow Rift or exile themselves to the surrounding domains. Cut off from all normal interaction with their own kind, these criminals are usually driven mad by an eternity alone with their own thoughts and are, as a rule, very dangerous.

I refer my patron to the case of the G'Hennan village of Viashpa. According to contemporary records, in 706 BC a "most tiny and ill-visaged

sprite" appeared. It sat in the village square from dusk until dawn every night. A few witnesses claim it wept constantly, but this detail may be nothing more than romanticism, as anyone who approached it was horrifically slaughtered after several hours of torture. Many victims were found impaled on the church spire and throttled with their own intestines. The imp, who I believe was Jozell, vanished after a week.

The Seelie Court

While the Unseelie Court is definitely evil, the Seelie Court isn't exactly "good." It is dominated by the shee and shares their amoral, hedonistic outlook. Alven, portune and seelie fir courtiers are also present. They have a relatively benign attitude to mortals; while they can be spiteful or destructive, particularly if offended, on the whole they see mortals as too interesting to destroy.

The Seelie Court is basically a cult of personality dominated by Maeve, the Faerie Queen. All power and influence radiate from her. The Court has a rigorous code of etiquette, but Maeve gives and takes favors constantly, so the inner and outer circles of the Court are constantly changing. The fey endlessly curry favor and politick to gain access to their beautiful Queen. Even the most ridiculous and demeaning tasks, such as being Keeper of the Royal Chamber Pot, are fought over with astonishing fervor. All shee seem to use their beauty as a weapon, but Maeve has perfected the art.

Because the Queen is so integral to the Seelie Court, it (as an entity) is understandably much like her: passionate, tempestuous and wild. The Court often engages in banquets, bardic celebrations, tournaments and hunts — all realms of competition in which participants strive to impress Maeve and win a favor. Sometimes particularly talented musicians, knights or hunters from the surface are invited to attend, although only the most polite and discreet last for long. Several have stayed for decades as Maeve's lovers.

Despite her sensuality, Maeve is quite capable of ruling draconically when she needs to; her word is law as much as Loht's, and her punishments for disobedience can be just as cruel, if not more so. While Loht's punishments are usually physical beatings or imprisonment, Maeve uses psychological methods, toying with the prisoners and sending them on hopeless quests to gain forgiveness. As such, the pain of those who offend her lasts much longer than those who offend Loht. She does not





share Loht's paranoia toward the Twilight; although she is concerned and plans for the day when he finally escapes, she doesn't let the possibility dominate her life as Loht does.

The Unseelie Court

The Unseelie Court is dominated by the sinister but elegant sith, but the muryan, teg, unseelie fir and powrie also have considerable influence. It is far more ordered and formal than the Seelie Court, as Loht rules tyrannically. He brooks no opposition, and his cold, distant cruelty is legendary. One unusual court position that Loht has created is the office of whip. Loht's whips are currently Mohrg, leader of the muryan, and Malinda, Jozell's successor as leader of the powrie. As the name implies, these two are responsible for enforcing discipline and keeping the court members in line. Still, the creatures in Loht's Court idolize the quiet-spoken Crippled King. Many rulers would have lost control of the Court when so publicly discovered trying to free their people's greatest enemy, and then being so badly injured they can barely move. Instead, Loht has used these trials to weld his Court into an efficient and vigilant force, dedicated to opposing the Twilight. My captive's eyes almost glowed when it spoke of Loht's quiet determination to preserve the dignity and freedom of the Arak.

The Unseelie fey are quite well known on the surface. Unlike the Seelie, they believe mortals are little more than animals, and they indulge their cruelest whims upon us. Like all fey, they are fascinated by mortals, but their fascination is more dispassionate, like schoolboys playing with insects. Any mortal unlucky enough to encounter Unseelie fey on the surface or in the Rift will be tormented and then captured or killed, although thankfully the Unseelie fey's tendency to play cat-and-mouse games with their victims affords an opportunity for escape. Humans are definitely not welcome at the Unseelie Court.

As well as harrying mortals, the Unseelie Court occupies itself with opposing the Twilight. They frequently send expeditions into the Stonedowns to control the number of saugh (a policy that has caused some dissent among the sith), and some have begun kidnapping scholars and arcanists to find a way of closing the Obsidian Gate forever without further damage to the Regalia of Arak. They also search for a way to heal Loht's injuries.

Economy

The Shadow Rift does not boast an economy as such. There is certainly no trade with neighboring realms. What little trade occurs internally is usually organized by barter — a delivery of fruit in return for brag stonework, a favor, or a particular number of changelings or rare plants, for example. Tale's suggest that Maeve's palace in Esmerth was built by the brag in return for a single entertaining tale. If an individual needs something he or she cannot get by barter, magic is used to summon it or it is just taken from someone who is not using it. Many fey are very relaxed about the ownership of material objects, although others are very protective of some things. Alven, for example, are very intolerant of people stealing fruit from their gardens.

Arak who need things that only or most easily come from mortals usually steal them, although some exchange work or favors for the object. Others use *faerie gold* to buy them. Faerie gold looks like pure gold until touched by sunlight, when it is revealed to be nothing more than bones, rocks, dead leaves and dirt. All fey have the ability to create faerie gold, but the shee and the mercane are most famous for using it. Those who keep their wits about them, however, may be able to trade some valuable object, such as fey forged weapons or magical items for some exotica that captures the trader's fancy.

The Shadow Rift is a bountiful realm: furs, grains, meat, lumber and fruit of all sorts are easily obtainable (although getting them without provoking fey wrath is quite another matter). The fey use so little of these resources that they probably remain largely untapped. Although the brag do a small amount of quarrying, mining seems entirely unknown since the Scourge destroyed the human population, so any mineral resources are completely untouched. Records from Arak indicate that the area was once well known for its precious stones, gold, silver and copper.

Diplomacy

The Shadow Rift also has no organized diplomacy with its neighbors. It regards the mortal realms with a greedy, fascinated eye, while they in turn view it with fear and suspicion. The Arak use the mortal world to keep themselves occupied through eternity. They ape our lifestyles, steal our livestock and goods, and harass us for fun. However, this all occurs on an individual level, not a



state level, and is the same regardless of which realm the Arak visit — the Arak treat all mortals alike. Only two realms deserve special notice.

Keening: All Arak know who rules Keening and her fate, and they hold her in superstitious dread. Tristessa is almost a divine force for them, like the mythical Furies: to mention her or acknowledge her existence in any way would be to invite her fate. They also find the umbra, the only undead shadow fey in existence, unspeakably disturbing. Thus, although Keening sometimes weighs heavily on the minds of the Shadow Rift's inhabitants, they never speak of it. I have no record of any living Arak ever traveling to Keening since its formation.

Tepest: Tepest is well known for its rabid hatred of the fey. It is therefore ironic that the only constant, easily traversable Fracture leads to Tepest. This means Tepest also has much more fey activity than other realms. For their part, the Arak seem aware of the hatred the Tepestani hold for them, but this attitude makes them an even more tempting target. The shee, for example, find convincing a Tepestani to do something for them much more difficult, and so spend a disproportionately large amount of time trying to rise to the challenge.

Sites of Interest

While legend credits the Shadow Rift with any number of strange locales, only a few are consistent enough in their representation for me to be sure that they are real places. I include below only those sites for which I have encountered human witnesses or that are mentioned consistently in three or more unrelated myths. Other sites, such as the Tower of Wind, the Temple of Seasons or Ygmorgl's Labyrinth may well exist outside of legend, but I am not confident enough to put their existence forward as fact.

Anvolee

Anvolee is the northernmost city in the Shadow Rift and perhaps one where surface dwellers would be most at home. It consists entirely of small cottages, forges and workshops, in each of which a solitary changeling labors away at his or her tasks for eternity. Each of these buildings are masterworks created by changeling carpenters and stonemasons, each a slightly different work of art created in an attempt to perfect the craft. They are made in every style seen on the surface, juxtaposed

in such a way that the buildings enhance the beauty of their neighbors. The effect is apparently both breathtaking and eerie.

Dividing Anvolee's buildings are neatly cobbled roads and parks filled with flowers (tended by the alven and alvenkin). Fountains and artificial streams are common, maintaining the flow of water with delicate mechanisms created by the fir. At the center of the city stands another fir-crafted monument, the Clocktower. Despite its name, this circular tower isn't actually a clock. Instead, it is filled from floor to ceiling with clockwork of function known only to its designer, an unseeleie fir that has been working on the machinery since Anvolee was founded. The gremlin's task is apparently nearing completion, so whatever purpose it may have given its tower will be finally revealed. When not tinkering with its machines, the fir is "chief artisan" or mayor of Anvolee.

The setting for all this human-like normalcy, however, is a huge cavern built into one of the Greenland's massive plateaus. At the peak of the cavern hangs a dull green ball of light the Arak call a sun. Unlike the real sun, Anvolee's sun never varies in position or brightness. Anvolee basks in a permanent green-tinged twilight, slightly brighter than the rest of the Shadow Rift but nowhere near full light. The light is sustained by a gwytone named Arlien, whose wordy title is She Who Maintains the Sun. Arlien lives in a stalactite directly behind the sun. Although she is undeniably powerful, the other Arak believe that constant exposure to the sun has unhinged the gwytone, who has become fascinated with light of all sorts. Her enemies in the Shadow Rift claim that her madness has led her to begin trying to recreate true sunlight — an obviously dangerous pastime for a shadow fey. These opponents, however, have not met with much success in removing Arlien from her position for two reasons. The first is that no one else is prepared to take up the role, and the second is that Arlien has magically protected all the doors leading from the Greenlands to Anvolee's cavern. Those who wish Arlien harm cannot find the passageways and so cannot enter the city.

Anvolee seems to be home to around 5,000 residents, most of which are changelings. Many of the changelings here were great artisans in life and now carry on their trades for their fey masters, their skills honed by centuries of constant, compulsive experience. Practitioners of virtually every craft known to the surface world can be found here —





everything from Rokushman flower arranging to masonry — as well as some that are now unknown. One of Jilliavere's dead companions described a weaver who used a technique that could only have been the long dead *otropa* of Arak. Goldsmiths, silversmiths and blacksmiths create wonders of finely engraved or wrought metalwork, while weaponsmiths create masterwork weapons of such skill they can supposedly cut through stone without becoming blunt. Master woodworkers produce elegant furniture and parquetry, elaborately carved doors and figurines of uncannily fine detail. Sculptors fashion statues so realistic that some, it is said, animate with personalities of their own (although, considering what I learnt in Lamordia, one must wonder whether this is a good thing). Weavers spin the finest fabrics and create garments for every need, from the sturdy kilts of the muryan to the glossiest satins and velvets for the sith. According to legend, they are so experienced they can weave a fabric out of any substance imaginable, as long as it is supplied in large enough quantities.

In short, Anvolee is filled with the most talented of many generations of artisans, each working forever to surpass his or her last achievement and

perfect the craft. One can only wonder how fulfilling this literally endless pursuit of perfection is to the changelings themselves. From the little I have learnt, I suspect that changelings retain their mental faculties after their transformation from mortal to immortal, but the Arak themselves seem to regard them as clockwork mannequins that exist only to serve the fey. It is a great irony that the Arak fled the Plane of Shadow where the Twilight treated them as tools and toys, only to recreate that society in their new realm with changelings as the underclass. If some changelings, the keepers of the kin, are given the task of watching over their fellows, I wonder how long it will be before one decides that the best way to protect the changelings will be to do away with the Arak?

Where to Stay in Anvolee

As the changelings never rest, there are few places for mortals to stay in Anvolee. A few small inns are kept for the benefit of visiting fey. These are all excellent, with good quality rooms and food, and are free of charge — the changeling inn keepers run the inns because they have been created to do so, not to turn a profit. However, the inns are



frequented by fey who are less than receptive to mortal visitors. Of course, changelings are so taken by their tasks that one could easily find shelter in a corner of a changeling's workshop, and, as long as they don't need anything from that area, they would never notice your presence.

Anvolee (large town): Conventional; AL N; 3,000 gp limit; Assets 750,000 gp; Population 5,000; Mixed (changelings 89%, brag 4%, alven 3%, other 4%).

Authority Figures: Waelin (chief artisan), male unseelie fir Exp10; Arshansaba (guard captain), female muryan Ftr4.

Important Characters: Arlien (She Who Maintains the Sun), female gwytyne Wiz4; Barrone (Keeper of the Kin), male changeling.

Esmerth

Esmerth is a bastion of shee culture and is home to the Seelie Court while Loht rules from the Malachite Palace. The city is built in a series of small caves, not one large cave like Anvolee, and artfully designed to meld seamlessly with the natural rock. The delicate pinnacles and spires, labyrinthine tunnels and winding steps were painstakingly crafted to reflect the natural curves of flowstone and stalagmites. As such, becoming lost is exceptionally easy.

While Anvolee rings with the sounds of working changelings but is free of idle conversation, Esmerth is filled with music, poetry and the free exchange of creative ideas. The main caverns are crafted to echo, so everywhere in the city is filled with the sounds of life. The shee's aesthetic senses have been shaped by their subterranean existence, and they seem to appreciate echoes in particular. Shee bards compose works where the echo is a vital part of the performance, so each building has an echo cave nearby for this strange art. Buildings are also built alongside deep pools of still water. These pools are, according to legend, the tears of earth spirits enchanted by the shee's beautiful music, and their levels flux with the amount of music in the city, not with the seasons. When Maeve holds her great ball before resuming her throne in the Malachite Palace, many of the pools flood. Deep under the city, the pools join into a vast lake, creating a secret route for Maeve's spies to move around the city. The waterways are also home to several species of large predators.

Esmerth is home to Maeve's Summer Palace, a towering spire of stone that rises from a lake of cold,

still water. The palace was built as a reflection of the Queen's wit, beauty and majesty. Squadrons of changelings ferry visitors constantly when Maeve is present, and colored paper lanterns hang in every window. When she is not home, the palace stands cold, empty and silent. The name, Summer Palace, is something of a misnomer, as the Seelie Court inhabits it when the Unseelie Court holds the Malachite Palace, and this rarely coincides with the season of summer. However, surface rulers have summer and winter palaces, and so Maeve apes them as the fey copy all our institutions.

Esmerth is also home to numerous bardic colleges, full of mortal musicians and artists lured away from the surface as well as sheekin. Visitors can rub shoulders with some of the greatest composers, poets and performers the Core has ever seen. The colleges maintain vast libraries filled with sheet music (often, priceless originals) and rare instruments, but contain nothing about the Arak themselves. Although the shee are the lorekeepers of the Arak, their race's history is entirely orally preserved.

Where to Stay in Esmerth

Because Esmerth is home to a surprisingly large number of living mortal performers, the city is capable of supporting visitors. The bardic colleges provide basic food and communal lodging (average meals, poor rooms), while the shee occasionally welcome particularly appealing mortals into their own homes.

Esmerth (small town): Conventional; AL N; 800 gp limit; Assets 60,000 gp; Population 1,500; Mixed (shee 58%, humans 20%, elves 6%, half-elves 4%, portune 2%, brag 2%, alven 1%, other 7%).

Authority Figures: Rillien (mayor), male shee Brd4; Paolo di Rimini (chief protector), male muryankin.

Important Characters: Elizabeth Eirilcrune (bard), female human Brd9.

Beliviue

Beliviue is the macabre city of the sith, a grim and cheerless foil to Esmerth's gaiety. Like all Arak cities, Beliviue is built inside caverns in one of the great plateaus rising from the Greenlands. The buildings resemble barrow mounds both outside and in, with trilathon doorways and megalithic walls. They are laid out in neat, arrow-straight rows with a standing stone at each intersection for travelers to orient themselves. Here and there, smaller caves

The Shadow Rift

contain stone circles or rows of monoliths, and the land around Beliviue's plateau is also home to many of these structures. These circles are clearly intended for magical rites; when passing through one, Jilliavere's company felt the sudden, crawling chill of evil magic. One Falkovnian legend suggests the sith use the circles to conduct foul rites on captured mortals. These ceremonies snuff out the mortal's life force and trap his soul on the Plane of Shadows, making the victim into an undead shadow that then serves the sith. The sith are well known for their fascination with death and undeath and are often served by shadows — two facts that seem to verify this horrendous story. Another suggests sith make their homes only where a human was buried alive, which gives Beliviue an even darker cast.

The sith are a somber folk with little use for ostentation. Their homes are silent and spartan, even bleak by human standards. In the midst of the largest collection of the Breed in the world, each sith leads a lonely, individual life, served only by changelings and shadows. Even larger gathering halls are given over to small groups and quiet meditation. These halls bear names such as the Hall of Silence, the Hall of Memory, the Hall of Dreams and so forth. The most important hall is the Hall of Records, which is located next to Loht's

private palace. The Hall of Records is a library of sorts, and sith bearing the distinctive mustard colored waistcoats of librarians move through it at all hours of the day. However, instead of containing books, the Hall of Records is a vast collection of all the different ways human lives can end. Each death is depicted in a grisly tableau with a magical orb sitting in front. Those who touch the orb experience the emotions and sensations of the death depicted for that "record." The sith find the Hall both an amusing novelty and a valuable treasury of information. Powrie and muryan envoys occasionally seek access to the Hall of Records to improve their skills in the arts of murder or torture. Even these visitors are expected to remain silent while they are within the city. The sith treasure the quiet of the grave and allow no disturbances in their eternal contemplation of it.

Most of Beliviue is a rank one sinkhole of evil, although around the stone circles it is rank three and tainted by agony and fear. Any Evil spell cast in the stone circles occurs at +1 caster level. The Hall of Records is a rank four sinkhole of evil.





Where to Stay in Belivue

Belivue is the largest collection of Unseelie fey in all of the Shadow Rift. The city makes few visitors welcome, and of those, none are mortal. Any mortals who are found here would most likely be tortured, killed and raised as shadows. However, the Keeper of Secrets informed me that one sith named Parishel possesses a less harsh view of mortals than his kin. Parishel seems to believe that mortal servants are the tools he needs to achieve the position of greater influence he desires. As such, he sometimes hides and cares for adventurers in return for promises of aid, information and magical items.

Belivue (small town): Conventional; AL LE; 800 gp limit; Assets 40,000 gp; Population 1,000; Mixed (sith 91%, muryan 3%, brag 2%, powrie 2%, other 2%).

Authority Figures: Fahala (Hall warden), female sith Rog5/Sty2; Utreya (guard captain), male muryan Bbn4.

Important Characters: Tura (chief librarian), female sith Exp2; Thalta (Court spy), male powrie Asn6.

The Malachite Palace

The Malachite Palace has represented the seat of Arak power since soon after the shadow fey escaped the Twilight. Both Maeve and Loht hold court over their subjects from this unusual building.

The Malachite Palace is a mansion, not a castle — it has no curtain wall or gate house, and the land around it is patrolled no more frequently than anywhere else in the Greenlands. The awe-inspiring building is built to resemble a leering human face, another example of the disturbing fascination the Arak have with our race. However, it is more finely crafted than any palace one would encounter on the surface. Fine pinnacles, graceful lines, spindly towers and delicate carvings make it a magnificently beautiful structure. For reasons known only to the Arak, the palace also looks as though it were tens of thousands of years old: everything is shaped as if eroded by centuries of wind, rain and weather. The result is an eerie but beautiful building where the timeless and the dying are locked together in an intimate embrace. Needless to say, mortal eyes find the effect quite unsettling.

The Malachite Palace is built around a central well of crystal that runs through the entire building. This well is filled with a blood-red inferno that burns continuously and without fuel. According to one legend, this pillar of flame is a creature of elemental fire tamed by the Arak, whose spirit now inhabits the Palace. Another legend suggests the fire represents the spirit of the shadow fey, which was ignited when they fled the Twilight and will continue to burn as long as they are free. Whatever the truth, the flame makes the Malachite Palace visible from a considerable distance away. The shadows of the Rift seem to resent the flame's intrusion, however, and the Palace appears to flicker in and out of reality as the two forces battle, one to reveal and the other to conceal.

Inside the Palace, visitors have an uneasy sense that the building is alive and sentient, perhaps verifying the legend that the pillar of fire is an elemental. Doors open and close by themselves. Torches flare into life and extinguish themselves at random, shadows move independently of their owners, and the floor quivers like a wild beast beneath the feet. Crystal windows open onto the fiery well at every opportunity, so the building is lit primarily by the dull red light. This effect only increases the otherworldly aspect of the building.

The focus of the Malachite Palace is obviously the throne room, where Maeve's Gilded Throne and Loht's Midnight Throne sit side by side. Both thrones are protected by terrible magic, and even if one can survive these wards, anyone except Loht and Maeve found sitting in them is guilty of treason and Shunned or drowned in the Biting Tarn (if not Arak). The Palace also contains numerous art galleries, private chambers for high-ranking members of each Court, indoor gardens and sumptuous feast halls. Ghosts, shadows and invisible servants are always at hand to act as both servitors and guards.

The Malachite Palace has rank two ethereal empathy, promoting feelings of awe and peace. When the Unseelie Court is in residence, the Palace also becomes a rank two sinkhole of evil.



Arak's Comb

Arak is the greatest figure in the shadow fey's history. No other person is more revered or has affected so deeply what little original culture the shadow fey claim. The race and originally the realm bore his name, and the Law of Arak has protected the shadow fey from internal disputes for millennia. As such, a constant stream of pilgrims who wish to honor his memory visits the Tomb of Arak.

Arak's Tomb sits at the lip of Precipice, overlooking the Biting Tarn and marking the border between the Northern and Southern Rifts. The massive structure is made entirely from black marble, polished to a mirror finish, while the design is plundered from numerous mortal cultures. The base is a gigantic stepped pyramid, which becomes a vaulted arch supported by caryatid columns after a rise of about thirty feet. Inside, the floor is intricately carved with depictions of each of the Nine Breeds. A gigantic representation of Arak the Erlking in his Regalia lies at the very center. In a ring around the catafalque are the words, "I was the way to the cities of freedom; I was the death of night; Through me, the lost make their passage; The Enemy killed at last." Through the columns to the south, the Darkenheights and the Obsidian Gate at its peak are clearly visible, a reminder to all visitors of why and how Arak died.

I have managed to unearth an unusual fact about this building. According to my powrie captive, Arak designed the tomb himself just before the exodus from the Plane of Shadow. He gave precise instructions for every aspect of its creation. If this is true, I suspect there is more to Arak's Tomb than would meet the eye — a man prepared to sacrifice himself for the good of his people would hardly waste time designing his own monument in such detail it held some other purpose. The epitaph seems to suggest that the Tomb is either another portal through which "the lost make passage" or some great weapon for destroying the Twilight. That this artifact lies so far out of my reach is most frustrating. I would dearly like to study the monument and discover what, if anything, it does. I also wonder if Loht and Maeve know how to use it.

A portal on my very doorstep? An interesting idea... and one that may be worth exploring if my current plan fails to bear fruit.





The Obsidian Gate

The Obsidian Gate is the portal through which the Arak escaped the Plane of Shadow. It was also discovered in 751 BC to have served as the Twilight's prison for the last 5,000 years. The Sorcerer-Fiend has been trapped in the extradimensional space from the time Maeve closed the Gate with the Twilight inside it.

The Obsidian Gate has sat at the top of the Darkenheights ever since the Great Upheaval; before that, it was located in a cavern deep within the bowels of the earth, below the cavern that held the Greenlands. The Darkenheights peak into a flat expanse of broken stone devoid of vegetation. At its center is a great dome of impenetrable darkness — the aura of shadows that surrounds the Gate and gives it its name. The dome is presumably designed to protect the Gate from exposure to sunlight; no light can pass in either direction through it, and even the brightest lights are reduced to the sickly intensity of a glowworm inside it. Long contact has eroded the barriers between our reality and the Plane of Shadow. Creatures in the area can interact fully with those on the other plane, although they cannot change planes as such.

At the center of the dome, another globe of shadow floats at the top of a winding spiral staircase. This is the Obsidian Gate itself. The Gate can be opened or closed only by a ritual conducted with all nine pieces of the Regalia of Arak within 100 feet of the Gate. When the Gate was last opened, the *Crown of Arak* was hurled inside to seal it. Maeve believes that the Crown has therefore been destroyed and the Gate thus sealed forever, trapping the Twilight within for eternity. Loht, however, knows that it is possible to knock from either side of a door: the *Crown of Arak*, if inside, is still close enough to open the Gate if the other eight pieces of the Regalia are assembled. I know which of the two theories I agree with; cynicism, I have always found, is a virtue that protects us from despair when the worst inevitably occurs. To be fair, though, I believe my powrie captive, who supplied most of my information on the Faerie Queen, had a fairly low opinion of the Seelie ruler, so Maeve might be better prepared for the Twilight's release than I have given her credit for.

Even before the Twilight was discovered to be trapped within the Obsidian Gate, the area was avoided. Now that the truth is known and the Arak realize the Sorcerer-Fiend can force his mind between the bars of his cage, the Darkenheights are completely shunned. Only the saugh frequent the area, and dark tales (hopefully

baseless) suggest that centuries of imprisonment have sharpened the Twilight's indomitable will so that it can influence any creature near its prison. As such, Loht has declared that visiting the Obsidian Gate is treasonous, punishable by Shunning (if the traitor is Arak) or execution (if not). I suspect even these measures, however, aren't enough to contain a fiend of the Twilight's power.

The Midnight Garden

The Midnight Garden is a site of particular significance to the alven. It is a formal garden filled with topiary, hedge-mazes and neatly set out beds of flowers. Everything growing in it is black — some glossy, some dull, but every leaf, stem and flower is some sable shade. The only exception is a vine covering nearly every available hedge that has tiny glowing flowers that look like twinkling stars against the black background.

Crossing the Garden takes over an hour. Some enchantment prevents the Garden's protectors from noticing intruders while they remain on the paths, so travelers who stay on the roads are safe from the alven, alvenkin, and guardians such as lashweeds. Meeting these dangerous plants is perhaps the most preferable fate for intruders, for the death they offer is at least quick and clean. Why the alven are so protective of the Garden is mysterious, but their wrath for intruders is unrivalled and shows that Seelie fey are as capable of immense cruelty as the Unseelie.

Those who are captured in the Garden by the alven (or those who grievously insult them elsewhere) are transformed into the hedges that compose and shape the Garden. The transformed creatures are still intelligent and capable of feeling pain, and when the alvenkin prune the hedges the air is filled with cries for mercy and weeping, and blood bubbles from the severed branches. Thankfully, their cries can only be heard when the hedges are newly cut. Because these transformations don't kill the subject, the alven can even torture other shadow fey with imprisonment in the Garden without breaking the Law of Arak. Few are prepared to risk the transformation, and so the alven are allowed to live in peace. The alven occasionally take pity on their captives and reverse the transformation, but in most cases the change is eternal. Those who are planted at particularly important areas in the Garden are especially unlucky. They are doomed forever not because of the severity of their crimes, but because their hedges are particularly important to the Garden's aesthetics, which is far more important to the alven.

Searching the Shifting Sands

The Shifting Sands contain everything that the Arak have stolen from the surface and then abandoned or forgotten about. They are a treasure trove of rare works of art, mechanical devices and forgotten secrets, but the constant movement of the sands and the forgetfulness they engender in all visitors prevents most of these secrets from being wrestled from the dunes' surfaces.

Those searching the Sands for a fairly broad class of items — swords, for example, or statues — should make a DC 15 Search check every 30 minutes. One item is found per point of success, so a character that gets a Search result of 20 searches the Sands for half an hour and finds 5 swords. More specific or rarer objects (magical swords, or statues from a particular era of a realm's history) increase the Search DC to 30. Finding unique items increases the DC to 45. The DM should feel free to adjust the DC in either direction to account for objects that the Arak are particularly likely or unlikely to have abandoned here.

The movement of the sands is random and continuous, and the objects seem to move around underneath them of their own volition. What was found in one sand dune can change completely in a matter of moments. Thus, especially thorough searches are no more likely to give positive results than a superficial scan. Thus, searchers may not take 20 on their Search rolls, although they can take 10.

The Shifting Sands protect their forgotten treasures by stealing the memories of those who travel through them. Upon entering the Sands and every half hour thereafter, visitors must make a DC 17 Will save. The first failure indicates that the character has become *confused*; this effect persists until he leaves the Sands, when he returns to normal. The character never, however, remembers what he was searching for. A second failure on the same day indicates permanent amnesia; characters are *feble-minded*. The memories are stolen before they can find what they were looking for.

The Shifting Sands

As I have already noted, the Arak are cultural magpies, stealing anything and everything that takes their fancy. However, they are also capricious and quickly tire of many of these stolen trinkets. The object is then abandoned to the Shifting Sands, home of all that is lost.

The Shifting Sands are a desert waste in the Greenlands. As the name implies, the area is composed of sand dunes that shift and move like waves on the

ocean. Their constant motion exposes the hundreds of lost treasures concealed beneath their surfaces: ancient statutes, ships, strange mechanical devices, the corpses of discarded lovers, and anything else loved and left by the fey can be found here. The treasures are exposed for only a few hours at most before the sands swallow them again. Some Arak believe that the sands conceal much more than the abandoned possessions of the shadow fey; they claim that *everything* that is lost can potentially be found somewhere in the Shifting Sands. However, sorting through the constantly undulating dunes is almost impossible. The sand itself conspires to frustrate searches and keeps its secrets to itself.

Final Thoughts

As the fall continues to progress, I draw my research on the Shadow Rift to a close. I intend to hire a carriage back to the coast to begin my survey of the Nocturnal Sea and its islands before the winter sets in and prevents easy travel.

In all, I am quite relieved to put an end to this research. Trying to uncover any kind of truth about the Shadow Rift is a mission rife with frustration; obfuscation, conflicting truths and willful stupidity conceal any hope I had of describing the Rift in anything approaching the detail I am accustomed to. After six weeks of intense research, plumbing the minds of peasants for legends, devouring scholarly texts, and interviewing strange and foul creatures, I am convinced that a fey realm does survive beneath the Shadow Rift's concealing mist and that this realm was once Arak. Beyond these assertions, I can say nothing for sure. I cannot discover who truly rules the Shadow Rift, the names of more than a dozen or so of the most important nobles, even how the shadow fey actually live. After endless searches right along the eastern perimeter of the Rift, I still could not find the entrance to the Fracture. I fail to see how a scholar is supposed to work under these conditions; too few facts are concealed by too much fear and confusion. I suspect that others who don't have my talents at encouraging people to talk would have been far less successful. I also have no doubt that they — Van Richten's pretenders, for example — make more effort to conceal the paucity of fact than my scholarly pride demands, and the drooling public will consume whatever myths they masquerade as evidentially supported truths in their books. So be it. My patron knows in whom he should place his faith.

Regards,

S



Attached Notes: DNI's Appendix

*Then down the night's dim luminous ways,
Meseems they come once more,
Those great star-watchers of old days
The lonely, calm-ones, whose still gaze,
On old-time, orient shore,
Dreamed in the wheeling sons of light,
The awful secrets of earth's night.*
— Wilfred Campbell, “The Sky Watcher”



This section offers new game material for the Dungeon Master to include in her campaign. If you are a player, you should stop reading now.

The Church of the Lawgiver



he information here expands on previous descriptions of the Church of the Lawgiver given in the *Ravenloft Player's Handbook* and *Ravenloft Gazetteer I*.

Origin Myth and History

The true origins of the Church of the Lawgiver are lost in a fog of myth and dogma, and likely one of false history as well. Scholars can state with confidence only that the Church was already firmly entrenched in Nova Vaasa when the land first emerged from the Mists in 682 BC. Written proclamations and prohibitions from officials in the Church can be traced to this year, and records from neighboring lands first show references to the "Iron Faith" at this time. Prior to this, the only extant source for historical information on the Church is the Church itself, and it comes as no surprise that the Church offers a rosy view of its past actions and accomplishments.

The Church claims that it was the *first* faith and remains the only *true* faith. It traces its origins to a land known as *Torverden* ("Fair World"), the world from which Nova Vaasans claim their land originally came. According to the Church, *Torverden* was created by the Lawgiver over the course of three days. On the first day, the Lawgiver created the earth itself; on the second, He created the life upon it, including the first men and women; on the third, He created the Heavens, to provide Him a throne from which to oversee his creation. From this throne, the Lawgiver selected one man, who stood apart from the rest for his strength of purpose and sense of justice, to be His intermediary and the executor of His Divine Will. He named this man *Førstregel* ("First Ruler"), then whispered His own Holy Name into *Førstregel's* ear. Upon hearing the Lawgiver's Name, *Førstregel* became enlightened. *Førstregel* recorded his new understanding of the Lawgiver and His Will into two holy texts called *The Truth of Iron* and *The Fetters of Bronze*. The Lawgiver made *Førstregel* king over the First People and head of the Church, and *Torverden* was a paradise of unity and law.

Naturally, a fall from grace was imminent. After *Førstregel's* death at the ripe age of 500, the Lawgiver's Code, as set down in *The Truth of Iron*, dictated that his eldest son *Tilbyde* ascend to the vacated throne. Unfortunately, 36 of *Førstregel's* other sons rebelled against this holy law. Because of their wicked selfishness, *Torverden* was torn by war and bloodshed, and the First People became deaf and blind to the Lawgiver's Will. As is recorded in the third holy text of the Faith, *The Black Trials*, the people "polluted their minds with teachings of rebellion and disobedience. They polluted their souls with offerings to servile spirits and imaginary gods. They polluted their bodies with men, women and the beasts of the field. Thus was purity forever forsaken." The First People descended into degeneracy and iniquity, culminating in *Tilbyde's* murder and sacrifice to the false god *Mytteri*. With this tragic crime, the Lawgiver passed the First Judgment, separating lands and nations, confounding speech, and cursing the First People with fallen forms to match their fallen souls. In doing so, He proclaimed, "I have passed Judgment for the first time. It shall happen twice more. Afterward shall come an end."

After the First Judgment, the First People were a people no more. They had been divided into numerous nations, cultures, and races. According to the Church, each race was given a form to match its crimes. Those who "reached above themselves" were cursed with stunted forms and became dwarves, gnomes and halflings. Those who "lent a ready ear to false doctrines and lacked the strength to resist" were cursed with pointed ears and delicate frames, becoming elves. The truly wicked were given the hideous forms of goblinkind. Those who became humans as we know them today were considered the closest to righteousness. They lost some of the beauty and strength of the First People, but were not cursed with obvious disfigurements.

The transformed world was henceforth known as *Faldverden*, the "Fallen World." *Faldverden* persisted in strife for thousands of years, with the scattered pockets of the Church trying desperately to restore order, stability and adherence to the Lawgiver's doctrines to the many nations. With the Church weakened and disunited, this struggle proved impossible. Save for a few isolated pockets, the world remained faithless and chaotic.

The rise of *Højplads*, broadly recorded in the history of Nova Vaasa, restored the Church of the



Lawgiver to a position of power and prominence on Faldverden. It was a position the Church enjoyed for centuries, until the day of the Second Judgment when, according to Church authorities, the Lawgiver wrenched Nova Vaasa from Faldverden and cast it into *Falskverden*, the “False World,” better known as Ravenloft. Exactly what crime prompted the Second Judgment has never been determined — the Church simply points to a general descent into license and liberality. Why Nova Vaasa, alone of the nations of Faldverden, was chosen to suffer this fate also remains unexplained, but most within the Church believe that Nova Vaasa was the only nation worth saving. The other countries, they believe, were cast into the Hell of Slaves, a netherworld of ceaseless toil for those who flout their rightful position in life.

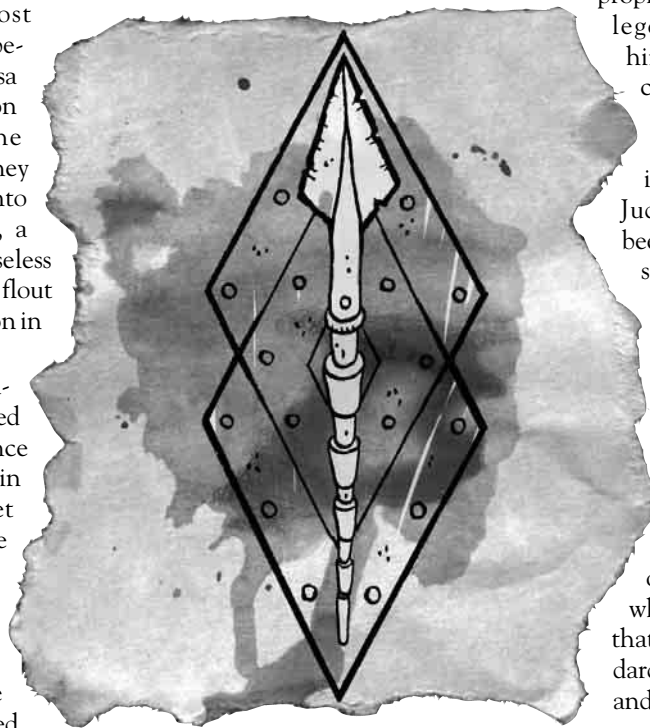
The Church immediately attempted to spread its influence to other domains in Ravenloft, but met with no appreciable success until the appearance of Hazlan, which accepted the religion with astonishing swiftness. The Church has enjoyed no comparable success since and has a minimal following outside Hazlan and Nova Vaasa.

The faithful of the Church live in fear of the Lawgiver’s next Judgments. According to the Church’s holy texts, there will be a Third and then a Final Judgment, when the world will be destroyed and all unworthy souls will be doomed to an eternity of torture in the Hell of Slaves. Some within the Church believe that the Grand Conjunction was the Third Judgment. For this faction, only the Final Judgment awaits. This is not the official view of the Church, which claims instead that the Lawgiver intervened to *save* the world from Mytteri’s attempt to destroy it.

Doctrine

The doctrine of the Lawgiver is explained in five holy texts: *The Truth of Iron*, *The Fetters of Bronze*, *The Black Trials*, *Crimson Faith* and *The Book of Stone*. *The Truth of Iron* lays out principles of government and moral behavior, while the complementary *Fetters of Bronze* details laws and punishments. *The Black Trials* delivers a mythic pseudo-history relating the creation and fall of humanity, while *Crimson Faith* discusses theology and cosmology. *The Book of Stone* is a collection of prophecies, proverbs and allegories. The Lawgiver himself has many titles, including the Iron Tyrant and the Divine Emperor, but he is never named; it is held that since the First Judgment mortals have been too impure to withstand the full might and glory of the Lawgiver’s true name. Church iconography depicts the Lawgiver as a powerful warrior fully clad in intimidating plate armor, revealing no hint of the being within. He wields an iron spear in one hand and a bronze whip in the other. Images that deviate from this standard are deemed heretical and destroyed.

At the heart of the Church’s beliefs is an unswerving dedication to order and law and to the rightness of the established order. The Church holds that all evil comes from *Mytteri*, or “Rebellion,” a malevolent force that is often personified as an evil anti-god. *Mytteri* is seen as a nihilistic, solipsistic malignancy that drives individuals to destroy the natural order in the name of self-interest and self-gratification. The Church considers rebellion against established authority a deadly sin. Only if the Lawgiver’s Mandate is formerly withdrawn can a regime be lawfully toppled. Of course, the Church claims the sole capacity to recognize when the Mandate is withdrawn.





From the Church's perspective, a good government is one of absolute centralized authority, for it is government's duty to punish the wicked and encourage right behavior. The *ideal* government would be a theocracy controlled by the Church, but the Church's own doctrine forbids the clergy from overthrowing existing regimes to place themselves in power.

The Church officially views arcane magic as the agent of Mytteri, and thus its practice is punishable by death in most cases. Lately, this tenet has caused a severe schism within the Church, as the Hazlani branch would prefer to see the prohibition on arcane magic removed entirely, and Pave Vatsisk has quietly ignored all commands to stamp out the practice of "witchcraft" within the Hazlani Church. His personal views aside, Vatsisk can hardly persecute arcane spellcasters in Hazlan without attracting the ire of Hazlik. Given the Red Wizard's noted ruthlessness, Vatsisk cannot likely be convinced to toe the official line.

A second issue of contention within the Church relates to appearances. The First Judgment is believed to be a persistent one. Thus, the unrighteous can still be cursed with forms to match their deeds. Those who suffer from disfiguring diseases are shunned, while transformative curses such as vampirism or lycanthropy are believed to befall only the supremely wicked. Calibans are held to be evil from birth and are swiftly put to death. This viewpoint has made the Mulan practice of tattooing an uncomfortable one for the Nova Vaasan Church. From the Nova Vaasan perspective, tattooing or other bodily modifications are tantamount to proclaiming one's degeneracy. This cultural difference further strains relations between the two halves of the Church.

Hierarchy and Terminology

The Iron Faith is organized along strict hierarchical lines. At the top of the hierarchy is the *Himmelsk Naeve* ("Divine Fist"), the ultimate authority over the entire Iron Faith, who resides in Kantora. The current *Himmelsk Naeve* is Pieter Jergaar (male human Clr16). The *Himmelsk Naeve* is served by two *Paves*, one in Hazlan and one in Nova Vaasa, each of whom wields ultimate religious authority within his respective domain. Currently Stavroz Vatsisk (male human Clr12) is the Pave of Hazlan, while Lod Ragnaar (male human Clr13) is the Pave of Nova Vaasa. Vatsisk

enjoys a much greater degree of freedom and impunity than Ragnaar, thanks to his comparative distance from the Church's central authority.

Below each Pave are the *aerkebiskops*, each of whom is given authority over a geographical region within a domain. Hazlan and Nova Vaasa each host four *aerkebiskops*. Each *aerkebiskop* is served by a group of *biskops*, who in turn have authority over numerous *dommers*, who perform most of the administrative duties within the church. *Kontors* preside over individual fanes and perform the actual worship ceremonies.

Existing parallel to the Church hierarchy are four recognized orders, each given a special duty within the Church and answerable only to the *Himmelsk Naeve* and *Paves* in performing of that duty. The monastic *Kunduktørs* ("Guardians") have the holy duty of watching over the deceased faithful, acting as caretakers of the fanes' tombs and graveyards. *Kunduktørs* take vows of silence so as not to disturb their charges. When not directly watching over the dead, they study the nature of death itself, seeking to understand the hidden truths of this most final judgment and universal law. Hazlani *Kunduktørs* originated the heresy that the Lawgiver died in the Great Upheaval, leaving nothing but an empty shell of dictates and titles.

The *Gudkædes* ("God-chains") are a military order, charged with the defense of the Church and the destruction of its enemies. Though they train constantly, thanks to disuse the *Gudkædes* have undeniably grown a bit softer and rustier than they were in the order's prime.

The *Jernspørgsmålers* ("Iron Inquisitors") are, as their name suggests, responsible for rooting out heretics and traitors within the Church body. The *Jernspørgsmålers* act as police, judges, and executioners. Even the guiltless cannot help but fear their attention, especially because most Inquisitors hide their membership in the order.

The *Didakti* ("Teachers") are an odd organization that works closely with the Iron Inquisition; like the Inquisitors, the *Didakti* keep their affiliation secret. The duty of the *Didakti* is to weed out the weak and uncertain within the Church, those who have not yet strayed but are in danger of doing so. The *Didakti* study wickedness and evil as their holy duty, and seek to tempt their fellow faithful into apostasy and unrighteousness. Those who succumb are given over to the Inquisitors.



Worshippers

The Lawgiver

Symbol: An iron spear bound in bronze coils.

Alignment: Lawful evil or lawful neutral. Those of authority in the Church's hierarchy are almost uniformly lawful evil. Lawful neutral worshippers are often seen as "liberal" or "permissive" by their peers and are unlikely to climb high in the ranks of the Church.

Domains: Bindings, Death, Evil, Law, Scrutiny, War. The Bindings and Scrutiny domains are unique to clerics of the Lawgiver. Law and Bindings are the favored domains of the majority of the Church's clerics. The Death domain is popular among the Kunduktørs, the War domain is highly favored by the Gudkædes, the Scrutiny domain is common among the Inquisitors, and the Evil domain is almost entirely the province of the Didakti.

Favored Weapon: Whip. Clerics who select the War domain can select the flail (light or heavy) instead.

Clerics of the Lawgiver pray for their spells at noon, when the light of day leaves them most fully exposed to the Lawgiver's scrutiny. Worship services are held every evening at the Lawgiver's fanes after the working day is ended. The faithful are required to attend at least twice a week. The Church observes many holy days. The two most important are the Day of Penance, held on New Year's Day, in which the faithful lament their failings of the previous year and resolve to do better the next, and the Celebration of the Reemergence, observed on the first full moon in August. This holiday marks the end of the Grand Conjunction in 740 BC and, more importantly, the end of the Lawgiver's period of silence and withdrawal during that disaster. Official church dogma credits the Lawgiver with the end of the Great Upheaval, and the holiday is spent in praise, thanksgiving and feasting. Clerics of the Lawgiver rarely multiclass. When they do, it is most often as fighters. Members of the Iron Inquisition occasionally multiclass as rogues, focusing on stealth and spycraft rather than on theft or disarming traps.

Prestige Classes



Each domain's unique properties and challenges call for different areas of expertise. Although the prestige classes presented below may appear elsewhere, they are most at home in the domains of the eastern Core.

Tepestandi Inquisitor

The Tepestandi Inquisition is devoted to rooting out and defeating the menace of the malicious "fey" and "wee beasties" that supposedly plague the humble folk of Tepest. While all of the clergy serving under High Inquisitor Wyan call themselves Inquisitors, only a rare few actually possess the talent and dedication to qualify for this class. By following a demanding regimen of meditation and prayer decreed by Wyan himself, combined with extensive first-hand experience with the fey, these elite Inquisitors become fearsome enemies of the Unseelie.

The Tepestandi Inquisition remains young and, at times, unfocused as an organization, so true Tepestandi Inquisitors are exceptionally rare. For now, this prestige class is more indicative of the Inquisition's ideals than of any clergy one is likely to meet. A character who advances in this class will assuredly draw attention: the admiration of one's peers, and the loathing of the fey.

Hit Die: d8.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Tepestandi Inquisitor, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Race: Due to the Tepestandi clergy's prejudices, must be human or capable of successfully posing as human indefinitely.

Alignment: Any non-evil.

Base Will Save: +3.

Skills: Knowledge (nature) 4 ranks, Knowledge (religion) 8 ranks.

Feats: Investigator, Iron Will.

Spells: Ability to cast *dispel magic* as a divine spell.

Special: Must have had a personal encounter with malicious fey, must be trained by the Tepestandi clergy and must worship a good-aligned deity.

Ex-Tepestandi Inquisitors: A Tepestandi Inquisitor who knowingly and willingly interacts peaceably with the fey loses all Tepestandi Inquisi-



tor spell levels and supernatural abilities. She may not progress any further as a Tepestani Inquisitor. To regain her abilities and advancement potential, she must atone for her actions as appropriate.

Class Skills

The Tepestani Inquisitor's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Gather Information (Cha), Heal (Wis), Knowledge (nature) (Int), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Wis) and Spellcraft (Int).

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class features

All of the following are features of the Tepestani Inquisitor prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Tepestani Inquisitors gain no proficiency with any weapons or armor.

Resolute (Su): At 1st level, a Tepestani Inquisitor's spiritual defenses grant her a +1 sacred bonus to all saving throws against spells, spell-like abilities and supernatural abilities used by fey creatures. This bonus increases to +2 at 3rd level, +3 at 5th level, +4 at 7th level and +5 at 9th level.

Turn or Rebuke Fey (Su): Tepestani Inquisitors can turn or rebuke fey as clerics turn or rebuke undead. Whether a Tepestani Inquisitor turns or rebukes fey is determined by whether she turns or rebukes undead. A Tepestani Inquisitor who also has levels of cleric or paladin adds her Tepestani Inquisitor level to her cleric level (or her paladin level -2) to determine her effective level with respect to attempts to turn the fey. A fey who attains the status of darklord automatically gains turn resistance equal to +1 or his Charisma modifier, whichever is higher.

Spells per Day: A Tepestani Inquisitor continues advancing in divine spellcasting ability as well as focusing on her new skills within the Inquisition. Thus, when a new Tepestani Inquisitor level is gained, the character gains new divine spells per day as if she had also gained a level in whatever divine spellcasting class she belonged to before adding this prestige class. She does not, however, gain any other benefit from her original class (such as improved chance of turning or rebuking undead). This means that she adds her Tepestani Inquisitor levels to the level of her other spellcasting class and determines her spells per day accordingly.





Example: If Karbrey, a 5th-level cleric, gains a level in Tepestani Inquisitor, he gains new spells as if he had risen to 6th level as a cleric, but uses the other Tepestani Inquisitor aspects of level progression such as base attack bonus and save bonuses. If he next gains a level as a cleric, making him a 6th-level cleric/1st-level Tepestani Inquisitor, he gains spells as if he had risen to 7th level as a cleric.

At 1st level, a Tepestani Inquisitor who casts spells as a cleric may replace one of her cleric domains with the Scrutiny domain (see below), if she wishes.

Detect Feycraft (Ex): Starting at 2nd level, whenever a Tepestani Inquisitor casts *detect magic*, in addition to making a Spellcraft check to determine the school of magic involved in the aura, she may also make a second Spellcraft check (same DC as for determining school of magic). If this second check succeeds, then the Tepestani Inquisitor can tell whether or not the effect was created by a fey.

Cold Iron Gaze (Su): Starting at 4th level, a Tepestani Inquisitor automatically disbelieves all illusions created by fey, regardless of whether the fey is casting a spell or using a spell-like or supernatural ability.

Pierce the Veil (Su): At 6th level, a Tepestani Inquisitor gains the ability to dispel any illusion created by a fey creature, regardless of whether the fey uses spells, spell-like abilities or supernatural abilities. The Tepestani Inquisitor must touch a fey-created illusion or a fey cloaked in illusion (such as *disguise self*), requiring a successful melee touch attack. If the attack is successful, the Tepestani Inquisitor then makes a caster level check as if casting *dispel magic* against the illusion effect. If she succeeds at this check, the illusion is

immediately dispelled. The Tepestani Inquisitor can use this ability at will.

Reveal Trickster (Su): Starting at 8th level, at will, a Tepestani Inquisitor can force a shapechanged fey creature back into its true form, regardless of whether the fey has changed its form using a spell or a spell-like, supernatural or extraordinary ability. The Tepestani Inquisitor must make a successful melee touch attack against the fey. If the attack is successful, the Tepestani Inquisitor makes a caster level check as if casting *dispel magic* against the shapechanging effect. The affected fey cannot change its shape again until it leaves the Tepestani Inquisitor's line of sight.

Disrupting Rebuke (Su): At 10th level, whenever a Tepestani Inquisitor slays a fey creature or is within 30 feet of a fey creature when it is slain, so long as the Tepestani Inquisitor can speak, she can utter a brief prayer as a free action, channeling spiritual wrath into the fey and scattering its form and essence to the four winds. The slain fey must make a successful Will save (DC 10 + Tepestani Inquisitor level + Tepestani Inquisitor Cha modifier) or be *truly* killed. If the Tepestani Inquisitor personally lands the killing blow, she may add +4 to the DC of the fey's Will save. Even if the Will save is successful, the fey's essence is so scattered that it requires one decade per the rebuking Tepestani Inquisitor's class level to reform.

Example: Karbrey, now a 5th-level cleric/10th-level Tepestani Inquisitor with a Charisma of 15, lands the killing blow on a drowning and utters a disrupting rebuke. The drowning must succeed at a DC 26 Will save or be truly slain. If the drowning succeeds, its essence still cannot reform for a full century.

Table 5-1: The Tepestani Inquisitor (Ciq)

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells per Day
1st	+0	+2	+0	+2	Resolute +1, turn or rebuke fey	+1 level of divine class
2nd	+1	+3	+0	+3	Detect feycraft	+1 level of divine class
3rd	+2	+3	+1	+3	Resolute +2	+1 level of divine class
4th	+3	+4	+1	+4	Cold iron gaze	+1 level of divine class
5th	+3	+4	+1	+4	Resolute +3	+1 level of divine class
6th	+4	+5	+2	+5	Pierce the veil	+1 level of divine class
7th	+5	+5	+2	+5	Resolute +4	+1 level of divine class
8th	+6	+6	+2	+6	Reveal impostor	+1 level of divine class
9th	+6	+6	+3	+6	Resolute +5	+1 level of divine class
10th	+7	+7	+3	+7	Disrupting rebuke	+1 level of divine class



Zelldrow

The zelldrow are the Breed of Arak who have given themselves over to the worship of the Spider Queen. Once they have joined the depraved cult, their transformation is inevitable, and as soon as it becomes noticeable, the other Arak shun them. Most retreat to the barrens of the Stonedowns or flee to the surface, where they sometimes induct mortals into the Spider Queen's heinous religion.

Hit Dice: d6.

Requirements

To qualify to become a zelldrow, mortal characters must fulfill all the following criteria. All requirements except alignment and religion are waived for shadow fey zelldrow.

Alignment: Chaotic evil.

Religion: The Spider Queen.

Base Attack Bonus: +4.

Skills: Bluff 4 ranks, Hide 4 ranks, Move Silently 4 ranks.

Special: Mortals must be inducted into the cult in a vile ceremony during which the inductee must kill an intelligent being.

Class Skills

The zelldrow's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Balance (Dex), Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Forgery (Int), Innuendo (Wis), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Sense Motive (Wis), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Spellcraft (Int), Spot (Wis), Tumble (Dex), Use Rope (Dex).

If a zelldrow selects the Trickery domain, Disguise (Cha) and Hide (Dex) are also class skills.

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features

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

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Zelldrow are proficient with all simple weapons, plus the hand crossbow, rapier, short sword and sap. They are proficient with light and medium armor and with shields (except tower shields).

Breed (Ex): All shadow fey who take up worship of the Spider Queen must take at least one level in this prestige class; no non-zelldrow Arak worshippers exist. When the first level in this

prestige class is taken, an Arak is no longer considered a member of its previous Breed. It loses all abilities that come from its Breed except spells, alternate form, immunities and special weaknesses. In addition, it becomes Medium size (if it is not already). Its skin turns pitch black and its hair bone white; its eyes and fingernails become midnight blue. It suffers 1d6 points of damage per round when in sunlight; in shaded areas, this damage is decreased by -1, to a minimum of 1 point of damage per round.

Aura (Ex): Zelldrow have powerful auras of chaos and evil, as a cleric of their total Hit Dice.

Spells: Zelldrow cast divine spells, which are drawn from the cleric spell list. They gain bonus spells for high Wisdom scores. Characters who already cast cleric spells gain new spells per day as if they had also gained a cleric level. Characters who did not cast cleric spells prior to taking a zelldrow level cast spells as a cleric of a level equal to their zelldrow level. Neither gain any other benefits of the cleric class, such as an increased ability to rebuke undead.

Like other clerics, zelldrow gain domain spells. They can choose two cleric domains from the following list: Animal, Evil, Greed*, Pain* and Trickery.

*See *Book of Vile Darkness*.

Spontaneous Casting: Zelldrow can convert memorized spells into *inflict* spells of the same level or lower, as evil clerics do.

Spell-Like Abilities: At 1st level, zelldrow gain the following spell-like abilities: *dancing lights*, *darkness*, *faerie fire*. At 7th level, they gain *addiction**, *cheat**, *detect magic*, *levitate*. At 9th level, they gain *charm person*, *discern lies*, *sadism**, *suggestion*. Each of these are useable once per day, as a sorcerer of a level equal to the zelldrow's total Hit Dice.

*Refer to the *Book of Vile Darkness*, from Wizards of the Coast.

Unnerving Gaze (Su): At 1st level, any opponents who meet a zelldrow's gaze are shaken for 2d4 rounds. This is a mind-affecting gaze attack with range of 30 feet. Victims can make a Will save (DC 10 + 1/2 zelldrow's Hit Dice + zelldrow's Cha modifier) to avoid the effect.

Poison Use (Ex): Zelldrow are schooled in the arts of poison and at 2nd level never risk poisoning themselves when applying a toxic substance to a weapon.



Spell Resistance (Ex): At 3rd level, a zeldrow gains spell resistance $10 + 1/2 \text{ HD} + \text{Wisdom}$ modifier. It also adds a +4 profane bonus to the saving throw DC of any magic it uses to detect falsehoods, such as *discern lies*.

Poison Resistance (Ex): At 4th level, a zeldrow gains a +2 racial bonus to saves against poison and drugs. At 5th level, it becomes immune to all poisons from vermin and cannot become addicted to drugs.

Jaded (Ex): At 6th level, a zeldrow gains Jaded as a bonus feat.

Spider Climb (Su): Upon reaching 6th level, a zeldrow can cast *spider climb* three times per day. This is a supernatural ability, but otherwise acts as the spell.

Alternate Form (Su): At 7th level, the zeldrow gains the ability to change into a monstrous spider between Diminutive and Large size at will as a standard action. This ability is similar to the *polymorph* spell, but affects only the zeldrow, and the zeldrow does not regain lost hit points when it transforms.

Deceiver (Ex): At 8th level, the zeldrow gains a +4 bonus to two of the following skills: Bluff, Hide, Intimidate or Move Silently (player's choice). Once the skills have been chosen, the bonuses cannot be reallocated.

Uncanny Dodge (Ex): At 8th level, the zeldrow retains its Dexterity bonus to AC (if any) even if it is caught flat-footed or struck by an invisible attacker. It still loses the bonus if immobilized. If the zeldrow already possesses this ability due to another class, it gains the benefit of Improved Uncanny Dodge as a bonus feat.

Transformation (Ex): At 10th level, the zeldrow transforms into a chimeric creature similar to a drider. The lower half of its body becomes like that of a spider; it gains four extra legs and a large abdomen. It gains a climb speed of 15 feet and a +8 racial bonus to Climb checks; it can always take 10 on these checks, even when threatened.

Poison (Ex): At 10th level, a zeldrow acquires a poison bite attack: Injury, Fortitude DC $10 + 1/2 \text{ zeldrow's Hit Dice} + \text{zeldrow's Con modifier}$, 1d6 Str/1d6 Str. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Web (Ex): At 10th level, transformed zeldrow can spin a web from their abdomen. A single strand is strong enough to support the zeldrow and one creature of the same size. As well as lowering themselves from ceilings and so forth, they can



throw a web four times per day. This is similar to an attack with a net but has a maximum range of 50 feet with a range increment of 10 feet, and is effective against Large or smaller creatures. An entangled creature can escape with a successful DC 20 Escape Artist check or burst free with a successful DC 26 Strength check.

The zeldrow can also create sheets of sticky webbing up to 10 feet square. Approaching creatures must succeed at a DC 20 Spot check to notice

a web; otherwise, they stumble into it and become trapped as though by a successful web attack. Attempts to escape or burst the webbing gain a +5 bonus if the trapped creature has something to walk on or grab while pulling free. Each 5-foot section of web has 6 hit points and damage reduction 5/—.

A zeldrow can move freely across its own webs at a speed of 15 feet and can pinpoint the location of any creature touching its web.

Table 5–2: The Zeldrow (Zdr)

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells per Day
1st	+0	+2	+0	+2	Breed, aura, spell-like abilities, unnerving gaze	+1 level of divine class
2nd	+1	+3	+0	+3	Poison use	+1 level of divine class
3rd	+2	+3	+1	+3	Spell resistance	+1 level of divine class
4th	+3	+4	+1	+4	Poison resistance	+1 level of divine class
5th	+3	+4	+1	+4	Poison resistance	+1 level of divine class
6th	+4	+5	+2	+5	Jaded, spider climb	+1 level of divine class
7th	+5	+5	+2	+5	Alternate form, spell-like abilities	+1 level of divine class
8th	+6/+1	+6	+2	+6	Deceiver, uncanny dodge	+1 level of divine class
9th	+6/+1	+6	+3	+6	Spell-like abilities	+1 level of divine class
10th	+7/+2	+7	+3	+7	Transformation, poison, web	+1 level of divine class

New Magic



his section presents new cleric domains, spells, and magic items particular to the eastern Core. Under certain circumstances, DMs may allow characters from outside the specified region special access to these magics.

Cleric Domains

The Bindings cleric domain originally appeared in *Ravenloft Gazetteer I*. It is repeated here for ease of reference.

Bindings Domain

Deity: The Lawgiver.

Granted Power: You cast enchantment (compulsion) spells at +1 caster level.

Bindings Domain Spells

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Command: One subject obeys selected command for 1 round. | 1 |
| 2 | Hold Person: Paralyzes one humanoid for 1 round/level. | 2 |

3

Lesser Geas: Commands subject of 7 HD or less.

4

Hold Monster: As *hold person*, but any creature.

5

Mark of Justice: Designates action that will trigger *curse* on subject.

6

Geas/Quest: As *lesser geas*, plus it affects any creature.

7

Repulsion: Creatures can't approach you.

8

Binding: Utilizes an array of techniques to imprison a creature.

9

Trap the Soul: Imprisons subject within gem.

Scrutiny Domain

Deity: The Lawgiver, Tepestani Inquisitors.

Granted Power: Gather Information, Listen and Sense Motive are considered class skills.

Scrutiny Domain Spells

1

Disguise Self: Changes your appearance.

2

Detect Thoughts: Allows "listening" to surface thoughts.





- 3 **Clairaudience/Clairvoyance:** Hear or see at a distance for 1 min./level.
- 4 **Discern Lies:** Reveals deliberate falsehoods.
- 5 **Prying Eyes:** 1d4 +1/level floating eyes scout for you.
- 6 **True Seeing:** Lets you see all things as they really are.
- 7 **Greater Scrying:** As *scrying*, but faster and longer.
- 8 **Greater Prying Eyes:** As *prying eyes*, but eyes have *true seeing*.
- 9 **Discern Location:** Reveals exact location of creature or object.

Weave Domain

Deity: Hala.

Granted Power: If you know the true name of the target of your spell (be it a creature, object or location) and invoke that name during casting, you impose a -2 penalty to the target's spell resistance and a -1 penalty to its saving throw against that spell, when applicable.

Weave Domain Spells

- 1 **Pass without Trace:** One subject/level leaves no tracks.
- 2 **Zone of Truth:** Subjects within range cannot lie.
- 3 **Helping Hand:** Ghostly hand leads subject to you.
- 4 **Locate Creature:** Indicates direction to familiar creature.
- 5 **Turn the Seasons:** Make yourself older or younger.
- 6 **Weave's Bounty:** Use the Weave to grant a *limited wish*.
- 7 **Control Weather:** Changes weather in local area.
- 8 **Antipathy:** Object or location affected by spell repels certain creatures.
- 9 **Foresight:** "Sixth sense" warns of impending danger.

Spells

The following spells are most commonly found in the eastern Core, though their use may have spread to other lands. (Adp = adept, Wch = witch; see the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.)

Befoul

Contaminate 1 cu. ft./level of once-living matter.

Transmutation

Level: Adp 1, Clr 1, Sor/Wiz 1, Wch 1

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: 10 ft.

Target: 1 cu. ft./level of once-living matter

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Will negates (object)

Spell Resistance: Yes (object)

Befoul ages once-living matter by one day per caster level (thus, a 7th-level caster would age the target by one week). While well-preserved matter such as wood and leather may not be visibly affected, more delicate materials such as foodstuffs or corpses decay rapidly. Many foodstuffs spoil within a day. Aging a corpse effectively increases the number of days it has been dead in regards to spells such as *raise dead* and *reincarnation*.

Black Blood frenzy

Transform a goblin into a monstrous berserker.

Transmutation [Evil]

Level: Adp 2, Sor/Wiz 2

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Touch

Target: One living goblinoid

Duration: 1 min./level (see text)

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

Black blood frenzy is a dire example of the intense yet self-destructive power of hag magic. This spell was supposedly created by the Three Hags of Tepest, who have since taught it to goblin adepts to bribe them into obedience.

This spell affects only goblinoids. As the tainted blood spreads through the subject's veins, the subject grows larger and more powerful. The subject gains all of the following benefits: +4 temporary hit points; +2 profane bonus to Strength, Constitution and Charisma; +3 natural armor bonus; and +4 profane bonus to saves against fear and fear effects. If the subject's size is Small or smaller, it grows by one size category.

Such power does not come without cost. The subject must drink hot blood from the heart of a freshly-slain non-goblinoid humanoid before the spell's duration expires; doing so purifies the subject's blood, ending the spell. If the subject does not drink heart's blood before the spell runs its course, the subject's own corrupted blood consumes the goblin from within, inflicting 1 point of Constitution drain per round (no save). When the subject's Constitution reaches 0, its blood forces itself from the goblin's body, resulting in a gruesome death.

Casting this spell requires a powers check.





Material Component: The heart of a freshly slain non-goblinoid; a subject must drink from the heart to receive the spell's effects. A single non-goblinoid heart can supply enough blood for four subjects, but all spells must be cast before the blood cools (2d4+2 minutes after the creature's death).

Black Blood frenzy, Mass

Transform several goblins into monstrous berserkers.

Transmutation [Evil]

Level: Adp 5, Sor/Wiz 6

Range: Touch

Target: One living goblinoid/level

This spell functions as *black blood frenzy*, except that it affects multiple creatures. Casting this spell requires a powers check.

Cuckoo's Egg

Trade a hag's unborn child for that of a human.

Transmutation [Evil]

Level: Sor/Wiz 5, Wch 5

Components: V, S, XP

Casting Time: 1 hour

Range: Personal and touch

Target: You and one female human

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

Only hags can cast this monstrous spell, which they use to steal healthy infants and/or dispose of their own unwanted progeny. *Cuckoo's egg* requires a full hour of taxing and profane rites to complete, during which time the hag must maintain uninterrupted physical contact with her victim, so the hag will usually first kidnap an intended subject and use sleeping draughts or magic to keep her helpless throughout the process.

For *cuckoo's egg* to have any effect, the hag, the woman, or both females must be with child. If the hag is pregnant, then upon the spell's completion, her unborn child is transferred to the human subject's womb. If the human is pregnant, then upon the spell's completion, her unborn child is transferred to the hag's womb. If both are pregnant, then upon the spell's completion, the unborn switch places. The transfer does not harm either female or the unborn. A hag child born to a human mother is always female and appears normal, but invariably develops an evil alignment as she grows to adulthood. Such women transform into hags during their fifth decade of life (see *Denizens of Dread*). A human child must make a DC 15 Fortitude save

each week it is carried in a hag's womb (Fort save +0) or be irreversibly warped into a caliban. In some folklore, if the child resists becoming a caliban, then it will assuredly develop into a powerful sorcerer.

Casting this spell requires a powers check.

XP Cost: 300 XP.

Dead Man's Tell

Transform a criminal's body part into a warning device.

Necromancy

Level: Clr 1, Sor/Wiz 1, Wch 1

Components: V, S, M/DF

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Touch

Target: One body part

Duration: Permanent until discharged

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

You transfer the magical power of one of your currently prepared divination spells into a body part taken from a criminal's corpse, such as a hand, finger or head. You must cast the spell to be imbued immediately after casting *dead man's tell*. Any divination spell with an emanation area of effect or "close" range can be imbued; this includes *detect animals or plants*, *detect chaos*, *detect magic*, *detect poison*, *detect scrying*, *detect secret doors*, *detect snares and pits*, *detect undead*, *discern lies* and similar spells. The first time the *dead man's tell* item detects the subject of the imbued spell within 60 feet (a chaotic alignment, a secret door, undead, a scrying attempt and so forth), it violently spasms for one round; a hand clenches, a finger jerks, jaws chatter and the like. The subject still receives a saving throw to avoid detection, if the imbued spell normally allows one. The *dead man's tell* item does not indicate the power or location of the subject it has detected, merely its presence. After a single display, the magic dissipates and the body part rapidly decays.

Casting this spell requires a powers check.

Material Component: A flexible body part harvested from an executed criminal.

Hag's Blessing

Warp a creature's features.

Transmutation [Evil]

Level: Sor/Wiz 3, Wch 2

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 standard action



Range: Touch

Target: One living creature

Duration: 10 min./level

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell grotesquely distorts the flesh of a living creature, making it resemble a caliban or goblin beast. These deformities increase the subject's Outcast Rating by +1 per two caster levels beyond 3rd (+1 at 3rd level, +2 at 5th level, +3 at 7th level, on up to the maximum of +9 at 19th level). They also grant the subject a bonus to Disguise checks equal to twice this OR increase (+2 at 3rd level, +4 at 5th level, and so forth) to avoid being recognized.

Hag's blessing can be made permanent with a *permanency* spell.

Material Component: Hog's blood, which must be smeared on the subject.

Rotted Warning

Use a corpse to deliver a brief message.

Necromancy

Level: Adp 1, Sor/Wiz 1

Components: V, S, M, F

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Touch

Target: One corpse

Duration: Permanent until discharged

Saving Throw: Will negates (object)

Spell Resistance: Yes (object)

This spell functions like *magic mouth*, except that the caster uses a dead body to deliver the message rather than an illusory mouth. The corpse speaks in its own voice, so the more degraded the body, the less intelligible the message will be when spoken.

Casting this spell requires a powers check.

Material Component: A gold coin and a few drops of ink, which are placed under the corpse's tongue as the caster whispers the message into the corpse's mouth.

Focus: The corpse of a creature that could speak when alive. The head and torso must be largely intact.

Weave's Bounty

Use the Weave to grant a limited wish.

Universal

Level: Wev 6

Components: V, S, DF, XP

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: See text

Target, Effect, or Area: See text

Duration: See text

Saving Throw: None (see text)

Spell Resistance: Yes

Weave's bounty functions like *limited wish*, but is draining and has several significant restrictions. First, casting *Weave's bounty* deals 1 point of Intelligence drain on the caster, and the desired effect must be expressed in no more than seven words.

The spell relies upon the tapestry of the Weave for most of its power rather than arcane magic alone, manipulating the endless interconnections of fate to reach its goals. The caster usually gets what she asks for (within the limitations of a *limited wish*), but the effects do not manifest immediately. Instead, a series of coincidences occur over the next 1d6 days to deliver the intended results to the caster by natural rather than supernatural means. Thus, *Weave's bounty* is never useful in immediate combat situations.

Examples: If a caster uses *Weave's bounty* to cast *lightning bolt* at a target, that target will "coincidentally" be caught outside during a storm and struck by lightning within 1d6 days. If a caster uses *Weave's bounty* to acquire wealth, she may come into an inheritance or stumble upon a cache of stolen goods within 1d6 days.

As with all *wishes*, casting this spell requires a powers check. If the powers check fails, the intended effects are delivered in some unpredictably horrific manner.

XP Cost: Same as *limited wish*.

Wicked Permanency

Make certain spells permanent, but the magic can be undone by true love.

Universal [Evil]

Level: Sor/Wiz 4, Wch 4

Components: V, S, XP

Casting Time: 2 rounds

Range: See text

Target, Effect, or Area: See text

Duration: Permanent (see text)

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

This spell functions like *permanency*, except that it effectively works as a curse. *Remove curse* can temporarily suppress the spell's effects (see Chapter Three of the *Ravenloft Player's Handbook*). If any humanoid willingly performs an act of true,





unselfish love on behalf of the target of this spell, the *wicked permanency* is immediately dispelled.

Casting this spell requires a powers check.

XP Cost: Same as *permanency*.

Magic Items

The magic items detailed below are found in the eastern Core. Though they might be found elsewhere, their flavor is best suited to that area when first encountering them.

Hands of Power

These grisly talismans are also known as *deadman's candles*: human hands harvested from executed criminals, with wicks sewn into their outstretched fingers and boiled in obscene brews until the flesh becomes a waxy substance. By some accounts, the Mindefisk sisters created the first *hands of power*, though the secrets of their creation have long since spread throughout the Land of Mists. Only hags can create *hands of power*, which rank among the most gruesome examples of the destructive, consuming power of hag magic. Related magic items such as the *hand of glory* or *hand*

of the mage may be better known, but their power pales next to these minor artifacts.

Hags often create *deadman's candles* at the behest of other black-hearted folk, invariably demanding terrible prices for their services — be it magic items consumed in their creation, ritual acts of darkness or samples of the petitioner's own blood or flesh.

Many kinds of *hands of power* exist; only a few are listed here. All share certain common properties. A user activates a *deadman's candle* by lighting its wicks (a standard action that provokes attacks of opportunity). Once lit, a *hand of power* can be snuffed only by the creature that lit it or by magical wind or water effects (such as *create water* or *whirlwind*). Whoever lights a *deadman's candle* receives its power until the hand is snuffed; she need not keep the *hand* on her person. However, all users of *hands of power* are also subject to terrible curses: the inescapable corruption of hag magic.

Hands of power cannot be destroyed while lit. When unlit, they are susceptible to damage, but always receive saving throws (as the hag that created them), even if unattended. Due to the





strange, primordial witchcraft used in their creation, *hands of power* do not detect as magical while unlit.

Each *hand of power* burns for a total of 13 hours. It can be snuffed and relit later, but cannot be recharged. Crafting or using a *hand of power* warrants a powers check, not including the required grave robbery.

Four-Fingered Hand: Also called *hands of silence*, these candles have four fingers curling outward like talons; the thumb is pressed against the palm. The *hand* must be harvested from a criminal who was strangled or drowned and must be severed from the corpse with a silver blade on the night of a new moon. For its powers to take effect, the user must light the *hand* within a building (such as a home, inn, keep, and so on). For each wick lit, one person within the structure must succeed at a DC 18 Will save or fall asleep, as if targeted by a *sleep* spell, save that creatures of any HD can be affected. The *hand of silence* targets the “master of the house” first, followed by occupants of decreasing importance in succession. The user is never targeted. For each subject the user puts to sleep, however, she is subject to a night of *nightmares*, as the spell.

Strong necromancy and enchantment; CL 16th; Weight 1 lb.

Many-Fingered Hand: The fingers of these *hands* are spread wide. The hand must be harvested from the body of a hanged criminal and severed with a stone blade on a foggy night while the corpse still hangs from the gallows. The hand is then boiled in the blood or ichor of a slain outsider. A *many-fingered hand* aids only divine spellcasters. While lit, its user receives a +4 profane bonus to turn/rebuke checks; Spell Focus (necromancy) as the feat; and a continuous *protection from good* aura, as the spell. Each hour the *hand* remains lit, however, the user’s spirit has a cumulative 10% chance of being displaced by an insane spirit, such as an odem. The user’s spirit becomes a geist, and she must succeed at a DC 18 Will save to cast out the spirit and reclaim her body. If the user fails this save, she must find some other way to reclaim her body within 24 hours or her spirit is consumed by the dark forces of the universe.

Strong necromancy; CL 16th; Weight 1 lb.

One-Fingered Hand: The fore- and middle fingers of these *hands* are extended and tightly lashed together; the rest are sewn into a tight fist. The hand must be harvested from a criminal who was whipped or beaten to death, and severed with

a hot silver blade. The hand is then boiled in seawater and at least four *potions of heroism*. While lit, its user receives a +5 increase to her natural armor, damage reduction 5/—, resistance to energy (all) 5, and fast healing 5. Each time the user suffers damage while so affected, however, she risks being cursed (% chance = damage taken), as the spell *bestow curse*. When the candle is snuffed, the user suffers 2d10 points of damage for each full or partial 10-minute period the candle was lit (Fort DC 18 for half).

Strong necromancy and transmutation; CL 16th; Weight 1 lb.

Three-Fingered Hand: The thumb, fore- and ring fingers of these *hands* are extended; the others are curled into the palm and nailed in place. The hand must be harvested from a criminal impaled for his crimes, be it on a spike or by piercing weapons, and must be severed with a bronze blade. The hand is then boiled in fat rendered from humanoid arcane spellcasters and at least one creature with innate spell-like abilities. While lit, all arcane spells cast by its user are automatically empowered, enlarged, extended and widened, as the feats. The user also gains a +4 profane bonus to all saving throws vs. spells and spell-like abilities. However, with each spell the user casts, she must succeed at a DC 18 Fortitude save or suffer magical backlash, suffering all negative effects of the spell, or 2d8 points of damage if the spell is harmless. When the *hand* is snuffed, the user must succeed at a Will save (DC 15 + consecutive hours the hand burned) or be immediately reduced to –1 hit points from the explosive backlash, inflicting (1d4 x user’s spellcaster class levels) damage to all living creatures within a 10-foot radius. Strong necromancy; CL 16th; Weight 1 lb.

Two-Fingered Hand: The fore- and little finger of these *hands* stretch out like the branches of a divining rod; the rest are twisted off. The hand must be harvested from a criminal left to starve to death, be it in a cell or gibbet, severed with a blade of sharpened bone during a rainstorm. The hand is then boiled in the fat of humanoid corpses that never received funereal rites. While the *hand* is lit, both it and its user become ethereal, as the spell *ethereal jaunt*. Snuffing the hand makes it and the user material again (even if they are currently within a solid object). A lit *two-fingered hand* also acts as a subconscious beacon to evil entities on the Ethereal Plane, such as incorporeal undead, phase spiders, and ethereal marauders. The user has a



10% chance of being attacked by such creatures (EL = user's level) each hour the *hand* is lit.

Strong necromancy and transmutation; CL 16th; Weight 1 lb.

Unfingere d Hand: Despite their name, these *hands* have all their fingers, which tightly clench a thick, black candle made of fat rendered from dead men. The *hand* must be harvested from a criminal who was beheaded or drawn-and-quartered, severed with a cold iron blade under the light of a full moon. While lit, its user is affected as if continuously under the effects of *haste*, *jump*, and *spider climb*. However, when the *unfingere d hand* is snuffed, the user must succeed at a DC 18 Fortitude save or magically age 1 year for every 10 minutes the *hand* has burned. In addition, the user automatically magically ages 1 year each time the *hand* is snuffed (no save). As a magical aging effect, the user receives only the negative effects of aging, with none of the benefits.

Strong necromancy and transmutation; CL 16th; Weight 1 lb.

The Regalia of Arak

The *Regalia of Arak* is a collection of nine major artifacts crafted from shadowstuff and empowered by the dreams of the shadow fey. They once belonged to the legendary hero whose name they now bear. Following his death, they were divided among the lords of Nine Breeds. Strangely, some quirk of fate frequently wrests the *Regalia of Arak* from the fey and scatters them across the surface world. Perhaps the Mists seek to prevent the Obsidian Gate from reopening; perhaps the artifacts are desperate to escape the Shadow Rift. Whatever the truth, they appear on the surface with alarming frequency. The fey, however, are loath to part with the icons of their hero and always take them back from those who "steal" them, with terrible consequences.

If all nine items in the *Regalia of Arak* are within 100 feet of the Obsidian Gate, a ritual can be performed that causes the Gate to open. Another ritual, or throwing one of the items into the Gate, closes it again.

The Amulet of Arak: This pendant is made of eight concentric rings suspended on a thin silver chain. The rings alternate between silver and obsidian. The bearer of the *Amulet* is immune to all magic directly affecting life force, such as spells with the death descriptor, *magic jar* and so forth. In the Shadow Rift, the bearer can also cast *summon*

nature's ally I–VIII once per day each, as a druid of the minimum level needed to cast the spells. The *Amulet of Arak* is held by the brag.

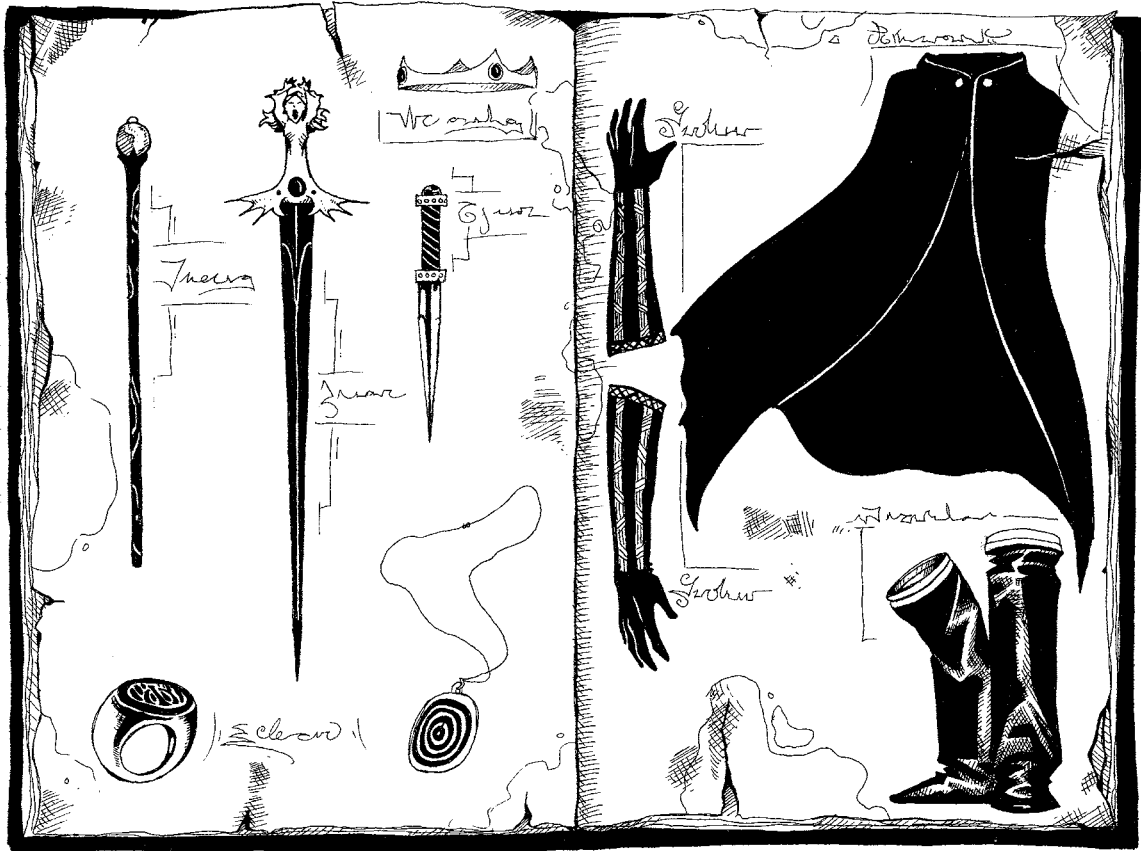
The Boots of Arak: These are knee-high boots of black leather, with gold bands around the top. They act as *boots of elvenkind* and *boots of speed*. The bearer is also considered to weigh only 5 pounds for determining how much pressure she exerts on the ground (such as whether she can walk across trapped surfaces without setting them off). The *Boots of Arak* belong to Mohrg, leader of the muryan.

The Cloak of Arak: Apart from the silver clasp, this cloak is utterly black, as though made from solid darkness. When worn, it acts as a *cloak of elvenkind* and a *major cloak of displacement*. In the Shadow Rift, the bearer can also cast *shadow walk* three times per day by stepping through the *Cloak*. It belongs to the teg.

The Crown of Arak: The *Crown of Arak* is a delicate silver coronet set with black opals. It grants a +4 enhancement bonus to the bearer's Charisma and allows her to cast *charm monster* at will. It also has the effects of a *ring of mind shielding*. It was once worn by Maeve, but is now supposedly trapped inside the Obsidian Gate with Gwydion.

The Dagger of Arak: The *Dagger of Arak* is a slender stiletto of silvery mithril, with a black leather hilt. A large bloodstone glistens in the pommel. Outside the Rift, the *Dagger* functions as a +2 *assassin's dagger of wounding*. It ignores all damage reduction, except epic. Inside the Rift, its bonus increases to +4. Additionally, the *Dagger* can be used to sneak attack (as the rogue ability), whereupon it inflicts +5d6 damage. If the bearer can already sneak attack, the damage bonuses don't stack; use whichever is higher. The *Dagger* deals double damage to Gwydion (or quadruple, on a critical hit). Unsurprisingly, the *Dagger of Arak* is wielded by Malinda, the leader of the powrie.

The Gloves of Arak: These long, tight-fitting gloves are sewn from soft black leather. A delicate embroidered pattern adorns the ends, and silver knotwork covers the gloves from wrist to elbow. The *Gloves* act as *gloves of dexterity +4*. The bearer gains a +10 insight bonus to any skill involving manual dexterity, such as Craft (clockmaking), Open Lock or Sleight of Hand, and takes only half as long to create complex mechanical devices. The *Gloves of Arak* are worn by Gurlar, the Seelie prince of the fir.



The Scepter of Arak: The *Scepter of Arak* is a slender baton made of polished black marble and set with an orb of silvery mithril. An opal is set atop the sphere. Inside the Rift, the *Scepter* acts as a *staff of healing*. It can be used up to ten times per day and has unlimited charges; outside the Rift, the number of charges that can be spent per day drops to five. Additionally, the bearer can cast *detect poison* and *deathwatch* at will. The *Scepter* belongs to the portune.

The Signet of Arak: This ring is fashioned from a single piece of silvery mithril, with the symbol of the Erlking set into the face in black mithril. The *Signet* grants a +2 luck bonus to AC and to all skill and ability checks and saving throws. Additionally, the bearer can cast *entangle*, *pass without trace*, *wood shape*, *speak with plants* and *plant growth* three times a day each, as a 15th-level druid. The bearer gains a +4 insight bonus to Charisma-based skills when interacting with plants. The princess of the alven wears the *Signet of Arak* as her crown.

The Sword of Arak: The *Sword of Arak*, most infamous of all the *Regalia* items, is a slender longsword seemingly forged from black mithril. The hilt is cut from ivory and carved to resemble a wailing banshee, said to be Arak's wife Finngalla. It is carried at all times by Loht, prince of the sith.

Outside the Shadow Rift, the *Sword* acts as a +2 *keen vorpal longsword*. Inside the Rift, its bonus increases to +4, and it ranks as a +6 weapon for overcoming damage reduction. The *Sword* is so sharp that it ignores hardness when attacking objects. The bearer of the sword gains darkvision out to 90 feet. If she already has darkvision, the ranges do not stack. Finally, the *Sword* deals double damage to Gwydion (or quadruple, on a critical hit).

Once per day, the bearer of the *Sword* can cast the following spells upon uttering their command words: *antiplant shell*, *cure critical wounds*, *dominate monster*, *irresistible dance*, *lesser globe of invulnerability*, *raise dead*, *summon monster IV*, *summon nature's ally IV*, *true seeing*. The spells function as though cast by a 10th-level cleric or wizard.



Curses

In the hands of the shadow fey, the *Regalia of Arak* bear no curse. However, the case is very different for other beings.

First, the items must be used every day. The *Sword* and *Dagger* must kill a creature; the *Signet*, *Scepter* and *Amulet's* spells must be used, and so forth. If they are not, the bearer's reality is permanently eroded by 1%. The bearer gradually becomes more and more transparent and intangible, applying the incorporeal special quality when 75% nonexistent, and fading from reality completely when the total reaches 100%.

Outside the Shadow Rift, the *Sword of Arak* bears a different curse. Each day the *Sword's* bearer does not use it to kill a creature, she gains a cumulative +1 bonus to Strength, Dexterity and Constitution, but suffers a cumulative -1 penalty to Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma. As the bearer grows stronger, she gradually transforms into a nearly mindless, twisted creature resembling a caliban or ogre; if the bearer gains +4 Strength, her size increases by one category. Enslaved by the *Sword*, the creature exists only to slake the blade's bloodlust. If the bearer is separated from the *Sword* before any of her mental ability scores reach 3, the transformation slowly reverses itself at the same rate it progressed, until the character returns to normal. If any ability score drops to 3, the transformation is irreversible, even if the bearer is separated from the *Sword*.

In addition, anyone but a shadow fey who uses one of the *Regalia* items will never knowingly let it out of her sight thereafter (no save). If she is separated from the item, she does whatever it takes to get it back. Each day, she must make a Will save (DC 20, -1 per day of separation from the item); failure indicates that she degenerates mentally, acquiring a dangerous, frantic obsession to recover the item at all costs. Even if the save is successful, she still tries to get the item back, albeit in a more rational manner. After five successful saves, the item's hold is broken and the character returns to normal. If the character has carried all nine items, she never recovers, and remains obsessed forever.

Means of Destruction: The strange substances used to create the *Regalia of Arak* make them impervious to physical harm. However, they are all partially composed of shadow. They can be destroyed if exposed to the unfiltered light of the sun for seven consecutive days, for at least 10 hours each day. Also, if returned to the Plane of Shadow,

the shadowstuff begins leaking back into that plane. Every hour, the item loses one magical power. For example, the *Sword of Arak* would lose each of its spells, then its ability to ignore hardness and overcome damage reduction, and so on. When the last power decays away, the item evaporates. Note that the *Cloak of Arak* is protected from this draining while its bearer uses its *shadow walk* power.

New Monsters



his section presents monsters known to roam the lands of the eastern Core.

Arak, Gwytune

	Medium Fey (Shadow Fey)
Hit Dice:	4d6 (14 hp)
Initiative:	+1
Speed:	30 ft. (6 squares)
Armor Class:	17 (+1 Dex, +3 deflection, +3 luck), touch 17, flat-footed 16
Base Attack/Grapple:	+2/+1
Attack:	Gore +1 melee (1d6-1)
Full Attack:	Gore +1 melee (1d6-1)
Space/Reach:	5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Spells
Special Qualities:	Darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, alternate form, damage reduction 10/copper, uck, sunlight vulnerability Fort +1, Ref +5, Will +7
Saves:	Str 9, Dex 13, Con 10, Int 18, Wis 17, Cha 14
Abilities:	
Skills:	Bluff 9, Concentration +7, Craft (any) +11, Knowledge (arcana) +11, Profession (woodworking) +10, Spellcraft +11
Feats:	Eschew Materials, Skill Focus (Knowledge [arcana]), Skill Focus (Spellcraft), Spell Focus (any 1 school), any 3 metamagic feats
Environment:	Temperate hills, forest and plains (the Shadow Rift)
Organization:	Solitary
Challenge Rating:	6
Treasure:	50% coins; standard goods; double items
Alignment:	Usually lawful neutral
Advancement:	By character class
Level Adjustment:	+1

The golden-eyed, horned figure, clad in symbol-encrusted robes, gestures with its hands, which glow with the aura of magic, allowing a small sizzling dart to fly unerringly to its target.





Gwytune stand between 5 and 5 1/2 feet tall. They have wizened features, spindly limbs and long dexterous fingers like spider monkeys. However, they also have curling ram's horns and goat-like golden eyes. Between their horns grows a thick shock of long auburn hair. Their skin has a very faint lilac tinge. Gwytune always wear long woolen robes, usually black or rust-colored and covered in copper symbols.



Gwytune are the arcanists and wizards of the Arak. These exceptionally rare shadow fey are obsessed with the accumulation of arcane magic. They align themselves with neither of the Two Courts, preferring a life of scholarly pursuits.

Combat

Gwytune are quite weak in physical combat. Their only real attack is to gore or butt with their horns, but their lack of physical strength undermines even this attack. However, they are masters of the arcane arts and rely on magic to avoid or overpower opponents.

Spells: Gwytune learn and prepare spells as wizards, using Intelligence to determine save DCs and bonus spells. The number of spells they can cast each day is of a caster level equal to double their Hit Dice (that is, 8th level for standard gwytune)."

Alternate Form (Su): Gwytune can assume the forms of goats and sheep. They can spend up to 12 hours per day in this form, changing back and forth as they please, provided they do not exceed the daily limit. Gwytune can speak intelligibly in ram form.

Luck (Su): Gwytune receive a +3 luck bonus to AC and can reroll a failed save once per day.

Sunlight Vulnerability (Ex): Gwytune take 1d4 points of damage each round they are exposed to direct sunlight. Filtering the sunlight, through thick cloth for example, reduces the damage by -1, to a minimum of 1 point per round.

Gwytune Characters

A gwytune's favored class is wizard. The levels stack with their natural spellcasting abilities to determine how many spells they can cast per day. (For example, a 4 HD gwytune with 2 sorcerer levels would have the same number of spells per day as a 10th-level sorcerer). They favor scholarly prestige classes such as the loremaster.



Avanc

	Huge Magical Beast (Aquatic)
Hit Dice:	8d10+32 (76 hp)
Initiative:	+2
Speed:	20 ft. (4 squares), swim 30 ft.
Armor Class:	25 (–2 size, +2 Dex, +15 natural)
Base Attack/Grapple:	+8/+25
Attack:	Bite +16 melee (2d8+13) or tail slap +15 melee (1d12+13)
Full Attack:	Bite +16 melee (2d8+13) or tail slap +15 melee (1d12+13)
Space/Reach:	15 ft./10 ft.
Special Attacks:	Improved grab, vortex
Special Qualities:	Darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, aquatic empathy, water dependent, resistance to fire 10
Saves:	Fort +10, Ref +8, Will +3
Abilities:	Str 28, Dex 14, Con 19, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 14.
Skills:	Hide +8*, Listen +4, Spot +4, Swim +17
Feats:	Power Attack, Snatch, Weapon Focus (bite)
Environment:	Temperate aquatic
Organization:	Solitary
Challenge Rating:	6
Treasure:	Standard
Alignment:	Always neutral evil
Advancement:	9–15 HD (Huge)
Level Adjustment:	—

This reptilian horror cuts cleanly through the lake's surface, measuring fully twenty feet from tail to snout. It resembles a huge, monstrous cross between a crocodile and a fish. Six short, finned limbs propel the creature through the water. A bony fin runs the length of its back to the end of its long, flat tail. Its long, narrow jaws are filled with scissoring, needle-like fangs. Its black, beady eyes are as inhuman as those of a viper, but gleam with malign intelligence.

The avanc is a huge monster said to lurk in the waters of Lake Kronov. Tepestani fishers claim to sight it several times a year. None curse it for devouring their catch, however, for fear that the "great beastie" will devour

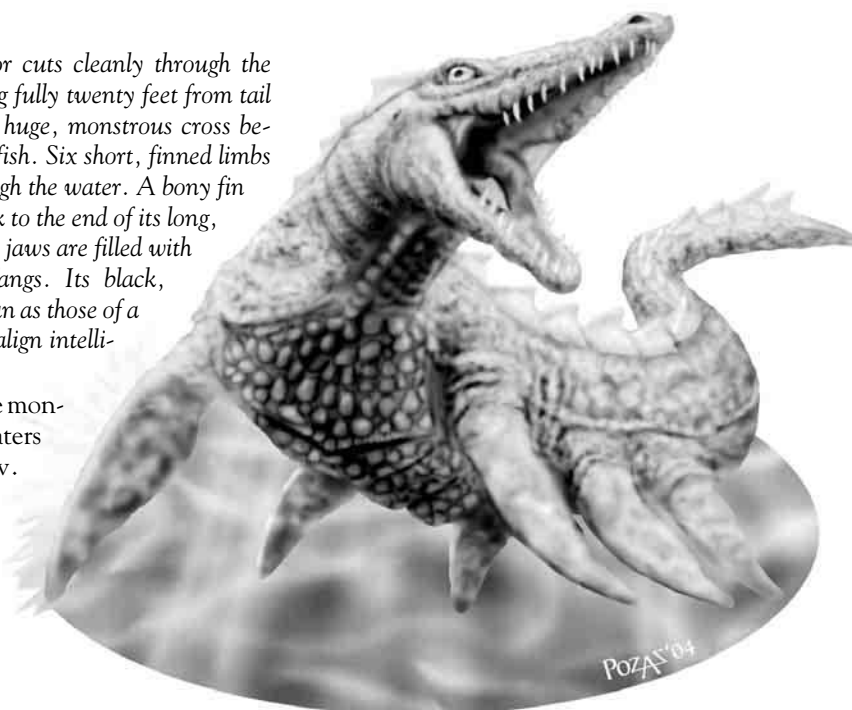
them instead. Most sightings occur near Castle Island — yet another reason to shun that haunted rock. The avanc can leave the water, crawling on its six finned legs, but it never leaves sight of the shoreline.

Numerous legends surround the origins of the avanc, which has stalked Lake Kronov for many years. All Tepestani agree that the avanc was originally an evil man who was direly cursed by supernatural forces. Who or what cursed him remains a matter of dispute, however; claims include an Unseelie prince, the Lady of the Lake, or even the monstrous, shapeshifting sea hag older folktales claim once lived in the lake.

The avanc speaks Sylvan and can communicate with all crocodiles and fish.

Combat

The avanc has a ravenous appetite, though it can go for long periods between meals. Whether or not it was once a man, its thoughts are now entirely consumed by hunger. When hunting along the lakeshore, it lies perfectly motionless in shallow water or mud, waiting for victims to draw near before lunging forward to strike. In the water, it rushes up from the depths to crush boats before picking off struggling swimmers. Whenever the





avanc grabs a creature in its jaws, it dives deep to drown its victim before returning for remaining foes.

The avanc can devour a dozen Medium creatures if given the chance. Once full, it retreats to the bottom of the lake to sleep for a week per devoured victim.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, the avanc must hit with its bite attack. It can then start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, the avanc establishes a hold on its opponent with its jaws.

Vortex (Su): Once per day, as a full-round action, while the avanc is fully submerged it can thrash its body through the water with such speed and violence that it creates a whirlpool 100 feet across. This whirlpool is similar to a tornado (see Table 3–24 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*), save that it affects only objects and creatures in or on the water. Swimmers must make a successful DC 30 Swim check or be swept into the vortex's funnel; boaters must make a successful DC 30 Profession (sailor) check or have their craft capsize. Creatures sucked into the vortex suffer 4d6 points of damage per round. The vortex continues for as long as the avanc continues to thrash, up to the avanc's Constitution bonus in rounds.

Aquatic Empathy (Su): The avanc can communicate simple concepts with crocodiles and fish. It can order them to come to its aid, though they are not compelled to do so.

Water Dependent (Ex): The avanc can survive out of water for 1 hour per point of Constitution; after that, it risks drowning.

Skills: The avanc has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it runs in a straight line.

* The avanc gains a +4 racial bonus on Hide checks when in the water. Further, it can lie in the water with only its eyes showing, gaining a +10 cover bonus on Hide checks.

Goblin Beast

The feral equivalent to calibans, goblin beasts are warped in the womb by exposure to foul magic, dire curses, powerful sinkholes of evil or the corruptive aura of hags. They are known by many names, including “witch-blooded beasties” or, simply, “wretches.” Goblins are noted for their affinity with these twisted creatures and sometimes train them for use as mounts or guard animals.

Goblin beasts are grim caricatures of their natural kin. Their bodies are larger, more powerful and strangely distorted. Some folk remark that they resemble simple creatures of nature as sketched by a deranged artist. Even worse, their minds are infused with malign cunning. Should goblin beasts survive their birth, they “breed true,” producing more of their tainted kind. Worgs are the most notorious example of goblin beasts; these malevolent wolves have prospered and spread far and wide.

Sample Goblin Beast

This example uses a Small monstrous hunting spider as the base creature.

Goblin Hunting Spider, Medium Medium Magical Beast

Hit Dice:	3d10+3 (19 hp)
Initiative:	+3
Speed:	40 ft. (8 squares), climb 20 ft.
Armor Class:	14 (+3 Dex, +1 natural), touch 13, flat-footed 11
Base Attack/Grapple:	+3/+5
Attack:	Bite +6 melee (1d6+2 plus poison)
Full Attack:	Bite +6 melee (1d6+2 plus poison)
Space/Reach:	5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Poison, web
Special Qualities:	Darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, tremorsense 60 ft.
Saves:	Fort +4, Ref +6, Will +2
Abilities:	Str 15, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 4, Wis 12, Cha 6.
Skills:	Climb +11, Hide +9, Jump +12, Listen +4, Move Silently +6, Spot +11
Feats:	Alertness, Weapon Finesse
Environment:	Temperate forests and underground
Organization:	Solitary or colony (2–5)
Challenge Rating:	1
Treasure:	1/10 coins; 50% goods; 50% items
Alignment:	Neutral evil
Advancement:	4–7 HD (Large); 8–15 HD (Huge); 16–31 HD (Gargantuan); 32–62 HD (Colossal)
Level Adjustment:	+1 (cohort)



The size of a child, this bloated vermin is all spindly legs, knobby joints, clicking fangs and lurid colors. This is not a spider; this is a nightmare of a spider.

Combat

Poison (Ex): Bite, Fortitude DC 14, 1d4 Str/1d4 Str. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Web (Ex): Goblin spiders often spin broad webs to snare their prey, be it between the trees of dense forests or in the tunnels of the caverns where they lair. Unlike their simple kin, goblin spiders frequently use leaves and detritus to better conceal their traps, and coins and other shiny trinkets to entice greedy victims.

A single strand of a goblin spider's web is strong enough to support the spider and one creature of the same size. A creature entangled in a web spun by this example spider can escape with a successful DC12 Escape Artist check or burst it with a Strength check (break DC 16; 6 hp). The check DCs are Constitution-based, and the Strength check DC includes a +4 racial bonus.

A goblin spider can move across its own web at its climb speed.

Tremorsense (Ex): A goblin spider can detect and pinpoint any creature or object within 60 feet in contact with the ground, or within any range in contact with its webs.

Skills: Goblin hunting spiders have a +4 racial bonus on Hide checks, a +8 racial bonus on Climb and Spot checks, and a +10 racial bonus on Jump checks. A goblin spider can always choose to take 10 on Climb checks, even if rushed or threatened. Goblin spiders use either their Strength or Dexterity modifier, whichever is higher, for Climb checks.

Creating a Goblin Beast

"Goblin beast" is an acquired template that can be added to any animal or vermin (referred to hereafter as the "base creature"). It uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Size and Type: The creature's type changes to magical beast. Recalculate base attack bonus, saves and skill points. Goblin beasts created from vermin lose the mindless quality, if applicable. Size may increase due to advancement (see below).

Hit Dice: Change to d10, and advance the base creature by +2 Hit Dice.

Special Attacks: Same as the base creature.

Special Qualities: A goblin beast retains all the special qualities of the base creature (except the mindless quality) and also gains darkvision out to 60 feet and low-light vision.

Abilities: Increase from the base creature as follows: Str +4, Int +4, Wis +2, Cha +4. If the base creature has no Intelligence score, the goblin beast has an Intelligence score of 4.

Skills: A goblin beast has skill points equal to $(2 + \text{Int modifier}) \times (\text{HD} + 3)$. Skills from the base creature's list are treated as class skills, as are Hide, Listen, Move Silently and Spot. Other skills are cross-class. The goblin beast retains all of the racial skill bonuses of the base creature.

Feats: Goblin beasts have $1 + (1 \text{ per } 3 \text{ HD})$ feats, plus they gain any bonus feats of the base creature. If the base creature has feats, apply those first before adding new ones. Common feats among goblin beasts include Agile, Alertness, Diehard, Dodge, Stealthy, Toughness and Track.

Environment: Same as the base creature.

Organization: Same as the base creature.

Challenge Rating: Same as the base creature +1.

Treasure: 1/10 coins; 50% goods; 50% items.

Alignment: Always evil (any).

Advancement: Same as the base creature.

Level Adjustment: —



Pozas'04



Scourged

The Scourged are humanoids who were slain by the sandstorm that ravaged Arak in 588 BC. They are found only in the village of Marbh-Cathair in Keening, where they exist in a feeble mockery of life. Physically, the Scourged resemble walking corpses in various states of decomposition. Scourged do not communicate with the living and do not usually attack unless threatened. They believe themselves to be living creatures and will defend their homes and possessions against thieves. If a Scourged is attacked, all nearby Scourged will turn on the attacker.

Sample Scourged

This example uses a human commoner zombie as the base creature.

	Scourged
	Medium Undead
Hit Dice:	2d12+3 (16 hp)
Initiative:	-1
Speed:	30 ft. (6 squares; can't run)
Armor Class:	13 (-1 Dex, +4 natural), touch ?, flat-footed 13
Base Attack/Grapple:	+1/+2
Attack:	Slam +2 melee (1d6+1) or meat cleaver +2 melee (1d6+1)
Full Attack:	Slam +2 melee (1d6+1) or meat cleaver +2 melee (1d6+1)
Space/Reach:	5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Scourging scream, create spawn
Special Qualities:	Darkvision 60 ft., single actions only, damage reduction 5/slashing, turn resistance +2, undead traits
Saves:	Fort +0, Ref -1, Will +3
Abilities:	Str 12, Dex 8, Con —, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 1
Skills:	Profession (any two) +5
Feats:	Skill Focus (Profession [any two]), Toughness
Environment:	Temperate desert (Keening)
Challenge Rating:	1
Alignment:	Always neutral evil

This mummified, wind-swept corpse may have been a butcher in life. It still wears a dusty, tattered leather apron and clutches a dull cleaver in one hand.

Combat

Scourging Scream (Su): Reflex DC 12 for half damage.

Single Actions Only (Ex): Scourged have poor reflexes and can perform only a single action

or attack action each round. A Scourged can move up to its speed and attack in the same round, but only if it attempts a charge.

Creating a Scourged

“Scourged” is an acquired template that can be added to any humanoid zombie (hereafter referred to as the base creature). Size and type remain unchanged.

Armor Class: Natural armor improves by +2.

Special Attacks: A Scourged retains all the special attacks of the base creature and gains those described below.

Scourging Scream (Su): Once per day, a Scourged may breathe forth a searing blast of sand as a standard action. This attack is a breath weapon that takes the shape of a 30-foot cone. Creatures caught in the cone take 2d6 points of damage. A successful Reflex save (DC 10 + 1/2 Scourged HD + Scourged Str modifier) reduces the damage by half. A character's OR is increased by +1 for every 10 points of damage she takes from the scourging scream ability. This OR adjustment is due to scarring.



PoZAs'04



Create Spawn (Su): Any humanoid slain by the scourging scream ability of a Scourged becomes a Scourged within 1d4 rounds. Apply the zombie template and then the Scourged template to such a creature.

Special Qualities: A Scourged retains all the special qualities of the base creature and gains those described below.

Turn Resistance (Ex): Turn resistance improves by +2.

Abilities: Same as the base creature, except that the Scourged has the base creature's original Intelligence while alive (usually 10).

Skills: Unlike zombies, the Scourged are not mindless and do not lose their skills.

Feats: Unlike zombies, the Scourged are not mindless and do not lose their feats. They still gain the Toughness feat, however.

Organization: Solitary, pair, family (3–6) or crowd (11–20).

Challenge Rating: Same as base creature +1.

Treasure: Standard.

Advancement: —

Level Adjustment: —



Widderribhinn

Widderribhinn are undead fey, born when such creatures perish by brutal violence or powerful magic. They first appeared in the Realm of Dread following the Scourge and have started occurring with greater frequency in recent years. Widderribhinn are drawn to Mount Lament, where they submit themselves to Tristessa. They then serve as her eyes and ears in Keening and beyond, perpetually searching for her lost child, in the hopes that they will one day be restored to life.

Widderribhinn appear as ghostly fey formed of transparent mist and shadow, their strange beauty only heightened in death. They speak Arak or Sylvan, and occasionally the languages of nearby domains.

Sample Widderribhinn

This example uses a muryan as the base creature.

Widderribhinn Medium Undead Fey (Incorporeal)

Hit Dice:	7d12 (45 hp)
Initiative:	+5
Speed:	Fly 30 ft. (perfect) (6 squares)
Armor Class:	18 (+5 Dex, +3 deflection), touch 18, flat-footed 17
Base Attack/Grapple:	+3/+3
Attack:	Incorporeal touch +8 melee (2d6 or 1d6) or scimitar +8 melee (1d6/18–20) or longbow +8 ranged (1d8/x3)
Full Attack:	Incorporeal touch +8 melee (2d6 or 1d6) or scimitar +8 melee (1d6/18–20) or longbow +8 ranged (1d8/x3)
Space/Reach:	5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Dance of despair, sapping aura, corrupting gaze, unnatural aura, spells
Special Qualities:	Darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, alternate form, immunities, spell resistance 17, damage reduction 10/mithral, invisibility, +4 turn resistance, undead traits, incorporeal traits
Saves:	Fort +4, Ref +10, Will +6
Abilities:	Str —, Dex 20, Con —, Int 9, Wis 13, Cha 17
Skills:	Concentration +10, Hide +21, Jump +12, Move Silently +13, Perform (dance) +7, Spot +17, Tumble +13
Feats:	Skill Focus (Profession [any two]), Toughness
Environment:	Any
Organization:	Solitary or pair
Challenge Rating:	9
Alignment:	Any evil
Advancement:	By character class
Level Adjustment:	+2



Appearing much as it did in life, the dancing man raises its incorporeal sword and begins the steps of its deadly sword dance.

Creating a Widderrìbhinn

“Widderrìbhinn” is an acquired template that can be applied to any fey (hereafter referred to as the base creature).

Size and Type: The creature’s type changes to undead. Do not recalculate the creature’s base attack bonus, saves or skill points. It gains the incorporeal subtype. Size is unchanged.

Hit Dice: Increase all current and future Hit Dice to d12s.

Speed: Widderrìbhinn have a fly speed of 30 ft., unless the base creature has a higher fly speed, with perfect maneuverability.

Armor Class: The widderrìbhinn’s natural armor bonus, if any, changes to +0. It gains a deflection bonus equal to its Charisma modifier or +1, whichever is higher. If the base creature has a deflection bonus to AC, the bonus increases by that number. If the base creature normally wears armor or uses a shield, it retains the armor or shield, which acquires the ghost touch ability.

Attack: Any natural attacks possessed by the base creature are replaced with a single incorporeal touch attack that uses the creature’s highest attack bonus. If the base creature normally attacks with weapons, those weapons are retained, and they acquire the ghost touch ability. As an incorporeal creature, a widderrìbhinn adds its Dexterity modifier rather than its Strength modifier to its attack rolls.

Damage: A widderrìbhinn’s incorporeal touch deals 2d6 points of damage against animals, fey and plants and 1d6 points of damage against all other creature types. A widderrìbhinn’s ghost touch weapon deals normal damage for a weapon of its type. As an incorporeal creature, a widderrìbhinn’s damage rolls are not modified by Strength.

Special Attacks: Special attacks that rely on physical contact with a foe do not function. All other special attacks are retained. The widderrìbhinn also gains those special attacks described below.

Ghostly Abilities: A widderrìbhinn with a Charisma of 14 or higher has one ghost special attack taken from the following list: aura of despair, corrupting gaze, draining touch, ebon shroud, frightful moan, horrific appearance, mind games, paralyzing touch, phantasmal killer or telekinesis. (See MM, Chapter 1: Monsters A to Z, “Ghost” and **Ravenloft Player’s Handbook**, Chapter Five: Horrors of the Night, “Ghosts,” *Special Abilities*.) Where appropriate, the widderrìbhinn’s “rank” is 2.

Unnatural Aura (Su): Animals within 30 feet of a widderrìbhinn must make a successful Will save (DC 10 + widderrìbhinn’s HD + widderrìbhinn’s Cha modifier) or be panicked for 5d6 rounds. Animals that successfully save are shaken for as long as are within 30 feet of the widderrìbhinn, although they need not save again for 24 hours. This is a mind-affecting fear ability.

Special Qualities: Special qualities that rely on physical contact with a foe do not function. All other special qualities are retained. The widderrìbhinn also gains those special qualities described below.

Invisibility (Su): A widderrìbhinn can become invisible (caster level 3rd) as a free action.

Turn Resistance (Ex): A widderrìbhinn has +4 turn resistance.

Abilities: Same as the base creatures, except that the widderrìbhinn has no Strength or Constitution score, and its Charisma score increases by +2.

Skills: Widderrìbhinn have a +8 racial bonus on Hide, Listen, Search and Spot checks. Otherwise same as the base creature.

Environment: Any.

Organization: Solitary, troop (3–6) or conclave (11–20).

Challenge Rating: Same as the base creature +2.

Treasure: None.

Alignment: Any evil.

Advancement: Same as base creature or by character class.

Level Adjustment: +2.





Who's Doomed



his section details the darklords of the domains covered in this gazetteer as well as other notable personalities. Information presented here takes precedence over previous versions already detailed in *Secrets of the Dread Realms* or elsewhere. The NPC descriptions adhere to the following format:

Statistics: The character's complete game statistics. Some characters use special rules found in the *Ravenloft Player's Handbook* or *Denizens of Dread*. The character's native language is always listed first and marked with an asterisk.

Background: The character's history.

Current Sketch: The character's personality and current activities.

Combat: Tactics and strategies the character usually employs in battle. If the character has any unique special attacks or qualities not described in the core D&D rulebooks, the *Ravenloft Player's Handbook* or *Denizens of Dread*, they will also be detailed here.

Lair: The character's home or where she can often be encountered.

Closing the Borders: If the character is a darklord, this section details how a border closure manifests in his or her domain.

Othmar Bolshnik, Prince of Nova Vaasa

Male human Aristocrat 6/Fighter 3: CR 8; Medium humanoid (human) (6 ft. 2 in. tall); HD 6d8+3d10+27; hp 63; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 19, touch 12, flat-footed 17; BAB +7; Grp +9; Atk +13 melee (1d8+5/x3, +3 *battleaxe of wounding*); Full Atk +13/+8 melee (1d8+5/x3, +3 *battleaxe of wounding*) or +9/+4 ranged (1d8/19–20, light crossbow); AL NE; SV Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +6; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 10. *Skills:* Appraise +4, Bluff +6, Diplomacy +7, Handle Animal +9, Intimidate +12, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) +2, Knowledge (local) +4, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +7, Listen +4, Ride +11, Sense Motive +9, Spot +3, Survival +3

Feats: Negotiator, Mounted Combat, Persuasive, Ride-By Attack, Spirited Charge, Trample, Weapon Focus (battleaxe).

Languages: Vaasi*, Balok, Falkovnian.

Signature Possessions: +3 *battleaxe of wounding* ("Snake-spittle"), +2 *studded leather of light fortification*, +1 *light wooden shield*, *ring of protection* +2, *periapt of wound closure*, *scarab of protection*.

Prince Othmar is a large man, 50 years of age, with curly dark hair and hazel eyes that alternately

smolder with anger and shine with pride and arrogance. His most distinctive feature is his enormous mustache, which is waxed into fine points that stretch until they are even with his ears. The mustache is a smoky gray, creating a striking contrast with the dark auburn of his hair. It serves to cover partially a scar that runs diagonally from his left cheek and down across his lips, giving them an oddly full, puckered appearance. He refers to it as a "battle scar," but in fact he received it as a teenager while jousting.

Othmar prefers colorful garb, and his ostentatious dress has become something of a signature. Yellows and reds are his favored colors, and he uses them to create as striking a contrast as possible. He is never seen without his black cap made from plains cat fur. All of his clothing is embroidered with the Bolshnik snake and axe.

Background

Born into the powerful Bolshnik family of Nova Vaasa in 708 BC, Othmar was the second son of Kethmar Bolshnik, one of the most respected nobles in Nova Vaasa's recent history. Kethmar was one of the few nobles with a natural ability to walk the fine line between the firmness and severity demanded by Church dogma and the *noblesse oblige* and respect for the people that are supposed to be part of the Nova Vaasan code of honor. Kethmar tried to instill this same ability in his sons, but neither proved capable of learning the lesson.

The elder son, Talgaard, was a disturbed and troubled child, prone to hallucinations and fits of violence. Kethmar quickly set him aside, instead focusing his ambitions on Othmar, who proved to be both strong and clever as a child. Unfortunately, Othmar also proved undisciplined and selfish, with little capacity to understand or value the needs of others. Kethmar did what he could, providing the boy with the most upstanding and capable mentors and advisors he could muster, but to no avail. The selfish and cruel child became a selfish and cruel adult.

In 729 BC, when Othmar was 21 years old, Kethmar was 58 and acting Prince when his health suddenly began to fail. Despairing of the heir he was leaving behind, Kethmar conspired on his deathbed with Tristen Hiregaard and the heads of the other families to appoint Tristen as regent throughout Othmar's term. He knew that Othmar would no doubt perceive this as a gross insult, as traditionally regencies ended when the ruler reached



the age of 17, but Kethmar had no intention of allowing his spoiled son to sit the throne unsupervised.

What Kethmar and the other lords did not know was that Othmar's flaws went far beyond selfishness and pride. Othmar lusted after power, yet his father had shown every sign of living to be a hundred, threatening to "rob" Othmar of decades of leadership and control. Determined not to wait any longer, Othmar had been slipping undetectable poisons to his father, purchased from a Vistani outcast and bandit known as Chezna. Othmar slowly murdered his father without remorse.

When he discovered that he was not to be given the unfettered power he craved, Othmar seethed internally, but outwardly submitted to his father's deathbed commands. Over the next five years, while Tristen Hiregaard ran the country, Othmar made his own plans and preparations. With his family's incredible fortunes, Othmar could surreptitiously purchase the loyalties of the Kantora City Guard and the support of the Church. When Hiregaard officially stepped down at the end of his five-year regency, Othmar announced that his right of rulership had been inappropriately usurped and that he would not be stepping down as Prince. This would certainly have resulted in military action by the other families, but when the Himmelsk Naeve issued a swift decree supporting Othmar's right to continue as Prince the opposition found itself paralyzed. The Hiregaards and Chekivs reluctantly announced their acquiescence, and the Rivtoffs and Vistins were left with little choice but to fall in line. Since that encouraging beginning, Othmar has systematically increased his hold on power. He intends to found a continuous dynasty of Princes, and eventually Kings, of Nova Vaasa.

Current Sketch

The foundation of Othmar's power is his strong alliance with the Church of the Lawgiver, which announces the Lawgiver's support for his actions in return for Othmar's generous donations and non-interference in Church policies. Othmar is too clever to keep all his eggs in one basket, however, and has pursued other avenues of influence. He has made the Bolshniks the greatest military power in Nova Vaasa, and by maintaining close ties with the Hiregaards and Chekivs he made open revolt too risky a proposition for the other two families. He has also forged alliances with several of the marauding bandits of the plains, agreeing not to hunt



them down as long as they concentrate their attacks on his rivals' holdings. His manipulation of the bandits has backfired only once, when he attempted to eliminate his erstwhile ally Chezna the Bloodcat to cover up his crime. The mercenary adventurers he hired for the task failed to bring in the bandit queen, and since then her aggressive raids have been a thorn in his side. He no longer fears what she knows, as the horrific crimes she has committed in vengeance have made her an unreliable witness at best, but he would still like to see this loose end permanently tied off.

Othmar has also made indirect contact with the crime lord Malken and established similar arrangements with him as with the bandits. In return for a cut of the profits, Othmar ensures that the Kantora City Watch interferes with Malken's activities as little as possible. What Othmar does not know is that Malken has contacted the bandit lords as well, including the Bloodcat, and the crime lord knows all about Othmar's past indiscretions. Should Othmar ever attempt to betray Malken, Malken will put this information to good use. Malken will ensure that the first to hear of it will be his alter ego, Tristen Hiregaard. A conflict between Hiregaard and Bolshnik would hurt Malken's business in the short term, but the resulting death and chaos might prove worthwhile.



Combat

Othmar prefers to fight from horseback whenever possible, riding down his opponents and striking ruthlessly with his magical battleaxe *Snake-spittle*. He cares for honor and chivalry in combat only insofar as it makes him look good; he dispenses with such affectations immediately if they put him at a disadvantage. He rarely has the opportunity to engage opponents personally, however, as his elite contingent of Storkaskets prevent any would-be attackers from approaching so close to the Prince.

Lair

Othmar's primary residence is the family castle, Stonegard, a mighty fortress built at the confluence of the Dnar and the Vaughn Dnar rivers. Stonegard is of an irregular triangle shape, with walls facing southwest, northwest and northeast. With the rivers acting as natural impediments to the southwest and northeast, the northwest wall is by far the most fortified. When not at Stonegard, Othmar is most often found at the Prince's Palace in Kantora, though he prefers to avoid the stench of the city where possible.

Gwydion the Sorcerer-Fiend, the Twilight, Darklord of the Shadow Rift

Unique male outsider (chaotic, evil, extraplanar): CR 40; Colossal outsider (24 ft. tall); HD 48d8+432; hp 648; Init +7; Spd 0 ft.; AC —; BAB —; Grp —; Atk —; Full Atk —; SA demand submission, frightful presence, spell-like abilities, modify memory, malevolence, shadowmaker, withering eye; SQ damage reduction 25/magic, fast healing 10, item master, multiple actions, omniscient mind, undead mastery, spell resistance 30; AL CE; SV Fort +36, Ref +34, Will +35; Str 40, Dex 17, Con 28, Int 31, Wis 29, Cha 30.

Skills: Balance +28, Bluff +51, Climb +29, Concentration +51, Craft (alchemy) +51, Craft (poisons) +51, Diplomacy +51, Gather Information +60, Hide +41, Intimidate +60, Jump +30, Knowledge (arcana) +61, Knowledge (geography) +51, Knowledge (history) +51, Knowledge (Ravenloft) +30, Knowledge (religion) +51, Knowledge (the planes) +51, Listen +50, Move Silently +50, Search +51, Sense Motive +50, Spellcraft +60, Spot +50, Swim +30

Feats: Cleave, Combat Expertise, Corrupt Spell-Like Ability (*ice storm*)*, Dodge, Empower Spell-Like Ability (*magic missile*), Endurance, Great Cleave, Greater Spell Penetration, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Multiattack, Power Attack, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*darkbolt*), Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*unholy blight*), Spell Penetration, Spring Attack, Whirlwind Attack.

* Found in the *Book of Vile Darkness*, published by Wizards of the Coast.

Languages: Abyssal*, Arak, Balok, Darkonese, Celestial, Draconic, Falkovnian, Infernal, Mordentish, Sylvan, Tepestani.

Gwydion is a monster beyond comprehension. Thankfully, no creature has seen his full, indescribable form for nearly five millennia, as time is reckoned in the Shadow Rift, and most of his alien body is permanently concealed in shadow. Even the shadow fey have started to forget the horror of his writhing appearance. When Gwydion partially emerged through the Obsidian Gate in 751 BC, what little of him that was seen — a slimy collection of seemingly independent tentacles, many-fingered hands, cloven hooves, a spiked tail and a murderous eyestalk — was more than enough to convince onlookers they wished to see no more. The immense fiend is a massive, lumbering nightmare made flesh.

History

Gwydion is a being of horrific power, evil beyond understanding. His history before he kidnapped the ellefolk is sketchy at best. It is known that he was absolute master of a vast realm on the Plane of Shadow for millennia before deciding to create a race of servitors, and that he desperately craved power and demanded respect. Some Arak believe he was spawned from the Plane of Shadow itself, where some taint corrupted the very planar fabric, so Gwydion emerged like pus from a sore. Others believe he was once lord of a tenebral layer of the Abyss who grew so powerful the other Abyssal Lords united to banish him to darkness. According to this version of the tale, Gwydion fled to the Plane of Shadow determined never to be overcome again, hungry for the day he would return to punish those who had expelled him. Either story could explain Gwydion's rage at being tricked by the rebellious Erlking and why he seemed to be trapped within the plane that he called home. Gwydion's true motivation may be less explicable to smaller minds; in any case, it led to the greatest mistake of the Sorcerer-Fiend's existence — his entrapment inside the Obsidian Gate.

Seeking to create an army of servitors, Gwydion drew the fey ellefolk into his realm and infused them with darkness, forever transforming them into shadow fey. Gwydion named their leader, Arak the Erlking, as his seneschal and eventually directed them to create a vast planar gateway through which Gwydion would escape the Plane of Shadow and subjugate new lands and peoples. The shadow fey obeyed Gwydion out of fear, construct-



ing the Obsidian Gate over the course of centuries, but secretly plotted against him as well.

When the Obsidian Gate was at last completed, Gwydion directed his armies through the portal, launching his invasion against whatever worlds lay beyond. Only slowly did Gwydion's senses pierce the illusions the shadow fey's mages had woven around the Gate. Gwydion now saw that the vast host filing through the Gate was not his armies marching forth, but a mass exodus of the entire shadow fey race, with the defiant Erlking and his brood guiding the way. So intense was Gwydion's rage that he abandoned all other matters in his realm, rushing into the gate to punish the fleeing creatures he had brutalized for so long.

Within the transdimensional tunnel, Gwydion found Arak blocking his path, wearing his *Regalia*. Arak fought a valiant battle against his master, holding the Sorcerer-Fiend at bay while his people raced for the far end of the tunnel. In the end, only Arak and Gwydion remained. Arak momentarily drove Gwydion back and rushed for the exit, but the Twilight lashed out with magical energy, paralyzing Arak mere feet from freedom. As Gwydion rushed toward the exit, only Maeve had the clarity of thought to grasp the *Regalia* and pull them free of the portal, sealing the Obsidian Gate with Gwydion and her father still inside. The Gate had opened a path into Ravenloft, and as Gwydion had dueled with the Erlking, the Dark Powers created a new domain to accept him: Arak.

For centuries, Gwydion raged against his prison, but because he had used his own life spark to power the Gate, it was as strong as he was. Gwydion remained trapped in the nothingness between realities. However, his evil was so great that it managed to seep from the Gate into Ravenloft, influencing the events in Arak. His malevolence led the drow safely to the Greenlands and encouraged the Unseelie to torment the surface dwellers. It helped Loht murder Tristessa and let Jozell take the blame. It lay beneath the formation of the Scourge of Arak, the decline of the Seelie Court, the mistrust between the twins, and a hundred other acts of evil.

During the Grand Conjunction, Gwydion finally felt the Gate's grip on him weaken. Exerting himself to the fullest, he tried to escape to another plane. The fiend was so powerful that, although he could not achieve the freedom he craved, he did manage to tear himself from the Dark Powers' carefully constructed prison. For a moment, Gwydion tasted freedom. Then the Conjunction



collapsed and he was dragged back to the fractured world he had created.

Gwydion's escape attempt had torn the planar fabric of Ravenloft. His domain ripped free of its original home and displaced G'Henna and Markovia. The Stonedowns appeared as a strange reflection of the Greenlands, and the once stationary features of the Northern Rift began shifting position, trying to find the right configuration that would fix the planar wound. Most strangely, the Shadow Rift was not quite in phase with the rest of the Core — the Mist of Shadows appeared like a scab, and the domain borders permanently closed to contain the damage. Fractures radiated through the demiplane.

Gwydion now found he could force his mind into the Shadow Rift. He sent dreams to Loht, pretending that Arak was still alive and trapped in the Obsidian Gate, having driven off the fiend. When Loht opened the Gate, Gwydion viciously crushed him. Believing he had nothing to fear, Gwydion was slow to emerge from the extradimensional tunnel, giving his foes time to hurl the *Crown of Arak* into the portal. The Gate snapped shut, severing one of Gwydion's tentacles, and he was trapped once more. However, part of his flesh remained in the Shadow Rift, providing a



doorway for his mind to enter the physical world. Gwydion settled back patiently to manipulate the Arak into freeing him once more and sealing the fates of every creature in the world Gwydion still wants to conquer.

Current Sketch

Gwydion is an alien being of pure evil, a tyrant who crushes all other creatures beneath his feet. He is patient and manipulative, but prone to violent fits of rage and spite. His curse is to be impotent despite all his power; the Arak live just under his nose as a thriving example of his failure as a despot and his inability to bring them to heel. Rage and envy born of injured pride gnaw at him. He has several separate schemes to free himself underway at any point, but also uses his abilities simply to cause pain and anguish.

Combat

Gwydion is far too powerful for most to confront directly; should he ever be freed, it will be a black day for all of Ravenloft. Even trapped in the Obsidian Gate, he is frighteningly powerful.

Special Attacks: *Demand Submission (Su)*: Gwydion can demand the complete subservience of anyone within the globe of darkness around the Obsidian Gate. This is a mind-affecting, language dependent affect. The victim must succeed at a DC 23 Will save or serve Gwydion completely for 10d10 days. This ability can't affect shadow fey.

Frightful Presence (Ex): Entering the globe of darkness requires a DC 24 Fear save. Anything being observed by Gwydion's omniscient mind can also detect the distant malevolence, although so far no one has realized what this sensation means.

Spell-Like Abilities: Blindness/deafness; damning darkness; deeper darkness; demand; dominate person; enervation; haste; ice storm; magic circle against good; magic circle against law; magic missile; mindrape; phantasmal killer; polymorph other; power word, stun; power word, blind; ray of enfeeblement; shades; shadow walk; sleep; slow; suggestion; summon monster VIII; tongues (self only); vampiric touch; wither limb. DC = 20 + spell level. The save DC is Charisma-based. All spells take effect as if cast by an 18th-level sorcerer, except their range is extended to anywhere in the Shadow Rift.

While trapped, Gwydion can use only one spell-like ability per month, chosen from the list above. Gwydion wants to conceal how much influence he can exert, so on the rare occasions he uses

these spells, he does so when their effect won't be noticed.

Modify Memory (Sp): Gwydion can cast *modify memory* (DC 24), *dream* (DC 25) and *nightmare* (DC 25) once per month each, as a 17th-level bard. Only shadow fey can be affected by these spells. Gwydion has complete control over the images that appear in his victim's dreams; they need not be a simple message.

Malevolence (Su): Gwydion's evil is so great that it subtly encourages evil in others and discourages good acts within the Shadow Rift. For example, those who are performing a morally upright quest will find themselves plagued by accidents, bad weather and fierce creatures, while those engaged in evil find the road much smoother. While this is mainly a role-playing device, feel free to impose a small profane bonus or penalty to actions in the Shadow Rift that are particularly good or evil.

Shadowmaker (Su): As a standard action, Gwydion can give any sylvan fey anywhere in the Shadow Rift the "shadow fey" subtype at will. This gives them the luck, darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision and sunlight vulnerability special qualities. See **Van Richten's Guide to the Shadow Fey or Denizens of Dread** for details. The fey can attempt a DC 20 Fortitude save to resist.

Withering Eye (Sp): 1/week—*bestow curse, blasphemy, charm person, darkbolt, desecrate, destruction, dispel magic, divination, harm, heartache, hold person, identify, implosion, insanity, morality undone, random action, shatter, spell turning, unholy blight.* DC = 19 + spell level. These spells take effect as though cast by a 17th-level cleric, except the range is 100 feet from the Obsidian Gate in any direction.

Special Qualities: *Item Master (Ex)*: Gwydion can use any magical item, except those that are good or lawfully aligned.

Multiple Actions (Ex): Gwydion can perform two move-equivalent and two standard actions each round.

Undead Mastery (Ex): Gwydion can control any undead in the domain.

Omniscient Mind (Su): Gwydion can observe any event in the Shadow Rift or in the Plane of Shadow within 100 miles of the Obsidian Gate. He can focus on only one scene at a time. He is considered to have permanent *true seeing*, and can cast *detect thoughts* on any creature in the Rift. When Gwydion focuses on a scene, those present who make successful DC 30 Spot checks may notice that local illumination dims ever so slightly.



Closing the Borders

The Shadow Rift's borders are permanently closed. They take the form of the Mists of Shadow, which fill the Rift from the surface and permeate the rock around it. Anyone who enters the mists loses 10% of his corporeality for every 10 feet he travels into the mist. If he turns back, he regains his solidity; if not, he vanishes utterly after 100 feet, never to return.

Sir Tristen Hiregaard/Malken, Darklord of Nova Vaasa

Male human Fighter 10 (Tristen) or Rogue 10 (Malken): CR 11; Medium humanoid (human) (5 ft. 11 in. tall; 5 ft. 8 in. tall as Malken); HD 10d10+10 (10d6+10 as Malken); hp 79 (56 as Malken); Init +7; Spd 30 ft.; AC 21, touch 14, flat-footed 18; BAB +10 (+7 as Malken); Grp +13; Atk +18 melee (+14 as Malken) (1d8+9/19–20 [1d8+7/19–20 as Malken], +4 *defending longsword*); Full Atk +18/+13 (+14/+9 as Malken) (1d8+9/19–20 [1d8+7/19–20 as Malken], +4 *defending longsword*), or +14/+9 ranged (+11/+6 as Malken) (1d6+4/x3, composite shortbow [+3 Str bonus] with +1 arrows); SA sneak attack +5d6 as Malken; SQ ancestral curse, fractured soul (plus evasion, improved uncanny dodge, slippery mind, trap sense +3, trapfinding as Malken); AL LN (CE as Malken); SV Fort +9, Ref +7, Will +6 (Fort +5, Ref +11 as Malken); Str 17, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 18.

Skills (as Tristen): Diplomacy +8, Handle Animal +12, Knowledge (local) +6, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +6, Listen +6, Ride +8, Sense Motive +6, Spot +6, Survival +6.

Feats (as Tristen): Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Mounted Archery, Mounted Combat, Power Attack, Quick Draw, Ride-By Attack, Weapon Focus (longsword, heavy flail), Weapon Specialization (longsword).

Skills (as Malken): Appraise +9, Bluff +12, Diplomacy +11, Disguise +11, Escape Artist +10, Forgery +9, Gather Information +11, Handle Animal +8, Hide +10, Innuendo +9, Intimidate +11, Knowledge (local) +9, Listen +9, Move Silently +10, Open Lock +10, Ride +11, Search +9, Sense Motive +9, Sleight of Hand +10, Spot +9, Tumble +10.

Feats (as Malken): Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Mobility, Improved Initiative, Quick Draw.

Languages: Vaasi*, Balok, Darkonese.

Signature Possessions: +1 studded leather, +2 buckler, +4 *defending longsword*, composite shortbow (+3 Str bonus), +1 arrows, ring of protection +1, scarf of resistance +1 (as cloak), vest of escape.

The Dark Powers have slowed Sir Tristen Hiregaard's aging. He is nearing a full century of life, but he appears 30 years younger and remains as active as a man half his age. He is tall and muscular, and his dusky skin is hard and lined like leather. He wears his hair long; once jet-black, it is now streaked with gray. He waxes the ends of his thick black



moustache into stiff points. Sir Tristen has a stern demeanor, but compassion flickers in his dark eyes.

Tristen dresses in the loose, comfortable fashions of Nova Vaasan nobility. He often wears tall black riding boots over black trousers, matched by a bright red shirt. He wears a yellow neckerchief, embroidered with red and black horses. Additional scarves, these marked with diagonal bands of black and red, are tied around his upper arms. He dons armor only when expecting trouble.

Tristen's alter ego Malken scarcely resembles him, even possessing a different height and hunched build. Malken's clean-shaven face is hideously misshapen and scarred by sores, his teeth are narrow and sharp, and his hair and thick brows are pure white. Malken's voice changes as well, and he often peppers his comments with obscenities. Malken tailors his fashions to whatever schemes he is currently engaged in. When entertaining himself with a simple murder, he wraps himself in a dark cloak. When dealing with underlings, Malken favors exotic and artistic papier-mâché animal masks.

Background

Tristen Hiregaard was born in 664 BC on an outlander world, in the Kingdom of Vaasa. He was



the son of Sir Romir Hiregaard, an aristocratic knight who taught him the arts of horsemanship and combat. Romir also taught his son his nation's rigid codes of conduct concerning both the battlefield and the interaction of nobles and the peasantry.

Romir Hiregaard was a fair ruler and a caring father, but he was an insanely jealous husband, flying into a rage if he merely imagined his wife with another man. When Tristen was ten, Romir caught his wife in the arms of another man. In the heat of passion he drew his sword and slew them both. Only later would he discover that the man had been a tutor teaching his wife a new waltz for an upcoming ball. With her dying words, Romir's wife cursed him. From that day on, he would kill any woman he loved and any man that crossed him.

Unable to bear his crimes, Romir soon took his own life, and his wife's powerful curse jumped to their son. The curse slept for the next five years, until Tristen first fell in love with a peasant girl who worked as a servant in his household. Tristen murdered the girl after their first kiss. Since young Tristen was the head of a prominent noble household, the crime was quickly hushed up, but it left Tristen badly shaken. Despite his honest and compassionate nature, and despite the remorse he felt afterward, in the heat of the moment he had *enjoyed* killing the girl. Unaware of the curse over his head, Tristen began to doubt his own sanity. By the time six years had passed, Tristen had murdered nine more women. Despondent, he chose to end his life as his father had done.

It was not to be. Before Tristen could kill himself, the Mists swept him into a new realm. It resembled his outlander homeland, but was subtly changed. It was a fresh start — it was the domain of Nova Vaasa. The Dark Powers granted independent life to Romir's curse, creating a murderous alter ego. Tristen's alter ego named itself "Malken" after the tavern where he chose his first victim.

Tristen was knighted by Prince Kethmar Bolshnik in 683 BC, and the two men soon became fast friends. Meanwhile, Malken gained a reputation as a sadistic "signature killer," prowling the alleys of Kantora and writing taunting messages to the authorities in his victims' blood. Sir Tristen became an officer in the Kantora city constabulary, heading the investigation to hunt down the killer. The cat-and-mouse games between these sworn foes would captivate Nova Vaasan gossip for decades to come. Even as Tristen tried new methods

of trapping the elusive killer, Malken expanded to new, more elaborate crimes.

In the nearly eight decades that have passed since Sir Tristen and Malken began their duel, Tristen served two terms as the Prince of Nova Vaasa, while Malken established a widespread criminal empire in Nova Vaasa's seedy slums. Tristen has been married and widowed twice. Malken murdered Tristen's first wife, Ailsa, and the son she bore him, Ivar. Tristen later wed Katya Chekiv, a loveless political marriage to strengthen their two households. Malken ignored Katya as much as Tristen did, and she bore him four sons. The eldest three, Yorgi, Sasha and Myar, are all middle-aged. Katya died in 748 BC giving birth to their fourth son, Mikhail.

In 729 BC, Kethmar Bolshnik died shortly after assuming another term of office. At Kethmar's dying request, Sir Tristen served as the young Prince Othmar's regent. However, when his five-year term elapsed and Tristen stepped down as regent, Prince Othmar refused to relinquish his title. Although Sir Tristen does not respect Othmar Bolshnik as a man, he feels that it is his duty as a noble to serve his prince, and thus he refuses to participate in the other families' continual machinations to remove Othmar from the throne. Malken admires Othmar's methods and knows enough of his secrets to render him highly vulnerable to blackmail, so the crime lord covertly supports Othmar's illegal regime whenever he can.

Ignoring politics as much as he can afford to, the aging Sir Tristen has spent most of the past twenty years once again focusing on the hunt for Malken. Malken too seems to be returning to his roots, stalking and killing the young women Sir Tristen romances.

Current Sketch

Sir Tristen has retired from his post as chief officer of the Kantora constabulary, but he remains a prominent political figure. As the Hiregaard patriarch, he controls and exacts tribute from the farmlands along the Vaughn Dnar River and the city of Liara, as well as the stone quarries of the Koshka Bluffs. Bound by strict codes of noble conduct and the edicts of the Church of the Lawgiver, Sir Tristen collects every copper of the taxes his peasants owe, though unlike most of the other families he never resorts to brutal collection methods. While some commoners hail Sir Tristen as a



champion of the people, others despise him for his support of the crushing Bolshnik regime.

Despite his passionless marriage to Katya, Sir Tristen has always been a ladies' man — even something of a womanizer, entertaining numerous trysts during his life. Although Sir Tristen treats his paramours as well as could be expected, Malken has always taken a particular delight in delivering a shuddering death to these women. Even the survivors of Malken's attention seldom escape without lasting scars.

Tristen has always suffered from the mad rages brought on by Romir's curse, but when a rage threatened to overtake him, he would have his guards lock him in a high tower in Castle Faerhaaven. Through this method, Tristen believed that he had been able to prevent tragedy for nearly 70 years. Roughly a decade ago, however, Sir Tristen finally made the horrifying discovery that he and his despised archenemy were one and the same. When the rages came, Sir Tristen would transform into Malken, who could then easily escape the castle to engage in his foul crimes. Sir Tristen has no memory of his time as Malken.

Malken is the true darklord of Nova Vaasa, not Sir Tristen. He despises having to share his body with his "weaker half" and maintains the impossible wish of ridding himself of his alter ego. In the meantime, he entertains himself by matching Tristen's life point for point: a crime for each honorable deed, a murder for each love. Malken knows that Tristen has started researching arcane methods of dispelling him, and he knows that Tristen is nowhere near success.

Combat

Sir Tristen is an experienced warrior, having spent most of his life as a knight in service to the Bolshnik line. He is as comfortable fighting on horseback as on foot. He is an honorable combatant, though he is not so naïve as to expect the same of his opponents.

Malken, of course, is entirely the opposite. When attacking a helpless victim, he prefers to strangle them with his bare hands (inflicting grapple damage). Against more worthy foes, he relies on poison and roguish trickery. If possible, Malken will send his underlings to test opponents' capabilities before facing them himself.

Special Qualities: *Ancestral Curse (Su)*: If Sir Tristen dies, the Malken curse will jump to his eldest son, Yorgi. This new "Malken" will adapt to

Yorgi's personality, and its first crime will likely be the murder of Yorgi's wife. Should Yorgi then die, the curse would be transferred to Sasha, then Myar, and then to little Mikhail. Should all of Sir Tristen's sons die, the curse will leap to the eldest of his grandsons. Only by slaying all of Sir Tristen's male descendants can Malken — and perhaps Romir — be finally laid to rest.

Fractured Soul (Su): When Tristen is overcome with jealousy, he involuntarily transforms into Malken as a full-round action within 3d6 rounds. Malken is identical to Tristen except in the following respects: class, alignment, hit points, attack bonuses, saving throws, skills, and feats. Malken transforms back into Tristen as a full-round action in 2d10 hours. Malken can also revert to Tristen at will, if he wishes. Tristen will also transform into Malken if he is overcome by hatred or rage, such as that caused by a *rage* spell. If Tristen is examined with *true seeing*, he appears as Malken; conversely, if Malken is examined, he appears as Tristen. When Tristen/Malken changes shape, he recovers damage as if he had rested for a day.

Lair

Sir Tristen and his family live in Castle Faerhaaven, their ancestral home. The castle is located a few hours' ride northwest of the city of Kantora.

Malken is reputed to possess a lair he mockingly calls "Darkhaaven." This maze of subterranean chambers is said to have no fixed location, appearing beneath any Nova Vaasan city at Malken's command. Likewise, the exact layout of Malken's sanctuary is said to adjust subtly to suit his moods. Darkhaaven rises to a rank two or three sinkhole of evil with numerous Taints when Malken is "entertaining guests," but since the lair exists only when Malken is active, it often slips back to rank one.

Closing the Borders

Unlike most darklords, Malken cannot seal his domain. The struggle within his soul prevents him from exerting his influence over the land.

Lady of the Lake, Darklord of Castle Island

Female sirine Bard 3: CR 9; Medium fey (aquatic) (5 ft. 5 in. tall); HD 4d6+3d6+28; hp 55; Init +4 (+6 with *+1 eager short sword*); Spd 30 ft., swim 60 ft.; AC 18, touch 18, flat-footed 14; BAB +4; Grap +5; Atk +9 melee (1d6+2/19–20, *+1 eager short sword*), or +8 melee touch (1d4 lnt damage, touch); SA spells, *charming song*, countersong, fascinate, Intelligence





damage, spell-like abilities; SQ bardic knowledge, bardic music, deflection, inspire competence, inspire courage +1, low-light vision, soothing touch; AL CE; SV Fort +3, Ref +11, Will +10; Str 13, Dex 18, Con 13, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 18.

Skills: Bluff +14, Concentration +8, Heal +10, Hide +14, Knowledge (nature) +6, Perform (dance) +19, Perform (sing) +22, Perform (wind instruments) +19, Spellcraft +6, Swim +8, Survival +10.

Feats: Combat Expertise, Dodge, Weapon Finesse.

Languages: Sylvan*, Aquan, Tepestani.

Bard Spells Known (cast per day: 3/2; save DC 14 + spell level): 0—*daze, ghost sound, lullaby, mending, read magic, resistance*; 1st—*cause fear, hypnotism, lesser confusion*.

Signature Possessions: +1 eager short sword, bracers of armor +1, ring of sustenance, 4 potions of cure light wounds. An eager weapon grants its bearer a +2 bonus to initiative, regardless if whether it is being wielded, and can be drawn as a free action (see the *Arms and Equipment Guide*, published by Wizards of the Coast).

The Lady of the Lake is a sirine (*Monster Manual II*), a nature spirit resembling a beautiful human woman. As an eternal and inconstant fey, however, she has no defined appearance and can alter her features however she likes. Long ago, in happier times, she usually appeared as a delicate woman of aristocratic bearing, with a slight green tinge to her skin and hair so blond as to be nearly silvery-white. As the prisoner of Castle Island, however, she expresses her inner torment by adopting greenish, kelp-like hair and the clammy, bluish-white skin of the recently drowned. Regardless of her form, her beauty is still evident through the anger and frustration that line her face. Her eyes are her only unchanging feature, always blue and flecked with gold. She wears an elegant gossamer gown.

Background

The history of the Lady of the Lake is wrapped in myth. Ages ago, a sirine spontaneously arose from the waters of a vast mountain lake. No one, not even the Lady herself, remembers what land that lake called home; the Lady herself believes that it was Tepest's distant past. For centuries, she served as the lake's guardian, watching aloofly as mortals flittered along her shores. The occasional mortal would seek her out to pay tribute, but for the most part they simply let her be.

The Avanc was a hermit seer who fished on the northern shore. Alone among mortals, the Avanc caught the Lady's eye, and they fell deeply in love. They were content in their solitude, and their joy only increased when the Lady revealed that she was with child.

One day, soon after, while the Lady was at the far end of her lake, an evil fey came to the Avanc, seeking guidance in the pursuit of some dreadful task. The Avanc insulted the dark spirit, saying that if the world held any justice, the fey would never achieve its goals. The vengeful fey direly cursed the Avanc, transforming him into a reptilian terror. The Lady was horrified when she found her lover, but she soon understood that his gentle spirit was intact, despite his monstrous form. She promised to restore the Avanc, somehow, someday.

In those days, the aristocratic Demnach clan lived on the Lady's lake, on an island just large enough to hold their tiny keep. Although the clan had dwindled over the generations, they were virtuous folk, best personified by the paladin Ione Demnach. In the months following the Avanc's transformation, Ione heard many tales of the "lake dragon" and eventually saw the scaly monster for himself. Mistakenly assuming the Avanc to be a brutal predator, Ione sought it out in shallow water. The Avanc could not communicate with Ione, and the paladin slew the beast.

The Lady of the Lake discovered her lover's remains at the bottom of her lake. She swore undying vengeance against the Demnachs, but she knew she could not defeat Ione alone. The Lady left her lake, seeking to empower her wrath. She wandered the forests until her feet bled, eventually encountering a covey of hags. She poured out her hatred in venomous song, beseeching the wicked crones for their aid and promising to lead many victims to them in return. The hags were amused and wove unspeakable spells over her.

The covey informed the Lady that she now carried the seeds of vengeance within her. The Lady's daughter would be a sorcerer of exceptional beauty and power, but she would burn through her entire lifetime within a short span. The girl, Katherine, was soon born and reached adulthood within a few years. Katherine sought out Ione and seduced him within Demnach Keep. Just as the Lady had planned, Ione's wife discovered them together and fled in shame. As she wept by the lakeside, the Lady appeared to her, offering to escort her to a faerie kingdom beneath the waves where her pain could not follow. The woman took the Lady's hand. Ione Demnach found his wife drowned the next day.

Katherine fled the keep as quickly as her youth and beauty were fleeing from her. She soon gave



birth to Ione's son, whom the Lady named Madchen. Madchen was a hulking, fish-like caliban, a feral brute who grew even as his mother waned. The Lady groomed him into a vessel of hatred. One year after Katherine had seduced Ione, the Lady sent her offspring to destroy the last Demnach and all within his home. Katherine, now aged and frail, was quickly felled by the guards' arrows, but Madchen proved oblivious to pain. He smashed through walls and tore guards apart. In the end, only Ione and Madchen remained. After a bitter duel, Madchen was slain and Ione was mortally wounded.

As Demnach lay dying, the Lady came in, sweetly promising to cure his wounds with a magic potion made from her lake's waters. Instead, it was the last of the hags' gifts. The potion would deny its drinker death, but it would neither cure wounds nor ease pain. After Ione drank, the Lady coldly promised to stay by his side forever — to keep him in eternal agony.

As the Lady sang to her victory, Ione closed his eyes and thought of his wife. The Mists rose to engulf the island. When they parted a moment later, the Lady's surroundings had drastically changed. Demnach Keep now lay in total ruin, obviously long-abandoned. Ione was little more than dry bones. The Lady's vengeance was forever denied, and she could never leave.

Current Sketch

The Lady of the Lake has now been trapped alone on Castle Island for fourteen years. She is plagued by boredom and consumed by rage and bitterness. Unable to torture Ione, she tries to sate her need for vengeance on anyone foolish enough to approach her prison. Goblin, human, hag, fey: all are subject to her wrath. The Lady understands little about the distant Tepestani she watches across the water, and they understand less about her.

Even worse, the Dark Powers have replaced the avanc. When the Lady's domain formed, another seer offended the shadow fey — this time, the Prince of Shadows himself — and was again direly cursed, transformed into a monster. Unlike the original Avanc, however, this beast is as monstrous in mind as it is in body. It feels no more love or pity for the Lady than it does for any prey, yet it never enters the waters of her domain, though it often patrols nearby. Should this avanc be slain, fate will conspire so that another man takes its place, and



then another. So long as the Lady of the Lake yet lives, an avanc will always prowl the waters of Lake Kronov. Only by destroying the Lady of the Lake can the curse be lifted and the current avanc's humanity restored.

Combat

Most foes hear the Lady of the Lake long before they reach the shores of her island. Few see her before they die. Unless she is certain that interlopers cannot harm her, the Lady remains invisible, using her enchanting voice to break her foes' morale or draw them under her power. She reveals herself only when her foes have been reduced to helpless simpletons, taunting and tormenting them. Thoroughly *charmed*, many of the Lady's victims gladly laud her even as she starves them to death. If pressed, the Lady falls back on her +1 *eager short sword*, the very sword wielded by Ione Demnach. Should battle turn against her, the Lady usually retreats to deep water or *polymorphs* herself into a gull to flee.

Special Attacks: *Charming Song (Sp)*: At will, the Lady can sing a blissful song that functions like a *charm person* spell (caster level 2nd; save DC 14), except that it lasts for 11 hours and affects every creature that hears it.



Intelligence Damage (Su): Any creature hit by the Lady's touch attack takes 1d4 points of Intelligence damage (or 2d4 points on a critical hit).

Spell-Like Abilities: 1/day—*fog cloud*, *improved invisibility*, *polymorph* (self only). Caster level 11th; save DC 14 + spell level. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Special Qualities: **Deflection (Su):** The Lady is surrounded by an invisible aura that grants her a +4 deflection bonus to AC.

Soothing Touch (Su): If she wishes, the Lady can use her touch to restore 1d6 points of Intelligence damage caused by any sirine.

Skills: The Lady receives a +8 racial bonus on Perform checks.

Lair

Castle Island is a tiny crest of rock rising from the choppy waves of Lake Kronov, supporting only a few struggling trees and the shattered remains of a small fortress. Once an elegantly appointed retreat, Demnach Keep now houses only the Lady and the skeletal remains of a few victims. Gulls and terns perch atop the walls, their cacophonous cries warning all to stay away. The Lady spends much of her time swimming through the cold, clear waters of Lake Kronov. Whenever she tries to swim farther than a quarter-mile from Castle Island, however, she immediately finds herself teleported back to the keep. She retreats to the keep whenever she wishes to hide or rest. Castle Island is usually a rank two sinkhole of evil with a despair Taint. When a charmed fisher follows the Lady's songs and wastes away, however, it may rise to rank three.

Closing the Borders

When the Lady wishes to seal her domain, she sings a sorrowful dirge. The Mists rise from the lake, swirling and contorting to confuse creatures attempting to escape. The Lady's siren song evokes all the hidden secrets and emotions within intelligent creatures attempting to cross the border. If they do not turn back, their frustrations and sorrows consume them; all such creatures automatically gain the Suicidal Thoughts madness effect. This madness effect cannot be removed until those affected return to Castle Island.

Loht, Prince of Shadows, the Crippled King

Male sith Aristocrat 4: CR 10; Medium fey (shadow fey) (6 ft. tall); HD 11d6+4d8; hp 58; Init -3; Spd 5 ft.; AC 12 (touch 12,

flat-footed 12); BAB +3, Grap +6; Atks +18 melee (1d8+7, crit 17-20/x2, *Sword of Arak*), or +10 ranged (1d8+2, +2 *light crossbow*); SA blinding speed, fear aura, spells, *disguise self* (3/day); SQ darkvision 120 ft., low-light vision, damage reduction 10/silver, immunity to fire and steel, luck, pain, shadow form, sunlight vulnerability, spell resistance 19; AL LE; SV Fort +6, Ref +7, Will +17; Str 17, Dex 5, Con 10, Int 18, Wis 14, Cha 21.

Skills: Bluff +16, Craft (alchemy) +10, Decipher Script +11, Diplomacy +16, Gather Information +13, Hide +10, Intimidate +18, Knowledge (arcana) +11, Knowledge (history) +10, Knowledge (the planes) +11, Knowledge (the Shadow Rift) +14, Listen +10, Move Silently +9, Read Lips +10, Ride +3, Sense Motive +14, Spellcraft +11, Spot +10, Use Magic Device +12.

Feats: Iron Will, Leadership, Negotiator, Persuasive, Silent Spell, Spell Focus (necromancy), Still Spell.

Languages: Arak*, Sylvan*, Balok, Darkonese, Mordentish, Tepestani.

Sorcerer Spells Known (cast per day: 6/8/7/7/7/5; save DC 14 + spell level, 15 + spell level for necromancy spells; caster level 12th): 0—*dancing lights*, *daze*, *detect magic*, *disrupt undead**, *ghost sound*, *mage hand*, *read magic*, *resistance*, *touch of fatigue**; 1st—*cause fear**, *charm person*, *chill touch**, *detect undead*, *ray of enfeeblement**; 2nd—*command undead**, *darkness*, *false life**, *ghoul touch**, *spectral hand**; 3rd—*arcane sight*, *halt undead**, *hold person*, *vampiric touch**; 4th—*animate dead**, *contagion**, *screaming*; 5th—*blight**, *symbol of pain**. * Necromancy spell

Signature Possessions: The *Sword of Arak*, +2 *light crossbow*, *cloak of resistance* +2, *ring of protection* +2.

Loht is a sith, a morbid and quiet breed of Arak. He stands 6 feet tall, with silver hair flowing to the center of his back, but his delicate bone structure and angular face make him seem taller and he weighs much less than one would expect. He dresses as a dandy from the Borcan courts of 50 years ago, wearing an embroidered black tunic, tied at the waist with a silver sash, and tight black leggings. A silver clasp secures a long, gray cloak, and a gray tricorne hat completes the outfit. All of his clothes, even the cape, are made of finest silk.

History

Loht and his sister Maeve are twins, the first children born after the ellefolk were transformed into shadow elves. Their father, Arak the Erlking, taught them much about power and leadership and instilled a fierce racial pride in Loht. Loht idolized his father, and when the time came he eagerly sought to prove himself by leading the exodus while Arak fought a rearguard action against Gwydion. Instead, he saw his father annihilated and was too shocked to close the Obsidian Gate and protect his people. He has castigated himself for this failing ever since. Considering himself unworthy to take the name of king, he became the



Prince of Shadows in the Arak's new home. His self-loathing may be another reason the Two Courts separated: he resents Maeve for having the strength to save their people when he did not, and he despises himself for being jealous of his sister and not living up to his father's name.

Loht's despair and hatred curdled inside him for centuries, finally coming to a head when the cult of the Spider Queen challenged his rule. After 500 years of brutal warfare and the deaths of innumerable changelings, he finally overcame Tristessa. With his second-in-command Jozell, he staked Tristessa and her deformed baby to the surface of Mount Lament and left her to die in sunlight. Jozell was blamed for the crime — the only time the Law of Arak, forbidding shadow fey to kill shadow fey, has ever been broken — and Loht retreated into a guilt-ridden, self-destructive shell.

Just after the Grand Conjunction and the creation of the Shadow Rift, Loht began hearing his father's voice in his dreams. Arak's voice told him that the Erlking was trapped within the Obsidian Gate, not dead, and that Loht was the key to his release. Filled with new purpose, the Prince undertook a great quest to reunite the *Regalia of Arak* and open the Obsidian Gate. With the help of a mysterious gentleman who revealed many of the secrets of Ravenloft to him, Loht eventually managed to wrest the *Sword of Arak* from Tristessa and tricked mortal adventurers into acquiring the *Crown of Arak* from Maeve. He energized the Unseelie Court and opened the Gate. Gwydion partially emerged, rewarding Loht by breaking every bone in his body, before the mortals trapped him once more. Loht, now called the Crippled King, was carried on a litter back to the Greenlands. Over the many decades that have followed, he has partially healed and plots to avenge himself.

Current Sketch

Loht is a tyrant, but not a monster. He is witty, intelligent, capable, experienced and a great leader. In many ways, he is an admirable figure. His quiet determination to destroy Gwydion and ensure the pride and freedom of the Arak has welded the Unseelie Court into a powerful force under circumstances that would have destroyed many other leaders. Finally understanding that he failed his father by not becoming the true leader of his people, he is determined to do so. Loht would sacrifice himself and every member of his Court if



it would ensure the rest of the Arak are free. He would even break the Law of Arak again.

However, Loht's methods are less admirable. He regards mortals with cold and distant cruelty; they mean nothing to him, except as cannon fodder and servants. He intends to build a vast army of changelings to destroy the Obsidian Gate, making him a considerable danger to the surface world. He has also instructed the arcanists of his Court to try to find ways of resisting Gwydion's control and of sealing the dimensional corridor if the Gate cannot be physically destroyed. Having been tricked by Gwydion before, he is now wary to the point of paranoia. More personally, Loht seeks to heal his shattered body so he can take the field against Gwydion again. He does not consider the cleansing of a transitory death an option; too much of himself would be washed away.

Combat

Loht is a dangerous opponent. His single-mindedness allows no opposition to his plans, and he crushes those who stand in his way. Unseelie fey would give their lives to protect him, and his bodyguards surround him. Although he dislikes combat and any physical activity causes great pain, he is terrifying once roused.



Special Attacks: *Fear Aura (Su)*: At will, Loht can project an aura of fear. Opponents within a 30-foot radius must make a successful DC 20 Will save or be stunned for 1 round. If a foe's saving throw is successful, she cannot be affected by his aura for one day.

Special Qualities: *Luck (Su)*: Loht enjoys a +3 luck bonus to AC and can re-roll a failed saving throw once per day.

Pain (Ex): Loht can perform intense physical activity (such as combat) for only 2 rounds before the pain of his injuries becomes too much, leaving him nauseated for 2d4 rounds. Although Gwydion inflicted this injury, it is actually Loht's curse for breaking the Law of Arak. No magic of any kind can properly heal his bones, ease his pain or restore his Dexterity.

Shadow Form (Su): Loht can assume the form of a non-magical shadow as a standard action. He can move and sense his surroundings in this form, but cannot make attacks. He prefers this form to his solid body, as it allows him to move freely (at a speed of 30 feet) and without pain. Unlike most sith, he can appear as the shadow of any creature he has ever touched. This is the Dark Powers' reward for his act of ultimate darkness.

Sunlight Vulnerability (Ex): Exposure to direct sunlight inflicts 2d4 points of damage per round (no saving throw). Shaded cover reduces this by 1 hp per round.

Maeve, the White Lady, faerie Queen

Female shiee Aristocrat 4: CR 10; Medium fey (shadow fey) (6 ft. tall); HD 11d6+4d8; hp 58; Init +7; Spd 30 ft.; AC 19, touch 19, flat-footed 16; BAB +3, Grap +2; Atk +12 melee (1d6+1/19–20, +2 rapier), or +16 ranged (1d6+1, +2 screaming composite shortbow [+1 Str bonus]); SA *charming kiss*, *alter self* (3/day; caster level 5th), *cursed arrows*, *enchanted weaponry*, *spells*; SQ *darkvision* 120 ft., *low-light vision*, *alternate form*, *damage reduction* 10/lead, *luck*, *immunity to cold and wood*, *sunlight vulnerability*, *spell resistance* 19; AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref +13, Will +15; Str 9, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 19, Wis 15, Cha 22.

Skills: Bluff +11, Diplomacy +14, Knowledge (arcana) +10, Knowledge (history) +10, Knowledge (nature) +21, Knowledge (the planes) +10, Knowledge (the Shadow Rift) +21, Perform +24, Ride +9, Sense Motive +15, Spellcraft +10, Spot +13, Use Magic Device +10.

Feats: Improved Initiative, Leadership, Muse, Negotiator, Skill Focus (Knowledge (fey lore), Knowledge (the Shadow Rift)), Spell Focus (enchantment).

Languages: Arak*, Sylvan*, Balok, Darkonese, Mordentish, Tepestani.

Bard Spells Known (cast per day: 3/5/5/4/2; save DC 16 + spell level, 17 + spell level for enchantment spells [each designated with an asterisk (*)]); caster level 11th): 0—*dancing lights*, *daze**, *detect magic*, *ghost sound*, *lullaby**, *read magic*; 1st—*charm person**, *cure light wounds*, *disguise self*, *sleep**; 2nd—*daze monster**, *detect thoughts*, *enthrall**, *suggestion**; 3rd—*deep slumber**, *dispel magic*, *lesser geas**, *scrying*; 4th—*cure critical wounds*, *dominate person**, *modify memory**.

Signature Possessions: +2 rapier, +2 screaming composite shortbow (+1 Str bonus) (as screaming bolts), ring of protection +2, ring of resistance +2 (as cloak).

Maeve is gracefully tall and slender, and her long pale hair hangs to her knees. Her skin is snow-white, and she only ever wears clothes of the finest white silk in the current Dementlieu fashions. The sole splashes of color are her large amber eyes, rosy lips, a sapphire torque and a blue satin sash that mark her as Faerie Queen, and the ornate black rapier she always carries. Although her face is very angular, she is stunningly, heartbreakingly, perilously beautiful.

History

Maeve's youth was spent on the Plane of Shadows under the tyranny of Gwydion's rule. Because she was the Erlking's daughter, she led a fairly privileged life and was tutored in the arts of rulership. She and her twin brother Loht were the only shadow fey who knew all the details of Arak's plan to escape, and when the exodus came, she led her people side-by-side with Loht.

Arak's death was heartbreaking for Maeve, but it transformed her outlook from that of a carefree adolescent (albeit one who was then 424 years old) into that of a determined adult. She ruled the Arak while they carved out a new home for themselves beneath the Mountains of Misery, during the first contact with the mortal races she found endlessly fascinating, and through Loht's struggles with the cult of the Spider Queen. Maeve brought the Seelie Court intact through the horrors of that war, but Gwydion's distant influence over the Unseelie Court ensured that her own followers gradually declined until, in 750 BC, she fled to the surface to avoid capture, hiding the *Crown of Arak* to prevent it falling into Loht's hands. For a time, she feared her brother had gone mad, never realizing the method behind his behavior. Maeve decided it would be politic to use outsiders to interfere with Loht's plan and allowed mortal adventurers to recover the *Crown*.

After Loht was crippled and the machinations of Gwydion revealed at the Obsidian Gate, the



Unseelie Court fell into eclipse and Maeve returned to the Gilded Throne in triumph. Since then, she has concentrated on rebuilding her powerbase and entertaining herself with mortals, while keeping one eye on the Unseelie Court and the other on the Darkenheights.

Current Sketch

Maeve's pale appearance is matched by a cold heart. Maeve cares nothing for the emotions of others; she does not even believe mortals *have* true emotions. When Maeve finds others attractive, be they mortal or fey, she entertains them for as long as they amuse her and then abandons them as blithely as she might leave the table when dinner is finished. She rarely uses her beauty as a weapon, but it is so great those around her obey her commands anyway, without gaining the least appreciation for doing so. Maeve is aloof, selfish, hedonistic and physically accessible while being emotionally unobtainable.

Despite her show of flightiness, Maeve is a canny judge of character and at least as effective a leader as Loht. She believes confronting Gwydion is foolishness, but has laid plans to lead her people to safety should he escape, and she watches her courtiers closely for Gwydion's agents. She mistrusts Loht; his paranoia and hatred of mortals are unappealing, and she suspects that he and his followers may again be influenced by Gwydion without realizing. She has banned the Unseelie from her court, inadvertently pushing many of the malevolent creatures out into the mortal realms above. Although she holds no ill will toward mortals, it would not disturb her to discover that the fleeting creatures have come to harm.

Another long-held suspicion nags Maeve — that Loht may have had more to do with Tristessa's death than was thought.

Combat

Like all shee, Maeve is reluctant to engage in combat. Should her bodyguards be overcome, she defends herself first through magic and then with weapons. She flees in bird form when closely pressed.

Special Attacks: *Charming Kiss* (Sp): Maeve's kiss causes *charm person*, as the spell cast by an 11th-level sorcerer. A DC 21 Will save negates.

Cursed Arrows (Su): Maeve's arrows cause *doom* (as the spell cast by an 11th-level sorcerer) when they strike their victims, as well as their other



effects. A DC 17 Will save negates. This effect is a function of Maeve's, not of the arrows themselves.

Special Qualities: *Alternate Form* (Su): Maeve can assume the form of a swan for up to 12 hours a day. She can change at will, as a standard action, remaining in bird form for up to a total of 12 hours in a 24-hour period.

Luck (Su): Maeve enjoys a +3 luck bonus to AC and may re-roll a failed saving throw once per day.

Sunlight Vulnerability (Ex): Exposure to direct sunlight inflicts 2d4 points of damage per round (no saving throw) to Maeve. Filtered light, such as through thick clothing, reduces the damage by -1 per round, to a minimum of 1 point per round.

The Three Hags, Darklords of Tepest

Laveeda Mindefish

Female annis Sorcerer 6: CR 13; Large monstrous humanoid (8 ft. 3 in. tall); HD 7d8+6d4+65; hp 127; Init +4; Spd 30 ft.; AC 28, touch 15, flat-footed 24; BAB +12; Grap +19; Atk +19 melee (1d6+7, claw); Full Atk +19 melee (1d6+7, 2 claws) and +14 melee (1d6+3, bite), or +16 ranged (spells); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA spells, hideous, improved grab, mimicry, rake 1d6+7, rend 2d6+10, spell-like abilities; SQ darkvision 60 ft., cauldron of life, change shape, damage reduction 2/blud-



geoning, dread familiar (owl), enemy of light, keen scent, spell resistance 19, telepathy; AL CE; SV Fort +12, Ref +11, Will +13; Str 25, Dex 18, Con 21, Int 16, Wis 17, Cha 18. OR 8.
Skills: Bluff +7, Concentration +10, Craft (leatherworking) +4, Diplomacy +9, Disguise +7 (+9 acting), Hide +9, Intimidate +8, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Knowledge (nature) +5, Listen +10, Move Silently +7, Sense Motive +6, Spellcraft +7, Spot +10 (+13 in shadows), Survival +7.
Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Craft Wondrous Item.

Languages: Tepestani*, Draconic, Goblin, Sylvan.

Sorcerer Spells Known (cast per day: 6/7/6/4; save DC 14 + spell level): 0—*daze, detect magic, detect poison, mage hand, mending, prestidigitation, read magic*; 1st—*cause fear, enlarge person, shield, unseen servant*; 2nd—*glitterdust, summon swarm*; 3rd—*lightning bolt*.

Signature Possessions: *Bracelets of armor +3 (as bracers), ring of protection +2, shawl of Charisma +2 (as cloak), hag eye, oil of levitate, 3 potions of protection against good, lesser rod of metamagic (Empower), wand of summon swarm.*

Leticia Mindefisk

Female sea hag Sorcerer 10: CR 15; Medium monstrous humanoid (4 ft. 9 in. tall); HD 3d8+10d4+68; hp 122; Init +4; Spd 30 ft., swim 40 ft.; AC 22, touch 16, flat-footed 18; BAB +8; Grap +12; Atk +12 melee (1d4+4, claw); Full Atk +12 melee (1d4+4, 2 claws), or +12 ranged (spells); SA spells, evil eye, hideous, horrific appearance, mimicry, spell-like abilities; SQ darkvision 90 ft., amphibious, cauldron of life, change shape, dread familiar (toad), enemy of light, spell resistance 14, telepathy; AL CE; SV Fort +11, Ref +10, Will +12; Str 19, Dex 18, Con 20, Int 12, Wis 15, Cha 16. OR 7.

Skills: Bluff +5, Concentration +9, Disguise +5, Hide +8, Knowledge (arcana) +11, Knowledge (local) +5, Listen +8, Sense Motive +4, Spellcraft +5, Spot +8, Survival +5, Swim +6.

Feats: Alertness, Brew Potion, Craft Wand, Craft Wondrous Item, Scribe Scroll.

Languages: Tepestani*, Sylvan.

Sorcerer Spells Known (cast per day: 6/7/7/7/5/3; save DC 13 + spell level): 0—*arcane mark, detect magic, disrupt undead, open/close, prestidigitation, ray of frost, read magic, resistance, touch of fatigue*; 1st—*chill touch, identify, obscuring mist, reduce person, sleep*; 2nd—*black blood frenzy, blindness/deafness, darkness, eagle's splendor*; 3rd—*dispel magic, sleet storm, slow*; 4th—*bestow curse, ice storm*; 5th—*baleful polymorph*.

Signature Possessions: *Bracelets of armor +3 (as bracers), ring of protection +2, shawl of Charisma +2 (as cloak), bag of holding type 1, hag eye, 2 potions of magic fang, scroll of see invisibility, wand of slow.*

Lorinda Mindefisk

Female green hag Sorcerer 4: CR 10; Medium monstrous humanoid (5 ft. 5 in. tall); HD 9d8+4d4+65; hp 131; Init +4; Spd 30 ft., swim 30 ft.; AC 21, touch 10, flat-footed 20; BAB +11; Grap +16; Atk +16 melee (1d4+5, claw); Full Atk +16 melee (1d4+5, 2 claws), or +15 ranged (spells); SA spells, hideous, mimicry, spell-like abilities, weakness; SQ darkvision

60 ft., cauldron of life, change shape, dread familiar (snake), enemy of light, mimicry, spell resistance 18, telepathy; AL CE; SV Fort +13, Ref +11, Will +15; Str 21, Dex 18, Con 18, Int 16, Wis 20, Cha 17. OR 7.

Skills: Bluff +9, Concentration +8, Disguise +6, Heal +9, Hide +14, Knowledge (arcana) +9, Knowledge (nature) +8, Listen +12, Move Silently +7, Sense Motive +7, Spellcraft +11, Spot +12, Survival +6, Swim +10.

Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Great Fortitude.

Languages: Tepestani*, Draconic, Goblin, Sylvan.

Sorcerer Spells Known (cast per day: 6/7/7/4; save DC 13 + spell level): 0—*acid splash, dancing lights, detect magic, flare, message, read magic*; 1st—*charm person, silent image, summon monster I*; 2nd—*hypnotic pattern*.

Signature Possessions: *Bracelets of armor +3 (as bracers), ring of counterspells, ring of mind shielding, ring of protection +1, shawl of Charisma +2 (as cloak), hag eye, hand of glory.*

The sisters Mindefisk can take any form. No shape ever really pleases them, however, for they always see themselves as they truly are: monstrously hideous, wretched crones. These hags have twisted backs with jutting spines; sagging, warty skin; pointed noses; sharp black fangs; and long curving talons that are as hard as iron. They wear patchwork clothing stolen (or made) from their victims. The Three Sisters were beautiful in their youth, and their current ugliness torments them.

The eldest sister, Leticia, became a sea hag and is the most grotesque of the three. Open sores on her yellow skin ooze white fluid. Her eyes have red irises surrounding large black pupils, and she weeps yellow-green tears. Her face is distorted by bony protrusions, and her hair resembles rotting seaweed. Her physique is particularly withered and twisted, and she waddles like a bloated frog.

The middle sister, Laveeda, became an annis. Standing over 8 feet tall even with her hunched back, she towers above her sisters. Her shiny, mottled skin is as hard as iron and has the blue-black color of bruises. Baggy pouches of flesh hang from her lanky frame. Her fangs are too large for her mouth, leaving ropy strands of drool to dangle from her gaping maw. Her eyes are small and black, as are her tears.

The youngest sister, Lorinda, became a green hag. She has the pebbly greenish-brown skin of a toad. Her knotted black hair resembles a tangle of vines, but is greasy to the touch. Her large, bright orange eyes have reptilian slits for pupils. She weeps tears the color of blood.



Background

The hags' tale begins with Holger and Rudella Mindefisk, peasant farmers who worked a desolate patch of ground on a distant outlander world. Rudella was a superstitious and desperately lonely woman; both her husband and their two sons were gruff and surly and spent most of their time hunting or working the fields. The occasional traveler would spend a night in their barn, but this offered Rudella little respite. When Rudella expressed her desire for daughters, Holger swore that he would quit their wedding bed before adding such "weaklings" to his family.

One night, as the menfolk slept, Rudella knelt by the embers of the cooking fire and ardently prayed to the fairies for daughters, for she believed that they had many powers. She repeated her plea for three nights, and something heard her. The next morning, Rudella found three infant girls in a wicker basket on her doorstep. The girls were sickly at first, and Rudella dedicated herself to their care, much to Holger's disdain. As the girls flourished under their adoptive mother's care, Rudella's own health waned. She died two years later, somehow drained of her vitality.

After his wife's death, Holger tried repeatedly to rid himself of his unwanted daughters, often leaving them in the woods for the wolves. Once, he even tied them in sacks and threw them in the river. The girls always returned, however, and Holger eventually resigned himself to the fact that he would never be rid of them. Holger demanded that the sisters clean the house and prepare meals, but otherwise, he and his sons ignored them.

Over time, the girls grew into ravishing young women, each more beautiful than the next. Left to their own devices, they often plotted how they would one day leave their pathetic little farm behind and obtain lives of luxury. What began as daydreams soon twisted into dark desire.

One day, a wealthy traveler spent the night at the Mindefisk farm. The girls saw his purse when he paid their father a gold coin for his hospitality, and they knew their moment had arrived. While Holger and his sons were out performing chores, the girls worked together to murder the stranger. Rather than bother with burying the corpse, they cooked it into stew and served it to the unsuspecting menfolk. The plan proved so effective that the sisters continued the practice for several years, slowly drawing the attention of the Dark Powers.



Eventually, the girls realized that they would never make enough money this way, so they each came to the independent decision to seduce the next traveler and entice him to take her away to exotic lands. Before long, a roguish dandy came along. He sensed the girls' motives, but he had no intention of taking any of them anywhere. Instead, the rake merely played to their expectations, enjoying their favors while the girls drove each other mad with jealousy. Ultimately, each girl decided that she would rather kill the man than see one of her sisters leave with him. And so they did. As the Mindefisk sisters murdered the gigolo, the Mists descended on their farm. The girls became hideous hags and the darklords of the new domain of Tepest.

Current Sketch

The hags are reclusive creatures, better known to the goblins of Tepest than to any human denizens. Indeed, the carnivorous goblins that roam Tepest's woods are often blamed for the hags' predations. The hags have been responsible for the disappearance of many natives and travelers in the decades since Tepest appeared, for they have become masters of cannibalistic cuisine. The hags use their magic and trickery to lure victims out to their cabin for dinner. Since the establishment of the



Tepestani Inquisition, the hags have also bewitched many a man or woman into becoming quislings so they could later harvest the corpses of the condemned for material components.

Cautious and capable folk can occasionally bargain with the hags, who are capable of creating many exotic magic trinkets and talismans. The hags are unpredictable, however, and even if they elect not to devour their visitor, they often demand strange and bloody payments for their services.

The hags hate youth and beauty above all else and are deeply jealous of anyone in love. They often punish those who possess these traits simply for their own malicious satisfaction. The hags' favorite ploy is to kidnap a pretty young bride, assuming her form to seduce the handsome young groom before slaughtering them both. On the other hand, riddles and puzzles delight the hags. A cornered opponent can keep the hags at bay for hours by entertaining them with clever word games.

Combat

The three sisters share a ravenous appetite, though they eat for pleasure more than for survival. Each hag can devour the body of a Medium creature in 10 minutes (60 full-round actions), using her fangs and talons to strip flesh from bone. She can devour a Large creature in 240 rounds, a Small creature in 15 rounds, a Tiny creature in 4 rounds, or a Diminutive creature in 1 round.

Although the hags are physically powerful, they prefer to terrorize victims through spells and deceit. Each sister is a formidable opponent in her own right, but their power increases when they work together.

Laveeda:

Special Attacks: *Spell-Like Abilities:* 3/day—*disguise self*. Caster level 14th. Save DC 14 + spell level.

Special Qualities: *Keen Scent (Ex):* Laveeda can detect the presence of any humanoid within half a mile by scent, regardless of wind direction. She can even discern the humanoid's type (e.g., human, goblinoid, and so forth). Otherwise, this ability is identical to the scent ability. If Laveeda has detected a particular individual before, she automatically recognizes its personal scent.

Leticia:

Special Attacks: *Evil Eye (Su):* The save DC to resist the effects of Leticia's evil eye is 18. Creatures that survive but are dazed remain dazed for 6 days.

Horrific Appearance (Su): The save DC to withstand Leticia's horrific appearance is 18.

Spell-Like Abilities: 3/day—*disguise self*, *fog cloud*. Caster level 13th. Save DC 13 + spell level.

Lorinda:

Special Attacks: *Weakness (Su):* The save DC to resist Lorinda's weakness touch attack is 19.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will—*dancing lights*, *disguise self*, *water breathing*. Caster level 13th. Save DC 13 + spell level.

Abilities Common to All Three Hags:

Special Attacks: *The Covey:* The save DC for the sisters' covey spell-like abilities is 15 + spell level; caster level 12th. The sisters can use these abilities regardless of their distance from one another, though all three must participate.

When the Three Hags are all within 10 feet of one another, they share their known sorcerer spells. For example, Laveeda could use one of her own daily spell slots to cast *dancing lights*, a spell known only by Lorinda.

Hideous (Ex): If any of the sisters looks at her reflection in a mirror (regardless of her current form), she sees her true form and the mirror instantly cracks beyond repair. This is a gaze attack with a range of 30 feet, which the hags cannot suppress. Nonmagic mirrors receive no saving throw. Attended magic mirrors receive a saving throw as the character; mirrors with a "moderate" magic aura receive a +2 bonus to the save, and those with a "strong" aura receive a +4 bonus. Artifacts are immune. The DC of this save is 10 + 1/2 the hag's HD + the hag's OR modifier.

Spell-Like Abilities: At will—*fog cloud*, *ghost sound*, *invisibility*, *pass without trace*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *speak with animals*, *speak with plants*, *tongues*. Each hag uses these shared spell-like abilities at the caster level listed above.

Special Qualities: *Cauldron of Life (Su):* If one of the Three Hags is slain, either of her surviving sisters can restore her to life by retrieving her corpse, placing it in the voluminous iron cauldron they keep in a clearing near their cottage and boiling the body in a special mixture of loathsome ingredients for 24 hours; the surviving sisters must also expend a total of 200 XP (often dividing it between them). If the process is uninterrupted, the slain hag emerges alive and well from the bubbling slime. If the process is interrupted, the hags must begin the process anew.



Dread Familiars: The hags' familiars have been warped by their corruptive auras; apply the goblin beast template to Laveeda's owl, Leticia's toad, and Lorinda's viper, respectively. These malignant wretches have no names.

Enemy of Light (Ex): The sisters' change shape ability and spell-like abilities are automatically suppressed in direct sunlight. The hags suffer 1 point of damage for each 10 full minutes they are exposed to direct sunlight.

Mimicry (Ex): All three sisters share the mimicry ability common to green hags. In addition, they can imitate the voices of specific individuals they have heard. This gives the hags a +4 circumstance bonus to Bluff and Disguise checks when using their mimicry to deceive allies of the person they are imitating. A hag must make a Will save (DC 13 + number of previous minutes spent speaking) each minute she imitates an individual's voice. If the hag fails this save, she cackles uncontrollably in a hideous voice, giving herself away.

Change Shape (Su): The sisters can change shape at will as a standard action, assuming the form of any Medium or Large humanoid or monstrous humanoid. They can remain in any form as long as they want (but see enemy of light, above) and can imitate specific individuals they have observed, but they always see each other in their true forms. The hags typically kidnap victims they opt to replace, subjecting the hapless soul to grueling physical examinations to ensure that no distinguishing marks are overlooked.

Telepathy (Su): The sisters can communicate with one another telepathically over any distance as a free action. While one hag assumes the role of a Tepestani, the other two Mindefisks typically interrogate the kidnapped victim, mentally relaying the victim's answers to their sister.

Lair

The Three Hags reside in a crude and cramped cottage at the heart of the Wormwood forest. A cauldron is always kept bubbling on the hearth fire, unspeakable ingredients roiling within. The hags have nailed grisly trophies from many of their victims on the walls, including the tanned skins of countless types of creatures. The ground outside the hags' cottage is littered with gnawed and broken humanoid bones, both human and goblin. The cabin is usually a rank three sinkhole of evil, but when the covey gathers to perform powerful rituals, the rank can occasionally rise to four.

Closing the Borders

When the hags wish to seal their domain, a fierce storm whips up at Tepest's borders. The winds cause all creatures of all sizes to be blown away (no saving throw; see Table 3–24 in the DMG), rolling or blowing them back from whence they came, either back into or out of Tepest. Creatures that somehow manage to resist the winds still face being battered by hail (inflicting 1 point of damage per round, no save) or incinerated by lightning (1 bolt per minute, each dealing 1d8 x 1d10 points of electricity damage, Reflex DC 20 save for half).

Tristessa, the Queen of Black Tears, Darklord of Keening

Female sith widderrìbhinn, Cleric 4 (Spider Queen)/Zelldrow 6: CR 18; Medium undead (incorporeal) (6 ft. 1 in. tall); HD 17d12; hp 163; Init +9; Spd fly 30 ft. (perfect); AC 21, touch 21, flat-footed 18; BAB +10; Grap +10; Atk +13 melee (1d6, incorporeal touch); Full Atk +13 melee (1d6, incorporeal touch); SA blinding speed, fear aura, rebuke undead, spells, spell-like abilities, spontaneous casting, unnatural aura, unnerving gaze (DC 22), poison use, wail; SQ darkvision 120 ft., low-light vision, aura, damage reduction 10/silver, luck, immunity to fire and steel, *disguise self* (3/day, caster level 5th), poison resistance (+2 saves vs. poison, immunity to vermin poison), spider climb (3/day, caster level 6th), incorporeal traits, invisibility, queen of the dead, shadow form, sunlight vulnerability, +7 turn resistance, spell resistance 21, undead traits; AL CE; SV Fort +11, Ref +8, Will +14; Str —, Dex 17, Con —, Int 20, Wis 17, Cha 18.

Skills: Bluff +11, Concentration +11, Craft (alchemy) +10, Decipher Script +10, Escape Artist +10, Hide +23, Intimidate +11, Knowledge (arcana) +11, Knowledge (local) +10, Knowledge (religion) +11, Listen +19, Move Silently +15, Search +18, Spellcraft +11, Spot +19.

Feats: Dodge, Improved Initiative, Jaded^B, Mobility, Spell Focus (necromancy), Spell Penetration, Weapon Finesse.

Languages: Abyssal, Arak*, Draconic, Drow, Elven, Sylvan, Undercommon.

Cleric Spells per Day: 6/5+1/5+1/4+1/3+1/2+1; save DC 13 + spell level. **Deity:** Spider Queen. **Domains:** Evil (cast Evil spells at +1 caster level); Trickery (Bluff, Disguise and Hide are class skills).

Signature Possessions: None. Tristessa was stripped of possessions before her execution.

Tristessa, best known simply as the Banshee of Mt. Lament, is the oldest and most powerful widderrìbhinn in the Land of Mists. Her appearance is that of a translucent and twisted shadow fey, although an outlander would no doubt take her for an undead drow at first sight. She is a slim, graceful humanoid woman just over 6 feet tall, with pitch black skin that glitters like an evening sky. She has



pointed ears and angular features, more pronounced than those of an elf, suggesting an otherworldly heritage. Her eyes and fingernails are both midnight blue. Her wild, long hair is white as bone and writhes as though she were underwater. Her robes of black trimmed with deep red and violet likewise drift about her on ghostly currents.

Tristessa's face is a mask of sorrow, her features twisted in agony. Spectral tears stream down her cheeks, and she wails and sobs continually. She clutches an empty bundle of bloody white cloth to her breast, at times rocking it gently or cooing and muttering to it as though it were a child. Tristessa rarely speaks to the living, and when she does so she is likely to shriek in Arak, heedless of whether she is understood.

Background

In life, Tristessa was a shadow fey, a sith maiden of exquisite beauty and boundless cruelty. In the sixth century BC, she dwelled with her shadow fey kin deep beneath the surface of Arak. When outlander drow brought the worship of the Spider Queen to Arak in 577, Tristessa was among the first and most zealous of the cult's adherents. Driven by ambition and a wicked nature that reflected the Spider Queen herself, Tristessa quickly rose to prominence in the cult and eventually became its high priestess.

The Spider Queen's followers advocated decadence and deviance that even the Unseelie Court of the Arak found repugnant. Adherents flouted Arak law, and their forms twisted until they resembled drow. Loht, the Prince of Shadows and ruler of the Unseelie Court, felt threatened by the cult's waxing power. He began a campaign to suppress worship of the Spider Queen, but he met fanatical resistance. Tristessa led the cult in a protracted and bitter struggle against the Unseelie Court. Though countless servitor creatures perished and unrest consumed the realm, both factions abided by the Law of Arak and refrained from spilling a drop of shadow fey blood.

While the conflict raged, Tristessa found herself with child. Since she permitted no male to touch her, she suspected her own blasphemous dealings with fiends were responsible for the pregnancy. The child was born an abomination, a twisted fey with arachnid deformities. Although her fellow cultists reviled the child as a sign of the Spider Queen's disfavor, Tristessa felt nothing but affection for her babe. Maternal love and compas-

sion blossomed in her cold heart, and she clung blindly to the child in defiance of her faith.

In 588 BC, shortly after the birth of Tristessa's child, the Unseelie Court dealt the Spider Queen's cult a crushing and final defeat. To mark his victory, Loht committed the gravest sin known among the shadow fey. In violation of the Law of Arak, he ordered that Tristessa and her deformed child be staked to the slopes of Mount Lament, so that the rising sun would consume them.

Tristessa and her child died in agony, their flesh boiling away in the first rays of dawn. With the pitiful screams of her child ringing in her ears, Tristessa's own screams became a dying curse. From her words a burning sandstorm was born, and it swept across the surface of Arak, scouring away every trace of life. This cataclysm, which history remembers as the Scourge of Arak, marked the emergence of Keening. Tristessa rose as its undead queen, and the Mists wrenched Mount Lament to its own domain.

Current Sketch

Her own death and the loss of her child have plunged Tristessa into madness. Her memory of her past and fate is unreliable, and she seems to exist in a fluctuating fugue. Her most persistent delusion is that her child is still alive, and either she has lost it through her own carelessness or it has been taken by her traitorous kin. Despite her dementia, Tristessa is far from a helpless madwoman. Her spirit still harbors a spark of the wicked, ambitious priestess she once was, and she revels in terror, deceit and strife.

Tristessa was the first widderrìbhinn in Ravenloft, and since Keening's formation undead fey have appeared in growing numbers. When they rise into undeath, widderrìbhinn are compelled to travel toward Keening. Once they reach the temple of the Spider Queen deep beneath Mount Lament, they are bound to serve Tristessa. Despite the swelling host of widderrìbhinn that gathers around her, Tristessa is only vaguely aware of these minions. When she acknowledges them at all, she commands them as though they were her acolytes, demanding that they recover her child and destroy her foes.

Though the widderrìbhinn are wild and capricious creatures, they obey Tristessa unflinchingly. Many emulate her devotion to the Spider Queen, although there are no clerics among them. Widderrìbhinn believe that they have been cursed



unjustly, and that should Tristessa be redeemed and returned to the living world, they will as well. To that end, they search Keening and the surrounding realms ceaselessly for any trace or rumor of her child, unaware themselves that their task is futile. They also search Keening for living trespassers and gleefully slay any Arak they encounter elsewhere. Given Tristessa's own muddled recollection of the past, the widderríbhinn often pursue conflicting schemes that make no sense to a mortal mind. The undead court beneath Mount Lament has begun to resemble that of a mad queen and her hopelessly devoted courtiers.

Living creatures can buy safe passage through Keening for 2d8 days by offering Tristessa a living humanoid child less than one year old. On the first night that a party spends in Keening, they must offer the child to the first widderríbhinn they encounter. The undead use telekinesis to bring the child before Tristessa beneath Mount Lament, assuming it is not Tristessa herself who confronts the party. This surrogate child only placates Tristessa for a time, however. Her fleeting joy turns to rage when the child perishes from her undead caresses.



Combat

Tristessa responds erratically to the presence of living creatures. She often asks about the whereabouts of her child, rambling and periodically bursting into fits of sobs. However, any encounter with Tristessa almost always ends in hostility, as she inevitably attacks out of confusion, rage or frustration. She is ruthless and frenzied in battle, concerned only with destroying everything in her sight.

Special Attacks: Saving throws against Tristessa's supernatural abilities have a DC of 22.

Spells: As a sith, Tristessa casts necromancy spells as a 6th-level wizard (save DC 15 + spell level, 16 + spell level for necromancy spells). See *Van Richten's Guide to the Shadow Fey*, "DM's Appendix," *The Breeds*.

Spell-Like Abilities: 1/day—*dancing lights*, *darkness*, *faerie fire*. Save DC 14 + spell level; caster level 17th.

Wail (Su): By night, Tristessa can unleash a lethal wail. This attack can slay up to ten living creatures within a 30-foot spread centered on Tristessa, or within a 60-foot cone extending from her, at her option. A successful Fortitude save negates the effect. Tristessa can wail once per day.

Special Qualities: *Queen of the Dead (Ex):* Any widderríbhinn that enters the temple of the Spider Queen under Mount Lament falls under Tristessa's sway forever. The creature obeys Tristessa's commands without fail and may never willingly take an action that would harm or betray her.

Shadow Form (Su): Tristessa's shadow form ability simply grants her a +4 circumstance bonus on Hide checks in areas of shadow and a -4 circumstance penalty on Hide checks in brightly lit areas.

Sunlight Vulnerability (Ex): Tristessa takes 1d6 points of damage each round she is exposed to direct sunlight. An overcast sky, cover or concealment reduces this damage by 1 point per round (minimum 1). Total cover negates this damage.

Cair

Tristessa is free to roam anywhere in Keening, but she usually lingers near Mount Lament, either on the mountain slopes or in the old mines and shadow fey warrens below. She usually wanders alone in her sorrow, though the widderríbhinn stand ready to defend their mistress at a moment's notice. Tristessa is often found in the temple of the Spider Queen, a cavernous chamber beneath Mount Lament where the widderríbhinn still venerate



their heathen goddess. On this unholy ground is a pit of horrors, where the zombies of dozens of infants wail and scabble like damned souls. These are the surrogate children of Tristessa, brought before her by her minions, slain by her corrupting touch, and then discarded in frustration like so much refuse. Due to the pall of sorrow and blasphemous devotion that hangs over it, the temple and its surrounding tunnels are a rank three sinkhole of evil.

Closing the Borders

When Tristessa wishes to seal her domain, a savage, moaning wind arises around the borders of Keening. The winds cause all creatures of all sizes to be blown away (no saving throw), forcing them either back into or back out of Keening. (See “Wilderness Adventures” in Chapter 3 of the DMG.)

Wyan of Viktal

Male human Cleric 5 (Belenus)/Tepestani Inquisitor 2: CR 7; Medium humanoid (human) (5 ft. 10 in. tall); HD 7d8+8; hp 42; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 11, touch 10, flat-footed 11; BAB +4; Grap +4; Atk +5 melee (1d6, masterwork cold iron sickle), or +4 ranged (spells); SA spells, turning (undead, fey); SQ resolute +1, detect feycraft; AL CG; SV Fort +8, Ref +1, Will +13; Str 11, Dex 11, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 19, Cha 16.

Skills: Concentration +6, Diplomacy +12, Gather Information +10, Heal +10, Knowledge (nature) +6, Knowledge (religion) +10, Search +4, Sense Motive +11, Spellcraft +4.

Feats: Investigator, Iron Will, Negotiator.

Languages: Tepestani*, Vaasi.

Cleric Spells per Day: 6/5+1/4+1/3+1/2+1; save DC 13 + spell level. **Deity:** Belenus. **Domains:** Good (cast good spells at +1 caster level); Sun (greater turning 1/day).

Signature Possessions: Masterwork cold iron sickle, quarterstaff, *bracers of armor* +1, iron holy symbol, 4 vials of holy water, healer’s kit, prayer book, five sets of masterwork cold iron manacles.

Wyan of Viktal is aging before his time. His gaunt face and wiry build make him appear a decade older than his 55 years. Prematurely snow-white hair curls out from under his black skullcap. Wyan sports a long, thick moustache and goatee, both of which are groomed into neat, stiff points. His eyes are deeply lined, gazing out upon all they see with rapt attention and deep suspicion. Wyan is seldom seen out of his ceremonial vestments, a black partial cape worn over a plain white robe. He habitually clutches a large book to his chest when appearing in public; although the tome is usually his book of prayers, he replaces it with official Inquisition ledgers when officiating over trials.

Wyan exudes an aura of unyielding confidence in himself and his clergy, but this façade has been known to crack. When Wyan is given reasons to doubt himself, he lapses into long, contemplative silences.

Background

Wyan was born just outside Viktal in 703 BC, the son of a logger. He was an inquisitive but reserved child; whenever he was puzzled, he preferred to remain silent and watch until an answer presented itself rather than ask questions. His upbringing was rustic and unremarkable, perhaps because young Wyan heeded all of the cautionary tales of faeries, witches and wee beasties his mother told him at the hearth.

At the age of sixteen, Wyan took up his father’s axe. He prospered as a logger and gained a confident swagger in his step; two years later, he gained a wife, Dympna. Just a year later, Wyan returned to his rural cottage at the end of a long day to discover that goblins had hacked a hole though the roof. Everything of value had been carted away, and all that remained of Dympna was a trail of drying blood where something had been dragged into the woods. Wyan surrendered his pursuit when he reached the first of the bones.

It was a quieter, more pensive Wyan who moved into the heart of Viktal and threw himself into a new trade: fishing on Lake Kronov. Over the next eight years, he slowly put his grief behind him, developing a contemplative, spiritual side in the process. After all, he was hardly the only Tepestani to have lost a loved one to the dark spirits of the woods. In 730 BC, Wyan entered the clergy and soon married his second wife, Muirne. Their daughter Lorelei was born three years later, but when Muirne bore a second child in 737 BC, both she and the child died during labor. It was later accepted that the child’s monstrous deformities caused the complications. This fresh sorrow hardened Wyan’s eyes, and his hair soon showed its first hints of grey. Some folk noted that Wyan now led the annual goblin sacrifice with a certain grim satisfaction, but whatever torment roiled within him, he kept to himself. He continued to focus on tending to his young daughter and his flock in Viktal.

In the summer of 740 BC, the neighboring domains of G’Henna and Markovia were rudely replaced by the Shadow Rift. For Wyan, this event was the final straw — an act of war. Throughout his entire life — and if tales were true, throughout time



immemorial — evil fey had plagued mortals for their own pleasure, stealing one innocent life at a time. Now, so Wyan presumed, the fey had used their strange, primeval magic to steal entire countries at once: their malice had grown insatiable. Wyan would no longer grit his teeth and bear these injustices; he would no longer remain stoically silent as his kinsfolk fooled themselves into believing that hiding in their homes could keep them safe. To save Tepest itself, the Tepestani needed to lay siege to the fey.

Wyan rapidly put his plans in motion. By the end of the year, Wyan had organized the clergy in Viktal's temple into a neophyte Inquisition, dedicated to rooting the sickness of the fey and their magic out of Tepest and its goodly people. Within a decade, Wyan's Inquisition was present throughout Tepest's villages, though it controlled few settlements as securely as it controlled Viktal. The Tepestani Inquisition put dozens of fey and fell creatures to death, and its reputation spread well beyond Tepest's borders. Not all rumors were kind, however, and a few reached Wyan's ear. Tales were spreading that Tepest's Inquisitors were all too zealous in their goals and that at least a dozen innocents had been caught in the Inquisition's net. These rumors gnawed at the back of Wyan's mind. He could not be present at *every* trial, after all, and a few of the records he reviewed *did* hint at disturbing trends: quislings convicted on nothing but gossip; forced confessions that contradicted known facts; Inquisitors arguing over the details of old folktales. Wyan dismissed his concerns, however. He recognized that his Inquisition was not perfect, but surely it had done much more good than bad.

In 751 BC, the fey struck at Wyan's heart once more. Lorelei was now eighteen. Her renowned beauty had drawn suitors from as far away as Liara, but Wyan could not see that his fiery daughter had become as vain and jealous as she was lovely. Lorelei claimed that one of her childhood friends, a scarred orphan named Bryonna, had now revealed herself as a quisling, using fey magic to bewitch away her suitor. Wyan had the girl arrested, but eventually a very different truth was revealed. Evil fey *were* involved, but Bryonna was guilty of no crime; it was *Lorelei* who was bewitched by a boowray to bring innocents to ruin.

Adventurers brought the truth to light and defeated the boowray before Bryonna came to harm, but the fey damaged Lorelei's sanity and left Wyan stricken to his very core. For all of Wyan's



vigilance and toil, the fey had still nearly tricked him into personally executing an innocent. As Wyan protectively guided his daughter's slow recovery, he returned to his brooding of old. The utter malice of the fey had been clearly revealed, but so had the flaws in Wyan's Inquisition.

Current Sketch

The seven years since Bryonna's arrest have proven trying for Wyan. Lorelei is humbler now, and gentler. Some would claim that the boowray made Lorelei a better person, but it is also true that she lives in the shadow of her own shame over her unforgivable actions while under the boowray's sway. The boowray *lessened* Lorelei, dousing the fiery spirit of her youth. Lorelei is a daily reminder of the evils the fey have visited on Wyan, his family and his people. Wyan is ever more resolute that the fey must be repelled, but he has also been forced to open his eyes to the dangerous potential of the Inquisition itself. The Inquisition has solidified its grip on Tepest in recent years, but the more powerful it becomes, the harder it is to control. Publicly, Wyan is still greatly admired and unquestioned in his role as High Inquisitor, even as his encroaching



age slows him. Privately, Wyan understands that not even *he* has the power to stop his Inquisition now. Even *Wyan* could very well find himself on trial were he to defy the wrong frenzied throng. Quietly, Wyan does what he can to keep the crazes in check and ensure that innocents do not fall victim to his followers. He fears his efforts will never be enough.

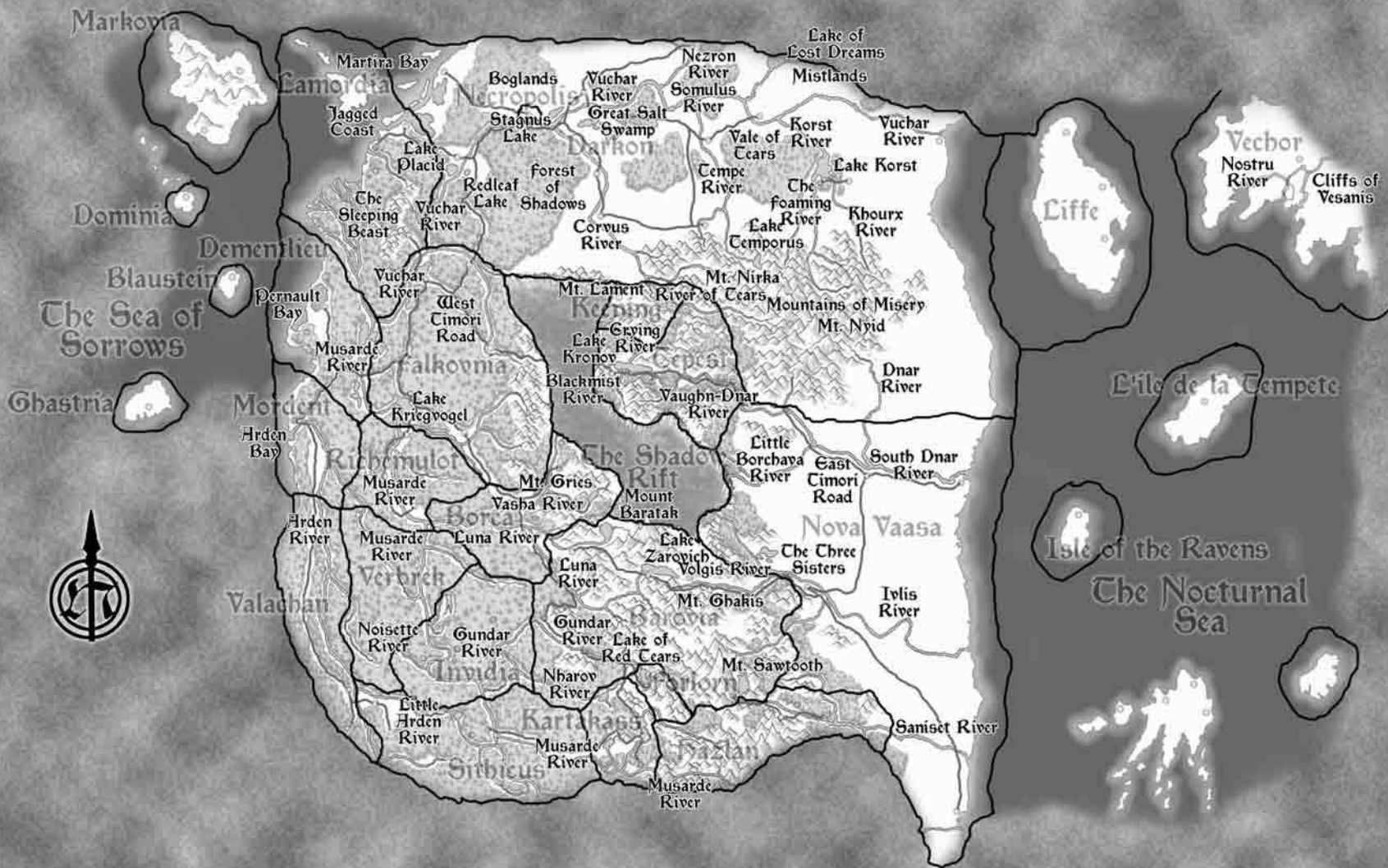
Combat

Wyan has never been a fearsome physical opponent, so he relies on his considerable divine gifts to defend himself. Wyan uses his magic to expose, repel and contain the treachery of the fey, typically preparing spells such as *dispel magic*, *dimensional anchor*, *discern lies*, *invisibility purge*, and *protection from evil* rather than focusing on offensive power. Wyan is always accompanied by at least 1d4 Tepestani Inquisitors (see above), who are quick to defend him.

Special Attacks: *Turning (Su)*: Wyan receives a +2 synergy bonus to turn checks. He turns undead as a 5th-level cleric and turns fey as a 7th-level cleric.

Cair

Wyan lives with Lorelei in a two-story stone cottage in the heart of Viktal. Two acolytes serve as Wyan's aides by day, returning to their own homes at night. Wyan's home is lavish only in comparison with its neighbors; the interior is actually quite humble. The true home of the Tepestani Inquisition is the nearby local temple, a blocky, one-story building of pale, mossy stone. All gods of the Tepestani pantheon are worshipped here, with a traditional emphasis on Lugh. Unlike the open-air temples of Belenus, the Viktal temple interior is enclosed and starkly furnished. Beyond the main hall, which is used for both worship and trials, a few back rooms are stacked from floor to ceiling with the Inquisition's dog-eared records. Rough-hewn stairs lead down into a lightless, musty cellar containing a handful of cramped cells, where the accused are dragged to await their hearings. The cell doors are banded with cold iron. Clergy staffing the temple seldom allow visitors to see the accused without some form of magical protection (such as *protection from evil*). The Viktal temple usually has rank two ethereal resonance, with hope and fear being the strongest taints. When a terrified captive is being held here, it can rise to rank three.





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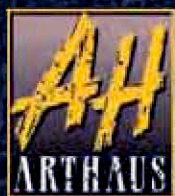
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