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VILLAGE BACKDROP:
BLEAKFLAT 2.0



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VILLAGE BACKDROP: BLEAKFLAT 2.0

Lost to the north of nowhere, far beyond the reach of prying eyes, a rocky bluff rises from barren soil. Here, deep amidst the frozen tundra, a ruined castle has been refitted into a tiny village. Ten hovels, whose rude architecture suggests structures five centuries old, surround a refurbished tower, and in this tower lives Bleakflat's lord. Wise and capable, he tends to his villagers as a shepherd to his flock.

The very presence of such a remote village is enough to arouse suspicion. There are no ore mines here, no nearby dungeons, no ley lines or trade routes. The people seem simple enough, but they are somehow able to fend off the wolf packs roaming the land, and are unperturbed by the massive bats which attack the rare unannounced visitor. How? The people of Bleakflat are under the protection of a vampire, the lord of the village and the only citizen with rosy cheeks and warm smile. The villagers trade their blood for his protection and care, and in turn he tends his flock well.

CREDITS

Design: Jeff Gomez

Development: Creighton Broadhurst

Art: William McAusland and Maciej Zagorski (The Forge Studios).

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Cartography: Maciej Zagorski (The Forge Studios).

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BLEAKFLAT AT A GLANCE

Ruler: Aldrich Hellbrooke

Government: Overlord

Population: 62 (1 half-vampire, 60 humans, 1 vampire)

Alignments: LE, LN

Languages: Common

Resources & Industry: Sheep, undead hospitality

When the characters arrive, the following items are for sale:

- **Potions:** *growth* (300 gp), *heroism* (500 gp)
- **Scrolls (Cleric):** *protection from evil* (300 gp), *spiritual weapon* (600 gp)
- **Scrolls (Wizard):** *strength* (600 gp)

Lost to the north of nowhere, far beyond the reach of prying eyes, a rocky bluff rises from barren soil. Here, deep amid the frozen tundra, a ruined castle has been refitted into a tiny village. Ten hovels, whose rude architecture suggests structures centuries old, surround a refurbished tower and in this tower lives Bleakflat's lord. Wise and capable, he tends to his villagers as a shepherd to his sheep.

The very presence of such a remote village is enough to arouse suspicion. There are no ore mines here, no nearby dungeons, no ley lines or trade routes. The people seem simple enough, if a little drained. They live off watery mutton soups, graze thin flocks of sheep on rocky fields, burn wood from the scattered groves to keep warm and eat silent meals under poorly constructed roofs. But they are somehow able to fend off the wolf packs roaming the land and are unperturbed by the massive bats which attack the rare unannounced visitor. How? The people of Bleakflat are under the protection of a vampire, the lord of the village and the only citizen with rosy cheeks and warm smile. The villagers trade their blood for his protection and care and in turn he tends his flock well.

Bleakflat is Aldrich Hellbrooke's human farm. He asserts total dominion over the people and rules with absolute authority. But he also treats his subjects well. He walks among them, jokes with them, cares for them and heals them. He invites his human cattle to dinner, tells stories to their children and teaches the adults how to read. By all accounts, he is a warm and just lord, far more compassionate than the leaders of many normal villages.

However, this harmonious relationship is often strained. Aldrich hosts undead guests, who harass the villagers and admonish him for his strange practises. Aldrich's own daughter, the half-human Gaela, believes humans should be treated like the animals they are.

Insular and indoctrinated, the people of Bleakflat do not consider their precarious situation particularly unusual. They are wary of outsiders, whom they rightfully view as a challenge to their way of life. Very occasionally an adventurer happens upon the village and vows to "free" the people from their vampiric overlord. The villagers play along until the adventurer sleeps—then they end the threat with a knife to the throat.

VILLAGERS

Appearance: The villagers are thin and pale, though fundamentally healthy.

Dress: The villagers wear heavy wool and leather coats with thick trousers. Most outfits have high collars or scarves to obscure the puncture wounds on their necks.

Nomenclature: *male* Aegar, Baern, Klyide, Maestin; *female* Gaela, Junip, Raella; *family* Burke, Girain, Goodabby, Laupren.

VILLAGE LORE

A character may know something about Bleakflat, its history and surrounds. Determine how knowledgeable the characters are and then impart some (or all) of the information below:

- Aldrich Hellbrooke, the good-natured lord of Bleakflat, has absolute control over the populace.
- The Girain household contains strange occult artefacts from across the centuries.
- Aldrich is a vampire who feeds upon Bleakflat's willing villagers and tends to them as a shepherd to his flock.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

While in Bleakflat, a character may hear one or more rumours. The PC can learn this information in several ways: perhaps by overhearing two locals gossiping, chatting with regulars over a few drinks at the local taverns and so on. Use the table below, to determine which rumours the character learns.

D6 RUMOUR

1	Mardread Burke is touched by the gods and secretly wishes to destroy Aldrich. He is now old—the oldest living human in the village—and must soon act.
2	Gaela—Aldrich's daughter—looks for any excuse to murder a villager. She needs considerably less of an excuse to murder a visitor to the village.
3*	The stone mask in the Girains' basement is haunted by a violent poltergeist. The spirit attacks any who visit the Girains' house uninvited.
4*	Aldrich dominates the villagers using his dark powers; none of them have the will to resist him.
5	Aldrich is the weakest member of his extensive family. Sometimes members of his family come to visit him.
6	Aegar Goodabby has more sway over Aldrich than the vampire realises.

*False rumour

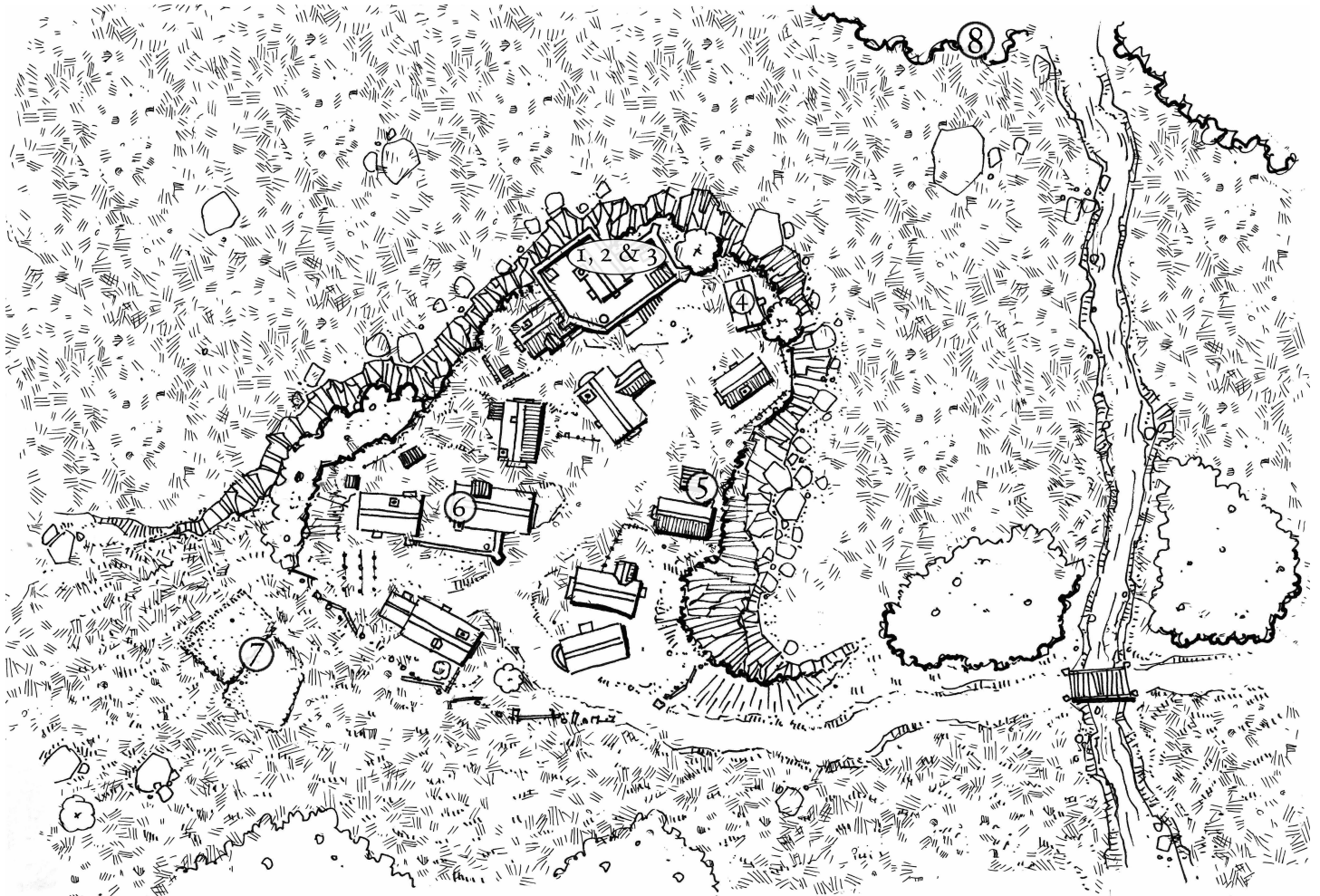
NOTABLE LOCATIONS AT A GLANCE

Most of Bleakflat comprises peasant homes. A few locations, however, are of interest to adventurers:

1. **Kraegor's Keep:** This ancient ruin is the home of Aldrich and Gaela Hellbrooke. The structure has been partially refitted, with windows blocked up and roof patched, but the general aesthetic is still decrepit. The keep wards access to the many natural tunnels honeycombing the bluffs.
2. **The Blood Baths:** Fed by hot mineral springs, the Blood Baths lies beneath the keep; here, Aldrich relaxes with his guests. Dreev and other vampire lords can sometimes be found in these subterranean pools. Aldrich occasionally brings villagers here for a spiritual awakening, but the journey is less than pleasant for the unfortunate peasant.
3. **The Red Hall:** The keep's underground dining hall, decorated sparsely in crimson banners, seats up to 20 guests. Dusty and macabre, the setting seems rustic to the vampiric guests who dine there. Villagers are invited to eat here when Aldrich is without vampiric guests.
4. **The Goodabby Home:** This hovel is the ancestral home of the Goodabby family, long seen as Aldrich's favourite humans. With a large hearth and plenty of seating, the house acts as an occasional meeting place for villagers.

Underneath the floorboards, the Goodabbys keeps various forged documents to fool perceptive wanderers.

5. **The Girain Home:** Unlike the rest of the village, the Girain family worships Aldrich as an occult vampire lord. Their house is musty and unpleasant, and their basement contains dozens of unusual artefacts (most of which are entirely harmless, but which they believe hold great value).
6. **Haegar's Stables:** Stablemaster Haegar keeps several dozen horses in the stables as feed for the giant bats roaming the countryside. Deprived of exercise, these mounts are sickly and listless, but rarely make any noise.
7. **Abandoned Farmland:** Once Bleakflat's lifeblood, the surrounding farmland has fallen into disarray and decay. Now, semi-domesticated sheep roam the countryside, grazing on what little grass is available.
8. **Burke Household:** Mardread and his son Haegar live in this smoky home. It is a tense, brooding place, where little is spoken and much is implied. The family's ancestral silver sword gleams threateningly over the mantle.



LIFE IN BLEAKFLAT

Bleakflat is cold and barren, but safe. The villagers are warm with one another, suspicious of outsiders and otherwise like to keep things simple.

TRADE & INDUSTRY

Bleakflat is completely reliant on Aldrich and his guests. While some materials and sustenance come from the local sheep and wildlife, most arrives on bat wings or the fangs of wolves. Guests always bring food for Aldrich's flock, or valuable goods as gifts.

While some creature comforts can be found in the village, such as dyed clothing and fine tapestries, there are no artisans among the populace. Iron tools and complex woodwork must be imported from afar. Nowhere is this sorry state of affairs more apparent than in the condition of the village's dilapidated houses and keep. Without a talented stonemason, much of the village has fallen apart.

LAW & ORDER

There is one law in Bleakflat and there is one enforcer: Aldrich. The villagers are well aware Aldrich not only defends the village, but could easily destroy it. Villagers occasionally voice concerns or requests to their lord, but they do not push their luck.

Aldrich is a caring judge, but he does not tolerate disobedience or insubordination. Difficult villagers feel extreme social pressure to comply and Aldrich occasionally uses his vampiric domination to nudge naysayers into line. Only rarely is a villager so incorrigible they must be removed. These villagers are drained completely of blood and their reanimated corpses are given as gifts to Aldrich's guests.

CUSTOMS & TRADITIONS

Humans require simple rituals and pastimes to get them through the year. Though Aldrich has little need of such distractions, he plays his part in the village's traditions willingly enough.

Each full moon, Aldrich gathers the villagers in the Red Hall to give a sermon. He speaks of moral duty and instils a general distrust for outsiders in his folk. The people of Bleakflat hang on every word and analysis of the speech is a common fireside topic until the next village meeting.

When a child comes of age, he or she is invited to visit the Blood Baths with Aldrich. Amidst the swirling, delirious gas, Aldrich talks of the importance of the village and the child's place in the community. While generally not a pleasant experience, the child often emerges with a new-found respect for the status quo.

During great storms and blizzards, the villagers gather together for warmth. Usually, they gather in a few prestigious households, such as the Goodabby and Burke homes. In rare occasions of real danger, the villagers retreat to the vaults beneath Kraegor's Keep to stay warm by fire and hot springs.

VILLAGE DRESSING

Use this table, to generate the minor sights and sounds the characters experience as they explore Bleakflat.

D20 DRESSING/EVENT

1	A pile of elk and boar carcasses appears in front of the butcher's house at night. Bite marks and paw prints indicate wolves have been in the village, but the villagers do not seem disturbed by this event.
2	A swarm of bats enters the caves beneath the bluff.
3	The Girain household rushes to the keep in a panic, holding aloft a strange velvet cloak.
4	A group of villagers use wolf-dogs to corral their sheep.
5	A child has gotten lost in the frozen moors to the west. Aldrich leaves at night to find her.
6	It is a cold day in Bleakflat and an unusually noisy crowd gathers in Goodabby's home.
7	A young elk, alone and lost, wanders through the village.
8	Two young lovers return from the Bleakwood with strange injuries. They rush to seek audience with Aldrich.
9	Aldrich explains he is entertaining many guests tonight. A strict curfew is enforced at sunset.
10	As the clouds roll in, Dreev takes a stroll. He stops in the Goodabby home, to enjoy his quiet inebriation.
11	Faendran emerges from the Bleakwood, wiping blood from her face.
12	At sunset, 13 candles are lit in the tower of Kraegor's keep. A like number of villagers excuse themselves, enter the tower and do not emerge until sunrise.
13	On her 13th birthday, a young woman enters the Blood Baths with Aldrich and does not emerge for hours.
14	On an overcast day, Aldrich comes down from his keep to heal a sickly child. He is warm and wise, using magic to remove the illness and a song to comfort the mother.
15	Two of Aldrich's guests emerge in a huff from Kraegor's Keep. They lash out at nearby villagers, before leaving.
16	The howling of wolves keeps the characters up all night as hundreds of massive beasts circle the village until daybreak when the pack disperses.
17	Gaela and Mardread get into an argument which looks like it will come to blows (or worse), until Aldrich and Aegar separate the two.
18	Dreev wanders the streets at night, quite drunk. He woos a maiden with tricks and gifts. She will not last the night, unless Aldrich is alerted.
19	Mardread Burke spies on the characters, from a distance.
20	Aegar greets the party, shows them around, offers them hot mutton stew and asks when they'll be leaving.

THE SURROUNDING LOCALITY

Bleakflat is isolated and desolate, far from any trade route or city. The roads leading to the village are overgrown or completely disintegrated. A traveller can only find his way through keen observation, prior knowledge or poor luck.

For those few who do pass by, the village seems nearly abandoned. Chimney smoke can be mistaken for frozen mist and little movement can be seen. During the day, the bluff seems a ruin best avoided. At night, the icy candlelight lures unlucky travellers to the castle like a will-o'-the-wisp.

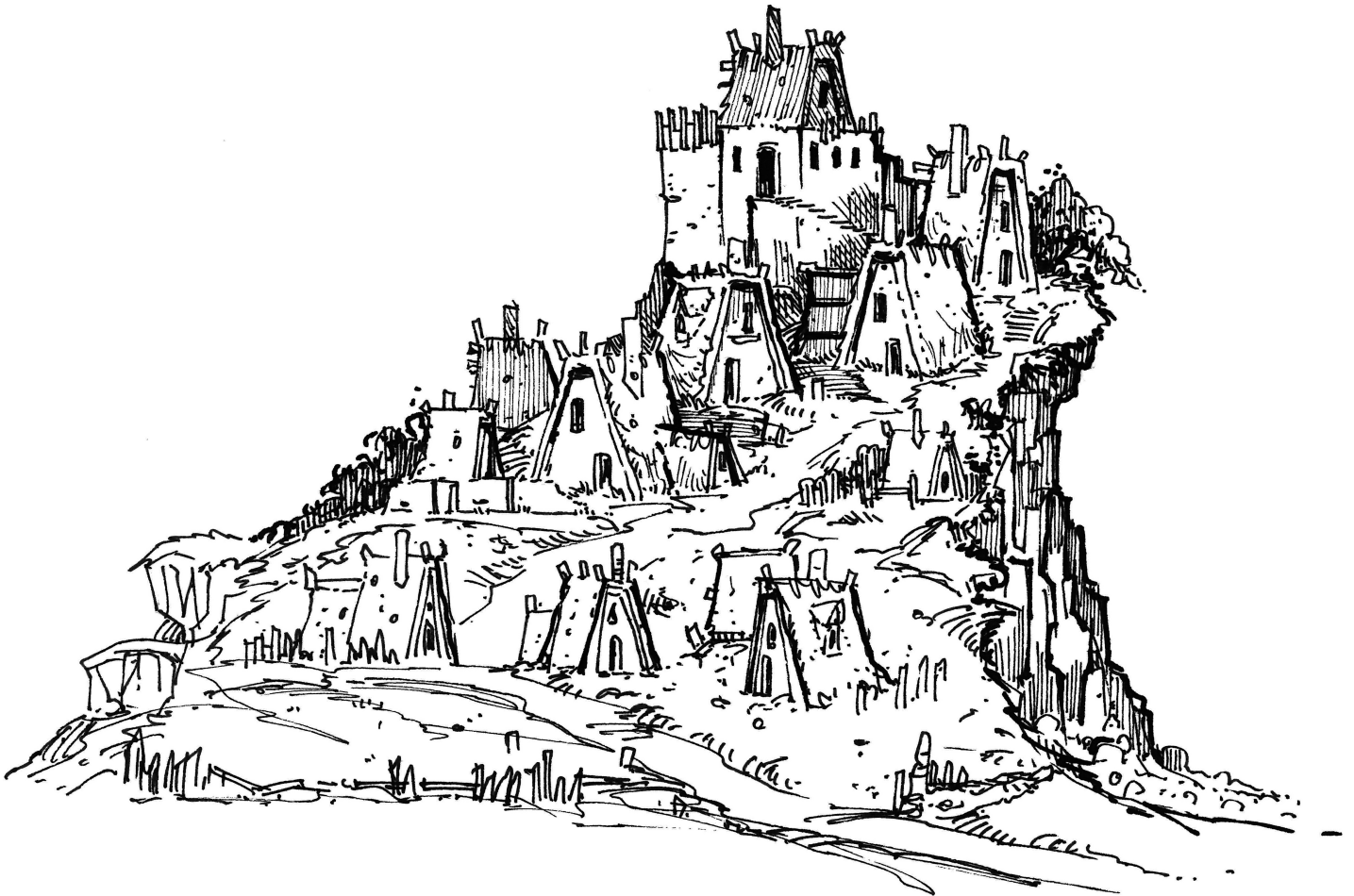
Even so, Bleakflat is a welcome bastion of civilisation compared to its surroundings. For miles to the south and east, the land is near-tundra in its infertility. Rocky bluffs emerge from a thin veneer of pale grass. The soil runs rough and dry with stones. Permafrost kills any tree larger than a man. Every few miles, an icy oasis of marsh and thin reeds breaks the monotony, and these landmarks are sometimes guarded by the spectral memories of the dead.

There is a great silence upon this endless frozen moor, even in the deafening winds that can tear across the barren landscape. Lost travellers are starved of colour and life, until their skin becomes as grey and pockmarked as the flats. Those who survive the journey are forever changed.

But the Bleakwood thrives, a thin, expansive forest which extends for nearly 100 miles to the east. Through all seasons, the trees and leaves take on a muted, grey colour offensive to the senses. Here hunt Aldrich's wolf packs. Food can be found here, if one has the wits and nose to find it: massive elk chew pale leaves and hairy boar scratch at the ground for edible roots.

During the summer, large herds of muskox and reindeer migrate through the Bleakwood and tundra. They give the village a wide berth, but Aldrich's wolves and bats travel far. Summer is a time of meaty stews and fresh furs for the villagers.

The Bleakwood is a playground for Aldrich's guests. Something about the muted colours and twisted trees attracts the undead. Aldrich and his kin take long walks or flights through the wood, revelling in a living world which seems to mimic their dead one. Occasionally, the vampires transform into wolves or bats to stalk their prey. Though human blood is preferable, little compares to the savage thrill of the hunt. Though he does not admit it, Aldrich has a growing need for violent triumph after centuries of sedate and comfortable human farming.



NOTABLE LOCATIONS IN BLEAKFLAT

I: KRAEGOR'S KEEP

This hilltop keep looks nearly abandoned, with boarded windows and a crumbling roof. Even so, the ruin draws the eye.

Little remains of Kraegor's keep. This once mighty fortress is fallen into ruin, the broken stones used as building blocks for the surrounding hovels. The last remaining dungeons and passages are home to Aldrich Hellbrooke (LE male vampire cleric 8) and his daughter Gaela (CE female half-vampire fighter 2). Across four centuries, Aldrich has renovated the inner rooms and corridors, drawn curtains across the boarded-up windows and converted cells into a small library and painting room. Aldrich tries to avoid extravagance and his living space is certainly not as grandiose as his kinsmen's castles. He sleeps in his room during the day, invites villagers over for supper at night and always tends to his flock.

The keep is nearly beyond repair. No villagers possess the skill to repair it, but the loose stones do not bother the inhabitant. Aldrich cleans and tidies what he can.

Even in its dilapidated state, the castle is relatively welcoming. Villagers are invited to speak with Aldrich at any time, either for pleasant conversation or to bring his attention to any dangers. On cloudy days, Aldrich walks the streets, keeping up on events and tending to the sick or injured. It is because of Aldrich's diligent care that Bleakflat remains safe and secure.

GAELA HELLEBROOKE

CE young female half-vampire fighter 2

This pale-faced girl's scowl and crossed arms would look charming on other young girls. On her, they seem strangely menacing and malevolent.

Mannerisms: Gaela is a brooding child who stomps when she walks. The word "hulking" would come to mind, but she has yet to exceed 5 feet tall.

Personality: Gaela, filled with ideas from Aldrich's more powerful guests, believes the human villagers should be more thoroughly subjugated. Violent, unpredictable and eager to humiliate the villagers, she none-the-less understands she must stay in her father's good graces (for now).

Background: Gaela is the result of a one-time pairing between a villager and Aldrich. She grew up in the keep, but was largely neglected by her father. In recent months, Gaela has disrupted the order which has endured across four centuries with violence against the villagers. Aldrich has promised to turn her once she reaches maturity and then she is free to live as she likes—as long as she does no harm to Bleakflat's inhabitants.

Hook: Gaela longs to explore her primal, blood urges and sees the adventurers as an opportunity to do just that; she attempts to provoke them to violence so she can defend herself. She is not subtle.

ALDRICH HELLBROOKE

LE male human vampire cleric 8

This tall and ruddy man emanates warm charisma, even if his eyes betray an icy severity.

Mannerisms: Aldrich wears one face with his flock and another with his guests. About Bleakflat, he is warm and friendly, a willing dispenser of life and wisdom. When roused to anger, or pushed to defend his life choices by other vampires, Aldrich is icy and severe. In both cases, his quiet voice bears no disagreement.

Personality: Aldrich is practical, effective and oddly empathetic. He does not let emotions rule him, yet he takes risks to enjoy his strange lifestyle. By suppressing and denying his dark nature, the vampire risks violent outbursts in times of stress.

Background: When Aldrich was freed from his brood, he knew he wanted to do things differently. He spent decades travelling to expand his horizons, until finally coming across Bleakflat. After years of patient governance, he revealed his secret during a terrible famine. Most villagers complied with the new rules. The few dissenters were drained of blood.

Hook: When Aldrich learns visitors have reached Bleakflat he sets out to track them down and to explain to them how the village works. He tries charm and reason first, but if the adventurers choose violence, he responds (mercilessly) in kind.

FAENDRAKAN HELLBROOKE

CE female elf vampire fighter 11

This dark creature's presence is overwhelming. Large as an ogre, with sharp, cruel features and vicious eyes, she radiates power.

Mannerisms: Faendrankan does nothing in half measures. She gesticulates wildly, smashes goblets to make a point and snarls when angry. Demonic features emerge in her foulest moods.

Personality: Faendrankan is fond and even respectful of Aldrich, but desperate to convince him of the abomination of his ways. She would never harm him and so must take out her violence on the items and mortals around her.

Background: Long ago, Faendrankan was one of Aldrich's spawn mates. When they were freed, Faendrankan took the route of bloody adventure. In her travels, she has both caused and endured much suffering. Aldrich's way of life instills a cold fury in her heart that could only come from the insecurity born of her own decisions.

Hook: Frustrated with Aldrich's shepherding of the villagers, Faendrankan tries to provoke visitors into doing something stupid like saving the village from its vampire lord. She uses this aggression as evidence for the need for Aldrich to give himself over to his baser urges—if only on occasion.

2: THE BLOOD BATHS

Acrid crimson steam hangs in the air in these strange and twisting passageways. The walls are smooth with erosion and algae.

Beneath the ruins of Kraegor's Keep, through natural tunnels oozing sulphuric crimson sludge, boil the Blood Baths. Rank and acidic, these fuming pools of red liquid are used as a spa by Aldrich and his guests. While polite conversation is made in the Red Hall, the Blood Baths see the true wheeling and dealing of vampire politics. Most common are requests for aid against pesky adventurers, but the vampires also share arcane knowledge and prepare betrayals of their rivals.

Though they are sometimes invited, including for the coming of age ceremony, the humans of Bleakflat cannot stomach the scent of the baths. This is a place for those with immortal stomachs. Human visitors find themselves sickened or worse in the Blood Baths.

3: THE RED HALL

This large, subterranean armoury has been refitted with a long oak table, blood-red tapestries and a copper chandelier.

Within the dungeons of Kraegor's Keep, out of reach of stray sunbeams, a large armoury has been refitted as a dining hall. Dusty and grand, flanked by crimson tapestries and copper chandeliers, the Red Hall is set with a magnificent oak table with seats enough for 20. When the room is full, it contains some of the most powerful undead in the realm.

The Hellbrooke clan is a far-flung and powerful vampire cabal connected by a single common progenitor: the (now permanently) deceased Barbaneth Hellbrooke. Though the sect is to be feared, Aldrich is perhaps the weakest and least respected of this prestigious bloodline. He is constantly ridiculed for his

DREEV VISKAV

NE male human vampire

Well dressed and droll, this pale man does nothing to arouse suspicion. His handsome smile suggests perpetual amusement with the world around him.

Mannerisms: Dreev has the manner of a spoiled, slightly drunk aristocrat. His shining eyes and biting wit revel in anything from politics to the cruellest torture. He is usually found with a goblet of fermented blood in hand.

Personality: Dreev cannot help but smile at Aldrich's work, which runs counter to Dreev's aristocratic upbringing. Dreev enjoys novel concepts even more than a good drink and in Bleakflat he has found both.

Background: Dreev was raised in a large metropolis, surrounded by sparring vampiric families. He views his regular trips to Bleakflat as entertaining holidays to the quaint countryside. Occasionally, he brings bewitched consorts who become meals once their novelty runs dry.

human "farming," and for taking no steps to build his strength. None-the-less, he is a Hellbrooke vampire and far more powerful than mere mortals. Relatives often come calling for one reason or another and they are hosted in the Red Hall.

When Aldrich expects guests, he lights a candle for each guest in the highest window of the keep. For each candle, a single human from below is "invited to dinner." The villagers are both waiter and meal, offering their necks until they can no longer stand. The feedings are not as gentle as Aldrich's, but Aldrich ensures no feeding gets out of hand. Guests must obey the rules of the castle, which means leaving meals with enough blood to stagger home.

4: THE GOODABBY HOME

This simple home is clean and warm. The large living room is set with comfy wooden rocking chairs.

If Aldrich had favourites (and he insists he does not), it would be the Goodabby family. Soft spoken, pliable and eager to please, the Goodabby family has served Aldrich for centuries. Luckily for Bleakflat, the Goodabbies also passed down marked intelligence and wisdom through the generations. They do well for the village at Aldrich's ear.

Aldrich speaks to Aegar Goodabby (LE male human) as a master speaks to his dog. The vampire works out problems aloud and tousles Aegar's hair when the pet needs attention. Aegar answers rhetorical questions, nods understandingly and occasionally offers a humble piece of advice. When this advice is helpful (more frequently than Aldrich realises), the vampire laughs in delight at the simple marvels of "human intuition."

The Goodabby home is simple and tidy. The only aspect that sets it apart is a large hearth room, where Aegar occasionally entertains his vampiric lord. Hidden beneath the floorboards of the bedroom, Aegar keeps a few administrative documents and forged royal missives that come in useful for distracting travellers.

AEGAR GOODABBY

LG male human

This short, plump man wears a compliant smile beneath strands of thin blonde hair.

Mannerisms: Aegar always smiles. He listens to speakers in rapt attention, hands bobbing along in emphatic nods. The man's undivided attention can be unnerving.

Personality: Despite his simple mannerisms, Aegar is intelligent, cunning and observant. His conversations always offer compelling points and counterpoints, even when shrouded with innocence.

Background: Aegar was trained to be a supplicant. His mother taught him the trade well, even after Aegar's father was murdered by one of Aldrich's guests.

5: THE GIRAIN HOME

This ancient hovel is dusty and stagnant, with black curtains perpetually drawn. The faint scent of mould permeates the air.

The Girain family is an odd bunch, devoted to Aldrich but strangely obsessed with his darker nature. While the other villagers treat Aldrich as lord and protector, the Girains' adulation borders on worship. They collect strange items from Aldrich and his guests: discarded shoes, lost buttons and even stray hairs. They also comb the surrounding area looking for relics of the people who lived here centuries ago. The Girain basement is an occult repository, complete with ancient masks, carved animalistic totems and other—less savoury—objects.

While this bizarre idolatry bothers the other villagers, Aldrich finds it nothing more than amusing. He puts on small shows for the Girains and speaks to them in archaic tongues. In return, they fall on their hands and knees in ecstatic worship.

6: HAEGAR'S STABLES

The pale horses of these expansive wooden stables look ill and restless, but remain strangely silent.

Haegar Burke (LN male human fighter 1) looks every bit the stablemaster. Nearly seven-foot tall, with bulging muscles and wide shoulders, he easily overpowers his horses. Not that overpowering them is too difficult. The horses are weak and sickly, with bleary eyes and leaking nostrils. They are unable to stand still and constantly tug at their restraints.

On closer inspection, the entire apparatus of the stable is unusual. The villagers have little need of horses with no distances to travel nor hard labour to be done. Why are there so many, nearly a horse for every man, woman and child in Bleakflat? Why are the horses confined to such small grazing areas? And why do the horses whinny in fear at night?

Answers are available to any willing to brave the cold after the setting sun. The horses act as feed for the massive bats roaming the lands. One by one, bats the size of dogs land on the shackled horses, drink their fill and then return to scouting for Aldrich.

7: ABANDONED FARMLAND

Half a dozen abandoned farms spread out below the bluff. The rocky fields have clearly not been worked in many, many years.

Before Aldrich's arrival, the people of Bleakflat did their best to scrape a meagre living out of the barren soil. Only hardy root vegetables grew here (potatoes, radishes and carrots), which, when stewed with stringy mutton, provided the base of all meals in Bleakflat. Six farmsteads provided enough food for the village, though convincing the rocky ground to yield anything was a daily, back-breaking struggle.

All that remains of the farm buildings now are ruins, barely distinguishable from the piles of other mossy stones littering the expansive countryside.

Now, Aldrich takes the care of his flock very seriously. His guests know to bring nutritious foods as gifts. Aldrich's wolves

hunt the nearby Bleakwood and bring excess boar and elk back to the villagers. After all, regular meaty meals are important for a healthy heart.

The primary ingredient in the villager's meal is, as it has always been, mutton. Sheep roam the old farmlands, seeking out stray blades of grass in the stony soil. The giant wolves which range the countryside do not hunt this prey, but instead act both as guard dogs and shepherds.

8: BURKE HOUSEHOLD

A smouldering fireplace fills this small hovel with haze. Above the mantle, a silver sword gleams with strange light.

The Burke household looks like any other along the winding path: small, nearly derelict, but clean and tidy.

The ancient Burke patriarch, Mardread LG venerable male human paladin 1), spends most of his time in the hearthroom, brooding over the flames and his family's ancestral sword. His son, the stablemaster Haegar (location 6), prefers the company of horses but returns to the house to sleep. The atmosphere inside the home is smoky and tense.

Some months ago, Mardread's wife visited Kraegor's Keep and did not return. Gaela brags about killing the old woman, but some of the villagers blame Dreev. Aldrich refuses to speak of the matter. In any case, the death sparked a crisis of faith in Mardread. Centuries ago, the Burke line were Bleakflat's defenders. With little left to live for, Mardread considers the silver sword above his mantle and mulls his options' although he is under no illusions of the placid villagers' ability to free themselves from Aldrich's grip.

MARDREAD BURKE

LG venerable male human paladin 1

This man is ancient and loose-skinned, with shaggy waist-length white hair. In his youth he must have been a strapping man and some of that strength still grips his tired bones.

Mannerisms: Mardread is gloomy and mumbles to himself constantly. He pierces the characters with unyielding blue eyes, seemingly immune to any growing discomfort.

Personality: The old man is conflicted and restless. He gives little thought to others, instead focusing on his own turmoil. He loves his son, and wishes a better life for him—a life free of Bleakflat and its vampiric overlord.

Background: Mardread grew up as the stablemaster before his son. Large and powerful, he even assisted Aldrich in Kraegor's Keep from time to time. However, voices of doubt and confusion assailed him even then. After the death of his wife, these voices have become clearer.

Hook: Mardread knows in his heart he is no match for Aldrich or his family. If the adventurers seem capable, he gifts them his family's silver sword and begs the party to rid the village of its vampire masters. He remembers magic lurks in the silver blade, but cannot remember what kind.

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