

BLOOD THRONE



Blight Elves: Architects of Despair Hal Maclean



Requires True20 Adventure Roleplaying
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BLOOD THRONE

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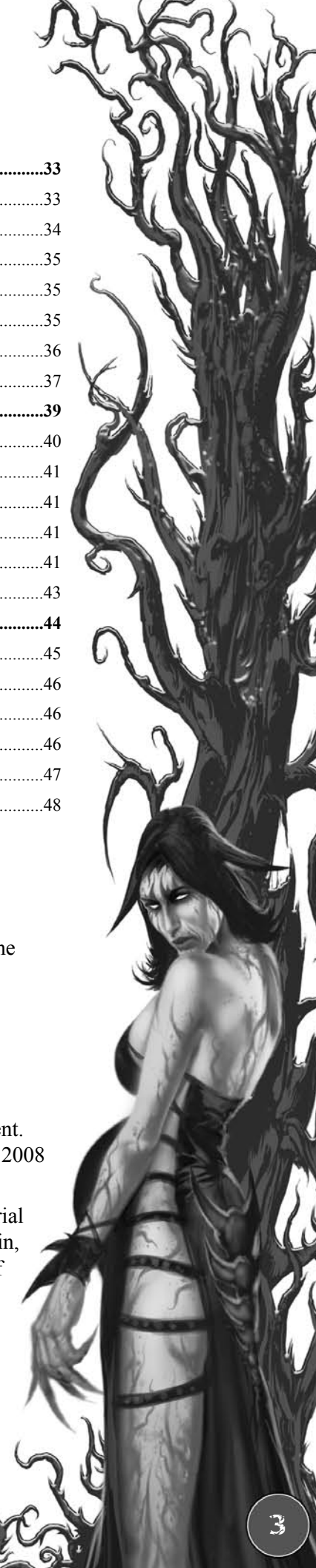
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INTRODUCTION

"Life is a meaningless torture only made bearable when enjoying the misery of others. If you are too blind or weak to accept this... Dear brother... My king... We will use your own suffering to prove it."

-Salena Valanas on the eve of civil war

Blight Elves: Architects of Despair offers Narrators and players a definitive look at the cruelest race to walk the lands of Simarra. Worshipping a goddess who has taken suicide as her own personal portfolio, the blight elves seek not to conquer the world, or even wantonly destroy it, but rather to drive every mortal soul to choose death over life. They consider the spread of misery for misery's sake their paramount mission, and regard torture, both physical and psychological, as the highest of all art forms.

For Narrators, this makes them ideal villains. Weavers of countless schemes, capable of the most cold-blooded acts, blight elves exist to make others suffer, and their innate magical talents present myriad opportunities for success. Entropic channelers, living conduits of both decay and failure, cause objects to collapse into dust with but a touch, and unravel even the most carefully laid plans by their mere presence. Joy eaters, emotionless plunderers of the soul, use mental scalpels to excise hope and wonder from their victims, leaving them helpless thralls to despair. Plaguewrights, who fashion diseases and poisons with the same diligence other races apply towards crafting swords and armor, spend every day increasing their arsenal of degradation. Shapers, who twist living things into monstrosities, call forth abominations that are ever more grotesque while the world itself recoils in dismay. Ruling them all, the dark matrons, expectant mothers who draw power from the unborn children trapped forever in their wombs.

For players, creating a blight elf, whether one still loyal to the twisted ideals of his people or a renegade who has chosen to embrace the light, presents interesting opportunities for both hero design and roleplaying. All the special abilities, equipment, and other new game options contained within this book will augment a hero just as easily as they augment a villain created by the Narrator. Similarly, the extensive background information on blight elves, when coupled with the extreme worldview most possess, lays the groundwork for a memorable and challenging character to play. While playing a renegade with an uncharacteristic reverence for life seems the most likely choice when adventuring alongside other races, an unrepentant blight elf infiltrator presents just as entertaining an option. Endowed with the duplicitous cunning and endless patience all blight elves take as their birthright, he might choose to rein in any sadistic impulses until the perfect opportunity arises.

BLIGHT ELF HISTORY

The blight elves began with a whisper in the darkness. A morargrim, tasked by the dark god Thûrak with sowing dissent among the Volsparran elves, chose the younger sister of their king, Taladin Valanas, as its tool. Brilliant but unworldly, Salena Valanas fell under the sway of the demonic shapechanger once it assumed the identity of a notable young poet named Elylsa Myrille. Becoming one of the princess's ladies-in-waiting, the morargrim spent three years insinuating itself into the royal court, and Salena's heart.

Exploiting her passion for magic and intellectual discourse, the morargrim wooed Salena so shrewdly the princess believed she initiated the affair herself. Over the next few years, the couple pursued their tryst, even as they explored the boundaries of dark magic. The morargrim used its position to corrupt the princess' mind, posing difficult questions that sent worms of doubt burrowing into her understanding of elven society.

Salena soon found herself questioning the most esteemed tenets of her people. Remembering their lost immortality, and the agonizing cycles of defeat following their exile from the Cradle of Life, she realized that everything fails. Though her sense of duty kept her from making a public breach, in her heart this insight caused her to turn away from Gimbureth, the mother goddess, and eroded her reverence for the natural world.

Salena might have remained a closet skeptic, paying only lip service to her people's dogmas, if the morargrim



had not engineered the discovery of their secret relationship. At first, Taladin offered no opposition to this dalliance. However, when Salena told him that she intended to make the affair public and actually marry her lover, the king put his foot down.

Reminding Salena of her duty, to cement one of the great houses to the royal family and to bear children ready to lead, Taladin ordered her to end the relationship. For the first time in her life, Salena refused her brother. Infuriated, Taladin hastily vowed to see Elylsa dead before he permitted a wedding to take place.

The morargrim rejoiced as it covertly witnessed this exchange. The last piece of its plan was now in place. Reclaiming Elylsa Myrille's corpse from magical stasis, it staged the young maiden's suicide. Still shaken by the confrontation with her brother, Salena returned to her quarters to find her lover dead. Next to the body was a note, explaining that the king had given her a choice—a cup of poison or a public execution for treason.

INFECTION

Instead of rage, Salena felt a strange, icy calm descend upon her as she cradled Elylsa's body in her arms. Telling her ladies-in-waiting to dispose of the corpse as they saw fit, Salena turned her back on life at the palace, taking a private residence in the capital.

In the days that followed, Salena spoke at many gatherings throughout Vol-spareth. At each, she delivered the same message: that hope was a mirage, that everything must eventually crumble and decay, and that because death was the only truth, true beauty must lie in death.

This bleak sermon struck a chord with a great number of her listeners, just as it had with Salena herself. Still reeling from their loss of immortality, many suffered from feelings of emptiness, and a sickening dread of the future that caused them to embrace Salena's revelations. Finally given liberty to show their despair over being doomed to die, they refused to take any joy in the time still allotted them. Within weeks, others had taken up her creed and carried it throughout the realm. Everywhere they went they earned the rebel princess fresh converts, making her an exponentially greater threat to the crown.

During those first few months, one man emerged as Salena's chief follower. Alorious Teldar, arguably her only intellectual and magical equal, took up the cause with a vigor she found difficult to match. With his newfound zeal the Church of the Blighted Ones, a name he himself coined, swelled. Though still a minority its doctrines infected every family, earning them the sorrowful nickname of the Fallen from their Volsparran kin..

For three years the Volsparran elders and the king kept an uneasy eye upon this heretical sect. Hoping they would return to their senses and the true faith

of their own volition, the authorities vacillated, wringing their hands in dismay but taking no action. Their tolerance ended following a stormy debate in the summer of the Year of Mists, the 105th of the Age of Steel. For the first time Salena addressed the assembly of elders, chaired by her own brother, and made her case directly to them.

Furious, hurling catcalls and insults, they dismissed her arguments without even offering a rebuttal. Unable to defeat Salena in a battle of wits—though they considered her arguments intrinsically flawed—they finally decided to use force to silence her. Speaking on behalf of the elders, Taladin gave Salena and her followers one last chance to repent before suffering banishment. Faced with this dire threat many of the blighted did in fact recant, willing to feign adherence to a faith they no longer believed.

However, three thousand of her most devoted, led by Alorious Teldar, chose to stand with Salena and on a rainy day, near the end of summer, the remaining blighted ones departed. As they left, under the watchful eye of the army, one heckler from the jeering crowd offered them a piece of advice. "If you think life is so pointless, why don't you just go ahead and die then?"

To this question, Salena and Alorious offered, in concert, identical replies. A chilling promise and, as time would demonstrate, prophecy. "You first."

TRANSFORMATION

The blighted ones soon found a new home. Less than a year after leaving, they made camp deep within Sarangak Forest. Scouting its environs, they encountered a community of nature loving adepts centered on a particularly powerful mana well they called Grazen Dur Mrair, "the world's heart." Unaware of their disposition the adepts made the elves welcome, delighted at the prospect of gaining allies to help them safeguard the forest.

Salena and her followers repaid them with murder. Still stinging from their exile, and taking their philosophy to its logical conclusion, they accepted that since life had no meaning it also had no value. This gave them license to fall upon their hosts in the dead of night and slaughter them. In the aftermath of their first great bloodletting, the blighted made their final break with Volsparr by taking a new name: blight elves.

For more than a century, the blight elves kept to themselves. Securing their new territory and making plans for the future occupied much of their time. Their numbers grew as those blighted who had chosen to remain behind learned of this new homeland through secret correspondences and slipped away from Volsparr to make their way north. However, they encouraged some of their colleagues





to stay. In the years to come, these agents, positioned to penetrate deep into Volspar society, proved priceless. In time, they would become the Semyad—communities of outsiders, raised from birth to support the blight elf cause and to infiltrate their own racial homelands.

Salena reigned as queen over her people, and the forest stolen through treachery. She took Alorius as both her prime minister and occasional lover. Together these two formidable adepts, with all the resources of their growing nation at their disposal, delved into occultism.

They uncovered many secrets during this century of exploration and gained a powerful ally. A morargrim aided them in their research. Unknown to Salena, this was the very same shapechanger who had once posed as her lover. Alorius focused on reaching through time, to call upon the power waiting at the end of the universe, and eventually founded the Cabal of Entropic Channelers. Salena preferred to study ways to alter the living in both mind and body. From her initial research emerged the League of Plaguewrights, and the groundwork for what would one day become the shapers, joy eaters and dark matrons. For a century, their research and nation building expanded at a feverish pace, but the blight elves remained restless, with a burning need to humble their former kin.

THE BLOOD WAR

In the 111th year of their exile, the blight elves returned to Volspar as an invading army. With the help of their secret cadres of supporters, they achieved total surprise and overran the border forts. Though still outnumbered by their Volsparan kin, the blighted supplemented their numbers with undead, powerful magic, incapacitating diseases and treachery from within, granting them victory after victory.

During the next four years, the blighted swallowed Volspar one gulp at a time. Though the defenders won the occasional skirmish, these momentary pauses in the aggressors' advance only served to delay the inevitable. At Sunken Vale, the Volspar, driven to crisis, risked everything on one final battle in hopes that this desperate gamble would turn their fortunes around.

They failed.

Salena slew her own brother in a magical duel and the blight elves shattered the remnants of the Volsparan army. The survivors fled the field, convinced that they faced extinction as a people, but then, inexplicably, the blighted walked away. Choosing to return to their strongholds within Sarangak Forest, they ended the Blood War as swiftly as it had begun. Even though some of the Volsparan leaders called this a retreat, and dubbed



themselves victors, their more realistic colleagues merely shook their heads. In the decades that followed, as they built the Northwatch, a mighty network of forts, and conscripted the troops to defend them, militarizing their society just in case the blight elves might one day choose to return, they realized something. That the blight elves, architects of despair, enemies of hope, who used disease itself as a tool, had infected their entire people with the most terrible pestilence of all: dread.

A NEW GODDESS

Alorius never forgave Salena for ordering the withdrawal just when they stood poised to crush the Volspar forever. He found her explanation that leaving the Volspar to wallow in their dismay was actually better than simply killing them off baffling and for the first time questioned her judgment. Their morargrim advisor, also stunned that its plan to exterminate the Volspar had gone awry, exploited Alorius' doubts in hopes of convincing him to mount a coup and renew the assault.

Things simmered for more than a century, only coming to a head when the newly formed plaguewright guild made a critical discovery—a disease that delayed childbirth indefinitely, allowing the mother to use her unborn child parasitically to augment her mind and magical power. When Salena informed Alorius that she had already conceived a child with him and infected herself with this disease he decided he had had enough.



Alorious attacked Salena in her private chamber. Using his physical strength and magic, he intended to seize power but keep her as his consort. They struggled, shaking the foundations of the palace itself with great flares of magic, but Salena rose from the struggle, her face a mask of fury. She unleashed a lethal counterattack. Alorious called upon his secret ally in the assault, the morargrim, for aid and the demonic shapechanger joined the fray.

It took all of Salena's efforts to keep the pair at bay, but then the morargrim made the fatal mistake when, hoping to distract her, it revealed the truth about their long ago relationship, and took gloating pleasure in offering up details only Elylsa could have known. Salena erupted in rage and, already drawing power from her unborn child, launched terrible blows upon both of her foes. Alorious died shrieking, his bones melted, and, though it managed to escape, she scarred the morargrim's face with a magical attack that left it disfigured no matter which form it assumed.

In the centuries that followed Salena only devoted part of her attention to managing her realm. Ordering her dark matrons to oversee civic details, she focused on revenge. The morargrim was unfinished business. In her absence, Salena's dark matrons did their best to carry out her wishes. Competing for their neglectful queen's favor they initiated many useful projects, but never managed to attract her attention long enough to renew their quest to drive Simarra into despair. Forced to make do with lesser victories, the bright elves bided their time and laid the groundwork for their queen's eventual triumph, particularly after founding the Semyad and infiltrating other societies.

Scarcely more than four hundred years ago, Salena completed her preparations and launched her final assault upon her morargrim enemy. It fell to her magic with almost astonishing ease, making her realize exactly how much power she had acquired. As it died the final death, a sudden insight allowed Salena to absorb its essence. Augmented by this last burst of supernatural energy she reached out into the cosmos and claimed immortality, becoming a goddess.

The Fallen insist she made this great leap without any assistance. Most outsiders suspect she had help; perhaps even that of Thûrak himself. Though returned to immortality, one of the few still alive who remembers the long-lost days in the Cradle of Life, Salena no longer believes life eternal a true possibility. The universe must eventually wind down, whether in a day or an eon, and Salena intends to make sure that she and her chosen cause everyone else to suffer until they accept this fact.

THE AGE OF BLOOD

Philosophically compelled to accept their inevitable withering away, the Fallen viewed the Age of Blood as quite possibly their final opportunity to visit misery upon the world. Urged on by their newly risen goddess, they exploded from their strongholds soon after the fall of Megath-Tor. They overran the northern territories of the Volsparran with almost contemptuous ease, and, upon meeting the rampaging keza-drak for the first time, left even these bestial warriors daunted. The blight elves warred not for territory or glory, but simply to corner fresh audiences to degrade and terrorize. This bewildered the keza-drak, and inspired feelings of superstitious dread. In turn, the blighted regarded the keza-drak as talented amateurs, showing some promise in their work despite their lack of subtlety.

Content to loom over the remnants of the Volsparran nation, the blight elves then turned their attention to Sudeja, launching a bloody campaign of attrition and sieges designed more to break the spirit of foes than actually conquer them.

BLIGHT ELF SOCIETY

Blight elves organize themselves into clans based upon kinship ties with the oldest living relative who shares their gender. Daughters always





belong to the clan of their mother, sons to that of their father. Since elves tend to live for lengthy periods, many clans consist of numerous generations tracing their lineage back to a single venerable ancestor. Traditionally, clan elders take the title of “First Father” or “First Mother,” and give their name to the clan as a whole. Thus, any modern day blight elf with a surname also has a clan elder.

Clan elders, through force of both law and custom, exercise considerable power over their descendants and rarely hesitate to use this influence for their own benefit. They choose their descendants’ spouses and, in a broad sense their careers, since anyone seeking to join a guild must first secure the permission of their elder. Clan elders often leverage this fact to control the behavior of their younger descendants.

For older descendants, those already married and settled in their careers, clan elders must employ other methods. Since the Fallen believe that clans exist as a single cohesive unit, each elder has the right to speak on behalf of their descendants. While normally confined to representing the clan at the annual parliament, an elder may also assert this privilege by stepping in and taking over whenever a descendant deals with one of the guilds. This right of intervention presents elders with an easy way of punishing wayward descendants, since nothing requires them to strike a good deal.

Elders also enjoy the right to summon any member of their clan for an audience at any time. The blighted regard few crimes as more serious than failing to show up for this meeting, let alone dallying during the journey. Clan members accused of violating this law must account for their actions before a triumvirate of dark matrons. If even one of these priestesses deems the explanation unacceptable the offender earns instant execution, denied even the honor of suicide.

Finally, though rarely used, clan elders may disown any of their descendants at any time and for any reason. Blight elves without a clan suffer all the hardships accorded to second-class citizens in any society. In addition, they must immediately resign from their guild, though Salena dictates that no break with a clan expunges her servants’ duties as dark matrons. The disowned must also forfeit all property, save that which they can carry from their former home in a single trip. However, since this injunction applies not only to the one disowned but also to that person’s descendants, elders rarely sanction senior members of the clan as it could cost them dozens, if not hundreds, of followers.

When an elder dies the clan immediately fragments into many smaller units; each led by the oldest descendant of that particular lineage. The new elder has the option of welcoming back anyone disowned by the previous elder. These breakups occur regularly, merely another wrinkle in the ebb and

flow of blight elf society, so it seldom prompts much comment or investigation. That truth acts as the one great check upon clan elder power—the constant threat of assassination by impatient, or simply exasperated, heirs. The Fallen never reward carelessness or celebrate weakness, particularly amongst the ranks of their most powerful citizens. By their reckoning, an elder who proves unable to manage his own descendants deserves oblivion.

Blight elf society grants a special status to individuals belonging to “clans of one”—those lacking any living relatives of the same gender either above, who could serve as their clan elder, or below, to rule over as clan elder. Called “uncles” or “aunts,” they may join any clan willing to adopt them by accepting that clan’s elder as their own. This protects them from suffering the odium usually afforded to someone without a clan. However, this arrangement ends immediately should the aunt or uncle become a parent to a child of the same gender since this automatically creates a new, albeit very small, clan.

PARLIAMENT

At least once each year all clan elders must assemble in Salena’s foremost temple, the Palace of Pain, so that they might offer advice to the goddess and her priestesses about important issues. While the parliament has no real decision-making power in this totalitarian theocracy, the blight elves nevertheless take it very seriously. Since they regard Salena as the “mother” of their people, clan elders who fail to honor this summons often end up executed just like a descendant who skips an audience with one of them. The dark matrons, who enforce this edict, rarely accept excuses or apologies. By their thinking, even illness merely demonstrates that the elder no longer has the hardiness to lead a clan. As a rule, only clan elders serving the interests of the blight elf nation as a whole, such as those commanding armies in the field, survive missing a parliament.

GUILDS

Blight elves assign every important task in their society to organizations they collectively refer to as “guilds,” even if a particular organization prefers to use another name. Each guild has near total authority over the way in which it carries out its responsibilities, and the liberty to take savage measure against anyone who attempts to usurp their bailiwick. Only a dark matron, who speaks for the goddess herself, may interfere with a guild’s operations or internal affairs without fear of reprisal.

The Fallen assign a relatively small number of activities to the general population as a whole. Most of these, referred to as “arts,” concern themselves with the officially approved forms of entertainment such as sports, games, and, of course, torture. The blight elves consider home building and home repair activities available to anyone rather than the exclusive domain of a particular guild.

TIMELINE

YEAR

- 150: Taladin Valanas leads 30,000 followers out of the Cradle of Life.
- 149: Occupation of Dassurri homeland begins.
- 146: Elven nation divides.
- 145: Wild Lands settled.
- 1: Age of Steel begins.
- 35: Shek-tar gnomes conquer the Wild Lands.
- 53: Volspar founded.
- 105: "Year of Mists" Salena Valanas exiled for heresy.
- 106: Salgrannok founded. Ghost Mill created.
- 129: League of Plaguewrights and Cabal of Entropic Channelers founded.
- 176: Fey Paths created.
- 217: Blood War begins.
- 221: Battle of Sunken Vale. Taladin Valanas killed by his sister, Salena.
- 223-235: Construction of Northwatch.
- 332: Alorious Teldar leads unsuccessful coup.
- 339: Parliament of clan elders formed and guild system established. Conclave of Dark Matrons formally recognized.
- 427: Shapers Guild founded. Cabal of Entropic Channelers in decline.
- 827: Society of Joy Eaters founded.
- 1506: Age of Plenty begins.
- 1567-1620: First generation of Semyad begin indoctrination.
- 1867: Joy eaters assume control over Semyad training.
- 2313: Ascension of Salena Valanas.
- 2736: Age of Blood begins. Blight elf armies invade neighboring realms.

Each guild imposes its own tests and membership criteria on potential applicants. Those who fail to meet the guild's standards, or secure their clan elder's permission, never gain admission. The more prestigious the guild, the greater its pool of applicants and the more stringent its entry requirements.

Most of the Fallen, though they might wish otherwise, eventually settle for joining one of the lesser guilds, organizations that perform vital but mundane chores such as making furniture or tending crops. Only the most talented, or well-connected citizens, get the opportunity to join the greater guilds that exert true influence over blight elf society.

Many believe that the dark matrons exist somehow above the guilds. As evidence, they point out that a prospective dark matron need not seek her clan elder's permission to become a priestess. Though there is some disagreement as to the true number of greater guilds, none dispute the legitimate status of the following five groups:

Cabal of Entropic Channelers: Reaching through time to call forth the unimaginable power found only during the final moments of the universe, the entropic channelers employ both decay and defeat as instruments to work their will. (See Chapter 2)

Society of Joy Eaters: Freely choosing to infect themselves with a disease that cripples their own ability to experience strong emotions, joy eaters use the detachment they gain from this to become the ultimate manipulators of mind and soul. (See Chapter 3)

League of Plaguewrights: Creators of diseases and poisons, the plaguewrights provide the blight elves with their most devastating weapons and most formidable tools. (See Chapter 4)

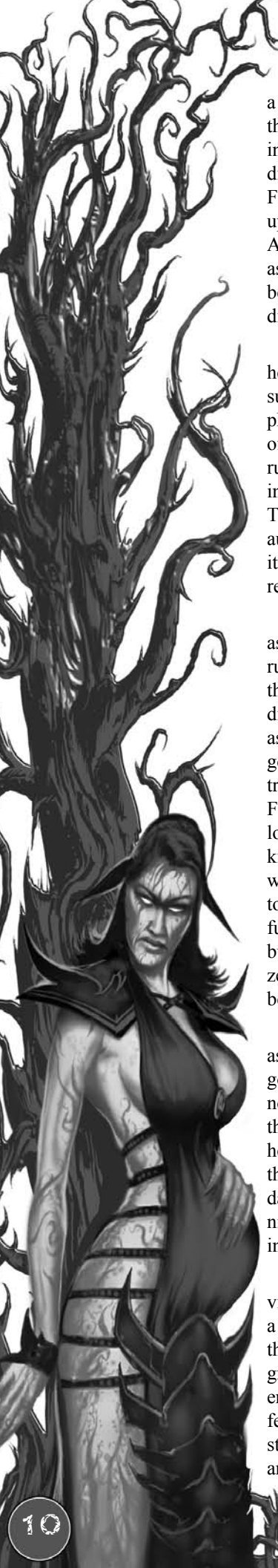
Shapers Guild: Breeders of countless monsters, the shapers supply their society with creatures that serve many different purposes, ranging from cannon fodder to street cleaners, to household appliances and everything in between. (See Chapter 5)

Conclave of Dark Matrons: Priestesses who oversee blight elf society on behalf of their goddess, the dark matrons offer both direction and leadership for the Fallen. (See Chapter 6)

RELIGION

Until the ascension of Salena Valanas, the blight elves bent their knees to no god. The dark matrons, speaking on behalf of their queen, frowned upon any sort of worship whether public or private. This official disapproval stemmed from the blight elf ideology that everything must eventually fail, including the gods themselves, and the lingering resentment over the role a morargrim had played in the origin of their people. Individual dark matrons took this antipathy to religion one step further and actively persecuted believers.





Of course, that all changed once Salena became a goddess. The dark matrons immediately reversed themselves and attempted to throw their entire society into a religious frenzy. Several of them, under the direction of the goddess herself, wrote a holy book, Fraz Dur Gul, "The End of Pain," that expounded upon the idea of driving lesser beings to suicide. All blight elves must commit this book to memory as part of their education and, since it mirrors the bedrock assumptions of their society, most find little difficulty following its precepts.

However, the blight elves, and presumably Salena herself, remain convinced that not even a god shall survive the end of the universe. This discouraging philosophy, when coupled with the fact that many of them remember her as the powerful but mortal ruler who reigned over them just four centuries past, influences the way the Fallen venerate their goddess. Though they respect her might, and willingly augment it through worship, they approach it with a certain measure of skeptical reserve.

Most continue to regard her as the founder, and natural ruler of their people, rather than an impossibly remote divine being. They treat her as more of a queen with godlike powers than as a true god. Despite this the Fallen remain fanatically loyal to Salena. Ready to kill or die at her slightest word they do their best to worship her, dutifully fundamentalist, but lacking the zeal of true believers.

Even after ascending to godhood, Salena saw no reason to leave her throne. She still rules her people from her former headquarters and now chief temple Nrayntor, the Palace of Pain. There she spends most of her days conducting the business of the realm and her nights, since she no longer needs to sleep, pursuing increasingly ambitious magical experiments.

Though Salena's divine powers allow her to adopt virtually any appearance, she often prefers to wear a guise quite similar to her mortal form, albeit one three times her original size. Stooped, her belly grotesquely swollen and constantly shaking from the enraged kicks of the infant forever trapped inside, few traces of her youthful beauty remain. Dank strands of chalk white hair reaching down to her ankles shroud most of her wizened frame. Despite

the seeming infirmities of advanced age, her gnarled rheumy claws and crusted eyes retain the startling strength and vigor of her younger days.

SALENA VALANAS

Salena Valanas revels in the morbid certainty of failure and despair. The patroness of suicide demands that her servants inflict misery upon every living thing until it finally reaches its breaking point. Though she welcomes blood sacrifice of sentient life, she requires that her followers prepare their victims by actually making them beg for death's sweet release. The cult regards torture, both physical and psychological, as a sacrament and considers driving a victim to suicide as the most holy of offerings. Sometimes priestesses seeking particular favor journey in secret to other lands and target a prominent figure as a victim for the goddess. They then dedicate themselves to destroying that person, ruining their life until suicide seems the only respite from misery.

CULTURE AND TRADITIONS

BIRTH

Blight elves have a number of taboos related to childbirth, many designed to keep mothers from forming strong attachments to their children.

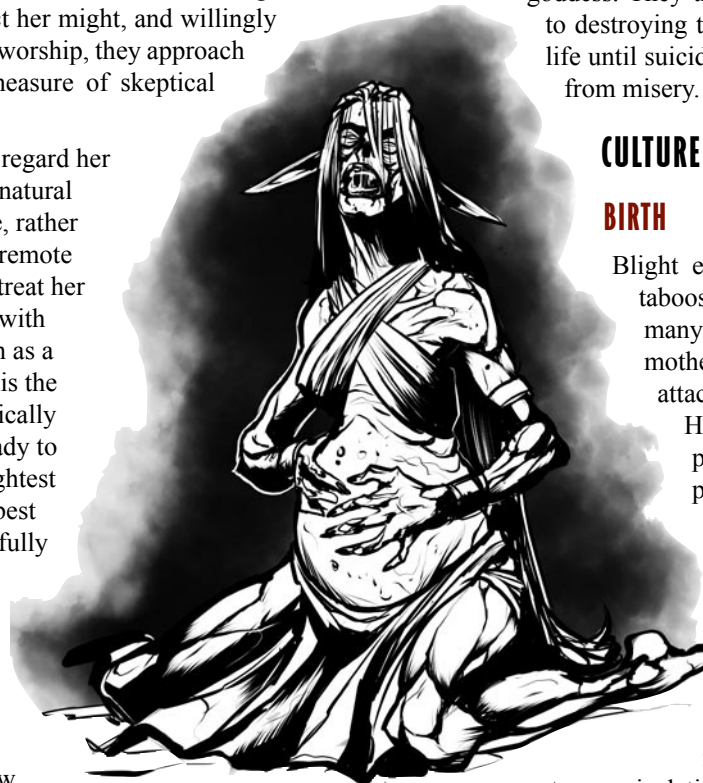
However, some of these prohibitions rest on very practical concerns.

Innate sorcery, if accidentally unloosed during an excruciating childbirth could be catastrophic. When a pregnancy nears its end, an expectant mother removes herself

to an isolation hut maintained by the Sisterhood of Midwives. Forbidden all contact with anyone outside the Sisterhood, she must take regular swallows of a sour herbal concoction that leaves her dazed and disorientated. This potion, brewed exclusively by the Sisterhood, makes it impossible for the mother to use her magic, whether deliberately or inadvertently, and clouds her memory of the labor itself. Reducing the arduous ordeal of childbirth to a set of hazy recollections in this way also makes it easier for mothers to surrender their children to the stringent requirements of blight elf society.

COMING OF AGE

Blight elf mothers must relinquish their children as soon as they wean them. Taken away and fostered with a group of other children near their same age, they



CONFINEMENT POTION

This tongue numbing herbal concoction dulls the minds and magical abilities of blight elf women during childbirth. However, since its stultifying properties apply to any blight elf drinking it, not just pregnant women, the Sisterhood takes pains to keep both the recipe and samples of the potion out of unfriendly hands. For someone with a legitimate reason to purchase it, a dose of confinement potion has a cost of 6. For anyone else it costs 22 due to the need to go through the black market. Any blight elf drinking a dose of this potion must make a Difficulty 20 Fortitude save or become dazed for 12 hours. Any blight elf currently suffering from the effects of this potion receives a -5 penalty on any saving throw to resist another dose.

grow up in an atmosphere of deliberate scarcity. Forced to fight their foster siblings for food, clothing, blankets and all the essentials of life they soon develop the cunning ruthlessness the blighted consider a defining aspect of their racial heritage. They also learn that escaping an existence of pain and hardship requires they make others suffer privation in their stead. Indeed, blight elves rarely forget those cherished childhood memories of savoring a full belly or a warm bed while a nearby foster sibling groaned with hunger or shivered with cold.

It takes three decades for one of the Fallen to reach adulthood. During this time, a child must learn many different disciplines and commit a great deal of lore to memory. Since blight elves discourage innovation in children, most of their education takes on the form of rote learning with brutal punishments for those who fail to master the curriculum.

The blighted require that every child learn how to call forth diseases and poisons through an act of will alone, a terrifying ability they call the blighted touch. This not only enables them to strike down their enemies but also, thanks to the manipulation of the shapers, shields them from the many creatures produced by the Guild. Any creature tracing its origin back to the Guild suffers agonizing and incapacitating convulsions the instant it attempts to harm a blight elf.

Those children who prove unwilling, or unable, to master the discipline of channeling their innate magic in this way never survive to adulthood due to a ritual called the Grayntole, "the exposure." Cast out into the most isolated part of the wilderness and ordered to make their own way home, children lacking the

blighted touch invariably fall prey to the many fell beasts stalking the forest. Blight elves send children on the cusp of gaining full control over their ability out on this rite of passage with the unfeeling instinct of a bird pushing her fledglings from the nest.

MARRIAGE

The Fallen scorn the very notion of love and romance. Clan elders arrange all marriages, not bothering to inform the bride and groom until negotiations are completed. When elders agree to a union, they summon their descendants and immediately conduct the ceremony. The elders then speak the vows on the couple's behalf. To keep spouses from forming strong emotional bonds, tradition forbids newlyweds from speaking to one another during the first month of matrimony, from meeting for any reason other than mating, and they are required to maintain separate residences throughout their lives.

Blight elves punish adultery by mutilating both parties to prevent either from ever producing offspring again. However, this only applies when the adultery takes place between couples of different genders. The Fallen rarely concern themselves with affairs between people of the same sex. Scholars who study blight elf culture speculate that this double standard stems from the fact that adultery between male and female risks producing children and hence attacks the very foundation of the clan system.

DEATH

Blight elves regard death as inevitable, and in many ways as a welcome end to an abject existence. Though they frown upon suicide during most stages of life, considering it an earned blessing, those approaching their final breath due to old age or illness frequently kill themselves to honor their goddess. Distant and unemotional as always, those who choose to take their own lives rarely make much of a ceremony about the act, merely putting their affairs in order and then getting on with it.

Harkening back to the death of Elylsa Myrille, the Fallen reject most funeral rituals as pointless and unnecessary. Rather than bury or cremate a body, they prefer to expose a corpse to the elements so that it might decay at its own pace. The blight elves typically rest a corpse upon a raised platform located in one of the many clearings dotting the forest and let the world devour it at its leisure.

Since the blighted touch persists even after death, creatures native to the forest tend to leave these remains alone. However, the sheer number of powerful adepts found within blight





THE CULT OF SALENA VALANAS

The dark matrons lead Salena Valanas' cult. These priestesses, deliberately infected while pregnant with a disease that makes it impossible for them to deliver their child, leach mystical powers from wombs forever swollen with babies that are alive but destined never to draw independent breath.

Agenda: To make others accept the futility of their existence.

Membership: 450 dark matrons

Resources: All the resources of the blight elf nation are at the disposal of their goddess and her chief servants.

Common Powers: Dominate, Flesh Shaping, Harm, Heart Shaping, Mind Shaping, Pain, Psychic Blast, Sleep, Suggestion, Withering Blast

elf society always places unattended bodies at risk of animation as undead. The Corpse Mongers Guild views safeguarding cadavers as its most important duty and devotes considerable cunning to fashioning traps designed to kill, or at least foil, body snatchers.

SARANGAK FOREST

At one time, this great wood, isolated and remote, had a reputation as a place that exalted the dignity of the living world. That all changed when the blight elves claimed and transformed it. A playground for countless diseases and toxins, home to nightmarish beasts spawned in the obscene imaginations of the Shapers Guild, nothing remains of that idyllic forest save a fading memory.

Every living creature found within this forest, plants and animals alike, bears some sign of the blight elves' malign influence. Creaking trees seem to moan in agony, trembling even when the wind lies still. Their roots drawing groundwater irredeemably befouled, their leaves damp with the leavings of the loathsome yellow mist that fills the air with the taste of rust. These trees seem to cringe away from sunlight, no longer worthy of its embrace. Animals, mutated into hideous forms, their original stock sometimes barely recognizable, stalk every path and trail. In Sarangak Forest, even the plant eaters hunt, driven to murder through madness and pain.

Only the blight elves and those they choose to escort may move through this forest unimpeded. Beneficiaries of the blighted touch, the magical safeguard the Shapers Guild breeds into every

creature it produces; this ability makes it all but impossible for these poor beasts to revenge themselves upon one of the Fallen. Trespassers, on the other hand, must grapple with myriad poisons and diseases that flourish within the forest while fending off the frenzied attacks of animals desperate for the momentary release from their suffering. Secure within this nearly impenetrable barrier, the blight elves regard Sarangak Forest as a vast moat of hostile life around their settlements. This allows them to deploy larger portions of their fighting force into the field than most other nations, conveying an exaggerated sense of their actual population to outsiders.

BLIGHT FEVER

Only creatures native to the Sarangak may travel the forest without risking exposure to the hundreds of illnesses and toxins manufactured by the League of Plaguewrights. While symptoms vary between victims, blight fever is universally fatal, if left untreated. Any non-indigenous creature must make a Fortitude save for each day spent within Sarangak Forest. The Difficulty of this saving throw depends upon the creature's degree of exposure.

With each failed saving throw, victims suffer 2 points of ability score damage; determine which score randomly. Victims also suffer a secondary effect with each failed save. Once ability score damage is healed, secondary effects persist for twenty-four hours. Narrators may use the following optional effects, or create their own.

- (1) *Blinded*
- (2) *Deafened*
- (3) *Fatigued* (exhausted, if already fatigued)
- (4) *Mentally Numb*: The creature finds it very difficult to focus on complex tasks, suffering a -4 penalty on all checks involving Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma.
- (5) *Shaken* (frightened, if already shaken)
- (6) *Sickened* (nauseated, if already sickened)
- (7) *Slowed*
- (8) *Winded*

A devastating mélange of diseases and poisons, blight fever resists most cures. Exposed creatures undergoing

BLIGHT FEVER EFFECTS

ACTIONS WITHIN PAST 24 HOURS	FORT SAVE DIFF.
Traveled through the forest	12
Suffered an injury while within the forest	14
Inhaled smoke from a campfire using local wood	16
Drank water local to the forest (including rain)	18
Ate a plant or animal native to the forest	20

preventative treatment can substitute Medicine skill checks for Fortitude saves. Used together, Cure Disease and Cure Poison can cure an infected creature. Using only one of these powers has no effect.

LIFE IN THE FOREST

A significant percentage of blight elves maintain three different homes, and some, belonging to one of greater guilds, actually manage a fourth. The law requires them to keep a residence in Salgrannok, the blight elf capital. Since they all relish occasional moments of privacy and seclusion, whether to further their experiments or simply to brood about the inanities of existence, most also keep a private dwelling secreted somewhere within the forest. Those who belong to clan large enough to support a family stronghold also typically claim personal quarters there as well.

Despite this incentive to travel, the blight elves rarely devote much time to wandering about their realm. The Fey Paths, a magical network allowing them to arrive at any location within the Sarangak Forest after only one day's travel, makes it so easy to move from place to place that they seldom bother to take more conventional routes. Very few normal roads breach the interior of the forest. Most buildings, whether a private home or a formidable stronghold built by a clan boasting hundreds of members, stand isolated, surrounded by wilderness raw and untamed.

With the exception of those clan strongholds, and the farms, orchards, ranches and other places staffed by members of the guilds charged with food production, the forest boasts only a handful of noteworthy spots. Four of the greater guilds maintain their own private sanctuary somewhere within the forest. Only the dark matrons, who treat Salgrannok itself as their own personal fiefdom, see no need for a citadel devoted to their guild alone. In addition to those four significant locations, the blight elves also set aside one particular region of their domain to house and train the Semyad. Members of other races reared from birth to, in secret, advance the cause of the Fallen among their own people; the Semyad willingly serve as spies, saboteurs, and carriers of deadly diseases on behalf of their masters.

FEY PATHS

This network of pathways, constantly bordered by a whooshing barrier of wind, crisscrosses the entire forest. Like a single thread drawn into a tangled skein, these paths all eventually terminate at their point of origin, Halluride, "the Ghost Mill," stronghold of the Cabal of Entropic Channelers. Blazed in the early days of the blight elf nation, when the Cabal still enjoyed the trust of the queen, they endowed these paths with two magical properties that made them very useful. First, they repelled monsters, which offered the Fallen their only guaranteed way to travel safely through the realm before the Cabal's eclipse by the Shapers Guild and

the development of blighted touch. Second, the magic of the paths somehow hastened a creature's journey, making it possible to reach any location within the forest in but a single day.

Magically bending time and space, the paths writhe throughout the blight elf domain, allowing travelers to reach any point within Sarangak Forest. Those hoping to walk a Fey Path must first locate one. A few of the more remote parts of the forest lack them, such as those used to test children for the blighted touch. This means that while travelers can use a Fey Path to reach these areas, they will not find one with which to return.

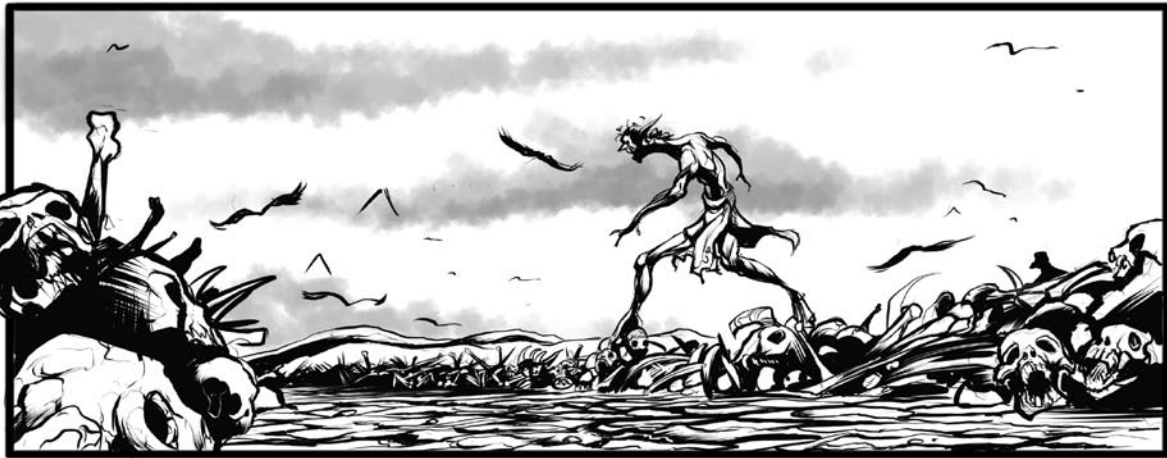
Wary of allowing the Cabal access to such a potent tool following the attempted coup by its founder Alorious Teldar, Salena Valanas ordered the entropic channelers to find a new use for the paths or to abolish them, and after internal debate, they finally hit upon a solution. It took nearly thirty years of painstaking calculations and preparatory work to recalibrate the magic but eventually, in one blast of raw power, they transformed the paths into an intricate trap. Now, these paths ensnare the unwary, scourging them with their greatest fears until they flee in heedless terror and arrive, all but prostrate with fatigue, at the Ghost Mill itself. With this new contribution to the defense of her realm, the Cabal proved its loyalty to Salena and, while still out of favor, ensured its survival.

Any creature not native to the forest who stumbles upon one of these magical paths must make a Difficulty 16 Will save to avoid feeling an overwhelming compulsion to use it for the next 1d6 hours. Since the Fey Paths retain their ability to keep monsters at bay, and hasten travelers to their journey's end, even those who succeed in this saving throw might still decide to travel upon them. However, each hour any creature not indigenous to the forest spends journeying along one of these paths, whether due to conscious choice or magical compulsion, requires it to make a Will save. A failed save causes the creature to become panicked as its greatest fear appears to come to life and begins to chase it. The Difficulty of this Will save starts at 12 and increases by +1 for every hour spent on the path.

Creatures pursued by this hallucination flee in horror, but magic forces them to stay upon the path. Unless an unaffected ally pursues them and manages to drag them off the path, requiring a successful grapple check, their flight always drives them to the Ghost Mill. They always arrive exhausted, making things much easier for the blight elf guards who lay there in wait.

Using these paths for their original purpose, rapid travel throughout the forest requires a





great deal of skill for interpreting and navigating magical patterns. Blight elves learn how to do this while still children and may walk these paths without conscious thought. However, members of other races must succeed in three consecutive Difficulty 15 Knowledge (supernatural) checks to deduce the pattern they must follow to reach their intended destination. Each of these checks requires that they walk along the path for one hour (requiring a Will save to avoid encountering their greatest fear). Following these three successful checks, it then takes four more hours to reach any location within the forest (requiring four more Will saves). Creatures failing any of these Knowledge checks, or falling prey to the terror of the paths, must wait twenty-four hours before attempting to navigate the paths again.

FAYNE GRISIN (DEAD LOOP)

A mile wide ring of gray, barren soil leached of all life surrounds this great swath of fertile open land ten miles across. A single meandering path of bone white paving stones, circling the interior of this ring at least five times, and spaced so that a person must jump from purchase to purchase, seems the only way to pass through it without touching the soil. In stark contrast to the dead earth within the ring, and the writhing ghastliness of the forest proper, the land surrounded by the ring appears home to scores of small settlements. Each with its own unique architecture and carefully tailored landscape, the area seems a microcosm of the world as a whole, containing something familiar to all of the major, and most of the minor, cultures of Simarra.

Twelve hundred years ago, the blight elves, acknowledging the loathing other races felt toward them, embarked upon an ambitious program to create cadres of fifth columnists able to infiltrate other cultures on their behalf. Kidnapping, or in some cases, purchasing children belonging to many different races, they set themselves to the task of indoctrinating them with their own twisted philosophy and dubbed them the Semyad, or “poison

seeds.” Though these children, and their descendants, appear as normal dwarves, humans, gnomes, orcs and even elves, they possess souls as corrupt as any blight elf. Using magic, and the tutelage of their most gifted agents, the blight elves constantly update each community with the latest fashions and news, all so that any Semyad they dispatch may seamlessly blend in with his or her original culture.

In a rare moment of cooperation, the Cabal of Entropic Channelers and the League of Plaguewrights worked together to create a lethal barrier around the area set aside to house these communities. Designed to not only keep the malign influence of the forest at bay, but also to ensure those inside could make no escape until conditioned to unquestioned loyalty, this barrier swiftly kills any living creature attempting to pass through or over it. It does this by creating an effect similar to the Withering Grasp power (see page 115 of the Survivor’s Guide for complete information on this power).

This attack automatically affects anyone crossing across the barrier, except those using the paving stones, regardless of whether or not they come into direct contact with the soil. Even those attempting to tunnel beneath or fly overhead suffer from the life sapping effects of the barrier. Narrators must make a power check for each round a creature spends within the barrier (power check modifier +20). This determines the Difficulty of the Fortitude saving throw and the consequences of a failed save exactly as explained in the description for the Withering Grasp power. Creatures slain by the barrier collapse into gray dust.

The Fallen use the Fey Paths to reach the area set aside for their Semyad servants, allowing them to bypass the barrier that surrounds it. However, since the Fey Paths do not exist within this area they must leave under their own power. Originally, the blight elves used specially woven magical cloaks to protect themselves from the barrier’s life sapping power but eventually, as the volume of travelers increased, they laid down a path of stones allowing creatures to move directly through it. These bone white paving stones, spaced to make it difficult for someone to easily leap between

them, offer a reliable, if precarious path through the dead loop.

Those seeking to traverse the paving stones must attempt three consecutive Difficulty 30 Jump checks. This represents the creature achieving a certain rhythm to its leaps and landings that allows it to cross the barrier with rapid momentum. A creature failing one of these checks suffers all the consequences of coming into contact with the barrier and, in addition, must begin anew, requiring that it still succeed in three consecutive Jump checks. Due to the risks and dangers of making so many rapidly placed leaps, a creature may not take 20 with these Jump checks.

DEATHWARD CLOAK

This thin cloak, the color of river sand, shields its wearer from the danger that surrounds Fayne Grisin. Anyone wearing a deathward cloak may travel through this wasteland of magical deadly soil without any risk of the life-draining hazard that normally comes with passing over it. Since the blight elves long ago dispensed with the need to wear these cloaks themselves they now consider collectible antiques at best and contraband at worst. For a blight elf a deathward cloak has a cost of 12. For anyone else it costs 28 because of the need to go through the black market.

The blight elves, devised their own magical solution to this problem. Anyone with the blighted touch may, by shedding their blood upon the first paving stone on either end cause these pavers to form a temporary causeway allowing speedy, and safe, passage across. The blight elf must voluntarily choose to wound itself. Any coercion, whether magical or physical, causes the magic to fail.

SALGRANNOK

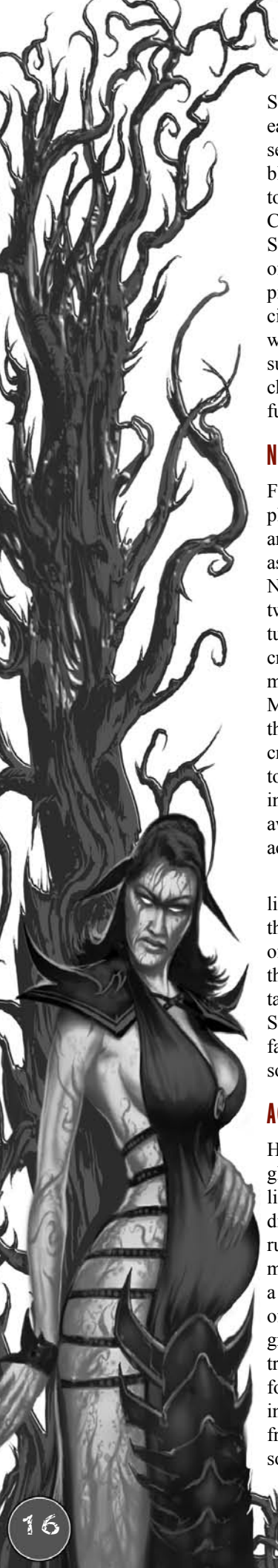
Even though the blight elves claim the entire Sarangak Forest as their exclusive domain, their queen demands that each of them maintain a residence in Salgrannok, the capital, and only, city of the realm. Because of this requirement, approximately one-third of the Fallen live within Salgrannok at any given time. Able to walk the Fey Paths to reach any location within the forest, blight elves frequently maintain other, more private homes elsewhere, but the Fallen always regard “the city” as their nation’s central core.

A place that exalts suffering and slough as an art form, Salgrannok’s formidable reputation does little to mask the squalor of a rain-swept city where bricks of kiln-baked mud serve as the primary building material. The blight elves see little purpose in making homes that last; most take a certain grim delight in watching structures

decay before their very eyes. Few regard home décor as a meaningful pastime, preferring to focus instead on more practical activities, such as torture and crafting new diseases. For this reason, most of the buildings in Salgrannok adhere to one of three common designs based upon their purpose; living quarters, storehouses, or gathering places.

This unnatural uniformity, endless rows of identical gloomy buildings without the slightest spark of individualism to differentiate them, transforms Salgrannok into a drab labyrinth for those who wander its unpaved streets. Lacking street signs or any other easily identifiable way of navigating its avenues and byways, neighborhoods blend into one formless mass making it nearly impossible for outsiders to reach their destinations without assistance. The blight elves and their servants, familiar with this quirk of Salgrannok’s design, long ago learned to attune senses other than sight to steer a course through the city. In Salgrannok, smells and sounds emanating from a handful of more permanent landmarks prove a far more reliable guide for travelers than the eyes. The blight elves and their servants, familiar with this quirk of Salgrannok’s design, long ago learned to attune senses other than sight to steer a course through the city, distinguishing from the unique smells and sounds emanating from a handful of more permanent landmarks.





Only five such locations defy Salgrannok's esthetic of homogeneity, each one making a signature sensory contribution to the city's bleak ambiance, allowing citizens to triangulate their exact position. Creatures accustomed to life in Salgrannok, without impaired senses of smell and hearing, may always pinpoint their location within the city. However, creatures unfamiliar with how Salgrannok works must succeed in a Difficulty 25 Notice check (which they may make as a full-round action).

NYRANTOR (PALACE OF PAIN)

Found in the heart of the city, this place, originally Salena's home and headquarters has, with her ascension to godhood become her primary temple. Nrayntor took form from a stand of towering trees twisted by dire magic into a tangled mass and then turned to stone just before their collapse. Blight elf craftspeople fashioned stairs and ladders to link the many hollow spaces found upon the Palace's façade. Millions of undead termites, former inhabitants of the trees and corrupted by that same petrification, crawl across its stony bark. Selena asks her people to contemplate these bugs which sometimes drop into food, hair or even open mouths before scuttling away and resuming their endless march, for their actions exemplify the futility of being.

The wind keens through Nrayntor's holey walls like a shrieking calliope, creating an earsplitting din that nevertheless fails to muffle the anguished pleas of those put to torment within. At the Palace of Pain, those with the greatest talent for inflicting suffering take their art to its most vile extremes. Long before Salena ascended, she led her magical artisans in fashioning an item that denied the tortured what sometimes proved their only possible revenge.

AGONY ALTARS

Hundreds of these tables wrought from volcanic glass, dark but veined with lines of purple and green, lie scattered within the Palace of Pain. Appearing no different than any other sacrificial altar complete with rusted iron manacles and stains of dried blood, their magical properties transform them into obscenities of a much higher order. Any living creature bound to one of these altars loses the ability to die. No matter how great or extreme the injury, the magic of these altars traps a spark of life within the body. Unfortunately, for those so bound, the altars do nothing to heal any injuries they might sustain, nor do they cushion them from the pain. Not even old age or starvation frees someone from the grip of an agony altar. So long



as they lie helplessly bound to its surface they must endure any torment visited upon them.

GRISTLING (IRONBRIAR)

Sprawling along the northern periphery, this great hedge of cruelly barbed thorn bushes seems at first like some half-hearted fence designed to repel invaders, however the nauseating pungency of the slaves trapped within soon reveals its true purpose. The ironbriar entwines itself around any living being unfortunate enough to fall into its fishhook grip, piercing their flesh and holding them absolutely still. Semi-sentient, designed to shrink away from anyone with the blighted touch, the ironbriar keeps its prisoners close until a blight elf chooses to wander in and claim them.

Drawing its sustenance from not only the blood and waste of its captives, but also in some way from their misery, the ironbriar uses pain to incapacitate even the most strong-willed. The ironbriar automatically grapples any non-blight elf within its reach without any need to make an attack roll. It acts as a huge creature with a +5 strength and +5 combat bonus (total modifier versus medium sized creatures +18) and always attempts to pin its opponent. On any round in which a creature succeeds in a grapple check versus the ironbriar the creature may choose to move up to half its normal speed (heavy obstruction) in any direction. However, if the creature does choose to move it must succeed in a Difficulty 15 Will save or suffer 1 point of Wisdom damage due to the intense pain of pushing through the ironbriar. Creatures whose Wisdoms reach -5 due to this pain become despondent and lose the ability to offer any further resistance to the ironbriar.

POSIPILITON (THE MENAGERIE)

Standing just outside the eastern boundary of the city, this large collection of pits, cages and other restraining areas serves as the Shaper Guild's second

most important facility. Unlike its primary stronghold at Danvaargak Nydair, the Guild only puts creatures it deems ready for use on display here. It keeps the unfinished, and outright failures, carefully hidden away to help foster its reputation for infallibility. As part of this campaign, it allows non-Guild members to tour selected parts of the grounds. Blending the functions of both zoo and coliseum, the Shapers Guild uses Posipiliton to entertain the rest of the blight elf population, and remind them of the contributions it has already made. Here, countless thousands of creatures cower in cramped, wretched quarters. Prevented by their callous masters from performing the tasks for which they were bred, the Guild regularly pits them against each other, or unlucky slaves, to amuse a jaded audience in gladiatorial games.

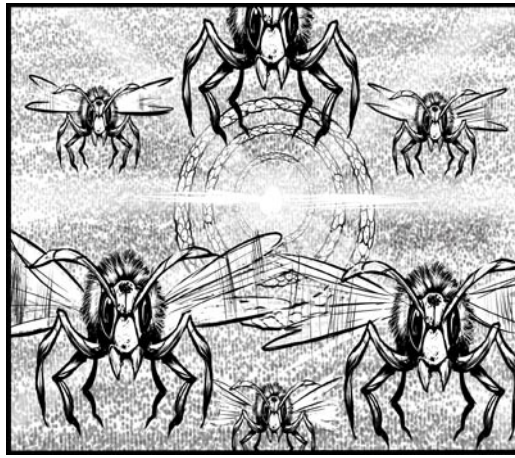
A cloud of fetid sorrow wafts from this place, rolling over the city with even the slightest breath of wind. Born in the waste, sweat, and grisly dietary requirements of so many of the menagerie's inhabitants this miasma is made only more sickening when joined by the mournful calls of the creatures trapped within. Though the roster of Posipiliton's denizens constantly shifts, the stench and dolorous howls emanating from the menagerie makes a pointed contribution to Salgrannok's frightful ambiance.

NAMROTH-TOR-ALETHE (DRONING HENGE)

This mana well, marked by three concentric rings of pale blue crystal stones, all but disappears beneath a buzzing storm of enraged bees at the western edge of the city. This living cloud fills the air, extending out a quarter mile in all directions from the glittering henge, becoming a solid mass as the bees—wingtip to wingtip—maintain a precise formation at all times. Every few moments one or more of the crystals making up the henge flares, releasing a burst of cerulean energy that ripples through this massive swarm and invigorates each bee it touches.

These bees, the final surviving remnant of Sarangak Forest's original inhabitants, savage any creature including the Fallen that approach the henge since, still in their original forms and never altered by the Shapers Guild the blighted touch has no effect upon them. Granted a form of immortality by the blue light emitted by the henge, they recover almost instantly from injuries, allowing them attack without respite until their target collapses beneath the weight of their stings. Tens of thousands of killer bees swarms, each healing all damage at the start of its turn, their instinctive drive to revenge themselves upon the blight elves, have inadvertently turned into pitiless guards for one of Salena's most valuable holdings.

Salena selected what would become Salgrannok as her capital because of its close proximity to a large mana well, then called Grazen Dur Mrair, "World's Heart." Undulating with power and energy, she knew it would prove one of her greatest tools in reshaping



the Sarangak Forest, its inhabitants and her followers. After exterminating the community of nature loving adepts who had hitherto claimed the mana well, using its power to nurture and sustain the forest as a whole, she set to work laying the corrupted foundations of her newly won realm.

In one of her first acts of malicious sorcery, she extended her dark will across the forest and then, in an instant, snuffed out the life of every single queen bee. Using magic to, in some inexplicable way, actually taunt the former hives of these assassinated queens she lured them all to the henge and bound them to it. Their minds frozen by this magical ritual, for the bees it seems as if only moments have passed since they lost their queens and they still thirst for vengeance. Reveling in the torment of even these nearly mindless creatures Salena Valanas compounded their affliction by fashioning magics that allowed her, and a few trusted followers, to walk unimpeded through their ranks, allowing her to make full use of the mana well while the bees rage on in helpless fury.

THRENADIRE (HELL KILNS)

Located at the southern edge of the city these three hills, hollowed out to form nearly one hundred large ovens, provide the baked bricks that serve as the primary structural component for the majority of Salgrannok's buildings. A sizable corps of zombies performs most of the labor here, closely supervised by a contingent of blight elves. Each instructed to do a single repetitive task; these zombies form grisly assembly lines that mechanically transform lumps of mud into finished bricks.

These ovens, designed to draw in great drumming breaths of air that boom across the city also take their toll upon the zombie labor force. Creating gale force winds, these ovens often "inhale" some of those undead instructed to work in the final stages of the brick making





process. The thunderous rumble of these ovens, when coupled with the ubiquitous scent of decayed flesh barbecuing upon incandescent coals, grates upon the nerves of most blight elves. Born to relish the suffering of others they consider the notion of mindless, unfeeling zombies crackling and sizzling within the ovens, rather than a living person, as a wasted opportunity that leaves them gritting their teeth in frustration. This makes the southern reach of Salgrannok the least popular part of the city. Only the most ill favored, those without the backing of a clan or guild, including what passes for the criminal underclass, consent to live near the Hell Kilns.

In addition to the ovens, the Hell Kilns also contain the pens for the unique creatures the Shapers Guild fashioned to harvest older bricks once they decay and fall from buildings. Called mudtongues, they seem like a cross between an anteater and gloomy gray peacock, albeit one that stands fifteen feet high at the shoulder. Each day, packs of mudtongues wend their way through the streets of Salgrannok seeking wayward bricks, snagging any they discover with their 20-foot tongues and then slurping them down. The priestesses of Salena Valanas, the dark matrons, for reasons they never bother to explain, insist that the workers make painstaking efforts to recover every speck of mudtongue droppings and deliver them all to the Palace of Pain. More than one worker at the Hell Kilns has paid the ultimate price for failing in this duty, becoming merely another zombie under the supervision of former colleagues.

BLIGHT ELF BACKGROUND

Blight elves, also known as the Fallen, are a heretical offshoot of the Volsparan people. Brutally nihilistic they believe that life lacks purpose, and therefore all worth. Taking this as their motto, they consider themselves fully justified in committing the vilest acts without allowing even the faintest glimmer of conscience to sway them from their course. Even before Salena Valanas ascended to become the patron goddess of suicide, they considered sowing misery and despair a desirable goal unto itself. Possibly concealing their envy for those still able to find elation in life behind a veil of contempt, they delight in putting other living creatures through unspeakable torment. They even extend this obstinate malice toward the environment as a whole; taking pride in their capability to degrade the natural world through diseases, poisons and any number of dire magical rituals.

The Fallen require their children master the blighted touch ability, a magical power that gives them the capacity to generate toxins and plagues at will. This makes them a terminal threat to anyone stepping within their

reach. They also use the blighted touch as a defense mechanism, carefully breeding their servant creatures to suffer painful convulsions whenever they try to harm someone with this ability. This alone keeps most of these anguished creatures from taking revenge on the Fallen.

A people who habitually release diseases and pollutants into their surroundings, blight elves reap the consequences of this disdain for the natural world through its effects upon their own bodies. Their frames thin to the point of emaciation, sunken chests often wracked by rasping coughs, blight elves always look on the brink of falling over. Long, reddish and green lesions snaking across their limbs and torsos, like crowns of mold atop inflamed sores, give a wide berth to the many pus-filled boils that blot their oily skin. Gauzy gray cataracts cast a film over their eyes, making it seem as if they recede even deeper into the sockets of their gaunt faces than they actually do. Their teeth, black and rotting, marked by pieces of spoiled food, stand sentinel at mouths that reeks with the putrefaction of death.

Ability Adjustments: +1 Dex, -1 Con

Bonus Feats: Night Vision, Talented (Notice and Search), Trailblazer

Mandatory Favored Feat: Blighted Touch. Blight elves must take Infect as a supernatural power at 1st-level. Complete information regarding the Infect power is in the Survivor's Guide (Chapter 3: The Magic of Simarra).

THE TAINT

Blight elves enter the world hopelessly stained by Taint, their bodies and minds scarred by the sins of their forefathers. However, while the Fallen cannot escape this racial inheritance, it serves to inoculate them from further corruption, allowing them to survive in the toxic Sarangak Forest.

Those who choose to embrace their Taint suffer the effects as outlined in the Survivor's Guide (Chapter 3: The Magic of Simarra). These blight elves may acquire



additional Taint, typically manifesting the following mutations.

Slight: Creatures from outside Sarangak Forest sense a fundamental “wrongness” when in your presence.

Minor: Nearby plants wilt slightly. Animals hesitate before approaching you.

Moderate: Normal plants die when coming into direct contact with your body (e.g. blackened footprints). Creatures of the animal or plant type must make a Difficulty 10 Fortitude save when within ten-feet of you, or become fatigued.

Severe: Normal plants die when coming within one foot of your body. Creatures of the animal or plant type must make a Difficulty 15 Fortitude save when coming into direct contact with your body, or suffer lethal damage.

Horrible: Normal plants die when coming within ten feet of your body. Creatures of the animal or plant type must make a Difficulty 20 Fortitude save when coming into direct contact with your body, or die. Creatures of your level, or higher, suffer lethal damage on a failed save.

BLIGHTED TOUCH

Over the centuries, the Fallen have found new ways to Infect their enemies. The following feats require blighted touch as a prerequisite; only blight elves may acquire them.

CONTAMINATE (GENERAL)

Prerequisite: Blighted Touch

As a full-round action, you may touch an object and temporarily endow it with toxic or infectious properties (chosen when activating this feat). Any creature touching a contaminated object must make a saving throw against your Infect power. This requires a successful power check (Difficulty 10 + 4 per size category larger than Medium), the contamination’s duration determined by your degree of success. A contaminated weapon can only Infect its wielder.

FIREWALL (GENERAL)

Prerequisite: Blighted Touch

As a standard action, you may Infect yourself with a minor toxin or disease as protection against a more serious threat. Each time you use this feat you must select whether to call upon a disease or poison (infecting and poisoning yourself counts as two separate uses). In either case, you suffer 1 point of Constitution damage and 1 point of damage to any other ability you choose (including Constitution if you wish). However, if you poison yourself, you gain immunity to any further ability damage caused by poisons, and if you infect yourself, you gain immunity to any further ability damages caused by diseases. You

BONUS VICES

Members of a race that celebrates the darkest parts of the mortal soul, all blight elves have the option of selecting a second vice from the list below. Blight elves regain a point of Conviction whenever they perform an action in keeping with a bonus vice. However, this bonus vice gives them an even greater incentive to perform evil deeds.

Pernicious: You take a spiteful pleasure in ruining beautiful objects and places.

Sadistic: You delight in inflicting pain and suffering, both physical and psychological, upon other creatures.

Vicious: You feel an instinctive need to injure, or better yet, kill, enemies and innocents alike. You find the notion of showing mercy foreign and rarely pause to accept an opponent’s surrender or strike a non-lethal blow.

still suffer all other ill effects from any poisons or diseases you encounter while enjoying this protection. This immunity lasts until the end of the current scene, or until you recover from the ability damage caused by this feat, whichever comes first. Note, the ending of the scene does not cure you of the ability damage dealt through this feat. You must eliminate it as you would the effects of any other disease or poison.

POISON THE MIND (GENERAL)

Prerequisite: Blighted Touch

You know how to strike back through the psychic link an opponent uses to assault your mind or soul. Whenever you succeed in a Will saving throw to resist a magical attack you may, as a free action, use your blighted touch power upon your attacker even if he is not within reach. Except for the fact that you need not touch your target this operates in all other ways as any other use of your blighted touch power.

SEEPING GRIP (GENERAL)

Prerequisite: Blighted Touch

As a standard action, you may turn a melee weapon into an extension of yourself allowing you to direct your blighted touch through it





when making an attack. The first creature you strike within the next minute suffers, in addition to any damage dealt by the weapon, all the effects of your blighted touch as if you had successfully struck it with a touch attack. Your opponent may still make a saving throw to resist this power. If the weapon ever leaves your hand during the time before you strike an opponent, the magical energy you endowed it with dissipates instantly.

TOXIC TRACE (GENERAL)

Prerequisite: Blighted Touch, Track

You find it very easy to locate anyone suffering from the effects of your blighted touch attack. Whenever you attempt to track someone with ability damage due to the effects of your blighted touch, you gain a +5 bonus on the check for every point of ability damage the target currently suffers from.

MONEY AND EQUIPMENT

DANVAAR

Like all complex societies, blight elves use a currency to regulate their economy and, since they suffered few disruptions following the fall of Megath-Tor, still use it in the Age of Blood. Called a danvaar, or “shriek,” these rings of psychically active glass feed upon the pain and suffering of any nearby creature, growing progressively darker the more anguish they absorb. Each time a danvaar encounters someone new a tiny portion of the misery it contains seeps out of it and into the person who touched it, causing it to brighten ever so slightly.

Members of most races find this an extremely disturbing experience, but blight elves savor it. Anyone except a blight elf who comes into direct contact with a danvaar must make a Difficulty 15 Will save or become shaken for one round. Blight elves on the other hand, experience a sharp jolt of pleasure whenever they handle a particular danvaar for the first time. This heady rush of delight grants them a +1 bonus on any saving throw to resist fear effects for one minute.

Rather than employ scales to weigh their money blight elves use a color chart to determine the worth of any given danvaar. The darker the ring, the greater its value. Generally, 100 empty, translucent danvaars equal one fully loaded and pure black danvaar.

RING GLOVES AND RING SABERS (SIMPLE WEAPONS)

Fashioned from mysterious materials these two

NEW WEAPONS

Weapon	Damage	Critical	Descriptor	Range	Size	Cost
Ring Glove	+1	20/+4	Bludgeoning	-	Tiny	12
Ring Saber	+3	19-29/+5	Slashing	-	Medium	15

BLIGHT SUPPRESSION (GENERAL)

Prerequisite: Blighted Touch.

As a full-round action, you can change your appearance to that of a typical elf for one day. You do this by suppressing your blighted touch ability, eliminating the effects of Taint. You must make a successful Constitution check, the Difficulty of which depends on your Taint score.

Taint Condition	Difficulty
Negligible (default blight elf)	5
Slight	10
Minor	15
Moderate	20
Severe	25
Horrible	30

If you use your blighted touch ability, whether to Infect an opponent or ward yourself from a creature with the blighted subtype, you immediately regain your true appearance.

weapons use the latent torment stored in blight elf currency to leave their targets quaking with fear. They both come with five grooves specially fitted to hold a single ring-like object in each slot. If their wielder fills these five grooves with danvaars retaining all, or most, of their potency, they immediately drain this dark dread from the currency, making them transparent and much less valuable. The first creature successfully struck by a weapon imbued with frightful energy must make a Difficulty 15 Will save or become panicked for 1d6 rounds. It takes a full-round action to place the danvaars needed to activate its power into these grooves.

Ring Glove: Made from a network of thin dark wires drawn into a tight mesh along the knuckles, this glove’s leather interior cushions the impact of any blows its wielder delivers. Each of its fingers or thumb contains one of the five grooves designed to hold the danvaars needed to activate its powers.

Ring Saber: This curved gray sword possesses a single jagged edge that tapers into a needlelike point on its end. The five grooves designed to hold the danvaars all rest along the length of its hilt.



CHAPTER 1: CABAL OF ENTROPIC CHANNELERS

Reaching forward through time, drawing on the strange anti-energy that surges and roils as the universe goes through its death throes, the entropic channelers languish under constant suspicion. Preoccupied with lore that other blight elves regard as dangerously alien, their reputation stained by Alorious Teldar's ancient treachery, the Cabal's status has slowly, but inexorably, declined over the last two millennia. However, the critical role it performs keeps the Cabal safe from reprisals. Clan elders deal with this curious, almost schizophrenic, situation by subtly directing iconoclasts and other unorthodox thinkers toward Cabal membership, segregating these potential rebels into a vital, though fringe, part of society.

Creators and controllers of the undead legions, they still resent the way the Shapers usurped their primacy as suppliers of shock troops. The Cabal also tends to many parts of the magical infrastructure created during the founding of the blight elf realm, when they still enjoyed an unblemished reputation. This applies in particular to the "Ghost Mill," their headquarters and chief stronghold, and the Fey Paths it sustains. Able to call down misfortune upon their foes, they travel in the vanguard of blight elf armies, tasked with ensuring that coincidences always favor the Fallen and not their opponents.

CABAL CUSTOMS

- (1) Entropic channelers shun mirrors and other reflective surfaces. The power they wield makes them acutely sensitive to the relentless march of decay and they find looking upon their own faces utterly revolting.
- (2) On special occasions, when feasting among themselves, entropic channelers make a point of cooking at least some of the meat courses whole and then animating them as zombies. Whether ripping chunks from squirming poultry nailed to their platters or slicing pieces from larger creatures writhing on a roasting spit, they claim that "wiggling meat" tastes better.
- (3) The law forbids entropic channelers from ever expressing ill wishes about another blight elf. The ability of senior Cabal members to manipulate chance and circumstance leaves many of the Fallen convinced that all channelers have the power to curse their enemies. An entropic channeler convicted of openly wishing harm on another must pay a fine that permanently reduces his wealth score by one.
- (4) Entropic channelers believe that they shall die after



hearing their names a certain number of times. Each uses his own formula for calculating this number, and keeps it a closely guarded secret. For this reason, whether true or not, they make a point of employing colorful euphemisms whenever they refer to themselves or a colleague. Those who learn a channeler's real name, and use it during a negotiation, earn a swift surrender or a vicious assault.

- (5) Entropic channelers relish any opportunity to destroy knowledge. They view erasing an intangible, such as information, from the cosmos as a welcome change from their normal emphasis on erasing material objects.

HALLURIDE (THE GHOST MILL)

Private domain of the entropic channelers. Point of origin for the Fey Paths. Colossal gravestone to countless souls lost—Halluride, the Ghost Mill, is a towering featureless spire jutting from the arboreal canopy like an unholy fang. Here, entropic channelers teach their students and conduct their ceremonies far from the prying eyes of other guilds. Halluride seems fashioned from a solitary butte of milky stone reaching two-hundred and fifty feet into the air. The forest presses close against its base, and only a single rutted path, defined by a constant wind that ruffles branches along its edge, yields to this tousled mat of vegetation.

The exterior of the Ghost Mill is smooth, a blank expanse unbroken by doorway or window. However, entropic channelers, capable of causing objects to collapse into dust, may create a door when needed—ordering part of the wall to crumble by an act of will alone. Once they step through this man-sized aperture, the magic of the Ghost Mill repairs the wall in the following round. Anyone attempting to smash through the side of the Ghost Mill must pierce the wall with one swift strike since it automatically fixes any damage dealt to it over consecutive rounds. This requires a Difficulty 35 Strength check.

The blight elves first claimed their realm through an act of treachery and murder when they slaughtered a community of nature loving adepts. One thousand, eight hundred and seventy-six souls perished during that night of betrayal, all of them pledged to defend the beloved Sarangak with their magical gifts. Rather than allow this preternatural energy to be wasted the blighted seized these spirits and bound them to a spire of stone located several days away. These ghosts, a shrieking whirl of hideously distorted faces ringing the top third of Halluride, wail out their sadness, horror, and rage. Their revolutions generate a cacophonous racket and an extraordinary magical power in the process that created and sustains the Fey Paths; that one rutted trail beginning at the foot of the Ghost Mill that twists and multiplies by magic until it somehow manages to touch every inch of the Sarangak simultaneously. The trapped, helpless, fury of the spirits protects any creature walking on a Fey Path from harm. If a hostile



creature attempts to step onto a Fey Path the constantly surging wind that borders the paths, a mere whisper of the shrieks of those bound to the Ghost Mill, erupts into a full fledged gale and tosses the creature aside.

SECRETS OF THE CABAL

Long ago, when the Cabal still feared sudden attack by those deemed more loyal to the crown, its leadership loosened some of the bindings that keep the Ghost Mill's supernatural energy in check. Vowing to release it only if on the brink of extermination by their own kind, they viewed it as a potential distraction to help cover their flight or a final gasp of revenge should all else fail. Though that danger passed long ago, the entropic channelers never bothered to strengthen the wards again. Once each month at least one of the most senior members of the Cabal must shore up the remaining bindings. Failure to do so would free the more than 1,800 angry spirits bound to the Ghost Mill, giving them free rein to take their long delayed revenge against their slayers, and destroy the Fey Paths.

One group of entropic channelers reveres the inherent potential of undead. Viewing them as far more than mere cannon fodder they advocate transforming the entire blight elf nation into undead. Though they acknowledge that even undead must turn to dust as the universe makes its inevitable slide toward the end of time, they make the very reasonable point that undead shall surely last the longest. So far, not even the majority of the Cabal supports to their plan of using the Ghost Mill to work this great magic, and very few outside the ranks of the entropic channelers even know the scheme exists.

LEADERSHIP

A council of nine entropic channelers leads the Cabal. Each year, all members able to attend the feast commemorating the death and disgrace of the traitor Alorious Teldar vote a new member onto this council for a nine-year term. The outgoing member of the council presides over this election. Each member of the council gets one vote for every year served when determining the business of the Cabal.

Entropic channelers divide themselves into two ideological factions based upon their own personal perception of creation's final moments. Those who believe it meekly fades away into nothingness with very little fanfare call themselves the Resigned and insist that the Cabal do whatever it takes to placate the rest of the Fallen. On the other hand, those who believe





the cosmos surges and rages right until the final moment call themselves the Valiant and push for a more aggressive role in blight elf society. Since both factions apparently draw forth the same power from the far future the Cabal's scholars find these two conflicting perceptions of the same event quite puzzling.

CABAL MECHANICS

ENTROPIC CHANNELER INITIATE POWER PATH

Trained in the rudiments of channeler lore, you become a vessel for the alien energy that shall devour everything at the end of time. Your touch can cause objects to collapse into dust, but objects in your possession become brittle.

Prerequisites: Adept, Lucky, blight elf.

Key Ability: Wisdom. Even for a blight elf, confronting the end of the universe on such a regular basis requires an exceptional store of mental discipline to avoid madness.

Benefit: You may, by spending a point of Conviction, attempt to make an object collapse into dust. You must make a successful touch attack against the object, followed by a Wisdom check. The Difficulty for this check is equal to 20 plus the object's toughness, and you receive a bonus equal to twice your adept level. You destroy the object if this check succeeds. At the Narrator's discretion, objects with great supernatural power, or serving important story purposes, may possess a base Difficulty greater than 20.

Special: Any object on your person suffers a -5 penalty to Toughness so long as it remains in your possession. This only applies to attacks and effects directed specifically against the object. Armor, for instance, still modifies your Toughness without any penalty, but attempts to sunder it become easier than normal.

SABOTEUR POWER PATH

The beneficiary of specialized training at the hands of the entropic channelers, you know how to make even the most complex machinery falter with but a glance. Unfortunately, this sometimes makes you impatient and prone to taking risky shortcuts when using traditional methods.

Prerequisite: Expert, Disable Device, blight elf.

Benefit: You may, by spending a point of Conviction, attempt to break machinery merely by looking at from a, with any luck, safe distance. You must still succeed in a Disable Device check as normal.

Since you make this check purely as an act of will you neither gain a bonus nor suffer a penalty based upon the quality of your tools.

Special: You suffer a -1 penalty to your Disable Device



check whenever you attempt to interfere with a machine by hand.

VILLAINOUS PATH: ENTROPIC CHANNELER

Entropic Channelers reach through time to offer themselves up as living conduits of the power that devours creation itself in its final moments. They use this not only to destroy objects and curse their opponents with ill luck but also to endow undead with fearsome powers.

Primary Skills: Concentration, Craft (Entropic Gear), Disable Device, Knowledge (Earth Sciences), Knowledge (Physical Sciences), Knowledge (Supernatural), Knowledge (Theology and Philosophy)

Primary Feats: Imbue Item, Improved Sunder, Lucky, Supernatural Talent (Imbue Unlife and Visions)

Primary Powers: Aport, Drain Vitality, Imbue Unlife, Teleport, Vision.

ENTROPIC CHANNELER MASTERY I

Prerequisites: Adept level 6, blight elf, Entropic Channeler Initiate Power Path.

Skills: Concentration (9 ranks), Disable Device (9 ranks).

Feats: Improved Sunder, Supernatural Talent (Imbue Unlife and Visions).

Powers: Drain Vitality, Imbue Unlife, Visions.

Benefit: As a standard action, you may curse an opponent with bad luck. This requires you to make a

NEW FEAT

AUGMENT UNDEAD (ADEPT)

Each time you use the Imbue Unlife power, you may enhance some aspect of your creation. Each enhancement requires a separate power check. Failure on any check results in fatigue, and causes all your effort to be wasted. You may attempt to increase the same quality more than once, but this raises the Difficulty by +5 each time you do.

Damage Reduction +1 (silver): Difficulty 15

Increase Speed (+5 feet): Difficulty 15

Improve Attack (+1): Difficulty 20

Improve Damage (+1): Difficulty 20

Increase Toughness (+1): Difficulty 20

Improve Ability (+1 Strength or Dexterity): Difficulty 25

Immunity (One energy type): Difficulty 30

one last attack upon their opponents. This requires you to make a Difficulty 20 Imbue Unlife check (if creating unintelligent undead) or Difficulty 25 (if creating intelligent undead) in addition to any other checks needed to create the undead. If you succeed in this check, the undead creature gains a bonus to its Toughness equal to 1/3 of your Adept level. In addition, when destroyed the creature automatically collapses into many pieces capable of making one final attack upon its opponents. Scuttling around the ground, leaping through the air, sometimes even simply appearing next to their target, these pieces attack every opponent within a 50-foot radius of the creature. They all use the creature's attack and damage bonus with a -1 penalty, and lose all animation immediately after making this one last attack.

NEW POWERS

JINX

Fatiguing, Maintenance

You can steal the good fortune from those around you, using it to improve your chances of succeeding in actions while at the same time increasing their odds of failure. Make a power check when you first use this power. Anyone, friend or foe, coming within 10 feet of you must succeed in a Will save with a Difficulty equal to your power check. Those who fail suffer a -1 penalty on all checks, saving throws and attack or damage rolls for one minute or until they move out of

range (whichever takes longer). You gain a +1 bonus on all checks, saving throws and attack or damage rolls for each person currently affected by your Jinx power up to a maximum of +5.

MISSILE EVAPORATION

Fatiguing, Concentration

You can create a barrier that destroys missile weapons before they manage to strike you. This barrier springs forth just beyond the reach of your outstretched hand. Make a power check when you first use this power and then apply it against any object directed toward you through the barrier. If your power check equals or exceeds a Difficulty of that objects' Toughness +20 the barrier destroys the object before it strikes you. Even if you fail to destroy the object, the barrier grants you a +1 bonus on your Defense against that attack. This power only applies against objects you know exist and offers absolutely no protection from melee attacks or energy attacks.

ENTROPIC EQUIPMENT

Drawing on the mysterious force that devours creation at the end of time, the Cabal fashions many powerful items. They offer this equipment to any blight elf willing to meet the price. Cabal members gain a +2 bonus on Wealth checks when purchasing entropic equipment.

Crack Club: This single knobby piece of sturdy black wood rewards those who put their faith in fortune rather than martial skill. Its wielder may take up to a -5 penalty on his attack roll. If the wielder nevertheless manages to not only hit the target but also land a critical threat, he makes the confirmation roll at the normal attack bonus plus the amount of the penalty on the original attack roll. If the wielder succeeds in landing a critical hit, he then gains a bonus on the damage equal to the amount of the penalty on the original attack roll.

For instance, a wielder who normally has a +6 attack bonus decides to take a -3 penalty with the crack club. If the wielder makes a critical threat, he attempts to confirm it with a +9 bonus (the original +6 and then +3 more due to the penalty). If the wielder successfully makes a critical hit, he then gains an additional +3 on the damage roll (due to the -3 penalty on the original attack).

Leech Lance: Made from shards of polished bone held together by multiple layers of finely drawn wire, this tapered spear boasts a single razor sharp point that allows its wielder to feed upon the vital energy of others. Each time the wielder successfully damages a living creature with this weapon he may make a Difficulty 15





Constitution check as a free action. If the wielder succeeds in this check his current damage condition, if any, improves by one step (e.g. from wounded to hurt).

Split Blade: Emitting a barely perceptible hum at all times this thin sword, made from some unidentified gray metal, performs much better against non-living material than mortal flesh. It gets a +4 bonus to its damage when used against objects or constructs, raising it to a total of +7 against such targets.

Corrosion Canister: This ceramic container, once shattered, releases a cloud of thick greenish gas that smells strongly of rust and corruption that remains in place for 1 minute before dispersing. Though it has absolutely no effect upon living tissue, any object must make a Difficulty 20 Toughness save for each

round spent within the gas. Upon its first failed save the object loses all useful abilities until someone with the appropriate version of the Craft skill repairs it (Difficulty equal to two less than that needed to build a new object). The object disintegrates after a second failed save.

Dust Vest (Light Armor): Metallic rings of unknown origin coat the exterior of this bulky leather vest. Any weapon successfully striking against this armor risks utter destruction due to its connection with the raw forces of entropy. The weapon must succeed in a Difficulty 20 Toughness save. If it makes this saving throw it deals damage as normal, if it fails, the weapon collapses into powder the instant before it manages to harm the wearer.

ENTROPIC ARMOR

Armor	Toughness	Other Traits	Cost
Dust Vest	+2	Sometimes destroys weapons	21

SPECIAL ENTROPIC ITEMS

Item	Effect	Radius	Reflex Save	Size	Cost
Corrosion Canister	Destroys Objects	15 feet	15	Tiny	14

SIMPLE MELEE WEAPONS

Weapon	Damage	Critical	Descriptor	Range Increment	Size	Cost
Crack Club	+2	18-20/+3	Bludgeoning	-	Medium	9
Leech Lance	+4	19-20/+4	Piercing	10 feet	Large	16
Split Blade	+3	20/+3	Slashing	-	Medium	14



CHAPTER 2: SOCIETY OF JOY EATERS

Technicians of mind and soul, joy eaters regard all emotion with a clinical detachment stemming from their deliberate infection with Heartstill, a disease that permanently cripples the ability to experience strong passions. No longer capable of feeling hatred or love, woe or delight, they nevertheless continue to engage in the obsessions that preoccupy all their kind. However, rather than indulge in torture and the spread of despair for its own sake, or even some sense of religious duty, the joy eaters regard it as the only way to sate the one sensation they still retain; curiosity. By their reckoning, to understand something truly, you must first dismantle it and then closely examine the pieces. The joy eaters, who freely gave up their own emotions, devote themselves to the enigma of the mortal heart, and the many ways to mold it. Studying not just mind-control magic but also education, propaganda, diplomacy, the arts, even the riddle of love, they view all sentient life as research fodder, and, not so much evil as simply morally vacant, their conduct sometimes outrages even the debased scruples of their own kind.

The most recent of the greater guilds, though still nearly two thousand years old, they began, like several others, as an offshoot of the plaguwrights. Their founder, Nuralene Trayn, creator of the Heartstill virus and its first victim, swiftly lost interest in the study of toxins and pestilence, switching her focus to the mathematics of emotion. Most of her plaguwright colleagues, who found her axioms and formulas wholly incomprehensible, declared her permanently disabled by the illness and tried to lock her away. Only the intervention of the dark matrons, and the fact that some of her calculations actually seemed to work, saved her. In the years that followed, as she gathered students and slowly transformed her little society into one of the Fallen's most influential and indispensable organizations, Nuralene diligently repaid the dark matrons for their support.

The plaguwrights still nurse a grudge against the joy eaters, regarding Nuralene's defection to be yet another indignity imposed upon them. Their feud grew even more acerbic when the joy eaters managed to wrest authority over the Semyad away from the plaguwrights nearly 900 years ago. The entropic channelers also regard the joy eaters as deadly enemies because they claim that control of the Fey Paths (because of the hallucinatory nightmares they cause) and by extension, the Ghost Mill itself rightly belongs with them instead. The joy eaters get along quite well with the shapers, considering their focus upon changing physical forms as a natural complement with their own emphasis upon altering the mind.

SOCIETY CUSTOMS

- (1) Joy eaters feel a strange compulsion to count things and divide them into groups of equal amounts, particularly food. If necessary, they use knives and forks to cut each type of food on their plate into smaller, more easily divisible pieces before eating.
- (2) Joy eaters avoid physical contact whenever possible. They gain a +1 bonus on any attempt to escape from a grapple but suffer a -1 penalty whenever they attempt to grapple another creature.
- (3) Joy eaters customarily wear garish costumes despite their somber demeanor. These outlandish outfits seem more suited for a court jester than a member of one of the greater guilds. Some scholars suspect that they use the first reactions of people they encounter to help them calibrate the formulas they use to predict behavior.
- (4) As part of their training, joy eaters learn to ignore fear. Their superiors require them to undergo several tests that, should they falter even the slightest, result in their deaths. One of the more well-known tests involves tying ropes around students' ankles and throwing them into spike filled pits. Those who flinch create just enough extra momentum to impale themselves on the spikes, while those who remain calm dangle safely above.
- (5) Joy eaters rarely handle danvaars, the blight elf currency. When dealing with money, they prefer to use a servant or a slender rod with a hook on one end. Many suspect that even these emotionless beings feel something akin to regret that they no longer experience the frisson that results when a blight elf handles a danvaar.

VINSHANRA (THE GREAT FACE)

Only the joy eaters, and a few of the more senior members of the great guilds, know why they call their headquarters Vinshanra, "the great face." At a high enough elevation, this collection of hills, gullies, and low-slung buildings of an unknown purpose and design actually does resemble a face nearly one mile across. The joy eaters, borrowing a page from the thusparri "wind lords," use hot air balloons to observe their stronghold. They keep a close watch on it for one simple reason:





sometimes the face moves, but only when no one watches it.

People living on the surface never notice these sudden adjustments, the landscape always appears unaltered, but when seen from above the changes seem clear. Some strange magic not only changes the face but also tampers with the memories and perceptions of everyone in the vicinity to make it seem as if all remains the same. Left to its own devices the face, over a ten-year period, gradually cycles through a series of expressions covering the entire gamut of emotions. If kept under surveillance the face remains frozen in its current expression, however, it also aggregates some unexplainable tension that causes it to move far more rapidly should observers turn their attention away for even a moment.

When the joy eaters first discovered the strange properties of this site, they immediately laid claim to it. Though no longer able to experience emotion, a product of the Heartstill virus that led to the founding of their organization, they still harbored considerable reserves of curiosity, and the puzzle of the great face intrigued them immeasurably. Their realization that could actually keep the face from altering simply by looking at it roused them even more, and prompted them to keep rotating shifts of hot air balloons above it day and night. Now, the great face only changes when the joy eaters wish, and because of the amount of time they keep it trapped in one expression, it alters its mien all at once.

The joy eaters use a sophisticated form of facial geometry to help them understand and manipulate the emotions of others. Trained to not only instinctively measure every twitch of the eye and tic of the mouth but to also immediately deduce the secrets these subtleties reveal, they fully expect to one day solve the enigma of the great face. They already use the insights gained by some of their members while studying it to good effect since much of their secret lore traces back to those rare flashes of inspiration.

One of their first great discoveries also helps to explain why the joy eaters manage to keep word of Vinshanra's magical properties from spreading; most outsiders shun the area, unable to bear the powerful waves of pure emotion emanating from it. A defensive barrier, created by the most sophisticated lore the joy eaters possess, begins three miles from the great face. Any creature except a joy eater (or someone else lacking emotions whether from the Heartstill virus or for some other reason) must make a Difficulty 18 Will saving throw at the three mile mark. This rises to Difficulty 20 at the two mile mark and finally to Difficulty 22 at the one mile mark. Failing any of these saving throws immediately incapacitates the target, overwhelmed by a cascade of primal emotions. One moment laughing, the next crying, morphing from snarling fury to tender concern in a heartbeat, the target surrenders to these unleashed emotions and takes no other actions until dragged at least three miles away from the great face. Creatures that succeed in these three saving throws learn how to fend off the psychic assault and may act normally when traveling through the area claimed by the joy eaters.

SECRETS OF THE SOCIETY

Utterly lacking in sentiment, the joy eaters see little point in conducting their business at just one spot. They claim the Great Face as their chief headquarters but freely operate anywhere else that strikes them as an efficient use of their resources. Because they supervise the Semyad, the joy eaters keep a stronghold within Fayne Grisin, the so-called "Dead Loop" that shelters these minions of the Fallen from the perils of the Sarangak Forest. They also maintain a network of safe houses throughout Simarra that act as both the spinal cord of blight elf intelligence and their secret diplomatic corps, which the joy eaters regard as mutually interchangeable.

The joy eaters manufacture danvaars, the blight elf currency. Rings of psychically active glass able to both absorb and release the misery of others, growing progressively darker or lighter as they do. Danvaars offer the Fallen a form of recreation as well as a means of exchange. However, unknown to all save the most senior joy eaters, danvaars possess an additional quality as well. They allow the joy eaters to monitor the population, getting a sudden flash of person's



location each time they touch a danvaar. Even though only a handful of joy eaters know this secret, their reluctance to handle danvaars stems from noticing, and imitating the reticence of the most senior members of the Society.

In the last few centuries, the joy eaters expanded Semyad operations in other lands. Fifty years ago, this went so far as to include creating secret training and breeding facilities. Nearly a third of all currently active Semyad have never actually seen “home.” The joy eaters consider the question of what this means for their long-term loyalty fascinating and anticipate dissecting the brains of the first defectors within the next generation if not sooner.

LEADERSHIP

Every four years the joy eaters gather a group of captives together then subject them to an unrelenting stream of propaganda and carefully designed lies. After several weeks of indoctrination, they then ask their captives to select a number of joy eaters to advocate on their behalf. Those joy eaters who prove most adept at manipulating these captives, presenting the most compelling web of lies, gain power over the Society as a whole. Once the captives serve their purpose, the joy eaters then use them as subjects for their experiments until they all die.

SOCIETY MECHANICS

JOY EATER NOVICE POWER PATH

Like all joy eaters, after freely choosing to infect yourself with the Heartstill virus you now rarely experience strong emotions. This fends off most magical attempts to manipulate your feelings whether for good or ill.

Prerequisites: Adept, Sense Motive, blight elf.

Key Ability: Charisma. A joy eater must possess formidable reserves of personal magnetism in order to overpower his or her victims.

Benefit: Your inability to experience strong emotions makes it very difficult for even magical assaults upon your feelings to affect you. Whenever you fail a saving throw to resist any magical attempt to influence your emotions (fear attacks, Heart Shaping, etc) you may, as a free action, spend a point of Conviction to gain a new saving throw with a +2 bonus on the save. Each time you fail this saving throw you may, so long as you take no other intervening action, spend an additional point of Conviction to gain another saving throw with a cumulative +2 bonus on that save. For instance, if it took you three saving throws (all as free actions) to overcome a fear attack your final saving throw would receive a +6 bonus.

Special: You no longer gain any benefits from magic or other game effects that affect your emotions. Among other things this includes the Rage feat and some versions of the Heart Shaping power.

AGONIZER POWER PATH

Recruited by the joy eaters from among the ranks of your people’s most gifted torturers their advanced training allows you to call forth crippling pain with but a touch. Unfortunately, though you hate to admit it, those able to shrug off this assault leave you fainthearted.

Prerequisite: Expert, Intimidate, blight elf.

Benefit: You may spend a point of Conviction to enhance your blighted touch ability to inflict crippling pain upon an opponent. You must still make a successful touch attack and your target must fail his or her saving throw as normal. However, if you succeed with this attack you render the target helpless due to the incapacitating pain you generated. A failed saving throw always makes the target helpless for at least one round. To determine exactly how long you incapacitated the target take the amount by which he failed the saving throw to resist your attack and subtract 4 from it. If this creates a number greater than 1 you render him helpless for that many rounds, otherwise he remains helpless for but a single





NEW FEAT

TEXT FOCUS (ADEPT)

Mind Touch

You can establish a magical connection with a piece of writing that allows you to work your will upon anyone who reads it. You must possess suitable writing materials and then spend at least one hour working on this text. At the end of that time choose, from among all the powers you can use which require mental contact to operate, which ones to embed in the text, and make a Mind Touch power check. The Difficulty for this check is equal to $10 + 5$ for each power you embed in the text. The result of this check determines how long the psychic connection you establish between yourself and the text endures.

CONNECTION

Check Succeeded By	Duration
5 or less	1 hour
Between 6 and 10	12 hours
Between 11 and 15	1 day
More than 16	1 week

So long as the connection between yourself and the text endures you instantly know whenever someone reads it (familiarity equivalent to present) and gain the option of using any one of the powers embedded in the text upon that creature. You must still make any applicable power checks and deal with all other consequences of using your power as normal (such as fatigue). If unconscious or otherwise incapacitated you cannot use any of the powers embedded in the text when someone reads it. This feat, since it requires the target actually read, does not affect creatures lacking the ability to read the text.

round. For instance, if the target failed his saving throw by 6 you make him helpless for two rounds, if by 9 you make him helpless for five rounds, etc.

Special: Should an opponent successfully resist your pain attack, you become shaken for the remainder of the scene.

VILLAINOUS PATH: JOY EATER

Joy eaters sacrifice the ability to experience strong emotions, gaining power over the emotions of others. They use their training to leach mental energy, robbing opponents of their fundamental survival instincts.

Primary Skills: Bluff, Concentration, Diplomacy, Gather Information, Intimidate, Knowledge (Art), Knowledge (Behavioral Sciences), Medicine, Sense Motive.

Primary Feats: Alchemical Lore, Exotic Weapon (Contact Dart), Shield Penetration.

Primary Powers: Bliss, Calm, Drain Vitality, Heart Reading, Heart Shaping, Mind Shaping, Mind Touch, Psychic Shield.

JOY EATER MASTERY I

Prerequisites: Adept level 4, blight elf, Joy Eater Novice Power Path.

Skills: Bluff (7 ranks), Intimidate (7 ranks), Sense Motive (7 ranks).

Feats: Exotic Weapon (Contact Dart).

Powers: Drain Vitality, Heart Shaping, Mind Touch.

Benefit: You can regain mental energy at your target's expense. This requires you to make a power check (treating this ability as a power), as a standard action against a Difficulty equal to the target's Will save bonus +10. If you succeed, your target becomes morose and unable to take any action except defending itself from attacks for one round. Your target also gains one level of fatigue while your fatigue level (if any) improves by one. You may use this ability multiple times against the same target. If you render your target unconscious with this power due to accumulated levels of fatigue you may, by devoting one more round to the attack (and one final power check), attempt kill the target by unreservedly eliminating its will to live.

JOY EATER MASTERY II

Prerequisites: Adept level 7, blight elf, Joy Eater Novice Power Path.

Skills: Bluff (10 ranks), Intimidate (10 ranks), Sense Motive (10 ranks).

Feats: Joy Easter Mastery I.

Powers: Calm.

Benefit: You may eliminate your target's most basic survival instincts. This requires you to make a power check (treating this ability as a power), as a standard action against a Difficulty equal to the target's Will save bonus +10. If you succeed, your target loses all interest in its own well being and refuses to take any action whatsoever, including those essential to keeping it alive. The target remains like this for a period of time determined by the amount by which you succeeded in your check (or until you chose to end it as a standard action).

APATHY DURATION

Check Succeeded By	Targeted Affected For
Less than 5	1 minute
6 to 10	1 hour
11 to 15	1 day
More than 16	1 week

All attacks during this time treat the target as helpless. The target simply lies on the ground and refuses to move under its own power. In addition, with sufficient time the target suffers from starvation and dehydration unless someone else takes care of its needs. If placed in any sort of hazardous situation the target takes no action to safeguard itself (Such as making Swim checks to keep from drowning).

NEW POWER

HORROR SHOW

Fatiguing, Mental Contact

You can induce so much terror that your target could actually die from it. The target must make a Will saving throw. A failure incapacitates the target for 1 round and permits you to make a power check which establishes the Difficulty of the Toughness save the target must make to avoid suffering lethal damage due to heart palpitations and muscle convulsions. You may use this power against the same target multiple times. Each time you do the target suffers a cumulative -1 penalty on its Will save to resist the power for each previous failure during the current scene.

JOY EATER EQUIPMENT

The joy eaters know lore allowing them to create many different items involved with the field of emotional control or manipulation. They offer this equipment to any blight elf willing to meet the price. Society members gain a +2 bonus on Wealth checks when purchasing joy eater equipment.

Contact Dart: This tiny needle, propelled through a hollow tube via a puff of breath, allows its wielder to establish a nigh unshakable mental connection with the creature it strikes. A creature struck by this dart, regardless of whether or not it actually deals any damage, automatically becomes vulnerable to any

power the wielder can use that requires mental contact in order to operate.

The dart serves as a substitute to the Mind Touch power and also imposes a -2 penalty on any Will saving throws to resist any power requiring mental contact that the wielder chooses to use upon the target. Due to the dart's small size and cunning design, once lodged under the skin it proves exceedingly difficult to locate and remove. Actually finding the dart requires a Difficulty 20 Search check made as a full-round action. Once found, removing the dart requires the target to make a Difficulty 20 toughness save to avoid taking lethal damage unless the person removing it succeeds in a Difficulty 15 Medicine check.

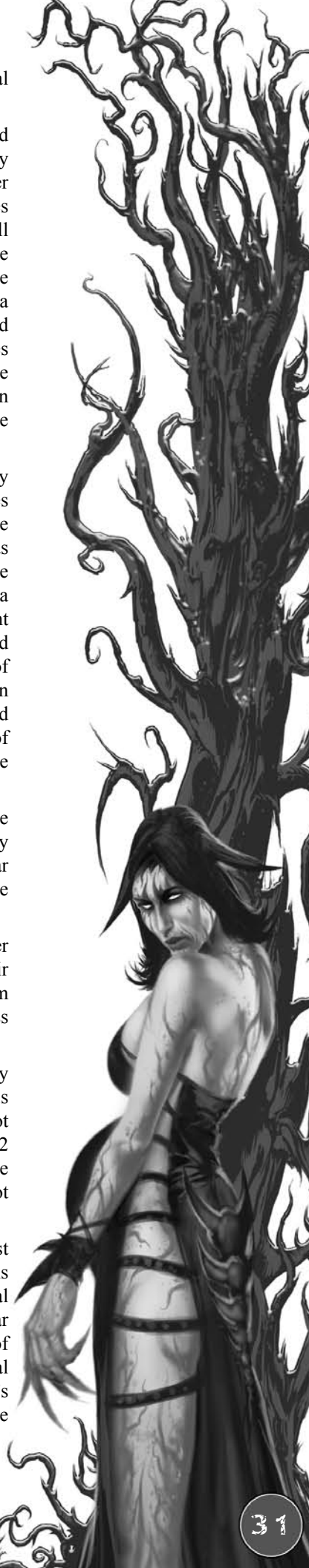
Distilled Emotions: Joy eaters frequently draw particular emotions from their captives much as a farmer might milk a cow. Once harvested, they then store them as either a gas or a liquid. If stored as a gas they deliver the distilled emotion as grenade attack creating a 15-foot wide cloud for 1 minute at their point of impact before dispersing. If stored as a liquid they deliver the distilled emotion as one dose of either a contact or ingested poison (placed on a weapon or in food as needed). Unless stated otherwise in the description the effect of any of these distilled emotions lasts until the end of the scene.

Cringe: Creatures exposed to cringe become shaken and suffer an additional -5 penalty on any saving throw or check to resist a fear based effect (including level checks to oppose Intimidate checks).

Giggle: Creatures exposed to giggle suffer from bouts of uncontrollable laughter. Their inability to take any threat seriously makes them flat-footed even as the exertion of this endless mirth causes them to gain one level of fatigue.

Rash: Creatures exposed to rash find it very difficult to focus upon any particular task. This split in their attention causes them to waste a lot of effort on useless activities. They suffer a -2 penalty on all checks and, each round, may take either a single move or a standard action but not both.

Inducers: Joy eaters recognize that for most creatures, those still able to experience emotions sometimes manifest profound physiological changes when under the influence of a particular feeling. Using their unparalleled knowledge of how to instill an emotion, they create alchemical compounds that temporarily alter a creature's mental state and, by so doing, briefly endow the creature with new abilities.





Pharmaceuticals: Though blight elf law forbids their kind from using any sort of intoxicant, the joy eaters nevertheless manufacture a number of powerful drugs. Using some upon their captives to keep them docile, and sending others out into the wider world through their Semyad followers, the joy eaters regard them as very useful ways to weaken the moral fiber of other races.

Since all these drugs pose the risk of addiction, they also regard them as a potential way of recruiting new servants as drug-addled thralls. Each time a creature consumes one of these drugs it must make a Fortitude saving throw or become addicted. Addicts suffer from some harmful consequences due to withdrawal if they go one entire day without taking another dose of the drug. After one week of abstinence, an addict may make another Fortitude saving throw. If the addict makes this saving throw it no longer suffers any ill effects from withdrawal. However, until the addict succeeds in two more of these weekly Fortitude saving throws the addict, if ever put in a situation where it could obtain its drug of choice, must succeed in a Difficulty 18 Will saving throw to avoid doing whatever it must to obtain it again.

Delight Discs: These tiny circles of hard orange bread dissolve rapidly if placed beneath the tongue. Creatures ingesting a delight disc experience an ecstatic rush for several minutes. Addicts going through withdrawal from delight discs feel despondent and simply sit and brood during any hour in which they fail to make Difficulty 10 Will save.

Tranquil Twigs: These slender pieces of wood emit a soothing smoke if set aflame and held beneath the nose. Creatures inhaling the smoke of a tranquil twig experience a profound sense of contentment and well-being. Addicts going through withdrawal from tranquil twigs find everything extremely irritating and lash out in fury whenever they fail a check. Compelled to attack the object or creature (they may use non-



lethal damage if they wish) they hold most responsible for their failure they may make a Difficulty 10 Will save each round to break off the assault.

Wonder Wine: This viscid, green liquid oozes from of its container as a series of droplets large enough to fit in the palm of person's hand. Creatures drinking wonder wine experience an extraordinary sense of novelty and excitement when examining their surroundings. Addicts going through withdrawal from wonder wine feel a constant need for new sensations. In order to repeat any task during consecutive rounds they must make a Difficulty 10 Will save, otherwise they try something different.

CONTACT DART

Weapon	Damage Bonus	Critical	Damage Descriptor	Range Increment	Size	Cost
Contact Dart	+1	20/+1	Piercing	20 feet	Tiny	11

DISTILLED EMOTIONS

Name	Effect	Difficulty (gas)	Difficulty (liquid)	Cost
Cringe	Fear and submission	16	18	13
Giggle	Uncontrollable laughter	18	20	11
Rash	Impetuousness and error	14	16	9

INDUCERS

Name	Size	Cost
Focus	Tiny	22
Wrath	Tiny	14

PHARMECUTICALS

Name	Addiction Difficulty	Withdrawal	Size	Cost
Delight Discs	12	Gloom	Tiny	6
Tranquil Twigs	10	Agitated	Tiny	3
Wonder Wine	14	Bored	Tiny	4

CHAPTER 3: LEAGUE OF PLAGUEWRIGHTS

The source of virtually everything that defines the blight elves as a people, the plaguewrights nevertheless suffer from a lack of respect for their accomplishments. Even the entropic channelers, the other original guild, admit, in moments of candor, that the contributions made by the plaguewrights surpass their own. However, each time the plaguewrights devised something truly significant it led to a schism within their own ranks and eventually the founding of either another greater guild or some lesser, but still vitally important, organization. All three of the other greater guilds—the joy eaters, the shapers, and even the dark matrons—owe their existence to one or more diseases that first emerged from a plaguewright laboratory. Similarly, the Semyad, the cadre of spies belonging to other races trained from birth to put the interests of the blight elves ahead of their own people, started as a plaguewright project.

Manufacturers of countless diseases and poisons, the plaguewrights are the research scientists of their society, producing the Fallen's most potent weapons and their most subtle tools. However, while acknowledging their undoubted brilliance the rest of the blight elves also regard them as dangerously unworldly, and frankly, a little strange. Though not politically adroit enough to change this perception, it still rankles, and they never stop searching for some way to reverse it.

LEAGUE CUSTOMS

(1) Virtually all plaguewrights choose to take a familiar. Strangely, not just for the typical blight elf but even more so for researchers who callously dispatch countless animals in the course of their experiments, most plaguewrights lavish attention upon their familiars. In fact, blight elf law regards a plaguewright's familiar as an extension of its master, and punishes injuries or insults against one with the exact same penalties as against the other.

(2) Even the elaborate precautions plaguewrights take when working with diseases and poisons sometimes fail. The notion of incompetence, or worse yet, deliberate sabotage, infuriates them like nothing else. The laws of their organization mete out the most vicious penalties for carelessness, and this colors how plaguewrights view negligence and treachery outside the laboratory as well. Plaguewrights loath political subterfuge and, obsessed with precision in the laboratory, only lie when inarguably necessary which means they tend to do a very poor job of it. This helps to explain why their rivals always seem to outmaneuver them.

(3) Most plaguewrights at least entertain the possibility that diseases possess their own form of intelligence.

They often use courtship metaphors to explain how a disease operates upon a victim despite the loveless nature of their own society. Many blight elves privately suspect that a plaguewright would root for the disease as often as for the patient and therefore typically refuse to accept treatment from League members despite their expertise.

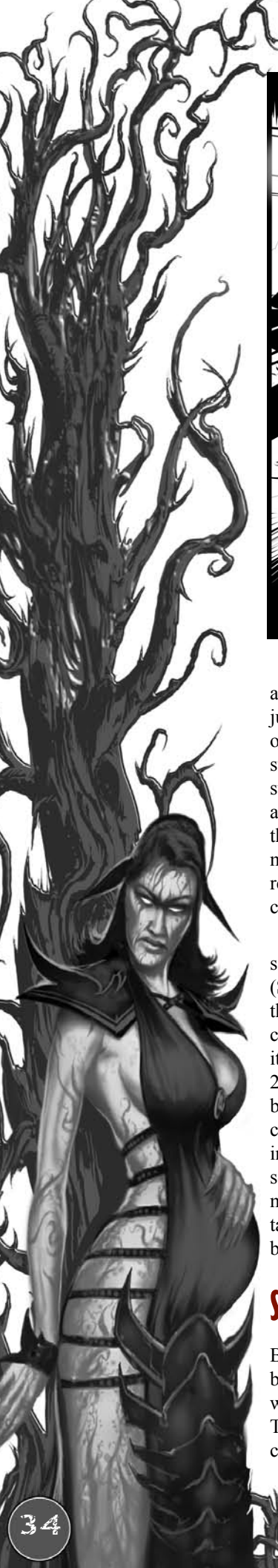
(4) Each plaguewright fashions their own portable research kit consisting of diagnostic tools, containers for samples and similar objects. Plaguewrights never share the exact contents of their research kits with anyone else. In fact, they regard the notion of someone snooping through their research kits with the same horror and indignation as they would someone poking and prodding their bodily orifices.

(5) Plaguewrights insist upon the strictest discretion from their members. Revealing any part of their lore to the outside world without careful thought -and permission from a more senior member- could warrant the death penalty. This mania for secrecy stems primarily from the long history of others profiting from plaguewright ideas. Some observers speculate that the plaguewrights now deliberately suppress knowledge of their most critical discoveries out of fear of losing control of them yet again. If true, this goes a long way toward explaining why the plaguewrights have not presented the Fallen with a truly significant development in nearly 1,000 years.

BRINTRIERTAK (CINDERGROVE)

Nicknamed "Cindergrove" by those few outsiders fortunate enough to survive encountering it, Brintriertak, the headquarters of the League of Plaguewrights, appears, at first glance, perhaps the last stand of untainted wilderness in the entire Sarangak Forest. Trees sway in a gentle breeze while birds and squirrels dart through their branches. Larger animals, deer, foxes and similar creatures, cautiously sniff the air before creeping out of the shadows to take drinks from shallow pools that reflect the placid sky above. However, closer examination, and the realization that they all move in carefully arranged patterns without ever once breaching the sepulchral silence, reveals the dreadful truth. The entire area, approximately one square mile, actually consists of great plumes of crematory ash magically twisted into a mockery of an idyllic natural scene.





The plaguewrights conduct their vile business in a knotted warren of tunnels and chambers creeping just beneath the surface of the Cindergrove. They use over fifty different ovens to dispose of their research subjects—animals, plants and sentient beings that succumb to pestilence or poison. As the smoke and ash from these ovens drifts up out of the ground, the magical bindings created and maintained by the most senior members of the League seize these last remnants of their victims and weave them into the constantly evolving counterfeit landscape.

The plaguewrights prefer to use one of several secret entrances carefully hidden along the edge (Search Difficulty 25) of the Cindergrove rather than risk inhaling the extremely lethal ash. Any creature that actually does enter the Cindergrove itself must move very carefully (Stealth Difficulty 20 each round) to avoid disrupting the magic that binds the ash particles together. Failing one of these checks creates a 30-foot radius cloud that remains in place for 1d6 hours before resuming its original scene. Each round a creature inhales this ash it must make a Difficulty 20 Fortitude saving throw to avoid taking 2 points of Constitution damage along with becoming nauseated for 1d6 rounds.

SECRETS OF THE LEAGUE

Because of the inherent dangers of their research, blight elf law requires that the plaguewrights only work beneath the environs of the Cindergrove. The dozens of crematory ovens, and the rigorous containment protocols, help to ensure that nothing

leaves before they deem it ready. Despite all the precautions, a few plaguewrights still manage to die in lab accidents every decade. The plaguewrights acknowledge no other bases within the Sarangak forest, and their fellow blight elves breath sighs of relief.

More than three centuries ago, a team of plaguewrights developed a pathogen called “Bloodgurgle.” Named for the raspy popping sound the afflicted make as their insides liquefy and then drown them, it possesses one particular property that keeps the plaguewrights diligently toiling to perfect it. The infected only manifest symptoms, and die soon after, when someone performs a very simple ritual upon a drop of their blood, regardless of its present location. This means someone infected with Bloodgurgle lives at the sufferance of anyone who knows this ritual and has access to even a single drop of his or her blood. Though, as yet, still quite difficult to contract, requiring several hours worth of blood transfusions, the plaguewrights view it as potentially the key to taking over the entire world. If they manage to make it airborne, they could infect entire cities, and then enslave the population merely by putting their names and blood samples on file.

Because of this potential, the plaguewrights take extreme precautions to keep Bloodgurgle a secret as it represents potential future supremacy among all guilds save that of Salena’s dark matrons.

Borrowing a page from the joy eaters, the plaguewrights also make use of thusparri, the so called “wind lords,” technology, in their case, six captured airships which serve as portable labs. Hewing to the rule that they work nowhere within the Sarangak forest except the Cindergrove, they make a point of keeping these ships either above or beyond its borders at all times. Airtight, crewed by thusparri infected with Bloodgurgle, they use these airships to both gather up research subjects and to conduct secret field tests upon unsuspecting populations across Simarra.

LEADERSHIP

Any plaguewright able to attract the support of at least two other members earns the title of project leader. Project leaders may stake their claim to resources and support staff with a priority given to whomever has the largest number of followers. Because most plaguewrights work on multiple projects at the same time, they use a complex formula to determine how much of a member’s time “belongs” to a particular project leader. Often a given project leader simultaneously works under another in a different lab.

A project leader may attempt to take over control of the League at any time, though most, preferring pure research, see little point. They use mock assassinations to mediate these changes in leadership. If a project leader manages to slip any one of several officially permitted poisons, each harmless but with embarrassing side effects, into the system of the current ruler of the

League that ruler must immediately step down in favor of that project leader.

LEAGUE MECHANICS

Unless otherwise specifically mentioned in the text, assume that all effects outlined in this section only affect creatures vulnerable to disease or poison.

PLAGUEWRIGHT INITIATE POWER PATH

Your exposure to some of the lore of the plaguwrights has given you a new appreciation for the blighted touch. Now able to trigger it with but a glance at your target, your disdain for those who must still deliver the attack by touch makes you leery of employing any sort of touch attack.

Prerequisites: Adept, Medicine, blight elf.

Key Ability: Intelligence. Crafting diseases and poisons requires painstaking attention to detail and carefully itemized procedures since the slightest mistake could prove fatal.

Benefit: You may spend a point of Conviction to use your blighted touch ability as a ranged attack against any target you can see. This attack has range increment equal to your adept level x 10 feet.

Special: You suffer a -1 penalty on your attack roll whenever you attempt to touch or make some other sort of unarmed attack for any reason.

DEATH NEEDLE POWER PATH

Your singular preoccupation with archery made it impossible to advance very far through the ranks of the plaguwrights, but you put what training you did receive to full use. Unfortunately, your ability to endow arrows with toxins and poisons by an act of will alone leaves you slightly contemptuous of other weapons.

Prerequisite: Warrior, Seeping Grip, blight elf.

Benefit: By spending a point of Conviction, you may fire contaminated arrows using your blighted touch ability. Save the fact that this is a ranged attack, this ability is identical to that described by the Seeping Grip feat (see Chapter One).

Special: You suffer a -1 penalty on any attack or damage rolls you make with melee weapons.

VILLAINOUS PATH: PLAGUEWRIGHT

Plaguwrights produce diseases and poisons that their people use as weapons and tools. The most talented members of their profession learn new ways to apply the blighted touch ability shared by all their kind.

Primary Skills: Concentration, Craft (Disease), Craft (Poison), Knowledge (Life Sciences), Knowledge (Supernatural), Knowledge (Technology), Medicine.

Primary Feats: Alchemical Lore, Contaminate, Familiar, Lethal Bond, Widen Power.

Primary Powers: Body Control, Cure, Cure Disease, Cure Poison, Drain Vitality, Harm.

PLAGUEWRIGHT MASTERY I

Prerequisites: Adept level 8, blight elf, Plaguwright Initiate Power Path.

Skills: Craft (Disease) (11 ranks), Craft (Poison) (11 ranks), Medicine (11 ranks).

Feats: Alchemical Lore, Widen Power.

Powers: Drain Vitality, Harm.

Benefit: You no longer need to spend a point of conviction to employ your blighted touch ability as a ranged attack. In addition, you may, as a standard action, attempt to affect multiple targets with your newly enhanced ability. To do so you must succeed in a power check (Difficulty 15 +5 for every additional creature targeted by the attack). If you fail this check, you only affect the primary target and all others escape unharmed. Except for the fact that you can target multiple creatures at a distance this ability operates in all other ways as identical to your blighted touch.

PLAGUEWRIGHT MASTERY II

Prerequisites: Adept level 11, blight elf, Plaguwright Initiate Power Path.

Skills: Craft (Disease) (14 ranks), Craft (Poison) (14 ranks), Medicine (14 ranks).

Feats: Contaminate, Plaguwright Mastery Level I.

Powers: Body Control.

Benefit: You can make victims of any version of your blighted touch ability contagious by increasing the Difficulty of the relevant check by +5 (since blighted touch does not require a check when used as the standard touch attack treat the Difficulty for this as 15). If you succeed in this check, and your target or targets, fail the saving throw, they become contagious for 1 day or until they eliminate all ill effects of the attack (whichever comes first). Any creature susceptible to disease or poison coming into direct physical contact with the target must make a saving throw (identical to the one the target failed) or suffer the exact same ill effects as the original target. Creatures afflicted because of this ability do not become contagious themselves.





NEW FEATS

LETHAL BOND (ADEPT)

Familiar

Anyone, except you, coming into contact with your familiar risks contracting a potentially fatal illness. Your familiar infects any creature it touches unless that creature succeeds in a Fortitude save (Difficulty equal to 10 + 1/2 your adept level). Creatures infected by your familiar must make a saving throw each day or suffer 1 point of damage to their Constitution and any other single

ability you wish. They must continue making these saving throws until successfully cured or until they make two consecutive saving throws to resist the disease.

TOXIC SURGE (GENERAL)

Your body reacts strangely to poisons, sometimes drawing strength and vigor from them even as they course through your veins. Each time you make a saving throw to resist suffering ability damage or ability drain to any ability score due to poison you immediately gain a +1 bonus to that ability for 1 hour. If you fail your saving throw, you suffer ability damage or drain as normal.

NEW POWER

WEAKEN RESISTANCE

Harm

You can lower a target's ability to fend off diseases and poisons with merely a touch. After successfully touching the target make a power check opposed by the target's Fortitude save. If you win this opposed check the target suffers a penalty on all saving throws to resist diseases and poisons for the remainder of the scene equal to amount by which you won the opposed check (up to a maximum of -5).

ENGINEERED DISEASES

DEATH WHEEZE (Airborne) (save: Fortitude Difficulty 14)

Incubation: 1 day (save interval: 1 day)

Description: Death wheeze impairs the body's ability to absorb physical trauma, making even relatively minor injuries potentially life threatening. It earns its name by severely restricting the pathways to the lungs, forcing victims to make long, rattling, gasps for breath. Anyone coming within 10-feet of someone suffering from death wheeze breathes in this tainted air and must make a Fortitude save the following day to determine if they fall prey to it. With each failed save a victim suffers 1 point of Constitution damage. In addition, while afflicted with death wheeze, any attack that would normally deal non-lethal damage deals lethal damage, while any attack that would normally deal lethal damage imposes a -5 penalty on the Toughness save.

FAMINE FLOW (Contact or Waterborne) (save: Fortitude Difficulty 14)

Incubation: 1 day (save interval: 1 day)

Description: Famine flow severely dehydrates its victims by causing sickly white beads of perspiration to exude from them like garden slugs. However, its secondary effect upon plant life exposed to water tainted by this perspiration earns its reputation as a weapon of terror. Anyone coming into contact with a victim's perspiration, whether by touching the victim or something stained by his sweat, must make a Fortitude save the following day to determine if they fall prey to it. With each failed save a victim suffers 1 point of Strength and Dexterity damage.

In addition, this tainted perspiration, if brought into contact with water, whether by washing soiled beddings, bathing a fevered victim, or some other way, thrives and undergoes an abysmal transformation. Coating the surface of the water with a pale yellow slime it expands at the rate of 1 mile each day in still waters such as lakes and 2 miles in more rapid waters such as rivers.

The Narrator must make a Difficulty 10 check each day, and the slime continues to expand at this rate until one of these checks fails after which it recedes at the same pace in which it expanded. Anyone drinking from or bathing in this tainted water must make a saving throw the following day to avoid contracting famine flow. Any normal plant life drawing sustenance from this tainted water dies within one hour, melting into a disgusting puddle of purplish sludge. Plant creatures and other exceptional plants may make a Difficulty 14 Fortitude save to avoid this fate.

NEW POISONS

CONTAMINANTS

When the plaguwrights seek to poison large numbers of creatures, they typically resort to contaminants. Contaminants transform a particular area, making it dangerous for vulnerable creatures to interact with it in any way.

Gill Oil: If poured into any well, pool, or similar body of water this thick, greasy liquid rapidly sinks to the bottom, gradually breaking down and mixing with the surrounding fluid. Each dose of gill oil creates a 20-foot radius cloud of tainted water that lasts one hour in swift running bodies of water and one day in bodies of still water. Gill oil has no effect upon creatures with the aquatic subtype except that it contaminates them along with the water. Any creature coming into contact with, or ingesting either the contaminated water or a contaminated creature must succeed in a Fortitude saving throw or suffer potentially life threatening coronary trauma.

Fire Powder: This finely ground, crystalline blue dust becomes a sweet smelling vapor once exposed to flame. Each dose produces a 10-foot radius cloud that resists diffusion, remaining effective for ten minutes in outdoor settings and eight hours indoors unless dispersed by a strong wind. Any creature breathing in this gas risks severe disorientation and impairment of mental faculties. Assassins sometimes mix fire powder with wax to create dangerous candles.

SPECIAL EFFECT POISONS

The plaguwrights fashion countless poisons designed to weaken the mind or body. However, they also devote considerable time to creating poisons intended to affect their victims in some other way. Each of the poisons outlined below deals absolutely no ability damage but does something potentially even more debilitating in its place.

Allergy Dust: This course green powder makes its victim far more sensitive to the presence of one creature type (animals, vermin, etc) not its own. For the next day, each round the victim spends within five-feet of a creature belonging to this type it must immediately make a Difficulty 20 Toughness check. The victim begins by suffering non-lethal damage, however, if rendered unconscious all further checks deal lethal damage instead.

Dazzlestems: These thick, brown branches release an oily sap when first cut. Any creature struck a weapon coated with dazzlestem sap suffers from a rapid dilation of the pupil. If the creature fails its saving throw it becomes sensitive to sunlight, suffering a -2 penalty on all checks made while exposed to the sun for the next week. At the discretion of the Narrator, this penalty could also apply when in the presence of strong light generated by some other source.



Fumblepaste: This clear, silky gel, often spread upon locks and the arming mechanisms of traps rapidly sinks beneath the skin to enter the bloodstream. Displaying no visible effect at first, and indeed, quite easy to miss (Notice Difficulty 18) the paste shows its true effect only after about a minute. Any creature exposed to the poison who fails its saving throw sweats profusely for the next twenty-four hours; and this perspiration makes it very difficult to grip objects. The victim must make a Difficulty 16 Reflex save each round or drop anything it holds in its hands.

Hatelure: These few droplets vaporize almost instantly once exposed to air and alter the smell of their victim in such a way that creatures of certain type (animals, vermin, etc) find it extremely aggravating. Creatures belonging to this type must make a Difficulty 10 Will save to avoid attacking the victim as soon as they come within 10-feet of it. In addition, they gain a +1 bonus on their attack and damage rolls made against the victim.

Parchsand: This grainy, orange particulate with the consistency of beach sand has a vaguely salty aftertaste best masked by mixing it with spices and seasonings. Any creature that consumes a dose of parchsand and fails the saving throw to resist its effects develops a powerful, almost overwhelming need for water during the next day. It begins to suffer from dehydration almost immediately, and, during





any hour that it fails to drink at least some water must make a Constitution check (Difficulty 10 + 1 for each previous check made that day) or receive a level of fatigue. If rendered unconscious from fatigue the creature becomes disabled after failing another check and then dies.

Truth Serum: This clear liquid reeks faintly of the laboratory hinting at unnatural origin. Any creature struck by a weapon coated with truth serum finds it much more difficult to tell a lie for the next hour unless it makes its saving throw. If asked a direct question during this time the creature must succeed in Difficulty 20 Will save to avoid answering truthfully.



ENGINEERED DISEASES

Name	Transmission Vector	Difficulty	Incubation (save interval)
Death Wheeze	Airborne	Fort 14	1 day (1 day)
Famine Flow	Contact or Waterborne	Fort 14	1 day (1 day)

CONTAMINANTS

Name	Type (Difficulty)	Initial/Secondary	Cost
Gill Oil	Contact or Ingested (Fort)	2 Con/3 Con	11
Fire Powder	Airborne (Fort)	3 Int/3 Int	9

SPECIAL EFFECT POISONS

Name	Type (Fort Difficulty)	Effect (secondary)	Cost
Allergy Dust	Inhaled (14)	Monster vulnerability (none)	16
Dazzlestems	Blood (18)	Sunlight sensitivity (none)	14
Fumblepaste	Contact (16)	None (Slippery fingers)	12
Hatelure	Inhaled (20)	None (Creatures attack)	16
Parchsand	Ingested (18)	Thirst (none)	14
Truth Serum	Blood (20)	Forced honesty (none)	20

CHAPTER 4: SHAPERS GUILD

Breeders of countless monsters, the Shapers take megalomania to unprecedented heights. Not content merely to redesign creatures to meet their needs and those of fellow blight elves, they actually conspire to replace all living things everywhere with their own inventions. Combining the imaginative daring of artists with the technical proficiency of scientists, and melding both with a grandiose conceit all their own, the shapers represent one of the most visible threats posed by the blighted.

Though with less overt political power than the dark matrons, the shapers exert by far the greatest influence over their own people. Every household contains at least a few of their creations bred to do specific chores, and the blight elf war machine depends upon the monstrous cannon fodder provided by the guild. This despite the fact its founder had absolutely nothing to do with the critical breakthrough the guild relies upon.

Like several other greater guilds, the Shapers Guild began with an innovation of the plaguewrights that swiftly moved beyond their control. When its inventor unveiled “Wombtwist,” a blood borne virus that made creatures susceptible to alteration before their birth, to Salena Valanas herself, he had no idea it would lead to his own death in less than a day. A courtier named Hagline Briln, practiced at offering fawning compliments to his queen if nothing else, and finally

despairing of ever replacing Alorious Teldar, petitioned for control over the pathogen. Salena, as one of the first dark matrons already pregnant for over one hundred years and in no mood for romantic liaisons, granted the request only out of curiosity to see what he would actually do with the virus. Briln took her delegated authority and ran with it, seizing the laboratory of the pathogen’s inventor and giving him high-handed orders concerning the subsequent stages of his research. When the plaguewright protested and demanded to speak with the queen Briln slapped him across the face. This blow, intended as a rebuke, knocked the researcher off his feet and accidentally killed him when his head struck the corner of a worktable.

The plaguewrights’ outraged demands for Briln’s execution were a presumption that vexed the queen, and out of spite she spared the luckless courtier. Salena decided upon another punishment. Exiling him and some of his associates to the deep wilderness, she forbade him the right to return to Salgrannok until he managed to produce a useful creature. From those humble beginnings, in fits and starts, eventually emerged the Shapers Guild.

GUILD CUSTOMS

- (1) All shapers must learn Blight Speak, a language of whistles and clicks understood by each of their creations. A creature from the Shapers Guild responds to properly phrased commands using Blight Speak with barely a thought, just as they flinch away from a sudden blow or eat when hungry.
- (2) Shapers must maintain several different faces and use their Flesh Shaping ability to switch between them when circumstances warrant.
- (3) Shapers use sepia creepers to augment their Flesh Shaping ability. These creatures, capable of producing a biodegradable ink, allow the host to manufacture tattoos and other body art at will. The only evidence of a creeper’s existence is the tiny bulge beneath the host’s skin about the size of a snail immediately preceding the appearance of a new tattoo.
- (4) As part of their training, all shapers must first create and then kill a clone that possesses all their knowledge and abilities. Since guild elders drug the would-be shaper and the clone, letting both rouse at the same time, some winners of these conflicts never recover from the lingering suspicion that they may in fact be the simulacrum.



(5) Perhaps stemming from the original transgression of their founder, all shapers may claim the right to trial by combat if found guilty of a crime. Drinking a magical concoction that temporarily disables their blighted touch ability they must battle one or more dangerous beasts, all products of the guild. Those who survive the ordeal usually suffer no other punishment. However, if their offense earned them a sufficiently powerful enemy they often find themselves forced to defend themselves against other charges until they either make restitution or finally die in one of these combats.

DANVAARGAK NYDAIR (THE SHRIEKING PLATEAU)

At first glance, it seems this stunted mesa, only about fifty feet above the treetops, hosts a bizarre collection of colossal tents, flapping and almost yanked free by some strong wind that inexplicably fails to so much as ruffle the land below. Each of the massive support beams that hold the oily leather-like fabric in place appears drawn to a starfish point by the squirming struggle. However, a second look, followed by a cocked ear and a deep breath through the nose, soon reveals the truth.

Every one of these so-called “tents” lives. Great curtains of rank flesh, pinned to, and then suspended from, towering pillars that resemble spiny vertebrae they cover every inch of the compound but never receive even a moment’s respite from their pain.

Danvaargak Nydair, “the shrieking plateau,” serves as the headquarters of the Shapers Guild and represents the greatest testament to its defining ethic.

The shapers long to cleanse the entire world of its original plants and animals, replacing them with something better. They envision an environment where they breed every living thing to serve some specific purpose. A world freed of spontaneity and surprise, where nature itself, leashed and humbled, submits itself to the guiding intelligence of the Shapers Guild for all time.

The shapers treat Danvaargak Nydair as the first step toward their ultimate goal, revering it as the place where their dream takes on physical form. Those few outsiders who see it firsthand, and escape with their mind and body intact, describe it instead as a nightmare made flesh. Everything on the plateau, save the shapers who call it home, endures an existence of unspeakable torment. The air permeates with the rank smell and tortured cries of creatures desperate to escape from an unrelenting agony bred into their very forms and natures. Helpless to flee or strike back, many lacking limbs or sensory organs, the shapers nevertheless ensure that all possess some means to express their suffering. Though able to breed creatures insensitive to pain, or even find ways for them to perform their tasks without suffering such anguish, the shapers consciously choose to



bring their creations into a world of tears. From their perspective, a creature’s ability to experience pain factors into its viability equally as much, or in some cases even more, as its aptitude for the task the shapers breed it to perform.

In private, many shapers acknowledge that this esthetic of engineered pain actually impedes their work, contributing to the high rate of failure whenever they seek to bring forth the first generation of a new life form. It usually takes them dozens of attempts before they manage to produce something not only useful but also capable of breeding true. From there they typically devote many further mating cycles toward tweaking even these successful creatures to a stabilized form.

The shapers administer prenatally the specially tailored diseases and poisons which warp the flesh of their creations. They recently developed a more advanced version that affects adults, though so far with always-fatal results. A ring of creepers, no higher than a tall man’s knee, skirting the edge of the shrieking plateau spreads this fast acting pathogen to anyone coming into physical contact with it. Only members of the Shapers Guild and creatures with the blighted subtype may pass through these plants without risking exposure, but anyone else must make a Difficulty 25 Stealth check to avoid disturbing the plants and coming into contact with the virus. Those exposed to the virus must make six Difficulty 15 Fortitude saves, one per

hour as the illness rapidly runs its course. With each failure, victims suffer 1 point each of Strength and Dexterity drain as their bodies permanently kink into hideous new forms.

SECRETS OF THE GUILD

In hopes of fostering an aura of infallibility, the Shapers only permit the rest of the Fallen to see their successful creations, typically the results of one breeding program in a sixty. They put these perfected creatures on display at Pospilliton and keep all the failures hidden away on the shrieking plateau. Due to the extensive infrastructure needed to support their breeding programs, and the risk of outsiders coming upon one of their failures, they use these two locations exclusively.

Many shapers believe that their race could also stand some improvement, or more accurately, other members of their race could. Envisioning a future where an aristocracy of original stock blight elves oversees a lower caste more suitable for war and manual labor this faction spends its days tinkering with a variant race suitable to fill this role. Calling them the brute elves, these shapers wait for the right moment to introduce them to the population as whole.

The shapers remain obsessed with what they call their “grand project”—the elimination and replacement of all the world’s original life forms. They still search for the proper vehicle to bring it about. Recently much of their attention has focused upon a soupy blue algae nicknamed the “eater.”

Theoretically capable of converting any living tissue it encounters into duplicates of itself they believe the eater, once released, could creep across all of Simarra and eventually destroy everything in its path. They still search for some way to eliminate its vulnerability to sunlight.

LEADERSHIP

Every six years the Shapers Guild holds a great exhibition where each guild member puts a new life form of their own devising on display. A blending of artistic showcase and science fair, the membership selects a first, second and third place winner from among all the entries. Each winner then selects a circle of associates—the first place winner choosing five, the second four, and the third three. The members of these three circles govern the guild until the next exhibition, determining their status based upon which circle they belong to and also their order of entry within that circle (i.e. the first person asked to join a circle outranks the second person so asked).

GUILD MECHANICS

SHAPER APPRENTICE POWER PATH

Your Shaper training allows you to make minute adjustments to your own form if given enough lead time. While making it easier to prepare your body for predicted traumas it unfortunately also leaves you more vulnerable to others types of hazards.

Prerequisites: Adept, Flesh Shaping, Blight Speak, Handle Animal, blight elf.

Key Ability: Wisdom. Those seeking to hone their talent for altering living things in order to suit new purposes must learn to trust their instincts more than their reasoning.

Benefit: As a full-round action, you may spend a point of Conviction to grant yourself a bonus to any one of your saving throws (Toughness, Fortitude, Reflex, or Will) for the next ten minutes equal to your Wisdom modifier.

Special: Whenever you use this ability, you suffer a penalty to your three other saving throws equal to your Wisdom modifier.

BLIGHTED CHANTER POWER PATH

Though, due to your lack of magical training, not a formal member of the Shapers Guild you nevertheless display an extraordinary flair for commanding all the creatures produced the Guild. This mastery of the clicks and grunts of Blight Speak, while allowing you to impose your will upon these helpless creatures, unfortunately also leaves you short tempered and tongue tied when dealing with everyone else.

Prerequisite: Expert, Blight Speak, Handle Animal, blight elf.

Benefit: You may spend one point of Conviction to take 20 when using the Handle Animal skill upon a creature with the blighted subtype without increasing the amount of time needed to make the check.

Special: You suffer a -5 penalty on any check involving social interaction (Bluff, Diplomacy, etc) that does not involve a creature with the blighted subtype.

VILLAINOUS PATH: SHAPER

Shapers devote themselves to altering living tissue, both of other creatures and their own. Obsessed with remaking the world they seek to retain the most useful abilities of other creatures; first by duplicating them and eventually by stealing them.

Primary Skills: Concentration, Craft (Animal Husbandry), Disguise, Handle Animal,





NEW FEAT

BLIGHT SPEAK (GENERAL)

You know the language of clicks, grunts, and growls every creature tracing its origin back the Shapers Guild instinctively understands. Part of their fundamental nature, as integral as the number of their limbs or the placement of their eyes, they find it almost impossible to resist instructions using this language. You may use the Handle Animal skill to influence any creature with the blighted subtype, regardless of its Intelligence or creature type. In addition, every creature with the blighted subtype instinctively

knows the following tricks, and, by making a Handle Animal check, you may prompt it to perform that action.

These tricks do not count toward the maximum number of tricks you may teach a creature to perform with the Handle Animal skill. In fact, if you wish to teach a creature to perform one of the tricks in the table above without the need to prompt it with Blight Speech, you must teach it the trick as normal. Creatures with an Intelligence of -3 or greater may attempt to resist any command issued using Blight Speak. They must succeed in a Will save with a Difficulty equal to your Handle Animal check to avoid leaping to obey your order without conscious thought.

TRICKS

Trick	Difficulty of Handle Animal Check
Attack (creature you designate)	20
Defend (creature you designate)	25
Fetch (object you designate)	20
Follow (creature you designate)	20
Guard (creature, object, or location you designate)	25
Heel/Halt	15

Knowledge (Life Sciences), Medicine.

Primary Feats: Animal Empathy, Blight Speak, Skill Focus (Handle Animal).

Primary Powers: Flesh Shaping, Enhance Ability, Self Shaping, Supernatural Speed.

SHAPER MASTERY I

Prerequisites: Adept level 8, blight elf, Shaper Apprentice Power Path.

Skills: Concentration (11 ranks), Disguise (11 ranks), Medicine (11 ranks).

Feats: Animal Empathy, Blight Speak, Skill Focus (Handle Animal).

Powers: Flesh Shaping, Enhance Ability, Self Shaping.

Benefit: You can, as a full-round action, attempt to emulate a special ability in the round immediately following its use by the living creature that possesses it. You cannot use this power to emulate feats or supernatural powers, only abilities innate to that creature such as a special attack (e.g. petrifying gaze), defense (e.g. resistance to energy), sense (e.g. keen scent) or something similar. You must make a power check (treating this ability as a power) with

a Difficulty equal to 20 + the level of the creature that possesses the power you seek to emulate. If you succeed, you gain the ability to use that power for a maximum duration based upon the result of your check.

ABILITY EMULATION

Check Succeeded By	Retain Ability For
Less than 5	1 minute
6 to 10	1 hour
11 to 15	12 hours
More than 16	1 day

Your shaper training and innate magical talents actually permit you to alter your form to accommodate the ability you seek to emulate. However, you cannot use this ability to change your type or to make yourself unrecognizable. If, in the opinion of the Narrator emulating a particular ability requires too great a physical change you may not duplicate that power. Any power you emulate uses your level and abilities for the purposes of determining such things as duration, saving throws and similar details, not those of the original creature. Note, this power lets you emulate a power, not steal it, the original creature retains full use of its ability at all times.

SHAPER MASTERY II

Prerequisites: Adept level 11, blight elf, Shaper Apprentice Power Path.

Skills: Concentration (14 ranks), Disguise (14 ranks), Medicine (14 ranks).

Feats: Shaper Mastery Level I.

Powers: Beast Link.

Benefit: Rather than duplicate an ability, you can actually steal it from the target. This requires you to make a second check as a free action with the same Difficulty as the original after successfully duplicating the ability. If you succeed in this check, the creature loses the capacity to use the ability you duplicated for as long as you retain the ability.

NEW POWER

BONE MELT

Fatiguing, Concentration

You can liquefy the target's bones until it dies from the strain on its internal organs. Your target gets a Fortitude save when you first use this power. If the target fails the save it immediately collapses into a shrieking puddle of skin, helpless and unable to take any action due to pain and its altered state. Each round you concentrate upon this power the target must make a Toughness save with a difficulty of your power check for that round. If the target fails this, check it takes lethal damage and suffers 1 point of ability damage to its Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution. Once you cease using this power the target's bones reform back to their original shape as a full-round action.

TEMPORARY GRAFTS

The Shapers not only use the Flesh Shaping power to permanently graft new features upon creatures (as outlined on page 111 and 124 of the Survivor's guide) but they also pioneer the technology of temporary grafts. Easier, and less painful to attach, adepts may even fix them to their own bodies (though this increases the Difficulty of the power check by +5). Attaching a temporary graft requires a full-round action and a successful power check.

Once attached, a temporary graft lasts for one hour plus an additional hour for every point by which the power check exceeded the base Difficulty of the check. Any adept with the Flesh Shaping power may remove a temporary graft by succeeding in a power check with a Difficulty equal to 5 less than that needed to attach it. If the creature wearing the temporary graft resists, the adept must make a melee touch attack first.

Climbing Claws: The creature gains a climb speed equal to half its base movement. In addition, the

creature may use the claws to make melee attacks (+3 Damage, Crit 20/+4, Slashing).

Fins and Gills: The creature gains the ability to breath underwater and a swim speed equal to twice its base movement.

Quill Coat: The creature's skin gains an exterior layer of sharp spikes. Any opponent making a natural or unarmed attack upon the creature must make a Toughness save (Difficulty 15) to avoid taking lethal damage each time.

Wings: The creature gains a flight speed equal to twice its base move (poor maneuverability).

TEMPORARY GRAFTS

Name	Difficulty	Size	Cost
Climbing Claws	20	Tiny	22
Fins and Gills	25	Small	24
Quill Coat	25	Medium	26
Wings	30	Medium	28

NEW SUBTYPE

BLIGHTED

Any creature produced by, or tracing its lineage back to the Shapers guild must have the blighted subtype. This represents the compulsions and magical conditions bred into their fundamental natures which keep them from turning against their masters; no matter how much they might wish to strike back at their tormentors. In game terms the blighted subtype affects a creature in two ways.

First, it makes it impossible for the creature to harm a blight elf, or, more accurately, anyone with the blighted touch ability by inducing painful convulsions as soon as it forms the intent to attack. Since typically only blight elves possess this ability it might seem a fine distinction. However, the blight elves make a practice of sending their children out into the woods alone as a rite of passage. Those unable, or unwilling, to use the blighted touch as a defense always die at the hands of the many creatures living within the Sarangak forest which must normally let blight elves undisturbed.

Second, it makes the creature susceptible to commands posed in Blight Speak, a special language designed by the guild to help it compel obedience from its creations. Though rather limited in its scope, with a vocabulary of perhaps only a few hundred words, many blight elves still make a point of learning Blight Speak since it gives them such influence over their servants. Some creatures, in addition to the commands programmed into every being manufactured by the guild, also live with the burden of one or two additional trigger phrases custom designed to exploit one or more of their special abilities.



CHAPTER 5: THE CONCLAVE OF DARK MATRONS



Even amidst a race of true believers, devoted to a philosophy of despair and the spreading of pain for its own sake, the dark matrons stand out as Salena Valanas' chief servants. Rejecting the most fundamental of all instincts, the bond between mother and child, they deliberately infect themselves with a disease that keeps them forever pregnant, and parasitically derive magical power from their helpless unborn infant. This betrayal of their own flesh and blood not only enhances their magical abilities but also propels them to the forefront of their society. In the totalitarian theocracy of the blight elf realm, where their goddess still rules them directly, the dark matrons—her priestesses, her representatives, her enforcers—speak with her voice, and their word is law.

Like several of the other greater guilds the dark matrons began with yet another discovery made by the plaguewrights; a discovery ultimately wrenched away from them. The plaguewrights called the disease “Empty Cradle” because it halted a fetus' further development, effectively trapping it inside the mother for the rest of her life, and its victims “Forsaken.” Though the notion of not only rendering a woman sterile but also leaving her with a constant reminder by way of a swollen belly doomed never to bear fruit evoked considerable glee, the plaguewrights eventually came to regard it as a disappointment. Despite vigorous efforts, the disease stubbornly

resisted all attempts to alter its transmission vector into something more communicable than blood. The plaguewrights knew that until they found some way to make it waterborne or airborne it would never take its place as a terror weapon. Eventually, after many frustrating experiments, the plaguewrights reluctantly decided to put aside what they had once viewed as their pinnacle achievement, a plague that would herald the final generation of life.

However, fate intervened. One of the members of the team, observing that the disease seemed to enhance the intelligence of the Forsaken test subjects, decided to infect herself in hopes of gaining a similar advantage. She got far more than she could have possibly imagined. The disease somehow enabled her to tap into the nascent brain and soul of her unborn child, augmenting not just her mental faculties but her mystical abilities as well.

When Salena Valanas learned of this discovery, she put her own imprimatur upon it by choosing to infect herself and become Forsaken as well. Though this precipitated her final break with Alorious Teldar, it also proved the effectiveness of the disease since it allowed her to prevail over her former lover and his morargrim ally. In the years that followed Salena recruited other women into her service and, as a test of their devotion to her philosophy, required that they too renounce motherhood.

When the first of what Salena came to call her “dark matrons” died, the blighted queen ordered her followers to cut the baby from its mother’s rapidly cooling womb. Originally, Salena merely planned to dissect it, hoping to learn something new from its undeveloped brain, but she changed her mind once she realized that the misshapen thing might actually survive on its own. Its connection to its mother severed by her death the child no longer possessed any instinctive magical abilities, but it soon developed formidable physical prowess and a berserk energy that made it a prodigious terror in battle. When Salena and the rest of her dark matrons learned they could compel this “neverborn” child to obey any order, they quickly realized its potential.

Only the tiniest fraction of the neverborn who serve the dark matrons began their existence within the womb of one of their own. Most emerge from captives or animals forcibly impregnated and then murdered during the harvest of their neverborn child. However, that handful of neverborn who once served as a second brain for their now dead dark matron mothers, enjoy far greater status than their fellows. Full-blooded blight elves, endowed with all the powers and equipment of their kind, these neverborn knights act as elite champions of the dark matrons, and the goddess they all serve.

CONCLAVE CUSTOMS

- (1) By long standing practice, only women who have yet to give birth may join the dark matrons. This helps to solidify their commitment to the goddess and implicitly rejects their former loyalty to their clan. In fact, dark matrons must sever all ties with their former family and friends once they join the Conclave, wholeheartedly devoting themselves to their new life.
- (2) Dark matrons find most forms of music quite grating as the children imprisoned within their wombs become stimulated and begin to fuss, sometimes violently.
- (3) Dark matrons operate in groups with memberships divisible by three. The more important the decision they must make, or verdict they must render, the larger the assembled group.
- (4) Dark matrons use magic to determine the gender of their unborn child after conception. They append the honorific “with daughter” or “with son” to their own names, replacing the clan name they renounced when joining the Conclave. Dark matrons carrying twins, or, most revered of all, triplets, use the title “with many” instead.
- (5) Emulating the appearance of their goddess, most dark matrons rarely cut their hair. As a sop to practicality, they usually keep their hair in floor-length braids. If necessary, they wrap their braids around their waists like belts.

SECRETS OF THE CONCLAVE

The dark matrons consider the entire blight elf realm their domain and see no need to set aside parts for their exclusive use. They regard even Nrayntor, the Palace of Pain, as Salena’s home and not their own. As such, any of the Fallen may enter it at any time, though those without a good enough reason must suffer the wrath of both the goddess and her servants.

Dark matrons sometimes suffer from daylong bouts of terrible pain as their unborn child spins and rages within their wombs. Only one thing soothes the ache of these false labors, an herbal broth that uses the dung of a mudtongue as its primary ingredient (see the entry on the Hell Kilns for more information about mudtongues). The dark matrons insist the guild working at the Hell Kilns collects every scrap of mudtongue’s leavings and delivers it to the Palace of Pain. There they brew the herbal concoction and distribute it to members of Conclave as needed.

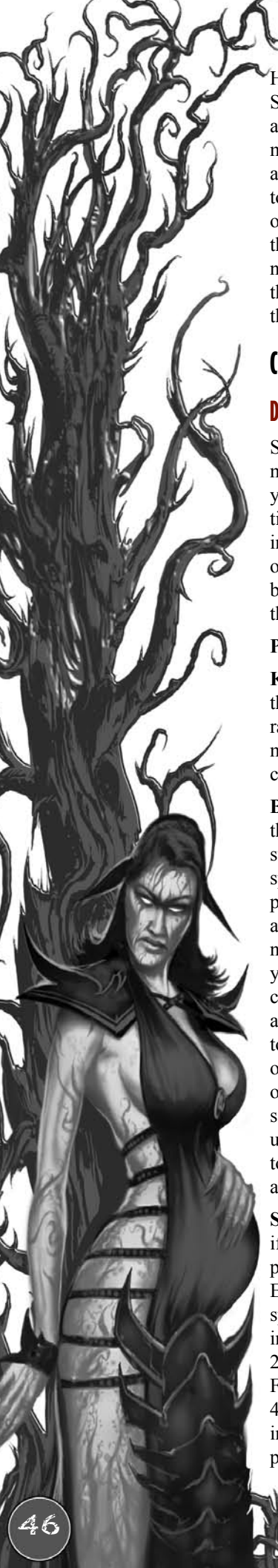
Unbeknownst to anyone, save those in the highest ranks of the dark matrons, these priestesses devote considerable thought to the final days of their people. Worshipping the goddess of suicide, embracing a philosophy of despair and futility, the dark matrons fully expect that one day the Fallen shall go extinct. Some of them even believe they should hasten this moment along and glorify the goddess with one great culling of the entire population. So far, Salena has refused permission for any such action, but the dark matrons who support it have laid out a large supply of poison and made the logistical plans to distribute it in the event she changes her mind.

LEADERSHIP

Dark matrons place a high emphasis upon seniority and usually defer to older members of the Conclave. They make but one exception to this policy. The nine dark matrons who most recently spoke to Salena Valanas enjoy a special status that supersedes all others. Even the most junior dark matron may, if she happened to speak but a single word to Salena that morning, countermand the orders of sisters with centuries of experience. For this reason, Salena chooses her targets of conversation very carefully.

Since the dark matrons serve Salena herself, they see no need to establish a more formal hierarchy among their own numbers. By their reckoning, they exist to carry out the will of the goddess, not to impose their own whims.





However, even before her ascension Salena often left the fine details of a plan to her dark matrons. Those most adept at divining her intent and anticipating her wishes tend to earn the favor of a compliment or even a conversation. This keeps them among the ranks of the top nine dark matrons who influence the Conclave and through them, the blight elves as a whole.

CONCLAVE MECHANICS

DARK MAIDEN POWER PATH

Seeking to emulate the dark matrons you one day hope to join, you have learned how to keep a tiny bubble of unrefined magic inside you at all times. This allows you to call forth one particular power without any conscious thought, but unfortunately also makes it harder for you to use that power deliberately.

Prerequisites: Adept, female blight elf.

Key Ability: Intelligence. Salena Valanas demands that her servants drive potential sacrifices to suicide rather than merely killing them out of hand. This means candidate priestesses must display an unusual cunning and ability to execute elaborate schemes.

Benefit: Choose any one of your supernatural powers that normally require you to take a move action or a standard action to use it. Once per round, you may spend a point of Conviction to activate that power purely as a reflex, allowing you to use it as a free action instead, even if not on your turn. You may not use this ability if unconscious or flat-footed, and you must still succeed with any applicable power checks as normal. If this power requires you to take any other action in order to use it, such as making a touch attack or establishing mental contact, you may only use it when you have already taken that action or, at the discretion of the Narrator, something very similar. For instance, the Narrator might allow you to use a power requiring a touch attack when a creature touches you as part of a natural attack, a grapple, or anything requiring physical contact.

Special: You find it difficult to use this power if not relying upon purest instinct to activate it, particularly when still learning the secrets of magic. Each time you attempt to use this power without spending a point of Conviction you must succeed in a Concentration check with a Difficulty equal to 25 minus your total power bonus with that power. For instance, a 1st level Dark Maiden (power rank 4) with an Intelligence of +3 would need to succeed in a Difficulty 18 Concentration check to use that power successfully.



DARK CONSORT POWER PATH

Trained to fight and, if necessary, die in defense of a dark matron, your protective instincts make you the ultimate bodyguard. Unfortunately, this split in your focus sometimes leaves you dangerously preoccupied.

Prerequisite: Warrior, Quick Draw, blight elf.

Benefit: At the start of each day, designate yourself as the protector of one particular person or creature. For the rest of that day, you may spend a point of Conviction to gain a +1 bonus on any attack or damage rolls made against an opponent that possesses the means to harm the recipient of your protection. You gain this bonus even if your opponent chooses to attack another, they must simply have the potential to injure your charge (within reach of a melee weapon, a clear line of sight with a ranged attack, etc). You spend this point of Conviction as a free action and the effects last for one minute.

Special: The attention you devote to your duty distracts you. You suffer a -1 penalty to your initiative on any day in which you decide to protect someone else.

VILLAINOUS PATH: DARK MATRON

Dark matrons freely choose to remain forever pregnant and put the power they gain from this in service to their goddess. Learning at first how to draw upon the mystical potential of their unborn child, they eventually discover ways to use any living creature as a power source.

Primary Skills: Concentration, Diplomacy, Intimidate, Knowledge (Civics), Knowledge (Tactics), Knowledge (Theology and Philosophy), Sense Motive.

Primary Feats: Blood Sacrifice, Benefit, Connected, Eidetic Memory.

Primary Powers: Cure, Dominate, Harm, Imbue Life, Imbue Unlife, Mind Shaping, Pain, Psychic Blast, Suggestion, Withering Grasp.



DARK MATRON MASTERY I

Prerequisites: Adept level 9, blight elf, Dark Maiden Power Path, Forsaken template (see below)

Skills: Concentration (12 ranks), Intimidate (12 ranks), Knowledge (Theology and Philosophy) (12 ranks).

Feats: Blood Sacrifice, Benefit, Connected.

Powers: Dominate, Mind Shaping, Psychic Blast, Suggestion.

Benefit: Your connection with your unborn child achieves new dimensions when applied to your own magical abilities. You gain a bonus action each round so long as you apply it toward using, maintaining, or concentrating upon one of your supernatural powers.

DARK MATRON MASTERY II

Prerequisites: Adept level 12, blight elf, Dark Maiden Power Path, Forsaken template (see below)

Skills: Concentration (15 ranks), Intimidate (15 ranks), Knowledge (Theology and Philosophy) (15 ranks).

Feats: Dark Matron Mastery I.

Powers: Harm.

Benefit: You can use another creature living creature as a power source for your magic. This requires you to make a touch attack, and, if you succeed, a check (treating this ability as a power) against the target's Will save bonus +10. Using this ability allows you

to make a connection that lasts until either you dismiss it or you reach the maximum duration as determined by the table below.

DARK MATRON CONNECTION

Check Succeeded By	Duration of Connection
5 or less	1 round
Between 6 and 10	1 minute
Between 11 and 15	1 hour
More than 16	1 day

Making a connection in this way allows you to bolster yourself against any fatigue from your magic to the target's detriment. Whenever you suffer fatigue due to the use of any of your supernatural powers, you may choose to draw vitality from your target as a free action. Your target must make a Toughness check (Difficulty equal to your Adept level +10). If the target makes this check, it gains one level of fatigue. If the target fails this check, it suffers a lethal wound instead. Note, you may, when called upon to make a Fatigue check, consciously choose to fail the check in hopes of debilitating your target.

VILLAINOUS PATH: NEVERBORN KNIGHT

Whenever a dark matron dies, the rest of the Conclave always harvests her unborn child from her cooling womb. These babies, the only blight elves with the neverborn template, receive special training and conditioning, making them their people's most formidable warriors.

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Climb, Escape Artist, Jump, Intimidate, Ride, Survival.

Primary Feats: All-Out Attack, Cleave, Improved Initiative, Quick Draw, Rage, Startle, Tough.

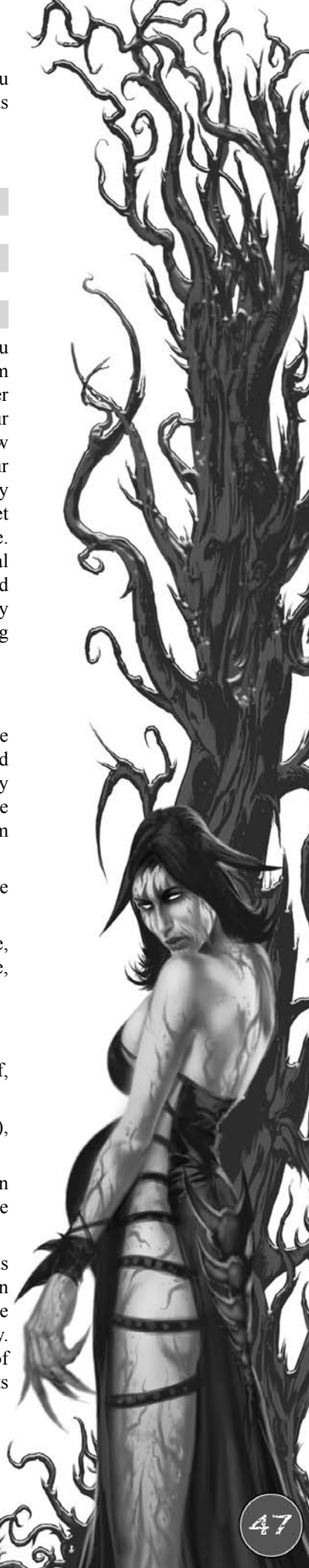
NEVERBORN KNIGHT MASTERY I

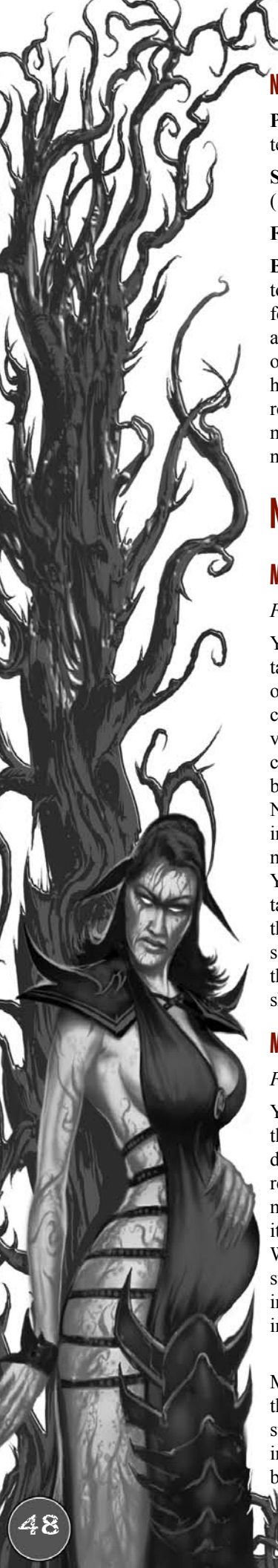
Prerequisite: Warrior level 5, Blight elf, Neverborn template (see below).

Skills: Acrobatics (8 ranks), Jump (8 ranks), Ride (8 ranks).

Feats: Quick Draw, Rage (x2) (two in addition to the one received as a bonus feat from the Neverborn template), Tough.

Benefit: You automatically enter into a rage (as the feat) whenever you believe a dark matron is in jeopardy. This does not count toward the number of times you can rage in any given day. In addition, you no longer suffer any period of fatigue when one of the uses of your Rage feats expires.





NEVERBORN KNIGHT MASTERY II

Prerequisite: Warrior level 8, Blight elf, Neverborn template (see below).

Skills: Acrobatics (11 ranks), Jump (11 ranks), Ride (11 ranks).

Feats: Neverborn Knight Mastery I, Startle.

Benefit: Opponents find your fury almost too terrible to face. Whenever you gain the effects of the Rage feat make an Intimidate check the first time you attack any creature susceptible to fear. The result of this check (with a +5 bonus if you succeeded in harming the creature with your attack that round) represents the Difficulty of the Will save the target must make to avoid becoming frightened for the next minute.

NEW POWERS

MARK

Fatiguing

You inflict a physical and psychic scar upon your target that it can never erase. You must succeed in two opposed checks to use this power. One is your power check versus the target's Fortitude save and the other versus the target's Will save. If you succeed on both checks, you deal an injury to the target that registers both to the eye and to such powers as Second Sight. Nothing in existence can remove or conceal these injuries except your decision (made free of any magical compulsion or influence) to dismiss them. You always know the approximate location of the target. Additionally, succumbing to this power fills the target with such dread that it must make a Will save (Difficulty equal to 10 + your adept level at the time you inflicted the mark) to avoid becoming shaken whenever in your presence.

MULTISHIELD

Fatiguing

You wreath yourself in a skintight energy barrier that has the potential to protect you from many different threats or nuisances. Activating multishield requires a full round and, once activated, lasts for a maximum of ten minutes (though you may renew it at any time by taking another full-round action). While your multishield is active you may, as a standard action, grant yourself a defense or even immunity against one, but only one, specific and individual threat at a time.

Each supernatural power you know (except Multishield itself) grants you access to a different threat. For instance, if you know six other supernatural powers you can grant yourself immunity or a defense against six different threats, but only one at a time. Each user, even those with

the same powers, must create their own list of threats. A multishield immediately dematerializes if its creator takes any sort of aggressive action against a creature currently unable to harm it.

Setting note: The most senior dark matrons, and, until her ascension, Salena herself, use this power to keep themselves safe from the swarms of bees guarding the Droning Henge.

NEW TEMPLATES

FORSAKEN

Exposed to a virulent disease that renders them forever sterile—halting further development of their fetus—forsaken leach powers from their unborn child, enhancing their intellect and mystical abilities. The forsakens' grossly bulging, wriggling bellies mark them as dangerous beings operating beyond conscience or care.

"Forsaken" is an acquired template that can be added to any pregnant creature.

Type: If the base creature is a humanoid, change its type to monstrous humanoid. If the base creature is an animal, change its type to supernatural beast.

Speed: Same as base creature.

Abilities: Increase base creature's Intelligence and Wisdom by 2 but decrease its Strength and Dexterity by 1. The Forsaken gain clarity of mind at the price of permanent encumbrance by pregnancy.

Skills: Same as base creature.

Feats: A Forsaken creature gains one of the following bonus feats: Eidetic Memory, Empower, Iron Will, Skill Focus (Concentration), Widen Power

The creature gains another bonus feat for every two levels it gains. Once the creature gains all five of the feats listed above (whether through bonus feats or by taking them as normal feats gained through advancing in level) the creature may then choose any feat or adept power for which it meets the prerequisites as its bonus feats.

Traits: A Forsaken creature retains all the traits of the base creature. In addition, they gain the following traits.

Command the Neverborn: Any Forsaken creature with an Intelligence of at least -1 may issue orders to any creature with the Neverborn template. If the creature refuses to obey your command you may, by succeeding in a Charisma check opposed by the target's Wisdom check, compel it to follow your instructions. Even if you fail in this check, a creature with the Neverborn template never harms a creature with the Forsaken template.

Directed Repair: A Forsaken creature may, as a full-round action, achieve a deeper communion with its unborn child and use its physical and mental resources to hasten its recovery from injuries. Each time it does this, it must succeed in a Difficulty 20 level check with a -1 penalty for each time it has already used this ability during that day. If it succeeds in this level check, it immediately improves its fatigue or damage condition by one level.

Reserve of Fatigue: Whenever a Forsaken creature makes any sort of check involving fatigue it may make two rolls and use the more advantageous result as its own.

Combat: Same as base creature.

Saving Throws: Same as base creature.

NEVERBORN

Sliced from the womb the neverborn lose access to the magical abilities they once offered their mothers. In its place, they gain great physical power, and the power to channel a fury that makes them nigh unstoppable in battle. Forever marked by the extra time they spent waiting to draw breath on their own finally, the neverborn always retain some infant like features incongruously melded to a muscular frame. Often round, undeveloped faces dominated by large eyes rest on top of squat and powerful shoulders.

“Neverborn” is an inherited template that can be added to any living creature belonging to a species that gives birth as opposed to creatures that lay eggs or use some other method of reproduction.

Type: If the base creature is a humanoid, change its type to monstrous humanoid. If the base creature is an animal, change its type to supernatural beast.

Speed: Same as base creature.

Abilities: Increase base creature’s Strength and Constitution by 1 but decrease its Wisdom by 2. The neverborn enjoy great physical power but suffer from a lack of common sense.

Skills: Same as base creature.

Feats: A Neverborn creature gains Rage as a bonus feat.

Traits: A Neverborn creature retains all the traits of the base creature. In addition, it gains the following traits.

Bloodlust: Each time a Neverborn creature succeeds in damaging a creature it gains a +1 bonus on its attack and damage rolls against the creature for 1 minute.

Damage Reduction: A Neverborn creature has Damage Reduction/silver +2. A Neverborn’s natural weapons are treated as silver weapons for the purpose of overcoming Damage Reduction.

Madluck: A Neverborn creature gains the equivalent of the Luck feat whenever it Rages.

Recovery: A Neverborn creature only suffers fatigue for 1 round following the use of the Rage feat.

Combat: Same as base creature.

Saving Throws: A Neverborn creature gains a +2 bonus on its Toughness save and a -1 penalty on its Will save.







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